



2 Newborn baby found near mosque; police investigate



24 TV show 'Roseanne' abruptly canceled after racist tweet



28 Djokovic reaches third round at Roland Garros



رمضان

Remadan Month

IMSAK	03:06
FAJR	03:16
DHUHR	11:46
ASR	15:20
MAGHRIB	18:43
ISHA	20:13

Northern region projects to attract \$400 bn investments

Minister denies raising housing payment



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said yesterday that mega projects in the northern region - the Silk City and Boubyan Island - are expected to attract as much as \$400 billion of international investments. The minister told the National Assembly yesterday that all the investments will be foreign and the government is not expected to pay anything towards the projects.

The northern region, with an area of 1,800 square kilometers, requires the presence of legislation to lure the investments, adding that a law is currently under consideration. Part of the mega projects necessary for the region, like the Subbiya Causeway and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Harbor, are already in final stages of completion. The minister, who heads the higher environment council, said that all new licenses for new factories in Shuaiba industrial areas have been suspended until the environmental damage to the area has been effectively assessed.

His comments came after several MPs raised environmental concerns in the area which is home to scores of industrial plants in addition to oil facilities, mainly refineries. The debate took place during the discussion of the 2018/2019 budgets and the final statement for 2016/2017 for eight government bodies and agencies which included Kuwait News Agency, Small and medium enterprises fund, Investment Promotion Authority, Public Fire Department, Central Bank, Credit Bank, Public Environment Authority and Public Private Partnership Authority.

During the debate, State Minister for Housing Jenan Bushehri reiterated that there are no plans to increase installments paid by citizens for their government houses. She said the news are fabricated and were denied.

Continued on Page 24

MoI launches new cameras, e-driving license machines

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Ministry of Interior's (MoI) Undersecretary Lt Gen Mahmoud Al-Doussary yesterday

launched 100 new traffic cameras and 20 multimedia displays and reviewed the new solar-powered mobile cameras. Doussary was briefed about the main control system and the efforts exerted to develop it. He also launched the new e-driving license service through which a user can pay fines and renew the license by filling a form then taking it to the nearest self-service machines, which will be placed in various government facilities and shopping malls.

Manager of the Traffic Department's Specialized Training Center Col Salem Al-Ajmi said the e-license services will be more secure and will include data in various languages so that it can be used abroad, as it matches ISO specifications and entitles the holder to drive in all countries using this system.

Supplications for Ramadan

Ramadan Kareem

By Teresa Leshner

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Three supplications will not be rejected (by Almighty God), the supplication of the parent for his child, the supplication of the one who is fasting, and the supplication of the traveler. [At-Tirmidhi]. Because Ramadan is the month of fasting, it is one of the best times to supplicate to our Creator for whatever our hearts desire. Allah says in the Quran, "When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close: I respond to the dua of every suppliant when they call on Me" (2:186).

We should take care to ask our Creator for things that are really important and valuable, not things that may eventually lead us to wrongdoing. God has given us some good suggestions of what to pray for, such as the following ones taken from the Quran.

- (1) Our Lord! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come and keep us safe from the torment of the Fire (2:201)
- (2) Our Lord! Bestow on us endurance and make our foothold sure and give us help against those who reject faith. (2:250)
- (3) Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or fall into error. (2:286)
- (4) Our Lord! Lay not upon us such a burden as You did lay upon those before us. (2:286)
- (5) Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear, grant us forgiveness and have mercy on us. You are our Protector. Help us against those who deny the truth. (2:286)
- (6) Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate from the truth after You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Your grace. Verily You are the Giver of bounties without measure. (3:8)
- (7) Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and the lack of moderation in our doings, and make firm our steps and succor us against those who deny the truth. (3:147)
- (8) Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and efface our bad deeds and take our souls in the company of the righteous. (3:193)
- (9) Our Lord! Place us not among the people who have been guilty of evildoing. (7:47)
- (10) Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and make us die as those who have surrendered themselves unto You. (7:126)

Continued on Page 24

Kuwait seeks protection for Palestinians

UNITED NATIONS: Kuwait yesterday circulated a watered-down draft UN Security Council resolution on setting up an international 'protection mission' for the Palestinians in a bid to win European support in a vote expected this week, diplomats said. The council could hold a vote, possibly today, on the draft resolution that is expected to face a US veto, the diplomats said.

Still, Kuwait, a non-permanent council member that represents Arab countries, is hoping to win a high number of votes in favor of its proposal to highlight

Washington's isolation on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The revised draft drops an outright demand for an international protection mission and instead requests that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres present recommendations. The new text "calls for the consideration of measures to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilian population" in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Gaza Strip, according to the draft obtained by AFP.

It requests that Guterres present a report within 60 days on proposals for the protection of Palestinian civilians including the establishment of an international mission. France and Britain, two veto-wielding council members, have complained that the draft resolution lacked details on the scope and objective of the proposed protection mission, diplomats said.

Continued on Page 24

'Dead' Kremlin critic turns up alive on TV

KIEV: Ukraine admitted yesterday it had staged the murder of anti-Kremlin journalist Arkady Babchenko in order to foil an attempt on his life by Russia, a stunning development in a case that had already provoked an outpouring of grief and a diplomatic spat. Reporters gasped and applauded as Babchenko appeared alive and well at a press conference in Kiev, less than 24 hours after authorities said he had died from three gunshots to the back in the stairwell of his apartment building in a contract-style killing.

The head of Ukraine's security service Vasyl Grytsak said at the press conference that the assassination was faked as part of a "special operation" to pre-empt a real plot to kill him. "Thanks to this operation we were able to foil a cynical plot and document how the Russian security service was planning for this crime," Grytsak said. He announced that the authorities had arrested the alleged mastermind of the plot, saying a Ukrainian citizen named only by the initial G. had offered to pay a hitman \$30,000 to carry out the killing after being recruited by Russian special forces.

Grytsak also thanked Babchenko and his family, who he said were in the loop about the secret operation. The reporter, however, apologized to his wife for putting her through "this hell she had to live through for three days...but there was no other option". News of the



KIEV: Russian anti-Kremlin journalist Arkady Babchenko reacts during a press conference at Ukrainian Security Service in Kiev yesterday. — AFP

"death" of the prominent Russian war correspondent and former soldier set off a series of recriminations between Kiev and Moscow, and pictures and flowers were laid by mourners at the Russian embassy in Kiev. Ukrainian officials led by Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman accused Russia of being behind the killing of the Kremlin critic, a charge that Moscow batted back.

After the truth of the reported assassination came to light, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said it was "great news" that Babchenko was alive. But on Twitter she slammed the "propagandistic effect" of the set-up. Reporters Without Borders condemned the faked death as a "pathetic stunt".

Continued on Page 24



GAZA: A young relative of 23-year-old Palestinian Najji Ghonaim mourns during his funeral in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Ghonaim succumbed to his injuries after he was shot by Israeli forces during protests and clashes on the Gaza border. — AFP

Saudi 'criminalizes' sexual harassment

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's Cabinet on Tuesday approved a measure criminalizing sexual harassment, the state news agency SPA reported, set to expire before a decades-old ban on women driving is set to expire. The legislation, which awaits an expected royal decree to become law, is the latest in a series of reforms that Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has initiated in a bid to modernize the deeply conservative Muslim kingdom.

Prince Mohammed is also trying to diversify the Arab world's largest economy away from oil exports and open up Saudis' cloistered lifestyles by easing strict social rules and promoting entertainment. The anti-harassment measure, which was approved on Monday by the Shura Council advisory body, introduces a jail sentence of up to five years and a 300,000 riyals (\$80,000) fine.

"(The legislation) aims at combating the crime of harassment, preventing it, applying punishment against perpetrators and protecting the victims in order to safeguard the individual's privacy, dignity and personal freedom which are guaranteed by Islamic law and regulations," a statement from the Shura Council said. Last year's decision to end the ban on women driving cars, set to take effect on June 24, has been hailed as proof of a progressive trend in the kingdom. — Reuters

Kuwait looks forward to formation of new govt in Iraq: Al-Jarallah

Deputy Foreign Minister hopes GCC-US summit would take place in September



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) attends a ghabqa organized by the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah (center right) and Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah (second from left) pose with Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Sabah (center left) and other officials.

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said Tuesday evening that Kuwait hopes that the brothers in Iraq will be able to form a new government as early as possible. "The visit to Kuwait earlier (Tuesday) by Sayyed Muqtada Al-Sadr, the leader of the Iraqi Sadrist Movement, provided a chance for reviewing the situation in Iraq in the wake of the general elections," he said at a ghabqa held at the Foreign Ministry.

"Sayyed Muqtada Al-Sadr, a prominent politician, is always welcome in Kuwait and his visit came in response to an invitation from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," Jarallah said, noting that His Highness the Amir received the Iraqi politician at Dasman Palace.

On the situation in Libya, Jarallah voiced hope that the coming days would see positive developments that could lead to security and stability. He also expressed hope that the GCC-US summit meeting would take place in September and contribute to turning over a new leaf in the history of the relations among the GCC member states. Jarallah expressed joy for the large number of dignitaries in attendance in the ghabqa, hosted by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends the ghabqa.



(From left) Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK Khaled Al-Duwaisan and Kuwaiti businessmen Jawad Bukhamseen and Emad Bukhamseen attend the ghabqa.

KOC official suspected of corruption

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) referred a senior official for investigations after receiving unconfirmed reports about suspicions of corruption, profiteering, favoring some contractors and mismanagement of scores of contracts under his direct supervision. In this regard, informed sources said the suspected contracts had been repeatedly changed without fining the concerned contractors. The sources added that the suspect also helped contractors avoid the contracts' penal terms.

The sources said when the suspicions were first raised, some pressure was applied to wrap up the issue and settle for penal measures within the company without referring the concerned official to prosecution to avoid any government-parliament tension. The sources also noted that following the State Audit Bureau's investigation of all contracts under the concerned department's supervision, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) ordered internal investigations by its own auditors.

Meanwhile, another KOC official stressed that all contracts are strictly audited and that violations and those committing them are immediately referred to investigation. "Unfortunately, many

conflicts are going on amongst some oil sector officials who seek to impose their own interests and agendas," the official added, noting that such a situation led to divisions and both teams have been exchanging accusations. The official added that KPC should work hard to help the oil sector avoid such conflicts and maintain its unity.

Bedoon teachers

In view of the lack of Kuwaiti teachers in certain subjects, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) approved the appointment of a number of bedoons with two-year diplomas as teachers for a period of three years for a monthly payment of KD 480 including KD 60 in rent allowance. In this regard, an educational source stressed that the Ministry of Education's (MoE) human resources department had never stopped appointing bedoon teachers in accordance with the ministry needs as announced by the assistant undersecretary for public education Fatima Al-Kandari, who stressed that they come second in priority after citizens in terms of appointment. The source also denied MoE's responsibility for delaying bedoons' salaries, noting that this was the result of expiration of the security IDs of some.

Amiri Hospital

Ministry of Health's (MoH) assistant undersecretary for projects and engineering affairs Najj Al-Sager sent a letter to the contractor responsible for the Amiri Hospital expansion project, expressing the presence of some remarks that need to be tended to before approving the second phase of the project.

Food Bank trucks reach people in need

By Meshal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Food Bank (KFB) launched a fleet of trucks in various areas around Kuwait to provide iftar meals to needy people. KFB Manager Salem Al-Hamar said the

campaign is organized in collaboration with Al-Theqa Company and its top brands as part of its social responsibility activities and to highlight the value of compassion amongst Muslims during Ramadan.

Hamar added this is the second Ramadan season for KFB and expected the bank's iftar campaign will be more successful than that of last year because the trucks will enable KFB to reach the neediest people in the remotest parts of Kuwait including Hawalli, Salmiya, Farwaniya, labor cities, Wafra and Abdaly. Hamar added teams of volunteers to prepare and distribute the meals daily.

No injuries in three reported fires

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A huge fire broke out yesterday at dawn in a poultry company's fodder store located over an area of 1,500 sq m along Salmi highway, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said in a statement. Firemen from Shaqaya station rushed to the scene and managed to control the fire without reporting any injuries or casualties.

Another fire broke out at a Jahra stable, said security sources, noting that Jahra firemen rushed to the scene to find that the fire started in two rooms used as laborers' quarters on the stable's roof. The fire was controlled and no casualties were reported.

A third fire broke out in the wood scrap market in Amghara, said security sources, noting that firemen from Jahra, Jleeb, Subhan and the backup unit rushed to the scene and found the flames covered an area of 250 sq m used to store wood, ceramic and other sanitary ware. The fire was contained and put out in record time. No casualties were reported but further investigations are in progress to determine the cause of the fire.

Fish auction

Kuwait Fishermen Union yesterday issued a statement calling for moving the imported fish auction from Sharq market immediately as its permanent market in Rai has been completed and is ready. The union also urged relevant government bodies to keep promises they had made in this regard, especially since the imported fish market was temporarily moved to Sharq for two months in Sept 2017, and the move was renewed three times. In addition, the statement stressed that Sharq fish market is in bad need for maintenance as many buyers are complaining about foul odors and faulty air conditioning.

Newborn found near mosque

KUWAIT: A citizen found a newborn near a mosque and informed police. Paramedics and police responded and took the baby to Adan Hospital. Detectives took over the case and began their search for the person who left the child there.

Homicide investigation

The Ahmadi prosecutor sent the body of an unidentified person to the coroner for identification and to determine the cause of death, as a homicide investigation as opened in the case. The building's haris (janitor) said he did not know the deceased, who was found in his undergarments and covered with a blanket on the stairs of the building.

Extreme fatigue

A policeman lost consciousness while in his patrol car on Fifth Ring Road. A security source said a female citizen in Rumaihiya noticed the policeman was not moving, and then called interior ministry operations. Policemen responded along with paramedics,

who gave him first aid as he was suffering from extreme fatigue.

Harassment

Jahra police arrested three men who were harassing women and urging them to commit immoral acts. The three are all citizens, and one of them is an ex-convict jailed over drugs cases.

Maid accused of theft

A citizen accused her domestic helper of stealing jewelry and KD 1,200. She said that she went along with her daughters to have iftar and left the helper at home, but when they returned, the helper had disappeared while the jewelry and money were missing.

Illicit pills

A citizen who was recently released from jail was arrested in Jahra in an abnormal condition with suspected illicit pills. The suspect was seen in his car in a dark area and attempted to drive off when he saw the police.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

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Local

Amir urges Municipal Council members to exert efforts to serve Kuwait's interest

New members called to speed up the pace of development



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with State Minister for Municipality Affairs Husam Al-Roumi, President of the Municipal Council Osama Al-Oteibi and members of the council. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Municipality Affairs Husam Al-Roumi, President of the Municipal Council Osama Al-Oteibi and members of the council at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir gave his directives to the Municipal Council members, urging them to exert their tremendous efforts for the best interest of the homeland. Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received Roumi, Oteibi and the council members, congratulating them on their new appointments, and praising the significant role played by the Municipal Council in the best interest of the homeland and citizens. Furthermore, His Highness the Crown Prince urged members of the council to exert tremendous efforts to speed up the pace of development, developmental projects and architectural renaissance under the wise guidance of His Highness the Amir.

The meeting was attended by President of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Al-Faisal Al-

Saud Al-Sabah and head of the protocols at the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. Roumi and the new Municipal Council members then met with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

Earlier yesterday, Highness the Amir received His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a cable yesterday to King Philippe of Belgium, expressing his deepest condolences over the loss of life in a deadly shooting in the eastern Belgian city of Liege.

In his message, His Highness the Amir emphasized that "Kuwait deplores this despicable act of terrorism that claimed innocent lives," wishing all those wounded in the rampage a speedy recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar messages to the Belgian King. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with State Minister for Municipality Affairs Husam Al-Roumi, Municipal Council President Osama Al-Oteibi and council members.

AUB participates in 'Partners to Employ Them'

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced its participation in the 'Partners to Employ Them' campaign, which was launched on May 28, 2018. This unique initiative, a first of its kind in Kuwait, aims to develop, train and employ individuals with different needs and integrate them within society as well as the State's human development plan. In addition, the campaign is in line with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's vision in empowering youth and integrating individuals with different needs and abilities into the wider community.

Sahar Dashti, AUB's Deputy General Manager responsible for the bank's Corporate Social Responsibility Program said: "We are using the term 'individuals with different needs' instead of special needs, as it is part of our belief and commitment that every individual's needs vary from each other. At AUB, we are keen to participate and engage in the 'Partners to Employ Them' campaign, which reflects our core belief in leveraging the strong potential of special needs individuals, and by giving them the opportunity to contribute to the development of our nation."

Dashti added, "AUB encourages the training and employment of individuals with different needs. There are vacancies for those who are interested to work across a number of divisions within the bank and other businesses, including customer service. This is part of the bank's firm belief in providing fair and equal opportunity with a special focus on nurturing strong capabilities. At AUB, we recognize that having different needs, and therefore different abilities, should not be considered as a



KUWAIT: AUB's Sahar Dashti participates in a meeting held to prepare in the campaign.

barrier towards achieving success, and that people with different needs are a core part of our society, and worthy of our support."

"AUB is unique amongst financial institutions to participate in this campaign and it is deeply committed to supporting individuals with different needs. The bank has sponsored a wide range of initiatives that serve individuals with different needs and at the same time, ensures that selected branches are equipped with the necessary services that cater to their requirements and eases their access to our banking services. In addition, the bank has also been at the forefront of providing professional training to a number of its employees with the objective of serving clients with different needs and their banking requirements. This was reflected in a series of training workshops that included communicating in sign language, in an effort to ensure that hearing impaired

customers receive the best banking service," added Dashti.

Dashti expressed her confidence in the success of 'Partners to Employ Them' campaign to create a strong platform and environment that is equipped for individuals with different needs, and at the same time, to provide job opportunities that are suited to drive their potential and distinct capabilities. The aim is to end the misconception around employing individuals with different needs and gain society's support to employ them, raising awareness across various sectors of society around the importance of supporting and providing similar opportunities and benefit from their enthusiasm." Dashti commended and thanked General Authority for Disability Affairs as well as the Human Development Institute and all authorities that have contributed to make this initiative a successful one.

Municipality, World Bank cooperate in waste management

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality and the World Bank have signed a contract to deal with all issues related to solid waste management for 24 months at a cost of KD 573,806.7 (approximately \$1,894,841). Director General of the Municipality, Engineer Ahmed Abdullah Al-Manfouhi, said in a press statement yesterday that the municipality continues to cooperate with the World Bank in improving the management of municipal solid waste.

Manfouhi said that following the signing of the technical assistance agreement with the World Bank for the waste management planning project. He added that the

Municipality's vision in the integrated management of municipal waste came after the State of Kuwait suffered from this file, which was of great importance due to its association with human health and safety, especially with the increase in the quantity of individual production of daily waste.

Through preparing the master plan for solid waste management, the Municipality looks forward to addressing all issues related to solid waste management to improve the situation in a strategic manner characterized by achieving environmentally and economically sustainable development and in line with the country's development plans.

He added that with the increase in population growth and the development of new cities, it was necessary to identify future needs and address deficiencies in terms of best practices and requirements of the future national strategy for waste and identify the necessary consultative steps by signing the agreement with the World Bank to provide cost-effective consulting services according to the schedule. — KUNA

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Local



Zain's family gathers in Ramadan ghabqa

Company recognized employees and showcased Ramadan social campaign



Eaman Al-Roudhan with a number of Zain employees.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, celebrated its employees in the annual Ramadan Ghabqa gathering held at Al-Raya Hall in a family atmosphere filled with joy and happiness. The event witnessed the attendance of Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan along with the company's executive management.

The annual Ramadan ghabqa gathering is one of Zain's main social programs held for its employees during the holy month of Ramadan of every year. The event brings together staff and senior executive management together, further strengthening the links between members of the Zain family, and renewing the spirit of teamwork it enjoys being the leader in the Kuwaiti telecommunications market.

Addressing the guests, Roudhan said: "I would like to take this opportunity during this holy month to express my sincere gratitude to all of you. Every member of the Zain family had a contribution in achieving our strategic goals during the past period."

Roudhan explained: "the holy month of Ramadan always reminds us of the human values that encourage us to communicate with each other and be closer to one another, as it is the month of kindness, generosity, and forgiveness. I remind you that commitment and passion are the focus for the next phase of Zain's journey, and there is no doubt that working together under that focus will ultimately leave us with competitive capabilities, and allow us to communicate with our customers in bold ways. That's why our ambition will always be to keep Zain in the leadership position it enjoys today."

Roudhan continued: "we built our innovations on our customers' aspirations, and thanks to that, we will stay committed together in offering unmatched experiences in the telecommunications and IT sector. The family spirit that gathers us today guides us, and I hope from you all to look upon the future with hope and optimism."

Roudhan stressed: "we have a lot of challenges ahead of us, and we are capable of overcoming them by enriching trust and honesty among ourselves, our customers, and our partners. We at Zain have a strong relationship with change, as the telecom industry is one of the most changing industries of our time, and therefore we have one choice: to adapt to these rapid changes and stay as the top telecom service provider."

Roudhan concluded: "Zain's Ramadan social campaign, led by our own team of volunteers, shines year after year. The team reflected the values and spirit of the holy month with their dedication and hard work. I am very proud of the long list of our social and humanitarian programs and



Eaman Al-Roudhan delivers her speech.

initiatives during the holy month of Ramadan, which shines more every year."

During the event, Zain recognized and honored employees who have been a part of the Zain family for a long time, and who's efforts, hard work, and achievements added to the company's success during the past years. Zain also showcased a documentary that highlighted the array of initiatives, programs, and activities of the company's extensive social campaign during the holy month of Ramadan, which witnessed the participation of Zain's volunteers throughout the holy month.

Zain's Ramadan campaign for this year witnessed a wide range of social and charitable initiatives. The company participated in a number of charitable, social and voluntary activities, including the distribution of Ramadan Machla boxes - containing essential food supplies - to underprivileged families who are in need of support during the month of fasting in multiple areas of Al-Jahra governorate. The distribution also included delivering a large number of boxes to Zain's partners of non-profit entities, including the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), the Kuwait Food Bank, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

Every year, Zain launches the iftar Halls initiative, which this year sees the company providing fasting individuals with daily iftar meals in three main halls in Jleeb Al-



Eaman Al-Roudhan and senior executive management recognize an employee.

Shuyoukh, Khaitan, and Hawalli, offering nearly 50,000 daily iftar meals throughout the holy month. Zain was also keen to reach out to the many segments of the community, including orphaned children, the elderly, and people with special needs, by visiting the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor's Care Centers to share the joyful blessings of the holy month with them. Zain also shared the joys of the holy month with children and patients in a number of the biggest hospitals in Kuwait, as well as with Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center, where the company's volunteers visited the children and their families to distribute girgijan and gifts while also organizing many other fun activities.

Zain has a long list of programs and contributions that serve noble causes through strategically partnering with entities that adopt humanitarian work, including its Platinum Partnership of Nurture and Educate Students Today (NEST)'s educational campaign, entitled #Rock_Paper_Pen, which mainly aims at raising donations for the benefit of building three new schools set to serve 820 students in the Republic of Chad. This Ramadan, Zain was also the Humanitarian Partner to a new campaign launched by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to offer essential food supplies and medical aid to underprivileged families inside Kuwait. Zain also sponsored the #Ramadan_Aman campaign for the second consecutive year in collaboration with 'Nahtam' volunteering team

under the Volunteering Work Center and the Ministry of Interior. The campaign aims at distributing Iftar meals for road drivers during Maghreb prayers with the aim of reducing road accidents that usually occur during this particular period of time.

This year, Zain is the Humanitarian Partner of #Thousand_Wells campaign organized by Direct Aid during the holy month of Ramadan. The campaign aims at collecting donations to dig and build 1,000 water wells for those in need in areas that suffer from scarcity and lack of water in Africa by digging wells, building reservoirs, and extending water lines.

Zain stressed that it has always been keen to organize a number of social and humanitarian initiatives during Ramadan to support the various sectors of the Kuwaiti society, and the company is keen on reflecting the religious as well as traditional humanitarian values and principles to enrich the art of giving and to increase bonding between individuals.

The company further affirmed its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility campaign during the holy month of Ramadan, which includes an extensive array of programs that cover different areas. The initiatives and programs include humanitarian, voluntary, cultural, religious, sports, and recreational activities to cater to the different segments of society.



Hamad Al-Ali hosts the event.



The audience at the ghabqa.



Eaman Al-Roudhan honors Zain Kuwait CTO Nawaf Al Gharabally.

Local



Justclean hosts Ramadan ghabqa



By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Justclean, Kuwait's first on-demand laundry application, held its Ramadan ghabqa on Sunday at Jumeirah Hotel, where officials presented a slideshow about the Justclean and Floward applications. With a selection of over 100 laundries in all areas of Kuwait, the app offers free pickup and delivery service for thousands of orders monthly. It's the app that gives you a stress-free, convenient alternative to your normal cleaning experiences. Customers can easily pay online and save.

Founded in 2016 under the name Masbagti by two young ambitious entrepreneurs Athbi and Nouri Al-Enezi, it has successfully grown into a business with 45 employees and a large office and call center in Hamra Tower. After being acquired by Faith Capital in 2017, it was rebranded 'Justclean'.

Mohammed Jaffar, Deputy Chairman and CEO of Faith Capital, welcomed the guests. "We are meeting

after a year and we have achieved significant success due to the great efforts of our team. We work fulltime to maintain our success. We invested in three companies last year, and we are planning to invest in four other companies in the next six months," he said.

The laundry sector is major one in Kuwait and the region. "We are trying to develop this sector and convert offline laundries to online. There are around 600 laundries in Kuwait, and their number is growing. We will come up with more products that serve the owners and employees of the laundries. We will create significant value in this industry within the next four years," added Jaffar.

Abdulaziz Al-Loghani, Managing Partner of Faith Capital, spoke about the Floward application for ordering flowers online. "This application has been in the market for about a year and a half and we already have over 55 employees. Before launching this application, we studied the market and realized that online services are limited, as well as flower delivery services. So we



brought flower shops together under one application and added some additional services. The flower market is a huge one," he said.

Justclean is the first major platform in the online laundry marketplace. "We started with 15 laundries and today have over 100 mostly single laundries of young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. We help them sell their services and reach more customers. Our mission is to change the classic habit of using the offline laundry, saving customers' time and provide the best and fast garment care experience," stressed Athbi Al-Enezi, Co-Founder of Justclean.

Justclean is not just about making profits. "We also care about social responsibility as we believe it's our duty. We hold charity events on monthly and quarterly bases. We spend one percent of our revenue financing aid activities. Apart from charity events during the year, we have special donation events in cooperation with official societies to help poor people," said Nouri Al-Enezi, Co-Founder of Justclean.



KUWAIT: Mohammed Jaffar, Deputy Chairman and CEO of Faith Capital, speaks during the event. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



Emsakiya: Keeping track of prayer timings

By Nawara Fattahova

Kuwait Times celebrates Ramadan in Kuwait with 30 days of the Icons of Ramadan. We highlight our favorite activities, events, symbols and foods that are popular during this holy month, along with Kuwait's Ramadan culture, history and traditions.

As the day gets shorter or longer depending on the season, the timing of prayers changes as well. And fasting Muslims need to know the exact timing of both the Maghrib azan (for iftar) and emsak (time to end suhoor), that change daily. During regular days, people depend on the muezzin's call to prayer, but during the holy month of Ramadan, they want to know the timing in advance for the whole month. For this purpose, the timings of prayers (emsakiya) is printed

every year. Due to the difference between the Gregorian and Hijri calendars, the timing of Ramadan changes every year.

Although the world has gone digital and the emsakiya is now available online, many companies and organizations still print it annually and distribute it, usually with newspapers. The most useful emsakiya is the one printed as a poster. This is usually stuck in the kitchen, so those who are cooking can see it every day. According to online sources, the emsakiya was first printed in Egypt in 1846 on a yellow 27 x 17 cm-sized paper. This emsakiya was distributed to all public organizations. The same source mentioned that the first commercial emsakiya was printed in 1929.

Email us at local@kuwaittimes.com with your favorite symbols of Ramadan and Ramadan photos.



Gulf Bank brings girgian cheer to children

KUWAIT: Bringing joy to children in hospitals all over Kuwait, Gulf Bank celebrated girgian at a variety of different hospitals in cooperation with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals (KACCH).

Over the course of one week, Gulf Bank staff visited children in five hospitals: Al-Amiri Hospital, Ibn Sina, Al-Farwaniya, Al-Jahra and Al-Razi Hospital, distributing girgian bags and engaging with the young patients in a series of fun activities such as coloring, face painting, henna, hair braiding, and bringing joy to the young patients' hearts during the Holy Month of Ramadan.

Ahmad Al-Ameer, the Assistant General Manager for External Communications at Gulf Bank, said on this occasion, "Our corporate social responsibility program is committed to playing an active role in supporting Kuwait and its people. During the holy month of Ramadan, we are glad we could give back to the young children and share with them the spirit of giving."



شركة البترول الوطنية الكويتية
إحدى شركات مؤسسة البترول الكويتية
A Subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation

Notice of sale certain Shuaiba Refinery Assets

Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation is pleased to announce the sale of certain retired physical assets of its decommissioned Shuaiba Refinery, through sealed-bid auction sale process.

Potential buyers interested to participate in the sale process are invited to access the information and download Expression of Interest file through KNPC webpage:

<https://www.knpc.com/>

Potential buyers are required to submit their responses on or before 11/07/2018 through email: SHUAssetsSale@knpc.com



HK 'part-time girlfriends' putting themselves at risk

US governor resigns amid sex scandal, finance probe



GAZA: A man inspects the damage at a site targeted by an Israeli air strike a day before in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. — AFP

Israel denies Gaza truce but calm returns

Hamas, Islamic Jihad declare shared responsibility for rocket fire

GAZA CITY: Israel denied it has agreed to a ceasefire with Palestinian militants in Gaza as claimed by Hamas after the worst military flare-up since a 2014 war, but calm returned yesterday and there were signs the latest crisis may be ending. The exchange of fire on Tuesday and into the early hours of yesterday had raised the possibility of yet another war in the beleaguered Palestinian enclave run by Islamist movement Hamas, which would be the fourth since 2008.

Israel said it targeted some 65 militant sites in the Gaza Strip. It also said around 100 rockets and mortars fired from Gaza either exploded in Israel or were intercepted by air defenses. Three Israeli soldiers were wounded, one moderately and two lightly, the military said. There were no reports of casualties in Gaza. Late Tuesday, an Islamic Jihad spokesman said a ceasefire had been reached, and yesterday senior Hamas official Khalil Al-Hayya also spoke of an accord. Calm returned to the Gaza Strip and nearby Israeli communities yesterday. Israeli Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz denied talk of a deal, though a senior defense official reportedly said Israel would refrain from further strikes if there was no more fire from Gaza. "Israel does not want the situation to deteriorate, but those who started the violence must stop it," Katz

told Israeli public radio. "Israel will make (Hamas) pay for all fire against Israel."

Tuesday's violence followed weeks of deadly unrest along the border between Israel and the blockaded Palestinian enclave. In a rare joint statement, Hamas and Islamic Jihad declared shared responsibility for the rocket and mortar fire, saying it was in retaliation for Israeli attacks targeting their positions. Three Islamic Jihad members were killed in an Israeli strike Sunday, and the group vowed revenge. Islamic Jihad is the second-largest armed group in Gaza after Hamas.

The United Nations Security Council is expected to meet yesterday to discuss the violence, following a US request for an urgent meeting. "The Security Council should be outraged and respond to this latest bout of violence directed at innocent Israeli civilians," US ambassador Nikki Haley said. Kuwait, a non-permanent council member

representing Arab countries, circulated a draft resolution calling "for the consideration of measures to guarantee the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilian population".

Early Tuesday, some 28 mortar shells were fired toward Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel said most were intercepted by its air defense systems but put residents in the area on high alert, ordering them to stay within 15 seconds of shelters. One mortar shell exploded near a kindergarten building, a military spokesman said, damaging the structure. No children were present at the time. It was the largest barrage fired from Gaza into Israel since a 2014 war and led to Israel's biggest response since then.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had vowed Tuesday to "respond to these attacks powerfully". Shortly after he spoke, Israel's military began air strikes. Explosions shook the Palestinian enclave and smoke rose from the sites hit. Later in

the day, further rockets and mortar rounds from Gaza were intercepted or exploded in Israel, the army said. It said some of the mortars fired were supplied by Iran. On Tuesday night, a rocket hit an Israeli home near the Gaza border, but no one was hurt, the military said.

'Any upcoming escalation'

Israel's military said it hit "military targets" including a tunnel stretching into its territory, weapons stores and militant bases. Hamas said in a statement Tuesday that "what the resistance carried out this morning comes within the framework of the natural right to defend our people". Tuesday's incidents followed weeks of deadly demonstrations and clashes along the Gaza-Israel border, beginning on March 30. The protests demanded that Palestinians who fled or were expelled in the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation be allowed to return to their former homes, now inside Israel.

They peaked on May 14, when at least 61 Palestinians were killed in clashes as tens of thousands of Gazans protested the US transfer of its embassy in Israel to the disputed city of Jerusalem the same day. Low-level demonstrations and clashes have continued since. — AFP



Signs latest crisis may be ending

Yemen forces plan siege of rebel-held port

MOKHA, Yemen: Pro-government forces in Yemen are preparing to surround a key Red Sea port in a bid to force Houthi rebels to surrender it without a fight, military sources said yesterday. At least 60 fighters were killed in the latest clashes and air strikes, according to medical sources. Loyalist fighters backed by Saudi and Emirati forces are sending reinforcements ahead of a "new operation" to enter Hodeida city and seize its port, a commander from one of the forces said.

Hodeida port is the main conduit for humanitarian aid into Yemen, where years of war have left some 22 million people in need of food aid. Colonel Sadiq Duwaid, spokesman for the "National Resistance", one of three main forces taking part in the operation, said it was "being bolstered by new forces... that will take part in retaking Hodeida". "First, we will cut off supply lines, especially between (rebel-held capital) Sanaa and Hodeida, then we will place the Huthis under siege and bring them down, perhaps without a fight," he said.

Clashes broke out east of the port city yesterday while the Saudi-led coalition carried out numerous air strikes on rebel positions, Yemeni military sources said. Seven pro-government fighters were killed and 14 wounded, according to medical sources in Hodeida province, while at least 53 rebels also died. The deadly clashes come a day after an AFP reporter saw a large military convoy heading towards Hodeida from Mokha, 180 km to the south.

UN 'extremely concerned'

Hodeida lies 230 km from Sanaa, which the Houthis seized in 2014. This prompted a Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen the following year, aimed at propping up the internationally-recognized government of exiled President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi. The coalition accuses the rebels of using Hodeida as a launchpad for attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and for



HODEIDA, Yemen: Yemenis check the wreckage of an armored vehicle and a pickup truck after clashes between fighters loyal to the Saudi-backed exiled President Mansour Hadi and Houthi rebels near this coastal town on Tuesday. — AFP

smuggling in rockets. The Iran-backed insurgents have in recent months ramped up missile attacks against neighboring Saudi Arabia.

Nearly 10,000 people have been killed since the Saudi-led alliance launched its intervention in Yemen in March 2015. More than 2,200 others have died from cholera and millions are on the verge of famine in what the United Nations says is the world's gravest humanitarian crisis. The UN warned Tuesday that any operation aimed at seizing Hodeida would disrupt the entry of aid shipments to Yemen, 70 percent of which flow through the rebel-held port. "We are extremely concerned about the situation around Hodeida," said spokesman Stephane Dujarric, adding that the UN had taken precautions in case of "further escalation".

The UAE, Saudi Arabia's main coalition ally, set up a force in early 2018 to ramp up the coastal offensive, leading a disparate collective of groups with the stated goal of taking Hodeida. The forces include the "Giant Brigades" - a former elite unit of the Yemeni army rebuilt by the UAE - which has been at the vanguard of the offensive, reinforced by thousands of fighters from southern Yemen. The "National Resistance"

is made up of loyalists of Yemen's ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was assassinated by his former Houthi allies in December. It is commanded by his nephew Tarek Saleh. The third force, the "Tihama Resistance", is named for a Red Sea coastal region from which it draws most of its fighters, who are loyal to Hadi.

The fighting in western Yemen has been fierce, slowed by landmines that Yemeni military sources say have been laid by the insurgents. The Houthis have said they are ready to thwart any coalition operation and have urged Hodeida residents to join their ranks to prevent the city's capture. Hamoud Abbad, the Houthi-appointed governor of Sanaa, has called for "mass mobilization" to defend the front and appealed to tribesmen in the area.

Rebel-run media outlets yesterday claimed a drone attack on "the enemy's air defenses on the west coast" and said an overland counter-attack south of Hodeida had "inflicted heavy losses on the enemy". But in a phone call to Hodeida's governor, Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher called on the city's residents to "close ranks... against the Houthi militia which is losing strength every day". — AFP

Confusion in Iraq amid election fraud charges

BAGHDAD: Close to three weeks after parliamentary polls, confusion reigns in Iraq as allegations mount of election fraud even with negotiations to form a government well underway. Since the May 12 victory of anti-establishment electoral lists, long-time political figures pushed out by Iraqi voters hoping for change have called for a recount - with some even calling for the poll results to be cancelled. Iraqi authorities have agreed to review the results, but have yet to take any concrete measures.

Experts say claims of fraud are more likely to stem from frustrated outgoing politicians, rather than any major electoral manipulations in a country determined to turn the page after a brutal three-year fight against the Islamic State group. In a surprise to many, the parliamentary poll saw populist Shiite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr's electoral alliance with Iraq's communists beat a list of former anti-IS fighters close to Shiite Iran.

"To cancel these results is not possible, it would lead to a crisis and perhaps armed clashes," political analyst Essam Al-Fili told AFP. Fili said Shiite forces, now in a strong position amid negotiations to form a government, "aren't ready to give up what they've won". Many of Iraq's longtime political figures - seemingly irremovable since the fall 15 years ago of dictator Saddam Hussein - were pushed out of their seats by new faces. It is their voices - with parliament speaker Salim Al-Juburi leading the charge - that have been the loudest in challenging the poll results.

'12,000 votes'

Politicians, who have until today to formalize their complaints, voted Monday in parliament to annul the votes of displaced Iraqis and those living abroad. They also voted in favor of a manual recount of 10 percent of ballot boxes.

If the results differ by more than 25 percent from those announced by the electoral commission, the move would force a manual recount of nearly 11 million ballots. But the vote - which is non-binding - is purely symbolic.

Intelligence services said tests of electronic voting machines brought varied results - appearing to give credence to the fraud claims. And while the government has ordered a review of vote results, media and social networks continue to pick apart the allegations, which mainly concern polling stations abroad - a fragment of the overall vote. An outspoken outgoing MP, Mishan al-Juburi, has charged that while in Damascus he saw "the head of the electoral commission for (expats in) Syria and Jordan selling a political leader 12,000 votes of Iraqi expatriates in Syria and 4,000 votes in another country".

Juburi has also denounced alleged fraud in Amman, where his family lives and where he claims to have conducted an intense campaign that had officially won him a mere 19 votes. "I have the impression that there is a clear conspiracy against me," he said.

'Incongruities'

But it is in the multi-ethnic oil-rich province of Kirkuk that the challenge to the poll's results is the strongest - and the most explosive. Kirkuk's ethnically mixed population - majority Kurdish but with sizeable Arab and Turkmen minorities - pushed authorities to impose a curfew. Vote results in the province reflect its communal balance, with six Kurds, three Arabs and three Turkmen elects.

But the International Crisis Group has said the results have two "striking incongruities". The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan swept the Kurdish vote, but "won in several non-Kurdish areas where the party is not known to have any support", the group said in a report published last week. The second discrepancy was that "turnout in Kurdish areas was low compared both to past elections and to the participation rate in Turkmen neighborhoods and camps for the internally displaced", where much of the province's Arab population has lived since IS militants swept across the country in 2014. — AFP

International

Prison day-release practice under scrutiny after killings in Belgium

Attacker killed two policewomen, bystander, also an associate

LIEGE/BRUSSELS: Belgian authorities faced questions yesterday over why a prison inmate, suspected of links to radical Islamists in jail, was let out for a day, enabling him to carry out what police called a "terrorist attack" in the city of Liege. The justice minister, who oversees the prison service, said he felt "responsible" for Tuesday's bloodshed in which two policewomen and a bystander were killed. The attacker was shot dead by police at a nearby school shortly afterward. "The question of whether this man should have been given leave is striking because he killed three completely innocent people with a wish to kill himself," Koen Geens told RTBF radio. "I have to examine my own conscience."

Interior Minister Jan Jambon said authorities were still examining the motives of Benjamin Herman, a 31-year-old Belgian drug dealer who had been in jail for years but was let out for two days on Monday to prepare for an eventual release in 2020. But federal prosecutors said there was evidence that they were dealing with "terrorist murder". Herman had shouted "Allahu Akbar", the Muslim affirmation of faith, during his attack and he had had contact with Islamist radicals in jail in 2016 and early 2017.

He also appeared to have followed online exhortations from Islamic State to stab police officers and use their service weapons to shoot others, prosecutors said. Adding further evidence of an Islamist motive, a school cleaning woman who was briefly held by Herman told public broadcaster RTBF that he assured her he would do her no harm as she was a Muslim and told her to spare her tears for Palestinians and Syrians. Officials praised the quick wit-

tedness of the cafe owner outside whose bar Herman had killed the two policewomen, aged 54 and 44. By the time the killer, wielding two police pistols, came in looking for more victims, he had got all his customers into hiding.

Confirming that Herman was also believed to have killed an acquaintance 50 km away on Monday night, Jambon told RTL radio: "There are signs he was radicalized in prison but is it that radicalization which drove him to commit these acts? "It could have been because he had nothing to look forward to, because he also killed someone the night before, the guy's psychology and the fact, it seems, he may have been on drugs." He said that although Herman was flagged up in security reports on possibly violent Islamists in 2016 and early 2017, he had appeared to be something of a fringe figure. Unlike after other suspected "lone wolf" attacks in Europe, there has been no claim of responsibility by Islamic State.

Jail to jihad?

In and out of jail for a variety of crimes since 2003, Herman may have found a path to violence that has heightened concerns that Europe's prisons are incubators for jihadism. In Belgium, a prisoner's inclusion on a state security list as a suspected radical Islamist is not automatically passed on to all police or the prison service, experts say. It was the fourteenth time since his detention that he was granted temporary leave, to help him prepare for eventual reintegration into society, Justice Minister Geens said.

"Everyone in Belgium is asking the same question: how is it possible that someone convicted of such serious acts was allowed to leave prisons?" Deputy Prime Minister



LIEGE: Policemen take part in a tribute ceremony yesterday for the victims of a shooting. — AFP

Alexander de Croo was quoted as saying. The national crisis center, on high alert since a Brussels-based Islamic State cell helped kill 130 people in Paris in 2015, did not raise its alert level, an indication follow-up attacks were not expected. "I think it was just one individual who completely snapped and went on a killing spree," said Pieter Van Ostaeyen, a specialist on jihadism who has maintained contacts with Belgians fighting in Syria. "I don't think it was an organized attack."

Convicts have been behind several Islamist militant attacks in Europe. Hundreds of prisoners deemed radical by authorities are due to be released in the coming years. The Belgian parliament warned in a report late last year: "They come in as drug dealers and leave as Salafi jihadists," a security source said. Security services in Belgium and France have faced criticism at home and abroad for intelligence failures and their response to attacks in Brussels, Paris and Nice. — Reuters



Herman was on 'radical' watchlist

Zimbabwe to elect post-Mugabe president on July 30

HARARE: Zimbabwe announced yesterday it would choose a new president and parliament on July 30, in the country's first electoral test since the removal of its autocratic leader Robert Mugabe. His successor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, unveiled the date in the official Zimbabwe Government Gazette. "Monday, the 30th day of July, 2018 (is) the day of the election to the office of President, the election of members of the National Assembly and election of councilors," Mnangagwa said in a proclamation.

Once a right-hand man to the Mugabe, Mnangagwa dramatically succeeded the 94-year-old veteran leader in November after nearly four decades in charge when troops swarmed the streets and briefly seized key sites. Mnangagwa, 75, will square off against the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, now led by 40-year-old Nelson Chamisa following the death of Morgan Tsvangirai in February. "We have a great task ahead of us. A task to mobilise people and canvass for votes," Mnangagwa said at a meeting of the ruling ZANU-PF party on Monday following the announcement. "Whatever teething problems we faced, we need to focus on the coming elections."

'We will win'

The MDC said it accepted the date but called for "electoral reforms (to be) implemented before the elections are held". "We are prepared to fight and we know we will win," said MDC spokesman Douglas Mwonozora. He added that the party wanted external scrutiny of the voter roll and impartial media coverage for parties. If no candidate receives a simple majority in the first round of the presidential election, a run-off will be held on September 8.

Elections under Mugabe were marred by corruption, intimidation and violence, but Mnangagwa has vowed to hold a free and fair vote. In a move that could deter many opponents of ZANU-PF rule living in self-imposed exile overseas, the country's top court ruled Monday that non-resident Zimbabweans would be unable to vote from abroad. The MDC has called for voters living abroad to be permitted to vote in their own countries. The election will however be the first to be monitored by Western observers in many years. On Monday Harare and the European Union announced that observers from the bloc would monitor polls in the southern African country for the first time in 16 years.

Western observers

The head of the last EU observer mission, Pierre Schori, was thrown out of Zimbabwe in 2002 on the eve of presidential elections that were condemned as flawed. Following the high-profile spat, Zimbabwe barred the EU and other Western observers from sending further missions to monitor polls in the country as Mugabe grew more and more defiant of foreign criticism up until his downfall. And in a further sign of Zimbabwe's growing efforts to mend fences with former foes following Mugabe's resignation, the country has applied to re-join the Commonwealth, the bloc of former British colonies said Monday.

Harare's membership was suspended in 2003 over the violent and graft-ridden elections the previous year. Zimbabwe left the Commonwealth at the height of violent land seizures, when white farmers were evicted in favor of landless black people - a policy that wrecked agriculture and triggered economic collapse. Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland confirmed that the organisation would also send observers to the elections. — AFP

Police clear biggest migrant camp in Paris

PARIS: Security forces moved in on the biggest migrant camp in the French capital yesterday where some 1,700 people lived in makeshift tents alongside a canal. The migrants would be housed temporarily at more than 20 sites across the Paris region while the authorities checked their identities. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said in a statement. CRS riot police were deployed at dawn, some arriving by boat, as the migrants emerged from their tents and waited patiently to be bussed away from the Port de la Villette camp in the northeast of Paris.

"We don't really know where we are going," said a Libyan who reached Paris seven months ago and gave his name as Issam. "It was hard here," he added, holding on to his one piece of baggage. The "Millenaire" or Millennium camp was home mainly to Sudanese, Somali and Eritrean migrants. Two similar camp sites in the capital along the Canal St Martin, which houses 800 mostly Afghan migrants,

and the Porte de la Chapelle, home to 300-400 people, would also be quickly evacuated, said regional prefect Michel Cadot. "The other camps will be evacuated as soon as possible next week," Cadot told reporters. The authorities said the dawn operation yesterday was the 35th such evacuation in Paris in the last three years as thousands of migrants have arrived seeking a better life.

Migration spotlight

French President Emmanuel Macron has pushed a new immigration law, decried as too hardline by some associations but which he sees as essential to identify genuine asylum seekers and economic migrants. The law, which is still being debated in parliament, would speed up the asylum process and lead to increased deportations of people who are seeking work in France, rather than fleeing war or persecution at home. The issue of migration was thrown into the spotlight at the weekend after a Malian migrant, in the country illegally and working in the construction industry, saved a child dangling from a fourth-floor balcony.

The dramatic rescue act by Mamoudou Gassama, who scaled the Parisian apartment bloc with his bare hands, turned him into a global superstar and led Macron to grant him honorary citizenship. Immigration remains one of the main con-



PARIS: Municipal police officers of the city of Paris and workers clean up the Millenaire migrants makeshift camp along the Canal de Saint-Denis near Porte de la Villette following its evacuation yesterday. — AFP

cerns of French voters, polls show, and the far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen won a third of votes in last year's presidential election.

Rather than Gassama's heroics, some far-right activists have highlighted a different case involving migrants this week: That of two Afghans arrested for allegedly harassing a woman they judged to be

inappropriately dressed on a train. The Paris mayor's office, run by Socialist Anne Hidalgo, praised the clearance of the camps yesterday but said that it had been calling on the national government and interior ministry to take action for four months. Several officials from the mayor's office were openly critical of Interior Minister Gerard Collomb. — AFP

Help wanted: UN mission struggles in troubled CAR

LIBREVILLE: Six months ago, the UN Security Council agreed to send an additional 900 troops to the Central African Republic (CAR), reinforcing one of its biggest peacekeeping missions in one of the world's most dangerous countries. So far, just 400 have arrived - a worrying sign of the problems that the UN mission, known by its French acronym MINUSCA, is having in coaxing countries into sending men to the flashpoint nation. Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ivory Coast and Uruguay are among the countries which were approached, but without success, a UN source said.

In the end, Nepal agreed to provide 600 troops and Rwanda the other 300, the source said, adding, "They should all be there before the mission's mandate is renewed" in December. MINUSCA has been in CAR since April 2014, tasked with helping to stabilize the country after a brutal sectarian-tinged civil conflict that France helped to dampen. It currently has 11,000 troops and 2,000 police in a complement of nearly 13,500 people.

But commentators question whether the mission can achieve much, given the scale of CAR's problems. The country is in disarray and most of its territory remains in the hands of rival militias, many of them claiming to protect Christian or Muslim communities. "Like many UN missions, MINUSCA presents several major weaknesses. Foremost, it is undersized and under-equipped. Up against the multiplication of 'hot spots', the mission is completely overwhelmed," the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank said at the end of 2017. Thierry Vircoulon, a specialist at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), is more blunt: "It's not just that nobody wants to go into the Central African quagmire - it's that this quagmire is pointless."

Clashes

Events in recent months have heavily underscored such grim assessments. Bangui saw its bloodiest flare-up in two years on April 9-10, when 27 people were killed and more than 100 were wounded in clashes between peacekeeping troops and militias in a flashpoint Muslim enclave of the city. Muslim residents accused UN soldiers of killing 17 men, while MINUSCA said the violence erupted with an ambush of its troops during a security sweep. On May 1, religious-toned



LIBREVILLE: Young people walk in the street of the popular district of Cosmopark, in Libreville. — AFP

violence spread when armed men stormed a Christian church in the middle of a service, killing worshippers and a priest. In response, a mob burned a mosque and lynched two people believed to be Muslim. Twenty-four people died and around 170 were injured.

Troubled record
Since its deployment, MINUSCA has lost 73 people, three of them since the start of the year. Command and disciplinary problems within MINUSCA have added to the mission's woes. Accusations range from "passivity" in the face of attacks against civilians to sexual abuse and collusion with armed groups. Almost a third of the allegations of sexual abuse reported in all 15 UN peacekeeping missions worldwide in 2017 concerned MINUSCA.

In March, Gabon decided to withdraw its 444 soldiers amid allegations of sexual abuse and inadequate equipment. Negotiations are in hand to persuade Gabon to keep these men on the ground. "Their departure planned for June has been postponed until September 30," a UN source said. In 2016, 120 Republic of Congo troops were dismissed after accusations of sexual assault and various forms of illegal trafficking, and last year a battalion of more than 600 of their colleagues was sent home amid similar suspicions.

"The fundamental problem for the contingents of Blue Helmets (in the CAR) is not their quantity but their quality," argues Vircoulon. The UN says it is responding to these problems. In 2017, it opened internal inquiries into killings in incidents involving soldiers from the Moroccan, Rwandan and Mauritanian contingents, and appointed human-rights lawyer Jane Connors to vet allegations of sexual abuse. — AFP

Italy renews bid to form govt and end turmoil

ROME: Italy searched for a last-minute exit from almost three months of political turmoil yesterday, with its biggest party looking to make a renewed attempt to form a coalition government with the right-wing League. The two anti-establishment parties, the 5-Star Movement and League, had abandoned plans to jointly take power at the weekend after the president blocked their proposed cabinet lineup. President Sergio Mattarella's veto of 81-year-old eurosceptic Paolo Savona as economy minister appeared to tip the country back towards repeat elections and triggered a dramatic speculative attack on Italian financial markets.

The parties are now trying to find "a point of compromise on another name" for the economy ministry, said the source close to 5-Star, the single-biggest party in the new parliament. The sense that a resolution of the stalemate might be at hand came from Prime Minister-designate Carlo Cottarelli, who was tasked by the head of state this week to calm the turmoil and plan for repeat elections after the summer.

"New possibilities have emerged for the birth of a political government," Cottarelli was quoted as saying by ANSA news agency, implying that a government headed by politicians rather than technocrats like himself could be in the offing. "These circumstances, also considering the market tensions, have caused me to wait for further developments."

However, League leader Matteo Salvini, who is surging in opinion polls, appeared to throw cold water on the notion that his party and 5-Star could try again to take power, saying Italy should return to an election as soon as possible. "The earlier we vote the better because it's the best way to get out of this quagmire and confusion," Salvini told reporters. He did, however, appear open to an interim administration to govern for a few months, saying an election at the end of July would be "disruptive" for Italian seasonal workers. — Reuters

International

US claims 50 Afghan Taliban leaders killed in rocket strike

Militants kill one in attack on interior ministry in Kabul

KABUL: More than 50 senior Taliban commanders were killed in an artillery strike on a meeting in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand, a US military spokesman said yesterday, as fighting continued across the country. Details of last week's operation emerged as fighting continued in other parts of Afghanistan, where the Taliban, aiming to restore their version of hardline Islamic law, launched their annual spring offensive last month.

There were also serious incidents in Takhar province in the north, in Loghar, east of the capital, and Kandahar in the south, keeping up a pattern of attacks across the country. The US military said the May 24 meeting in Helmand's district of Musa Qala involved commanders from a number of Afghan provinces, including neighboring Farah, where Taliban fighters this month briefly threatened to overrun the provincial capital.

"We think the meeting was to plan next steps," said Lt Col Martin O'Donnell, spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan. While the strike by an artillery rocket system would disrupt Taliban operations, it would not necessarily mean any interruption to the fighting, he said. However, the attack in one of the heartlands of the Taliban insurgency was a significant blow to the insurgents, he said. "It's certainly a notable strike," he said, adding that several other senior and lower level commanders had been killed during operations over a 10-day period this month.

The Taliban dismissed the report as "propaganda" and said the attack had hit two civilian houses in Musa Qala, killing five civilians and wounding three. "This was a civilian residential area, which had no connection with the Taliban," spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi said in a statement. In the northern province of Takhar, Taliban fighters in the Dasht-e Qala district center captured the govern-

nor's compound and police headquarters yesterday but heavy fighting was continuing, police spokesman Khalil Aseer said. In Loghar, the Taliban claimed an attack on a police station in the provincial capital, Pul-e Alam, which killed three police and wounded 12, among them four police and eight civilians. Shahpoor Ahmadzai, a spokesman for the provincial governor, said three attackers who sought to enter the police station in the early morning hours triggered a three-hour gunbattle that ended when all three were killed. Elsewhere, three civilians were killed and 13 wounded by an explosion in the southern city of Kandahar that appeared to have targeted a mechanics' workshop repairing Afghan army vehicles, a spokesman for the provincial governor said.



Militants dismiss strike report as 'propaganda'

Kabul targeted

Meanwhile, militants launched a gun and bomb attack on the interior ministry in Kabul yesterday, killing a policeman in the latest chilling demonstration of their ability to strike at the heart of the Afghan capital. Five people were injured in the attack, which took place during the holy month of Ramadan and was claimed by the Islamic State (IS) group. Special forces rushed to the scene after the attackers detonated what police said was a car bomb at the first checkpoint leading to the ministry, then tried to battle their way inside.

"The fighting is over, the attackers have all been killed by security forces between the first and second security perimeter," said Kabul police chief Daud Amin. A security source told AFP a clearing operation was continuing. "The attackers used two vehicles to reach near interior ministry compound. There were eight attackers involved, one detonated his explosives, seven others were killed," interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish told reporters.

Danish said one police officer had been killed and five



KABUL: Wounded Afghan girl Seweeta Saberi, 17, receives treatment as her relatives weep at Wazir Akbar Khan hospital yesterday. —AFP

civilians wounded. Policeman Mujibullah Nabizada was injured in the first blast. "I dragged myself to the road and a car picked up and brought me to the hospital," he told AFP from his hospital bed, where he was being treated for broken bones. Seweeta Saberi, 17, was also wounded in the blast and taken to hospital. "Everyone is sitting in their loved ones' blood these days," her brother Sameer told AFP. "We request you [government leaders], for God's sake, if you can't manage this country please resign."

A security source told AFP there had been multiple blasts but could not confirm how many. "I was in my office when I heard a blast followed by gunfire. We were told to stay inside our offices as the compound was attacked," said one ministry employee. IS, which is trying to make inroads in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the attack via its Amaq propaganda service. Police also said they had found a car stuffed with explosives and guns at Kabul's international airport near the interior ministry yesterday. — Agencies

Vietnam court upholds decision in fraud case

HANOI: A court has upheld a key judgement in Vietnam's biggest-ever fraud case, spotlighting the country's ability to tackle financial crime at a time when foreign banks are heading government calls to invest. The Ho Chi Minh City People's High Court rejected an appeal yesterday against a judgment that the central perpetrator of a 4.9 trillion dong (\$215 million) theft - dubbed "Super Swindler" by local media - is responsible for returning some of the stolen money, rather than the individual's employer at the time, state-controlled VietinBank.

The ruling comes as financial firms flock to Vietnam, hoping to capitalize on a period of privatization and capital-raising deals in the fast-growing emerging Southeast Asian economy. The chief executive of one victim, depositor Saigonbank Berjaya Securities JSC (SBBS) - a unit of Malaysia's Berjaya Corp Bhd - said she had no hope of recouping her bank's \$10 million from the perpetrator, who was sentenced to life imprisonment. "I am heartbroken and lost for words," Josephine Yei told Reuters.

VietinBank, formally Vietnam Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Industry and Trade, did not respond to emailed requests for comment. A VietinBank lawyer told Reuters the bank had instructed its lawyers not to comment to media. Majority owner State Bank of Vietnam - the country's central bank - could not provide immediate comment. In many economies, banks can be liable for embezzlement of depositors' funds if negligence of the bank is established. In Vietnam, interpretation of liability law becomes more open when the perpetrator goes beyond their responsibility, a lawyer said.

"Vietnam doesn't have case laws for such cases so it depends completely on the mind of the jury," said Nguyen Thanh Ha, chairman of Hanoi-based SBBLAW, ahead of the ruling. Court documents showed indebted Huynh Thi Huyen Nhu and 22 accomplices were convicted in 2014 for "misappropriation of funds" from 15 victims in 2010 and 2011. Nhu used her title as a senior VietinBank manager to encourage customers to deposit funds which she and accomplices appropriated using fake official documents, according to the indictment.

The court yesterday said the victims signed contracts which promised interest rates higher than those permitted by the State Bank of Vietnam and were therefore illegal. SBBS said it was unaware of any illegality, and argued that contracts with forged signatures should be considered void. Both domestic and foreign investors have been watching the case closely to "see how the legal framework protecting depositors in Vietnam is being implemented", SBBS lawyer Nguyen Thi Minh Huyen told Reuters after the ruling.

VietinBank is Vietnam's second-largest listed bank by market value. It is 64.46 percent state-owned, with its next-biggest shareholder Japan's MUFG Bank Ltd, a unit of Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc, with 19.7 percent. Earlier this month, credit-ratings firm Fitch upgraded its view of VietinBank to B+ from BB-. — Reuters

HK 'part-time girlfriends' putting themselves at risk

HONG KONG: For Hong Kong's "part-time girlfriends", social media provides an easy way to connect with clients, but campaigners warn that online convenience is tempting girls as young as 13 to put themselves at risk. The label "part-time girlfriend" is a euphemism often used by young women in the city who may be studying or have jobs, but who also offer sex on the side. By using variations of the hashtag #ptgf as shorthand, they connect with men on networks such as Instagram then switch to direct messaging to offer services and arrange to meet.

Instagram says it has made #ptgf and #hkptgf unsearchable, but a host of new alternatives that add Chinese characters or initials to the original tag circumvent the block. Loneliness, curiosity, family breakdown and financial pressures are key motivators for young women to try it out, according to support workers on the ground. High-school student Kiki, a pseudonym she chose to protect her identity, started part-time sex work aged 17, saying it was easy to search for men on Instagram by using one of the #ptgf tags.

"I had an argument with my sister and was not very happy, so I just wanted to find someone to listen to me," she told AFP. "For the first few times I felt quite good... so I kept looking for clients for company." She admits she was nervous about meeting strangers, but the financial incentive outweighed her doubts. "My family is not very wealthy. I was

making money for myself and saved it," she says. Kiki says she charged from HK\$300 (\$38) for dinner or "touching", up to HK\$1,000 for other sexual services.

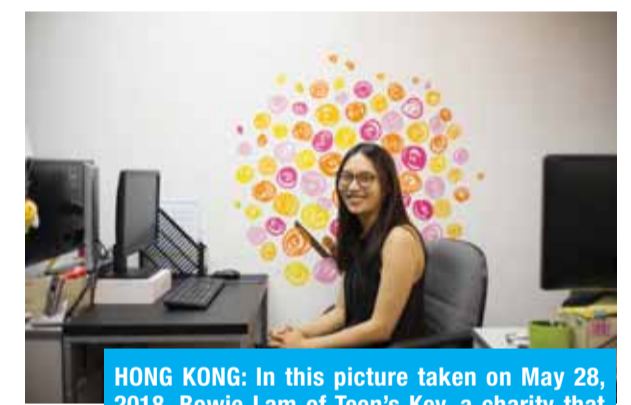
After less than a year she gave up because she had started a new relationship. Now 19, she says she is left with a sense of regret and warns other girls to think carefully before taking the leap. "A future boyfriend or husband might find it hard to accept," she says. "It's like you have a needle piercing your heart and it's always there."

Blurred boundaries

Connecting with clients online often gives young women a false sense of security, says Bowie Lam, executive director of Teen's Key, a charity that offers support to Hong Kong's sex workers under the age of 25. She says the age of "part-time girlfriends" is getting lower and believes that social media is a factor. "They think they have autonomy and control because they can screen a client online, talk with him, but it makes the boundary more blurred," Lam says.

These young women often do not see themselves as sex workers because they are not based out of seedy rooms, or the bars and clubs of Hong Kong's traditional red light districts, she adds. Sometimes they meet clients without offering sex at first and are taken to theme parks, dinner or even on hikes, but as more money is offered, the path usually leads to paid sex. Some young women have their first sexual experience as a "part-time girlfriend", says Lam. Believing they have become friends with a client can lead them to drop their guard. "Girls have been treated violently and even raped because they trusted the man wouldn't harm them," Lam told AFP.

Hong Kong police said they have taken action against websites, chat rooms and discussion forums to combat "illegal prostitution activities" in a statement to AFP. The



HONG KONG: In this picture taken on May 28, 2018, Bowie Lam of Teen's Key, a charity that offers support to sex workers under the age of 25, poses in her office. — AFP

"act of prostitution" in itself is not illegal in Hong Kong, police say, but soliciting is. Instagram told AFP it acts to "swiftly remove" content, accounts and hashtags that violate its community guidelines. A long-term strategy addressing taboos around talking about sex within schools and families in Hong Kong's conservative society is what is most needed to stop girls putting themselves at risk, says Lam. Teen's Key offers young sex workers a range of support services, ranging from health tests to career advice and help with financial planning. Lam says they want to help the women reconnect with their dreams and aspirations. However, even when they are given support by the charity, some feel they cannot leave part-time sex work behind. As the cost of living in Hong Kong soars, financial pressure is often the main factor. — AFP

The man sent by Kim to US for high-level talks

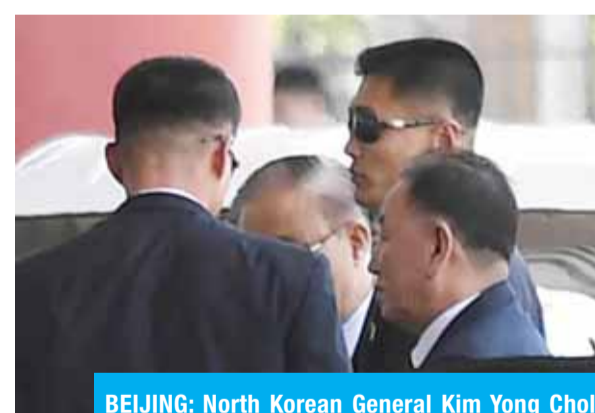
WASHINGTON/SEOUL: When Kim Yong Chol lands in New York, he will become the most senior North Korean envoy to hold talks with American officials on US soil in 18 years. The former spy chief is a trusted adviser to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, playing a pivotal role in preparations for an historic summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump. In a sign of his importance, Trump announced Kim Yong Chol's New York trip on Twitter on Tuesday. The White House said he would meet US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo later this week, the most high-level contact between the two countries in the United States since Jo Myong Rok, a marshal, met President Bill Clinton in 2000.

Diplomatic heavyweight

Kim Yong Chol is a four-star general, vice chairman of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee, and director of the United Front Department, which is responsible for inter-Korean relations. Such positions, and his omnipresence before and during inter-Korean summits in April and on Saturday, make him one of the most powerful people in North Korea, South Korean officials say. He has played a central role in the recent thaw in relations between the North and South Korea, as well as the United States. Sent as Kim Jong Un's envoy to the Winter Olympics in South Korea in February, Kim Yong Chol told South Korean President Moon Jae-in Pyongyang was open to talks with Washington, the first indication North Korea was changing course after months of trading threats and insults with the United States. He and Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, were the only two officials to join the North Korean leader at the two inter-Korean summits. He also coordinated Kim Jong Un's two meetings with Pompeo in Pyongyang.

Spy under sanctions

Kim Yong Chol was previously chief of the Reconnaissance General Bureau, a top North Korean mili-



BEIJING: North Korean General Kim Yong Chol (front right) arrives at Beijing airport for a flight departing for New York yesterday. — AFP

tary intelligence agency, and has spent nearly 30 years as a senior member of the intelligence community. The United States and South Korea blacklisted him for supporting the North's nuclear and missile programs in 2010 and 2016, respectively. A visit to the United States would indicate a waiver was granted. He was accused by South Korea of masterminding deadly attacks on a South Korean navy ship and an island in 2010. He was also linked by US intelligence to a devastating cyber attack on Sony Pictures in 2014. North Korea denied any involvement in either incident. Kim Yong Chol "stormed out of the room" during military talks in 2014 when the South demanded an apology for the 2010 attacks, according to South Korean officials. "He is a tough negotiator and an expert on inter-Korean talks, but it is true that he had been a symbol of hawks rather than harmony and reconciliation until this year," said Moon Sang-gyun, a former South Korean defence official.

Bodyguard to Kim's father

Kim Yong Chol served in the military police in the demilitarized zone on the border of the two Koreas. He was also a bodyguard to Kim Jong Il, the former leader and late father of Kim Jong Un, according to North Korea Leadership Watch, an affiliate of the 38 North think tank. He has been closely linked to Kim Jong Un's succession and has been seen flanking the leader on several public visits. — Reuters

MH370 hunt may resume if new evidence found

KUALA LUMPUR: The hunt for Flight MH370 may resume if new evidence comes to light, Malaysia's prime minister said yesterday, as a private search for the plane draws to a close. The Malaysia Airlines jet vanished in March 2014 with 239 people - mostly from China - on board, en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. US exploration firm Ocean Infinity was contracted for a three-month search for the Boeing 777 on a "no find, no fee basis". This is set to end in the coming days after finding no sign of the wreckage.

The private search came after an Australian-led hunt, which covered a vast area of the southern Indian Ocean and was the most expensive in aviation history. It was suspended last year. Mahathir Mohamad, who became Malaysia's premier for a second time after a shock election victory, indicated the government had no plans at the moment to resume the hunt. "We have come to a stage where we cannot keep searching for something we cannot find," he told a press conference. "We understand the feelings of the relatives but we cannot allow the search to go on forever." But he added: "If we find any new information, we may resume the search."

Transport Minister Anthony Loke said he hoped a final report into the plane's disappearance by an independent international investigation team would be published by July. Ocean Infinity had stood to make up to \$70 million if it found the jet or its black boxes. The private US firm scoured over 112,000 sq km of seabed. The ship conducting the hunt, Seabed Constructor, was a Norwegian research vessel carrying 65 crew, including two members of the Malaysian navy as the government's representatives. It used eight autonomous drones equipped with sonars and cameras, able to operate at depths up to 6,000 m. Only three confirmed fragments of MH370 have been found, all of them on western Indian Ocean shores, including a two-metre wing part known as a flaperon. — AFP

International

US governor resigns amid sex scandal, finance probe

Greitens attempted to coerce mistress into silence

CHICAGO: Missouri Governor Eric Greitens - once a rising Republican political star - resigned Tuesday amid expanding investigations of a sex scandal and potential violations of campaign finance laws. It was a stunning fall from grace for the military veteran and Rhodes scholar once rumored to be considering an eventual run for the presidency. The Midwestern US state's legislature, controlled by the governor's own party, was in the midst of a special session to consider whether Greitens should be impeached, when the governor announced his resignation would be effective Friday evening.

"This ordeal has been designed to cause an incredible amount of strain on my family," said the defiant governor, who had repeatedly called the investigations against him a "witch hunt", borrowing a favorite phrase of President Donald Trump. "I have not broken any laws or committed any offense worthy of this treatment," he added at a brief news conference, at one point clearly holding back tears.

Greitens' troubles had mushroomed over revelations of a 2015 extramarital affair and charges, which he vehemently disputed, that he attempted to blackmail his mistress into

silence with a compromising semi-nude photo. The state legislature's investigation had expanded to probe potential campaign finance violations, as questions swirled about whether the governor's campaign illegally coordinated with a non-profit organization to conceal the identity of political donors.

The governor's decision came after a judge compelled Greitens to release information about A New Missouri and any

ered soliciting donations from foreign nationals, according to the newspaper.

'No end in sight'

The former US Navy SEAL and non-profit founder, who swept into power in the 2016 election, had alienated many in the Midwestern state's political establishment by casting himself as an outsider and criticizing lawmakers of both parties who disagreed with him. The 44-year-old married governor was hobbled when an extramarital affair from two years ago became public in January, including allegations that he attempted to coerce his mistress into silence.

Greitens' mistress, who has not been publicly identified, claimed that he took a photo of her partially nude, bound and blindfolded, without her permission, and threatened to release the photo if the affair became public. An investigation by a bipartisan state legislative committee found the woman credible, and released a report laying out her allegations in great detail. While admitting to the extramarital affair, Greitens insisted his failings were personal and did not rise to the level of a criminal offense.

He claimed the allegations, and subse-



Stunning fall from grace

communications or coordination between the group and his own campaign fund, according to the St Louis Post-Dispatch newspaper. A former Greitens campaign adviser also told a state House investigative committee that the campaign had consid-



UNIVERSITY CITY, Missouri: In this photo taken on Feb 22, 2017, Missouri Governor Eric Greitens addresses the crowd at Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery. — AFP

quent investigations, were the result of entrenched forces wanting to cripple him politically. Greitens repeated that claim Tuesday. "It's clear for the forces that

oppose us there's no end in sight. I cannot allow those forces to continue to cause pain and difficulty to the people that I love," the governor said. — AFP

Journalist killed in northern Mexico, at least 5th of 2018

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico: A Mexican journalist was found beaten to death Tuesday in the northern state of Tamaulipas, on the US border, prosecutors said, at least the fifth reporter murdered in the country this year. Hector Gonzalez Antonio, a correspondent for national daily Excelsior and local radio and TV stations, was found bludgeoned to death on a road in the state capital, Ciudad Victoria, the state prosecutor's office said in a statement. "An investigation has been opened to identify and locate those responsible for this homicide," it said.

Pictures from the crime scene showed the journalist's bloodied body, shirtless and missing a shoe, abandoned on a narrow dirt road on the outskirts of Ciudad Victoria. Gonzalez, 40, had been kidnapped in a carjacking on Monday, said watchdog group Reporters Without Borders. A married father of two, he covered politics and general news, including stories on the wave of violence that has engulfed Mexico in recent years - which has hit particularly hard in Tamaulipas, the scene of bloody turf wars between rival drug cartels.

Tamaulipas is "a black hole as far as the freedom of the press, so it's very likely he was killed because of his work as a journalist," said Balbina Flores, head of Reporters Without Borders in Mexico. Flores called for a full investigation and government protection for Gonzalez's family. Racked by violent crime



CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico: Handout picture shows the corpse of Mexican journalist Hector Gonzalez Antonio, who was found beaten to death on Tuesday. — AFP

linked to the multibillion-dollar narcotics trade, Mexico posted a record number of homicides last year: 25,339. That included at least 11 murdered journalists, making the country the deadliest in the world for the profession after Syria, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Asking questions about powerful drug cartels or government corruption can be a deadly job in Mexico. Including Gonzalez, at least five journalists have been murdered so far this year in the country in possible retaliation for their work, and another is missing, according to the rights group. More than 100 have been murdered in the country since 2000.

'Dangerous to publish here'

The vast majority of the cases have gone unpunished - as do more than 90 percent of

violent crimes in Mexico. "When journalists are murdered or threatened for doing their jobs, freedom of expression is threatened," said Giancarlo Summa, director of the United Nations Information Center in Mexico. "We demand the authorities investigate what happened (to Gonzalez) immediately and arrest those responsible. The impunity must end."

A colleague and friend of Gonzalez, who asked not to be named out of fear for his safety, said the late journalist's death did not appear to fit the profile of a typical drug cartel execution. "It's strange that he was beaten to death and not shot," he said. He said Gonzalez had not mentioned receiving threats, but was "very careful about what he wrote and said." "It's dangerous to publish or comment on what happens here" in Tamaulipas, Gonzalez's friend said. — AFP

Turkey to look elsewhere if US blocks F-35 sale

ANKARA: Turkey will buy jets elsewhere if the United States stops it buying Lockheed Martin F-35s, Ankara's foreign minister was quoted as saying amid tensions between the allies over defense and the fate of a jailed US pastor. NATO member Turkey has caused unease in Washington with its decision to buy S-400 surface-to-air missiles from Russia and drawn criticism over its detention of a US Christian pastor, Andrew Brunson, on terrorism charges.

A US Senate committee last week passed its version of a \$716 billion defense policy bill, including a measure to prevent Turkey from buying the Lockheed jets, citing Brunson and the Russian missile deal. Turkey could procure jets elsewhere, broadcaster NTV cited Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu as telling reporters on his return flight from a visit to Germany, although it was unlikely that Washington would be able to back out of the deal.

"The pre-payments for this project have been made. This is a comprehensive agreement. It's not just purchasing, but also joint production," NTV quoted Cavusoglu as saying. Turkey has plans to buy more than 100 of the F-35 jets and last year the

Pentagon last year awarded Lockheed \$3.7 billion in an interim payment for the production of 50 of the aircraft earmarked for non-US customers, including Ankara. Brunson faces up to 35 years in prison on charges of links to the network Ankara blames for a 2016 coup attempt. The pastor denied the charges in a Turkish court this month.

Syria policy

Relations between Washington and Ankara have been tested by several recent developments, including the sentencing this month of a former Turkish state bank executive to 32 months in prison for taking part in an Iran sanctions-busting scheme, a case Turkey has called a political attack. Differences over Syria policy and Washington's decision to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem have also angered Ankara. In particular, Turkey has been outraged by US support for the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia - a group Turkey regards as a terrorist organization. However, Cavusoglu said separately yesterday that an understanding had been reached in Washington over Syria's northern Manbij area, where the militants would leave. — Reuters

Fast lava from Kilauea volcano closes highway

HONOLULU: Fast-moving lava from Hawaii's Kilauea volcano forced officials to close part of a highway on Tuesday, and they warned that sharp, thin strands of volcanic glass fibers carried by the wind could injure eyes and lungs. As lava crossed Highway 132, officials shut a stretch of road from Lava Tree State Park to Four Corners and told residents who had not evacuated to leave the area immediately. The lava flow destroyed a farm where Kevin Hopkins and partners raise tropical fish and the ornamental carp known as koi. "It just came over and ate the farm, boiled the water out of the ponds," Hopkins said.

Earlier on Tuesday, a small explosion of ash erupted from the summit of the volcano in a vertical plume some 4,600 m high, the US Geological Survey said, the latest outburst in a month of volcanic activity. The agency warned that ash was drifting northwest and liable to affect anyone in the summit area. Hundreds of people have been ordered to leave the vicinity of one of the world's most active volcanoes in its biggest eruption cycle in a century.

Kilauea entered its fourth week of what may be an unprecedented, simultaneous eruption at its summit crater and along a 10-km string of fissures 40 km down its east flank. Lava flows from multiple fissures have blocked roads and damaged dozens of buildings on Hawaii's Big Island. Lava has also destroyed more than 400 electric poles and other equipment, causing power outages, the



PAHOA, Hawaii: A USGS scientist in the Lower East Rift Zone documents the fissure 7 lava fountain on Tuesday. — AFP

utility Hawaii Electric Light reported. It is unclear how many homes and businesses were without power. One fountain of lava rose more than 60 m at times on Monday, the Geological Survey said.

Officials are on high alert for occasional earthquakes, though most have been small. Lava has engulfed the heads of two wells that tap into steam and gas deep into the Earth at the 38-megawatt Puna Geothermal Venture electrical plant, which used to produce a quarter of the Big Island's electricity. Its operator, Israeli-controlled Ormat Technologies Inc, said it had not been able to assess the damage.

So far no deaths have been blamed on the eruption, though a man's leg was shattered

when he was hit by a plate-size chunk of lava rock. Residents fear the electrical plant's deep geothermal wells may be explosive. Officials have said the power plant is safe but lava has never engulfed a geothermal plant anywhere in the world, creating a measure of uncertainty.

Contingency plans have been made for a possible helicopter evacuation of up to 1,000 residents in a coastal area south of the fissures should their last exit route, State Highway 130, become blocked by lava or become unsafe due to gaping cracks, County of Hawaii officials said. At least 82 homes have been destroyed in the southeastern corner of Big Island and about 2,000 people have been ordered evacuated since Kilauea began erupting on May 3. — Reuters

Probe urged into Venezuela 'crimes against humanity'

WASHINGTON: A panel of independent international experts has found "reasonable grounds" to refer Venezuela to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, the Organization of American States said Tuesday. In a report, the experts identified more than 8,292 "extrajudicial executions" since 2015, "often a result of various security forces conducting unlawful and violent home raids where false confrontations are staged to rationalize the summary executions of, commonly, young men."

The document identifies 11 men, including President Nicolas Maduro and Vice President Tarek El Aissami, as the masterminds of the repression. "Maduro could wind up in jail" said one of the authors, legal scholar Santiago Canton of Argentina. The experts' recommendations include opening an investigation into possible crimes against humanity and submitting their report to the International Criminal Court.

The panel "considers that there are reasonable grounds... for considering that acts to which the civilian population of Venezuela was subjected to dating back

to at least February 12, 2014, constitute crimes against humanity," the report said. The 400-page report also found 131 people were killed during the protests against Maduro since 2014. "The tactics used demonstrate a clear pattern of the intent to kill, demonstrated by the location of the death blow (vital areas of the body, in particular, shots to the head and neck), the use of modified and live munitions, and the close range in which these acts were perpetrated," it noted.

In addition, the report said more than 12,000 Venezuelans have been arbitrarily detained since the 2013 presidential election, when Maduro was elected as president to succeed Hugo Chavez. And more than 1,300 people have been held as political prisoners during that same period. OAS chief Luis Almagro, who is from Uruguay and mandated the panel, is an open critic of Maduro, and refers to Venezuela as a "dictatorship".

Maduro won 68 percent of the vote in Venezuela's May election that was boycotted by the opposition and condemned as illegitimate by much of the international community. "The regime moved forward with the fraudulent elections, continues to act with impunity and the people of Venezuela endure increasing intimidation, fear, repression and assault," the report added. "The severity of the tactics only increases. These tactics and methods are to instill fear and intimidate with torture used as punishment." A statement from Venezuela's OAS mission called the report a "grotesque media farce", and cast doubt on whether Almagro has the authority to order such a document and research. — AFP

Analysis

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The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

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Positive steps and fragile promises by Libyan leaders

The gathering of Libyan leaders in Paris this week marked a positive step for the violence-racked country, but analysts warn the absence of key players could make the optimism short-lived. The Tuesday meeting hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron brought together four leaders representing most-but notably not all-of Libya's rival factions. Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj, head of the UN-backed unity government in Tripoli, was at the table along with military strongman Khalifa Haftar, whose rival Libyan National Army dominates the country's east.

Also present were Aguila Saleh Issa, the parliament speaker based in the eastern city of Tobruk, and Khalid Al-Mishri, the newly elected head of the High Council of State. The leaders dispute each other's legitimacy and are entwined with numerous militias who are known to switch their allegiances. Despite the stark differences, the four leaders agreed to hold parliamentary and presidential elections on December 10 and vowed to respect the results. They also said they would work towards phasing out parallel institutions and unifying the Libyan Central Bank.

Key players absent

In a sign of the fragility of such promises, the Libyans verbally agreed on the proposals rather than formally signing a text. Rachid Khechana, director of the Mediterranean Centre for Libyan Studies, said a signature on paper does not necessarily mean action. "Even if the declaration had been signed, we know how many (Libyan) politicians, in particular MPs, have failed to uphold their commitment," he said, citing a 2015 Libya deal agreed in Morocco which numerous signatories did not implement.

Khechana highlighted the absence in Paris of "groups and networks of great influence, including the tribal chiefs and the armed groups". In western Libya, "some of these groups are more influential than the government," he added, in reference to the UN-backed Government of National Accord. Federica Saini Fasanotti, from the Brookings Institution in Washington, agreed "the solution in Libya is strictly connected to the armed groups". As long as the international community continues to negotiate with political leaders "who are not fully recognized on the ground... the situation in Libya won't be solved," she said. The International Crisis Group drew on the absence of a delegation from the city of Misrata, home to the most powerful armed groups in western Libya.

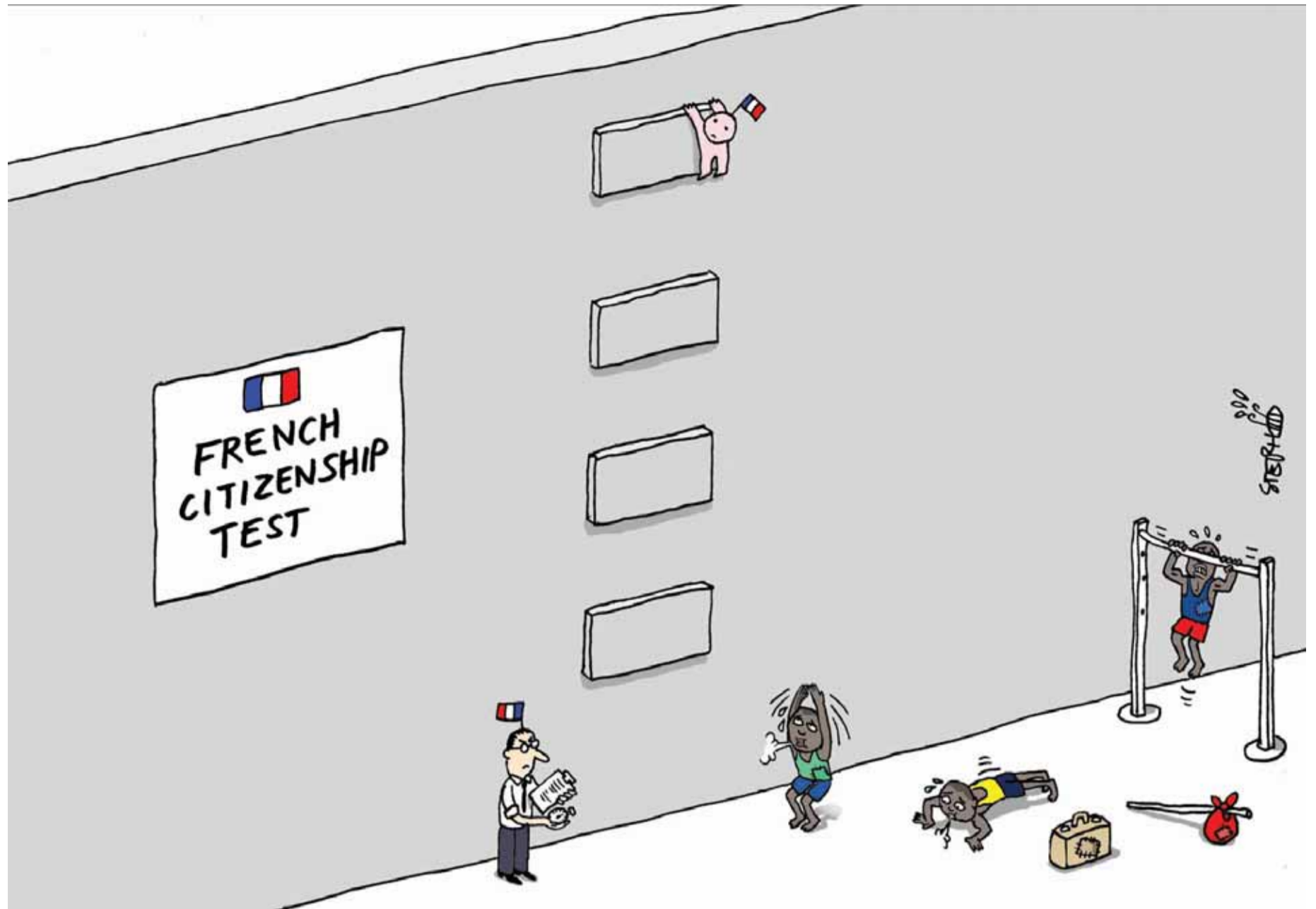
Election hurdles

GNA deputy premier Ahmed Maiteeq, who represents Misrata, refused to attend the Paris meeting according to one of his advisers. Ibrahim Ben Rjab, a senior military figure in the Misrata militia, told AFP the city had boycotted the meeting in protest at the presence of Haftar whom they accuse of wanting to establish a dictatorship. While there are "some positive points" to come out of Paris, he said the agreement has no official status and "ultimately is not worth anything because it hasn't been signed".

Fathi Bashagha, a Misrata lawmaker, said that "the outcome of the Paris meeting is good," but the pledges "remain words and wishes on paper, in the absence of a clear mechanism for applying them". Analysts remain sceptical that Libya will go to the polls in December, despite leaders in Paris agreeing to adopt the necessary laws by September 16. "The legal framework for holding elections remains opaque," said Human Rights Watch. Staging elections is "unrealistic from a strictly technical perspective," said Crisis Group. "Neither the legal nor the constitutional framework is in place-hurdles that may prove impossible to overcome within a short timeframe," the organization added.—AFP



PARIS: Libya Chief of Staff, Marshall Khalifa Haftar, whose rival Libyan National Army dominates the country's east, stands on the steps of the Elysee Palace following the international conference on Libya in Paris yesterday. — AFP



Mauritania's nomadic herders seek safe passage

Chronic fatigue, weight loss and lingering sadness. Mohammed Elmouved does not need a doctor to diagnose his symptoms. "It's my animals," said the livestock owner, at a dusty herders' camp in R'Kiz, on the edge of the Mauritanian desert. "They've barely had anything to eat or drink in days, so the weakest ones are dying... Whatever they feel, I feel." His emaciated goats wobble around a trough half-filled with water, while other smaller bleating competitors try to push to the front for a drink themselves.

With his goats, cows and camels, Elmouved is crossing stretches of arid land in southern Mauritania to reach Senegal, 40 km (25 miles) away on Africa's west coast, where he plans to sell part of his herd to buy feed for his stronger animals. "There are no trees, no pastures here but I think I will have more luck on the other side of the (Senegal) river," said the herder, aged in his fifties and swathed in a long bright blue and gold robe. For centuries, nomadic herders in Mauritania and across the Sahel, a vast dry region in northwestern Africa, have moved hundreds of miles every year to find pasture for their herds.

But worsening drought is depleting traditional grazing areas, forcing pastoralists from Mauritania - a country already nearly three-quarters desert or semi-desert - to travel ever longer distances into neighboring Mali and Senegal to find fodder and water. This is causing conflict with farmers along the way - with herds damaging fields and cattle raiders stealing animals - and threatening an age-old way of life as rising poverty forces more herders to sell up and move to cities.

However an innovative project is underway to protect the livestock sector that accounts for 13 percent of the nation's economy and provides 75 percent of the population with income, according to United Nations data. A team of charities, researchers and local authorities are setting up pastoralist corridors to ensure herders can safely take livestock across national boundaries in Africa's Sahel. Key to the success of such corridors is persuading those living along the way that herders bring more benefits than threats.

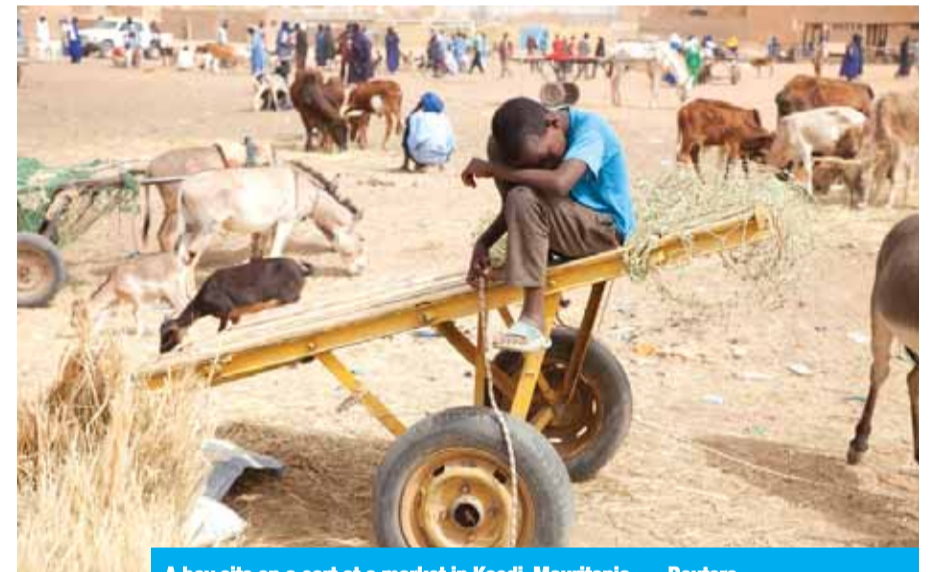
"If a pastoralist does not move, he dies," said El Hacen Ould Taleb, head of Groupement National des Associations Pastorales (GNAP), a Mauritanian charity working with pastoralists. "His animals will become ill or die due to the lack of food and water, and he won't be able to feed his family," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from his office in Nouakchott, Mauritania's capital.

Safe passage

But finding precious pasture is tricky when you "have no idea where to start" or when mayors do not allow you to pass through their villages, said Ould Taleb. His organization mapped strategic routes along Mauritania's southern border with Senegal, based on the location of water points, grazing areas and markets where pastoralists can sell their animals and produce. It then lobbied local authorities to secure the routes and give pastoralists and their herds the right to pass through.

The initiative, led by French charity Acting for Life, is part of the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) program, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

"Pastoralism accounts for over 10 percent of the country's GDP," said Kane Aliou Hamadi, a GNAP project coordinator who manages the BRACED programme in Mauritania. "Helping pastoralists get what they need is not just the right thing to do, it's smart." Herder Ahmed Haibala said knowing where to find resources is critical, having spent three months roaming Mauritania's southern Gorgol region in search of water for his ailing goats and



A boy sits on a cart at a market in Kaedi, Mauritania. — Reuters

other animals. His 10-square-metre tent is as organized as it is busy, with metal teapots dangling from a black cauldron, bags of sugar and rice stacked up, straw mats rolled up in a corner. "It's so I can pack up and leave easily," said Haibala, who has spent his life herding animals. Every morning he sets off on a rented horse cart looking for boreholes and - when he is lucky - brings back several containers' worth of water to the campsite.

"My 70 animals are too weak to move so I can neither go home (to neighboring Brakna region) or travel to Senegal. I am stuck here," he said, chewing a bit of tobacco. A few meters outside his tent lies the carcass of a calf, half buried in sand. Livestock herding is an ancient activity in West Africa's Sahel, but herders have become increasingly vulnerable as climate change disrupts rain patterns in the region. Erratic rainfall threatens the pastoralists' traditional months-long seasonal migration to Mali and Senegal - known as transhu-

mance - and their main source of income, experts say.

"Transhumance allows pastoralists to hit three birds with one stone: find pastures and water, sell their animals at the market and buy produce they need like cereal crops and wood," Ould Taleb said. But droughts have become so long they have forced some pastoralists to abandon their way of life entirely, he said. "Many (pastoralists) had to abandon or sell their animals this year and move to slums near Nouakchott, taking up day jobs like road(side) sellers," said the head of the pastoralist association.

Giving up the herd is the worst thing that can happen to a pastoralist, Hamadi said. Livestock is so important for herders that community life revolves around the animals. "Weddings, for example, will only happen in the rainy season, when animals are healthy and well fed," he explained. "If the weather continues like this, pastoralism could disappear." —Reuters

No Warning: Witnesses describe how Indian police kill protesters

Police in the port city of Thoothukudi in southern India gave no warning last Tuesday before firing with live ammunition on protesters seeking the closure of a copper smelter owned by London-listed Vedanta Resources Plc, according to 16 witnesses interviewed by Reuters. The police also appear to have ignored Indian federal police rules on the use of force to quell protests by, in some cases, firing at the heads of protesters rather than their legs.

Friends and relatives of two people who died said they had been shot in the face. Warning protesters before firing is stipulated in the current federal manual for crowd control, and it is also outlined in Section 129 of India's criminal procedure code, according to a home ministry official in New Delhi, who declined to be identified. "It is mandatory," the official stressed. Vappala Balachandran, a former deputy police commissioner in Mumbai, added that the manual gives detailed instructions about how force should be used.

"First baton charge, then tear gas and when everything fails, firing. The constables have to squat on the ground placing one knee on the floor, take aim on the legs to incapacitate the rioters and fire," he said. Ten people were killed on the day of the shootings, and a further three have died since, making this one of the most deadly environmental protests in India since at least 14 were killed by the police in Nandigram in West Bengal in 2007 in a demonstration against plans for a chemicals hub.

Several state and district officials declined to comment

on what happened that day, citing a pending investigation. Sandeep Nanduri, who was installed as the new district chief for Thoothukudi after the protest, told Reuters the sequence of events leading up to the firing has not yet been established. The federal home ministry has asked the Tamil Nadu government to submit a report on the police firing, a ministry spokesman said. He said the ministry wouldn't say anything else at this stage. India's government funded National Human Rights Commission said on Tuesday it will send a team of investigators to Thoothukudi to carry out its own probe.

Vedanta's Sterlite Copper smelter is one of only two major copper smelters in India and it had announced plans to double its capacity. The Tamil Nadu state government ordered that the plant be shut permanently on environmental grounds on Monday, and officials physically sealed the smelter, saying it was listening to residents' complaints. Vedanta, in which Indian-born resources magnate Anil Agarwal has a controlling stake, has been accused by local residents and environmentalists of polluting the city's air and ground water. The state pollution control board in April rejected the company's request to renew its license to operate, saying it had not complied with environmental laws on five counts.

The company has denied it is in breach of any environmental laws. Agarwal in a video on Twitter last Thursday expressed sadness about the protesters' deaths, saying "it was absolutely unfortunate" and his full sympathy is with the families of those killed. He said he is committed to the local community and the environment, and to abiding by the law. In response to the state shutting the plant, Vedanta said on Monday that it will study the order and decide on its next course of action.

Stormed government offices

Last Tuesday (May 22), the protest quickly got unruly and out of police control as the demonstrators reached the

district offices. The protesters had been given permission to rally in a playground in the city but not to gather outside the district government offices, police said. The playground could hold only 2,000 and the protesters said numbers swelled to at least 50,000 on the 100th day of their campaign against the smelter - a campaign that began when the company announced plans for the expansion. Police and protesters threw stones at each other, seven witnesses said, and protesters stormed the offices and threatened to get into an apartment building where Vedanta employees live, police and a Vedanta official added. Four police officials and two people working at the district headquarters said police fired only after protesters threw stones at the office building.

Most of the 16 witnesses said police moved straight from using tear gas and sticks to live ammunition to try to control protesters. Police and other officials haven't challenged this. Reuters was unable to determine what or who prompted the police to fire on protesters, why live ammunition and not rubber bullets was deployed, and why some people were shot in the head. One police officer speaking on condition of anonymity said police had to act to restore order. "Do you expect us to take it lying down and die in a riot situation? Of course we will hit back," he said.

Initially, local police and state officials defended the use of live ammunition. The state's chief minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, told reporters on the day of the protest that the police had been forced to act after it turned violent. And on the same day, state Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar said it had been "unavoidable" for police to fire on protesters. In the past few days, though, Tamil Nadu state officials have declined to respond to detailed questions posed by Reuters about the police actions on that day, including deputy chief minister O. Paneerselvam during and after a news conference on Monday. Six of the witnesses - a mixture of protesters and bystanders - said in separate conversations that they saw gunmen shooting from behind trees. —Reuters

Business

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AMARAVATI: This handout photo taken on April 7, 2018 and released on May 22, 2018 by the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (AP Govt) shows an aerial view of the under construction "city" of Amaravati. —AFP

Hopes on hold for model Indian capital

Nothing of this scale has been tackled for decades

AMARAVATI: It promised to be "an Indian city like no other"—a modern, leafy metropolis modeled on Singapore, where citizens would enjoy parks and rivers and breath air unrivalled in freshness. But the southern capital of Amaravati has been painfully slow to materialize and remains little more than dust and farms as its crusaders resort to crowd funding to turn the pipe dream into reality.

A staggering \$15 billion is needed to transform Amaravati from a few shiny buildings, villages and thousands of acres of agricultural land into the envisioned capital of Andhra Pradesh, one of India's largest states. Andhra once had another capital—the booming tech and business powerhouse of Hyderabad, which pulses with IT know-how and a startup culture. But the revenue-rich city was assigned as the capital of a brand new state, Telangana, when it was carved out of Andhra in 2014 following a populist movement to secede. The two states were to share Hyderabad until Andhra chose another city as its capital. But authorities decided instead to build a grand new seat of power some 275 kilometers away on the banks of the river Krishna. While India has a tradition of planned cities, including Sir Edwin Lutyens' New Delhi and Chandigarh in the north which was designed by Franco-Swiss modernist trailblazer Le Corbusier, nothing of this scale has been tackled for decades. Amaravati was envisioned as a metropolis free of the chaos, traffic and air pollution that plagues India's urban centers. "It'll be an Indian

city like no other," said Sreedhar Cherukuri, commissioner of Andhra's Capital Regional Development Authority.

Largely deserted

Amaravati's anticipated 3.5 million inhabitants would enjoy efficient public transport including a monorail and metro network, while trees would shroud half the city with a green zone akin to New York's Central Park, Cherukuri said. Consultants from Amsterdam provided advice about an extensive canal system and expert opinion was sought from Singapore and Japan, among others.

"Everything has been planned to the last detail. We've taken the best ideas from around two dozen global cities but this perhaps comes closest to Singapore in its inspiration," Cherukuri said. However, nearly three years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone, Amaravati is largely deserted. An island of modern office buildings in the middle of fields hosts Andhra's chief minister and state government, which relocated

there after Telangana claimed Hyderabad. Yet there is scant evidence of the promised utopia.

Half-finished settlements dot farmlands, most not connected by proper roads. Plans for the promised riverfront, housing and public transport have been marred by delays. "We came here

because it really has the plans and potential to become a global city," said a university official at a huge but largely empty campus in the planned city. "The on-ground infrastructure development, particularly the roads, has been slow," he said, asking not to be named. K Nageshwar, an independent legislator in Telangana, said: "Nothing much has happened on the ground in Amaravati. It is still more dream than reality."

'Extravagance' criticized

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu ambitiously suggested in 2014 that the project—unlike anything ever seen in India—could be completed within five years. But since then officials have been

reluctant to offer a timetable for its completion. Naidu, who today governs Andhra from a high-tech office in Amaravati, insists a magnificent city will one day rise from the plains.

"I am not changing any plans for Amaravati. I only have to work harder to make it a reality," the brainchild of the nascent capital told AFP recently. Cherukuri, the official overseeing Amaravati's development, said contracts worth \$5 billion have already been issued, spurring the first phase of development. It was hoped the project would also attract foreign investment, he added. But funds are running low.

Naidu blames the national government for reneging on promises made during the Telangana split that would have conferred a special status and ensured a stream of financial aid and incentives to bankroll the dream city. The dispute soured ties with New Delhi, culminating with Naidu going on a hunger strike in April and severing ties with Modi's ruling party. "This is a prestigious project for the nation and if government of India had supported it, we could have showcased it to the world," Naidu said. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has rejected assertions Andhra was double crossed, saying it got all it was promised. Naidu remains broadly popular in Andhra but has been accused of pursuing the eye-wateringly extravagant project for personal prestige. "Naidu very clearly projected Amaravati more as an instrument of electioneering," said K. Nageshwar, the independent legislator. —AFP

“ Potential to become a global city ”

One million bank workers strike across India

MUMBAI: Around one million bank employees went on strike across India yesterday, a union representative said, demanding better pay and a government crackdown on companies who willfully default on loan payments. Some 5,000 workers chanted slogans and waved banners at a protest in the financial capital Mumbai, union boss Devidas Tuljapurkar said, as they claimed they were paying the price for India's mountain of bad debts.

The Asian giant's troubled lenders have some of the highest levels of debt in emerging markets, weighed down by billions of dollars of non-performing assets (NPAs) also known as bad loans. The two-day strike, which ends on Thursday, led to tens of thousands of branches of public sector and commercial banks downing their shutters, paralyzing operations in some parts of the country.

The strikers are unhappy with a proposed two percent wage rise which they have been offered, noting that it is well below India's inflation rate of around 4.5 percent. "Bankers justification in offering the meager wage rise is losses to the banks," Tuljapurkar, convener of India's United Forum of Bank Unions, said in a statement. "(However)... It is big corporates who are attributable for losses to the banks. But for no fault on their part ordinary employees and officers are being denied their due share in profits," he added.

India's bad loan problem received national attention in March 2016 when beer and airline



MUMBAI: Indian Punjab National Bank workers stage a protest inside a branch. —AFP

tycoon Vijay Mallya fled to the UK to avoid paying nearly \$1 billion in loans that he owed banks. Earlier this year the government said banks' bad loans were worth more than \$120 billion. High debts mean banks are stretched too thin to lend funds for fresh investments, holding back economic growth.

The government is trying to help state-owned banks clean up their books and in October approved a \$32 billion recapitalization plan for struggling lenders. It has also given India's central bank greater powers to intervene in cases of bad loans, and to order lenders to deal with their debts under new bankruptcy laws.

"We have been consistently demanding that the government should come down heavily against those big corporates (who default on payments). Without which Indian banking cannot be revived," Tuljapurkar said. The union boss said bank employees' workloads had increased since Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected four years ago and implemented a number of economic initiatives. A sudden move in late 2016 to devalue 86 percent of India's currency sparked long lines at ATMs and chaotic scenes at banks. Many poorer Indians, reliant on cash, were left scrambling to buy basic necessities as their meager savings evaporated in an instant. —AFP

Iran sets sanctions waiver deadline for oil giant Total

TEHRAN: Iran's oil minister yesterday gave French energy giant Total 60 days to win a sanctions waiver from Washington or it would lose its stake in a multi-billion-dollar gas project. "Total has 60 days to negotiate with the US government," said Bijan Zanganeh, according to the oil ministry's Shana news agency. "The French government too can have negotiations with the US government during these 60 days for Total to stay in Iran."

Total was the only western firm to finalize an investment deal in Iran's energy sector following the 2015 nuclear deal, from which Washington withdrew earlier this month. It signed the agreement last July to become the lead partner in a \$4.8 billion (4.1 billion euro) project to develop the South Pars 11 gas field, alongside the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Iran's Petropars. But after Washington quit the deal and pledged to fully reimpose sanctions by November, Total has said it will be impossible to continue unless it gets a specific waiver from Washington.

If the French firm fails to win an exemption, CNPC "will replace Total in this project," Zanganeh said. The oil minister did not explain why the French firm only had 60 days, with US sanctions on foreign energy companies in Iran not due to kick in until November 4. Even before Washington pulled out of the nuclear deal, Iran had struggled to attract investment into its oil and gas sector. The only other deal was a \$742 million (600 million euro) deal with Russian state-owned firm Zarubezhneft to boost production at two oil fields in the western province of Ilam.

Hardliners in Iran had opposed foreign investment in the energy sector despite the government saying billions were needed to realize its potential. "Iran failed to attract much energy investment, even when conditions were at their most favorable," wrote the US Center on Global Energy Policy in a recent briefing note. "The country was far too slow in unveiling its new Iran Petroleum Contract, and when it did, potential investors complained that the terms were unattractive." —AFP

Business

Italy leads Europe mini-bounce as election risk fades slightly

World stocks hit by trade war fears

LONDON: Hopes that Italy might avoid a potentially damaging general election lifted European markets yesterday, bringing Italian bond yields off multi-year highs and dampening some of the recent buying interest for German and US government bonds. The backdrop for world markets remained sombre, however, as the United States revived trade war fears with an announcement that it would press ahead with tariffs and restrictions on Chinese investments, and Beijing threatened to retaliate.

The prospect of acrimony between the world's biggest two economies added to fears for the global economy, already feeling the hit from the risk of an Italy-driven crisis in the euro zone. However, equity futures signaled Wall Street indexes would open around half a percent higher, after the previous day's harsh session and losses across Asia earlier yesterday, where a key equity index shed more than 1 percent.

World stocks slipped 0.2 percent, heading for their sixth day in the red, but European shares made tentative gains after falling almost 4 percent in the past five days. The recovery was partly driven by news that Italy's two anti-establishment parties were again renewing efforts to form a government, rather than force the country back to the polls for the second time this year.

Another positive was a smooth auction of Italian debt that raised 5.57 billion euros, easing concerns about Rome's ability to finance itself. "(The auction) clearly indi-

cates that investors still have faith in the Italian economy, if not the government," said Seema Shah, global investment strategist at Principal Global Investors. But she warned that political uncertainty would remain elevated.

Japan's biggest private life insurance firm, Nippon Life, which holds some 4.8 trillion yen (\$44 billion) worth of euro zone

“ Investors have faith in Italian economy ”

bonds, said it had no plans for now to buy or sell its Italian debt holdings. Milan-listed equities snapped a five-day losing streak and bounced almost 2 percent while short-dated Italian bond yields - a sensitive gauge of political risk - fell more than half a percent from half-decade highs.

They had suffered their worst day in nearly 26 years on Tuesday. Ten-year Italian yields slipped 18 bps.

The risk for investors is that eurosceptic political parties are further boosted, with any election viewed as a de facto referendum on Italy's euro membership. The events have evoked memories of the 2011-2012 euro debt crisis, with potentially huge implications for

the single currency. The risks had sent investors scurrying for safer German and US government bonds as well as currencies such as the yen and Swiss franc, at the expense of the euro. That safe-haven trend receded yesterday, with the euro bouncing almost one percent versus the dollar and recouping all its Tuesday losses, which had taken it down to 10-month lows. It also rose between 0.7 percent and one percent against the Swiss franc and yen respectively.

"The political problems in Italy heighten the risk of a systematic problem within the euro zone and within the euro zone financial system, but that is still a risk rather than a probability," said Laith Khalaf, senior analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. The improved mood encouraged investors to sell US and German bonds, reversing some of the 15-20 bps yield rises seen on Tuesday. US 10-year yields jumped more than 10 basis points to 2.87 percent while their German counterparts were up 8.5 basis points.

Most investors remain cautious though, with Goldman Sachs cutting its forecast for the euro's exchange rate against the dollar due to Italian political developments. It said it now expected the euro to trade at \$1.25 in 12 months' time versus its previous \$1.30 prediction. With brewing trade conflicts, world growth is another concern. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development warned in its latest report that a trade war was threatening the growth



BRUSSELS: EU Commissioners Valdis Dombrovskis (L) and Jyrki Katainen address a press conference on commission proposals to strengthen the financial union with the development of the so-called sovereign bond-backed securities, sustainable finance and giving smaller businesses easier access to financing through capital markets at the European Commission. — AFP

outlook. That is likely to weigh especially hard on the developing world - emerging equities were down more than one percent to 5-1/2 month lows while Shanghai shares dropped 1.4 percent. Emerging markets are also suffering from the dollar's surge since

mid-April, with Indonesia raising interest rates for the second time in two weeks to support the rupiah currency. "Italian politics mask the underlying growing risks of a US-China trade war," ING Bank analysts told clients. — Reuters

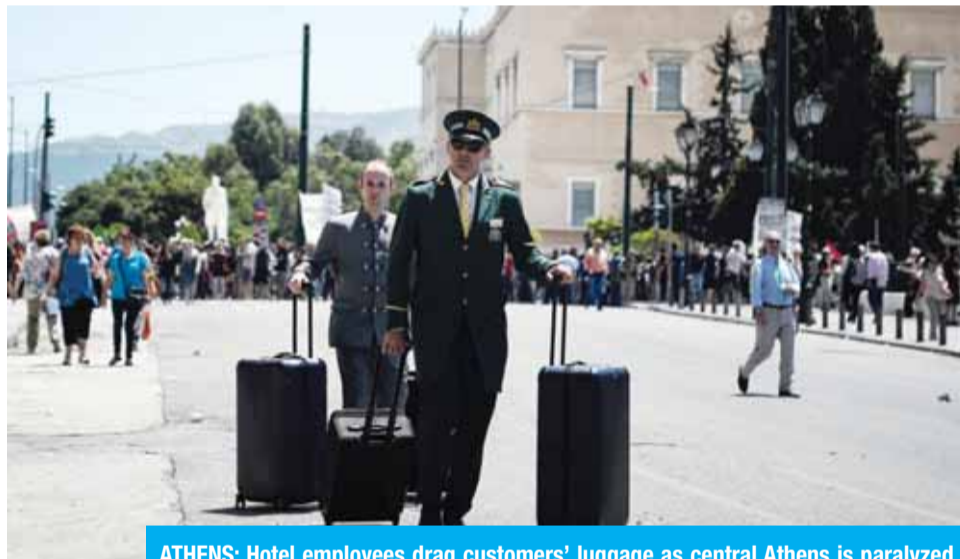
Greece in strike standstill over bailout reforms

ATHENS: Thousands of people protested in Greece yesterday as a nationwide 24-hour strike against reforms linked to a third and final bailout got under way. Some 7,500 people were demonstrating in Athens, police said, as the strike disrupted flights and urban transport and knocked out train and ferry services with the busy tourist season in full swing.

Flight controllers staged a three-hour stoppage, causing scores of flights to be rescheduled and several others to be cancelled outright. Greece's leftist government is concluding the final audit of its third multi-million euro bailout package from fellow eurozone states, under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund.

A new bill containing the latest reforms demanded by creditors-including the breakup of Greece's state-dominated energy sector-is to be approved by parliament by June 14. Athens hopes that a scheduled June 21 meeting of eurozone finance ministers will also greenlight the measures.

Nearly 50 general strikes have been



ATHENS: Hotel employees drag customers' luggage as central Athens is paralyzed due to a demonstration as part of a 24-hour general strike against reforms linked to a third and final bailout got under way. — AFP

held since the start of the Greek economic crisis in 2010. Government promises to speed up the sale of other state assets have also sparked the ire of unions. Yesterday, the state privatization agency announced the sale of an additional five percent in Balkans telecoms giant OTE to Germany's Deutsche Telekom, which already controlled a 40-percent stake in the company. The agreed price was just

over 284 million euros (\$331 million), the agency said. The country signed up to three bailout packages-in 2010, 2012 and 2015 but its economic recovery remains fragile. Greece intends to return to financial markets after its third bailout officially ends on August 20. But political turmoil in Italy is likely to increase borrowing rates, especially if concerns about eurozone stability persist. — AFP

cent of the value of their currencies since the start of April. These countries have responded by sharply increasing interest rates, a move not without risk to their own economies. Argentina's Central Bank lifted the rate of a key lending rate to 40 percent as it has sought loans from the International Monetary Fund. Turkey's Central Bank last Wednesday boosted its lending rate from 13.5 percent to 16.5 percent despite a push from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who

has sought low rates to boost growth. The sharp fall in the currencies' value has come as Turkey heads to June 24 presidential and parliamentary elections where Erdogan is seeking a new mandate and a thumping parliamentary majority.

"Turkey is burdened by a large current account deficit, foreign currency denominated debt more than three times larger than its foreign exchange reserves, and double-digit inflation," said Low of FTN Financial. — AFP

Surging dollar hits few emerging economies

NEW YORK: The strengthening of the dollar amid Federal Reserve interest rate hikes has sharpened pressure on some emerging economies as investors steer funds to the United States. Funds dedicated to emerging economy equity and debt saw withdrawals of \$569 million and \$253 million during the week of May 23, according to data firm EPFR Global.

That is on top of the \$1.6 billion and \$2.1 billion taken from the same funds during the week ending May 9. "The primary explanation for these capital outflows comes from the rising dollar," said Eric Vitoria, a strategist at Wells Fargo. Higher US interest rates have prompted investors to rethink investments in smaller economies.

"You do not feel the urge to invest in emerging markets when investing in much lower-risk US assets offers you higher returns," said Chris Low, chief economist at FTN Financial. The trend marks a shift from the period after the financial crisis when low interest rates in the US gave incentive to investors to seek higher yield overseas, especially in emerging economies.

Argentina, Turkey suffer

The yield on the 10-year US Treasury is back up at around three percent after hitting an all-time low in July 2016 of 1.3 percent. The biggest losers from the current dynamic have been Argentina and Turkey, according to the Institute of International Finance. Those two countries have lost 22 and 19 per-

Bayer wins US nod for Monsanto deal to create agriculture giant

FRANKFURT/WASHINGTON: Bayer won US approval for its planned takeover of Monsanto after agreeing to sell about \$9 billion in assets, clearing a major hurdle for the \$62.5 billion deal that will create by far the largest seeds and pesticides maker. Makan Delrahim, who heads the US Justice Department's (DoJ) Antitrust Division, said the asset sales agreed to by Bayer were the "largest ever divestiture ever required by the United States."

A Bayer spokesman said the planned sale of businesses with 2.2 billion euros (\$2.54 billion) in sales to BASF already agreed to address antitrust concerns, mainly in Europe, were not materially different from the DoJ's demands. "Receipt of the DOJ's approval brings us close to our goal of creating a leading company in agriculture," Bayer CEO Werner Baumann said in a statement. Shares in Bayer jumped to the top of Germany's DAX index in early Wednesday trading and were trading up 2.8 percent at 101.6 euros by 0833 GMT.

Bernstein analysts said the DoJ approval made it possible for Bayer to close the Monsanto deal by the end of June. After months of delays in a drawn-out review process the ruling brings Bayer close to creating an agricultural supplies giant with sales of about 20 billion euros, based on 2017 figures, when taking into account the divestments.

Industry-leading seeds business

At current foreign exchange rates, that compares to about 12.4 billion euros at DowDuPont's Corteva Agriscience unit, 11 billion euros at ChemChina's Syngenta and 7.9 billion at BASF, including businesses to be acquired.

Bayer's move to combine its crop chemicals business, the world's second-largest after Syngenta AG, with Monsanto's industry-lead-

ing seeds business, is the latest in a series of major agrochemicals tie-ups.

US chemicals giants Dow Chemical and DuPont merged in September 2017 and are now in the process of splitting into three units. In other consolidation in the sector, China's state-owned ChemChina purchased Syngenta and two huge Canadian fertilizer producers merged to form a new company, now called Nutrien. Bayer committed to selling its entire cotton, canola, soybean and vegetable seeds businesses and digital farming business, as well as its Liberty herbicide, which competes with Monsanto's Roundup.

Under agreements with European and other antitrust enforcers, Bayer agreed to sell assets with revenues of 2.2 billion euros (\$2.6 billion), to rival BASF for 7.6 billion euros. Bayer said in a statement it expected Bayer and Monsanto to begin the integration process as soon as the sales to BASF are complete, which it said are expected to take two months to complete.

If Bayer does not close the deal by June 14, Monsanto could withdraw from the takeover agreement and seek a higher price. It has already secured the go-ahead from key jurisdictions, including the European Union, Brazil and Russia. Apart from the United States, it still needs clearance in Canada and Mexico. In a separate statement, Bayer said on Tuesday said the European Commission had approved BASF as a suitable buyer of the businesses to be divested.

German seed seller KWS Saat, which had made an eleventh-hour bid for Bayer's vegetable seed business, said yesterday it accepted the Commission's decision. Bayer last week said synergies from folding Monsanto into its organization would be about \$300 million below its previous target because it will have to sell more businesses than initially expected. — AFP

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd		BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL	
Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate	CURRENCY	BUY SELL
US Dollar	302.890	British Pound	0.395075 0.408975
Canadian Dollar	233.265	Czech Korune	0.005513 0.014813
Sterling Pound	403.525	Danish Krone	0.043055 0.048035
Euro	352.390	Euro	0.343141 0.356841
Swiss Frank	303.275	Georgian Lari	0.121263 0.121263
Bahrain Dinar	805.495	Hungarian 0.001005	0.001195
UAE Dirhams	82.870	Norwegian Krone	0.032608 0.037808
Qatari Riyals	84.105	Romanian Leu	0.058542 0.075392
Saudi Riyals	81.665	Russian ruble	0.004826 0.004826
Jordanian Dinar	428.490	Slovakia	0.009046 0.019046
Egyptian Pound	16.957	Swedish Krona	0.029871 0.034871
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.919	Swiss Franc	0.298744 0.309744
Indian Rupees	4.485		
Pakistani Rupees	2.617	Australasia	
Bangladesh Taka	3.625	Australian Dollar	0.219185 0.231185
Philippines Pessso	5.752	New Zealand Dollar	0.203455 0.215955
Cyprus pound	18.020		
Japanese Yen	3.780	America	
Syrian Pound	1.590	Canadian Dollar	0.227427 0.236427
Nepalese Rupees	2.802	US Dollars	0.299150 0.303550
Malaysian Ringgit	76.815	US Dollars Mint	0.299650 0.303550
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	47.545		
Thai Bhat	10.420	Asia	
Turkish Lira	67.425	Bangladesh Taka	0.003001 0.003783
		Chinese Yuan	0.045884 0.049384
		Hong Kong Dollar	0.036565 0.039315
		Indian Rupee	0.003765 0.004492
		Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017 0.000023
		Japanese Yen	0.002701 0.002881
		Korean Won	0.000270 0.000285
		Malaysian Ringgit	0.072209 0.078209
		Nepalese Rupee	0.002735 0.003075
		Pakistan Rupee	0.002005 0.002775
		Philippine Peso	0.005609 0.005909
		Singapore Dollar	0.220162 0.230162
		Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001558 0.002138
		Taiwan	0.009963 0.010143
		Thai Baht	0.009115 0.009665
		Arab	
		Bahraini Dinar	0.797488 0.805988
		Egyptian Pound	0.014313 0.020031
		Iranian Riyal	0.000084 0.000085
		Iraqi Dinar	0.000197 0.000257
		Jordanian Dinar	0.423108 0.432108
		Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000 1.000000
		Lebanese Pound	0.000150 0.000250
		Moroccan Dirhams	0.021247 0.045247
		Omani Riyal	0.781344 0.787024
		Qatar Riyal	0.079005 0.083945
		Saudi Riyal	0.079780 0.081080
		Syrian Pound	0.001285 0.001505
		Tunisian Dinar	0.113647 0.121647
		Turkish Lira	0.061771 0.072071
		UAE Dirhams	0.081139 0.082839
		Yemeni Riyal	0.000986 0.001066

Business

Where gold is grey: Ivory Coast cashes in on cashew industry

Supplanted India as the biggest producer of the nut

ABIDJAN: Famous for its cocoa and coffee, the Ivory Coast has drawn up an ambitious five-year plan for the cashew industry, seeking to modernize production in a sector where it is already the world's number-one exporter. "We have shown that we know how to produce the nuts—now we have to demonstrate that we can sell them and above all process them," Adama Coulibaly of the national Cotton-Cashew Council said.

From tiny harvests two decades ago, the West African country now holds the cashew crown, supplanting India as the biggest producer of the nut. Helped by price guarantees for farmers, its harvest doubled from 380,000 tons in 2013 to 711,000 tons in 2017, amounting to 22 percent of global output. This year's production of the nut—known locally as "grey gold"—is expected to attain 750,000 tons.

Curvy, rich in taste and filled with protein, the cashew is a familiar ingredient in salads, stir-fries and other meals. But it also features in a widening range of other food products, including cashew butter and cheese, and its oil has found uses in medicine, industrial resins and cosmetics.



A classic dilemma for African countries

these zones," he said.

'A working business'

The cashew's extraordinary success sometimes leads to speculation by traders who buy nuts below the floor price fixed by the state and hope to sell it on at a profit—and to smuggling to neighboring countries. According to official estimates, between 20,000 and 50,000 tons of production is diverted this way each year. The authorities recently responded by ramping up the legal arsenal to deal with such offences, which also affect the cocoa industry.

Lip service

The mammoth carmaker admitted to fitting millions of cars worldwide with "defeat devices"—software designed to trick regulators into thinking cars met emissions standards. In fact, output of harmful fine particulates and nitrogen oxides (NOx), which can cause respiratory and heart diseases, was far higher than legally permitted. Drivers have voted with their wallets ever since, sending diesel's share of new car sales plunging from 47.7 percent in 2015 to 38.7 percent last year.

Nevertheless, Germany's federal government under Chancellor Angela Merkel has often appeared to take the car industry's side. It has pushed back against diesel bans and rejects the idea of a "blue badge" drivers could stick on their windshields that would identify the least polluting vehicles. Instead, Berlin has offered longer-term measures like a cash pot to extend public transport and build up cities' electric vehicle fleets.

That makes measures like those in Hamburg "just lip service from the politicians... I don't think it will actually affect anything" said Felix Fischer, 49, who works in a bicycle shop on the Stresemannstrasse highway—the other stretch to be closed to diesels. Some media have dubbed leader Merkel the "Autokanzlerin" or car chancellor, playing on her concern to protect a critical sector for the German economy.

Diesel 'a German child'

With some 600,000 jobs dependent on the internal combustion engine according to estimates from the Ifo economic institute in Munich, the chancellor's centre-left coalition partners are just as concerned as Merkel's conservatives to keep the technology alive. Many such jobs would not be replaced if the industry switches to less mechanically complex electric power en masse.



BOUAKE: A woman breaks raw cashew nuts at a cashew nuts processing factory in the central Ivorian city. —AFP

Kouadio Djedri, a planter in his 60s at N'Zere village near the capital Yamoussoukro, likes to talk about how profitable the cashew business can be. "I started out growing cashew nuts 20 years ago, when the product sold for 50 CFA francs (0.07 euros/\$0.08) per kilo," the farmer, wearing a cowboy hat and green boots, said. "From a harvest of 200 kilos—two bags—in my early

days, this year I've grown 13 tons for sale at 500 CFA francs per kilo," he said. Djedri, who is also village chief, has a cashew plantation of 11 hectares (27 acres) and plans to expand over a further 13 hectares. "I tell young people to go into growing cashew nuts. It's a working business that has enabled me to send my children to school," he said. —AFP

Germany clings to diesel, even as driving bans hit

FRANKFURT: Hamburg will today become the first German city to ban older diesel vehicles from some highly polluted stretches of road, as public confidence in the once-loved technology goes up in smoke. A one mile stretch of highway and a 580-metre section of another major road will be closed to older diesels.

The port city is the first to act on a court ruling that found such bans were a legitimate way for local authorities to reduce air pollution below European Union health thresholds. Judges at the Federal Administrative Court found in February that cities could "gradually" eliminate diesel vehicles, starting with the oldest, while allowing exceptions including for emergency services, local residents and businesses.

"Germany has to do something" to improve air quality, said 37-year-old Sabine, who works on the Max-Brauer Allee, one of the roads hit by the ban. "We should abolish diesels," she added. Diesel was long seen by Germans as a proudly home-grown technology that could help battle climate change, with lower emissions of greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO2) than petrol motors. Patented by Bavarian engineer Rudolf Diesel in 1892, the fuel is subsidized to this day in a number of European countries. But its reputation has lain in tatters since Volkswagen's "dieselgate" scandal broke in 2015.



HAMBURG: Picture taken on May 15, 2018 shows a worker fixing a driving ban sign for diesel trucks. —AFP

Consulting firm SMP found firms can produce around 350 combustion engines per worker per year, a figure that rises to 1,600 for electric drive-trains. Diesel is "a German child that we'd rather not allow to die", said Stefan Bratzel of the Centre of Automotive Management, Bosch, the world's biggest auto components supplier, trumpeted in April new technologies it claimed could "drastically" reduce diesel emissions and "put a stop, once and for all, to the debate about the demise of diesel technology". But the long-term effect of government and business prevarications could actually be to undermine the German car industry, argued Ferdinand Dudenhofer of the Centre for Automotive Research. "The longer you wait, the harder it will be to make the transition to electric," he warned. —AFP

AirAsia shares drop as India probes Fernandes

KUALA LUMPUR: Shares of budget carrier AirAsia fell to a six-month low yesterday after Indian authorities raided the airline's local offices and accused its boss Tony Fernandes of illegally obtaining operating licenses. The Central Bureau of Investigation said Tuesday it was probing allegations that Fernandes illicitly lobbied Indian officials for favorable treatment for his Malaysian-based carrier.

Officers raided AirAsia offices in major Indian cities as part of its investigation. AirAsia has denied any wrongdoing. The carrier's shares fell as much as 6.3 percent to 3.10 ringgit (78 cents) in Kuala Lumpur, their lowest level since late November, before edging back up. The investigation is a blow in a market that AirAsia had singled out as a major destination to expand.

Corrine Png, CEO of Asian transport equity consultancy Crucial Perspective, told AFP investors might be concerned as "investigations are likely to impede" plans by AirAsia India to expand out of the domestic market next year. "International flights will be more lucrative for AirAsia India than domestic operations where competition is stiff." —AFP

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Business

In spirit of gratitude this Ramadan: Huawei says 'Thank You' to users

DUBAI: A successful company is made up of a combination of factors. Inspired leaders, dedicated employees, innovative products and most importantly, loyal customers. Customers are at the centre of any business, and at Huawei, this is no exception. This month, as we celebrate Ramadan, a time of reflection and gratitude, we at Huawei want to take this opportunity to recognize and say thank you to those we are grateful for: our users. Our strong relationship with our customers has been a catalyst for the success we have achieved, and it is thanks to our customers that we continue to grow from strength to strength in the region.

The Middle East is an extremely diverse and important region for us, and we are grateful to have been welcomed so warmly as a business partner and trusted provider. Since entering the region in 2011, Huawei Consumer Business Group has united efforts with key government entities to support the Middle East's vision for innovation and growth, and has also focused on providing consumers access to best-in-class technology, innovative devices and exceptional quality products, to develop more meaningful ways to stay connected.

Our investment in the region is a testament to our ongoing commitment to the markets and our users. This past October, Huawei also opened its first flagship 'Experience Store' in the UAE, fully equipped and dedi-

cated to offer customers a complete hands-on product experience. The experience store complements our 47 service centers across the region, where customers receive VIP assistance and shorter service cycles for their devices.

It doesn't end there

It is this dedication to the region and its customers that has contributed to Huawei's vision of becoming a global iconic technology brand. According to the IDC's Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker, Huawei has remained third in global smartphone market share during the first quarter of 2018, with a new market share high of 11.8%.

It doesn't end there. Although Huawei is already the fastest growing smartphone brand in the region, we continue to invest in research and development efforts to create devices that understand our customer needs. At Huawei, we have moved from the smart phone to the intelligent phone with the development of our Kirin 970 chipset, which powers AI computing and offers a significantly faster intelligent experience for consumers across the region.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be a critical factor that shapes the smartphone competition over the next five years, and we are already ahead of our time. Last year we introduced the revolutionary HUAWEI Mate 10 Pro series,

the ultimate in intelligent experience. This year, we launched a new era of smartphone photography with the launch of the HUAWEI P20 Pro, the first 40 MP Leica Triple camera with master AI. AI not only explores and enhances users' preferences - it may even alter business models of the smartphone industry.

We have come a long way, and our customers have played a large part in our success so far in the region. We remain committed to continuing to put the people of the Middle East first. You have welcomed us into your home. Trusted us with your most precious moments. You taught us your culture and we embraced your teachings and discovered your rich heritage. You showed us the power of diversity; beauty in difference; and strength in character. To everyone in the Middle East who so warmly embraced us, we make a commitment to serve you with dedication and pride. To you, we say Shukran.



Gene Jiao, President of HUAWEI CBG MEA



ABK launches 'Global View' platform to deliver simpler banking services

KUWAIT: In line with its 'Simpler Banking' strategy, Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced the launch of its new 'Global View' service, which will provide its customers across the region with a simpler, smarter way to manage multiple ABK accounts through a single login point. ABK is the first bank to introduce this innovative service in the country.

ABK's 'Global View' service is integrated within Mobile and Internet Banking, and will deliver an enhanced functionality adapted to increasingly sophisticated customer requirements. The platform allows customers with accounts in multiple locations, such as Kuwait, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, to view all accounts and balances in one place. Simultaneously, customers with multiple accounts such as personal, small business, and kids and youth accounts, can link their



accounts to view balances with a single login. "The 'Global View' platform is the first of its kind in Kuwait, and is an important undertaking in our continuous commitment to provide our customers across the region with a simpler yet efficient banking experience," said Mr Stewart Lockie, General Manager-Retail Banking at ABK. "Understanding that today's banking customers have multiple accounts, both within Kuwait and overseas, and access them through various devices, we

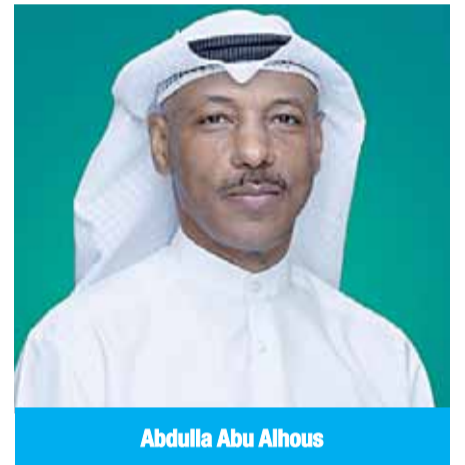
are focused towards providing them with a user-friendly platform that will allow them to view all their accounts simultaneously, on any digital touch point through a single login."

A key advantage of the 'Global View' platform is that it provides ABK with flexibility to introduce future enhancements in line with its commitment towards digitization. While currently customers will not be able to complete transactions on the platform, ABK is planning to further enhance this service in the future.

KFH launches new charity standing order system

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched the first-of-its-kind system specialized on charity standing order creation resulting on minimal effort without the need to the usual traditional paper work. This comes as part of the bank's efforts in keeping abreast of the latest technology in the banking industry.

Group Chief Operations Officer at KFH, Abdulla Abu Alhous said that this system will result in a revolutionary change with the charity standing order on banks wide scale. He pointed out that the customer through the charity representatives will be able to create the standing order online directly on KFH system without having to pass through the paper work cycle resulting shortcut for both the customer and the charity representative. This service can be utilized online through laptops or iPads.



Abdulla Abu Alhous

Abu Alhous added, in a press release, that launch of Charity Standing Order System confirms the success of KFH strategy in adopting the latest technology while developing and enhancing the banking services from all angles of the transactions which will lead to smoother and much easier steps which are aligned with the fast-technological developments and highest standards of security. He further noted that KFH offers "Zakat Al Fitr and Feed the Fasting" donation service on its ATMs in an easy and secure manner, indicating the service has been available to customers for 3 years.

GE Digital, SIG to drive a new era of food and beverage packaging

KUWAIT: GE Digital (NYSE: GE) and SIG, a leading provider of packaging systems and solutions for the food and beverage industry, announced a strategic partnership to power digital innovation in food and beverage packaging. SIG will deploy GE Digital's Predix Asset Performance Management (APM) and Predix Service Max industrial applications across more than 400 customer factories worldwide to drive new levels of efficiency, create intelligent solutions and enable new possibilities for its customers.

In the region, the key implementation sites for these solutions will be the manufacturing facilities under SIG's joint venture with Saudi Arabia's Obeikan Investment Group. SIG Combibloc Obeikan has a strong presence across the Middle East and Africa, and through this initiative, will continue to be a leader in the digital future of food packaging manufacturing.

The food and beverage industry is ripe for digital transformation, with consumers increasingly seeking innovative, convenient products that are not only safe and sustainable but also affordable and differentiated. At the same time, producers are facing competitive pressures, supply chain complexities and ever-shorter production cycles - creating an increased need for technologies that can enable producers to quickly identify, predict and act on changing consumer and market demands.

The unique combination of GE Digital's APM and Service Max applications will enable SIG to build an end-to-end digital platform that will bring a new level of insight and data-driven intelligence to its customers worldwide - helping them and SIG transform how they predict, manage and service the entire lifecycle of SIG filling lines. By automatically collecting and analyzing asset data - tapping into billions of data points across its operations globally in real time - SIG and their customers can move beyond traditional asset monitoring and predictive service models to re-imagine their supply chain, enhance

SIG will deploy GE Digital's APM & ServiceMax software globally



quality control technologies and evolve their portfolio mix.

'True global strategic partnership'

"Our ability to harness data is central to delivering on our promise of opening up new opportunities for our customers," said Rolf Stangl, SIG, CEO. "By tapping into information in new and innovative ways, we will be able to deliver an unmatched level of performance, security, transparency and creativity across the entire food and beverage supply chain - through to the end consumer."

SIG's customers fill more than 10,000 unique products into SIG packaging across 65 countries worldwide. In 2017 alone, SIG produced 33.6 billion carton packs for its customers. Through this large-scale partnership, SIG and GE Digital will co-innovate packaging solutions and technologies to address the industry's two biggest needs today: improving asset performance and optimizing service delivery.

"Digital is reshaping every sector, and industrials know they need to own

the productivity of their assets to succeed," said Bill Ruh, GE Digital, CEO. "By adopting Predix applications, SIG is establishing itself as a leader in the transformation of food and beverage packaging. This partnership brings our teams together to write a new chapter for SIG and for the industry." The new digital service model will also enable SIG to deliver new solutions and business models based on advanced performance metrics, including as-a-service delivery, performance-based and subscription solutions.

"This will be a true global strategic partnership," said SIG's Rolf Stangl. "We are excited to work alongside an experienced digital industrial company to collaborate on innovative solutions - from 3D-printed spare parts to a fully connected, intelligent supply chain to innovative ways to bring advanced tracking and intelligence direct to the consumer." The initial deployment is expected to go live in July 2018 with the global rollout anticipated to begin in January 2019.

Hong Kong Airlines taps investors ahead of IPO-document

HONG KONG: Chinese conglomerate HNA Group's Hong Kong Airlines is considering an initial public offering in the "short to medium term" and tapping investors to raise funds through the issue of new shares and convertible bonds, a document reviewed by Reuters shows. Ahead of the planned listing, HNA is seeking to raise about \$350 million by selling new shares, expanding its equity base by 22 percent, according to the document dated April 2018. That would give the 12-year-old airline a pre-IPO valuation of about \$1.6 billion, based on Reuters calculations.

The company also wants to raise up to \$550 million via convertible bonds or tradable bonds before the listing, the document showed. The bond issue will be at a coupon rate of 8-to-10 percent for a two-to-five year period, according to the document. For comparison, Virgin Australia Holdings, a partner of Hong Kong Airlines - which also lacks an investment grade rating - this month raised \$150 million (\$113 million) through a senior unsecured bond at a coupon of 8.25 percent, according to Thomson Reuters IFR.

HNA referred fund raising questions to Hong Kong Airlines. Hong Kong Airlines declined to comment. HNA Group declined to comment on its relationship with HK Airlines. These latest moves, previously unreported, signal its IPO plans for Hong Kong Airlines are back on after HNA tried to take it public a few years ago, eventually abandoning those plans in 2015. That attempt failed as it was unable to satisfy questions from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in the timeline provided. It did not refile its listing application.

Aggressive Chinese acquirers

The document reviewed by Reuters did not contain the reasons behind the new push for an offering, or the investor interest HNA may be able to generate. The Chinese aviation-to-financial services firm, which struck M&A deals worth about \$50 billion in 2016 and 2017, is faced with soaring debt and a Beijing crackdown on aggressive Chinese acquirers. HNA, which is selling a number of assets, is undergoing a wider reorganization under which it is partnering with companies to manage some of its assets. Reuters reported last month that HNA Group is seeking to raise as much as \$1.5 billion by the end of this year in an investment fund that will serve a vehicle for the group's acquisitions.

Some of HNA's other recent IPO efforts have been delayed or scrapped. HNA Group's Swiss ground services and cargo handling unit, Swissport Group, deferred plans to float shares on the SIX Swiss Exchange, citing market conditions. HNA Group scrapped its planned listing of Swiss-based airline caterer Gategroup.

The new capital raising plans come at a time when Singapore state investor Temasek Holdings has expressed interest in buying into Hong Kong Airlines and its unit Hong Kong Express Airways, Reuters reported last month.

The document obtained by Reuters shows that Hong Kong Airlines is targeting annual revenue of HK\$14.97 billion (\$1.9 billion) in 2018 and a compound annual revenue growth rate of 15 percent between 2015 and 2018. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, amortization, and restructuring or rent costs (EBIT-DAR) - a measure used by hospitality companies - are estimated to have grown 11.4 percent in 2017 to about HK\$4.21 billion. Estimates for 2018's earnings were not provided in the document.

Hong Kong Airlines is a carrier that operates 38 aircraft and flies to 40 cities in the Asia Pacific, Australia and North America. Its asset base is estimated to have grown 65 percent to HK\$12.97 billion by 2017 from net assets of HK\$7.84 billion in 2016, according to the document. Cathay Pacific Airways, another Hong Kong-based carrier, had annual revenue of HK\$97.3 billion in 2017 and has a market value of \$6.4 billion. —Reuters

Technology

At Beijing security fair, arms race for surveillance tech

Some claim ability to crack Apple iOS system

BEIJING: It can crack your smartphone password in seconds, rip personal data from call and messaging apps, and peruse your contact book. The Chinese-made XDH-CF-5600 scanner - or "mobile phone sleuth", as sales staff described it when touting its claimed features - was one of hundreds of surveillance gadgets on display at a recent police equipment fair in Beijing.

The China International Exhibition on Police Equipment is something of a one-stop shop for China's police forces looking to arm up with the latest in "black tech" - a term widely used to refer to cutting-edge surveillance gadgets. The fair underscores the extent to which China's security forces are using technology to monitor and punish behavior that runs counter to the ruling Communist Party.

That sort of monitoring - both offline and online - is stoking concerns from human rights groups about the development of a nationwide surveillance system to quell dissent. The Ministry of Public Security, which hosted the Beijing fair, did not respond to a request for comment. At the fair, Reuters also saw stalls offering cute-looking robots, equipped with artificial intelligence systems to detect criminals, as well as an array of drones, smart glasses, DNA database software and facial-recognition cameras.

At the fair, which is held annually, most buyers appeared to be local Chinese police, though some global firms attended, selling mainly vehicles and aircraft. Ford Motor Co, Daimler AG's Mercedes-Benz and Airbus SE had cars and model helicopters on display. The companies did not immediately respond to requests for comment. It is not unusual for western companies to sell vehicles to overseas police forces.

It was not possible to verify all the claims made about the products at the fair, including the XDH-CF-5600 scanner, which is made by Xiamen Meiya Pico Information Co Ltd, a Chinese provider of security products and services. Scanners like the XDH-CF-5600 exist in other markets around the world, including the United States, but their use is contentious, especially regarding the forcible extraction of

data from mobile phone devices.

Chinese firms are rushing to meet the growing demand from the country's security services, fuelling a surveillance tech arms race as companies look to outdo each others' tracking and monitoring capabilities. Western firms have played little overt role so far in China's surveillance boom. Beijing-based Hisign Technology said its desktop and portable phone scanners can retrieve even deleted data from over 90 mobile applications on smart phones, including overseas platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

A big selling point of the technology, according to one policeman from the restive far western region of Xinjiang who was eyeing a Hisign scanner, was its claimed ability to get data from Apple Inc's iOS operating system, used in products like the widely popular iPhone. "We are actually using these kinds of scanners in Xinjiang already, but I am interested in this one as it claims to be more successful with iOS phones than other brands," said the policeman, surnamed Gu, who travelled 3,000 kilometers to attend the fair. He declined to provide his given name.

The iPhone's iOS system is seen by many analysts as the most secure operating system. A handful of firms in Israel and the

United States have been able to crack into the iOS system, according to media reports. That ability is often shrouded in secrecy, however. "The ability to crack iOS has been around," said Matthew Warren, the deputy director of the Deakin University Centre for Cyber Security Research in Melbourne. "What's different in this situation is that Chinese authorities are admitting that they have the capabilities to do that."

At the Beijing fair, several firms told Reuters they could crack 4-digit passwords on platforms ranging from iOS 6 to iOS 8.1, and were working to break through security of the latest iOS 10 platform. The vendors did not demonstrate their stated capability of getting into security systems of older iPhones. Apple's latest operating system uses a stronger 6-digit password. Apple declined to comment on the vendors' claims.

Buyers appeared to be local Chinese police



BEIJING: A police robot patrols before the third plenary session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Surveillance web

Chinese authorities are targeting a nationwide surveillance network, leveraging off tools made by companies like Hisign to compile data gleaned from smartphones and cameras into an online database of its near 1.4 billion people. "Our forensic products are sold in 26 provinces across China and have helped police process 11 million cases," Han Xuesong, a sales director at Hisign, told Reuters at the fair.

Hisign is not alone. Meiya Pico has a rival offering, the DC-8811 Magic Cube, which its marketing materials call "the Swiss Army Knife of forensics". The larger FL-2000 is a "forensic aircraft carrier". Pwnzen Infotech, a firm backed by Qihoo 360, a cybersecurity specialist, was

another scanner maker at the fair who talked up its system's ability to get data from overseas platforms. A sales representative described a case last year in which Pwnzen cracked the phone of a suspect who was "subverting the government" to get data from his Facebook and Twitter accounts. The representative spoke on condition of anonymity. Facebook did not respond to requests for comment.

A spokeswoman for Twitter said the firm was unable to comment on technology it had not seen, but added that "privacy is built into Twitter's DNA and it's something we take an active role in promoting and advocating for across the world." —Reuters

Papua New Guinea mulls 'temporary' ban on Facebook

SYDNEY: Papua New Guinea said yesterday it was mulling a temporary shutdown of Facebook to uncover false accounts and block fake news in the Pacific nation, which hosts a major global summit later this year. The proposal, which Communications Minister Sam Basil said could lead to replacing Facebook with a locally developed social networking platform, was ridiculed as ill-timed and unworkable by opponents.

Basil floated the idea of a one-month shutdown on Tuesday, saying it would "allow information to be collected" on fake accounts and users who upload pornography and defamatory information so that they could be removed from the platform. "This will allow genuine people with real identities to use the social network responsibly," he said.

Basil also said PNG could create a local alternative to Facebook, which has been rocked by revelations that it improperly shared the personal data of 87 million users with British consultancy firm Cambridge Analytica. "If there need be then we can gather our local applications developers to create a site that is more conducive for Papua New Guineans to communicate within the country and abroad as well," he was quoted as saying by local media.

'Address their concerns'

No timeframe was given on the potential

shutdown, although some reports suggested it could coincide with Port Moresby hosting the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit later this year. A spokesperson for Facebook in Sydney said they had reached out to PNG authorities and were "working to address their concerns".

Basil issued a follow-up statement yesterday acknowledging that "Facebook use in PNG is not limited to personal chats and blogs" but also serves as a forum for legitimate commercial and information services. But he stood firm on pursuing a study of "the advantages and disadvantages of use of Facebook" and of "vulnerabilities" linked to personal data use and cybercrime.

PNG Institute of National Affairs executive director Paul Barker said shutting down Facebook would make a mockery of the nation during the 21-member APEC summit, expected to be attended by US President Donald Trump. "The APEC meeting is all about promoting the digital era to assist business, develop economies, and improve citizen welfare in member countries," he told the PNG Post Courier newspaper yesterday. "It would be a travesty if PNG sought to close down Facebook during the APEC month, making PNG seem rather foolish."

Facebook is widely used in PNG to discuss politics and expose corruption and MPs and officials have shown a high degree of sensitivity to posts in the past, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, one of the world's largest social media groups based in the country. Basil denied the proposed ban was a threat to freedom of speech. "I don't think so because MPs are open to criticism," he said.

Opposition MP Bryan Kramer, who has a large following on Facebook, called the proposal ridiculous. "The reason the word dumb comes to mind is because how does one shut



PARIS: This photograph taken on May 16, 2018, shows a figurine carrying the logo of social network Facebook. —AFP

down a platform to carry out research on it," he said yesterday. "It would be equivalent to saying we are carrying out research on the negative effects of TV so we are turning it off so we can study a blank screen."

Facebook's size no barrier to deals

In related news, Facebook Inc believes it could acquire other large companies without running afoul of antitrust enforcers if the world's largest social media network chose to enter a new market, Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg said on Tuesday. Sandberg was asked on stage by a journalist at the Code Conference whether Facebook, because of its

size, would be allowed in the future to buy companies as it has such as virtual reality firm Oculus and messaging service WhatsApp.

"It really depends what it is. If it was in something that wasn't core to what we were doing and a new area, like Oculus was, I think it would probably be allowed," Sandberg said. She gave no indication that a deal was forthcoming. Facebook, one of the largest corporations by market capitalization, has grown in part through acquisitions. In 2014 it bought WhatsApp for \$22 billion and Oculus for \$3 billion, but has not made a similar purchase since. It bought Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012. —Agencies

Tesla in autonomous mode hits a parked police car

SAN FRANCISCO: Police in a Southern California coastal town said that a Tesla in autonomous mode hit a patrol car parked on the side of a road on Tuesday. No one was in the patrol car when the collision took place in the late morning, the Laguna Beach Police Department said in a message posted along with photos on Twitter.

"When using Autopilot, drivers are continuously reminded of their responsibility to keep their hands on the wheel and maintain control of the vehicle at all times," a Tesla spokeswoman said in response to an AFP inquiry. "Tesla has always been clear that Autopilot doesn't make the car impervious to all accidents."

Responses to the police department Twitter post ranged from thoughtful analysis of the accident to mistrust of self-driving cars. "For automation to learn from mistakes, their developers need to admit making them," read a comment tweeted from the account of

@SafeSelfDrive. "Human error behind the wheel has been replaced with human error behind keyboard."

Tesla chief Elon Musk complained in a recent earnings call that accidents involving self-driving cars get sensational headlines while the potential for the technology to save lives is downplayed or ignored. Whether an Autopilot feature was engaged when a Model S collided with the rear of a stopped fire truck in the US state of Utah on May 11 remained to be confirmed.

According to local media, police said the woman at the wheel of the car claimed it was in a self-driving mode and that her attention was on her phone. "It's super messed up that a Tesla crash resulting in a broken ankle is front page news and the (approximately) 40,000 people who died in US auto accidents alone in past year get almost no coverage," Musk said in a tweet in mid-May.

"What's actually amazing about this accident is that a Model S hit a fire truck at 60mph and the driver only broke an ankle." Among accidents to make headlines was a fiery March crash in California that involved its "Autopilot" feature. The US National Transportation Safety Board is investi-



BEIJING: People look at cars in a Tesla showroom. —AFP

gating the accident, which led to the death of a 38-year-old father of two, Walter Huang. Huang's hands were "not detected on the wheel for six seconds prior to the collision," Tesla said in a

blog post. Uber put a temporary halt to its self-driving car program in the US after a March accident in Arizona that resulted in the death of woman pushing a bicycle in a street. —AFP

Cargo bandits disrupt e-commerce in Brazil

GUARULHOS: In a bunker-like room in a gritty suburb of Sao Paulo, retired police colonel Antonio Marin and a dozen employees track the location of hundreds of cargo trucks on a bank of monitors. During his 34 years in Sao Paulo state's military police, Marin took a gunshot to the thigh and spent two years guarding the governor. But his latest job at a private trucking firm may be his biggest challenge yet: protecting clothing, cosmetics and other merchandise amid a crime wave in Brazil that is reshaping the country's nascent e-commerce industry.

Last year, 22,000 cargo robberies were reported in two states alone - Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro - home to the country's two largest cities. That is about 60 heists a day, a record figure that has almost doubled since 2012. Authorities blame criminal gangs preying on shipments. Losses are estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars annually. "You are always running a risk," said Marin, head of security for Braspress, one of the country's largest trucking and logistics firms. "It starts the moment you put cargo in the truck and travel across Brazil."

All manner of businesses are targets, but authorities say bandits favor consumer goods that are easy to fence. That is posing a particular challenge to Brazil's fast-growing e-commerce trade. Security costs are squeezing profit margins and forcing retailers and logistics firms to adjust their strategies to succeed in Latin America's largest economy.

Electronics retailer Via Varejo SA, for example, has developed a satellite-tracking system to keep tabs on its trucks. And it dispatches armed guards to accompany many shipments, logistics chief Marcelo Lopes told Reuters. "We don't scrimp on security," he said. "We invest heavily to protect goods and to protect people."

A major e-commerce player, the company has also bet big on a "click-and-collect" operation that allows customers to pick up online orders at Via Varejo stores. The program is popular with working-class shoppers who like the security, and it means fewer delivery trucks plying dangerous neighborhoods, Lopes said. Brazilian retailer Magazine Luiza SA has employed a similar model to grow its online sales. Still, it is avoiding expansion in Rio state, in part due to worries about cargo theft, Chairwoman Luiza Trajano said last year. Lousy infrastructure, hefty taxes and tangled bureaucracy have long made shipping expensive in this continent-sized country. Rampant cargo theft has only added to the burden.

The tricky terrain will be a test for Amazon.com Inc. The world's largest online retailer is gearing up for a major expansion in Brazil after about six years of peddling mostly e-books and digital movies here. Amazon declined to discuss its strategy. But retail veterans said the Seattle company had better buckle up. Brazil presents "a very different reality for the companies that prosper elsewhere," Magazine Luiza's CEO, Frederico Trajano, said at a public event in April. —Reuters

Health

Marking World MS Day

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: World Multiple Sclerosis Day is marked in May, so Kuwait Times interviewed Dr Raed Al-Roughani, consultant neurologist and director of the MS Clinic at Amiri and Ibn Sina hospitals to get more information about this disease.

What is MS?

It is an autoimmune disorder affecting the myelin (the fatty substance that coats and protects nerve fibers in the brain and spinal cord) of the brain and spine. It's the most common neurological non-traumatic disorder in younger groups. MS usually affects young people aged 20 to 40, and is mostly predominant in females. It results from the inflammation of myelin along with the destruction of the axon.

Symptoms

They vary from mild to severe and may involve any system in the brain or spine. For instance, it may cause visual loss, numbness in all limbs, weakness in hands and legs, vertigo, fatigue, and others. The diversity of symptoms depends on the location of the inflammation, and which nerves it attacks.

Diagnosis

The diagnosing criteria is evolving and becoming much easier. The main diagnostic method is clinical. This means that the physician should consider all the symptoms after examination and support them with MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) to reach the diagnosis. In certain occasions, we need to do lumbar puncture or additional blood tests.

Statistics

Kuwait had the first MS registry in the region, which was established in 2010. The prevalence of MS in Kuwait is 85 per 100,000 persons, which is the highest in the Middle East. This high prevalence in Kuwait is maybe due to the establishment of the specialized MS clinic, availability of MRI, and the improvement of the healthcare system.

Treatment

In the past decade, there were several treatments approved for MS and in the last

four years, five treatments were approved. In the past, we were lowering relapses and slowing the progress of the disease. Now we are talking about stopping relapses (attacks) and improving disability. In the future, we would be hoping for a cure and going back to a normal life. So now our vision is to stop the disease, and hopefully we can cure it in the future.

Most of the medications now, which were approved recently, are capable of stopping the disease at a high rate and improving the symptoms and disability over time. Our job is to keep the patient at their normal activity level at work and home with no disability, which is our objective. With the advantage of the new medication, we are more than capable to do this. Most importantly, this needs selecting the right patient for the right treatment at the right time. We should not forget non-pharmacological approaches such as physical therapy and merging other symptoms such as bladder dysfunction, tingling, spasticity or stiffness that need a multidisciplinary approach with other specialists.

When should a patient be referred?

If a patient has new symptoms such as numbness and visual blurring or loss that last for more than 1-2 days constantly, they should be seen by a doctor and preferably referred to a neurologist. If the slinging or numbness is not going away or is spreading from the hand to leg, for instance, this needs to be checked by the doctor.

Are the medications available?

All medications are available for Kuwaitis. For expats there are some organizations like Axios that help expats get the medication either free or at minimum charges. The older medications are free for expats, but the new medications take a year or two before the process of approving them for expats. Also, the newer medications are more expensive. The treatment is available in all hospitals. Awareness activity will be held on Sunday, June 3 at Radisson Blu Hotel from 9:00 pm.



Dr Raed Al-Roughani, consultant neurologist and director of the MS Clinic.

Colon cancer screening should begin at 45

TAMPA: Screening for colon cancer should begin earlier, at age 45 instead of 50, due to an uptick in colorectal tumors among younger people, the American Cancer Society said yesterday. The new guidelines came after research showed a 51 percent increase in colorectal cancer among people under 50 since 1994, and an accompanying rise in death rates. "When we began this guideline update, we were initially focused on whether screening should begin earlier in racial subgroups with higher colorectal cancer incidence, which some organizations already recommend," said Richard Wender, chief cancer control officer for the American Cancer Society.

Groups known to suffer disproportionately high rates of colon cancer include African-Americans, Alaska Natives, and American Indians. "But as we saw data pointing to a persistent trend of increasing colorectal cancer incidence in younger adults, including American Cancer Society research that indicated this effect would carry forward with increasing age, we decided to reevaluate the age to initiate screening in all US adults." The new guidelines do not specify which kind of test people should get, but includes

options such as a traditional colonoscopy-which should be done every 10 years-or high-sensitivity stool analysis which depending on the type, could be done every year to every three years. Regular screening should continue until age 75, and "clinicians should discourage individuals over 85 from continuing colorectal cancer screening," because the risk of complications outweighs the benefits at that age, said the report.

Mysterious rise in cancer

Experts say it is unclear why colon cancer rates are on the rise in younger people. Research shows that adults born around 1990 have twice the risk of colon cancer and four times the risk of rectal cancer than adults born around 1950, who have the lowest risk, said the report in CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society. Meanwhile, colon cancer rates in people older than 55 are declining, largely due to screening and removal of precancerous polyps.

According to Elena Ivanina, a gastroenterologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, the 51 percent increase in colorectal cancer among those under age 50 since 1994 is an

"alarming" trend. "The reason for the increase is currently not known but possibly associated with obesity and sedentary lifestyles, heavy alcohol use and chronic inflammatory conditions, which are all on the rise," said Ivanina, who was not involved in crafting the guidelines. She applauded the move toward earlier screening, saying it "will benefit the general public."

Another widely respected medical group which issues screening recommendations, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), decided not to recommend in 2016 that colon cancer screening start at 45, saying any additional benefit would be "modest."

The American Cancer Society urged people to talk with their doctors about which kind of screening to pursue, based on risk factors like family history, diet, alcohol consumption and exercise patterns. "I would say an actual colonoscopy would be the best for multiple reasons," David Bernstein, chief of hepatology at Northwell Health in New York, told AFP. "It is the only one of those tests that actually prevents cancer. It allows you to find polyps before they become cancer."—AFP

China overtakes US for healthy lifespan

GENEVA: China has overtaken the United States in healthy life expectancy at birth for the first time, according to World Health Organization data. Chinese newborns can look forward to 68.7 years of healthy life ahead of them, compared with 68.5 years for American babies, the data - which relates to 2016 - showed. American newborns can still expect to live longer overall - 78.5 years compared to China's 76.4 - but the last 10 years of American lives are not expected to be healthy. "The last years of good health that are a factor in calculating healthy life expectancy at birth are lower for China, Japan, Korea and some other high income Asian countries than for high income 'Western' countries," said

WHO spokeswoman Alison Clements-Hunt. The United States was one of only five countries, along with Somalia, Afghanistan, Georgia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, where healthy life expectancy at birth fell in 2016, according to a Reuters analysis of the WHO data, which was published without year-on-year comparisons in mid-May.

The best outlook was for Singaporean babies, who can count on 76.2 years of health on average, followed by those in Japan, Spain and Switzerland. The United States came 40th in the global rankings, while China was 37th. In terms of overall life expectancy China is also catching up with the United States, which Reuters calculations suggest it is on course to

overtake around 2027. "Chinese life expectancy has increased substantially and is now higher than for some high-income countries," said Clements-Hunt.

Meanwhile US life expectancy is falling, having peaked at 79 years in 2014, the first such reversal for many years, Clements-Hunt said. That reflected increasing rates of drug overdose deaths, mainly from opioids, suicides, and some other major causes among younger middle-aged Americans, particularly in less affluent areas, she said. The world's longest life expectancy is in Japan, at 84.2 years, meaning that babies born there in 2016 were the first to be able to look forward to seeing the next century.—Reuters

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Kuwait Times

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What's On

Beautiful spirit of Ramadan adorns Sheraton Kuwait tent



The Sheraton Kuwait Coral Ballroom is decorated this holy month of Ramadan with the most charming ambience to offer unique moments. An acquired heritage from the East that reflects the traditions of authentic Arabian hospitality; decorated with white, black and golden colors with touches of lovely Damascus roses.

In the holy month of Ramadan, Sheraton Kuwait offers a wide range of menus for iftar, ghabqa and suhoor that compliments any taste, from appetizers, soups, hot and cold mezze, as well as salads and sushi bars to delicious main courses and desserts. The assortment of main dishes during Ramadan includes a wide range selection and live cooking stations offering traditional Kuwaiti

and international cuisine. Dessert lovers will find a lot to enjoy in the sweet buffet which includes a selection of Arabic desserts specially prepared for the occasion as well as traditional Ramadan drinks including jallab, tamar hindi and erk sous.

The Sheraton Kuwait Hotel's Ramadan Tent takes pride in hosting families, friends, corporate events and business travelers with

its renowned luxurious services enhanced with Oud tunes in the background which offers a pleasant ambience.

Sheraton Ramadan Tent will host all the ghabqa and suhoor lovers from 10 pm until late hours to offer the best selections and the most famous Ramadan cuisine to soulful Oriental tunes on the Oud, which will make your evening something to remember with

family and friends. On this occasion, Fahed Abushaar, General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait Hotel said "What distinguishes the Ramadan tent this year is the Sham spirit, evoking Damascus hospitality in its splendor which captures the admiration of all those who have visited it, in addition to preserving the high level of service and high quality of dishes during this holy month."



Ooredoo honors volunteer program members

KUWAIT: In alignment with its commitment to supporting youth and volunteers, Ooredoo honored the members of its volunteer program last Sunday during the company's annual ghabqa. The event was attended by hundreds of members of the Ooredoo Kuwait Family, including the Chairman of Ooredoo Group, Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Thani, the CEO of Ooredoo Group, Sheikh Saud bin Nasser Al Thani, and CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani.

This year saw the launch of the fourth edition of the volunteer program, which is operated in collaboration with Spread the Passion non-profit organization. The program aims to educate youth and provide them with necessary training before matching them with volunteer opportunities. The program received more than 300 applicants this year.

Commenting on this, Ooredoo Kuwait's CSR, Sponsorships and Social Media Senior Manager Yousef Al-Shallal expressed his deep pride in Kuwait's largest volunteer program, reiterating that it reflects the deep-rooted values of giving selflessly in Kuwait's youth. He added, "Over the past years, we saw continuous interest from youth to join this program, and we're happy that it has become a platform for volunteers to exchange experiences and help hone each other's skills."

He added that the program is aligned with the company's social responsibility policy and values of caring and connecting, which are in tandem with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who urged private sector entities to



Yousef Al-Shallal

take a proactive role in investing in youth. Spread the Passion Founder Dr Fatemah Almuoussawi lauded Ooredoo's commitment to supporting youth and volunteers, and thanked the company for setting a good example of a private sector entity that invests in youth and participates towards their development.

Ooredoo's volunteers have participated in more than 120 activities since the inception of the program four years ago, including iftar meal distribution in the company's iftar tent opposite the company's head office, in addition to its charity truck which drives to different locations across Kuwait to deliver meals to those in need. Members of the program also contribute regularly in organizing visits to care centers for the elderly, the orphanage, and hospital wards throughout the holy month and around the year.

The company earlier this month launched its activities with distributing iftar meals to hundreds of workers from its iftar tent, with its prime location on Soor Street opposite its head office. To better serve a wider range of beneficiaries, the company utilizes a special truck that will deliver meals to areas populated by underserved communities.

The meal distribution drive is fully operated by Ooredoo's volunteer program members, after the great success of the program in the last years. The upper management at Ooredoo regularly participate in the activities, in addition to staff from the company's different departments and divisions.

Ooredoo also held a special training session for registered members that focused on professional photography, with specialized cameras and advanced smartphone cameras. The session, which was presented by Ooredoo's Social Media Team, covered the basics of photography, photo editing, in addition to the best ways to angles of lighting. Ooredoo aims to hold several other training sessions throughout the course of the program aimed at enriching participants and helping them take their passion to the next level.

NBK shares girgian happy moments with children at NBK Hospital



On the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held its annual Girgian event at NBK Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit, at Al-Sabah Medical district, to celebrate with the children the happy moments of girgian and present them with felicitations and gifts. The event was attended by NBK Public Relations Team.

Commenting on the occasion, Joanne Al-Abdul Jaleel, NBK Public Relations officer stated: "Sharing with these children residing at NBK Hospital major social and religious occasions come as part of an extensive social outreach program specifically mapped out and implemented by NBK."

Abdul Jaleel explained that helping and supporting children and their families are integral parts of the Bank's culture and practices that reflect its deep commitment to its corporate social responsibility. This was the main reason that led NBK to expand the hospital services to include a first of a kind unit specialized in stem cell therapy at Sabah Medical district.

NBK's visit to the hospital was emotional and overwhelming for both the children and NBK

Team. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in the Kuwaiti society. NBK Children's Hospital stands as a landmark for the bank's social initiatives towards children. NBK expanded the hospital's capacity and opened recently the only Stem Cell Therapy Unit for children in Kuwait, further expanding its hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases.



Commercial Bank of Kuwait volunteers celebrated girgian with children at the Ibn Sina Hospital recently as part of the bank's social activities during the holy month of Ramadan.

Stars

CROSSWORD 1923

Crossword grid with numbers 1-77.

ACROSS

- 1. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
4. Be pregnant with.
11. A heavy long-handled hammer used to drive stakes or wedges.
15. A person active in party politics.
16. Not mined.
17. God of fire.
18. A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
19. The capital of Cameroon.
20. Most important element.
21. Take someone's car from him by force.
23. An embroidered rug made from a coarse Indian felt.
25. English geologist remembered as the first person to recognize that dinosaurs were reptiles (1790-1852).
26. A written agreement between two states or sovereigns.
27. A metric unit of length equal to one hundredth of a meter.
29. The syllable naming the fourth (subdominant) note of the diatonic scale in solmization.
30. Jordan's port.
31. Sailing close to the wind v l.
39. A law passed by US Congress to prevent employees from being injured or contracting diseases in the course of their employment.
40. Floor covering consisting of a piece of thick heavy fabric (usually with nap or pile).
41. A very wealthy or powerful businessman.
43. Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
44. Genus of Eurasian spiny shrubs.
45. (prefix) In front of or before in space.
46. One of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
49. Moth having nonfunctional mouthparts as adults.
50. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
51. Sole genus of the family Naiadaceae.
54. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
55. Of or relating to a seizure or convulsion.
58. The largest and southernmost island in the Marianas.
60. Affectedly trendy.
67. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
68. Enlarged beyond truth or reasonableness.
71. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
72. A benevolent aspect of Devi.
73. Health care for the aged.
74. A kind of person.
75. The basic unit of money in Albania.
76. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
77. Small cubes with 1 to 6 spots on the faces.

DOWN

- 1. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
2. (Greek mythology) Daughter of Zeus and Demeter.
3. Fear resulting from the awareness of danger.
4. A republic in northeastern South America.
5. Order by virtue of superior authority.
6. A cloud of fine particles suspended in a gas.
7. God of war and sky.
8. Shaped like a ring.
9. (Brit) A tough youth of 1950's and 1960's wearing Edwardian style clothes.
10. Order of mammals having few or no teeth including.
11. American and Asiatic trees having edible one-seeded fruit.
12. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
13. A member of the Uniat Church.
14. An energetic American dance that was popular in the 1930s (probably named for the aviator Charles Lindbergh).
22. A port in western Israel on the Mediterranean.
24. Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
28. United States baseball player (born in 1920).
32. A corporation authorized by Congress to provide a secondary market for residential mortgages.
33. Wild sheep of northern Africa.
34. A family of languages of the Fula people of west Africa in the sub-Saharan regions from Senegal to Chad.
35. How long something has existed.
36. A large heavy knife used in Central and South America as a weapon or for cutting vegetation.
37. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
38. United States industrialist who manufactured plows suitable for working the prairie soil (1804-1886).
42. Shrub bearing oval-fruited kumquats.
47. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
48. A literary language of Chinese Turkestan (named for one of the sons of Genghis Khan).
52. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
53. Of surpassing excellence.
56. Intelligent somewhat arboreal ape of equatorial African forests.
57. Infections of the skin or nails caused by fungi and appearing as itching circular patches.
59. Type genus of the Ardeidae.
61. Stable gear consisting of either of two curved supports that are attached to the collar of a draft horse and that hold the traces.
62. A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
63. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
64. Set down according to a plan.
65. Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
66. A reason for wanting something done.
69. 32nd President of the United States.
70. United States sculptor and architect whose public works include the memorial to veterans of the Vietnam War in Washington (born in 1959).

Yesterday's Solution

Completed crossword grid with letters.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Starting over, new beginnings, new ways of thinking these are a few things to be ready for as you've put it out there and the creator heard you. Second chances are rare and you're humbled by the opportunities that seem to flow to you. You understand that happiness is in sight when something telling occurs later. Your motto is "never, ever give up!" being a winner feels good after working so hard toward a specific goal: you help others when you help yourself and you're thrilled when it pays off. Sometimes you fight with being impatient and willful, but today this seems tame. Getting things done occupies most of your day; much of this involves laying the ground rules for a new venture that could bring financial success at some point. Being happy makes you healthy and you rest well tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You long to share your life on a romantic level, but the partner you're with isn't there, or you're still in search of a match; either way, you may find yourself romanticizing things that shouldn't be! A change in hairstyle gives you a refreshed feeling and appearance; this is a reflection of what's happening inside you. When opposites don't attract, you have to figure out a way to work with this person and dissolve the tension between you. Creative differences could actually be the perfect atmosphere for profound discoveries. You have an eye for color and you're a good judge of character most of the time, but in this instance you may be too trusting. Hold on to your purse strings to overcome a desire to spend, spend, spend! Making a better life for yourself in your home environment is strongly indicated.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Your way of thinking is intense and focused like a laser on your future. You've come a long way, but you can't seem to be satisfied with your hard work or other efforts; take a moment, look around and take in all that you've accomplished. A grateful heart is rewarded with more to be grateful for: The way you communicate lets people know your mood and they find you impressive! You think about buying something that could be passed down from generation to generation; these things are important to you now. You could notice a lot of redevelopment around your area as the residents join together to raise property values. Someone you love changes for the better and you feel relief. Getting to the bottom of a mystery is becoming habitual and this is reflected in your ready and television habits.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Legacy, long-lasting relationships and foundations are a priority for you during this phase. You could find that looking back on your life, you've been planning for the future for a long time without thinking about it! You're in a good place now because of your efforts in the past, now is the time to take a bit of rest and relaxation for you. You start something new, with no intention of it ever growing or becoming anything more than a hobby; this could likely change in time to come. Mystic and psychic questions come to the surface when a gathering of like-minded people hold a discussion you're glad to be a part of. Passions run high regarding a family situation that could get ugly if you're not careful. Putting time into something new is indicated and this is something you've thought about for some time.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You think of what you leave behind when you pack for a trip; this could be business or pleasure. Learning a new route or way to do something is a fun detour along the way. Interesting landscapes, or perhaps its seascapes, take the tension away and replaces it with soothing vibrations only nature can provide. High-tech gadgets are interesting but not reliable when you think about your past experience; staying with the tried and true works best. Being able to look someone in the eye means a lot to you. You don't mind being independent when it comes to your work environment, but you tend to want a partner in life. Leaving yourself open to the possibilities isn't hard when intuition tells you it's safe to take a chance! Severing ties with someone or something is indicated; this is for the best.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Relationships old and new undergo transformations; some may end, others strengthen. Something you see mesmerizes you and you can't seem to forget it; this could be a person or some type of art. If you feel compelled to take a scary risk, remember that now's not the time, the next cycle you enter is much better. You find yourself trapped in a mental environment far different from the way you view things; figuring out how to work with this could be tricky. Deadlines that seem impossible might be; perhaps it's time for a change. Going about something unpleasant is distasteful, but after the air's cleared you're much better. You have to stand up for the way you'd like something done, and everyone agrees after listening! Taking ideas from paper to actuality is an ability people admire in you; you're a talented person.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Old TV Shows 2

Find and circle all of the old TV shows that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional old TV show.

Wordsearch grid with letters and circled words.

- A-TEAM, DOCTOR WHO, HEE HAW, NEWHART, BEN CASEY, DYNASTY, HUNTER, NIGHT COURT, BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, EQUALIZER, JEFFERSONS, OUTER LIMITS, CHIPS, FALCON CREST, KNIGHT RIDER, PRISONER, CANNON, FAME, MAGGYER, S.W.A.T., CAPTAIN KANGAROO, MAVERICK, SILVER SPOONS, DOBBIE GILLIS, FANTASY ISLAND, MAYBERRY R.F.D., T.J. HOOKER, HOWDY DOODY, I SPY, TWILIGHT ZONE, DR. KILDARE, FLINTSTONES, MISTER ED, VIRGINIAN, EMERGENCY, FULL HOUSE, MUNSTERS, WEBSTER, FLIPPER, GROWING PAINS, NANNY, HAWAII FIVE-O

Libra (September 23-October 22)



Self-respect is important to you, as is the respect of others; a need to be appreciated could be strong now. Wanting things in their places is natural for you, but especially during this cycle where balance and organization is highlighted. What you value is changing and you feel this with intensity; your approach to life is a reflection of this love, laughter, joy! Looking into the unusual, secretive matters in life appeals to you as do mysteries in literature; your mind requires stimulation or you become anxious. Your interest in sex and romance are noticeable and you do your best with what you've got. Doing something for yourself makes you feel good inside, and you deserve it! Ambitions are high and you're up to the belief and work it takes to manifest them. Go forward assured of success and commitment to your goals.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Certain things turn you on and you know them when you see them; a sense of familiarity seems to come with these things. The motivations of others interest you, especially where someone in particular is concerned; this could be related to business. When the cause of a problem becomes clear, you're able to eliminate it; problem solved! Strong emotions have your attention; you want love, something lasting and you know that you're part of the problem! This is excellent progress, because now that you see it, you can fix it; all is well, Scorpio. Envisioning what you want brings it when you believe; now's a very good time! Personal matters are at the forefront. You want your life to mean something and you set forth on doing only what you want to come back. Smiles and laughter for you later.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Learning about an emerging industry is the focus of your attention now and this is something that could pay off very well. Neighbors join together to make a difference in the neighborhood and there could be some feelings hurt, but overall the outcome is positive. Being diplomatic is something you're good at and you gladly step up to the plate in a sensitive circumstance. Staying in touch with someone makes a difference in the outcome of some sort of deal. People look to you for guidance and your opinion carries a lot of weight; this could be pressure you're not comfortable with. Being on better terms is what you want, but this isn't going to happen; during this cycle you're surrounded by positive vibrations, this person isn't. Tending to your own needs is called for: it's a good time to create prosperity.



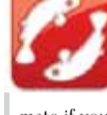
Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Busy, busy times on tap for you now. A move you made a while back pays off big time and positive vibrations abound. Breaking free of toxic people and situations is the answer and once you make this change, a brighter world immediately opens up to you. A cruel person drives you away, and you're relieved! New business creates new income that makes a huge difference in your life. You can feel the positive energy generated by the universe surrounding you during this phase; bask in this while it lasts. Intuition is very strong right now and it's right on about a certain person who is actually an imposter. Good friends and loyal family members show you their love later tonight. Plans come together flawlessly when like-minded people put their heads together to create better conditions in the world.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Becoming involved in a new business catches and holds your attention; this could have something to do with a controversial product that shows great promise. People admire you for your level-headedness and loyalty; they take your opinion very seriously, so be mindful of what you say! Forming new relationships and deepening bonds in current ones is highlighted. Your taste in art shifts a bit and you discover delight in unexpected places. If you're in the mood to take chances at this time, it's because the stars are aligned for good luck and abundance; if used wisely the probabilities for success are high. Someone you take for granted could become ill. The energies support taking one step at a time toward self-improvement. Paying close attention to your appearance and style in all areas is forecast.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

If you think it, it is so; remember this now and for the next few weeks of this phase because your thoughts are powerfully magnified now. You long for a mate if you don't already have one. If you do, you either want more out of the relationship or some type of big change. Style changes are strongly probable as your sense of attractiveness has grown stale; you answer the urge to jump out there and try something new! You have appreciation for all of the respect and admiration paid you by many; being humble is a blessed attitude. When you put your mind to it, you overcome a large obstacle; others may not consider this a big deal, but you know what it means to you. Trying new tastes and customs has a broad appeal as you make vacation plans to celebrate a special event. You can be true to yourself and others.

Yesterday's Solution

Old TV Shows 1

Wordsearch grid with letters and circled words.

- ALICE, FLYING NUN, L.A. LAW, ODD COUPLE, BEN CASEY, FUGITIVE, LASSIE, PEYTON PLACE, BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, GOMER PYLE, LOVE BOAT, RAWHIDE, CHIPS, GOOD TIMES, MAD ABOUT YOU, RIFLEMAN, CANNON, GREEN ACRES, MAUDE, RIN TIN TIN, CAPTAIN KANGAROO, GREEN HORNET, MEDICAL CENTER, SOAP, DOBBIE GILLIS, HOWDY DOODY, MIAMI VICE, ST. ELSEWHERE, DONNA REED, I SPY, MOD SQUAD, TAXI, DR. KILDARE, IRONSIDE, MOONLIGHTING, THREE'S COMPANY, EMERGENCY, JETSONS, MURPHY BROWN, WALTONS, FLIPPER, KOJAK

The hidden TV show is: THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW

Daily SuDoku

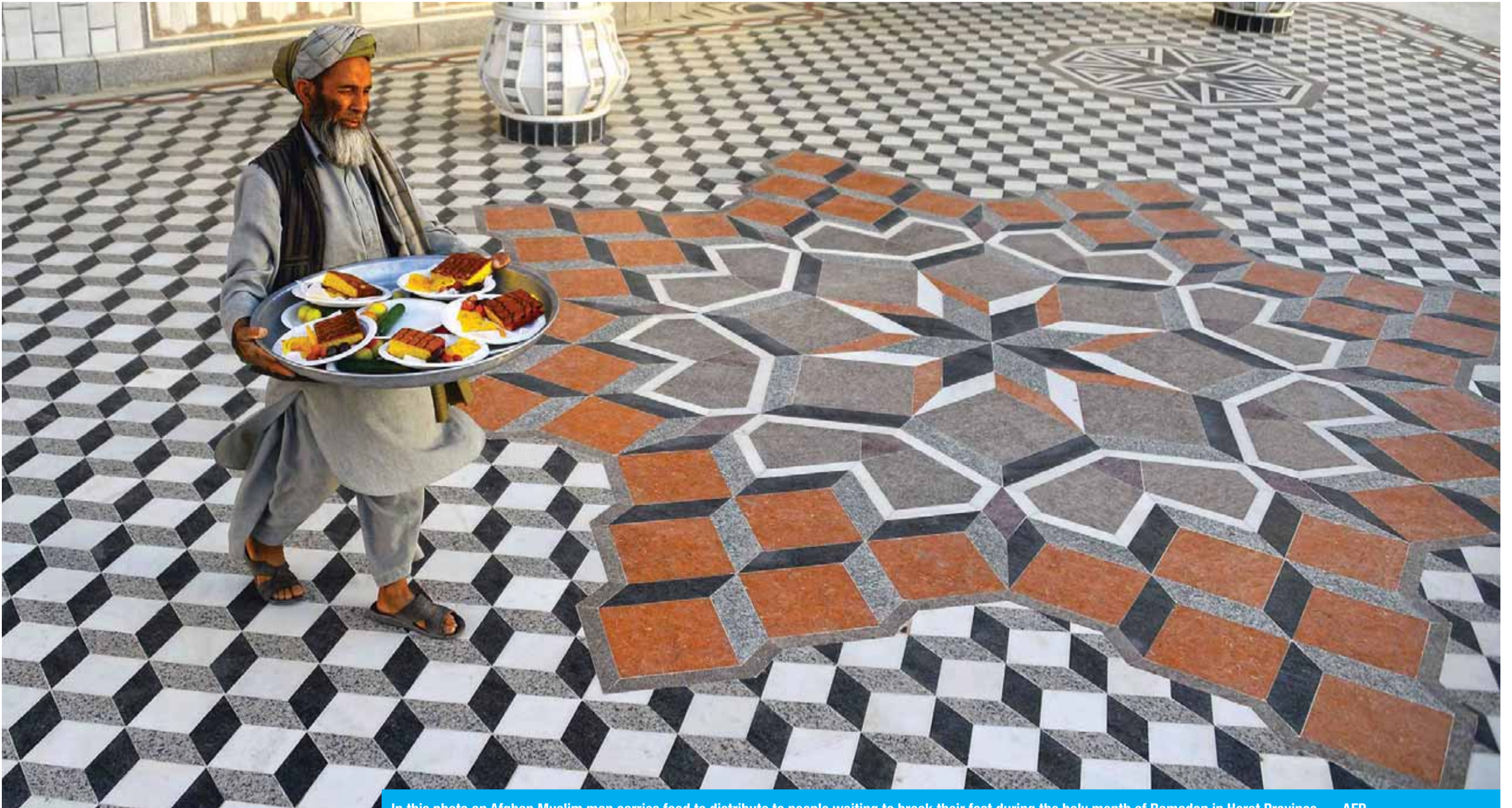
Daily Sudoku grid with numbers.

Yesterday's Solution

Completed Sudoku grid with numbers.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2018



In this photo an Afghan Muslim man carries food to distribute to people waiting to break their fast during the holy month of Ramadan in Herat Province. — AFP

Cities go wild with child-friendly design

In a part of Barcelona best known as a concrete transport hub, just a stone's throw from the bustling Sants railway station, a square has been transformed into an idyllic play area. Sitting on a sea of bright ethnic cushions and rugs, under canopies shading them from the sun, children tinker with nature-inspired toys, including bits of wood in all shapes and sizes, as their parents look on. The pop-up play area is part of an "Urban Forest" initiative organized by Tata Inti, a local non-profit founded in 2014 that provides education to children under six.

The government-funded organization aims to "democratise the care of young children, make it visible, and at the same time recover public space as a meeting place", said Merce Aranda, co-founder of Tata Inti. The Urban Forest project, which will hold sessions in eight areas of Barcelona over the next few months, offers free play to lower-income families, Aranda told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. It comes at a time when city authorities are pushing forward with a 20.7 million-euro (\$23.9 million) initiative, started in 2015, to make Barcelona a more child-friendly city.

Under the plan, 89 new play spaces will be built and 150 existing ones renovated by the end of next year, to make them more accessible and inclusive for children of different ages, as well as those with disabilities. Underpinning the ambitious scheme is a desire to develop areas outside of the traditional playground model, providing more spontaneous opportunities for play and physical activity.

Younger cities

Globally, fast-growing cities are under pressure to protect children from urban pressures including crime, traffic, pollution, cramped living conditions and social isolation. Of the 4 billion people living in the world's urban areas, nearly a third are children, according to UNICEF, the UN agency for chil-

dren's rights. By 2050, 70 percent of the world's children will live in urban areas, it estimates. Healthy development of children is crucial to the wellbeing of any society, and the costs of failing are huge, as children's early experiences shape their future achievements, according to UNICEF, which runs the global Child Friendly Cities Initiative.

Weaker social cohesion and higher crime rates in dense urban areas increase psychotic symptoms in children, including hearing or seeing things that others do not, found a 2016 study published by U.S.-based Duke University.

Out and about

Urban planners have begun looking for ways to make cities better for children in an everyday sense, by enabling them to get around independently and increasing the amount of time they spend outdoors and in contact with nature. Independent mobility - when a child can move around a city without being accompanied by an adult - depends on road crossings, perceptions of safety, and the proximity and availability of things to do, global engineering firm Arup said in a report earlier this year on design for urban childhoods.

Cities that can offer children a network of routes and activities that they enjoy using and are good for them means thinking beyond fenced-off playgrounds, said Tim Gill, a UK-based researcher and author who has advised London's mayor on child-friendly city planning in the past. Children will play in many different types of spaces, he noted. "So let's think more creatively about how we can design public spaces where play is a function... but may not be the only function," he said.

Cities designed with children in mind would have less traffic and more suitable infrastructure such as wider pavements, multi-functional play spaces and new models like Barcelona's "superblock" system which restricts traffic flow in

selected neighborhoods, Arup said. In Singapore, a new child-friendly bus stop opened last year, featuring a swing, artwork, children's books, a rooftop garden, lots of seating and access to e-books, digital maps and other online information. If the project, devised by the government with local firm DP Architects, is a success, the authorities plan to expand it from the Jurong region to other parts of Singapore.

Taking risks

Some cities have also begun incorporating wild spaces or freestyle playgrounds, where children can play in nature rather than a man-made setting, take risks, and even have accidents. Critics say playground design since the 1970s has become too focused on health and safety, leading to unimaginative facilities that stifle children's creativity by preventing them from trying new things and making discoveries for themselves.

New initiatives like forest schools and wild spaces aim to counter that. In Rotterdam's Nature Playground in the Netherlands, children are allowed to camp and build fires and dens, as if they were in the countryside. Unstructured outdoor play can improve children's problem-solving skills, focus and self-discipline, and boost their ability to get along with others, leading to healthier and happier lives, experts say.

However, a number of studies show children in richer countries are spending less time outdoors. British children play outside half as much as their parents did, according to a 2016 survey from Britain's National Trust. The developing world is starting to experience the same trend, said Gill. "As you are seeing a growing middle-class in poorer countries, you are also seeing children's lives becoming more constrained, and more fear about children's freedoms," he said.

That is partly because wealthier families tend to live in gated communities, he added. Giving chil-



dren simple liberties, rather than rearing them "in captivity", is good for them, but also for society more broadly because it points to the general healthiness of a neighborhood, said Gill. "That neighborhood is also going to work pretty well for older people, for people with disabilities, for a wider section of the population," he explained.

In Britain, the "Playing Out" movement to close streets to traffic for a couple of hours on a set day so that children can play there freely has gathered steam in the past few years, expanding from the city of Bristol across the country. Enabling children from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds to spend regular time together also reduces community tensions, said Gill. "Those sorts of childhood experiences help to make cities better, more convivial, and places that are more at ease with themselves," he added. — Reuters

Children play with musical instruments in a public space under the newly renovated Sant Antoni market, part of a 'superblock' pedestrianized area in Barcelona. — Reuters photos



Children ride scooters through a newly opened 'superblock' area, where traffic flow is restricted, in the Sant Antoni district of Barcelona.



Children and their parents take part in the "Urban Forest" initiative run by local non-profit organization Tata Inti in the Sants district of Barcelona.





Christina Aguilera: Kanye West is endearing

Christina Aguilera found Kanye West "endearing" in the studio. The controversial rapper produced the tracks 'Accelerate' and 'Maria' on the 'Fall In Line' singer's new album, 'Liberation', and while she was blown away by Kanye's artistry and they "clicked" immediately, she doesn't agree with everything he says. She told Entertainment Weekly: "[Kanye's] always said things that have stirred controversy and attention. I'm not getting involved in what he's saying or anything like that. I know him as an artist. I do know that when we sat down and he played me these tracks, he got me. I think he's an artist first and foremost and we're not always going to agree with artists. I loved our initial meeting and we totally clicked. I found him to be very endearing." The 37-year-old star worked with the 40-year-old producer on the two tracks in Malibu, California in early 2016, but they lost touch after he

embarked on his 'Life Of Pablo' tour later that year, during which Kanye was hospitalized with exhaustion. She said previously: "There were some personal things that arose..." The 'Dirrty' hitmaker revealed the new album has a strong hip-hop feel to it, insisting she sees herself as more of a soul singer than a pop star. Christina said: "To me, there's nothing like an amazing hip hop beat. At the end of the day, I am a soul singer. When you strip back the words 'pop star' and the many things that I've done, singing soulfully is where my core, my root and my heart really is. And as you can see, it's what I'm inspired by." 'Liberation' is Christina's first album in six years, with her last studio venture being 2012's 'Lotus'.

Minaj set for the BET Awards performance



Nicki Minaj is among performers announced for the 2018 BET Awards. The 'Barbie Tingz' rapper, Janelle Monae, H.E.R, rap trio Migos and British star Ella Mai are all set to take to the stage at the star-studded bash, held at Los Angeles' Microsoft Theater on June 24. This year's nominations were previously announced with DJ Khaled leading the pack with six nods, while Kendrick Lamar follows closely behind with four. Hot on their heels are Migos and SZA, with four each, while other notable nominees include Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Cardi B, Bruno Mars, Jay-Z, Beyoncé and Drake. Last year, the famous producer's son, Asahd, stole the show in a turquoise custom-made Gucci suit after he made an appearance alongside his dad on stage for a performance of his hit 'I'm The One'. Gushing about his little boy, Khaled said: "Me and his mommy always keep him around greatness, we always give him joy. We always give him happiness. We always give him love..." "The way I was raised, my family brought me around what they do, you know what I'm saying? And I'm bringing him out what me and mommy do (SIC)." Jamie Foxx is set to host the annual ceremony for the second time. The 'Beat Shazam' presenter previously fronted the awards show in 2009. Last year's ceremony was fronted by 'Ghostbusters' actress Leslie Jones, while other previous presenters of the awards - which honor musicians, actors, and athletes - have included Chris Rock, Mo'Nique, Kevin Hart and Chris Tucker.



Panic! At The Disco were offered The Greatest Showman soundtrack

Panic! At The Disco's Brendon Urie was offered a song from 'The Greatest Showman' soundtrack for his band. The 'Write Sins Not Tragedies' hitmaker has revealed Benji Pasek and Justin Paul, the Oscar-nominated scorers behind the soundtrack for the blockbuster musical film, sent him the song 'The Greatest Show' to see if he'd like to use it. Though the 31-year-old singer didn't end up recording the song because it just "didn't make sense", he has been inspired by the success of the Hugh Jackman-starring film, and would love to make a musical based around his emo pop band. Appearing on BBC Radio 1, Brendon revealed: "I talked to Benji and Justin who did the score for that and they actually sent me the song ('The Greatest Show') and they were like 'hey can this be a Panic! song?'. And I was like absolutely! And then it just didn't make sense. We didn't finally get a finished product. So then the movie came out and I was like 'Oh, it would have been fun to be a part of'. But either way I wanna do something like that in the future. It

would be great right? A Panic! movie or something." The band release their new album 'Pray For The Wicked' on June 22, and Brendon attended a signing and meet-and-greet with fans at HMV Oxford Street in London on Tuesday. Brendon starred in 'Kinky Boots' on Broadway last year, and his time in the Big Apple and all of the "incredible things" that he's done have inspired the songs, including lead single 'Say Amen'. He said: "After being away in New York for months doing 'Kinky Boots', I just wanted to hang out at home when I got back to L.A. I was so revved up that I asked some friends to come over to my home studio to help me write about all the incredible things I've experienced the last couple of years. 'Pray For The Wicked' is my 'thank you' to our fans and the most fun I've ever had making album." The record release will be supported by a tour, which will kick-off on July 11 in Minneapolis, before concluding in the band's hometown of Las Vegas on August 18.

Weller wants Dame Shirley Bassey for Bond song

Paul Weller wants Dame Shirley Bassey to sing the Bond theme tune he co-wrote with Noel Gallagher. The former Jam star revealed last year that he has penned "half a song" with the ex-Oasis star, which would be a "great" fit for the spy thriller franchise, and now he says they are serious in their bid to land the gig for Daniel Craig's final appearance as 007 next year. Weller told the Daily Star newspaper: "We're hoping to work on the next Bond, that's the plan, although no-one has asked us to do it. We're just gonna go for it." The 60-year-old musician would like to get the 81-year-old Welsh music legend - who sung the themes for 'Goldfinger', 'Diamonds Are Forever' and 'Moonraker' - to lay down her vocals on their track. He said: "We might get Shirley Bassey to do it." Revealing his intentions, Weller said previously: "I want to write a James Bond theme tune. I've got this half a song that me and Noel Gallagher worked on and I think it would be great for a Bond theme. There's a bit of minor key going on. That would be an ambition definitely." Should they land the gig, Noel's songwriting credit would fulfil the 50-year-old guitarist's dream of taking on the coveted task, which he first spoke about in 2015. He said at the time: "If I was asked, it is too right. I'd record a Bond theme in a heartbeat. But they usually want people who are famous in America, don't they? I'm only famous in Manchester. And bits of south London." And the 'Wonderwall' hitmaker said he would jump at the chance to record a theme for the franchise, but only if he was asked to do so. He said: "If I was asked to write a Bond song, yeah, sure. The thing is, I've never had to chase anything. With Oasis, starting that band seemed impossible, and all my ambitions have seemed possible, so I'm not remotely ambitious for anything that is attainable. Now I've done a bit, I don't really care any more about achieving anything. I just want to write the best songs I can."

Witherspoon calls on Hollywood to support female filmmakers

Reece Witherspoon has called on Hollywood to support more female moviemakers. The 42-year-old actress - who has been a vocal supporter of the Time's Up movement - thinks it's important that the film industry becomes more accessible to people with different perspectives and different stories to tell. Speaking to Fast Company, Reese explained: "You feel like you can't expect every movie to be made by the same 20 men and feel like you're getting different stories. I mean, we talk about the male gaze versus the female gaze... women tell stories in different ways. What if we had that kind of powerful storytelling from other perspectives, that was just as viable commercially, how can we change the world? And I really think we can." In 2015, Reese spoke of her determination to support more women from different backgrounds as they pursue their dream of working in the entertain-

ment industry. The Academy Award-winning star - who owns a production company called Hello Sunshine - suggested that a lot of the inequality issues are deep-rooted in American society. She explained: "I feel like it starts very young. Women who are writers and women who are directors are not getting those critical internships when you are 18, 19, 20, 21. I mean... just looking around, I'm standing on set looking for the female interns, Latin American interns. When we were doing 'Hot Pursuit' we had these Latin American writers. I mean, it was so hard to find a Latin American comedy writer. I'm calling everybody who runs a TV show. We need to develop the talent when they are 18, 19 years old and that responsibility is on us, our companies, other people in this audience that own companies. Let's find these young women."



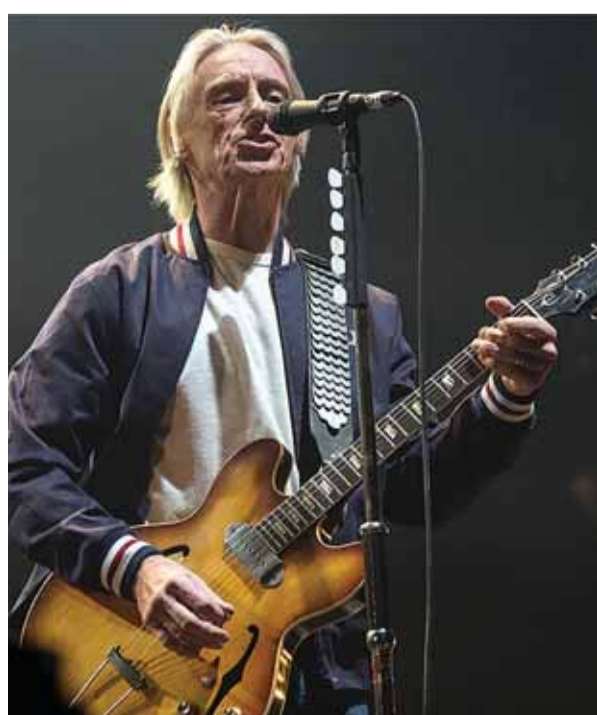
Bautista confirms his Avengers return

Dave Bautista has confirmed he will appear in the fourth 'Avengers' movie. The 49-year-old actor plays the part of Drax in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and despite 'Avengers: Infinity War' ending on a cliffhanger, Dave has revealed he will star in the sequel, as well as 'Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 3'. He shared: "I don't know if I was supposed to, but I believe that I've already said publicly that I am in both." However, Dave has insisted that, for the time being, he still doesn't know how or when Drax will return to the money-spinning franchise. He told Den of Geek: "We don't know. I don't even know. I haven't read the script for either, and you know, I've talked to James [Gunn, 'Guardians' writer/director]." Despite this, Dave happily admitted he is most excited about returning to the 'Guardians' franchise, which has become one of Marvel's biggest success stories. The wrestler-turned-actor confessed: "I'm more excited about 'Guardians 3', obviously. It's just much nearer and dearer to my heart. So I don't ask to see the script and I don't want to know about it until he's actually written it. And then I want to read it and just say I love it, 'cause it's always great." Dave first played the part of Drax in the original 'Guardians' movie in 2014, and has subsequently reprised the role for 'Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2' and 'Avengers: Infinity War'. — Bang Showbiz



Dormer says In Darkness has a 'voyeuristic element'

Natalie Dormer admits there is a "voyeuristic element" to her new movie 'In Darkness'. The 36-year-old actress stars as Sophia, a blind pianist, in the new thriller film, and Natalie has admitted that making the movie was a unique experience for her. She shared: "It was such an interesting experience, not being able to make eye contact with my co-stars. As an actor, you realize how deeply you depend on locking eyes. If you ever feel that you're losing the truth of the moment, that's what you come back to. So, to not be able to have that connection, we had to do some rehearsals with some of the pivotal scenes." Natalie's co-star Ed Skrein also found making the movie to be a weird experience. But, on the other hand, he also admitted that not being able to make eye contact with his co-stars was "weirdly liberating". Speaking to Collider, the English actress explained: "Ed Skrein said that he found that weird at the beginning, as well, not being able to make eye contact, but that it was then weirdly liberating because it allowed him to study my face. There's a voyeuristic element to it that is very thriller. I relied heavily on Anthony [Byrne, the director] for where my eye line should be, and what was communicating with the camera and what wasn't. It was a technical minefield, in that regard."





Amsterdam's De Waag, or Weigh House, is illuminated in Amsterdam, Netherlands. — AP photos

A dare: Skip the Colosseum and Vatican on a trip to Rome?

By Raf Casert

There was no escaping it. Try as one might, there was no way out but to go with the dense flow of sweaty humanity. This was the Vatican Museum with its endless galleries of some of the finest art Western civilization had ever produced - scores of high-lights obstructed from full view by fellow journeymen, many of whom were trying to make the most of a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

around there. Instead, try the Baths of Caracalla. The ruins of the baths, where 1,600 were served at once in Roman times, are awe-inspiring and you find better patterns for floor mosaics there.

2. Seeing 10 great paintings up close beats seeing 100 behind a forest of selfie sticks. So head for the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. Lore goes that when Pope Innocentius X saw Velasquez's portrait of him there, the pontiff is said to have exclaimed "Troppo Vero!" - too true - and kept it away from the public eye for far too long. Many



People dressed as gladiators stand in front of the Colosseum in Rome, Italy.



Two people stand in front of a fountain in Vatican City, Italy.



Tourists visit the Colosseum in Rome, Italy.



People wait in line to get into the Vatican museum in Vatican City, Italy.



A tourist takes a selfie in St Mark's Square in Venice, Italy.



Tourists ride in a horse drawn carriage in Bruges, Belgium.

One hapless tourist took pictures of the explanatory panels, unable to stand still and actually read them, before being swept up and moved along, up to the next masterpiece hidden from proper view. Michelangelo was a visionary genius for painting not only the walls of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, but primarily its ceilings. Over half a millennium later, it does allow for an unobstructed view, however tightly packed the masses are, however tense the neck muscles become.

This was a weekday in early autumn, when travelers in most destinations expect high tourist season to finally give way to a semblance of civility. Not in Rome, not at the Vatican. It captivated in a few claustrophobic moments the challenges top tourist destinations now face across Europe - be it Amsterdam, Venice, Rome or Belgium's Bruges. "Memories which someday will become all beautiful when the last annoyance that encumbers them shall have faded out of our minds," Mark Twain wrote in his famed travel report through Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, "The Innocents Abroad." With over tourism gripping the great treasures of humanity, it seems a lot of amnesia is in order for memories to truly shine.

But hold on. There is another way, and you don't even have to give up a visit to a place like Rome. One day after the suffocating zombie experience at the Vatican Museum, you might be forgiven for furtively looking over your shoulder at the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme museum and wonder, "Where is everybody?" The art is as unbeatable as at the Vatican. Try finding a better 2,000-year-old discus thrower, and wonder how so much human expression could be put in a bronze like the boxer. And here you can circle it from every angle with nary another tourist in sight.

What it comes down to is an acceptance that you might not see every top-five attraction in a city or country. But what you will lose in namedropping - "I was at the Uffizi" - you will gain in true travel experience and a sense of adventure to go off the beaten track.

Here's how that philosophy plays out on a visit to Rome, even if it might sound sacrilegious to some:

1. Skip a visit to the Colosseum. Don't worry, you will get plenty of great views of it from all so many streets

consider it the finest portrait in history, though the tourist hordes don't know about it.

Rome is so saturated with the greatest art that the list goes on forever. Too many sweaty shoulders to get a great view of statues of the legendary Bernini on the Piazza Navona? Head to slightly out of the way Santa Maria della Vittoria and see perhaps his greatest work, the sculpture depicting "The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa." I won't say more, but read the accompanying text in the church and you'll find some religious writing which could put "Fifty Shades of Grey" to shame.

You might even switch cities on your itinerary. Instead of Amsterdam and its choc-a-block crowds clogging the uneven streets, pick nearby Utrecht as your base. The canals have a charm all their own and you will find a similar waft of weed coming out of its many "cafes." In Italy, instead of Florence, spare a thought for Ferrara.

When in Belgium, bypass Bruges and go for nearby Ghent, and what you lose in quaintness, you win in student grit. Instead of ubiquitous chocolate shops, you get state-of-the-art bakeries. But stop! Last time I checked this spring, it seemed the hordes had discovered Ghent's scenic Graslei waterfront and had tourists almost spilling into the river.

It is a cautionary tale since the last thing an intrepid tourist now needs is to have someone tell them where to go. That is exactly how tourism turned into overtourism. For 19th century Twain, the "noblest delight" on his grand tour was "to be the first - that is the idea." Then he came to Rome and realized the impossibility of his quest. "What is there for me to touch that others have not touched," he asked.

The challenge for the 21st century is almost the inverse: Instead of the traveler touching something, the challenge is how to be touched by something, to find something inspiring in this overwhelming world of mass tourism. Just head off the overly trodden track. And with a bit of imagination, that can be done even within Rome. — AP

May the flop be with you: Inquest begins after 'Solo' washout

With "Solo: A Star Wars Story" proving an intergalactic dud on its opening weekend, analysts have been pondering whether Lucasfilm's enviable license to print money might just have expired. The latest prequel in the iconic space franchise opened over the Memorial Day weekend in the US and Canada on just \$103 million, worryingly short of predictions of a \$150 million debut. The news abroad was arguably worse, leaving Oscar-winning veteran filmmaker Ron Howard's contribution to the "Star Wars" universe barely halfway toward the predicted \$300 million opening global take.

"By any other movie's standards, this would be a home run," comScore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian told AFP. "In the world of 'Star Wars,' where the expectations are so high and interest rises to a fever pitch, it's being universally called a disappointment or an underwhelming performance." "Solo," starring 28-year-old Alden Ehrenreich ("Hail Caesar!") in the title role, charts the adventure-filled past of smuggler Han Solo-made famous in four "Star Wars" movies by Harrison Ford.

The second of three planned spinoffs from Disney-owned Lucasfilm, it follows "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story," the second highest grossing movie worldwide in 2016. It has endured a journey to screen as treacherous as

a picnic on a windy day in the Tatooine desert, with directing duo Phil Lord and Chris Miller sacked by Lucasfilm over "creative differences" far into the production.

'Fan outcries'

Another inconvenient personnel change that may have put pressure on the reported \$250 million budget was the withdrawal of Michael K. Williams, who had been tapped to play the main villain but had to pass the part on to Paul Bettany because of a scheduling conflict. "Solo" had to endure a year's worth of bad press," Shawn Robbins, chief analyst at Boxoffice.com, told AFP.

"Speculation ran rampant after myriad confirmed and unconfirmed stories relating to why Lucasfilm switched gears and changed directors near the end of production-reportedly resulting in 70 percent of the film being reshoot." Howard is generally credited with having done a decent job at short notice, however, and the problem for analysts isn't necessarily the quality of what ended up on screen.

Han Solo's origin story, Robbins argues, turned off fans because it didn't connect directly to the overarching myths of the main saga, whereas "Rogue One" dovetails directly onto 1977's "A New Hope." "A lot of people had made up their minds about this movie months before it even came out. It just wasn't



(From left) Donald Glover, Emilia Clarke, Alden Ehrenreich and Paul Bettany attend a screening of 'Solo: A Star Wars Story' in New York. — AFP

clear how significant a portion of the fan base that was until now," Robbins said.

"Despite the durability of the brand name, the film simply wasn't able to overcome the negative headlines and fan outcries that have gestated-whether or not one agrees with them-since Disney took over the franchise." Another potent factor might well have been "Star Wars fatigue," say analysts, 40 years into a series that kept respectable three-year

gaps between episodes in the original and prequel trilogies.

Bump in the road

The trilogies themselves-the original films, the prequels and the sequel series due to wrap up in 2019 - were also launched a long time apart, with gaps of 16 and then 10 years. Disney paid "Star Wars" creator George Lucas \$4 billion for Lucasfilm in 2012, and has

already brought out no less than four movies, starting with 2015's "The Force Awakens." "Solo" came out with "The Last Jedi"-the eighth movie in the main saga still playing in some foreign markets and having only just ended its US theatrical run a month earlier.

Robbins and Dergarabedian both refer to the stuttering start made by "Solo" as a rock or bump in the road, arguing that the franchise is still in good health. "It's easy to Monday morning quarterback for all of us. For Disney, they're putting it all on the line and they're going to take these lessons learned from this weekend and apply them," Dergarabedian said.

Over the next decade, Lucasfilm is planning an Episode IX, two further trilogies by "Last Jedi" director Rian Johnson and "Game of Thrones" showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, a Boba Fett origin story, a live-action series from Jon Favreau and a possible Obi Wan Kenobi spinoff. "Lucasfilm is still in a good position when it comes to the franchise's long-term future, but this no doubt serves as a teachable moment that even the most invincible of movie properties must be paced and cared for appropriately," said Robbins. "When that happens, the rewards will be reaped." — AFP



BEIRUT'S DAPPER BARBER ON A BIKE OFFERS CURBSIDE CUTS

Dressed in an old straw hat and navy suspenders, Abo Tawila pedals around a southern district of Beirut. A rare sight in modern-day Lebanon, the young barber-on-a-bike is looking for his next customer. Everything he needs for a trim on the pavement is in a handmade trunk attached to the back of his pushbike: scissors, combs, electric razors and brushes. "It's a beautiful idea because it's a really old one," says the dapper 18-year-old as he makes his way through the buzzing district of Burj Al-Barajneh. His real name is Mohammad Khaled Jahjah, but he prefers the name Abo Tawila "the Tall One" in Arabic. "People like this, and I love everything old. If I ever have the chance to open a barbershop, it'll be a vintage one," he says.



Mohammed, a Lebanese roaming barber better known as "Abu Tawila", gives a client a haircut on a sidewalk in the Lebanese capital Beirut's southern suburbs. — AFP photos



Mobile barbers were once ubiquitous in Beirut, but regular salons have since become more popular. Abo Tawila works in both, spending most of his day in a barbershop before hitting the tarmac on his bike. Some stop him for a haircut, but others hail him down to catch up or introduce themselves. "I used to love watching the barber near my parent's house. I'd come back from school, drop off my backpack, and go to his shop," Abo Tawila says. "He told me to come to the salon after school if I like this job. But I decided to leave school altogether to work with him. He taught me the trade and introduced people to me."

Loyal to his bicycle

The handsome hairdresser has become something of a celebrity in southern Beirut. He is slender, stylishly dressed, and has a sharp wit. "I'm so happy he's here," says Abo Saeed, one of his favorite curbside customers. "He's talented and always available. When I have some time, I call him and he comes immediately, so I never have to leave work to go to the barber," he tells AFP. "On top of all of that, he reminds us of the barbers of the old days." Abo Tawila wakes up at 9:00am every day, puts together an outfit and goes down to the coffee shop near his house before beginning his day at the salon.

In his free time or when his shift is done, he heads

out on his bike to find customers, grooming between five and 30 people a day. "The situation changes depending on the day," he says. "There's not much work now during Ramadan, because people are waiting for Eid", the feast which marks the end of the Islamic fasting month and triggers a flurry of trade. "Before Eid, we have three days where we don't sleep from all the customers coming in," he says. While he dreams of opening his own shop, Abo Tawila insists he'll stay loyal to his bike. "If I open a salon, I'll still keep it, because that's what got me here," he says. — AFP

“ He reminds us of the barbers of the old days ”



'Abo Tawila' rides his bicycle in a street on the outskirts of the Palestinian refugee camp Burj al-Barajneh, south of the capital Beirut.

Sports

Cheika names five new faces in Wallabies squad to play Ireland

No room for Crusaders flanker Pete Samu

SYDNEY: Wallabies boss Michael Cheika yesterday named five potential debutants in his 32-man squad to face Six Nations champions Ireland next month, including young guns Jack Maddocks and Tom Banks.

Australia host the Irish on three consecutive Saturdays from June 9 in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, and Cheika has admitted he is wary of them, with hard work needed to counter the threat. Melbourne Rebels' utility Maddocks got the nod after a superb season on the wing, scoring eight tries so far, while fast-emerging Brumbies full-back Banks also made the grade.

Queensland Reds' Caleb Timu was another to receive a maiden Wallabies squad call-up. He was among just five backrowers, including skipper Michael Hooper, Ned Hanigan—who won't be fit for the first Test—Lukhan Tui, and David Pocock.

But there was no room for Crusaders flanker Pete Samu, who was unveiled on Tuesday as a Brumbies contracted player from next year, becoming eligible to play for the Wallabies. He is still contracted to New Zealand and there was hope the Melbourne-born player would be granted clearance to represent Australia, but New Zealand Rugby has so far failed to issue such clearance.

Lock Rory Arnold was named, despite serving a three-week ban which rules him out of contention for the first Test. Brandon Paenga-Amosa was another to

get a first call-up, as was Folau Fainga'a, with the pair benefitting from Tatafu Polota-Nau being rested and Stephen Moore retiring.

Twice-capped Jordan Uelese was also included after recovering from a shoulder injury, but it is an inexperienced trio of hookers. It's been a rapid rise for Paenga-Amosa, who was playing Sydney club rugby barely a year ago.

"For me, a guy who's come out of club rugby... then he played in the NRC, got his opportunity out there, was spotted by the Reds and has taken that opportunity with both hands," said Cheika. "Now his challenge will be to get himself in the match 23."

The wing spots were among the most-hotly contested, with Maddocks and Banks beating out the seasoned Henry Speight and Queensland's Izaia Perese. "I think it was really tight," Cheika said.

"We've got very, very good attacking wingers and we look at the all-round components to make sure that we're solid in relation to our 'D' and also our kicking game and the kicking game that will be coming from Ireland to us."

Regulars Bernard Foley, Will Genia, Kurtley Beale, Israel Folau, and Dane Haylett-Petty head up the backs. Australia play Ireland in Brisbane on June 9, Melbourne on June 16 and Sydney on June 23.

Forwards - Sekope Kepu, Tom Robertson, Scott Sio, Taniela Tupou, Allan Alaalatoa, Brandon Paenga-Amosa, Jordan Uelese, Izack Rodda, Folau Fainga'a,



CANBERRA: File photo shows Sekope Kepu of the Wallabies is tackled during The Rugby Championship match between the Australian Wallabies and the Argentina Pumas at Canberra Stadium in Canberra, Australia. — AFP

Rory Arnold, Adam Coleman, Rob Simmons, Michael Hooper (capt), David Pocock, Caleb Timu, Lukhan Tui, Ned Hanigan.

Backs - Bernard Foley, Will Genia, Tom Banks,

Kurtley Beale, Israel Folau, Dane Haylett-Petty, Reece Hodge, Samu Kerevi, Marika Koroibete, Tevita Kuridrani, Jack Maddocks, Sefa Naivalu, Nick Phipps, Joe Powell, Curtis Rona. — AFP

S Africa pick seven new caps for Wales Test

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa coach Johan 'Rassie' Erasmus chose seven uncapped stars yesterday for his first match in charge, a one-off Test against Wales in Washington Saturday. Those set to wear the green and gold for the first time include backs Travis Ismaiel, Andre Esterhuizen, Makazole Mapimpi and Ivan van Zyl. The other newcomers will be forwards Ox Nche, Jason Jenkins and Kwagga Smith as the Springboks embark on a 14-Test season that ends late November with another Test against Wales, in Cardiff.

"As coaches, we are tremendously excited about

the prospect of seeing some of our best young players getting the opportunity to play at this level," Erasmus told a media conference. "Wales have a very solid and effective kicking strategy and their cohesive forward and set-piece play are some of their strong points. "However, I believe that we have picked a match-day squad that will be able to compete very strongly."

Erasmus succeeded sacked Allister Coetzee after South Africa lost 12 of 23 Tests during two disastrous seasons subsequent to coming third at the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England. After Washington, South Africa host England in three Tests on consecutive Saturdays from June 9, and many likely first choices for the home series have remained in Johannesburg.

The team facing Wales has an average of only nine caps and will be led by debutant skipper Peter-Steph du Toit, whose 32 Tests make him the most senior player although only 25 years old. Injuries to first choice skipper Warren Whiteley

and his 2017 stand-in Eben Etzebeth forced Erasmus to name two new captains for the June Tests. Du Toit hands over the reins after the Wales Test to Siya Kolisi, who will skipper the team against England, becoming the first black South African to fill the position in a Test.

Other "seniors" in the Washington side include centre Jesse Kriel, fly-half Elton Jantjies, hooker Chiliboy Ralepelle and flanker Oupa Mohoje. Erasmus chose 11 blacks — seven starters and four replacements-in his matchday 23, keeping a promise to accelerate racial transformation in the national team.

Although only eight percent of the South African population is white, they have continued to fill the majority of Springbok positions to the increasing frustration of politicians. A deal between rugby officials and the government demands that 50 percent of the South African team at the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan be black. South Africa have won 28, drawn one and lost four Tests against Wales, but

three of the last four ended in victories for the 'Dragons'.

Team (15-1)

Curwin Bosch (Coastal Sharks): Travis Ismaiel, Jesse Kriel (both Northern Bulls), Andre Esterhuizen, Makazole Mapimpi (both Sharks); Elton Jantjies (Golden Lions), Ivan van Zyl (Bulls); Daniel du Preez (Sharks), Oupa Mohoje (Central Cheetahs), Kwagga Smith (Lions); Pieter-Steph du Toit (Western Stormers, capt), Jason Jenkins (Bulls); Wilco Louw (Stormers), Chiliboy Ralepelle (Sharks), Ox Nche (Cheetahs)

Replacements: Akker van der Merwe (Sharks), Steven Kitshoff (Stormers), Thomas du Toit (Sharks), Marvin Orié (Lions), Sikhumbuzo Notshe (Stormers), Embrose Papier (Bulls), Robert du Preez (Sharks), Warrick Gelant (Bulls) Non-playing reserves: Cameron Wright (Sharks), Frans Malherbe, Nizaam Carr (both Stormers) Coach: Johan 'Rassie' Erasmus (RSA). — AGP

Coleman and Baker renew rivalry in Rome Diamond League

ROME: US sprinters Christian Coleman and Ronnie Baker are set to renew their rivalry today as the Diamond League heads to Rome for the fourth in the 14-leg IAAF series.

Coleman—who finished between Justin Gatlin and Usain Bolt in the 100m at the world championships last August and went on to win the world indoor 60m title in February with a new world record—lost his outdoor 100m season opener to Baker in Eugene, Oregon, last weekend. But as the Eugene race was not a Diamond Discipline the Golden Gala in the Italian capital will offer Coleman a first chance to pick up points on the Road To The Final.

US 60m indoor champion Baker, who holds the 2018 world best of 9.97sec, defended his 100m crown in a 2.4m/sec wind-aided 9.78 — the fastest time run this year.

Coleman was second best in 9.84, but the 22-year-old said he was still working his way back into shape after a minor leg injury kept him from competing in Shanghai earlier this month.

Among the US duo's challengers will be Turkey's Ramil Guliyev, South African Akani Simbine and American Michael Rodgers.

South African world champion Luvo Manyonga headlines a star-studded men's long jump in the Italian capital. Manyonga, 27, has already jumped 8.56m this season as he pushes to better the long-time world record of 8.95m achieved by American Mike Powell back in 1991.

Compatriot Rushwal Samaai, Cuba's world indoor champion Juan Miguel Echevarria, American Marquis Dendy and Olympic champion Jeff Henderson are among his chief rivals.

American world pole vault champion Sam Kendricks' bid for back-to-back wins will be challenged by Poland's Piotr Lisek, third last weekend, with Brazil's Olympic champion Thiago, pushing for a way back after he no-heighted in Eugene.

World 100m and 200m women's silver medalist Marie-Josée Ta Lou won in Eugene, where she ran 10.88 in the 100m to defeat the world and Olympic champions' Tori Bowie and Elaine Thompson.

Ta Lou, a 29-year-old from the Ivory Coast, moves up to the 200m in Rome where Shericka Jackson, 23, of Jamaica looks her strongest rival. In the women's steeplechase, US world champion Emma Coburn faces a huge challenge from the Kenyan trio of Beatrice Chepkoech, Hyvin Kiyeng Jepkemoi and Celliphine Chepteek Chespol, all of whom have run faster than her personal best of 9:02.58.

"I'm look forward to seeing the fruits of the last six weeks of training. It's my first time in Rome and I'm really excited about it," said Coburn. US athletes are favourites in the 100m hurdles: Olympic champion Brianna McNeal, who has already run 12.43 this year, Sharika Nelvis, Jasmin Stowers and 2008 Olympic champion Dawn Harper Nelson, who will retire at the end of this season, are the strong quartet on show. Croatia's world and Olympic champion Sandra Perkovic looks



Christian Coleman

favourite in the women's discus with Russian Mariya Lasitskene dominant in the women's high jump winning the past two world titles.

In the women's discus Croatian star Sandra Perkovic returns to the Olympic Stadium aiming to win for the third time.

"I've had some problems lately, but I'm convinced they won't stop me from doing well tomorrow," said the Olympic, world and European champion who has won the Diamond League title in her discipline for six years. The men's discus sees some big names jostling for their first points with German brothers Robert and Christoph Harting, Olympic champions in 2012 and 2016 respectively, up against Lithuania's world champion Andrius Gudzius and four-time Diamond Trophy winner Piotr Malachowski of Poland.

Norway's world 400m hurdles champion Karsten Warholm will be challenged by a field that includes Olympic champion Kerron Clement of the United States, Kenya's 2015 world champion Nicholas Bett and Qatar's Abderrahman Samba, winner in Doha this month.

The women's 400m hurdles will be a showdown between Olympic champion Dalilah Muhammad and two past Rome winners Georganne Moline and Janieve Russell, who will aim at winning her third consecutive race after Eugene. — AFP

Tiger can still beat my record, says Nicklaus

DUBLIN: Jack Nicklaus said on Tuesday he believes Tiger Woods can still overhaul his record of 18 Major Championship victories. Woods last won a major almost exactly 10 years ago, when he battled to a memorable playoff win at the 2008 US Open at Torrey Pines in Southern California.

That victory left him four shy of Nicklaus's tally of 18 majors, a target that has looked increasingly beyond Woods in recent years during long injury layoffs. Nicklaus however, who will host this week's Memorial tournament in Ohio, said he is convinced Woods can win Majors again after playing with him on Monday at Shinnecock Hills, the venue for the 2018 US Open.

"While Tiger has not had that much fun the last 10-years, and I would hate to go through what he's been through as he's been through a lot, but he's a hard worker, he's a tough competitor and he's still driven, so that's why I would never count him out," said the 79-year-old Nicklaus.

"Nobody ever said 'how's your record, Jack?' as I've always said that if Tiger comes back and plays then I've said he's still got a shot at breaking my record. "Whether he does or he doesn't, and even with now 10-years passing it doesn't make any difference he's still a great athlete and a

great golfer."

But while Woods has not tasted success since 2013 in capturing a remarkable eighth WGC - Bridgestone Invitational title, Nicklaus does believe Woods needs to learn how to win again.

"Tiger does need to learn how to win again, absolutely", said Nicklaus "I recall in the '86 Masters I hadn't won for a couple of years and I got to the last round, and I got into the back nine after struggling on the front nine but then I made a putt on nine and I finally remembered how to play."

"So, in holing a couple of putts suddenly you remember particularly if you have been a champion at one time as you will remember and you will have that to draw on. "That's what I had to draw on and Tiger has that also to draw on but he's got to through the barrier of not having done it for a while."

"When you haven't won for a while that always happens. That's just human nature but when you have a guy as good as Tiger is and as competitive as he is, he'll break through that barrier and I would not be surprised to see Tiger win this week."

"He loves his golf course and he's played well here in the past, and his remembrance of what he's done here will come back into his head. "That will help him play better." The 42-year old Woods has returned to the Nicklaus hosted Memorial for a first occasion since 2015 to tee-up in what will be his ninth event of 2018, and for a first occasion since sharing 11th place earlier this month in the Players Championship.

Woods first won the Memorial in 1999 and then successfully defended his title in both 2000 and 2001 before winning for a fourth occasion in 2009 and a fifth title in 2012. — AFP

Sports

Gardner, Torres rally Yankees to 6-5 win over Astros in 10

Williams hit home run as visiting Philadelphia win at Dodger Stadium

NEW YORK: Brett Gardner hit the game-tying home run with one out in the bottom of the ninth, and rookie Gleyber Torres singled in a run with two outs in the 10th, lifting the New York Yankees to a 6-5 victory over the Houston Astros on Tuesday night at Yankee Stadium. After the Yankees stranded two in the ninth against Chris Devenski, rookie Miguel Andujar ripped a double down the left field line to start the winning rally. Six pitches later, Torres won it by lining Brad Peacock's 2-2 pitch in front of right fielder George Springer. Springer's throw was up the line, and Andujar easily scored. After seeing Andujar score, Torres raised his arms and flung his helmet after rounding first base, where he was met by teammates to celebrate New York's fifth walk-off win.

ROYALS 2, TWINS 1 (14 INNINGS)

Alcides Escobar cracked a game-winning homer in the bottom of the 14th inning as Kansas City outlasted visiting Minnesota. It was the second homer of the year for Escobar, who took a 3-1 pitch from reliever Taylor Rogers (1-2) and launched it 398 feet to left field, handing Minnesota its eighth walk-off loss of the year. The Twins fell to 3-11 in one-run games. Scott Barlow (1-0) fired four hitless innings in his third big league game to earn his first major league win. He struck out five and walked one.



Scott Barlow fired four hitless innings

PADRES 9, MARLINS 5

Rookie Franchil Reyes hit a two-run, two-out home run off Dan Straily in the sixth inning to erase a one-run deficit and lead San Diego to a victory over visiting Miami. Eric Hosmer had three hits, and Raffy Lopez and Christian Villanueva each drove in two runs for the Padres. JT Riddle hit an inside-the-park homer for the Marlins in the ninth. Miami's Justin Bour and Brian Anderson both collected two hits.

RAYS 4, A'S 3

C.J. Cron, Joey Wendle and Wilson Ramos hit consecutive home runs in the third inning, giving Blake Snell and four Tampa Bay relievers most of the run support they would need for a victory at Oakland. Daniel Robertson added a fourth solo shot for Tampa Bay in the ninth inning. Sergio Romo allowed two runs in the bottom of the ninth but earned his first save of the year, helping the Rays win their second straight in the four-game series and their fourth straight overall. Jed Lowrie had a double and a single for the A's, who fell to 3-5 on their 10-game homestand.

DIAMONDBACKS 5, REDS 2

Daniel Descalso hit a two-run home run and Zack Godley broke a three-game losing streak as Arizona beat Cincinnati in Phoenix. Descalso, starting at first base as struggling All-Star Paul Goldschmidt was given

the night off, pounded a 96 mph fastball from Reds right-hander Luis Castillo into the seats in right field to turn a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 lead in the first inning. Godley (5-4) went six innings, giving up two runs on six hits and two walks while striking out seven.

PHILLIES 6, DODGERS 1

Jake Arrieta pitched seven scoreless innings, and Nick Williams hit a home run as visiting Philadelphia won at Dodger Stadium for the first time since 2016. The victory ended the Phillies' four-game losing streak in Los Angeles. Philadelphia was swept in a three-game series last year and lost 5-4 on Monday night after building a 4-0 lead. Arrieta (5-2) gave up six hits, all singles, while recording his second career victory at Dodger Stadium. He also pitched his first career no-hitter in the ballpark in 2015. On Tuesday, he walked two and struck out five.

RANGERS 9, MARINERS 5

Rougned Odor hit a three-run double to break a ninth-inning tie as Texas defeated host Seattle. Ronald Guzman went 4-for-4 with three RBIs and Shin-Soo Choo hit a home run for Texas, which snapped the Mariners' four-game winning streak. Seattle starter Felix Hernandez allowed five runs on six hits in a five-inning no-decision. He walked two and struck out four. The 32-year-old veteran pushed his career strikeout total to 2,397, moving him past Sandy Koufax and into a tie with Kevin Brown for 44th place on the all-time list.

ROCKIES 11, GIANTS 4

Nolan Arenado, Chris Iannetta and David Dahl had two RBIs apiece, and Colorado never trailed in a win over visiting San Francisco. The Rockies have won the first two games of the three-game series and their last three games overall. Colorado starter Kyle Freeland (5-5) allowed three runs in 5 1/3 innings. The Giants have lost three straight, and adding to their problems, Jeff Samardzija left after one inning due to tightness in his right shoulder. San Francisco pitcher Dereck Rodriguez-Ivan Rodriguez's son-made his major league debut in relief, but he exited after 3 1/3 innings when he was hit by a line drive in the right shin.

BRAVES 7, METS 6

Johan Camargo hit the first pitch he saw for a solo home run with one out in the ninth to give host Atlanta a walk-off win over New York. It was the second last-inning victory for the Braves in the series and their 45th final at-bat win since Brian Snitker became manager in 2016. Camargo's third homer of the season came against Gerson Bautista (0-1). New York starter Steven Matz opened the game with three scoreless innings. He



NEW YORK: Gleyber Torres #25 of the New York Yankees hits a game winning RBI single in the tenth inning against the Houston Astros at Yankee Stadium on Tuesday in New York City. — AFP

gave up one hit and two walks before leaving due to discomfort in the middle finger of his pitching hand. X-rays were negative, the Mets announced.

CUBS 8, PIRATES 6

Ben Zobrist, Anthony Rizzo and Kyle Schwarber homered and Jason Heyward had three hits as visiting Chicago topped slumping Pittsburgh. The Cubs, who took the lead for good with three runs in the seventh off reliever Edgar Santana (2-1), will go for a series sweep Wednesday. The Pirates blew an early three-run lead. Despite scoring two in the ninth on Starling Marte's single, Pittsburgh has lost four straight and nine of 11. Chicago's Jon Lester (5-2) gave up four runs and eight hits in six innings, with six strikeouts and no walks. Brandon Morrow recorded his 12th save.

RED SOX 8, BLUE JAYS 3

Rick Porcello tossed 6 2/3 innings of three-run ball with five strikeouts, and Sandy Leon had three RBIs as host Boston beat Toronto. Porcello (7-2) allowed two earned runs on five hits and two walks to pad his staff lead in wins. Mitch Moreland, J.D. Martinez, Andrew Benintendi and Leon all hit RBI doubles for Boston. Leon also hit a two-run homer, his second of the season, Xander Bogaerts had a solo blast, his eighth, and Jackie Bradley Jr. added an RBI for the Red Sox. Justin Smoak hit a solo shot, his eighth, and Curtis

Granderson drove in a run for Toronto, which lost for the 12th time in 16 games.

ANGELS 9, TIGERS 2

Luis Valbuena homered twice, and Ian Kinsler and Martin Maldonado also went deep as Los Angeles rolled to a win at Detroit. The Angels' Mike Scioscia collected his 1,600th career managerial victory. He passed former Los Angeles Dodgers manager and mentor Tommy Lasorda for 20th on the all-time managerial wins list. Valbuena and Kinsler each had three hits, three runs and three RBIs. Maldonado had two hits and drove in three runs. Los Angeles starter Nick Tropeano (3-3) gave up two runs on seven hits while striking out five and walking none in 5 1/3 innings.

CARDINALS 6, BREWERS 1

Michael Wacha allowed two hits over 6 2/3 innings to help St. Louis record a victory at Milwaukee. Wacha (6-1) was charged with one run while winning his sixth consecutive decision. Harrison Bader and Francisco Pena each went 3-for-4 with a homer while Matt Carpenter also went deep for the Cardinals. Jedd Gyorko went 2-for-5 with a two-run single as St. Louis won for the third time in its past four contests. Milwaukee had just three hits as it saw its four-game winning streak come to a halt. The setback was just the Brewers' third in the past 13 games. — Reuters

Vegas Strong: How tragedy unified Golden Knights, fans

LAS VEGAS: Whether they are wearing replica jerseys or outlandish fancy dress outfits, fans of the Vegas Golden Knights ice hockey team are masking the trauma of the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history.

Barely eight months after a gunman perched in a Las Vegas hotel shot dead 58 people and injured 500 at a music festival near the gambling haven's famous strip, the fairytale debut season of the Knights has provided the grieving city with an emotional rallying point.

Resplendent in a gold lame suit and sparkling sequined basketball sneakers, Kevin Tey is emblematic of the legions of Knights fans who have found solace in Stanley Cup-chasing exploits of the newly formed franchise team. Standing on the forecourt of the Knights' home stadium, the T-Mobile Arena, Tey mixes merrily with other fans decked out in costumes ranging from Elvis Presley to medieval knights and other eccentric characters. Tey, who has lived in the glittering Nevada gaming capital for 12 years, traces his allegiance to the Knights to October 1, when Stephen Paddock unleashed his carnage on unsuspecting concert-goers from a room at the Mandalay Bay Hotel.

Tey said he had never attended an ice hockey game before this season. "After October 1 I fell in love with the team, for what they did for the city," Tey says.

'IT NEVER GOES AWAY'

Fellow Knights fan Ray Sturck was supposed to attend the concert but didn't go after failing to obtain a ticket for his daughter. "It never goes away, I have friends who were there and it will never go away," Sturck said.

The massacre occurred just days before the Knights made their debut in the National Hockey League on October 6. In the days following Paddock's rampage, players from the hockey team, drawn mostly from across the United States and Canada, demonstrated their commitment to the city in various ways, visiting wounded victims in hospital, the families of victims or by simply giving blood.

For Sturck, that made an impression. "Whatever it was, they were there to help," he said. "They played for Vegas, they weren't playing for them at that point. That's what everybody saw in this team and here we are at the end, nobody expected that. It's incredible.

"I really wasn't a hockey fan. We live in the middle of the desert. But I said to myself 'Now let's support them as they supported us, they've got to see we support them.'" Tey said the team helped the city smile again. "At first it was getting everyone's mind off what happened, it was something to actually go out, have fun and cheer for," Tey said.

"After all the tragedy, everyone was down. To come and see the Golden Knights step in and win some games, I think it got the city to back up on its feet."

'A BEAUTIFUL THING'

Under the slogan "Vegas Strong", the Knights and their fans have forged a formidable bond. "It's unfortunate that thing happened, and sometimes beautiful things follow something like that, and the way that this community came together and these people helped each



LAS VEGAS: Head coach Barry Trotz of the Washington Capitals handles bench duties behind Alex Ovechkin #8 and Chandler Stephenson #18 of the Washington Capitals in the third period of Game One of the 2018 NHL Stanley Cup Final against the Vegas Golden Knights at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

other really was a beautiful thing to witness and experience," Knights general manager George McPhee said. Knights winger Pierre Edouard Bellemare said the Knights roster has been determined to repay the faith shown by their supporters. "From the first matches we said to ourselves 'Forget about each other. We are doing this for our city, and we will give everything to this city'. That's why we are in the final," the French international told AFP. Reminders of the tragedy are everywhere.

A banner with 58 stars was hung from the ceiling of the T-Mobile Arena in March as a memorial to the victims, while the slogan "Vegas Strong" welcomes players at the entrance of their locker room at their training facility. "We don't talk about it a whole lot, but I think we think about it," Knights coach Gerard Gallant said.

"When we come in the dressing room and we go out there and we see that banner up there in the stands, I think the guys think about it a whole lot." After Monday's dramatic victory in game one of the best-of-seven series, the Knights are three wins away from an improbable Stanley Cup triumph.

"Oh my god, if they win the Stanley Cup, this city will have the biggest celebration this world has ever seen," Tey said. — AFP

Olympic legend Redgrave joins growing foreign cast in China

SHANGHAI: Britain's decorated Olympic rower Steve Redgrave is just the latest foreign name lured to China as part of a broader drive by the ambitious country to ramp up its fortunes on the sporting world stage.

The five-time gold medalist said this week that he was taking up the post of high-performance director of Chinese rowing, on what is likely to be a bumper pay packet. China, who will host the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, have been busy hiring foreign expertise in senior coaching roles in a range of sports in recent years.

Chief among them is the World Cup-winning football coach Marcello Lippi, who is tasked with finally making China competitive at the international level. The 70-year-old Italian is reportedly the second best-paid football coach on the planet after Manchester United's Jose Mourinho, earning a whopping \$26 million a year in China, according to France Football magazine.

Chinese football clubs in particular have hired foreign coaches, often on high salaries. The 56-year-old Redgrave said his new challenge was much more than just a ceremonial post. "My decision to take the position in China was not one I made lightly," said Redgrave, who will manage a new coaching structure in Chinese rowing aimed at achieving success at the World Championships and Olympic Games.

Redgrave hinted that he was looking long term: "With the Tokyo Olympics (in 2020) fast approaching and looking ahead to Paris in 2024, the new role in China will be demanding." China won their only Olympic rowing gold medal in the quadruple sculls at the Beijing 2008 Games-when the

team also benefited from foreign coaching.

'FOREIGN LEGION'

February's Pyeongchang Winter Games in South Korea were another example of China drafting in overseas help to shore up areas of weakness. On the face of it, what Chinese state media called "a legion of foreign experts" enjoyed little success in Pyeongchang, China winning one gold medal and nine medals overall.

But state sports authorities-who spent months prior to the Olympics playing down expectations-are much more focused on Beijing 2022, when overseas coaches and their Chinese charges will be expected to deliver.

China's "foreign legion" in Pyeongchang officially comprised 20 foreign coaches, fitness trainers and technical experts, according to the China Daily newspaper. Ni Huizhong, a senior sports official, suggested that China reluctantly embraced outside help. "To make up for our weakness in winter sports, especially on snow, we have no better solutions than combining experiences from overseas with our own traditions to make it an effective programme for 2022," Ni said.

It is a trend that took off at the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics, when China surged to the top of the medals table. China employed 11 overseas coaches at London 2012 and 29 four years later in Rio-and is seen as especially keen to do well in 2020, when the Olympics will be hosted by its arch-rival, Japan. The country is also extending the foreign recruitment drive in looking for experts to help organise the Beijing 2022 Winter Games, the organising committee said on Tuesday. — AFP

Sports

Morgan ready for 'young and hungry' Australia in ODI series

Morgan to captain World XI in charity match against West Indies

LONDON: England limited-overs captain Eoin Morgan expects a "young and hungry" Australia will be "galvanised" by the ball-tampering scandal that rocked world cricket when the old rivals meet in a one-day international series next month.

England, currently involved in a Test campaign with Pakistan, resume their involvement in 50-over cricket with a one-off match against Scotland in Edinburgh on June 10 before returning home for a five-match ODI series with Australia.

The England fixtures will be Australia's first international matches since a ball-tampering scandal during a Test match against South Africa in Cape Town in March led to the ongoing suspensions of then captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and batsman Cameron Bancroft.

Australia will also be without all three members of their Ashes-winning fast-bowling attack-Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood.

'ONE EYE ON THE WORLD CUP'

But Morgan, who led an England team currently number one in the ODI world rankings to a 4-1 win over Australia in a five-match series held 'Down Under' in January, remained wary of the threat posed by the World Cup-holders. "I think they will, with one eye on the World Cup, they will

come with a strong performance," Morgan told reporters at an event in London yesterday to mark a year until the start of the 2019 World Cup in England and Wales.

"What's happened to them in the last six months has the potential to galvanise a young, hungry side."

Morgan added: "So we're going to have bring our 'A game' to this series."

It's going to be a good challenge for us moving forward."

Morgan was set to captain the World XI in a charity match against the West Indies at Lord's today which is being held to raise funds for stadiums in Dominica and Anguilla damaged by hurricanes that swept through the Caribbean last year.

But while he won't be able to play in that match, Morgan will take charge in Scotland and then in five matches against Australia starting at The Oval on June 13. "I have a small fracture in the ring finger of my right hand," Morgan explained. "I got hit in a game on Sunday at Somerset. It's disappointing, but it's not the worst news that could have come through."

"It's a week-to-10 days to get the swelling down in the finger and then protect it as we go on." Morgan was disappointed, however, to be sidelined from Thursday's match at Lord's. "It was my first time being selected in a charitable but also World XI game, it's very special to be selected," he said. "It's at my (Middlesex) home ground, I'll definitely be there to watch and support, but it's a shame to miss out."

England's 13-man squad for the ODI against Scotland in Edinburgh on June 10: Eoin Morgan (Middlesex, capt), Moeen Ali (Worcestershire), Jonathan Bairstow (Yorkshire), Sam Billings (Kent), Alex Hales (Nottinghamshire), Liam Plunkett (Yorkshire), Adil Rashid (Yorkshire), Joe



Eoin Morgan

Root (Yorkshire), Jason Roy (Surrey), Ben Stokes (Durham), David Willey (Yorkshire), Chris Woakes (Warwickshire), Mark Wood (Durham)

England's 14-man squad for the five-match ODI series against Australia commencing on June 13: Eoin Morgan (Middlesex, capt), Moeen Ali (Worcestershire), Jonathan Bairstow (Yorkshire), Jos Buttler (Lancashire), Tom Curran (Surrey), Alex Hales (Nottinghamshire), Liam Plunkett (Yorkshire), Adil Rashid (Yorkshire), Joe

Root (Yorkshire), Jason Roy (Surrey), Ben Stokes (Durham), David Willey (Yorkshire), Chris Woakes (Warwickshire), Mark Wood (Durham)

Fixtures:
Jun 13: 1st ODI, The Oval (1200 GMT)
Jun 16: 2nd ODI, Cardiff (1000 GMT)
Jun 19: 3rd ODI, Trent Bridge (1300 GMT)
Jun 21: 4th ODI, Chester-le-Street (1300 GMT)
Jun 25: 5th ODI, Old Trafford, (1000 GMT). — AFP

“I think they will come with a strong performance”

Court halts Sri Lanka cricket vote as crisis deepens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal yesterday suspended elections for the crisis-ridden cricket board, whose president Thilanga Sumathipala is being challenged for the top job. The Court of Appeal suspended for two weeks a vote due to be held Thursday pending the hearing of a petition by Nishantha Ranatunga, who argued that Sumathipala is unsuitable for re-election.

"The court issued a stay order on the elections till June 14," a court official said. Sumathipala is pitted against Ranatunga, a younger brother of Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup-winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga, in the election. The Ranatunga brothers accuse Sumathipala of violating International Cricket Council regulations by holding office despite alleged links to gambling. Sumathipala acknowledges that his family is involved in gambling, but says he has nothing to do with the business and has not violated the ICC code of conduct.

In 2016 Arjuna Ranatunga stood for vice president but lost by 22 votes to businessman Jayantha Dharmadasa, while Nishantha Ranatunga who stood for president lost by 32 votes to Sumathipala.

The latest court intervention in the cricket board came as four Sri Lankans were implicated in an alleged match-fixing scandal exposed in an Al Jazeera documentary broadcast on Sunday. Arjuna Ranatunga told reporters that cricket corruption in Sri Lanka was far more seri-



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's former cricket skipper Arjuna Ranatunga speaks during a press conference in Colombo yesterday. Ranatunga lambasted the International Cricket Council for failing to tackle worsening corruption and accused it of undermining the credibility of the game. — AFP

ous than alleged in the report and blamed the ICC for not acting swiftly. Sri Lankan police as well as the ICC have begun investigations into the allegations. — AFP

Smith will return stronger, says namesake Graeme

MUMBAI: Disgraced Australian cricketer Steve Smith will be much stronger mentally when he returns to international cricket after serving a one-year ban for his involvement in ball tampering, former South Africa skipper Graeme Smith has told Reuters.

Former Australia captain Smith was stripped of his position and banned from international and domestic cricket for a year by Cricket Australia (CA) for conspiring to scuff up the ball with sandpaper during a March test against South Africa in Cape Town.

Vice captain David Warner was also banned for 12 months and batsman Cameron Bancroft suspended for nine months, as Australia were criticised globally by fans and commentators for what they perceived to be an arrogant and hypocritical team culture.

"The Australia team got into that mindset of winning at all costs and the way they play the game," Smith, who played 117 tests while captaining South Africa in 109 of them, said in an interview. "I would love to interview him (Steve) and ask him if that's something he wishes he had sort of changed a little bit as the leader in terms of the culture, how they play, the win at all cost mindset."

"And how he's reviewed that now after the situation. That will be an interesting interview." One of the leading batsmen in the world, the 28-year-old Australian has also been barred from holding leadership positions in the national side for two years.

He will, however, return to cricket as a marquee player at next month's Global T20 Canada league. "Playing at the top level is competitive, you want to win,"

Graeme Smith said at the sidelines of the Ceat Cricket Rating awards.

"He's still a young man, we have all made mistakes. I expect him to bounce back and come back really strong. Mentally he would have grown a lot from this situation." The South African remains the most capped test captain in the history of the game. After taking over the reins of the side at the age of 22, he finished as the world record holder for the most test wins as a skipper with 53.

TEST CRICKET FEARS

Despite no longer competing, Smith still understands the pressure to gain reverse swing with an old ball and is not completely opposed to a slight relaxation of the rules laid down by the governing body International Cricket Council (ICC).

"The ball is a big issue. The Kookabura ball, in particular, has stopped swinging and bowlers are desperate to get some sort of movement," said Smith, who retired suddenly from cricket at the age of 33 in 2014.

"Reverse swing has become such a key. What happened in Cape Town was pretty shocking. I've never seen an actual foreign object being brought out on the field. It was madness. "I think the ICC needs to review that. Whether applying sweetened saliva or using a fingernail... I don't have a problem with that actually, but I wouldn't allow foreign objects on the field."

With the ever-increasing popularity of Twenty20 cricket and mushrooming domestic leagues in the shortest format around the globe, Smith admitted that he remains worried about the future of the traditional five-day game. Sitting in a hotel lobby overlooking the Arabian Sea, Smith said while cricket needed T20 to draw people into the game, the test format needed better marketing by its administrators. "I am a big believer that T20 cricket shouldn't be played at international level. Maybe have a World Cup every couple of years but it should be largely a domestic-based format," Smith said. — Reuters

Ex-Liverpool great Hamann slams Karius for tears in Kiev

BERLIN: Dietmar Hamann, a former Champions League winner with Liverpool, has criticised the Reds' goalkeeper Loris Karius for his tearful behaviour after the European final defeat against Real Madrid.

"My sympathy with Karius is limited," Hamann, 44, told magazine Sport Bild. "We don't have to discuss that he decided the final with his two mistakes. "Something like that can also happen to a professional footballer."

"But what I didn't like was his behaviour afterwards. "To publicly show his suffering after the final whistle was just as unnecessary as his tearful asking for forgiveness from the Reds fans." Karius' double mistakes in Kiev allowed Karim Benzema and Gareth Bale to snatch goals for Real in a 3-1 defeat and the 24-year-old goalkeeper cut a sad figure as he tearfully applauded travelling fans after the final whistle.

However, Hamann was unimpressed with his fellow German. "Liverpool fans forgive their stars just as well as any other, the anthem 'You'll Never Walk Alone' is part of life out at the club," said Hamann, who won the 2005 final with Liverpool.

"With one exception: when your ego doesn't match your performance. "Karius drives through Liverpool with the personalised number plates 'LKI' and makes waves in the city whenever he steps out. "Having airs like that is something Cristiano Ronaldo, alias CR7, can pull off in Madrid, because he has won the Champions League five times. "Someone like Karius has not achieved anything yet in his career and should be happy to have been given the chance by (Liverpool coach Jurgen) Klopp at a world-class club."

Hamann is not the first former Germany international to criticise Karius, who left Mainz for Liverpool in 2016, after Lothar Matthaus described his performance in Kiev as the "worst goalkeeping display in the last 20 or 30 years". — AFP

Lewandowski wants to leave Bayern: Agent

BERLIN: Bayern Munich's star striker Robert Lewandowski wants to leave the Bundesliga club this summer to seek "a new challenge", his agent told Sport Bild yesterday. "Robert feels that he needs a change and a new challenge in his career," Pini Zahavi told the weekly.

"The managers of Bayern know about it," Lewandowski, 29, whose Bayern contract runs until 2021, has been linked with Real Madrid while Qatari-backed Paris Saint-Germain and Premier League giants Chelsea and Manchester United are also understood to be interested. He was the Bundesliga's top scorer in the just-completed season with 29 goals, the third time he has won the trophy after success in 2015/16, also with Bayern, and 2013/14 while at ex-club Borussia Dortmund.

In late February, the Poland international parted ways with his previous agent of 10 years, Cezary Kucharski,

and signed up with Zahavi, one of the most powerful agents in world football. Zahavi said that "Robert's motivations are not money or a specific club, because almost all top clubs would like to sign up the world's best striker."

He said he hoped Bayern president Uli Hoeness and CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge would understand the player's position. "Everyone in the Bayern club leadership has their own great career to look back on. They should understand his situation," he told Sport Bild.

However, Bayern's bosses have made it clear that Lewandowski will play for them next season. Rummenigge told Kicker magazine earlier this month that Bayern fans "do not have to worry about Robert Lewandowski and the relationship with Bayern... We have a very good one."

"We know what we have in him and I'm very happy that we still have such a long-term contract," added Rummenigge. "There's no need to worry, he'll play here in Munich again next year."

Magazine Kicker also pointed out that Bayern's senior bosses have repeatedly informed Lewandowski that there is no possibility of leaving before his contract expires. — AFP

WCup bidding for 2026 enters final stages

JOHANNESBURG: The two bids chasing the right to host the 2026 World Cup have entered a frenetic last fortnight of canvassing while anxiously awaiting a potentially decisive report on their suitability.

The joint North American bid of Canada, Mexico and the US is the favourite to win when the member associations of world soccer's governing body FIFA vote at its Congress in Moscow on June 13 a day before the opening game of this year's tournament.

But Morocco are feisty rivals and, despite cracks in their own voting bloc, are expected to make a credible challenge. Their African support base, a potential 54 votes out of a total of 211, has been a primary focus for both bids over the last few days as what was presumed to be a solid bloc behind Morocco is now looking less guaranteed.

Liberia has already said it would vote for the "United bid" and South Africa's government warned its football association not to vote for Morocco, with whom it has strained relations. Morocco sent its bid chief Hicham El Amrani to Johannesburg last week to meet regional FA presidents, and the Americans, who have former FIFA competitions director Jim Brown running their bid, will do so this weekend, attempting to persuade

wavering voters to get behind them.

Also vital to the process is the bid evaluation report that FIFA is due to publish before the Congress, possibly over the next few days. In April it sent evaluators to Mexico City, Atlanta, Toronto and New York and then straight on to four of Morocco's proposed venues.

REVISED RULES

Previous bid inspections were seen as symbolic but revised bidding rules allow for the evaluation team to disqualify a candidate before the ballot even takes place. This is because the 2026 finals will comprise 48 teams for the first time, severely testing the capacity of a host.

This is the strong point of the joint North American bid with 23 venues which they claim will help FIFA achieve new records for attendance and revenue, increasingly vital for the world governing body which has been feeling a financial pinch.

Morocco's bid plays heavily on the country's passion for football and its fan culture, relatively compact size, proximity to Europe, climate and the emotional appeal of holding only the second tournament on the continent after 2010 in South Africa.

Morocco has already made unsuccessful bids to host the finals in 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010, although it was close on three occasions. The country was second to the U.S. for 1994, behind France for 1998 and just lost out to South Africa for the 2010 finals.

Mexico has twice previously hosted the World Cup - in 1970 and 1986 - and the U.S. in 1994. It would be a first for Canada. — Reuters

25 Coleman and Baker renew rivalry in Rome Diamond League



26 Gardner, Torres rally Yankees to 6-5 win over Astros in 10



27 Morgan ready for 'young and hungry' Australia in ODI series



PARIS: Romania's Simona Halep returns the ball to Alison Riske of the US during their women's singles first round match on day four of The Roland Garros 2018 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. — AFP

Djokovic reaches 3rd round at Roland Garros

Simona Halep battles to victory in opening match

PARIS: Former champion Novak Djokovic reached the French Open third round for the 13th consecutive year by beating Spanish qualifier Jaume Munar 7-6 (7/1), 6-4, 6-4 yesterday, while women's top seed Simona Halep battled to victory in her opening match. Djokovic, the 2016 Roland Garros champion and former world number one, is seeded 20 this year after struggling to rediscover his best form after returning from a right elbow injury. He wasn't at his best on Court Suzanne Lenglen, but goes on to face Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut for a place in the last 16. The Serbian 12-time Grand Slam champion fired 39 winners but 33 unforced errors and was broken three times by Munar, the world 155. "I am very happy to be here on Suzanne Lenglen and see so many people and see the support," said Djokovic. "Jaume is a great player, he has lots of quality and good concentration. I congratulate him on a great match today." Bautista Agut, the 13th seed, saw off Colombian qualifier Santiago Giraldo 6-4, 7-5, 6-3,

but Czech 17th seed Tomas Berdych lost a rain-interrupted first-round match to home hope Jeremy Chardy on the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (10/8), 1-6, 5-7, 6-2. The unlikely adventure of Argentinian world number 190 Marco Tringelliti, who became the eighth lucky loser in the draw after driving back to Paris from Barcelona, came to an end as he lost 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), 6-1 to Italian Marco Cecchinato in the second round.

HALEP FIGHTS BACK

World number one Halep fought back after a disastrous opening set to beat American Alison Riske 2-6, 6-1, 6-1 in their delayed first-round match. Halep, the runner-up in Paris in 2014 and 2017, slumped 0-5 down in the opening set to world number 83 Riske whose only win at the tournament came in 2014.

The Romanian committed 16 unforced errors in the set but stepped up a gear from that point on to book a second-round match against Taylor

Townsend of the United States. "It's always difficult in the first round of a Grand Slam, you are always nervous," said Halep.

The 26-year-old, who is still looking for a first Grand Slam title, will play for the second straight day on Thursday, after the match with Riske was pushed back from Tuesday due to rain.

"I think I'll be ready tomorrow, I feel strong in my legs," said the top seed. "Anything can happen with the rain so all we can do is rest and try to be at our best when we step on the court." Halep needs to reach the semi-finals or better if she is to retain the world top spot.

Eighth seed Petra Kvitova eased into the third round with a 6-0, 6-4 victory over Spain's Lara Arruabarrena on Court One. The two-time Wimbledon champion has now won 13 consecutive matches on clay after claiming titles in Prague and Madrid, and will face Estonia's 25th seed Anett Kontaveit for a place in the last 16.

Czech Kvitova, 28, has not reached the quarter-finals at Roland Garros since a run to the last four in 2012. Ukrainian fourth seed Elina Svitolina reached the last 32 for the fourth straight year by brushing aside Viktoriya Kuzmova in straight sets.

The 23-year-old, who arrived in Paris having won her second straight Italian Open title, saw off her Slovakian opponent 6-3, 6-4. Svitolina, a two-time quarter-finalist at Roland Garros, will next take on Romanian 31st seed Mihaela Buzarnescu.

Elsewhere, charismatic Japanese 21st seed Naomi Osaka came through a tight match with Kazakhstan's Zarina Diyas 6-4, 7-5. The 20-year-old Osaka is seeded for the first time at a major tournament, having lifted the prestigious Indian Wells title earlier this year before beating Serena Williams in Miami the following week.

Williams, who made her Grand Slam return with a singles win on Tuesday, is back in action in the doubles with sister Venus later. — AFP

LeBron leads longshot Cavs against Warriors in NBA Finals

OAKLAND: LeBron James will attempt the most amazing achievement of his historic career by leading the twice-rebuilt Cleveland Cavaliers against heavily fancied defending champion Golden State in the 72nd NBA Finals.

The 33-year-old superstar reached his eighth consecutive finals seemingly by sheer force of will, lifting the Cavs on his shoulders throughout the NBA playoffs to book their fourth finals meeting in a row against the Warriors, with the best-of-seven championship series opening Thursday at Golden State.

This marks the first time in North American pro sports history that two clubs will meet in the final for a fourth consecutive season.

A title would cap the superlatives of an epic career because never has a James-led finals club been so huge an underdog as the Cavs are now. Las Vegas oddsmakers have the Warriors as the biggest NBA Finals favorites since 2002.

"We have an opportunity to play for a championship. That's all that matters," James said. "We've been counted out for a long time this season. It's a heck of an accomplishment for our ball club."

"No matter what the storyline is going to be, no matter if we're picked to win or not, let's just go out and play."

Rebuilding after the off-season trade of star guard Kyrie Irving, the Cavs struggled and were retooled again at the trade deadline, leaving James and forward Kevin Love alongside role players such as outside shooters J.R. Smith and Kyle Korver and inside man Tristan Thompson.

"I switched my mindset at the trade deadline to 'Let's get the most out of this season I can,'" James said. "I'm trying to squeeze the most out of this orange to where there's no more juice left."

Skeptics wonder how much juice James has left. He has seen 164 playoff games—the equal of two full extra seasons—from his first finals run with Miami to now. And this year, in his 15th NBA campaign, James played all 82 regular season games, a career first, as he adjusted to ever-changing rosters.

"This has been one of the most challenging seasons I've had," James said. "It has been six seasons in one. It has been a whirlwind. It has been a roller coaster. There has been everything that you can ask for."

'A CRAZY FEELING'

James is 3-5 in career NBA Finals after losing his first with Cleveland in 2007, winning two of four with Miami from 2010-2014 and taking the 2016 title in seven games over Golden State between 2015 and 2017 losses to the Warriors.

Only three players in NBA history have reached more consecutive finals than James, with Sam Jones and Tom Heinsohn managing nine and Bill Russell a record 10 in a row. All three played on a 1960s Boston Celtics dynasty.

Four-time NBA Most Valuable Player James has averaged 34.0 points, 9.2 rebounds and 8.8 assists in the playoffs, taking command in game-seven playoff wins over Boston and Indiana to keep the title dream alive.

"After all these years, we almost expect him to do that," Smith said. "We expect him to get over the hump and take us with him. It's a crazy feeling."

BEWARE 'OTHER GUYS'

The Warriors seek their third crown in four seasons and sixth overall, which would match the Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls for third on the all-time list behind Boston and the Los Angeles Lakers.

With Kevin Durant dominating inside, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson as 3-

point sharpshooters and Draymond Green inside contributing rebounds and assists, the Warriors have been nearly as formidable as they were in last year's title run.

"Somebody asked, it's four years in a row getting to the finals, do you appreciate it? Yes, because it's really hard," Curry said. "All the smiles and embraces you have with your teammates, your coaches, it's well deserved."

Curry is also wary of dismissing James's supporting cast.

"They are NBA players and yeah they are new and what not and 'Bron is amazing. He played an unbelievable playoff run to date and has willed his team to his eighth straight finals and all that," Curry said. "It was an amazing performance, but don't disrespect the other guys out there. They fought hard, too."

Injuries could play a role, with Love uncertain for the opener while in the NBA concussion protocol and Golden State's Andre Iguodala questionable with a sore left knee. — AFP