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# PACI launches online service to correct Latin name errors

## Expats can verify their data before the issuance of civil IDs

### Qatar to abolish exit visa system by year end: UN

**DOHA:** Qatar is set to abolish its controversial exit visa system for all foreign workers by the end of the year, the UN's International Labor Organization said Friday. Qatar has introduced a series of labor reforms since its selection to host the 2022 World Cup, which set in motion a huge construction program employing foreign workers. "Last year, the exit visa was eliminated for the majority of workers," ILO's Houtan Homayounpour, head of the labor agency's project office in Doha, told AFP. "This year, that will be

extended to all remaining categories of workers."

In Sept 2018, Qatar approved legislation to scrap the "kafala" or sponsorship system which required foreign workers to obtain permission from their employers to leave the country. In October, it went into force for all but five percent of a company's workforce - reportedly those in the most senior positions. Homayounpour said "this year is a big year" for migrant workers and the exit visa system "will officially be eliminated" by the end of 2019.

Homayounpour spoke to AFP on the sidelines of a 5 km fun run organized for migrant workers by the ILO, Qatar's Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs and the embassy of the Netherlands. Organizers said more than 1,000 workers took part. Speaking to AFP after completing the run, US Charge d'Affairs William Grant voiced

support for Qatar's reforms. "The United States and the international community have noticed and we want to help Qatar keep making progress because it's a constant effort," he said.

Some two million foreign workers work in Qatar, many employed directly or indirectly on vast World Cup infrastructure projects. In February, the gas-rich Gulf state said it was committed to labor reforms, following an Amnesty International report that the 2022 World Cup host was failing to stop widespread abuse of workers. Doha said it was on course to deliver "lasting" change after the human rights group said it was "running out of time" to implement the reforms before the World Cup. Qatar has also introduced a monthly minimum wage of 750 riyals (\$206) and agreed to work closely with the ILO, which now has an office in the capital. — AFP

**KUWAIT:** Director General of the Public Authority for Civil Information Musaed Al-Assoussi said expats will be able to check and correct their names in Latin online starting today (Sunday), before the issuance of the civil ID. He said the launch of this service was at the instructions of Deputy Premier, Interior Minister and Chairman of the Board of PACI Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. He added this move is to ease matters for patrons and expand the use of computerization, which will reduce personal visits to PACI and interior ministry.



Musaed Al-Assoussi

Assoussi said the service enables an expat to visit PACI's site and make sure their data is correct, or apply for correction in case of any mistake in the Latin name. He added PACI employees are authorized to correct or update the Latin names of expats in case of a mistake in order to speed up services and ease problems faced by residents.

Assoussi said he met last week with the directors of the residency affairs

and IT departments of the interior ministry to discuss technical matters related to the cancellation of the residency sticker for expats. He said electronic passport readers will be installed at residency centers, which will eradicate errors in Latin names. Assoussi affirmed PACI is keen on accuracy in recording data. —KUNA

### 15 dead as tips lead Sri Lanka forces to hideout

**COLOMBO:** Fifteen people including six children died in a battle between Sri Lankan security forces and suicide bombers who blew themselves up in the latest fallout from the Easter attacks, police said yesterday. Three men set off explosives that killed themselves, three women and six children inside what was believed to be a militant hideout near the eastern town of Kalmunai. "Three other men, also believed to be suicide bombers, were found dead outside the house," police said in a statement. They were shot dead by security forces, police officials added.

Security forces tried to storm the house late Friday and a one-hour long gun battle ensued before the explosions, a military official said. A civilian was also killed in the crossfire during the raid near the predominantly Muslim town. Hundreds of families later fled their homes. Police and troops have stepped up searches after the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attacks on three churches and three luxury hotels, which killed least 253 people and injured 500.

Kalmunai is in the same region as the home town of the jihadist Zahran Hashim who founded the group accused of staging the attacks. Police and officials said a series of tip offs after the arrest of Hashim's driver, Mohamed Sharif Adam, in Hashim's home town of Kathankudy led them to the safe house. Officials said the driver provided information leading to a raid on Friday on a hideout south of Kathankudy where they believe Hashim and other bombers recorded a video

pledging allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi before carrying out the Easter attacks.

Video on state television showed explosives, a generator, a drone and a large quantity of batteries inside the converted studio. An IS flag and uniforms similar to those worn by the eight fighters in the video were also found, police said. That in turn provided a tip off about the hideout in Kalmunai, 370 km east of the capital. Authorities named Hashim's group, National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), as the perpetrators of the attacks. They announced Friday that he had been killed in the bombing of the Shangri-La hotel in Colombo.

President Maithripala Sirisena used emergency powers to ban the NTJ and a splinter group identified as Jamathe Millathu Ibraheem (JMI), his office said in a statement yesterday.



KALMUNAI, Sri Lanka: In this picture taken on Friday, security personnel inspect seized items after they raid a militant safe house. — AFP

Continued on Page 24

### China police smash \$30m fake Lego ring

**BEIJING:** Chinese police have dismantled a ring accused of manufacturing some \$30 million worth of counterfeit Lego sold across the country, authorities said. Police earlier this week raided the premises of Lepin - a Chinese toymaker manufacturing Lego knockoffs in the southern city of Shenzhen - arresting four people. Shanghai police said on Friday. "In October 2018, the Shanghai police found that Lepin building blocks available on the market were extremely similar to that of Lego," the statement said.

The toys were copied from Lego blueprints and sent to a factory in Shenzhen to be manufactured before they were sold all over China. "Across more than 10 assembly lines, over 90 moulds had been produced... (police seized) some 630,000 completed pieces worth more than 200 million yuan (\$30 million)," the statement said.

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BEIJING: This file picture taken on Nov 6, 2018 shows a counterfeit "Lepin" toy. —AFP

### Xi touts \$64bn BRI deals; more countries join

**BEIJING:** Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday \$64 billion in deals were signed at a summit on his Belt and Road Initiative and more nations would join the global infrastructure program as he sought to ease concerns over the colossal project. Xi and 37 world leaders wrapped up a three-day forum in Beijing with pledges to ensure that projects on the new Silk Road are green and financially sustainable following concerns about debt and environmental damage. "We are committed to supporting open,

clean and green development and rejecting protectionism," Xi told journalists at the end of the forum, without taking questions.

His signature foreign policy aims to reinvent the ancient Silk Road to connect Asia to Europe and Africa through massive investments in maritime, road and rail projects - with hundreds of billions of dollars in financing from Chinese banks. But critics say the six-year-old project is a plan to boost Beijing's global influence, riddled with opaque deals favoring Chinese companies and saddling nations with debt and environmental damage. The US, India and some European nations have looked at the project with suspicion. Washington did not send any representatives to the meeting.

Continued on Page 24



BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin smile during the welcoming ceremony on the final day of the Belt and Road Forum yesterday. — AFP

### Software 'glitch' leaves Air India fliers stranded

**NEW DELHI:** Thousands of Air India passengers were stranded at airports across the world yesterday, after a software "glitch" left those travelling with the state-run airline unable to check in, officials said. More than 80 domestic and international flights were delayed for six hours because of a problem with the company's check-in software that brought operations to a halt, causing further flight delays across the globe.

"Our check-in software experienced a glitch following a routine software upgrade. It was resolved after six hours," Air India spokesman Praveen Bhatnagar told AFP.

Bhatnagar said most of the delays were on its domestic circuit and they were "doing everything possible to clear the backlog". There were no flight cancellations and the airline expects operations to be back to normal by early evening, the spokesman said.

India's aviation industry is in choppy waters after one of the country's largest private carriers, Jet Airways, last week halted its operations indefinitely following refusal by lenders to pay it cash to run day-to-day operations. The state-owned loss making Air India operates more than 450 flights a day across the globe, with a majority of them domestically.

Hundreds of furious passengers took to social media to complain about the widespread disruption, posting pictures and videos of passengers waiting at check-in counters. "Thousands stranded at the airport for over 3 hours. No updates. No one to talk to. Terrible service," a traveller posted on Twitter from Delhi International airport. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Air India and Jet Airways planes are seen parked on the tarmac as flights operations were cancelled due to a server problem at Indira Gandhi International Airport yesterday. — AFP

## Local

# Belt, Road initiative coincides with Kuwait's strategic vision: Ambassador

## Kuwait participates in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

BEIJING: Kuwait's Ambassador to China Samih Jowhar Hayat reiterated Friday Kuwait's support for the Belt and Road Initiative, which coincides with its own strategic vision, in making a safe strategic corridor, a huge trade forum, and a core of a network of iron lines starting from China and ending in Jerusalem through Central Asia and strategic countries. Ambassador Hayat made his remarks on the sidelines of the second session of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which was launched in Beijing on Thursday under the patronage and attendance of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Kuwait is the first country in the world to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in cooperation with China regarding the Belt and Road Initiative after it was announced in September 2013, Hayat said. "Under the guidance of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Supreme Planning Council and Head of the Supreme Council of the North Economic Zone, Kuwait attaches great importance to this forum," he explained. The ambassador noted that Kuwait will sign two MoUs between the two governments, one with China Development Government Bank, which is related to development, construction and consultative coopera-

tion, and the second with the State Urban Planning Commission, which is related to the organization of consultative planning.

"Participation of Kuwait in the second session of the forum comes amid the participation of many heads of state and government, ministers and academics from more than 160 countries along the Silk Road. The forum will discuss ways to enhance cooperation, build a platform for cooperation and resolve problems facing the global and regional economy, and inject new energy to further develop interrelated development," Hayat added. He expressed his great confidence in the success of this session in pushing forward cooperation and coordination in reviving the historic Silk Road, which links different societies and cultures within a clear system based on trade and investment exchanges.



### Kuwait first to sign MoU with China on initiative

#### High-quality development

Chinese President Xi Jinping had urged participants of the Belt and Road Initiative to continuously advance the initiative along the path of high-quality development, China state-run Xinhua News Agency reported. Xi made the statement in a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. "The principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits should be upheld. The open, green and clean



BEIJING: Kuwait's Ambassador to China Samih Jowhar Hayat represents Kuwait at the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. —KUNA

approaches should be adhered to," Xi was quoted as saying. The goals of high standard, livelihood-improving and sustainable development should be achieved, according to the president. Xi also announced that China will also support 5,000 people from innovation sector in Belt and Road countries in conducting exchanges, training programs and joint researches in the next five years. "China will work with other participants of the Belt and Road Initiative to promote scientific and cultural exchanges, set up joint science labs, build science and technology parks, and promote trans-

fer of technologies," Xi said.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said China's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative meshes perfectly with the goals of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Putin told the forum that China's moves 'fit perfectly into our plans.' The Eurasian Economic Union groups Russia with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in a common market that seeks to remove barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital and labor. Putin added those five member states "unanimously supported the idea of linking the construction of the Eurasian Economic Community" and the Belt and Road.

#### Climate change effects

On another front, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said China's Belt and Road initiative offers a chance to help reverse the effects of climate change. Speaking at the forum, Guterres praised China for investments of more than \$125 billion on renewable energy in 2017, saying they played a pivotal role in securing an agreement at last year's UN Climate Conference in Poland. The scale of planned Belt and Road investments, "offers a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the creation of a more equitable, prosperous world for all, and to reversing the negative impact of climate change," Guterres said. The UN wants to align the Belt and Road with its sustainable development goals, Guterres added. Some 37 heads of state or government, including Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, took part in the three-day forum, in addition to about 5,000 participants from more than 150 countries. —KUNA

## Zain main sponsor of first International Infrastructure Conference

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the first International Conference entitled "Challenges in Developing Sustainable Infrastructure". The conference, organized by Kuwait Society of Engineers in partnership with Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum, came under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zain took part in the conference's opening ceremony held at JW Marriot Hotel, which witnessed the attendance of the representative of His Highness the Amir, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Hamed Al-Azmi, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Jenan Boushehri, Kuwait University President Dr Hussein Al-Ansari, Head of Civil Engineering Department at Kuwait University and Head of the conference's organizing committee Dr Fahad Al-Rukaibi, Head of Kuwait Society of Engineers Faisal Al-Atel, Zain Kuwait's External and Internal Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Matar, as well as many officials, professionals, and academics specialized in engineering and planning from across local, regional, and international levels.

Zain's support to this international conference came as part of its commitment in being present in international projects and activities that contribute to pushing the national economy wheel and achieving



KUWAIT: Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Hamed Al-Azmi honors Zain Kuwait's External and Internal Relations Department Manager Hamad Al-Matar with the presence of other officials.

the various developmental objectives of the country. The company is keen on reflecting its key role - as a leading national company in the Kuwaiti private sector - in engaging with the various planning projects that add to Kuwait's prosperity on all levels.

The conference witnessed the presence of multiple local and international entities that added a great value to the event's program. The conference featured joint-collaboration from Kuwait Society of Engineers, Civil Engineering Department of Kuwait University, College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University, General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, Rutgers University's Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation, Transportation Research Board (TRB), American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), American Society of Civil Engineers - Kuwait International Group (ASCE - KIG), and the Transportation and Development Institute (TandDI).

The first International Conference entitled 'Challenges in Developing Sustainable Infrastructure'

mainly aimed at discussing the challenges that face the development of a sustainable infrastructure in Kuwait and related topics, including infrastructure asset management and state of good repair (SRG), big data modeling, simulation, and management, structure health monitoring (SHM) and nondestructive evaluation and testing (NDE/NDT), sustainable and resilient transportation infrastructure, public transport management (airports, rail, ports, etc.), road safety infrastructure and ITS, infrastructure rehabilitation and preservation, transformative infrastructure technologies (automation, robotics, etc.), materials for sustainable structures, application of GIS to sustainability of infrastructure, and more.

Zain's support to this international conference comes in line with its core objectives that aim at shouldering the advancement of the community as a whole on all levels, where the company reaffirms the principal of partnership through similar efforts with the aim of contributing to the further progress of national economy and serve the country's developmental goals.

## ABK supports KEPS with Earth Day

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently sponsored an event organized by the Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS) to celebrate Earth Day and promote awareness of environmental issues. The event was attended by 52 teachers from the Ministry of Education who covered discussion on global warming, environmental protection and the importance of

environmentally-friendly products.

Earth Day is an annual event celebrated globally on April 22, with more than 190 countries around the world hosting activities to demonstrate support for environmental protection. Founded in 1974, the Kuwait Environment Protection Society works to combat pollution through educational, social and cultural activities and programs, and raise awareness of environmental issues among Kuwait's citizens and residents. Through its CSR initiatives, ABK advocates inclusive, social and sustainable environmental development and is committed to the protection of the planet and to raising awareness in Kuwait of issues affecting the environment.



## Festival aims to highlight 'richness' of Islamic countries

ABU DHABI: The Organization of the Islamic Conference's (OIC) goal is to highlight the richness, culture and heritage of Islamic countries in the second edition of this year's festival, the Advisor to the OIC Secretary General and Chairman of the Higher Committee organizing Abu Dhabi OIC festival Yusif Al-Dubaie said yesterday.

Dubaie said in a statement to the press that the idea behind this year's festival is to exchange knowledge on cultural heritage among all and focus on spreading the culture of moderation and tolerance in a simplified and new manner that is different from organizing seminars and political speeches as well as warning against the

dangers of terrorism and extremism. He underlined the importance of enabling everyone to learn a portion of Islamic history that has spread knowledge and culture around the world over the centuries, noting in this year events a group of Muslim scholars and thinkers will attend symposiums witnessed during the festival.

Dubaie thanked all the Islamic countries that are OIC members, especially Saudi Arabia, as the headquarters country of the Organization and its continuous support for its efforts and activities for 50 years, praising as well Kuwait's efforts and its active role in the Organization. "The Zakat House has been a valuable humanitarian and Islamic effort," Dubaie said. "The House is a pioneer in humanitarian and Zakat work, an honor that is undoubtedly worthy."

He pointed out that the idea of the festival was launched by the Secretary-General of OIC Dr Yousef Al-Othaimen, where the start was in Egypt for the Arab countries in February and then the United Arab Emirates. The second edition of the festival was described as "outstanding" for its activities highlight-



ABU DHABI: Secretary-General of OIC Dr Yousef Al-Othaimen with Kuwait's Islamic Arts Center Director Fareed Al-Ali. — KUNA

ing the heritage, Islamic values, humanity and cultural diversity of the participating countries. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti Youth Council: Crucial springboard for young empowerment

KUWAIT: The planned Kuwaiti Youth Council is a core part of relentless efforts exerted by the country's political leadership to stimulate and spur youngster involvement in society. The idea of creating this body caps the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to enable young people to demonstrate excellence and creativity, and even to listen to them on their needs and hopes. The fledgling agency is purposed to keep abreast of a worldwide youth development drive involving councils for young people with a view to propelling up their participation in decision-making.

It constitutes a young advisory framework for analyzing the conditions and needs of young people, promoting their societal involvement, reflecting on their issues and finding solutions to them with the ultimate goal of promoting national identity and developing dialogue and communication with them. Making up 72 percent of population, Kuwaiti young people enjoy much care and attention on the part of the country's political leadership, with His Highness the Amir having instructed the holding of major events on youth.

Addressing a parliamentary session on February 15, 2012, His Highness the Amir emphasized that it was imperative to fulfill the expectations and hopes of young people, provide them with jobs and encourage them to play a constructive role so as to serve their own society. His Highness the Amir also directed the holding of a national youth conference aiming at capitalizing on their capabilities and skills for the sake of their nation. Accordingly, young people joined a preparatory youth council including non-governmental organizations, which would be interested in key youth and social issues.

The agency came up with a national youth document that encompassed solutions to many problems and issues that bug youth in the country. The document involved 10 recommendations in the fields of promoting citizenship, education, small and medium-sized enterprises, housing, health, legal and administrative development, human and sports development, environment, culture, arts and literature. His Highness the Amir asked the Cabinet to take concrete moves to implement the recommendations enshrined in the national document by means of setting up relevant bodies, overhauling laws and programs and highlighting their requirements.

In this context, youth police-makers decided to create an entity that would reflect the hopes of young people in the country, so a decree was adopted on January 26, 2013 for establishing the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. The ministry was tasked with exerting national efforts to stimulate and launch integrated and holistic strategies, policies, initiatives and programs to ensure the development of societal youth participation. In 2015, another edict was adopted for creating the Public Authority for Youth (PAY) to pay more heed to young people who are the real wealth source of the country. The authority is meant to spur youth involvement in societal activities, safeguard national unity, maintain national identity and ensure balance between rights and duties. It is also working to create the Kuwait Youth Council which is mainly intended to beef up young presence in society and launch partnership between young people and state agencies in line with Kuwait's 2015 development vision. As an advisory body, the council will hand-pick, by a random drawing, 36 members from all the six governorates of the country; three males and three females from each governorate, in addition to a secretary.

Furthermore, the agency should comprise a number of people with special needs as per the PAY's regulations. The council's members should be between 18 and 34 years old and should have got at least high school certificates with no criminal records. The also ought to have experience in voluntary activities, knowledge of youth affairs and issues, and to have communications with young people. Finally, several state agencies have adopted initiatives and programs purposed to help young people and encourage them to live up to their due role in various domains in the society. — KUNA

## Local

# Companies scramble to handle labor after govt contracts expire

## 5,792 workers on more than 200 expired contracts face deportation

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Some Kuwaiti companies have begun reorganizing their workers registered on completed government contracts, and asked the workers to correct their situation and find valid government contracts to transfer their residences, or be ready to cancel them and return home. The law in Kuwait does not permit workers hired by private companies on government contracts to transfer their visas to other private companies, unless they are hired by a company on another government contract.

The Public Authority for Manpower asked the companies to sort their workers on the said contracts as there are 5,792 expat workers in this category. This comes as the authority made its periodic review of contracts and government project files, and found some contracts had expired on Sept 31, 2018, totaling more than 200 contracts with 5,792 workers. The authority has asked labor departments not to issue new contracts until the companies sort out this situation.

### Insurance sector

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a decision to regulate the insurance sector in cooperation with

the Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association that aims at reviewing the process of registering actuary experts and making sure the investment policies companies in this strategic sector apply are sound. The ministry said decision 215/2019 puts the actuary expert conditions



### Decision issued to regulate insurance sector

including that they have a fellowship from the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in London, Edinburgh or the US or a recognized university which gives equivalent degrees for the same scientific degree.

It said the decision had additional conditions that must be met by the actuary expert related to their degree or the

number of years of experience to design insurance products and carry out the actuary accounts necessary to price those products according to known actuary standards around the world. It added that the actuary expert should have gained practical experience after receiving their qualification of a minimum of three years, should not have been convicted in a breach of trust case or declared bankrupt. They also should have worked in the insurance field for 10 years at least, and should have practiced consultancy in an insurance company for three years at least.

The second item of the law set the main duties the actuary expert carries out in preparing actuary accounts according to actuary principles. It also helps the company in designing insurance products and carrying out actuary accounts necessary to price these products according to international actuary principles, and study results of the company's work results with actuarial analysis.

The law decided the study of the company's financial and technical situation and the sufficiency of the capital, technical allocations and financial solvency and give advice with regards to actuary work. The third item called for establishing a register at the insurance administration in which actuary experts are registered according to conditions mentioned in item 2.

### Large sum of money

Capital detectives arrested a Bangladeshi muezzin who collected donations but kept them for himself. Police found a large sum of money he had collected in a month as he took advantage of the nearing of the holy month of Ramadan. The suspect confessed to collecting donations for years, adding he had transferred large amounts of money to his father in Bangladesh, where he bought homes and plots of land. He said he was sending the money under different names to avoid suspicion. The interior ministry ordered his deportation.

### Munich Technology University

The executive system approved the request of the secretariat general of private universities council to allocate a site for the Munich Technology University in the area between Sixth Ring Road and residential Sulaibiya with an area of 150,000 sq m. The municipality stipulated the agreement of the services ministry and compliance with its stipulations to provide car parking for the university within its boundaries, present a traffic study for the location, obtain approval of the traffic department, make a comprehensive study of the environmental and social impact and get the approval of the Environment Public Authority (EPA).

## Kuwait monitoring closely situation in Eastern Ukraine

**NEW YORK:** Kuwait expressed concerns and affirmed that it was following closely the ongoing unstable situation in eastern Ukraine, which entered its fifth year and has serious humanitarian and economic consequences that affected the daily lives of the population. This came in the speech at a meeting for the UN Security Council on Ukraine, which was delivered by one of Kuwait's permanent delegation to the United Nations, Adviser Tariq Al-Bannai on Thursday evening. Bannai said such consequences destroyed infrastructure and caused more than 3.5 million people out of 5.2 million in need of urgent humanitarian aid, in addition to 1.5 million internally displaced persons.

Bannai urged the two sides not to take any escalating steps or any action that would fuel the ongoing conflict or hinder the progress made in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which is the only agreed framework for settling the dispute within its regional scope. Bannai reiterated Kuwait's commitment to respect the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and non-interference in its internal affairs. The diplomat expressed hope that all parties involved to adhere and fully implement resolution 2202 of 2015, the Minsk peace accords, and the presidential statement of June 6, 2018. — KUNA



Tariq Al-Bannai

## Search for cabby wanted for sexually assaulting child

**KUWAIT:** An arrest warrant was issued against a taxi driver who sexually assaulted a nine-year-old boy while bringing him back from school. The boy's father was hysterical as he told police that his son was assaulted. He gave police the driver's phone number and car details. Separately, a Kuwaiti woman told police that an unidentified person raped her in the chalets area south of the country. The woman handed police a medical report stating an injury. She was referred to forensics.

### Souq Mubarakia fight

Two Iranians were involved in a fight in Souq Mubarakia, during which one of them was injured and had to be taken to Amiri Hospital. The two work at the market and an argument turned violent. Sharp objects were used, injuring one of them behind the ear. The other man was taken to Salmiya police station.

### Couple fight

Police brought a fight between an Egyptian couple under control, as the fight was in front of the building they live in. The husband said his wife spoke abusively towards him and hit him with a broomstick. The two were sent for investigations and face legal action.

### Thief caught

Airport detectives sent an Indian man to concerned authorities after he attempted to travel with a passport that didn't belong to him. The suspect was carrying KD 23,000, which he confessed to stealing from his sponsor. Police called the sponsor, who said he did not know about his worker's travel plans, and was surprised to find the money missing. He said he did not expect the man to steal anything.

### Abnormal condition

An Egyptian man riding a motorcycle was arrested in an abnormal condition. The motorcyclist was driving erratically, hitting vehicles in the process, and did not have a license. — Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai



**KUWAIT:** Interior Ministry's Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham visited Colonel Meshaal Al-Huwaila at the Amiri hospital where he had a successful surgical procedure.

## UN Kuwait mission denies connection to alleged entity

**KUWAIT:** The United Nations mission in Kuwait has denied any connection with an alleged UN entity, called the global fund for development and planning, which had recently issued a statement bearing the UN emblem interfering in the Kuwaiti internal affairs. There was no United Nations organization or institution called the global fund for development and planning, the media office of the United Nations Resident Representative in Kuwait announced in a press statement. "This organization, which we do not know its legal status in Kuwait; whether it is recognized by any official Kuwaiti body, has issued a statement that interferes in the

internal affairs of Kuwait in a manner that contravenes the UN systems, working methods and charter," the office said. It went on to say that the UN mission in Kuwait had contacted the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs and urged it to take legal action against the alleged entity to preserve the rights of the United Nations and to avoid any damage resulting from the illegal and unauthorized use of the United Nations emblem. "The official authorities in Kuwait have been notified to take legal action in the light of the United Nations conventions in Kuwait against the alleged entity and its representatives who illegally used the United Nations logo to carry out action that violates the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations," the office stated.

The statement came following the circulation by social media users of reports about an institution, called the global fund for development and planning, that presents itself as a UN institution and one of its representatives in Kuwait issued a statement, with the UN logo, interfering in the internal affairs of Kuwait. — KUNA



## Water filling stations set for summer

**KUWAIT:** Water filling stations are currently working around the clock as they prepare to face a possible pressure during the summer season and provide necessary needs to meet the growing demand for fresh water. A number of major sectors in the country benefit from buying fresh water, which is transported to them through water tank trucks, particularly farm owners, new residential areas, houses under construction, desert camps, and houses on which water supply is cut-down due to technical reasons. — KUNA



## Four hurt in Salmiya building fire

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Four people were injured in a fire that gutted a Salmiya apartment on Friday. Firemen from the Bidaa and Salmiya fire stations responded to an emergency call reporting the blaze, which had started in a second-floor apartment of the eight-storey building. The building was evacuated and the fire was put out. Four people suffered fractured bones after they jumped out of windows before firemen arrived to the scene. Salmiya Fire Station Chief Col Mohammad Al-Khader was at the site.

Meanwhile, a house in Sabah Al-Ahmad caught fire, so Kout and Wafra fire stations responded and evacuated the house. The fire was in the living room, with a woman suffering from smoke inhalation. Firemen led by Lt Col Ahmad Al-Hammadi put out the fire and the woman was taken to hospital. In other news, a doctor in the pediatric emergency room of Adan Hospital was attacked by a man and his son, causing him various injuries. A complaint was lodged at the police station.



**KUWAIT:** Heavy damage seen inside the Salmiya apartment after the fire was extinguished.

## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Sunset at Shuwalkh Beach. —Photo by Mustafa Al-Bader (KUNA)

# NoufEXPO inaugurates 2nd Consulting Services for the Development Plan Forum on Tuesday

## Main topics include automation, unified portal and combating wastage

**KUWAIT:** NoufEXPO announced the inauguration of the '2nd Consulting Services for the Development Plan Forum' on Tuesday 30 April at 06:30 pm at the Diamond Ballroom of Sheraton Kuwait. ENCON2 convenes under the motto of 'Role of the Private Sector in Execution and Automated Integration among Related Agencies to Boost Productivity and Combat Corruption.'

The company welcomed the patronage and presence of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense - Chairman of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, during the opening ceremony. "The patronage and presence of His Excellency ensure the importance of ENCON2's topics that focus on the principles upon which Kuwait's Development Plan 2035 projects are executed; these fall under His Excellency's responsibility," NoufEXPO commented.

### Main topics

NoufEXPO added, "ENCON2 will discuss the ways to improve the work environment among the agencies responsible for delivery of consulting services to boost efficiency and integration. Information technology will be a clear path to achieving this objective through automation and development of a unified portal that can streamline operations among government agencies and consulting firms. ENCON2 will also

focus on the means and processes that can combat wastage and corruption; limiting variation orders will be a high priority topic in this regard."

Meanwhile, NoufEXPO expressed gratitude to the participating sponsors and companies that viewed ENCON2 as an important platform bringing them along with government agencies responsible for Kuwait's Development Plan 2035. The company, especially, commended the participation of: Dar SSH International Consultants (SSHIC), Zain Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Pan Arab Consulting Engineers (PACE), Gulf Consult (GC), KEO International Consultants (KEO), Project Management International Systems (PMI), Dar Al Jazera Consultants (DAJC), Molden Technical and Consulting Projects Company (MTC), N Design Engineering Consultants, The Associated Engineering Partnership (TAEP), Ahmadiya Contracting and Trading Company (Ahmadiyah), SOOR Engineering Bureau, Techno-Management, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT), Public Authority For Housing



Welfare, and Environment Public Authority.

### Overwhelming participation

Commenting on the agencies that participate in ENCON2, Magdy Sabry, the Executive Manager of NoufEXPO said, "NoufEXPO is organizing the event based on an invitation from the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, the Central Agency for Public Tenders, the Central Agency for Information Technology, and Kuwait Municipality. ENCON2 also features the participation of the Agency for Developing Madinat Al-Hareer (Al-Subiya) and Boubyan Island, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate, Ministry of Electricity and Water, Environment Public Authority, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Health, Kuwait University, Ministry of Education, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, and the World Bank. Also, the following supervisory authorities will participate in ENCON2: State Audit Bureau,

Department of Legal Advice and Legislation, Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha), the Financial Supervisory Authority, and the Government Performance Follow-up Agency."

Furthermore, NoufEXPO welcomes the participation of several agencies in ENCON2 accompanying FDIC workshop, which focuses on the new DIDIC contracts. The workshop will witness participation of specialist from Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC), United Real Estate Company, Public Utilities Management Company, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Salhia Real Estate Company, Action Real Estate Company, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Co, Commercial Bank of Kuwait, and Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC). NoufEXPO concluded its statement by wishing guests a pleasant stay and all participants a successful business development and networking event that will help in safeguarding a more prosperous future for Kuwait and its people.



Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

### Wide participation in FDIC workshop

## AUB offers 30 job opportunities for special needs

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank (AUB) has announced that it has made available 30 job opportunities to individuals with special needs to work in the banking sector after successfully completing training courses and suitable programs according to the plan specifically drawn by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, the Public Authority of the Disabled, and the Civil Service Commission, within the activities of the 'Partners to Employ Them' Campaign.

This announcement was made during the bank's participation in the First Customer Service Program organized as part of the activities of the 'Partners to Employ Them' Campaign, held under the patronage of the Director of the Public Authority of the Disabled Dr Shafiq Al-Awadhi, and attended by a large number of attendees and people interested in this field.

Sahar Dashti, General Manager Customer Protection,

being responsible for social responsibility programs at Ahli United Bank, made the following statement in her speech at the ceremony: "Ahli United Bank is keen to participate in this noble initiative strongly believing in the importance of social responsibility as a key element of sponsoring physically challenged persons in the State of Kuwait." She affirmed that the Bank's management is happy with this social partnership with Al-Manabir Quranic Society, represented by Affairs, and for the bank to be among those who care for the employment of members of the social care segments within this blessed campaign.

Dashti reaffirmed Ahli United Bank's pride in providing 30 job opportunities for physically challenged persons, thereby reflecting its keen desire to achieve the goals of sustainable development as adopted by the United Nations Organization, foremost among which are the provision of good education, the establishment of partnerships for goal achievement, attaining equality by making education opportunities available for all without discrimination and targeting appropriate employment and economic development. This will be done with a view to achieving progress and development according to the New Kuwait 2035 Vision, pursuant to the guidance of His Highness the Amir, May Allah Protect Him, to provide all forms of support to physically challenged persons and participate in sponsoring various activities and events that achieve



KUWAIT: Sahar Dashti presents AUB's speech.

employment and assimilation within society.

In conclusion of her speech, Dashti thanked all entities that contributed to the success of this initiative and reaffirmed Ahli United Bank's commitment to being a role model in promoting social partnership among civil society institutions, driving the wheel of sustainable development by sponsoring and supporting such training programs and providing job opportunities to our sons and daughters who are entitled to our full assistance and encouragement.

## Financial Sector Conference major event: Diplomat

**RIYADH:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said Friday the Financial Sector Conference 2019, which concluded in the Saudi capital on Thursday, is a major economic event and pioneering financial forum. Kuwait was eager to participate in such an important convention through Minister of Finance Nayef Al-Hajraf, Governor of Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, and the private sector, Ambassador Al-Sabah stated. During the event, a memorandum of understanding was signed between a Kuwaiti company and Saudi Projects Support Fund to finance part of the Avenues-Riyadh project, to be inaugurated in 2023, said the Kuwaiti diplomat. The conference boasted high levels of attention, with great participation of more than 4,000 experts and prominent figures from 80 countries who provided information, ideas, and experiments over 21 sessions, including key and special ones, he noted. —KUNA

## Local

# Kuwait, South Korea trade volume totals \$14 billion in 2018: Embassy

## 17 South Korean companies currently implementing \$30 million-worth projects in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The trade volume between Kuwait and South Korea has totaled \$14 billion in 2018, up by 33 percent, compared to 2017's, which was divided between \$12.7 billion as Kuwaiti exports and \$1.3 billion as South Korean imports. Kuwaiti exports of crude oil and its derivatives enjoyed the lion's share of trade exchange with South Korea, especially since the GCC-member state is Seoul's second-largest energy supplier after Saudi Arabia, the South Korean Embassy in Kuwait said yesterday.

South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon is scheduled to make a four-day official visit to Kuwait on Tuesday, during which he will meet top officials. His visit aims to find new prospects of cooperation between Kuwait and South Korea, and boost the current state of their bilateral relationship in various fields. The ASEAN plus three-member has become the ninth-largest export country in Kuwait, according to Central Statistical Bureau's fourth quarter data of 2018. South Korean imports in Q4'18 have totaled KD 83.8 million, equaling \$247.8 million, down by 16.4 percent compared to Q4'17. CSB said in its latest economic bulletin. It has maintained its ninth rank among most important export countries to Kuwait early this year with total imports of KD 28.4 million, equaling \$93.7 million, in January 2019, and a share of 3.1 percent of total Kuwaiti imports.

Furthermore, Korean companies play a significant role in Kuwaiti economy, among which 17 major ones working in engineering, constructions, hardware, and

energy sectors, are currently implementing \$30 million-worth projects in the country. There are some 150 South Korean commercial agencies currently working in the country and dealing with 100 of their Kuwaiti counterparts, mostly in automobiles field and auto spare parts. In addition, Kuwait invests over \$900 million annually in South Korea in financial, banking, and oil fields.

In October 1999, Kuwait and South Korea signed a memorandum of understanding on boosting and enhancing their commercial and industrial cooperation, including exchange of bilateral visits, benefit from advanced technologies, increase bilateral industrial cooperation, and make Kuwait a center for advanced manufacturing technology. The two countries also aim to bolster their commercial and economic cooperation, indigenize technological industries of positive outcome on them and their investors, especially since the Koreans

are well-reputed for their constructions expertise, particularly roads, oil tankers, and commercial vessels.

The Korean companies in Kuwait also play a vital role in implementing economic reformation projects. South Korean construction firm Hyundai Heavy Industries, for instance, has co-built the Az-Zour North Independent Water and Power Project in Kuwait as part of bilateral partnership deal between their state and private sectors. The project, in a full operational capability, produced 1,539 megawatts of electricity, equaling 10 percent of total current power generation in Kuwait, while its desalinated water production

the embassy of the State of Kuwait does in Belgium to coordinate and cooperate with Q8 in helping it in its investments and plans and in achieving its strategic goals," he added.

Meanwhile, Fadel Al-Faraj, Managing Director Q8 Northwest Europe, said "we are really proud of what we have achieved today. This is a great collaboration between the European Union, car manufacturers and Q8 to start the modernization of the service stations by introducing electric charging within our gas stations."

"Q8 would like to evolve into a 'mobility player', a hub offering a broad range of mobility solutions - from petrol or diesel, to power for electric cars and CNG (compressed natural gas). Consequently, e-mobility is one of Q8's strategic axes for the near future," he said. Together, Q8 and IONITY will build in total 16 charging stations in Belgium. "We have committed ourselves to fully invest in the electro-mobility market through investments, partnerships and acquisitions to provide the best future-proof service and convenience to our customer," said Faraj. "We are very happy that through this partnership with IONITY, we can offer high power charging in the time it takes our customers to enjoy a coffee," he added.

In the meantime, Carlo Di Antonio, the minister of Environment, Mobility and Transport in the Wallonia region of Belgium expressed his happiness over the opening of the charging stations and stressed on the importance for Wallonia region in southern Belgium to have this kind of investment. "As an owner of an electrical car, I am very happy about this development; that Q8 is investing in this project," he said. Marcus Groll, IONITY'S Chief Operating Officer said, "Q8 is a very important partner for us because they give us access to very nice and professional gas station area where our customers can rest, get some food and drink coffee in a very high quality atmosphere."

"This station is located in a very important highway between Brussels and Paris so the connection within our European network is also very important," he indicated. Electrical vehicles will be able to

charge up to five times faster than the current capacity at charging stations: it takes less than 20 minutes to cover a 300 km distance, he noted. Andreas Boschen, Head of Department, Connecting Europe Facility, Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA) in the European Commission, said "my message today is electric mobility becomes more and more reality in Europe."

"Today we are opening a high power charging station here in Q8 location which is another sign for the future that will make electric mobility even more attractive," he noted. "Q8 is very well placed as a mobility provider not only providing classical fuels but also this kind of electric mobility," he said. "Q8 wants to serve the clients whether they come with a traditional car or an electric car," he said. Deployment of alternative fuel structure is a clear priority for the European Commission, he added. —KUNA



### South Korean PM to visit Kuwait Tuesday



**KUWAIT:** This archive photo shows the signing of one of the many trade agreements between Kuwait and South Korea. —KUNA

capacity totals around 107 million daily gallons, making up 20 percent of current total capacity in water desalination in the country.

Korean firms also co-work with their Kuwaiti counterparts in other projects related to New Kuwait Vision 2035, including Sheikh Jaber Bridge which aims to short-cut distance between Kuwait City and Subbiyah area from 104 kilometers, 90 minutes of driving, to 37.5 kilometers, 30 minutes driving. The Kuwaiti-Korean cooperation also includes building

smart and environment-friendly cities, in which South Korea's Land and Housing Corporation (LH) developed a detailed design for South Saad Al-Abdullah area to accommodate 30,000 residential units to be the first smart and environmental-friendly city in the country. In 2018, Kuwait Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) agreed with Korean Incheon International Airport Corporation (IAC) to operate, manage, maintain, and develop the new Terminal Four (T4) at Kuwait International Airport. —KUNA

## Q8 inaugurates 1st high power charging station on Belgian motorway

**BRUSSELS:** Q8, the trademark brand for Kuwait Petroleum International's fuel stations in Europe, has made history by inaugurating the very first high power charging station for electric vehicles on the Belgian motorway network. Q8, in partnership with IONITY Company launched the charging stations on the Belgian motorway in Thieu, between Paris and Brussels, 50 kms from Brussels, in the presence of Kuwait's ambassador to Belgium, European Union and NATO Jasem Al-Budaiwi, Belgian and EU officials and representatives of the European energy and car industries on Thursday afternoon.

IONITY, based in the German city of Munich, is a joint venture of top carmakers BMW Group, Daimler AG, Ford Motor Company and the Volkswagen Group with Audi and Porsche. Its goal is to build an extensive and reliable 350 kW High-Power-Charging network for electric vehicles in Europe to make comfortable long-distance travel an everyday reality.

The charging stations in Belgium is part of the EUROP-E project, which is co-financed by the European Union. "I am privileged to take part today in the inauguration of the first of its kind in Belgium electric station operated solely by Q8," Budaiwi said. "I am very honored that a Kuwait company is taking lead in this field. We are observing the future today. This is where the market is going to be geared and I want to congratulate the management of Q8 for thinking in an innovational way," he said. "Our participation today comes in line with the activities of



**BRUSSELS:** Q8 Inaugurates its first high power charging station on the Belgian motorway network. —KUNA

# CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,  
management and staff convey their  
deepest condolences to

**Yousef Ahmad Muflih**

on the sad  
demise of his

**Mother**

*May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her*

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Heavy rains spark flooding fears in cyclone-hit Mozambique

## Biden spars with Trump on age, faces questions on women

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KHARTOUM: Sudanese protesters wave national flags as they gather near the military headquarters in the capital Khartoum during a rally. — AFP

# Opposition chief demands Sudan join ICC

Bashir ouster not a 'military coup' • Talks held on civil rule • PCP members pelted with rocks

**KHARTOUM:** A top opposition leader called for Sudan to join the International Criminal Court which has indicted its ousted president Omar Al-Bashir, as a panel of protesters and the military met to discuss civilian rule. Sadiq Al-Mahdi, a former prime minister and head of the opposition National Umma Party that has backed the protests, also told reporters that the army's ouster of Bashir was "not a military coup".

His comments came as a joint committee representing the ruling military leadership and protesters held their first meeting to discuss a demand by demonstrators for a handover to civilian rule. Rashid Al-Sayed, a spokesman for the protest movement, said the meeting was a confidence-building step between both sides who are "partners in the revolution" and a second round was due later yesterday. He said the military council vowed at the talks that a protest camp outside army headquarters "will not be dispersed by force".

Bashir was ousted by the army on April 11 after

months of protests against his three-decade rule. Thousands of demonstrators reached the sprawling military headquarters in central Khartoum on April 6, demanding that the army support those opposing against Bashir. Five days later, the army toppled Bashir but then took power into its own hands through a 10-member transitional military council.

The protesters, who have kept up the pressure round-the-clock outside army headquarters for weeks, are now demanding that the council step down and make way for a civilian government. Mahdi, who said his party would not join a civilian transitional government, told reporters "it is possible to agree on a civilian authority with the military council because they did not plan a coup".

He also said Sudan should "immediately" join the Hague-based International Criminal Court where Bashir is wanted for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for his alleged role in the conflict in Darfur. "This should be done in coordination with the

transitional military council," he added. Bashir, 75, has consistently denied the charges against him.

The war in Darfur erupted in 2003 when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against Khartoum's Arab-dominated government, accusing it of social and political marginalization. The United Nations says about 300,000 people have died in the conflict, with another 2.5 million displaced, many of them still living in miserable camps across the western region of the country. Bashir swept to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989 that toppled Mahdi's elected government.

### 'Regime still present'

Mahdi, who was ousted by Bashir in the 1989 coup, said yesterday that the president's regime remained in place despite the upheaval. "The head of the regime has been ousted but the regime is still present," Mahdi said. "The toppled regime might still try to do a coup," he said without elaborating. Protest leaders have held several rounds of inconclusive talks with

the military council since Bashir was ousted.

Earlier this week, the two sides agreed to set up the joint committee to chart the way forward. The military council has so far refused to step down, insisting that it has assumed power for a two-year transitional period. Western governments have expressed support, but Sudan's key Gulf Arab lenders have backed the military council, while African states have called for more time for the army to hand over to civilians.

As protesters were pushing the military on civilian rule yesterday, assailants hurled rocks at a meeting of members of the Islamist Popular Congress Party, an ally of Bashir's, injuring 32 of them. "When the participants in the meeting took a break, they came under attack from a group of people who threw rocks," said Suheir Salah, party's deputy undersecretary. The PCP, founded by late Islamist leader Hassan Turabi, had two ministers of state in Bashir's cabinet, including Salah, and seven lawmakers in parliament. — AFP

## Refugees trapped as Libyan rivals battle

**TRIPOLI:** Migrants and refugees have been shot and wounded in a detention centre south of Tripoli as Libyan fighters battle for control of the capital, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said yesterday. Clashes between Libya's Tripoli-based unity government forces and fighters of military commander Khalifa Haftar have raged since April 4, when the strongman launched an assault to seize the capital.

The UN and international NGOs have warned that thousands of migrants and refugees who fled violence at home and are now trapped in Libyan detention centers are facing enormous dangers and must be evacuated. On Wednesday the UN refugee agency UNHCR said it had evacuated 325 asylum seekers from the Qasr Bin Ghashir detention centre a day after an attack against refugees and migrants. It was not clear who carried out the assault.

"While there were no bullet wounds, 12 refugees endured physical attacks that required hospital treatment," a statement said. But on Friday MSF said "an analysis of existing photographic and video evidence by MSF medical doctors concluded that injuries shown are consistent with gunshot wounds". "These observations are further supported by numerous accounts from refugees and migrants who witnessed the event and reported on being brutally and indiscriminately attacked with the use of fire arms," it said.



ZAWIYAH, Libya: African migrants who fled battle zones in Libya gather at a detention center in Zawiyah, west of the capital Tripoli yesterday. — AFP

MSF published video footage showing several people bleeding from what appeared to be bullet holes in limbs and other parts of their bodies. "To say we were outraged is an understatement," MSF head of emergency programs Karline Kleijer was quoted as saying in the statement. "Mere condemnation of the violence against migrants and refugees is meaningless unless immediate action is taken by the international community to evacuate the remaining thousands."

MSF said that over 700 unarmed men, women and children were trapped in the Qasr Bin Ghashir detention centre. The watchdog said residents of the centre have been moved to another detention camp west of Tripoli on Wednesday and Thursday. "While they are no longer in the direct vicinity of fighting, people are still subjected to dangerous and degrading conditions

and rapidly changing conflict dynamics that continue to pose a threat to all those locked up in detention centers in and around Tripoli," it warned.

Human Rights Watch has also sounded the alarm. It quoted two migrants from a detention centre in an eastern suburb of Tripoli and a third one who was detained in the centre of the capital as saying armed men have forced them to work for them. In one instance two detainees said they were ordered to repair military vehicles and "to load, unload, and clean weapons", including machine guns, HRW said.

Libya, long a major transit route for migrants desperate to reach Europe, is home to around 6,000 migrants who are held in official detention centers, according to the International Organization for Migration. Hundreds more are held by armed groups elsewhere in the war-hit country. — AFP

## Sri Lanka former defense chief to run for president

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's former wartime defense chief, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, said on Friday he would run for president in elections this year and would stop the spread of Islamist extremism by rebuilding the intelligence service and shriveling citizens. Gotabaya, as he is popularly known, is the younger brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the two led the country to a crushing defeat of separatist Tamil rebels a decade ago after a 26-year civil war.

More than 250 people were killed in bomb attacks on hotels and churches on Easter Sunday that the government has blamed on Islamist militants and that Islamic State has claimed responsibility for. Gotabaya said the attacks could have been prevented if the island's current government had not dismantled the intelligence network and extensive surveillance capabilities that he built up during the war and later on.

"Because the government was not prepared, that's why you see a panic situation," he said in an interview with Reuters. Gotabaya said he would be a candidate "100 percent", firming up months of speculation that he plans to run in the elections, which are due by December. He was critical of the government's response to the bombings. Since the attacks, the government has struggled to provide clear information about how they were staged, who was behind them and how serious the threat is from Islamic State to the country.

"Various people are blaming various people, not giving exactly the details as to what happened, even people expect the names, what organization did this, and how they came up to this level, that explanation was not given," he said. On Friday, President Maithripala Sirisena said the government led by premier Ranil Wickremesinghe should take responsibility for the attacks and that

prior information warning of attacks was not shared with him.

Wickremesinghe said earlier he was not advised about warnings that came from India's spy service either, presenting a picture of a government still in disarray since the two leaders fell out last October. Gotabaya is facing lawsuits in the United States, where he is a dual citizen, over his role in the war and afterwards. The South Africa-based International Truth and Justice Project, in partnership with U.S. law firm Hausfeld, filed a civil case in California this month against Gotabaya on behalf of a Tamil torture survivor.

In a separate case, Ahimsa Wickrematunga, the daughter of murdered investigative editor Lanantha Wickrematunga, filed a complaint for damages in the same US District Court in California for allegedly instigating and authorizing the extrajudicial killing of her father. Gotabaya said the cases were baseless and only a "little distraction" as he prepared for the election campaign. He said he had asked U.S. authorities to renounce his citizenship and that process was nearly done, clearing the way for his candidature.

### Dismantle the networks

He said that if he won, his immediate focus would be to tackle the threat from radical Islam and to rebuild the security set-up. "It's a serious problem, you have to go deep into the groups, dismantle the networks," he said, adding he would give the military a mandate to collect intelligence from the ground and to mount surveillance of groups turning to extremism. Gotabaya said that a military intelligence cell he had set up in 2011 of 5,000 people, some of them with Arabic language skills and that was tracking the bent towards extremist ideology some of the Islamist groups were taking in eastern Sri Lanka was disbanded by the current government. "They did not give priority to national security, there was a mix-up. They were talking about ethnic reconciliation, then they were talking about human rights issues, they were talking about individual freedoms," he said. President Sirisena's government sought to forge reconciliation with minority Tamils and close the wounds of the war and launched investigations into allegations of rights abuse and torture against military officers. — Reuters

International

# Heavy rains spark flooding fears in cyclone-hit Mozambique

## Brazilian soldiers, UNICEF officials arrive to assess damage

**PEMBA:** Heavy rains from a powerful cyclone lashed northern Mozambique yesterday, sparking fears of flooding as aid workers arrived to assess the damage, just weeks after the country suffered one of the worst storms in its history. Cyclone Kenneth, a Category Three storm on the hurricane scale, made landfall in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province late Thursday after swiping the Comoros islands. It made landfall a day later, killing one person and wrecking thousands of homes.

"Tropical Cyclone Kenneth has now 'stalled' over Cabo Delgado province of northern Mozambique, where it is expected to bring heavy rains in the coming days," said OCHA, the UN's humanitarian coordination office, adding that it would remain in the area "for at least two days." "The stalling of the weather system is likely to cause significant flooding in Cabo Delgado, as well as high rainfall in southern Tanzania, over the next 10 days," it warned.

Mozambique's emergencies agency, the INGC, reported a death caused by a falling coconut tree in the port city of Pemba, Cabo Delgado's provincial capital, along with severe flooding, mudslides and widespread power outages. It said Kenneth-which has now receded into a tropical depression-had damaged or destroyed 3,300 homes while about 18,000 people were housed in emergency shelters.

Yesterday morning, emergency workers including

Brazilian soldiers, OCHA personnel and officials from the UN children's agency UNICEF, arrived in Pemba to assess the damage. "The INGC tell us to come here to make an evaluation of the situation," Captain Kleber Castro of the Brazil rescue service told AFP on the tarmac at Pemba airport. "Pemba had a minimal disaster impact. But we really need to know about the cities with 90 percent damage. Now we look for some aircraft and evaluate all the locations," he said.

On the tourist island of Ibo, home to 6,000 people, 90 percent of homes had been flattened, according to a spokesman for the INGC, Antonio Beleza. "It looks like the island has been bombed... It is biblical," said Kevin Record, a South African tour operator and owner of a hotel on Ibo. The work of rescuers has been hampered by damaged infrastructure, including communications. "A lot of people can be impacted in the region where the flooding is large and widespread," said Castro.

"The most difficult thing is transportation—we don't have helicopters yet. We need a lot of support, if you can help us we need support from helicopters." Communities in central Mozambique are still reeling from Cyclone Idai, which hit on the night of March 14-15, causing killer floods that swept away homes, roads and bridges. The storm also smashed into Zimbabwe and Malawi. In the three countries, more than a thousand lives were lost, and damage is estimated at around \$2 billion. — AFP



**MACOMIA:** This handout picture provided by the World Food Program shows a destroyed house in Macomia district, Mozambique. — AFP

## Jihadist attacks kill 22 Syria pro-regime fighters

**BEIRUT:** Attacks by two jihadist groups killed at least 22 Syrian government troops and militiamen in the northern province of Aleppo early yesterday, a war monitor said. Thirty others were wounded in the assaults by Al-Qaeda's former Syria branch, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and its ally Hurras al-Deen, which remains affiliated to the global jihadist network, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The attacks in the southern and southwestern countryside of Aleppo province were launched shortly after midnight and triggered clashes that continued until dawn, Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said. He said the fighting subsided after Russian aircraft struck jihadist positions in the area, prompting the fighters to

pull back. Eight jihadists were killed, he added. Russia aircraft also carried out strikes in neighboring Hama province early on Saturday, killing five civilians, the Observatory said.

On Friday, Russian strikes killed 10 civilians in Idlib province, the hub of territory held by the jihadists of HTS in northwestern Syria. Russia and rebel-backer Turkey in September inked a buffer zone deal to avert a massive government offensive on the Idlib region, but the deal has never been implemented. The region of some three million people has come under increasing bombardment since HTS took full control of it in January.

The latest Russian air raids came after two days of talks on the Syrian conflict between Turkey, Russia and fellow government backer Iran in Kazakhstan earlier this week. The three governments expressed concern over the growing power of HTS in Idlib and parts of adjacent provinces, and determination to cooperate to eliminate the jihadist group. The civil war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it began with the bloody repression of anti-government protests in 2011. — AFP

## 25 years after apartheid, S Africans still not free

**MAKHANDA, South Africa:** A quarter of a century after the end of the apartheid in South Africa, large swathes of population still aren't free given abject poverty and high unemployment and the scourge of corruption affecting the country, President Cyril Ramaphosa said yesterday. Speaking at a ceremony in Makhanda, formerly Grahamstown, in the south of the country, Ramaphosa said that South Africans were "gathered here to celebrate the day we won our freedom."

The first democratic elections were held in South Africa on April 27, 1994, with blacks—who make up three quarters of the population—voting for the first time, bringing to an end three centuries of white rule and the apartheid regime in place since 1948. "We remember the moment we placed a cross on a ballot paper for the first time in our lives," the president said, paying homage to Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid campaigner who was elected South Africa's first black president in 1994.

Nevertheless, "we cannot be a nation of free people when so many still live in poverty," Ramaphosa said. "We cannot be a nation of free people when so many live without enough food, without proper shelter, without access to quality health care, without a means to earn a living," he continued. "We cannot be a nation of free people when funds meant for the poor are wasted, lost or stolen (...)" when there is still corruption within our own country." — AFP



**BEIRUT:** Residents walk among debris caused by the reported explosion of a booby-trapped motorcycle in the city of al-Dana in Syria's rebel-held Idlib region, on the border with Turkey. — AFP

## Russian agent Maria Butina sentenced to 18 months in US

**WASHINGTON:** Maria Butina, the only Russian arrested and convicted in the three-year investigation of Moscow's interference in US politics, was sentenced on Friday to 18 months in prison. The leader of a small Russian gun rights group, the 30-year-old Siberian native used her ties to the National Rifle Association to build a network of powerful Republican contacts. She had admitted one count of conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government without registering—a so-called "espionage-lite" charge the US has used before against alleged Russian spies.

Prosecutors said that although she worked openly and was not tied to any Russian intelligence agency, she was sending back reports to a high-level Russian government official and posed a threat to the United States. "I humbly request forgiveness. I'm not this evil person depicted in the media," she told the court in Washington before her sentence was announced.

Dressed in a dark blue pajama-like prison uniform, her long red hair pulled behind her shoulders, Butina's voice broke as she addressed the court in fluent, Russian-accented English. She told the court she had only wanted to work towards better US-Russian relations and would have registered as a foreign agent if she had known it was required by law.

### Top Republicans

Moscow expressed outrage over the treatment of Butina, who was given credit for nine months already served and will be deported when she is released. "The accusations brought against her, intended to influence the internal political process in the United States, are totally invented and fabricated," Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement. "Our compatriot was condemned just because

she is a Russian citizen," it added.

On the sidelines of a summit in Beijing, Russian President Vladimir Putin called the conviction "arbitrary". "There is nothing we could accuse her of, but to make this case not look completely ridiculous, she was sentenced to 18 months in prison," he said. Butina's case played out against a backdrop of tension between Moscow and Washington over what US intelligence says was a concerted effort by Russian spies to interfere in the 2016 presidential election, using hacking and social media manipulation to help President Donald Trump to victory.

Special Counsel Robert Mueller charged 25 Russians with conspiracy for those activities, but, with all of them believed to be in Russia, none have been arrested. US prosecutors acknowledged that Butina had nothing to do with those cases but alleged that she was part of a "spot-and-assess" operation to identify potential recruits. A gun rights campaigner who attended NRA events and invited top gun lobby officials to Russia, she lived as a graduate student in Washington with her boyfriend, a Republican and NRA activist. Her activities brought her in contact with top Republicans, including Trump at a rally in 2015, where she was chosen to ask the then-candidate about US-Russian relations.

### Updates to Russia

Butina sent regular updates to her handler Alexander Torshin, at the time a senior Kremlin politician and central bank deputy governor who had accompanied her to NRA conventions. "There is no doubt that she was not simply a graduate student," Assistant US Attorney Erik Kenerson told the court. "She was simultaneously trying to make contacts... for the benefit of the Russian Federation."

Steven Hall, the CIA's former chief of Russian operations, said her operating in the open was simply an innovative tactic in Putin's "broader hybrid-warfare influence operation." "She's part of the Kremlin's plan to try to weaken the United States and the West," he said. Butina's lawyer Robert Driscoll, a prominent Republican attorney, said she had broken no law besides the registration statute, and would not have been pursued had she been of a different nationality. — AFP

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## International

# Biden spars with Trump on age, faces questions on women

## Women accuse Biden of touching them inappropriately

WASHINGTON: Newly announced 2020 Democratic candidate Joe Biden faced scrutiny on multiple fronts Friday, as President Donald Trump knocked him for his age and an all-female panel questioned his past treatment of women. It was unlikely the rollout that the former vice president had expected on the first full day of his White House campaign, but the attention from Trump himself served to signal Biden's status as the leading challenger in a crowded field seeking to oust the current president.

Biden's day in the public eye began with the 72-year-old Trump opening a fresh line of attack on his rival's age, saying Biden made him "look very young" by comparison. "I'm the youngest person. I am a young, vibrant man," a smiling Trump told reporters at the White House. "I look at Joe, I don't know about him," he said of Biden, who is 76 and would be the oldest person ever to serve as president. "I would never say anyone is too old, but I know they're all making me look very young both in terms of age and I think in terms of energy."

Biden, speaking Friday on ABC's popular talk show "The View," acknowledged politics is a "show-me business" where voters assess not just a candidate's political platform, but his physical fitness for office. "If he looks young and vibrant compared to me I should probably go home," Biden said of the president. Trump is technically obese, has a penchant for fast food and avoids strenuous exercise. His doctor declared him healthy in February.

Keen to paint Biden as unfit for the job, he has nicknamed his potential rival "Sleepy Joe." Biden presented himself as a vigorous candidate, insisting he was more like "hyper Joe." When he was asked Friday how he would beat Biden, whose working class appeal could help win back states Trump snatched in 2016 — such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — the president was succinct: "I

think we beat him easily." But Trump is watching Biden's rollout carefully. The former VP is angling to win back lower-income white voters who propelled Trump to the White House in 2016. Biden's opening campaign message Thursday featured a direct challenge to Trump's fitness for office, as he blasted his response to deadly white supremacist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017.

### Sorry, not sorry

On Friday it was Biden on the back foot, as he faced awkward questions about his past actions — and stopped short of making outright apologies for them. Multiple women have accused Biden this year of touching them inappropriately in the past, and while they have not said the elder statesman sexually harassed them, his tactile style and invasion of personal space has come under increasing scrutiny in the #MeToo era.

"So I invaded your space. I'm sorry this happened," Biden said, referring to his efforts to console or thank or inspire women he has met over the course of his half-century political career. "I'm not sorry in the sense that I think I did anything that was intentionally designed to do anything wrong or be inappropriate." Biden was also pressed on his handling of an infamous 1991 Senate hearing that involved testimony by Anita Hill, who was aggressively questioned by an all-male committee about her claims of sexual harassment.

He said he recently called Hill to express regret over his handling of the hearings, but when asked by The View's hosts to apologize directly to her, he stopped short. "I don't think I treated her badly," Biden said, adding that he believed her claims of harassment "from the beginning." "There were a lot of mistakes made across the board. For that I apologize," he said. Biden's team was



DELAWARE: In this file photo former US Vice President Joe Biden speaks during the First State Democratic Dinner in Dover, Delaware. — AFP

quick to refocus attention on the positive, announcing he raked in \$6.3 million in the first 24 hours of the cam-

aign, outpacing all other Democratic contenders on their opening days. — AFP

## Italy's 'zombie' govt lurches towards EU vote

ROME: Italy's populist government is on its last legs, its bitterly warring coalition partners putting up with each other merely to avoid losing votes at the upcoming European elections, analysts say. The far-right League and anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) have been at each other's throats since coming to power last June, with the "contract for government" that was supposed to unite them trampled underfoot.

The government "is already dead, but remains on its feet, a bit like a zombie, waiting for the European elections", political commentator Stefano Folli said this week. Italy, he said, was suspended "between farce and drama". The latest row erupted when an undersecretary close to League head Matteo Salvini was accused of corruption. Armando Siri is alleged to have accepted a 30,000 euros bribe — or the promise of it — from a businessman, for promoting the interests of renewable energy companies.

Prosecutors also suspect the businessman of being in league with a Sicilian who has links to a Mafia boss. The M5S, which made "honesty" a keyword of its political campaign, has demanded Siri resign. Even the movement's leader, Luigi Di Maio — who usually makes some effort to keep the peace with fellow deputy prime minister Salvini — has called for the undersecretary's head to roll. Salvini insists Siri is innocent until proven guilty — and has played up the fact the bribe may not have ever changed hands.

But Siri is not the only fuse lit under the coalition. Salvini angered many in Italy on Thursday by skipping Liberation Day commemorations, which celebrate the end of the Nazi occupation in 1945. His snub follows a rise in hate crimes in Italy, and the M5S is under increasing pressure from its left wing to take Salvini to task over his courtship of the far right.

"Under normal circumstances, the M5S-League government would have disintegrated long ago", La Repubblica daily said, while La Stampa simply asked: "is there still a government?" "We can't go on like this. We can't work in this climate, under attack on a daily basis," Salvini reportedly complained to Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, according to La Stampa. Salvini and Di Maio "cannot win the war by trying to win battles to use as a springboard in the election", Folli said.

Both parties are determined to keep the government alive until May 26, the date of the EU elections in Italy, for fear of losing votes. — AFP

## 17 dead in E Ukraine coal mine blast

KIEV: The death toll from a coal mine blast in a separatist eastern region of Ukraine rose to 17 yesterday, rebel authorities said. The gas blast on Thursday ripped through the mine in Yurievka village in the self-proclaimed republic of Lugansk, which broke away from Kiev in 2014 and is run by Moscow-backed rebels. "The tragedy took the life of 17 miners," Leonid Pasechnik, the head of the unrecognized Lugansk republic, said on Twitter. He added that the bodies of all the miners that died have been recovered.

Earlier the death toll accounted to 13, with another four people missing. Pasechnik called the explosion at the Skhidcarbon mine a "terrible tragedy" and declared April 29 a day of mourning. Russia's emergency situations ministry sent mine rescuers to the separatist territory after it requested help, it said in a statement. The Lugansk news agency said the mine was closed in 2014 due to the conflict between Kiev's forces and the Russia-backed separatists, but was reopened in 2018. Most of Ukraine's coal is produced in its eastern region, where the ongoing fighting has cost some 13,000 lives. Kiev has tried to boost the operations of other pits under its control in the west of the country. — AFP

## Trump, US media in open war on annual dinner date

WASHINGTON: It's meant to be the annual Washington love-in, a dinner where White House journalists and the president yuck it up in a hotel ballroom. But this Saturday, President Donald Trump will stand up his dates. Members of the White House Correspondents' Association, or WHCA, will be decked out in bow ties and gowns at the downtown Washington Hilton. Trump, however, will be 685 miles away in Green Bay, Wisconsin, for a rally with his baseball cap-wearing supporters.

And he's almost guaranteed to devote a portion of his speech-like most of his speeches — to haranguing the "fake news media" or "enemy of the people." Although there's nothing obligatory about attending WHCA dinners, presidents have usually done so at some point during their time in office every year since the inaugural version in 1921. Ronald Reagan was the last absentee in 1981 and he had a decent excuse: being recently shot in an assassination attempt.

Trump, however, has boycotted what he calls the "boring" and "negative" party for three years in a row — his entire presidency so far. The gala used to be a glamorous affair where hundreds of journalists, Hollywood celebrities and the president were entertained by a top-drawer comedian or other talent. Now the celebs have drained away and this year even the comedian is missing. A presidential historian, Ron Chernow, will deliver the main speech instead. "Killing the White House Correspondents' Dinner," runs the headline of a Columbia Journalism Review article amounting to an obituary for the formerly revered fixture.

## Woman war pilot shot down in Iraq returns as US senator

WASHINGTON: Tammy Duckworth, the helicopter pilot who lost her legs when she was shot down over Iraq 15 years ago, returned to the country for the first time this week as a US senator, her office said Friday. The decorated US Army veteran led an official congressional delegation to Baghdad, Taji and Arbil, where they sat down with Iraqi leaders, received intelligence briefings from American diplomats and met with US troops.

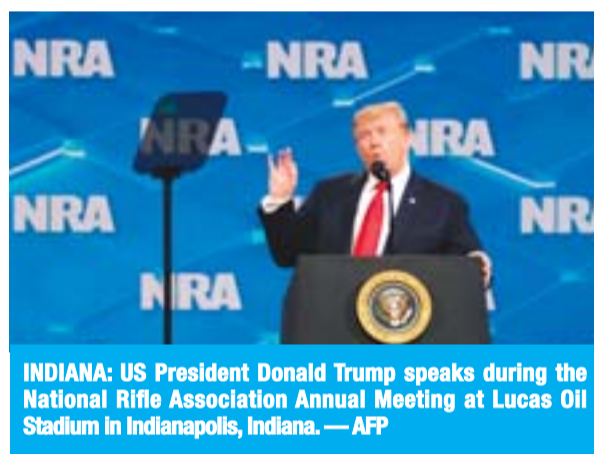
"Fifteen years ago I deployed to Iraq as an American soldier to fly helicopter missions. This week, I returned in a role I never expected: as a United States senator leading a bipartisan delegation to show our support for the people of Iraq," the Illinois Democrat said in a statement. "I was proud to join Senators (Johnny) Isakson and (Angus) King representing our nation on this important trip — and I was even prouder that I was able to leave Iraq under my own power this time."

The senators met with Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, among other officials, according to Duckworth's office. The trip was not publicly announced until after its completion for security reasons. The 51-year-old Duckworth, who was born in Thailand, is the first female amputee elected to the US Congress. She almost never got that opportunity.

Her life very nearly ended in Iraq on November 12, 2004, about 120 combat hours into her tour there, when the Black Hawk helicopter she was co-piloting was struck by an insurgent's rocket-propelled grenade. As a fireball tore through the cockpit, Duckworth tried to help land the chopper, but was unable to use its foot pedals. King said he was moved at seeing his colleague return to Iraq.

"To witness Senator Duckworth flying once again over the site where she was shot down in 2004 was a moment I'll never forget," King said. Duckworth's military experience has informed much of her work as a legislator. She has sought to help disabled veterans and ensure payment of troops during federal shutdowns.

She also has been outspoken about the importance of defending members of the Kurdish minority who fought alongside US military forces against the Islamic State. In January 2018, when President Donald Trump accused



INDIANA: US President Donald Trump speaks during the National Rifle Association Annual Meeting at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana. — AFP

### Insulting, confrontational

Underlining the snub, Trump has ordered staff, including chief press secretary Sarah Sanders, to also refuse invitations. It's the latest shot in what the president sees as his war against a media machine refusing to give him fair coverage. Trump's main weapon is Twitter, which he uses daily to reach some 60 million followers. Millions more follow him on other platforms. As Sanders said in 2017, Twitter "gives him a communications tool... that isn't filtered through media bias."

The other main way of bypassing potentially critical outlets is his extraordinary relationship with Fox News, the Rupert Murdoch owned network which has been criticized for coming to resemble state television. Even if many of the news journalists maintain their independence, some of the most prominent anchors and hosts show nothing but loyalty to Trump. They're rewarded with exclusive access to administration officials and to the president himself. Meanwhile, other outlets are mostly kept at arm's length.



WASHINGTON: In this file photo US Representative Tammy Duckworth of Illinois arrives to address delegates on the fourth and final day of the Democratic National Convention at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

Democrats of holding the military hostage over immigration, Duckworth delivered a withering Senate floor speech, saying "I will not be lectured about what our military needs by a five-deferment draft dodger." — AFP

The press briefing room in the White House, which used to see nearly daily Q&A sessions under previous presidents, has been all but abandoned. Trump is unusually accessible, but mostly through often chaotic, informal gatherings, while Saturday marks the 48th day since Sanders held a full briefing. When they're not being ignored, White House journalists can expect to hear abuse. Trump's rallies invariably include segments where he encourages the crowd to boo the reporters covering the event.

"This is new," says Jeff Morosoff, a journalism and media professor at Hofstra University's Lawrence Herbert School of Communication. "No president has ever been so contentious, insulting and confrontational." "I think the day is going to come when one of his followers is going to hurt somebody," Morosoff warned.

### Sense of humor failure

For years, WHCA dinners were a chance to let the hair down in a notoriously serious town. Past performers include Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra and Barbra Streisand. Since the 1980s, comedians have provided entertainment, making gentle and not-so-gentle fun, or "roasting," the centerpiece of the dinner. Presidents were expected to give back as good as they got.

A standout moment was Obama's riff in 2011, when one of his comic targets in the VIP-packed audience was none other than Donald Trump. Last year, though, the jokes fell flat. Featured comedian Michelle Wolf tore into Sanders and caused as much offense as laughter. Even the WHCA thought it had gone too far, calling her routine "not in the spirit" of the occasion. Wolf called the WHCA "cowards."

The association's president, Olivier Knox, says this year is an opportunity to return to the event's roots: a gathering to reinforce support for the constitutional right to free speech. "We're looking forward to an enjoyable evening of celebrating the First Amendment and great journalists past, present, and future," he said. — AFP

## Assange lawyers file 'extortion' complaint in Spain court

MADRID: Julian Assange's lawyers have filed a court complaint in Spain against a group of Spaniards they allege extorted the WikiLeaks founder and Ecuador's foreign ministry, a source in his defense team said yesterday. Assange, who for seven years lived holed up in London's Ecuadoran embassy where he had taken refuge to avoid extradition to Sweden on rape accusations, was arrested on April 11 after Quito terminated his asylum.

The 47-year-old founder of WikiLeaks, which exposed everything from US military secrets to the wealthy's tax evasion, is now awaiting sentencing for breaching his British bail conditions in 2012. The source, who wished to remain anonymous, said the complaint was against "a group of Spaniards who allegedly engaged in extortion and the embassy's employees and Ecuador's foreign ministry." The source added an investigation was ongoing and alleged "espionage" in the embassy against Assange, refusing to give further details.

According to Spanish media reports, four Spaniards have videos and personal documents of Assange. Online daily eldiario.es said they somehow got these via an alleged spying system set up in the embassy that included security cameras and employees taking photos of all documents handled by Assange. They allegedly tried to extort three million euros out of WikiLeaks not to publish any of it, Spanish media report.

Eldiario.es, which had access to the written complaint that was filed to Spain's top-level National Court, says Assange's lawyers also accuse Ecuador of spying on him. The National Court could not comment when contacted by AFP. That contrasts with Ecuadoran President Lenin Moreno's version of events. In an interview with the Guardian newspaper, he alleged Assange had tried to set up a "centre for spying" in Ecuador's embassy.

Last year, Quito cut his internet and mobile phone access, accusing him of breaking "a written commitment" not to interfere in its and allies' foreign policies. The move infuriated Assange, who sued the government for violating his "fundamental rights" by limiting his access to the outside world. Now in prison in Britain, Assange is also fighting a US extradition warrant relating to the release by WikiLeaks of a huge cache of official documents. — AFP



## International

# Khan's interior minister pick Shah raises questions about new Pakistan

## Pakistan cabinet reshuffle to attract foreign investment

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's new interior minister, appointed in a major cabinet reshuffle this month by Prime Minister Imran Khan, is a former spy chief and close ally of the country's last military ruler who has long been accused of deep ties to militant groups. The appointment of retired Brigadier Ijaz Shah has been heavily criticized by the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP), whose slain former leader Benazir Bhutto regarded him as a deadly enemy.

Some analysts said it suggested Pakistan's powerful military continued to wield heavy influence over the civilian administration - a persistent allegation since Khan took office eight months ago that both his government and the generals deny. In an interview with the BBC after his appointment, Shah said: "What power can I give the military as interior minister? I left the army a long time ago, I am a civilian and have participated in elections."

The prime minister's office and the information ministry did not respond to requests for comment. Shah was among four members of the civilian-military establishment named by Bhutto in a letter written to then President Pervez Musharraf months before her assassination as suspects who should be investigated if she was killed. Many Pakistanis have long suspected that elements of the intelligence agencies colluded with militants in Bhutto's assassination in a gun and bomb attack in the garrison city of Rawalpindi in December 2007. An investigation at the time blamed an al Qaeda-allied Pakistani Taliban leader.

"Are you trying to send a message to the world that we have terrorists and the abettors of terrorists in our cabinet?" Bhutto's son and chairman of the PPP, Bilawal Bhutto, told the country's parliament this week,

referring to Shah's appointment. "This cannot happen." Shah's office did not respond to a request for an interview or a list of questions sent by Reuters, but earlier this month then Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told local newspaper Dawn that "he is a clean man" and had been cleared of all allegations against him in a government inquiry.

### Spy chief

The sweeping cabinet reshuffle comes as Pakistan is trying to attract foreign investment and present itself as a reformed country. But critics say the inclusion of an "old school" figure such as Shah in the government shows little has changed. Under Musharraf, who as army chief seized power in a 1999 coup and ruled until 2008, Shah served as head of the military's leading spy agency in the Punjab province, and was later appointed the head of the civilian Intelligence Bureau.

He oversaw the surrender of wanted militant Omar Saeed Shaikh, who masterminded the kidnapping and killing of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl in 2002. That contributed to allegations he had been close to Islamist groups based along lawless border with Afghanistan, where Pakistan's security services have long been accused of playing a double game.

"The biggest controversy is his links with the Afghan jihad and figures like Omar Saeed Sheikh," author and analyst Ayesha Siddiqi told Reuters, a longstanding critic of Pakistan's military. "Looks very much like the army chief's choice."

The military did not respond to a request for comment on this article, but in the past has said it does not interfere in politics. The military has also repeatedly denied allegations leveled by the United States,



**ISLAMABAD:** Ijaz Ahmed Shah, Minister of the National Assembly (MNA), meets with Prime Minister Imran Khan at the Prime Minister Office in Islamabad. — Reuters

Afghanistan and others that is has covertly sheltered militants based along its borders. Under Khan's government, Islamabad has been trying to convince the outside world that it will not tolerate militants operating from inside Pakistan.

Pakistan currently finds itself on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list" for inadequately dealing with money laundering and terrorism financing, a designation that makes it harder for the coun-

try to access international markets at a time when its economy is stumbling. Convincing the FATF that it is making sufficient efforts to crack down on militancy will be harder with a controversial figure such as Shah in the cabinet, said PPP Senator Mustafa Khokhar. Some analysts agree. "Ijaz Shah's appointment just reinforces the perception that nothing has changed in Pakistani politics," political analyst Aamer Ahmed Khan said. — Reuters

## Sri Lankan man who confronted bomber at church door remembered

**BATTICALOA, Sri Lanka:** Ramesh Raju has become a hero to the shell-shocked congregation of the Zion evangelical church in Batticaloa after he died stopping a suicide bomber who was bent on killing hundreds of people. Nearly a week after the bombing, the road leading to Raju's house in the eastern city is flanked by posters and photographs of the 40-year-old father of two who blocked the attacker at the church door. A stream of well-wishers queue to express condolences to his widow, a Sunday school teacher.

Raju was one of 29 people, including 14 children, that media reports say died in the blast at Zion, one of three churches and three hotels targeted by Jihadist bombers. But about 600 people who were inside at the time escaped the human bomb. The dead from the other two churches make up the majority of the 253 overall death toll. "When he felt suspicious about the bomber he could have run away to safety but I think he chose to scuffle with him in order to stop him from entering the church," his father Velusami Raju said. "I feel very proud that he saved so many lives, especially so many children," he added.

### Jihadist target

The east coast city is thought to have become a target as the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) blamed for the attacks came from the region. Zion church was packed at the time and there were dozens of children fresh from Sunday school. Raju had volun-



**BATTICALOA, Sri Lanka:** In this photo Velusami Raju, father of the Zion Church suicide blast victim Ramesh Raju, looks next to a banner displaying Ramesh Raju portrait at his house, in Kattankudy. — AFP

teered to help manage the crowds, according to witnesses. When he spotted an unfamiliar man carrying two huge bags, Raju confronted him and asked him to leave them outside. The bomb went off during the argument.

A number of other children and parents who were outside at the time were killed along with him. "He was a very good man," said Raju's father, who described his eldest son as the "pillar" of their large family. "Every memory we shared is so precious... He was the main support for our family, for his three younger sisters and younger brother," the 63-year-old said. Father and son spoke just minutes before the explosion, Velusami said. Raju promised to call him back once the service was over.

The next time his phone rang, it was a parishioner calling to tell him his son had been killed in a blast. Raju's younger sister also died in the bombing, along with her hus-

band and 20-month-old son. "I have lost my grandson but at the same time I feel so proud that my son saved so many children, so other families don't have to go through what we are going through," the retired mill worker said, choking back tears.

### Services halted

Tucked away on a leafy street, the church is now surrounded by heavy security and investigators comb the premises for evidence. The congregation does not know when a service will be held there again. The other two churches attacked were Roman Catholic and the church's leaders have suspended all services across the country until Sri Lankan authorities can guarantee security. Raju was a success story in the Muslim-majority town, setting up his own company at the age of 28 and raising a family with his high school sweetheart. — AFP

## India investigates 40 migrant workers in Gabon after UN flags labor abuses

**NEW DELHI:** India is investigating the treatment of 40 migrant workers in Gabon after the United Nations said on Friday it was alarmed by allegations of labor abuse that could amount to modern slavery. A group of Indian laborers have been trapped in the Central African country since their employer - an India-based timber company - confiscated their identity documents, according to "credible information" received by UN human rights experts.

The workers have allegedly not been provided with written contracts or valid work visas, are required to do excessive overtime with no weekly rest, and are not paid regularly, said the U.N. Working Group on Business and Human Rights. Indian government sources said authorities were looking into the matter, and had notified its high commission in Gabon. Gabon's labor ministry and government spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"These precarious working conditions, restrictions on their freedom of movement and confiscation of their identity documents by the company may amount to contemporary forms of slavery and to human trafficking," the UN experts said in a statement. The United Nations said they had been in contact with India, Gabon, and the company, and urged all to look into the issue. The company named in the UN statement - India-based timber

firm Accurate Industries - could not be reached for comment.

The 40 workers - some of whom were interviewed by the UN experts by phone following a tipoff about their situation from within Gabon - are likely just the tip of the iceberg, according to Surya Deva, chairperson of the UN working group. "We do not fully know how many other companies and how many other workers are there, but based on the information we have it seems this is a pattern," Deva said. "There could be other companies doing something similar." The United Nations said the workers were based in the Gabon Special Economic Zone in Nkok, which says on its website it is "the biggest furniture manufacturing cluster in Central Africa." Special economic zones are manufacturing areas set up to attract foreign investment with tax exemptions and flexible labour laws, yet they risk becoming "black holes for human rights abuses," said Deva.

"This case we felt is not only serious but also reflective of the wider issues in special economic zones all over the world including in Africa and Asia," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "That's why we thought we should highlight it." About 23 Indian firms - mainly in the timber sector - were granted licenses to set up units in Gabon's special economic zone in 2016, according to the Indian foreign ministry website. — Reuters

## Two Koreas mark Moon-Kim summit anniversary with different tones

**SEOUL:** North and South Korea yesterday struck different notes as they marked the first anniversary of a summit between their leaders that fuelled a whirlwind of diplomacy which has died down amid deadlock over Pyongyang's denuclearization. Kim Jong Un and President Moon Jae-in held their first meeting on April 27 last year in the Demilitarized Zone dividing the peninsula amid a rapid diplomatic thaw, paving the way for a historic summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump in Singapore in June.

But one year later, little progress has been made on North Korea's nuclear weapons, with Pyongyang and Washington deadlocked since a second summit between Trump and Kim in Hanoi in February broke down without a deal. Moon, who brokered the first meeting between the two mercurial leaders, has tried to salvage the diplomacy although the North has remained largely unresponsive. North Korea did not respond to the South's invitation this week for Saturday's ceremony at Panmunjom-where Moon and Kim exchanged warm smiles and hugs-to commemorate their landmark meeting last year.

Instead, the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, which handles inter-Korean relations, urged Seoul



**PANMUNJOM:** A screen showing a picture of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un is seen during a ceremony to mark the first anniversary of the Panmunjom declaration between Moon and Kim which was held on the southern side of Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). — AFP

Saturday to take "more active measures" to improve ties. The Moon-Kim summit a year ago had restarted the "ticking of the reunification clock", it said, but the US was pressuring Seoul to lock steps in their approach towards the nuclear-armed North. "A grave situation is being created that may see a return to the past of reaching catastrophe in the thickening dangers of war," it said in a lengthy statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

### New path

At yesterday's ceremony, musicians from South Korea, the US, Japan and China performed at the South's side of Panmunjom. Both Moon and Kim were absent at the low-

key event, which was attended by some 500 diplomats, government officials and civilians. "This is a new path, and as we all must take it together, we need, sometimes, to wait for those moving slower to catch up," Moon said in a video message.

The meeting last April-the first inter-Korean summit in 11 years-was high on headline-grabbing symbolism, with Moon stepping briefly into the North and the two sharing an intimate one-on-one woodland chat before live TV cameras. The pair met twice more last year-the second, an impromptu encounter after Trump threatened to cancel the Singapore summit just weeks before it was due, and Moon flew to Pyongyang for his third meeting with Kim. — AFP

## US agrees with Russia, China on pulling troops from Afghanistan

**WASHINGTON:** United States on Friday found backing from rivals Russia and China on the key formula of a peace deal it is negotiating in Afghanistan-withdrawing troops in return for Taliban pledges not to welcome foreign extremists. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US envoy who is set shortly to hold his latest round of talks with the Taliban, called the consensus a "milestone" in efforts to end the war after he met Russian and Chinese representatives in Moscow.

A joint statement by the three countries called for an "inclusive Afghan-led" peace process and outlined points expected to feature in an eventual agreement. "The three sides call for an orderly and responsible withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan as part of the overall peace process," said the statement issued by the US State Department. They also said that the Taliban have made a "commitment" to fight the extremist Islamic State group and sever ties to Al-Qaeda.

The Taliban have promised to "ensure the areas they control will not be used to threaten any other country," the state-

ment said, calling on them to prevent any "terrorist recruiting, training and fundraising." Khalilzad said that the statement, along with his talks earlier in the week in London with European envoys, "means we have an emerging international consensus on US approach to end the war AND assurances terrorism never again emanates from Afghanistan."

"More to do but important milestone," he tweeted. President Donald Trump is eager to end America's longest-ever war, which was launched in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks, when the then Taliban regime gave shelter to Al-Qaeda. Russia and China both have strong interests in Afghanistan. Some 14,000 Soviet soldiers were killed in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 in a conflict with US-backed Islamic guerrillas.

China has been stepping up its involvement in Afghanistan both militarily and economically as it voices worries that militants could sneak into its restive Muslim-majority Xinjiang region. Khalilzad will also hold separate talks during his latest trip with Pakistan and India, which have strongly different views on Afghanistan. One major sticking point is the Taliban's refusal to negotiate with the government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, which has wide-ranging international support. The United States, Russia and China called on the Taliban to speak as soon as possible with a "broad, representative Afghan delegation that includes the government." — AFP

## Analysis

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## Washington Watch

Bringing light  
to the darkness

By Dr James J Zogby

Daily, we are inundated by a numbing and dizzying array of outrageous horrors and painful tragedies occurring both here at home and abroad. There are reports of: Families torn apart by war, domestic strife, or callous authorities; innocent lives taken by cruel acts of terror or brutally insensitive governmental action; and the freedoms of individuals and groups denied by repressive regimes or discriminatory policies.

With so much accumulated pain and suffering, it often becomes difficult to sustain the confidence that good will triumph over evil and the hope in a better tomorrow. At the times when I'm feeling overwhelmed by what appears to be the mountains of evil that confront our humanity, I turn to a simple insight I gleaned from my favorite theologian/philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin.

Teilhard would suggest it's not that there's more evil in today's world, it's that we are more aware of the evil that exists. And it is precisely because we are more conscious, that we are more capable of responding to the suffering and acting to ameliorate the conditions that have produced it. A century ago, unspeakable horrors took place on every continent that were known only to the victims and the perpetrators. Not so today. As a result of advances in communications - from the telegraph and radio to satellite television and the internet - the pain and loss of global tragedies are brought home to us in real time.

Because of this expanding consciousness, the post-World War II era has witnessed the rise of visionary leaders and the birth of countless organizations dedicated to alleviating suffering and elevating the causes of peace, human rights, and tolerance among peoples. Individually and collectively, they have championed the rights of peoples in far-flung corners of the world, some of which had been previously unknown to those who became their advocates. These same leaders and groups have also fought for civil rights and for economic, social, political, and environmental justice in their own countries.

Seeing our ever-expanding response to evil gives us hope and inspires us to do more. The bottom line is that despite all that is wrong in today's world, humanity is, in fact, in a better place today than ever before in history. A few examples: We read commentaries suggesting that the instability, terror, and wars raging across the Arab World are unprecedented, with Western analysts suggesting that it's all the result of the endemic brutality or dysfunctionality of Arab culture or society. In response, I ask these "scholars" to recall that in a short 30-year period of European history, nations on that continent fought two wars that produced the horrific slaughter of more than 50,000,000 souls. Added to this were the tens of millions of Arabs, Africans, and Asians who, during that same time frame, were victims of Europe's oppressive and violent colonial rule.

Most of those tens of millions died without provoking any questioning - then or now - of what was wrong with European society or Christian culture. While innocent Armenians, Ukrainians, Indians, and Algerians cruelly lost their lives, their tragedies were not recognized until decades later. Today, on the other hand, we organize protests in defense of the Rohingya Muslims, the people of Darfur or East Timor or Gaza, or the Yazidis and Christians in Iraq. We have international NGOs waging campaigns for justice for oppressed peoples on the other side of the world, mobilizing protests on behalf of victims of torture, or raising billions of dollars to house those displaced by war or to rescue victims of natural disasters or famine.

Looking to my own country, just a little over five decades ago, millions of African Americans lived under a repressive discriminatory regime that denied them basic human rights and justice. And during World War II, over one hundred thousand Japanese American citizens lost their businesses, property, and their freedom as they were placed in concentration camps for the duration of the war.

Today, African Americans, although still plagued by economic and social inequities and still victims of official violence at the hands of authorities, have made significant advances because powerful movements organized by their own visionary leaders and supported by other people of conscience, rose up to demand justice and press for change. And while many feared that in the post-9/11 period that Arab and Muslims in America might suffer the same fate as the Japanese Americans, a coalition of dozens of civil rights, religious, and ethnic communities - led by Japanese Americans - mobilized to defend them. The same coalition came together, almost spontaneously, and packed US airports to welcome Muslims to America after President Trump announced his now infamous "Muslim Ban."

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



This photo taken on April 17, 2019 shows customers inside a convenience store in Tokyo. — AFP

## Convenient but controversial: Konbinis under fire

It may be I am but Tokyo's omnipresent convenience stores, known as "konbini", are busy with customers dropping in for everything from milk to underwear. Popping in for a cheeky late alcopop at a busy konbini near Tokyo's Ueno Station, Mai Tsumuraya says: "I finish work late... The supermarket closes early so I come to a convenience store. It's very convenient." Day or night, they are rarely short of customers, but the much-loved stores are now at the center of a row over whether they should stay open 24 hours a day, every day of the year - a debate that strikes at the heart of crippling labor shortages in ageing Japan.

Visitors to Tokyo are often amazed at the sheer volume of stores. There are 56,000 across Japan and in the capital, it is not uncommon to see different konbini at all four corners of a crossroads. They provide a bewildering array of products, from toilet paper to bento boxes to hot chicken yakitori skewers. In addition, customers can do their photocopying, take out cash, pick up deliveries and even pay their bills. They also play a social role, providing a well-lit and always-staffed sanctuary, as well as a gathering point during natural disasters. The stores, run by franchisees, never, ever close.

## 'Collapse from overwork'

The recent row started with a store in the city of Higashi-Osaka, in the west of the country. Franchise owner Mitoshi Matsumoto made national headlines when he started closing his Seven-Eleven store between 1am and 6am, bringing him into conflict with company HQ. The 57-

year-old began shutting up shop in February when his wife, who helped him run the store, died.

But Seven-Eleven Japan insisted he continue the 24-hour service. "The company thinks we should run 24 hours no matter what, even if we collapse from overwork," he tells AFP, adding he once worked for 38 hours straight due to a lack of staff. "When you look at the costs and benefits, there's nothing good about this (24-hour) system," adds Matsumoto, who says he went public after being threatened with a fine of 17 million yen (\$150,000). Challenged by AFP, Seven-Eleven Japan declined to comment.

The firm's president Kazuki Furuya stepped down earlier this month. No official reason was given for his departure but critics said he had failed to respond to the discontent among franchisees. The government has got involved too, with industry minister Hiroshige Seko urging convenience store chains to come up with plans to tackle long hours and labour shortages in the sector, calling konbini part of "Japan's social infrastructure."

Seko's ministry have compiled a survey showing nearly two-thirds of franchisees (61 percent) said they cannot find enough staff - up from 22 percent in 2014. Moreover, 40 percent said they were unhappy with their situation, complaining of low profits and high royalties paid to the company head office. This was up from 17 percent four years ago. "The labor shortage has become more serious than ever in the past few years," Tomomi Nagai, chief analyst at Toray Corporate Business Research, explains. "It's difficult to keep part-timers after midnight because wages aren't high but the job is complicated due to vari-

ous services offered at the shops," she says. "As a result, franchise-store owners are forced to work long hours and they're frustrated."

## 'I'm spoiled'

Chains including Seven Eleven are now beginning to trial shorter working hours in a handful of stores and are boosting the use of self-checkouts and automation - with one firm testing a human-free system from midnight to 5am in two shops. But analysts say the 24-hour system is vital for efficient management of the stores. "Workers clean the shops and renew merchandise at night. They also wait for trucks bringing products," says Masayuki Kubota, chief strategist at Rakuten Securities. "The supply chain will be less effective if more stores close at night, because deliveries will have to be made mostly in the morning when the road is congested," Kubota insists.

Even disgruntled franchisee Matsumoto says there needs to be a balance. He explains: "I'm not saying all the stores should stop operating 24 hours. But we need a flexible system where we can do both 24 hours and shorter hours." While the Japanese love the convenience offered by the konbini, a recent survey showed that eight out of 10 believe the 24/7 system needed reform. Kota Shibai, a 22-year-old consultant insists it is "not normal" to operate 24 hours a day when there is insufficient manpower. And Tsumuraya, the late-night shopper in Ueno, says: "I'll manage somehow if no konbini is open. But I live my life on the premise that it is. She adds: "I know I'm spoiled." — AFP

CAR city casts  
worried eye at  
rise of warlords

Even by the turbulent standards of the Central African Republic, the sight was remarkable: a regional warlord stood next to VIPs at ceremonies in a city where his name is widely feared. Less than four months earlier, Ali Darassa's militia, the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC), had been battling the forces of the government and the United Nations. Today, though, their representatives now stood alongside him in the key city of Bambari - the next phase in a controversial bid to bring peace in the troubled country.

After seven failed peace deals since 2013, an accord reached in Khartoum in February has allotted government roles to 14 militia chiefs who control most of the country's territory, frequently fighting over resources and clashing over ethnic or religious affiliation. The big hope is to encourage the warlords to work together, beefing up security and shoring up governance.

But critics fear the concessions could be a free pass to men who should be prosecuted for extrajudicial killing, rape, looting and other crimes. The new posts risk a "sacrifice of the need for justice", warned Thierry Vircoulon, a specialist observer, after previous peace deals were undermined by the prospect of trial for war crimes. "Zero tolerance for impunity," said Vircoulon, referring to a UN watchword, "has become 'zero tolerance for justice'."

## Local fears

The ceremony in Bambari on April 15 was to present future members of mixed units that will help provide security - an innovation incorporating rebel fighters and members of the armed forces. Darassa, a self-appointed four-star general, was joined on the town hall steps by Prime Minister Firmin Ngrebada, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN under secretary-general for peacekeeping operations, and Smail Chergui, African Union commissioner for peace and security.

On March 24, three warlords were formally appointed as special military advisers to the prime minister. Two of them are Mahamat Al Khatim,

leader of the Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC), and Sidiki Abass, commander of a group called Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation, known as 3R. The third is Darassa, who took up the post in Bambari, a crossroads town in the centre of the country. An anonymous UN source told AFP the appointment "means that he is taking charge of Bambari with the approval of Bangui".

Townfolk turned out in strength for the ceremony but "the population was on edge", Mayor Abel Matchipata told AFP. "The conflict has led to many victims and many abuses - we have a lot of trouble with the armed groups." But, he said, "We have no alternative but to accept the Khartoum accords. We have to make concessions, that is the only way if we want peace."

In 2017, MINUSCA - the UN mission in CAR - drove the UPC out of town and Darassa became persona non grata there. But his men adopted a low profile and went on imposing "taxes" on cattle and minerals, before returning to open hostilities by May 2018, attacking police headquarters, church premises and several non-governmental organizations, according to a UN report. "Ali Darassa's appointment as a military adviser for the area where his men have committed war crimes should not be used to give him immunity from investigation into the UPC's abuses," said Lewis Mudge, Central Africa director at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

## Promises

Facing mounting criticism, the authorities have sought to provide assurance. In a joint statement issued six days after the Bambari ceremony, the UN and MINUSCA insisted that Darassa "has not been entrusted with an official security role" for Bambari. "The security of the town of Bambari remains and will remain the responsibility of the national authorities, with the support of MINUSCA," stressed the communiqué, which noted that the mixed brigades "are not yet operational".

And on Thursday, the CAR presidency said the peace agreement "does not grant amnesty" and was "subject to the constitution". The deal also "attaches importance to the fight against impunity," it insisted. But many question whether the unusual cohabitation can last, or whether it will simply be exploited by militia chiefs. "There is a real risk that these new advisors or ministers will work to increase their military power and finance their armed groups," said Nathalia Dukhan of the US think-tank Enough Project. — AFP

Symbol of Sudan protest  
movement pushes for change

Sudanese student Alaa Salah emerged as a singing symbol of the protest movement that toppled leader Omar al-Bashir, and now insists she will keep demonstrating until civilian rule is secured. The 22-year-old engineering and architecture undergraduate shot to prominence when a picture of her in a white robe leading chanting crowds from atop a car in Khartoum went viral on social media. Shortly after on April 11 the army ousted long-time leader Bashir, but since then a 10-member military council has resisted calls to hand over power.

Every evening Salah heads down to join the crowds still camped out around the army headquarters in the capital - leading thousands of demonstrators in singing out their calls for change. "We are staying at the protest site until all our demands are met," Salah said in an interview with AFP. "We want a democratic civilian government and that all corrupt figures of the previous regime be prosecuted." Like many gathered outside the military complex she insists "we don't want just words, we want actions". "Bashir was just the face of the regime, we want the entire regime to be uprooted."

## 'No political aspirations'

Portraits of Salah - dubbed "Kandaka" or Nubian queen online - have appeared on murals across Khartoum in the wake of Bashir's fall. The iconic image captured her wearing the traditional flowing white headscarf and skirt, her golden full-moon earrings reflecting in the fading sunset. The outfit is a nod to the lead role played by women in the protests that ended

three decades of iron-fisted rule by the veteran leader. "I wore this attire as part of an initiative to support the revolution," she says.

Symbolic too is the chant that she recites to raise the spirits of the demonstrators. The words are those of a well-known Sudanese poem that says "a bullet does not kill, what kills is the people's silence" - a sentiment she says aptly captures Sudan's new spirit of defiance. The protest movement in the country initially erupted in December in response to tripling of bread prices by the authorities. It swiftly mushroomed into nationwide demonstrations against Bashir led by an umbrella group of unions and opposition political groups called the Alliance for Freedom and Change.

Protest leaders from the alliance successfully mobilized supporters - young, old, women, men, professionals and students - by posting their calls for demonstrations online. "I'm one of those who took to the streets based on the schedules announced by the Alliance for Freedom and Change," Salah said. She also participated in protests on her campus as the demonstrations on the street drew a brutal crackdown from the authorities.

Officials say at least 65 people have been killed in protest-related violence since December.

Despite her new-found fame as the face of the uprising, Salah insists that she intends to limit her involvement in politics to these protests. "I have no political affiliation. I am a normal citizen who took to the streets for the sake of our country," she said. "I don't have any aspirations in politics...but I like to do social work." — AFP

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## Business

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LOS ANGELES: People stand in a Tesla showroom at a shopping mall in Los Angeles on Friday. — AFP

# Tesla CEO Musk strikes deal with regulators

## Settlement sets out guidelines on topics Musk should avoid on social media

**NEW YORK:** Elon Musk and US stock market regulators told a US court on Friday that they have reached a deal to settle their differences over the Tesla chief executive's Twitter use.

The settlement between Musk and the Securities and Exchange Commission sets out clearer guidelines on topics Musk should avoid on Twitter or other social media, including statements about acquisitions, mergers, new products and production numbers. Musk would have to adhere to Tesla rules regarding potentially significant comments by executives, and have tweets or other social media posts pre-approved by "an experienced securities lawyer employed by the company," according to the proposed settlement.

"The parties have reached an agreement to resolve the commission's pending contempt motion," a joint court filing said. A Friday deadline set by US District Judge Alison Nathan was extended until April 30 after Musk and the SEC asked for time to have a final version of the settlement ready to submit for court approval. The SEC said in the filing that the settlement "is fair, reasonable, and in the interest of the parties and investors because the proposed revisions will provide additional clarity regarding the written communica-

tions for which the defendant is required to obtain pre-approval."

SEC officials had originally argued Musk should be held in contempt of court for allegedly violating an earlier settlement on tweeting potentially market-sensitive information without having it reviewed by counsel. At a hearing earlier this month, Nathan ordered both sides to try to work out their differences, suggesting she could rule on the case if the talks failed.

The judge appeared sympathetic at times with some of the government's arguments, but she also expressed significant reservations about finding Musk in contempt, which she said was "serious business" and a ruling that placed a "significant burden" of proof on the government.

### Truce?

If approved, the settlement would mark a truce in Musk's dispute with the SEC after an October agreement required him to step down as chairman and pay \$20 million to settle charges he defrauded investors with false claims on Twitter in August about a possible bid to take the company private, which was quickly aborted. The settlement,

which allowed Musk to remain as CEO, required him to obtain pre-approval from Tesla counsel before making written communications "that contain, or reasonably could contain, information material to Tesla or its stockholders."

The SEC cracked down after Musk tweeted on February 19 that Tesla would make 500,000 cars in 2019 — up from the 400,000 that the company had estimated until then, an apparent increase on a benchmark tied to profitability.

Musk corrected himself four hours later, saying that Tesla would indeed produce about 400,000 cars this year. SEC attorney Cheryl Crumpton argued that the February 19 tweet and the fact that Musk had not submitted any tweets for pre-publishing review showed he had made no serious effort to follow the requirement.

John Hueston, an attorney representing Musk, had countered that Musk's February 19 tweet was not consequential to investors, and that the language in the settlement was ambiguous on what types of information needed to be reviewed prior to publication.

He also argued that the SEC had been hasty in seeking a contempt ruling without first trying to confer with Musk.

### Sputtering deliveries

Word of a settlement came just days after Tesla disclosed a heavy loss in the first quarter as car deliveries sputtered overseas and a US tax credit that made its prices more attractive was reduced.

The California-based company reported a loss of \$702 million in the first three months of this year after two consecutive quarters of profit. Tesla produced about 63,000 Model 3 vehicles in the period, an increase of three percent from the same quarter a year earlier but fewer than had been anticipated. The company attributed its disappointing financial results to Model 3 shipping delays, particularly in Europe and China. Overall company revenue in the period rose 33 percent to \$4.5 billion in a year-over-year comparison, but fell far short of Wall Street forecasts.

Tesla was confident it would get past the financial speed-bumps and into a smoother road to improved fortune. The company expected to remain on course to deliver between 360,000 and 400,000 vehicles in total this year, topping 2018 numbers by at least 45 percent. Tesla shares that finished the official trading day down five percent regained a little ground to \$237.31 in after-market trading. — AFP

## Russia not to raise output now after Iran waivers end

**BEIJING:** Russia will not immediately raise oil output after the United States ends sanctions waivers for buyers of Iranian crude in May, President Vladimir Putin said yesterday. The United States announced this week that, in a bid to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero, it would from May 2 end US waivers that countries such as India, China, South Korea and Turkey currently have on buying Iranian crude.

Eight countries including China, India and Turkey had been given temporary waivers by the US when it reimposed sanctions on Iran last year. "Russia is ready to meet the needs of not just China, but of all our partners around the world," Putin told reporters on the sidelines of a summit in Beijing.

"We currently produce 1.5 million barrels of oil per day and we can produce more. We have colossal potential," Putin said. "But we have an agreement with OPEC to maintain production at a certain level and this agreement is in force until July," he added.

The end of the exemptions sparked fears of supply shortages, pushing oil prices to near six-month highs. "I can't imagine how the world energy market will react" after the waivers end in May, Putin said. But, he added, "none of our partners, including Saudi Arabia, is withdrawing from our agreements within OPEC." Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, has also said it had no immediate plans to raise oil output after the sanctions waivers end. — AFP



LONDON: A tattered European Union (EU) flag hangs from a tree outside the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, central London on Friday. — AFP

## S&P and Fitch warn UK rating still at risk from a no-deal Brexit

**LONDON:** Britain's credit rating remains at risk of a further downgrade despite the extended deadline for its departure from the European Union, ratings agencies S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings said on Friday. "The agreement between the EU and the UK to further extend the process ... to 31 October 2019 reduces but does not eliminate the risk of a 'no-deal' Brexit over the next six months," Fitch said.

British Prime Minister Theresa May secured the extension to the Brexit deadline earlier this month after failing to bridge the divide within her own Conservative Party over the terms of Britain's departure from the EU. The delay averted the risk of an immediate no-deal Brexit which would deliver a shock to the world's fifth-biggest economy but the uncertainty remains, weighing on many companies which have cut back on investment.

S&P said its negative outlook reflected the risk of sustained economic weakness and a hit to government finances if Britain

lost access to EU markets, investors took fright or sterling's status as a reserve currency came under pressure. Fitch and S&P both have a AA rating on British government debt. S&P said it could revise its outlook to stable if negotiations with the EU provided more certainty for the economy, and if key sectors retained access to EU markets without penalizing tariffs or significant non-tariff barriers.

However, the ratings agency said it saw no easy end to the Brexit impasse in parliament, and even if Britain avoided a no-deal Brexit, its outlook was sobering. S&P expected the economy would grow by just 1.1 percent this year - its slowest pace in a decade - before picking up only slightly over the next three years. That sluggish growth was likely to constrain the government's ability to raise public spending, despite promises by Finance Minister Philip Hammond that he would be able to end austerity if Britain secured a Brexit deal. S&P also said the extension to the deadline for agreeing to Britain's exit from the EU meant London and Brussels would have even less time to thrash out their future trading relationship, the planned second phase of their negotiations.

"The originally envisaged 21 months was already a rather ambitious timeframe and the considerably shorter 14-month transition period may well prove to be inadequate, in our opinion," it said. — Reuters

# THE BEST JUST GOT BETTER

## ALSAYER Launches Next-Generation Hiace with Advanced Safety and Impressive New Features

- Semi-bonnet design offers outstanding performance, including ride comfort, quietness, and collision safety
- A wider choice of new engines and longer wheelbases
- Improved straight-line performance and stability

Keeping up with its heritage of transporting people and goods with peace of mind, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer has revealed a new-generation Toyota Hiace van and bus range with advanced safety features, powerful new engines, increased ride comfort, and a host of new specifications. Featuring a semi-bonnet design that enhances reliability, toughness, and functional beauty, and offering a wider choice of body sizes and wheelbase lengths, the all-new Hiace is set to strengthen the company's share of the Middle East's light commercial vehicle (LCV) market.

The event was attended by Faisal Bader Al Sayer Chairman, Mubarak Naser Al Sayer CEO AlSayer Holding, members of the Top Management from ALSAYER Toyota Group Sales including Johan Heislitz Senior Business Director, Scott McNicol General Manager, Savio Alvares Deputy General Manager Fleet, Hamad Al Fouzan Product Planning Manager, Sales consultants, Group Marketing along with members of the press and media.

According to Mubarak Naser Al Sayer "Toyota is continuing its journey of making ever-better vehicles. Toyota has achieved 9.5 million-unit worldwide sales last year, Thanks to our valuable customers. In Kuwait we have launched several new models - including new Camry, Rush, Avalon and Rav4 Toyota is reinforcing its commitment to offer - nothing but the best, in order to put a smile on our customer's face."

In the region, where tourist footfall and business activity across industries have increased tremendously as a result of the ongoing economic diversification efforts by regional governments, demand has risen for passenger and cargo transportation including tourist minibuses, private buses, and vehicles for use in logistics. The all-new Hiace range has been developed to respond to these diverse and ever-evolving needs.

"Our customers proudly say: Hiace is the No#1 commuter vehicle & Hiace is the No#1 goods carrier. We are always excited to hear such positive reviews from our loyal customers. From a sales point of view, Hiace has been the undisputed leader. Since its introduction over 50 years ago, across its 5 generations Hiace has been the most trusted partner in business. An Unparalleled Hero" said Savio Alvares.

"The Hiace was developed using the keywords 'Hiace Pride' as its foundation, and in line with the concept of being a faithful partner that makes people feel safe, satisfied, and proud. Owners, drivers, and passengers know they are in good hands when they own, drive, and ride in a Hiace," commented Chief Engineer Takuo Ishikawa, who was at the helm of the all-new vehicle's development.

Since the launch of the first-generation Hiace in 1967, it has become one of Toyota's representative global vehicles, with more than 6.24 million units sold in over 150 countries. The Hiace demonstrates prowess through its high durability and reliability, and has been used as a van, minibus, and as private transportation. Currently, it is largely sold in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania, Mexico, and Latin America.

Yugo Miyamoto, Chief Representative, Middle East and North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "We are excited to launch the all-new Hiace in the region, presenting our customers with the total solution for safe, seamless and cost-effective transportation of passengers and cargo. Featuring a semi-bonnet design, the vehicle offers immense flexibility through conversions and customization to meet varied business and personal needs."

Miyamoto added: "The sixth-generation Hiace has expanded its core mission as capable, durable and reliable transport to deliver the comfort and safety that today's motorists demand, whatever the road conditions. Offering minimal downtime and afford-



able maintenance, the all-new vehicle has also sought to reflect the preferences of the region. We thank our loyal customers for their relentless support and valuable feedback that help us develop 'ever-better' cars that are cherished and ridden for many years."

The shift to a semi-bonneted design has enabled the development team at Toyota to implement significant changes, which include a stiffer frame, stronger straight-line performance, greater stability and maneuverability, and more pliant suspension. Complementing the all-new vehicle's enhanced reliability, toughness, and functional beauty is a dynamic driving experience powered by two new engines - a 2.7-liter four-cylinder petrol engine and a 3.5-liter V6 naturally-aspirated petrol engine, with both being offered with a six-speed manual or automatic transmission.

Aiming to enrich the customer's experience, the all-new Hiace has been revamped inside-out with the objective of addressing two goals. The first is to create a vehicle that increases productivity, and the second is to provide safe, comfortable, and reliable transport for people everywhere.

At the literal forefront of the refreshed modern look is the new semi-bonnet design, which means that the engine is no longer mounted atop the front wheel axle. This design creates an external style that suggests a comfortable and sophisticated space. By changing the engine's position, both driver and

passengers can experience better ergonomics, without heat and vibration emanating underneath their seats. This also results in better serviceability, as the engine becomes easier to access compared to the previous generation. Additionally, the vehicle comes with a choice of two body types such as Normal, with a standard roof, and Long, which includes high roof design, to cater to the different needs of customers.

The completely redesigned Hiace features a comfortable interior that reduces driver fatigue, even over long distances, a driver seat lift function - which is a first in a Hiace, and new shape cushions and seatback that contribute to a more comfortable ride and help reduce fatigue for driver and passengers. In addition, a high-performance air conditioning unit with enlarged outlets have been provided for greater airflow, with an easy-slide shutoff function.

The all-new vehicle's spacious cabin space is built for maximized storage, with added features elevating the ownership experience to an unprecedented degree. The sixth-generation Hiace has also adopted a number of improvements for easier ingress and egress. There is noticeably bigger legroom, providing an enhanced riding experience enabled by wider doorsteps, strategically-positioned assist grips, and illuminated entry system.

Similarly, excellent cargo capacity - a hallmark of every Hiace - has been maintained at a maximum of 6.2 cubic meters in Long Wheel Base (LWB)

vans and 9.3 cubic meters in Super Long Wheel Base (SLWB) vans. This thanks to longer wheelbases and clever packaging that increases internal width by 215 mm and height by 5 mm without altering overall exterior width. Allowing customers to load more cargo at a faster pace with forklifts, the SLWB two-seat van is capable of accommodating four European standard pallets, 1,200 mm X 800 mm in dimension, thanks to its wider side door opening at 1,250 mm that enables forklift access. On the other hand, the LWB model is capable of accommodating three European standard pallets.

In addition, numerous flat-mount surfaces and anchor points have been provided to make it easy to alter the vehicle for specialized use. Toyota will also offer a detailed guide to assist bodybuilders in both English and Arabic languages.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the all-new Hiace comes with two drivetrain variants. A 2.7-liter four-cylinder engine producing 148hp and 24.6 torque, while a 3.5-liter V6 petrol engine with 24 valves incorporates Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing-intelligent) and high compression and direct injection (D4-S), to generate a maximum output of 177 hp and 27.8 torque. Both engines have been paired to a six-speed manual or automatic transmission. Furthermore, the manual transmission is equipped with Intelligent Manual Transmission (iMT) to enhance the shift feel and controllability while reducing the cabin noise.

Newly-developed MacPherson struts at the front provide excellent handling and stability, as well as ride comfort. In the rear, the new leaf spring suspension span has been increased by 200 mm, extending the bound stroke by an impressive 30 mm for a comfortable ride while enhancing handling and stability. Furthermore, with its excellent maneuverability, the all-new vehicle is able to turn in 0.2 m less than its previous model when making U-turns and parallel parking.

Living up to the Toyota tradition of always making safety a top priority, the sixth-generation Hiace gives its customers peace of mind by reinforcing both passive and active safety. Engineered to relieve the commuting burden from its drivers and passengers, the all-new vehicle's design cues are inspired by real-world problems to provide modern solutions. In addition to high-level body rigidity achieved through ring-shaped frame structures, the vehicle is characterized by an impact-absorbing body structure that leverages a straight side member to effectively absorb impact energy. The comprehensive array of safety features in the vehicle also include driver and front passenger SRS airbags, and a passenger airbag with a mini-clamshell design to protect center seat passenger.



## Business

# American Airlines cuts profit forecast as 737 MAX woes bite

## US carrier estimates a loss of \$350m due to grounding

**NEW YORK:** American Airlines slashed its profit forecast Friday largely due to the crisis around the Boeing 737 MAX, a somewhat more profound hit to operations and customer bookings than at other carriers affected by the jet's grounding. The US carrier estimated an overall hit of \$350 million to its 2019 earnings as a result of the grounding ordered by global regulators in mid-March following two deadly crashes. That has forced the cancellation of nearly 15,000 flights and the re-accommodation of almost 700,000 customers.

"That's not just our passengers," said American Airlines President Robert Isom. "It's literally thousands of our crew members that have had their work schedule altered on very short notice and that means that our reservations, customer relations and crew resources have been working nonstop and overtime to take care of our customers and team."

American's hit from the MAX crisis came as the aviation industry watches for Boeing to clear several key hurdles with the US Federal Aviation Administration and other global regulators to allow the planes to resume service. On Thursday, the FAA announced it was convening a meeting of global regulators on May 23 to describe its process for ensuring necessary safety fixes are made to get the 737 MAX back in the air.

That step, though keenly desired by carriers, will present its own series of challenges, including reassuring skittish consumers that the planes are safe.

### Costly to rebook

But for now, US airlines are adapting to the absence of the popular aircraft, as well as to the delays in the delivery of new jets they have ordered. American Airlines, which has 24 of the MAX planes in its portfolio, said net income for the first quarter was \$185 million, up 16.4 percent from the same period of the prior year, while revenues rose 1.8 percent to \$10.6 billion.

## Bayer shareholders vote against board over Monsanto merger

**BONN:** Bayer chief executive Werner Baumann was dealt a blow Friday at the German chemical giant's annual general meeting, amid tensions over last year's decision to buy US seeds and pesticides maker Monsanto, as disgruntled shareholders voted against management. At the AGM in Bonn, 55.5 percent voted against the management board, led by embattled CEO Werner Baumann, with just 44.5 percent of shareholders in favor - a huge drop down from 97 percent support last year.

The result is a slap in the face for Baumann and his management team. Although the vote carries no direct consequences, it is a clear statement by disgruntled shareholders. Around 500 protesters gathered outside the Bonn conference center with placards mocking Bayer's corporate motto "science for a better life" or calling to "stop glyphosate", the Monsanto-made herbicide at the center of the group's woes. Inside, investors were fuming.

"Bayer has choked on Monsanto," said Ingo Speich of Deka bank. "The company risks being taken over and dismantled." Mark Tuemmler of investors' federation DSW said 2018 was "a nightmare for shareholders".

### 'A scandal'

Bayer's share price fell last year by around 40 percent following its \$63 billion takeover of Monsanto in June—the biggest in German history. At 57 billion euros, its market capitalization is little higher than the price it paid to acquire Monsanto in the first place. "A scandal," Tuemmler said.

Opening the meeting, Baumann acknowledged that some 13,400 US lawsuits relating to glyphosate and initial unfavorable judgments against Bayer "are placing a heavy burden on our company and worrying many people". Last year's share price plunge was driven by the first of two jury rulings so far that have awarded plaintiffs-cancer

## Global economy is close to stalling as trade falls

**LONDON:** World trade volumes are falling for the first time since the end of the financial crisis in a sign the global economy is only one more major shock away from recession. Trade volumes in the three months between December and February were down 0.8 percent compared with the same period a year earlier, according to the Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis (CPB).

Trade is retreating for the first time since the fourth quarter of 2009, when the economy was still being buffeted by aftershocks from the financial crisis. South Korea's KOSPI-100 equity index, dominated by companies heavily exposed to trade, has been signalling a severe slowdown for almost a year now.

Hong Kong's International Airport, the world's busiest air cargo hub, reported volumes were down more than 5 percent year-on-year in the first three months of 2019. And containers handled through the U.S. Port of Long Beach, one of the major transshipment hubs for goods between the United States and Asia, were down more than 7 percent in the first quarter. Inside the United States, truck freight growth slowed, and rail freight fell, in the three months from December through February compared with the same period a year earlier.

Around the world, manufacturers have reported that export orders have been falling for seven months in a row, the longest slowdown since 2012, according to the JPMorgan global purchasing managers' survey.

### On the brink

So far, the loss of momentum has been felt most strongly in manufacturing and transportation, sectors with heavy international exposure, rather than in more domestically focused services. Bellwethers including 3M Company

The US carrier, which has canceled flights on the Boeing plane through August 19, said it now expects profits this year of \$4.00 to \$6.00 a share, down from the prior range of \$5.50 to \$7.50.

Executives described myriad impacts, such as rebooking customers at the last minute for flights originally booked long in advance at much lower fares. American's outlook also took a hit from higher fuel costs.

Chief Executive Doug Parker said the company pushed back its target for resuming 737 MAX flights so that it could more effectively plan for the peak summer holiday season and said there is "a lot of certainty" that the FAA will certify the plane for service "well before" August 19.

"Obviously, we're not happy about this issue, but no one is," said Parker, adding that the company, like peers, had not discussed any compensation from Boeing at this point. "All of our efforts at this point are working to get the airplane recertified and flying again," he said. "Boeing is a good and long-time partner and we'll work through that privately."

### Most cancellations since 9/11

American Airlines earnings came a day after the predominantly-domestic Southwest Airlines also highlighted the impact of the MAX groundings, along with weather and labor-related disruptions as factors that led to its greatest number of flight cancellations since the third quarter of 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. But 97.5 percent of customers in this case have arrived at destinations on the scheduled day, the result of "very solid" customer service, said Southwest Chief Operating Officer Michael Van de Ven.

Southwest has 34 MAX planes in its current fleet and is targeting August 5 as a resumption date. The company also plans another 41 MAX deliveries this year, although executives indicated some of the deliveries could be pushed into 2020. Chief Executive Gary Kelly said the



**BONN:** The CEO of German chemicals giant Bayer, Werner Baumann, gives a speech during the group's annual general meeting at the World Conference center in Bonn, western Germany on Friday. — AFP

patients who had been exposed to glyphosate over long periods — \$80 million each. Baumann complained that such decisions had been based on a 2015 finding by World Health Organization arm IARC that glyphosate "probably" causes cancer. "We remain convinced of the safety of glyphosate," the CEO said, recalling regulators worldwide found no new evidence that the pesticide causes cancer in reviews prompted by the IARC judgment.

In the two cases already heard, "we remain optimistic that the next higher courts will reach different verdicts," the CEO added, calling for "decisions based on scientific analysis—and not on emotions".

The business case for the merger remained as strong as ever, he assured investors, with the merged companies now operating "leading businesses in chemical and biological crop protection, in conventional and biotech seed, and also in digital farming". And he reiterated the group's targets—including its pharmaceutical and over-the-counter medicines units—to increase sales four percent, to 46 billion euros (\$51 billion) in 2019, with an operating profit before special items of 12.2 billion euros. Current market reactions were "exaggerated" and did not reflect Bayer's "true value", he said. — AFP

(diversified manufacturing), Intel (chip manufacturing), Bombardier (rail and aircraft) and UPS (distribution services) all downgraded their outlooks for 2019 on Thursday.

Rising interest rates, an appreciating dollar and the escalation of oil prices during 2017 and the first part of 2018 all combined to slow the expansion. But policymakers made the slowdown worse by sowing business uncertainty with the proliferation of tariffs, sanctions and national-security related investment restrictions.

The extended shutdown of parts of the US federal government and Britain's botched Brexit process added to the confusion and uncertainty among businesses. The result has been a hesitation to make risky long-term commitments and a slowdown in capital investment which is now weighing on global growth.

The economy is best thought of as a complex system in which positive and negative feedback mechanisms produce oscillations in the rate of expansion (ranging from boom, to steady growth, weak growth and recession). Expansions are characterized by strong positive feedback mechanisms, which ensure once they get going they develop considerable internal momentum (growth fuels more growth).

Momentum also helps inoculate the economy against shocks and makes it more likely to weather them without switching into a recession phase. But as the economy's internal momentum fades, the risk of the system undergoing a phase-change from expansion to contraction increases.

The current slowdown has increased the risk one more major shock or policy error will push the global economy from sluggish expansion into outright recession. Recent increases in major equity indices around the world and the very slight steepening of the US Treasury yield curve suggest investors think the global economy will narrowly avert a recession this year.

Investors are betting continued strength in consumer spending and domestically insulated services sectors may be enough to offset weakness in business investment, manufacturing and trade. But the global economy has come uncomfortably close to stalling. For the expansion to continue, everything must now go right, including steady financial conditions, improved business confidence, appropriate fiscal and monetary policy, stable oil prices and pro-growth trade policy. There is not much room for error. —Reuters



**ARLINGTON:** In this file photo, a man looks out his window at an American Airlines plane at Reagan National Airport in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

company will stick with a plans to add some 250 of the MAX planes to its fleet through 2026, dismissing questions about whether it would shift to Boeing rival Airbus.

"We have no intention of doing anything different in the near-term whatsoever," he said. "We have no plan to do anything other than grow our fleet with the MAX." Southwest is beginning to focus on its messaging to the public as it looks ahead to resuming flights with the MAX. Surveys suggest some customers are not willing to fly on

the planes, at least in the near-term. "We're doing a lot of work understanding what our customers perceptions are," said the airline's President Thomas Nealon. "But there's more work to be done."

Airlines are working closely with their pilots as they look ahead to resuming flights and expect to enlist pilots in testifying to plane safety when the time comes. Shares in American closed down one percent on Friday while Southwest lost 0.7 percent. — AFP

## Total oil, gas output up

**PARIS:** French energy giant Total lifted oil and gas output to record levels to bolster cash flow and lift first quarter net profits Friday—but price volatility kept results in check. Net profits rose 18 percent year-on-year to \$3.11 billion, enabling the firm to

keep a swathe of new projects on the ramp and hail its "strong" balance sheet. But that figure was aided by exceptional items that helped rein in adjusted net income which slipped four percent to \$2.76 billion, slightly below analysts' expectations.

"Markets remain volatile with Brent settling at a first-quarter average \$63 a barrel, down six percent on last year, while gas prices were down 11 percent in Europe and 30 percent in Asia," chairman and CEO Patrick

Pouyanne said in a statement. During the final quarter of last year Brent dove from \$80 a barrel down to \$50.

However the benchmark has risen this year on unrest in Libya, collapsed production in Venezuela, toughened US sanctions on Iran and an accord to limit production between OPEC members and non-members, notably Russia. That led to Brent pushing past the \$75 mark on Thursday for the first time in six months. — AFP



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## Business

# NBK showcases success stories of business banking customers

## University students among attendees join Al-Shaheed Park event



KUWAIT: In a commitment to supporting small and medium enterprises through banking services tailored to their needs, the Business Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait held a talk at Al-Shaheed Park to showcase the success stories of its business customers, discussing their challenges and the services offered by the Bank to help them overcome these obstacles to their growth.

The talk was attended by university students who engaged with the speakers on the business ideas, the challenges and experiences in operating in the Kuwaiti market. The talk aimed at inspiring students and provide them with valuable insights when they venture into entrepreneurship in the future.

Businesses who spoke at the event all agreed that the excellent range of banking products and services

offered by NBK had a great impact on saving time and effort, reducing costs and assisting them in every phase of their business growth.

With a high interaction from the audience, mostly from the younger generation, reaffirms NBK's support to them and in planning for their future.

Commenting on the campaign, Faisal Al-Fulaij, Sales & Acquisition Manager, Business Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said, "NBK holds such exclusive events to cater to our Business Banking customers and connect with small and medium enterprises in the best possible way, all while ensuring we provide them with the full support they need."

Al-Fulaij added, "Today's event is one of the most



unique events we've held, bringing together businesses that are our customers and that have succeeded with the support of NBK's services and facilities. We are happy to see university students take part of such events which comes as part of our vision to also help young individuals in planning for their future and support them from the beginning of their careers."

Al-Fulaij reaffirmed that NBK will continue to provide Business Banking customers with more services in the coming period, always ensuring they receive the best banking solutions that are personalized to their needs. NBK Business Banking customers have access to a wide range of banking products and services including: Business Banking Officers, Points

of Sale, Business Banking Credit Cards, Online Salary Transfers, Online Banking, Insurance, Business Loans, Letters of Credit, Letters of Guarantee and local invoices.

NBK also provides 9 Business Banking branches tailored to the needs of customers and located across Kuwait, including: Head Office, Surra, Shuwaikh, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Arraya Tower 2 (5th floor), Fintas, Ghazali, Sharq, and Ras Salmiya. These branches provide a team of professionals with different expertise to service Business Banking customers. Customers benefit from a one-on-one experience with their Business Banking Officer for credit, financial and investment consulting, commercial finance and treasury.

### Bayt.com weekly report

## 7 red flags to watch out for in an employer

KUWAIT: A manager who is great for someone might not be ideal for everybody else. That's why you need to ask yourself what is it that you want and don't want in a manager before taking up a job offer. Some employers flag warning signals, while others show more acceptable ones. But either way, you should be equipped and ready to notice these signals and move forward with the best job offer for your career goals. If you know what to pay attention to, you will be able to notice the signs that indicate a Bad Employer. Here are some of the things that career experts at Bayt.com recommend you to be aware of:

#### 1. Vague job descriptions.

A manager who doesn't really know the vacant job clearly cannot explain your responsibilities in simple words, tell you what milestones you'll be expected to achieve, or show you how you will get promoted. Inability to specify these elements means that the manager hasn't thought about what she or he really needs. This is the type of manager who is more likely to surprise you with job responsibilities and outcomes different from what you sign up for.

#### 2. The energy in the office

When you walk into the office for your interview you should be wary of the energy level. What is the atmosphere like? Do the employees seem relaxed and happy? Or do they seem stressed and disconnected? Pay attention to your potential coworkers' behavior and watch how they interact with their supervisors as it can tell so much about the work environment.

#### 3. The employer's behavior on the interview

The interviewer should always treat you professionally and respectfully. For example if they show up late for your interview, it is likely to show that they don't truly value you or your time. You can quickly tell when an interviewer is being rude, impolite and unprofessional. If they're checking emails during the interview, constantly making or receiving calls, or even stepping out of the office, then you should know that this is also the type of interaction you will have with your manager once you are hired.

#### 4. Disorganization of the office.

If the people interviewing you seem unready or unprepared, paperwork is flying all over the place, or they are asking questions that are clearly answered in your resume, then those are also bad signs. This could mean that your interviewers haven't taken a look at your resume prior to your arrival. If the managers and interviewers are disorganized then that probably reflects that the work environment is disorganized as well.

#### 5. There's more talking than listening.

It is true that in the interview, you should be learning more about the employer and the company, but this should go both ways. If the employers only talk about themselves and their interests without regard to your own goals and needs, then that is a sign that your employer is not a good listener or is not accommodating.

#### 6. Asking very personal questions.

If a manager asks questions about your religion, marital status or irrelevant demographical enquiries, it shows that the manager isn't trained on ethical interview practices. Such questions are often considered illegal during a job interview and only show an employer's insensitivity to such personal matters.

#### 7. Former employees' feedback

Existing employees might not be comfortable to talk candidly about their managers as it could cause them problems. However, former employees don't have that concern and you can ask them about your future manager. If you're wondering how to contact ex-employees, just be thankful for the internet. Using Websites like bayt.com can now give you the option to search for a specific company and find people who used to work there. You can easily contact them and get your answers right away without having to go through the hiring company.

## Al-Tijari launches Visa Signature Credit Card with range of benefits

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait announced the launch of Visa Signature Card with a wide range of benefits to provide its customers the chance to enjoy access to premium rewards and to enhance and revamp the benefits of the cards offered to its customers by introducing new diverse features on a credit card that would fulfill needs of its customers and live up to their expectations.

In this regard, Hameed Ebrahim Salman, General Manager - Retail Banking Division said "We are glad to announce the launch of Visa Signature Credit Card which comes with exceptional and exclusive benefits that are

accurately selected to suit customers' requirements through the premium rewards and distinct offers customers can enjoy over the globe". Salman explained that customers can now apply for Visa Signature Credit Card with no annual issuance fees for five years.

According to Salman, this card offers customers, among other exclusive benefits, cash back up to 3 percent on their monthly purchases made by using the Bank's Visa Signature, complimentary access to over 900 Global Airport lounges, free multi-trip travel insurance up to \$500,000 from Visa for customers and their families during all trips of up to 90 days when purchasing airline tickets by Visa Signature Credit Card in addition to 24 hours international and local Concierge Service which provides Visa Signature



Hameed Ebrahim Salman

Cardholders with many different personal services that satisfy their needs. Salman went on emphasizing that Visa Signature Cardholders can also enjoy Visa Luxury Hotel Collection that comprises over 900 intriguing & luxurious hotels across the world including boutique hotels & the global renowned hotels and this, in turn, provides customers with a premium collection of benefits. Mr. Salman denoted that the Bank's Visa Signature Cardholders can get 50 percent discount in VOX Cinema when purchasing tickets via VOX Cinema's website and 25 percent discount on VIP tickets, discounts from Avis (Car Rental) in addition to the bank's special promotions and offers from a diverse range of renowned retailers and stores as well as Al-Tijari Offers Program which provides customers with discounts up to 25 percent at reputable restaurants and coffee shops in Kuwait.

Customers can apply for Visa Signature Credit Card by visiting any of the Bank's branches or via the Bank's website and enjoy several financial and banking packages through this card which is locally and globally acceptable at P.O.S terminals, for online purchasing and for cash withdrawal from ATMs in addition to other numerous benefits this card offers.



## Huawei takes pride of great turnout after sales event

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) has proved its devotion to continuously enhancing its quality, performance, and design with an interest in changing the perception of mobile photography, through the Huawei P Series flagship.

Huawei (CBG) has witnessed a great turnout after the pre-booking event held at Huawei Experience Store (HES) in the Avenues Mall, where consumers were given the chance to book their favorite P30 Pro device. Ahead of the pre-booking event,

Huawei has initiated a sales event on the 11th April 2019 marking the first day of the sell-out for the Huawei P30 Series at HES.

Huawei P30 Pro has been awarded the honor of "Best Photo Smartphone" at the TIPA General Assembly, in recognition of the device as one of the best products.

Stressing on targeting all and the social media enthusiasts in specific, Huawei (CBG) has invited the icon of the modest fashion realm, Ascia Al-Faraj, and the creative actress, Farah Al-Hady. Both have interacted crazily with the public in the Avenues Mall and covered the event on social media.

"We, at Huawei Consumer Business Group Kuwait (CBG), were happy to see the excitement of the crowd here in the State of Kuwait, and proud of the great turnout after the launch of the Huawei P30 Series. We will continuously put the efforts to offer our consumers the advanced technology they are eager to," stated Jason Jiang, General Manager of Huawei CBG Kuwait.



## NBK announces winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draw

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait continues to reward its customers with Al-Jawhara Account through weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. The bank recently announced the winners of the weekly draw for the month of April, naming, Talal Abdullaheem Fahad Al-Zaid, Jamal Khalied Abdullahif Alduhaim, Heirs of Khayriya Habib Ramadan Boushehri and Min Hussain Maitham Taleb Hajeyah, as the winners of the KD 5,000 prize each.

## US economy expands 3.2% in Q1; growth details weak

WASHINGTON: US economic growth accelerated in the first quarter, but the burst in growth was driven by a smaller trade deficit and the largest accumulation of unsold merchandise since 2015, temporary boosters that are seen weighing on the economy later this year.

The surge in growth reported by the Commerce Department on Friday put to rest fears of a recession, that were stoked by a brief inversion of the U.S. Treasury yield curve in March. But it also exaggerates the health of the economy as consumer and business spending slowed sharply, and investment in homebuilding contracted for a fifth straight quarter.

Gross domestic product increased at a 3.2 percent annualized rate in the first quarter, the government said in its advance GDP report. Growth was also driven by increased investment in roads by local and state governments. "The gain in first-quarter GDP would seem to make a mockery of claims that the US economy is slowing as the fiscal stimulus fades," said Paul Ashworth, chief US economist at Capital Economics in Toronto. "Looking beyond the headline number, however, there are plenty of causes for concern."

The economy grew at a 2.2 percent pace in the October-December period.

Automatically entering customers into the draws, Al-Jawhara Account gives customers a chance to win KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly and a KD 250,000 grand prize quarterly for every KD 50 deposited into their account. If no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the required period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Since 2012, the National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes up to KD 2,200,000 in the weekly, monthly, and quarterly Al-Jawhara draws. All the draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the name of all the winners are announced. Customers can open an Al-Jawhara Account by simply visiting any NBK Branch.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast GDP increasing at a 2.0 percent rate in the first three months of the year. The economy will mark 10 years of expansion in July, the longest on record. President Donald Trump cheered the economy's performance in the first quarter. "This is far above expectations or projections," Trump tweeted.

The White House has sought to boost growth through an array of policies, including a \$1.5 trillion tax cut package passed in December 2017. Economists believe the fiscal stimulus, which also included more government spending, peaked in the third quarter. They expect GDP to slow this year, with annual growth forecast around 2.5 percent, below the Trump's administration's 3 percent target. The economy missed the growth target in 2018.

Excluding trade, inventories and government spending, the economy grew at only a 1.3 percent rate in the first quarter, the slowest since the second quarter of 2013. This measure of domestic demand increased at a 2.6 percent pace in the October-December quarter. A gauge of inflation tracked by the Federal Reserve increased at a 1.3 percent rate last quarter. Fed policymakers are likely to shrug off the last quarter's growth spurt and focus on the weak domestic demand and inflation when they meet next week. The US central bank recently suspended its three-year monetary policy tightening campaign, dropping forecasts for any interest rate increases this year. The Fed raised borrowing costs four times in 2018. "The Fed will focus on the composition of growth, which points to a slowing trend amid softening inflation," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM in New York. — Reuters

What's On



# LAPA celebrates World International Property Day



**L**oyac Academy of Performing Arts "LAPA" recently celebrated the World Intellectual Property Day, as part of its joint cultural and art cooperation with American Embassy in Kuwait on April 26. The event was held at its premise at Al-Qibliya School in the presence of the US ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman. Fare'a Al-Saqqaf, Head of LOYAC said, "We celebrate World Intellectual Property Day to acknowledge its role at encouraging innovation and creativity among youth." Al-Saqqaf added that it is important to raise awareness among the society to make it an important part of their culture of respecting these rights.

The event witnessed the participation of LAPA's musical team with the American international artist Aliya Cycon. The LAPA team also presented five famous Arab songs with the contribution of Youssef Barra. Silverman stressed his support to LOYAC's activities and underlined the importance of building bridges between Kuwaiti and American artists, in order to exchange culture and arts. It is worth mentioning that the event hosted Pete Mahravari, Specialist of Intellectual Properties in the Middle East, who explained to the participants the importance of protecting their musical creativity and explained the legal procedures to be followed in case of theft.



## DWC organizes cultural night



**T**he Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) in Kuwait has recently organized, in cooperation with the Embassies of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Algeria, Pakistan, Bosnia, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Kyrgyz, a cultural night on Latin Cooking Art and Kuwaiti Dishes, at the residence of the ambassador of Honduras. It was attended by a

number of dignitaries headed by Sheikha Hala Mohammed Bader Al-Sabah who was honored for her continuous support to the committee's activities. Narjis Al-Shatti, the committee's advisor, thanked the participants and pointed out that the committee will continue its cultural activities in order to aware the diplomatic society of the various cultures of Kuwait.

## Japanese Embassy in Kuwait announces Govt Scholarship 2020

**T**he Embassy of Japan is pleased to announce that the Government of Japan offers scholarship to those who wish to study at Japanese universities as undergraduate and research students. The Japanese Government Scholarship was established in 1954 in order to increase mutual understanding between the people of Japan and other countries as well as to make an international contribution to the intellectual field. All Kuwaiti citizens who meet the qualifications below are eligible to apply:

**Undergraduate students**  
Requirements: Completed 12-year school curriculum, good academic standing.  
Age: Born on or after April 2, 1995.  
Years of study: 5 years from April 2020 to March 2025.  
Fields of study: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities.  
Five years of study including one year for studying the Japanese language.

**Research students**  
Requirements: Completed 16-years of school education.  
Age: Born on or after April 2, 1985.  
Years of study: 2 years from April 2020 to March 2022 or 1 year and 6 months from Oct 2020 to March 2022.  
Fields of study: Field of study majored at university or related to it.  
Years of study might extend depending on the major category.  
Application forms, detailed information and other conditions can be downloaded from Embassy's website. The deadline for submitting applications is June 30, 2019. Only hard copies, preferably printed on A4 size paper, and mailed through courier or hand-delivered to the Embassy, will be accepted. The applications process consists of document screening, written exams, and personal interview. Academic exams will be held on July 2, 2016. Applicants are advised to prepare for it by referring to the past exams.

## Baby Dedication



**C**ongratulations Mr/Mrs Isaac Mensah on the arrival of your baby boy Kairos Favour. May God bless and protect your family. Greetings from LAIF, family, friends and well wishers.

Health

# Shadow of sanctions looms large over Venezuela's sick

**UN: Seven million Venezuelans are urgently in need of humanitarian aid**

**CARACAS:** In sanctions-scourged Venezuela, the sick suffer the most. Five-year-old Zabdriel needs a bone marrow transplant. Venezuela's government has stopped paying his treatment, blaming sanctions by the United States — which is set to add an oil embargo today. Zabdriel's case is common in Venezuela, where families want answers as their sick children await life-saving transplants.

The child's lymphoblastic leukemia is a nightmare made all the more acute because he has had to be treated with out-of-date medicines — the only drugs available in Venezuela. He has already suffered a relapse and his transplant cannot wait. "In December, we were called by the oil company PDVSA to tell us that everything was ready, that there was a donor in Italy. And then in January, they told me my son could not leave because of the economic blockade, because there's no more money," said his mother Ani Camacho, in tears.

PDVSA, the state oil company, runs a key humanitarian assistance program for transplant cases. It was directly targeted by US sanctions

last month, and said the lives of 25 patients, mostly children, who were transferred to Rome to receive bone marrow were at risk. Socialist President Nicolas Maduro accuses the US sanctions of being responsible for blocking PDVSA's "humanitarian assistance" program. From Sunday the US will no longer buy Venezuelan crude, an additional attempt to economically suffocate Maduro's regime.

But the shortages of medicines and medical equipment pre-date the first sanctions applied in 2017. The fall in oil prices in recent years has had a major impact. "Before the blockade, this was already coming, a decline, a lack of government," said Ani, 40. Enfeebled by his illness, Zabdriel interacts little with the outside world. With a handful of Lego pieces, an aquarium and a television, his parents are trying to rescue his childhood.

According to Venezuelan consultancy Ecoanalitica, imports of crude by the United States that topped \$66 billion in 2012 were worth only \$7.8 billion this year before the embargo. It is sure to worsen the crisis in a country that relies on oil exports for 96 percent

of its revenues, with the US its main customer. Seven minors who needed bone marrow transplants have died since September, said attorney Katherine Martinez, who represents the parents of several of the patients.

Martinez said PDVSA paid for operations in an agreement with Italy, which was suspended in 2018 because of the oil company's debts. Until then, 360 operations had been carried out.

Nestor Urbaneja, 14, dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player and his career was starting to take shape when in 2017 he was diagnosed with bone marrow aplasia, a rare disease. He too needs a transplant, but there is no compatible donor in Venezuela. Today, the teenager no longer wants to take the drugs his mother, Angi Teran, has to battle desperately to get.

"Mama, don't struggle anymore, you're tired and I'm tired," her son told her. But she won't give up, she says, recently launching a campaign to draw attention to the plight of a score of teenagers who, like her son, need transplants. PDVSA officials told her they could offer no help "because of the blockade". — AFP



CARACAS: Ani Camacho with her five-year-old son Zabdriel, who needs a bone-marrow transplant. — AFP

# CLINIC

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# CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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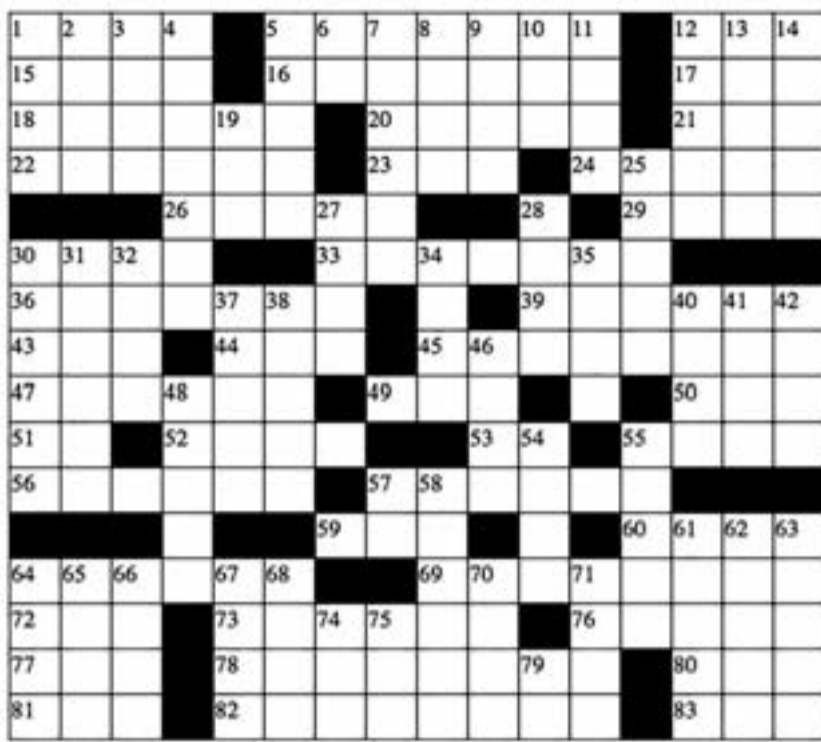
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2194



ACROSS

- 1. Speaking a Slavic language.
5. The horseman who pricks the bull with a lance early in the bullfight to goad the bull and to make it keep its head low.
12. A unit of pressure.
15. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
16. The great hall in ancient Persian palaces.
17. A cry or noise made to express displeasure or contempt.
18. A line of approach.
20. Filled with a great quantity.
21. Either extremely of something that has length.
22. God of wisdom or prophesy.
23. In favor of (an action or proposal etc.).
24. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people.
26. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
29. (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.
30. A mountainous landlocked communist state in southeastern Asia.
33. Cut with or as if with scissors.
36. An annual publication including weather forecasts and other miscellaneous information arranged according to the calendar of a given year.
39. Evergreen Indian shrub with vivid yellow flowers whose bark is used in tanning.
43. (Hawaiian) A small guitar having four strings.
44. Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.
45. The condition of having no arms.
47. Used of decomposing oils or fats.
49. A long thin fluffy scarf of feathers or fur.
50. A cgs unit of work or energy.
51. Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
52. Consisting of one of two equivalent parts in value or quantity.
53. A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
56. Any oily organic compound insoluble in water but soluble in organic solvents.
59. One-thousandth of an equivalent.
60. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
64. A slipper that has no fitting around the heel.
69. Not made with leavening.
72. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
73. The French-speaking part of the Canadian Maritime Provinces.
76. Jordan's port.
77. A federation of North American labor unions that merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955.
78. A system of timekeeping that defines the beginning and length and divisions of the year.
80. (British) Your grandmother.
81. Japanese ornamental tree with fragrant white or pink blossoms and small yellow fruits.
82. (architecture) Not arcuate.
83. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- 1. The scum formed by oxidation at the surface of molten metals.
2. Rock that in its molten form (as magma) issues from volcanoes.
3. A primeval personification of air and breath.
4. Painted beauty and red admiral.
5. A formal expression of praise.
6. The sciences concerned with gathering and manipulating and storing and retrieving and classifying recorded information.
7. A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
8. The sixth month of the civil year.
9. Panel forming the lower part of an interior wall when it is finished differently from the rest.
10. Used of a single unit or thing.
11. Type genus of the Ranidae.
12. At right angles to the length of a ship or airplane.
13. A monarchy on a Polynesian archipelago in the South Pacific.
14. (from a combination of Modulate and DEModulate) Electronic equipment consisting of a device used to connect computers by a telephone line.
19. North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in north-west North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
25. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
27. United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
28. A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
31. Any of various water-soluble compounds capable of turning litmus blue and reacting with an acid to form a salt and water.
32. A sign of something about to happen.
34. The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
35. Rounded like an egg.
37. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
38. Mix up or confuse.
40. Fertility goddess in ancient Greek mythology.
41. Affected manners intended to impress others.
42. The eleventh month of the Hindu calendar.
46. With no effort to conceal.
48. Most important element.
54. A blind god.
55. A dyed fabric.
57. A heavy ductile magnetic metallic element.
58. Resembling a horse.
61. (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
62. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
63. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
65. A small restaurant where drinks and snacks are sold.
66. Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
67. A piece of information about circumstances that exist or events that have occurred.
68. A mark left by the healing of injured tissue.
70. A quantity of no importance.
71. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
74. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
75. A young woman making her debut into society.
79. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aretha Franklin and you want the same thing today and that is "Respect." That need has presented itself seemingly overnight. The problem is working towards it with workmates. If you're not at work today and with family, you ply that trade towards organization and getting work done around the house. Family can sometimes make you wish they were more respectful of your feelings. Remember the only person you can control is you. Don't push too hard, Aries. Take time to enjoy yourself today. You need a little rest.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You're glad you have someone you love right now because physical love is on your mind. It's part of the control you want over your life but it has an extra benefit as well. The relief of some of the stress you're feeling over work is part of the benefit here. Besides this is a special day which needs special treatment too. You're thinking of doing more with the money you make in terms of investing. That's a decision you've been studying but are about to put into process. This birthday has made you think of security for your future more than usual.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

In conjunction with other items you've been thinking about lately, you're even contemplating marriage or renewal of marriage if you aren't married already. Big decisions are in a full-on assault of your brain now. At least you're capable of such massive brain interrogation. Others may not make you feel as if they care about your thoughts or intentions. Let it go. Don't allow them too much control over your thoughts. Children, family and close friends mean more to you now, perhaps because you're thinking of having more in life than just money. Gemini. Keep thinking until you're satisfied. Then make your move.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your choice of which life path to choose is up to you right now but you'll probably choose the one that makes it harder on you. The reason being is that you feel you need to go against the grain. If it's hard to do then it must be better, is your attitude. This may or may not be right, but for right now, you're on this path. Responsibility means a lot to you so once you make up your mind, you'll see it through to the end. Family and the security within are what makes your world go around. Anything you can do for them is what you're motivated to try. Cancer. There may be trouble with someone at your work place. Smile.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a good day to spend at home without the benefit of anyone who could make you snap. Do something you like now or just catch up on a movie. Trying to make others feel good isn't in your vocabulary now so just chill. They can take care of themselves today. Leo. This isn't even a day for trying to learn something new unless that's all you have in mind. Take a nap or just rest in some manner. Have lunch catered by Uber or put together something you've already cooked and can have cold, like good pizza. This day is fit for only you now, Leo. Tomorrow will probably get better.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Make this a day of play. That's about all it's good for right now. Keep to yourself or make sure you're with family or friends which you don't really mind. The mood you're in isn't one of the most enjoyable for those who love you but they're used to your idiosyncrasies. You're still wrapped up in yourself, reflecting on life, friends, family and your job. This may be a little overwhelming to you but you haven't really taken the time to realize you're in this mode, Virgo. You're a zombie playing at life right now and not really living it, just coasting.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a time to broaden your horizons. Get more education but be sure to make it something you find worthwhile. Moreover, you need something exciting that will command your attention and make you work hard to accomplish what you desire. This is not a time to procrastinate. You need to feel alive and worthy so that you can create a more productive life. Perhaps travel is involved or something that makes you study what and where human evolution really started. Libra. Use that intelligent mind to solve some of earth's oldest issues.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You might want to sleep in late this morning. This isn't going to be a day you remember with fondness. Instead you'll feel as if you're being stifled intellectually. Words don't come easily and you feel as if you're walking in water, mentally. You have a need to be respected. You want more in life at your job. Working is something you love but you're feeling the ambition without the ability to figure out how to get what you need to get started. Scorpio, you may feel blocked but this will pass. Enjoy your Saturday.



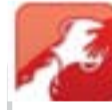
Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You may be a little bit irritable today. This is because you're too sharp thinking and way ahead of what's being said. Katy bar the door if someone takes you to task today. It wouldn't be advisable. You may look like the "Alien" movie for just a second when Sigourney is standing under the monster. Furthermore, you're not in the mood for people acting flighty right now. That can increase the odds of a confrontation. It may be best you to work in the garden, alone, or with your dog or cat. They love you no matter how you feel.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Anything that has political structure such as law, politics and religion interests you in a big way now. This is all in the part of you that wants to increase your mental faculties in order to increase your material and spiritual side of life. You'll note that in studying these subjects you're able to look at yourself in a way that you generally don't while you're working hard as you do. You're getting to know yourself on a psychological level that's generally reserved for the experts, Capricorn. Your emotions and those of the people you love become clearer now. You may even decide you like some better than others, including you.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You want to do for family members and friends today. Remember they'd rather have your time than money. It's you they love. Showing your love through buying for them only makes you feel better in the long run. Keep a tight rein on what you spend now. Go to the zoo or a museum for educational fun. There you can give both your time and provide enlightening topics from which to learn for all of you, Aquarius. A good book at home may be what turns you on later.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Be glad you're probably sleeping late at home today. You've taken on qualities while sleeping others may not love as much as your usual glowing self. You may have adopted a new value system. Most people have a need to know what they know and all that they know, like Popeye from the cartoons did right before eating his healthy spinach. You're breaking out of the mold and they're becoming uncomfortable with the change. You see it's really not about you, Pisces. It's them. You may find yourself making new friends and finding new love because of your thoughts.

Wordsearch Puzzle

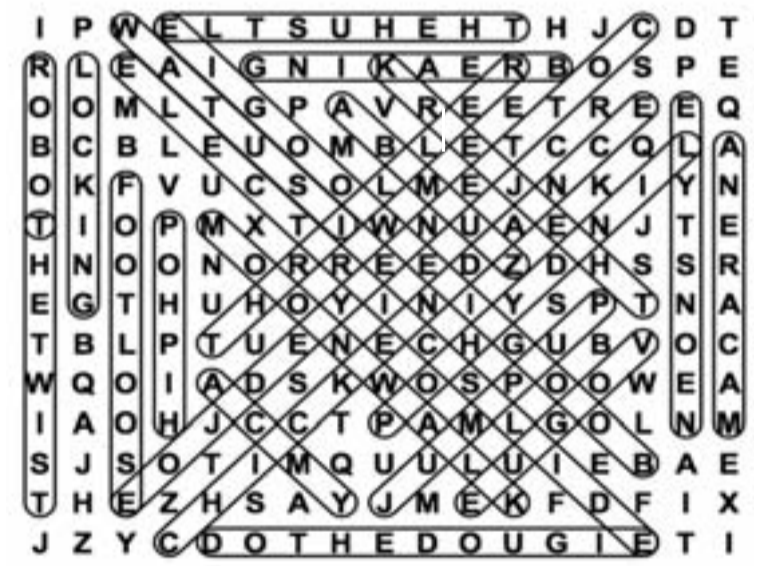
Dance Styles - Word Search



- Ballet, Bollywood, Cha Cha, Charleston, Clogging, Court Dance, Disco, Flamenco, Folk Dance, Foxtrot, Jitterbug, Mambo, Merengue, Polka, Square Dance, Swing, Tango, Tap, Two Step, Waltz, Western, Salsa.

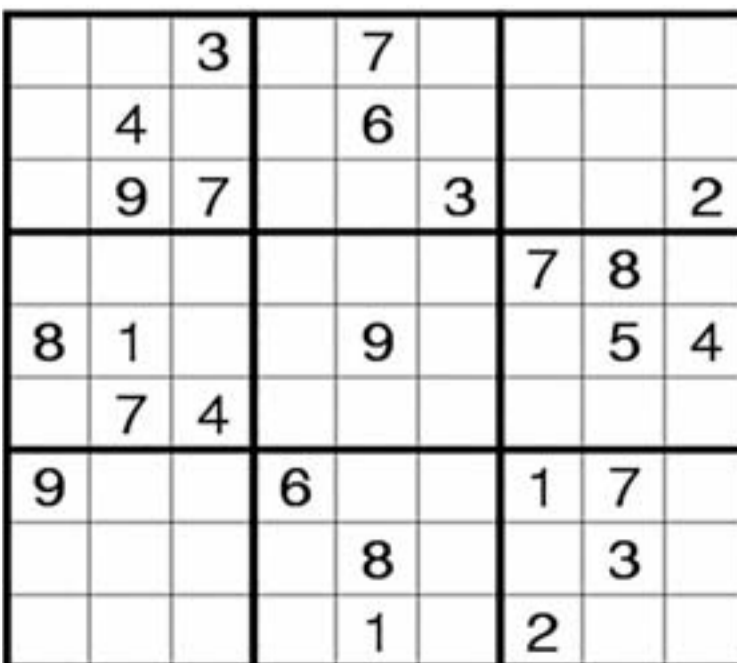
Friday's Solution

Dance crazes - Solution



- Boogie Woogie, Breaking, Chicken Dance, Cotten Eyed Joe, Do the Dougie, Electric Slide, Footloose, Hip Hop, Jump Up, Lindy Hop, Locking, Macarena, Moonwalk, Neon Style, Robot, The Hustle, The Jerk, The Twist, Thriller, Vogue, Watusi, Ymca, Zumba.

Daily Sudoku



Friday's Solution



# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2019



Artist Jaime Plensa's 'Behind the Walls' is on display at Rockefeller Center on 5th Avenue in New York during a press preview of the inaugural Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center. — AFP

## Rockefeller Center becomes art gallery for two months

New York's Rockefeller Center, famous for its ice rink and art deco buildings, was transformed Thursday into an art gallery housing 20 sculptures, some of them with a heavy political slant. The exhibition was organized by the group Frieze and will remain up until the end of June. It is spread throughout the Rockefeller Center, which covers an area of three city blocks and was built in the 1930s in the very heart of Manhattan. It has featured artworks before, but never a full-on exhibition.

Curator Brett Littman said he had chosen artists from a variety of backgrounds, including Hispanic and African, and that he insisted on the inclusion of female artists—four of them in total. Many of the artworks play off the vertical spaces of the urban architecture. Although Littman said there was no overt theme, "one of the things that really comes through for me is that this is a fraught political time and many artists are thinking about that."

Two huge cut-out shapes are placed on either side of the entrance to the main building, one representing the

sprinter Tommie Smith, famous for raising a clenched fist in a Black Power salute on the podium at the 1968 Olympic Games. On the other side is Ruby Bridges who, at the age of six, became the first African American child to be admitted to a white elementary school in the segregated American South in 1960.

Paulo Nazareth, the Brazilian creator of the two sculptures, saw symbolism in the proximity of the Ruby Bridges statue to a toy shop on the ground floor of the center, which the little girl might well have been forbidden from

entering in her own lifetime. Another politically themed work is by Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama, who replaced the 192 flags of the United Nations members states that normally line the ice skating rink with flags made of jute, a cheap material used as sacks in his homeland. "This is about his critique of global capitalism, his idea of the spice trade, the slave trade, even immigration in Africa," said Littman. "So it represents quite a few things and also it really changes the landscape," he said. —AFP



Grffiti artwork, suspected to have been created by the British street artist Banksy, is pictured opposite the environmental protest group Extinction Rebellion's camp at Marble Arch in London. — AFP

## Suspected Banksy work tackles climate protests

A new work believed to be by British street artist Banksy appeared near London's Marble Arch on Friday, where climate change protesters have camped out for days. The work features a child clasping a symbol of Extinction Rebellion, the group behind the protests, crouching next to a spade and a new plant. "From this moment despair ends and tactics begin," reads a sign next to the artwork, located at one of central London's busiest road junctions. "I think it's virtually a certainty it's him," auctioneer Andrew Tetley told London's Evening Standard newspaper.

"It hasn't been confirmed obviously that it is Banksy yet, but clearly there's a lot of excitement," added street art fan Lindsey Solomons, 53. "I think the message speaks for itself really, that if we don't do something

about the planet clearly we're going to be in a desperate state, and he captures that so well," she told AFP. Environmentalists used festive but highly disruptive rallies since last week to focus global attention on climate change, bringing parts of London to a standstill. The entire campaign saw police make 1,130 arrests and press charges against 69 people.

Banksy, whose identity is known to only a handful of friends, caused a sensation in October when one of his paintings began shredding itself, just after selling for \$1.4 million (1.2 million euros). The artist has previously espoused themes such as immigration and refugees, the Palestinian cause and the yellow vest movement in France. — AFP

## Egyptologist in Canada presents theory of two queen rule before Tutankhamun

Tutankhamun, the boy king of ancient Egypt, came to power only after two of his sisters jointly held the throne, according to an Egyptologist at Canada's Universite du Quebec a Montreal (UQAM). Researchers have known for more than half a century that a queen had reigned before Tutankhamun, whose intact tomb was discovered in 1922, sparking global interest in Egyptology. Some thought she was Nefertiti, the sister and wife of Akhenaten, who proclaimed himself "king" following his death. Others believed it to be the eldest daughter Princess Meritaten.

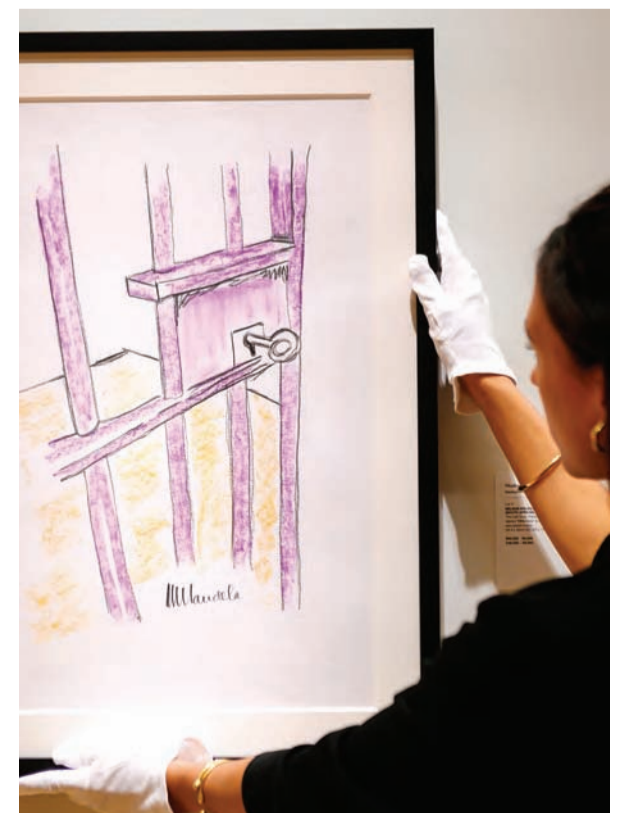
UQAM's Valerie Angenot says she has now conducted an analysis based on the study of symbols which revealed that two daughters of Akhenaten seized power at his death while their brother Tutankhamun, aged four or five at the time, was too young to rule. Akhenaten had six daughters before having his son later on, who had a frail constitution and was plagued by illness throughout his life. Akhenaten married Meritaten to prepare her to one day rule, but some inscriptions also indicate he was grooming another daughter Neferneferuaten Tasherit, for rule.

They jointly ascended to the throne under a common name, according to Angenot. Her work was presented at American Research Center in Egypt annual conference in Alexandria, Virginia, where she said it was well received. "Egyptology is a very conservative discipline, but my idea was surprisingly well received, except for two colleagues who fiercely opposed it," she said, adding she hoped it could advance knowledge on succession issues in Ancient Egypt and of the Amarna Period. —AFP

## Mandela prison drawing goes under the hammer in US

A drawing by late South African leader Nelson Mandela of the door of his prison cell on Robben Island—where he was held for 18 years—will be put up for auction in early May in New York. Bonhams, which will host the sale on May 2, has put the value of "The Cell Door, Robben Island"—completed in 2002 by the Nobel peace laureate—at \$60,000 to \$90,000. The work will be part of a sale of modern and contemporary African art. "The word 'iconic' is so overused but to have a drawing of one of the most important men of the 20th century... would be a remarkable thing," Giles Peppiatt, the auction house's director of modern African art, told AFP.

"It's the first time this work has ever been exhibited in public. It's also the first work by Nelson Mandela ever to be sold in the open market." The wax pastel crayon drawing shows a few bars of the cell door and a key in the lock, sketched in purple. The work is one of the few that Mandela—who was jailed for 27 years in total and inspired the struggle against apartheid—kept until his death in 2013. "It was a very personal, very poignant work for him," Peppiatt said, explaining that Mandela embraced art as a hobby after leaving South Africa's presidency in 1999. —AFP



A worker holds a sketch by Nelson Mandela-'The Cell Door, Robben Island'- in New York City. — AFP



Lifestyle | Music



Mapuches indigenous Filutraru Paillafilu (left) and Kalfullufken Paillafilu (right), members of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearse in Santiago. — AFP photos



Mapuche indigenous Filutraru Paillafilu, member of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearses in Santiago.



Mapuche indigenous Kalfullufken Paillafilu, member of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearses in Santiago.

# Mapuche rappers fight for indigenous rights in Chile

With songs like "We'll Beat the State," Chilean rappers Wechekeche Ni Trawun are on a mission to support the Mapuche indigenous people's fight for justice and land rights. Before the Spanish arrived in 1541, the Mapuche-or "people of the earth" in the Mapudungun language-controlled a territory that stretched 500 kilometers south of central Chile's Biobio River. Following centuries of conflict with the Spanish conquerors and then the Chilean government, that land has been reduced to just five percent of its former expanse-leaving the Mapuche fighting both for official recognition of their culture and the restitution of ancestral lands.

"Music plays a crucial role, it accompanies the process of the struggle," Filutraru Paillafilu, one of Wechekeche Ni Trawun's five members, proudly told AFP. It's a struggle that has at times descended into violence, with some of the most radical indigenous elements resorting in the last decade to arson attacks against logging companies, churches and homes. At the end of last year, the government claimed 20 people had been killed in Mapuche-related violence since 2011, with more than 900 firebomb

attacks amongst almost 3,000 acts of violence.

For the band, music offers the chance to protest in a different way against the appropriation of their land and to denounce security services' use of force against Mapuche people. In December, Chile's president Sebastian Pinera sacked top police chief General Hermes Soto after video emerged of the unprovoked murder of a 24-year-old Mapuche man, which contradicted the official version of events.

### 'Oppressors'

In "We'll Beat the State," written in 2017, the group speaks directly to those it brands "oppressors." "You imprison and murder and then ask for forgiveness. Your forgiveness is an insult to my nation." As well as campaigning for the restitution of indigenous lands, the musicians also want to convey to future generations their Mapuche pride. "Our lyrics speak about everything that concerns our culture, our struggle. We also add our musical instruments," said Paillafilu, a traditional music teacher at a school in the capital Santiago.

Another aim is to demonstrate the omnipresence of Mapuche culture in the city. "People don't realize that half the names" of streets and neighborhoods are Mapuche, he added. The Mapuche, originally from the south of the country and Argentina, are the largest indigenous group in Chile, making up nine percent of the 18 million population. The entire indigenous population is just under 13 percent of the total, or nearly 2.2 million people according to the 2017 Census.

Carolina, a teacher who went to watch the band at a concert in a Santiago square, said more people have "Mapuche blood" than they realize. "We're all mixed," she said. "Mapudungun should be taught at school so that our children are aware of our country's interculturality."

### Twice as much poverty

In the summer, Wechekeche Ni Trawun travel from the capital Santiago to the southern regions of La Araucania, Biobio and Los Rios to play in front of their families, who mostly live in small communities where life is tough. Statistics show that there is twice as much poverty in the

Mapuche community as the general population. Wechekeche Ni Trawun, who formed in 2004, are not the only Mapuche band but their concerts generate great excitement. Some concert-goers accompany the group by playing the "Trutruka," a traditional wind instrument that was once used by the Mapuche at gatherings ahead of battles.

From an artistic point of view, Wechekeche Ni Trawun combine rap with rock, salsa, cumbia and R&B, to attract as many "brothers" as possible, the band says. They sing in both Spanish and Mapudungun, denouncing police brutality and calling for the liberation of "Wallmapu," as they call Mapuche territory. Wearing traditional bandanas, band members beat out the rhythm with their "wada" instruments, a type of Mapuche maracas. And culture and their community is at the heart of their existence: they recently held a concert in Santiago to raise funds for a child who needs to travel abroad for medical attention.-AFP



Mapuche indigenous Kalfullufken Paillafilu, member of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearses in Santiago.



Mapuche indigenous Ana Millaleo, member of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearses in Santiago.



Mapuche indigenous Valentina Kurin (left) and Ana Millaleo, members of 'Wechekeche Ni Trawun' rap group, rehearse in Santiago.

## Prince estate to release new album featuring unreleased work

A new Prince album of mostly unreleased recordings will drop in June, the estate managing his music archives announced Thursday. The 15-track album entitled "Originals" will begin streaming exclusively on the paid subscription platform Tidal on June 7, Prince's birthday, with wider digital and physical release on June 21. Featuring music recorded primarily in the 1980s, the album includes 14 previously unreleased tracks and a number of demo versions Prince penned for fellow artists, including "Manic Monday" which ultimately soared onto the pop charts as part of The Bangles' 1986 album "Different Light."

"Originals" will also include a version of "The Glamorous Life," a 1984 dance hit he wrote for his pro-

tege Sheila E, and "Nothing Compares 2 U," which Irish singer-songwriter Sinead O'Connor brought to the masses in 1990. It is the second posthumous album from Prince-who died suddenly in April 2016 at age 57 of a fentanyl overdose-after last year's intimate "Piano and a Microphone 1983," the first album from his estate featuring exclusively material from his mythic bank of unreleased work, the Vault.

News of a second album follows the estate's announcement this week that prolific Prince's unfinished memoir, "The Beautiful Ones," will be released in October. Prince-one of the most influential but elusive figures in music-became an international sensation in the 1980s as he popularized the Minneapolis Sound of danceable funk, with 1984's "Purple Rain" often hailed as one of the greatest albums of all time. — AFP

In this file photo taken on February 1, 2007, recording star Prince performs during a press conference at the Super Bowl media center on Miami Beach, Florida. — AFP



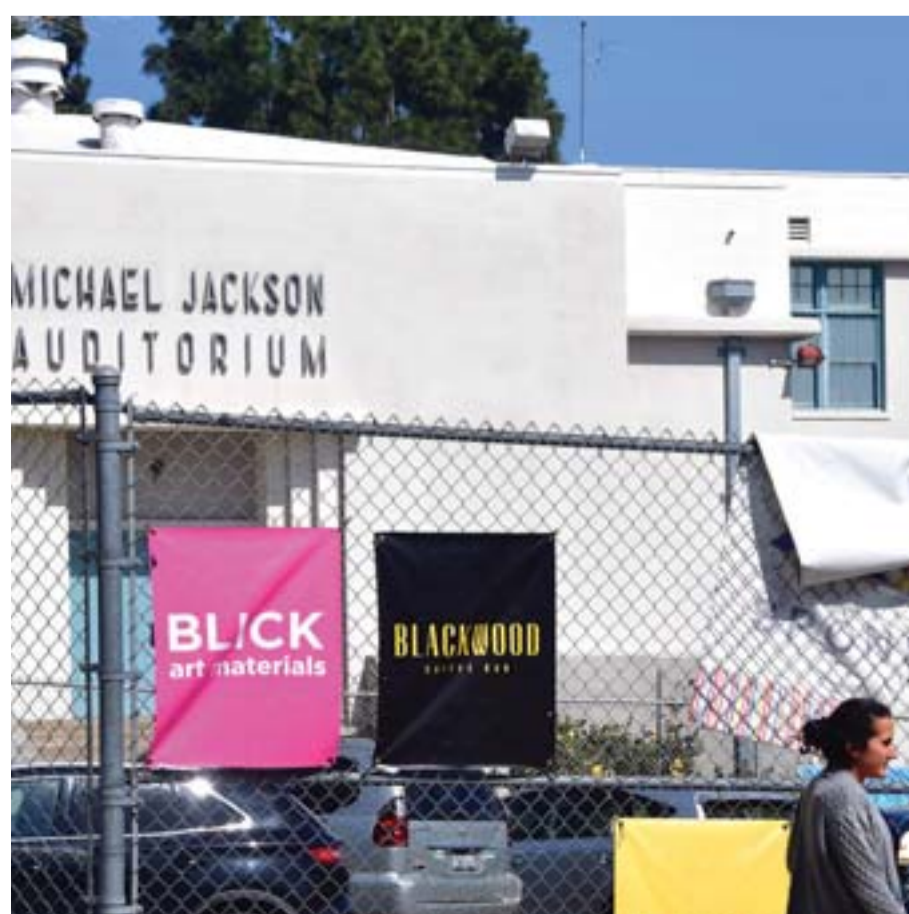
## Taylor Swift drops peppy song and pastel-drenched video

After a bout of social media teasing pop star Taylor Swift made good on a vow to drop new music, releasing early Friday the rainbow-colored video for her latest single, "ME!" The chipper track the 29-year-old superstar says celebrates individuality is a sharp departure from her previous album and much harsher lead single and video for "Look What You Made Me Do," which went heavy on black and white and saw her grapple with her very public celebrity dramas. "Me!" is a song about embracing your individuality and really celebrating it and owning it," Swift told ABC late Thursday, where she made a brief appearance at the National Football League draft.

"With a pop song, we have the ability to get a melody stuck in people's heads," she said. "I just want it to be one that makes them feel better about themselves, not worse." The video bathed in pastels-something of a psychedelic mash-up between "Mary Poppins" and kaleidoscopic 60s musical "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg"-sees Swift engage in relatively banal arguments with a love interest, played by the singer Brendon Urie of Vegas rock band Panic! at the Disco, who also contributes vocals. After an opening argument that sees the pair fight in French, she begins singing: "I know that I'm a handful, baby, uh/I know I never think before I jump," before breaking into the self-love chorus: "Me-e-e, ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh/I'm the only one of me." In the video featuring cats and a heavy dose of unicorn imagery, Swift memorably shouts out "Spelling is fun!" midway through but proceeds to spell nothing. Swift has seen a decline in her status in the industry-scoring just one nomination at this year's Grammys, where pop was largely ignored in favor of hip hop and country-tinged work-but commercially remains a megastar. Her last international tour reportedly grossed \$345.7 million over seven months, after which she released a concert film on Netflix. She has not yet revealed details of a new album but will appear in a film adaptation of "Cats," set for a December release. — AFP



In this file photo Singer/songwriter Taylor Swift arrives on the red carpet for the Time 100 Gala at the Lincoln Center in New York. — AFP



A woman walks past the Michael Jackson Auditorium at Gardner Street Elementary school in Hollywood, California. — AFP

## Parents vote on dropping Jackson's name from his old school hall

Parents at a Los Angeles elementary school have voted on whether to drop Michael Jackson's name from the auditorium after damaging pedophilia allegations made against the late pop singer in a documentary. Gardner Street school's Michael Jackson Auditorium has become a thorny issue ever since the airing of "Leaving Neverland," an HBO documentary which alleges the singer molested two boys when they were seven and 10 years old.

Jackson attended the school in 1969, but left after his family band, The Jackson 5, scored their first big hit, "I want you back". Officials at Gardner Street school would not say when the results of this week's vote would be released. "Following remarks by some parents and team members about the current name of our auditorium ... we gave the opportunity to parents and employees to decide on the issue," said principal Karen Hollis.

The auditorium at the school, in the heart of Hollywood, was named for Jackson in 1989 before first allegations of abuse were laid on the singer, who died in 2009 of a drug overdose. A 13-year-old boy complained about being abused by Jackson in 1993, but the case was settled out of court. The singer was tried in 2005 for the alleged abuse of another minor, but acquitted. "The name should probably be removed, it's not right for an elementary school. The documentary gave a very clear picture of the situation", Robert Fitzgerald, a parent told the Los Angeles Times. Another parent disagreed, however. "People in this country have done much worse, have been convicted and still have their names on buildings", said Myreon Arslan. — AFP



An exhibition of wax figurines by Roman Bajzik in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.



Roman Bajzik (48) fixes a head of wax figurine of Emperor Franz Joseph in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.



A wax figurine of Pope John Paul II by Roman Bajzik on display in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia. — AFP photos



An exterior of Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.



An exhibition of wax figurines by Roman Bajzik in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.

## Relaxing with wax: Meet the Slovak 'Monsieur Tussaud'

The bald head of Slovak general Milan Rastislav Stefanik is pierced before hairs are inserted into his skull. Stefanik's face remains motionless, his blue eyes do not even blink. The late founder of the former Czechoslovakia is the latest figure to get the wax treatment from Roman Bajzik, a 48-year-old opera teacher who moonlights as Slovakia's very own Monsieur Tussaud. "I began creating wax sculptures back in 2002 as I wanted to see what my great-grandfather looked like," Bajzik said, at his two-room gallery in what was once the family mill.

"I only had an old photo of him and was curious if I could turn him into something three-dimensional," he told AFP in Zavada, a central village of 600 residents, about 150 kilometres (around 90 miles) from the capital, Bratislava. Two decades later, there are now 23 motionless family members, royalty, folklore characters and important figures for tourists and schoolchildren to view.

Figures on display past the creaky wooden front door at the mill-turned-gallery include the vampire Nosferatu, pope John Paul II and a mermaid from Slovak mythology. The wax museum is open by appointment only for an entry fee of two euros (\$2.2).

### 'Mute'

An experienced tenor who once sang at Austria's prestigious Salzburg Festival, Bajzik studied opera directing and now teaches operatic acting at the state conservatory in Bratislava. He likes silence when he sculpts though, usually at night to relax. "I have enough singing during the day. I'm pleased to be surrounded by my mute figures," he said. He lives alone in a high-rise flat in the capital where he has turned one room into a tiny studio whose shelves are filled with chicken mesh, cornstarch, construction foam, silica gel—all used for wax modeling.

Currently he is working on two figures: Stefanik is getting his hair done, while Empress Elisabeth of Austria, better known as Sissi, is undergoing some facial work. Bajzik consulted available photos and busts of Sissi to get her facial measurements just right. Once the clay head is done, he casts it in plaster and then pours hot wax in the mold before fine-tuning the details.

### 'Lend a hand'

Wax is ideal for models because it looks similar to human skin, said Bajzik, whose mix notably includes beeswax and paraffin. "It has to be carefully blended as wax tends to crack when inserting hairs into the skull," he said. The hair comes from discount store wigs. Using a long needle, he attaches each hair into the wax skull. It is time-consuming, meticulous work.

"It took me a while to investigate how to make a hole that isn't too large but could secure the hair. I watch instructional videos," he said with a laugh. Bajzik often transforms everyday items into the props he needs. When one of his kings required an imperial orb, Bajzik bought a Christmas bauble and added a small cross. He opens a drawer full of semi-finished hands, waiting for their turn to become the appendages of a king or queen. "Hands are finicky. I usually ask someone to 'lend a hand' and I mold it for a figure," Bajzik said. "John Paul II, for example, has my hands." — AFP



A wax figurine by Roman Bajzik in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.



An exhibition of wax figurines by Roman Bajzik in Bajzikov mlyn (Bajzik's mill) in Zavada Slovakia.

## Splash stuns audiences with runway show featuring eclectic designs

The region's very own high-street retailer Splash, launched an exclusive limited edition collection in collaboration with four of the Arab region's most established fashion designers. The collection came to life in an exclusive presentation Trunk Show -The Splash Island Collection preview, held at the Four Seasons Hotel on Tuesday, which was attended by Splash CEO Raza Beig. The event was also attended by over 120 invited guests, which included VIPs, local social media influencers, TV hosts, singers, local celebrities and press.

The four designers who Splash collaborated with are Essa Walla, Nina Zandania, Ken Ferns, and Aiisha Ramadan. The home-grown talent who pushes creativity and innovation to the forefront of his designs, Essa Walla's collection was flamboyant with a focus on bold prints and irregular modest drapes. On the other hand, the inspiring fashionista who has been present in the media industry for a decade, Nina Zandania's collection had a stylish 70's disco edge. Coming with a very rich yet sophisticated fashion style inspired by Asian culture, Ken Ferns

collection showcased a playful mix of various cultures and tribes, with the uniqueness lying in the prints. Last but not the least, a global fashion designer who is known for her unique, modern style, Aiisha Ramadan's collection was colorful, beautifully-crafted and catered to women with different shapes and taste.

"Modest fashion is the rising trend that is being raved about not only in the Middle East but even internationally. The focus is on comfort, humility, and elegance," said Raza Beig, CEO of high-street fashion brands Splash and Iconic. The chosen designers have demonstrated remarkable taste, and we are elated to inculcate their designs into our brand." The Splash Ramadan collection is a celebration of the holy month and showcases kaftans, long flowy dresses with embellishments, floral prints, animal print, all reflecting elegance and attitude in true Splash style. The collection is already available in stores just in time for Ramadan shopping.



By Faten Omar

On the sidelines of the Kuwait edition of "Splash Island Collection Preview", Kuwait Times spoke with Raza Beig, CEO Splash & Fashion Director Landmark Group, to get the latest updates. Beig said Splash is happy to launch an exclusive limited-edition collection in collaboration with four regional designers for the first time in Kuwait, adding that the roadshow started in UAE, then headed to Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

He noted that throughout the fashion journey, Splash is trying to provide designer fashion at affordable price points. "The Splash Ramadan collection 2019 is a special edition where it represents Middle Eastern style to wear during Ramadan visits. The first of regional designer collaborations to come from Splash is with Essa Walla, Aiisha Ramadan, Ken Ferns and Nina Zandania."

Beig revealed that fashion show has a variety of fabrics and colors and a good organic collection, where 40 percent of the collection is 100 percent organic and sustainable. "I have been working with Splash for 26 years now, starting as a store manager. In all those years, Splash always tried to provide good quality at reasonable prices. We still have products at the same price for 25 years, although we added more quality because we understand that not everyone can afford to look good. That is why we stayed with this philosophy. We change the trends and keep our products updated with the season's fashion," he said.

Beig pointed out that Splash's future plan is to not only expand in the GCC market, but also globally. "It may take one or two years, but we are on the path. We are making plans now in China, UK and Egypt." Regarding his visit to Kuwait, Beig said: "I have always loved Kuwait - my understanding of fashion comes from Kuwait because when I came 25 years ago to Kuwait for the first time, I was surprised by their understanding of fashion. My fashion introduction came from Kuwait, and this is a special market for me. The Kuwaiti market is in third place after Saudi Arabia and UAE." Splash currently operates over 220 stores and 55 brand stores across 14 countries, and 34 ICONIC stores across KSA, UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar.







Competitors ride during a training session yesterday on the eve of the start of the 14th edition of Titan Desert 2019 around Merzouga in Morocco.— AFP

## Powerful but troubled US gun group sees shakeup amid row

WASHINGTON: A dramatic leadership struggle in the most powerful US gun-owners organization has resulted in its president Oliver North saying yesterday that he will not serve a second term. North, who gained international notoriety as a key figure in the Iran-Contra arms scandal under President Ronald Reagan, was forced out as president of the influential National Rifle Association by the group's longtime CEO, Wayne LaPierre.

An NRA board member, Richard Childress, read a letter from North at the group's annual convention in which North said his efforts to fight alleged financial mismanagement in the NRA had led to his ouster. North, who became president only last year, alleged in a letter to the NRA's executive committee that LaPierre had purchased more than \$200,000 in personal items and charged them to a vendor. The Washington Post reported. North called for the NRA to establish a committee to review the group's finances.

LaPierre put a different light on the men's differences, accusing North of issuing a blunt ultimatum to either "resign or there will be destructive allegations made against me and the NRA," LaPierre said in a letter published Friday by the Wall Street Journal. LaPierre said the threat "alarmed and disgusted" him. Amid the bitter internal spat, the NRA meanwhile has filed a lawsuit against its advertising agency Ackerman McQueen, complaining of unjustified billings. Ackerman employs North to host a TV show called "American Heroes". The firm called the suit "frivolous (and) inaccurate."

### Supported by Trump

The leadership struggle has played out in public view at a time when the NRA - which has long played an outsized role in the gun debate in America - has faced mounting political, regulatory and financial challenges. After recent years saw some of the worst mass shootings in US history, leading to new cries for gun control, the pro-gun group's revenues dropped sharply last year. Regulators in New York, meantime, have threatened to examine the group's tax-exempt status.

But President Donald Trump has thrown his strong support to the group. In 2017 he became the first US president since Reagan to address the NRA, and he did so again on Friday at its Indianapolis convention. North has long been a popular figure among American conservatives, despite - or perhaps because of - his involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal. A retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel who went to work in the Reagan White House, he was convicted in 1989 on three charges linked to the Iran-Contra scheme, under which money from arms sales to Tehran was funneled to rebels in Nicaragua. The convictions were later overturned.

LaPierre himself had warm words for North when he was tapped as the group's next president last year. "Oliver North is a legendary warrior for American freedom, a gifted communicator and skilled leader," LaPierre said in a statement. "In these times, I can think of no one better suited to serve as our president." —AFP



INDIANAPOLIS: A papier-mache doll of US President Donald Trump wearing a "make America Great Again" hat is set up near a stall at the 2019 National Rifle Association (NRA) Annual Meetings and Exhibits on Friday.— AFP

## China police smash \$30m...

Continued from Page 1

Images from the Tuesday raid - posted on official law enforcement social media accounts - showed molds and boxes that looked remarkably similar to lines produced by the Danish toy giant.

A Star Wars knock-off is called "Star Plan", while sets released in conjunction with the new "Lego Movie 2" have also been copied and sold under the name "The Lepin Bricks 2". The counterfeit products could be a safety concern for consumers, said Lego's China and

Asia Pacific vice president Robin Smith, the official Xinhua news agency reported. Foreign companies have long complained about lax intellectual property enforcement in China where counterfeiting is rampant.

In an attempt to end its trade war with Washington, Beijing has pledged to clamp down on intellectual property infringements. The knockoffs are popular in a price-conscious market: a small city-themed Lepin set retails for \$3 a box, whereas similar Lego sets start at \$15. A check by AFP showed that the imitation sets were still available on e-commerce platform Taobao yesterday afternoon. The Danish toy giant in February opened its first flagship store in Beijing - which features replicas of the Forbidden City made of plastic bricks - and has two other shops in Shanghai. Lego has in recent years seen a renewed popularity thanks to premium collectors' editions and a movie tie-up. —AFP

citizens for our failure to protect victims of these tragic events," he wrote on Twitter.

Amidst fears of new attacks, the Roman Catholic church has suspended all public services across the country until security is guaranteed by the government. The archbishop, who has appealed to Catholics to stay home and say private prayers, is to hold a special mass at his official residence today which will be broadcast live on television. Some groups were expected to hold public vigils in Colombo and Negombo, where St Sebastian's Church suffered some of the worst casualties in the bombings.

The military have poured troops onto the streets to back up police as they search for suspects using newly granted powers under a state of emergency. At least 94 people are in custody, including a man believed to be the father of two of the bombers. Authorities warned the hunt would continue. "We now have info that there are about 140 people in Sri Lanka linked to the Islamic State. We can and we will eradicate all of them very soon," Sirisena said Friday, when he announced the new legislation to tackle extremist groups.—AFP

## 15 dead as tips lead Sri Lanka...

Continued from Page 1

"All movable and immovable property of these two organizations will be confiscated," the statement said. The government is on the defensive over its failure to heed a foreign intelligence warning that NTJ was planning suicide bombings on churches. Police chief Pujith Jayasundara became the second high-ranking official to resign over the blunders Friday, after top defense ministry official Hemasiri Fernando stepped down.

Sri Lanka's Catholic leader, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the archbishop of Colombo, has said he felt "betrayed" by the government's failure to act on the warnings. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe apologized on Friday. "We take collective responsibility and apologize to our fellow

## Xi touts \$64bn BRI deals; more...

Continued from Page 1

"This year's forum sends a clear message: More and more friends and partners will join in the Belt and Road co-operation," Xi said. A document released after the meeting showed that Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Luxembourg, Jamaica, Peru, Italy, Barbados, Cyprus and Yemen were the latest countries to join the club. Xi said enterprises will be the main driver in all Belt and Road projects and market principles will apply, with governments providing a supporting role. "This will make the projects more sustainable and create a fair and non-discriminatory environment for foreign investors," Xi said.

Xi said that business leaders meeting at a side event signed some \$64 billion worth of deals during the forum, without providing details. At the picturesque Yanqi Lake outside Beijing, leaders from Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America gathered to issue a joint communique. The gathering included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, whose nation became the first G7 member to join Belt and Road, and Pakistan's Imran Khan.

The massive projects, financed mainly through Chinese bank loans and investments, have raised concerns that poorer countries are being saddled with debt - Sri Lanka turned over a deep-sea port to China for 99 years after it was unable to repay loans. A communique released at the end of the meeting said leaders encouraged multilateral development banks and other international financial institutions to support projects "in fiscally

sustainable ways" and mobilize private capital in line with local needs. "We emphasize the importance of economic, social, fiscal, financial and environmental sustainability of projects," it said.

The draft communique says BRI will welcome developed countries and international investors to participate in the projects. "Faced with this rising resistance for the past year and a half and this debt image ... China is trying to reposition (BRI) and send a reassuring message," said Nadege Rolland, a senior fellow at the National Bureau of Asian Research, a US-based think tank. But "let's see how it is put into practice", she said.

China's finance ministry released guidelines Thursday for assessing financial risk and debt sustainability to apply to projects in BRI countries. But the document notes that countries already facing payment problems or in the process of restructuring payments "does not automatically mean that debt is unsustainable in a forward-looking sense". Beijing also published a list yesterday of 283 "deliverables" that bore the Belt and Road brand name, including agreements between museums and art festivals, and even cooperation on space - a clear sign that BRI is a major soft power tool for China as well.

Russian President Vladimir Putin praised China for acting in a "civilized and soft manner" and he took a veiled swipe at the United States. "Nobody wants sanctions, nobody wants trade wars, except those who start them. These sanctions harm the world economy," Putin said, adding that China "currently defends liberal values". BRI projects have faced pushback in some countries. In Malaysia, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad cancelled some planned works and renegotiated a rail project, cutting 30 percent off the price tag. But Mahathir and other leaders attending the summit had fulsome praise for BRI. — AFP





## Sports

# Golden Warriors blast their way into the second round

## Durant makes history, scores a playoff career high 50 points

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored a playoff career high 50 points as the Golden State Warriors blasted their way into the second round of the NBA playoffs by clobbering the Los Angeles Clippers 129-110 on Friday. Durant made history by equaling the most points scored in the first half of a playoff game with 38 of his 50 coming in the opening half.

He tied former Phoenix Sun star Charles Barkley who scored 38 of his 56 points in the first half of a series clinching win over Golden State 25 years ago. "That was one of the great performances I've ever seen in my life," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "He's the ultimate weapon because there's no defense for Kevin." Durant was at a loss to explain his masterful performance on Friday.

"I am just out there playing. I was so lost in the game I am not really thinking about anything else but winning the possession. It is tough to explain. I am just in it," he said. The Warriors advance to face the Houston Rockets, beginning on Sunday in Oakland. Houston was already in Oakland waiting for the Warriors to finish the series so they can start the second round on Sunday. Durant said the Rockets are going to be a whole new challenge. "They are a talented ball club with a lot of high IQ players that shoot well and penetrate well so we got our work cut out for us," he said.

Draymond Green had 16 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists, Stephen Curry scored 24 points and Andre Iguodala contributed 15 points off the bench for the

Warriors, who won three road playoff games in the same series for first time in franchise history. The Warriors put the brakes on Clipper reserves Lou Williams and Montrezl Harrell, who had done so much damage against them in the two Clippers victories. The pair came in leading Los Angeles in scoring during the series at 24.4 and 20 points, respectively. Williams scored eight points on a horrific three-for-21 shooting, and Harrell was limited to just 10 points.

### 'We didn't roll over'

"He's Kevin Durant. We didn't roll over. We didn't just say, come on, just give us 50 tonight," said Clippers Patrick Beverley. "He's a hell of a player. The shots he took, he made some tough shots." Williams described Durant as "a special" player who is unguardable when he is on his game. "Sometimes you come across special people and it doesn't matter what you send to them," Williams said. "There's no scheme. There's nothing you can do."

"We tried everything. It didn't work. Even the game he came out, he was like 'I'm Kevin Durant, you all know who I am.' That's a bold statement to make when you are going to see some guys who are extremely competitive. It wasn't a lack of effort on our part. He's an all-world professional and he proved it." Danilo Gallinari had 29 points, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 22 and Beverley finished with 11 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists in the loss. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant #35 of the Golden State Warriors loses the ball as he is fouled by Danilo Gallinari #8 of the LA Clippers in a 129-110 Warrior win during Game Six of Round One of the 2019 NBA Playoffs at Staples Center. — AFP

## Injured Naomi Osaka pulls out of Stuttgart

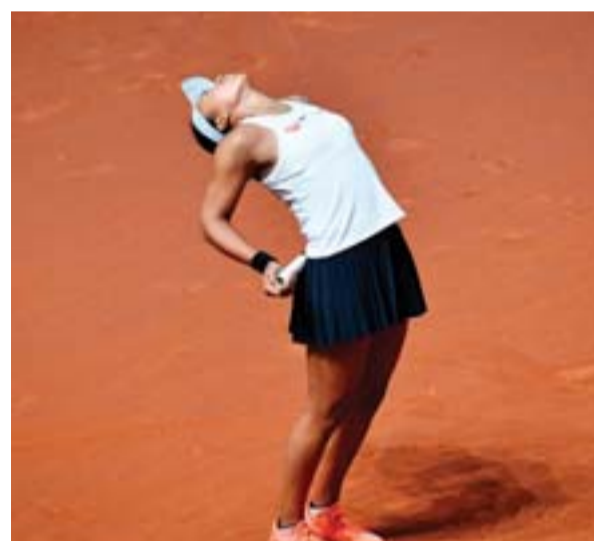
STUTTGART: World number one Naomi Osaka has pulled out of the WTA tournament in Stuttgart due to an abdominal injury. The 21-year-old Japanese was scheduled to play a semi-final tie against Estonian eighth seed Anett Kontaveit yesterday evening, but announced in the afternoon that she would be unable to play.

Osaka said that she had to roll out of bed yesterday morning after picking up the injury during her quarter-final win over Donna Vekic on Friday. "I couldn't lift my upper body. I don't expect that I will be able to serve," she said. "It's an ab strain, something that I've had before. Thankfully, because I've had it so many times I am able to tell what it is and I know what to do." "I nev-

er want to withdraw, especially in a semi-final, so I am sad," she said.

Osaka said she had broken the news that she was in pain to her team after her dramatic comeback against Croatia's Vekic on Friday. "We were in the gym to cool down and they were all happy," she said. "I was like er, I have some bad news, and sort of sprung it on them that I was in pain. They were cool about it, so I am grateful to them." Osaka, who reached her first semi-final on clay in Stuttgart, said that she might have jinxed herself by talking about injury ahead of the tournament. "They say you can speak things into existence. I feel like I do that a lot."

Yet having reached the last four of a WTA tournament for the first time since winning the Australian Open last January, Osaka said she was happy with how things had gone in Stuttgart. "Even though it is bad that I got injured here, I am happy that it happened at the beginning of the clay season, and not in Rome where it is really close to the French Open. "I am happy that I won two matches here. This was a really good boost for me, because it let me know that even though I am inter-nalizing pain or feelings, I can still win matches." — AFP



STUTTGART: Japan's Naomi Osaka stretches during her quarterfinal match against Croatia's Donna Vekic at the WTA Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart. — AFP

## Trieste marathon accused of racism, excludes Africans

ROME: Trieste half marathon organizers are facing accusations of racism over their controversial decision to close the May 5 race to African athletes. Race manager Fabio Carini told yesterday's edition of La Repubblica the move only to allow European entries was to make a stand against the exploitation of African runners. "This year we have decided only to take European athletes to make the point that measures must be taken to regulate what is currently a trade in high-value African athletes, who are purely and simply exploited, which is something we can no longer accept."

Interviewed on Rai Television Carini evoked athletes who were "under-paid and treated indecently in relation to their sporting value". Carini came under fire from an Italian member of the European Parliament, Isabella de Monte, who called the decision "serious and unworthy". "We are preventing professionals taking part in a race because they come from Africa....The situation is in the process of slipping away from us and we are returning to the dark days," the MEP for the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats said.

She added: "The only way to react to this type of decision is outrage. "Sport is about sharing, unifying, equality, loyalty and respect, that's what we teach our children. "But what example are we giving them with this type of decision?" The Trieste half-marathon controversy comes days after Lazio fans racially abused two AC Milan players in the Italian Cup semi-final. This was the latest in a series of racist incidents in Serie A this season. Earlier this month, Juventus youngster Moise Kean was racially abused in a game at Cagliari. — AFP

## Van Niekerk backs Semenya

JOHANNESBURG: Wayde van Niekerk has backed fellow Olympic gold medalist Caster Semenya in her battle with the IAAF over female eligibility rules, saying on Friday that "it goes beyond track and field". The Olympic 400-metre champion told reporters on the sidelines of the South African championships near Johannesburg that Semenya "is fighting for something" far greater. "Caster is fighting for something beyond just track and field athletics—she is fighting for women in sports, in society and I respect her for that. "I support the hard work and talent she has put into the sport," said Van Niekerk, who withdrew from the meet, fearing cold, wet conditions could threaten his recovery from a knee injury. "With what she believes in and what she is dreaming of, I have got a lot of respect for her. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: Goalie Philipp Grubauer #31 of the Colorado Avalanche gets help from Nathan MacKinnon #29 and Samuel Girard #49 defending their goal against Gustav Nyquist #14 of the San Jose Sharks during the second period in Game One of the Western Conference Second Round. — AFP

## Staal scores in OT as Hurricanes draw first blood against New York Islanders

LOS ANGELES: Jordan Staal scored in overtime to lift the Carolina Hurricanes in a 1-0 win over the New York Islanders in game one of a series that pits two of the numerous Cinderella teams left in the NHL playoffs. Staal scored 4:04 into the first overtime Friday to give the Hurricanes their first second round series victory in almost a decade. The puck bounced to Canadian Staal, whose lunging shot glanced off the skate of goaltender Robin Lehner and into the net in front of a crowd of 15,800 at the Barclays Center arena. Switzerland's Nino Niederreiter set up the goal by firing a shot off the boards behind the New York net. "We wanted to get a good start to the series," Staal said. "They are a very patient and tight defensive team so it was a tight game but we found way to win."

"I don't know what happened (with the winning goal). It popped out to me and it went in the net so I was happy about that." Game two is scheduled today in Brooklyn. Goaltender Petr Mrazek stopped 31 shots for his fifth playoff shutout. The Stanley Cup playoffs have been turned upside down this season by upsets. For the first time in the history of the four major North American pro sports leagues, every regular-season division champion was eliminated in the first round.

The Islanders (103 points) are one of three 100-point teams left along with the Boston Bruins (107 points) and San Jose Sharks (101 points). But the Islanders and Hurricanes are two of the four teams remaining that did not reach the playoffs last season. Friday's game was also the first for the Islanders at Barclays Center since February 16. New York played its final 13 regular-season games and both home games of its first-round sweep of the

Pittsburgh Penguins at Nassau Coliseum on Long Island.

### Labanc lifts Sharks

In another development, Kevin Labanc scored a high-light-reel game-winning goal, and Brent Burns collected a goal and three assists as the host San Jose Sharks broke open a tie game late in the second period and went on to win 5-2 Friday night in the opening tilt in their second-round postseason series. Game 2 will be today in San Jose. With the score tied 2-2, Labanc - on the heels of his four-point third period in San Jose's thrilling Game 7 victory over the Vegas Golden Knights to finish opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs - electrified the home crowd and his teammates with four minutes left in the middle frame. Labanc entered the offensive zone with speed, waltzed around Colorado's Mikko Rantanen while putting the puck through Rantanen's legs, backed off a defender and ripped a top-corner shot. Burns doubled the lead with one minute left in the period when he sent a shot from his point position that ricocheted off Avalanche defenseman Cale Makar and into the net. Timo Meier iced the game with a final-minute empty netter.

Martin Jones recovered from allowing an early goal in a 26-save performance for San Jose, which was without captain and top goal scorer Joe Pavelski due to a head injury he suffered in the clinching game against the Golden Knights. Twice the Avalanche took a lead, and twice they surrendered it. Gabriel Bourque opened the scoring 130 seconds after puck drop when he pounced on a juicy rebound, but the Sharks' Gustav Nyquist tied the game with a rebound tally with less than six minutes remaining in the opening frame.

Colin Wilson put Colorado ahead about four minutes into the second period with a power-play goal — a nifty redirect from the high slot of Rantanen's shot-pass. But Joe Thornton scored just past the midway point to again even the affair. Marcus Sorensen blocked a shot at his own blue line to create a two-on-one rush that ended with Thornton wiring a wrist shot home after taking a cross-ice pass. Shortly before Thornton's goal, San Jose killed off a four-minute double-minor high-sticking penalty to keep the deficit at 2-1. Colorado goalie Philipp Grubauer stopped 22 shots. — Agencies

## Women's football turns professional in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES: The women's game is turning professional in football-mad Argentina, but there's very little in that status to compare to the world in which the country's male superstar Lionel Messi operates and excels. The Argentine Football Association (AFA) announced in March that the 16-team women's top division would become professional from June - a welcome boon ahead of the World Cup that will kick off that same month in France.

Argentina have qualified for only the third time in their history. But scratching below the surface, women's professionalism is a far cry from that enjoyed by Messi, the highest paid player in the world on \$84 million a year added to \$27 million in endorsements, according to the 2018 Forbes list of top-earning athletes. AFA has created a fund worth \$2,600 a month for each team to pay the salaries of eight players - those players, not enough to make up a full team, will earn 15,000 pesos each, or \$330.

"People see that the national team isn't doing so well but no-one sees that we can't live on this," said Camila Gomez Ares, 24, who plays for Boca Juniors. Those eight salaries amount to the typical single wage of a men's fourth-division player. "Clubs invest in the men but it's only the biggest clubs that do so with us, and even then it's a little," added Gomez Ares, whose team bans the women's players from using the men's pitch to keep it pristine for the likes of former Manchester United, Manchester City and Juventus forward Carlos Tevez.

### Selling raffle tickets

One women's team, San Lorenzo, has decided to pay all 16 of its female players, but is the exception. Even at Boca and River Plate - the two biggest and best supported men's teams in the country - women are only paid expenses. Top-flight women players have to pay for their own transport, boots, clothing and even medical insurance. "Some pay membership fees (to their club) and if there's a shortage to pay the doctor, police or ambulance (who attend games), they have to sell raffle tickets or pay money to play," Florencia Quinones, a 32-year-old Boca midfielder who once played for Barcelona, told AFP.

"It's about economics," says Victoria Bedini, a 28-year-old cleaner who trains in the evenings with the modest Excursionistas club from the Belgrano neighborhood in Buenos Aires. There, "boots, clothing, everything is paid for by the players." The club doesn't even pay expenses meaning players often fail to turn up for training. "They don't have enough to pay for the transport," said Bedini.

One issue is that South American football's governing body, CONMEBOL, has launched a push to encourage teams to show more interest in the women's game. "The problem is they look for 20 girls and keep them in horrible conditions, because they're obliged to," said Macarena Gomez, whose judicial claim against her club, UAI Urquiza, over the lack of a contract was the catalyst that led to professionalism. She sees the major problem as one of culture. "The sparrer in the works is a backward and macho thinking that permeates football," added the 27-year-old.

### Slow progress

Given their struggles, just qualifying for the World Cup was an achievement for Argentina, who overcame Panama in a play-off to reach the showcase in France. They will be hoping to perform far better there than in their last World Cup appearance, in China 12 years ago.

Amongst chastening defeats to Germany (11-0) and England (6-1) they exited the competition with three defeats from three, a single goal scored and 18 conceded. They will face 2011 champions Japan, 2015 semi-finalists England and debutants Scotland in a daunting group stage. This team has come a long way since going without a head coach for two years until they went on strike in 2017 demanding "basic resources" such as travel expenses, a training pitch and accommodation when abroad. — AFP



**25** Women's football team braving storm, fights sexism in Comoros



**26** Durant nets 50 as Warriors advance to NBA 2nd round



**27** Salah, Mane send Liverpool top, crush Huddersfield 5-0



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh defender Ben Davies (left) vies with West Ham United's English midfielder Michail Antonio during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham United yesterday. —AFP

## Tired Spurs stunned by Hammers

Antonio inflicts Spurs first defeat at new stadium

**LONDON:** Mauricio Pochettino admitted Tottenham are suffering from fatigue after Michail Antonio fired West Ham to a 1-0 victory yesterday, while Cardiff's 1-0 loss at Fulham leaves them in severe danger of relegation from the Premier League. Pochettino's side had won all four matches at their new £1 billion Tottenham Hotspur stadium.

But Antonio's clinical second half strike ended that run as the West Ham winger became the first visiting player to score in the plush arena. Third placed Tottenham's second defeat in their last three Premier League games put a dent in their bid to finish in the top four. They hold a three-point lead over fourth-placed Chelsea and are four points ahead of fifth placed Arsenal, with both teams in action today.

It was a frustrating warm-up for Tottenham's Champions League semi-final first leg against Ajax in

north London on Tuesday. Blaming Tottenham's hectic fixture list for their defeat, Pochettino said: "We cannot put away the circumstance. They arrived fresh and ready to compete, for us it is completely different. "We were tired. We knew that it was going to be tough because it was a derby, but we have to move on. "It was really tough today. We did not manage the ball properly. In the second half we conceded a lot of space for them to counter attack."

Conceding that Tottenham had hurt their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League, Pochettino added: "It is a fight, it is a race, with two games to play. We knew that before." Third bottom Cardiff are three points from safety and would be effectively condemned to relegation if fourth bottom Brighton beat Newcastle. A Brighton win would move them six points clear of Cardiff with a vastly superior goal difference and both teams having two games to play.

### Lacklustre Cardiff

Cardiff had only themselves to blame for a lacklustre display against already relegated Fulham at Craven Cottage. Former Liverpool forward Ryan Babel netted Fulham's winner when he took Cyrus Christie's pass and produced a superb finish from 25 yards in the 79th minute. Neil Warnock's men almost snatched a draw in stoppage-time when Junior Hoilett side-footed against the bar.

Southampton sealed their survival in a dramatic 3-3 draw against south-coast rivals Bournemouth at St Mary's. Shane Long scored the fastest goal in Premier League history after 7.69 seconds against Watford in midweek and the Irish forward struck again, this time after 12 minutes, to put Southampton ahead with a low shot. Dan Gosling equalized for Bournemouth eight minutes later from Callum Wilson's pass and the visitors were in front in the 32nd minute.

David Brooks crossed for Wilson to fire home after

Southampton goalkeeper Angus Gunn could only push it into his path. James Ward-Prowse bagged Southampton's equalizer from 20 yards in the 55th minute and Matt Targett made it three in the 67th minute, his effort ranking as the 1000th scored in the Premier League this season. Wilson salvaged a point for Bournemouth with his 86th minute equalizer, but Southampton, seven points above the bottom three, are assured of staying up.

Wolves gained a measure of revenge for their FA Cup semi-final defeat against Watford as they beat the Hornets 2-1 at Vicarage Road. Mexico striker Raul Jimenez gave Wolves the lead in the 41st minute with a header from Diogo Jota's cross. Andre Gray drew Watford level four minutes after half-time, but Jota won it for Wolves in the 77th minute as Nuno Espirito Santo's side consolidated seventh place. Crystal Palace played out a dour goalless draw with Everton at Selhurst Park. —AFP

Dortmund title hopes hanging by a thread after derby defeat

**BERLIN:** Borussia Dortmund's Bundesliga title hopes were dealt a huge blow yesterday after a red card for Marco Reus and a Daniel Caligiuri double saw them lose 4-2 to Schalke in the Ruhr derby. Reus was the first of two Dortmund players to be sent off in five second-half minutes as Schalke came from behind to hand Bayern Munich a golden opportunity to win their seventh straight league title.

League leaders Bayern can now pull four points clear at the top with three games to go with a win at relegation-threatened Nuremberg today. Dortmund took the lead in style on 14 minutes, Jadon Sancho setting up Mario Goetze with a splendid chip over Schalke's back line. However Schalke drew level just two minutes later, Daniel Caligiuri converting a contested penalty after a handball decision against Julian Weigl. Two minutes later the visitors sent the Signal-Iduna-Park into shock as Salif Sane rose at a corner to put Schalke ahead.

Double disaster struck for Dortmund on the hour mark when captain Marco Reus was sent off for a

studs-up challenge on Suat Serdar and Caligiuri curled the resulting free-kick into the top corner. Marius Wolf then became the second Dortmund player to be sent off, once again for a reckless challenge on Serdar. Axel Witsel pulled one back for Dortmund on with five minutes remaining, but their hopes were crushed a moment later when Breel Embolo fired in Schalke's fourth.

Elsewhere, RB Leipzig secured Champions League qualification with a 2-1 win over Freiburg, while fourth-place Eintracht Frankfurt were held to a 0-0 draw by Hertha Berlin. Freiburg's Vincenzo Grifo became the first opposing player to score in Leipzig since February, cheekily converting a free-kick before goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi was ready. Yet goals from Timo Werner and Emil Forsberg saw Leipzig to a sixth straight win. Werder Bremen's hopes of qualifying for Europe were dealt a blow as they lost 4-1 at Fortuna Duesseeldorf.

They are five points of the Europa league places after a defeat in which Benito Raman put the hosts ahead after just 55 seconds, and Kenan Karaman doubled the lead on 23 minutes. A Max Kruse penalty restored hope for Werder, but second half goals from Rouwen Hennings and Markus Suttner sealed the home win. At the other end of the table, Henrik Weydandt fired bottom club Hanover to a 1-0 win over Mainz that means they still have escape relegation. —AFP



DORTMUND: Schalke's football team celebrate their victory during the German First division Bundesliga football match BVB Borussia Dortmund v Schalke 04 in Dortmund yesterday. —AFP