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Saudi king supports Palestinian state with E Jerusalem as capital

Pakistan, India eye investments from Saudi crown prince visit

RIYADH/NEW DELHI/ISLAMABAD: Saudi King Salman said yesterday the kingdom was committed to an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital ahead of a US-led conference on Middle East peace and security. The monarch was speaking during a meeting with visiting Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in Riyadh. King Salman said his country "permanently stands by Palestine and its people's right to an independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital", reported the official Saudi Press Agency.

The pledge comes as the United States is expected to offer hints of its proposals for peace between Israel and the Palestinians at a conference in Poland. Announcing the two-day conference last month, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that foreign ministers from around the world would attend to take up the "destabilizing influence" of Iran in the Middle East.

But with most major European powers sending low-level representation, the United States and Poland have toned down the agenda, saying the gathering is not focused on Iran but rather looking more broadly at the Middle East. US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, who has been putting the final touches on a "deal of the century" for the Middle East, will make a rare speaking appearance on Thursday.

Kushner, whose family is close to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is not expected to unveil the proposal until after the April 9 election in Israel. Kushner will reportedly visit the Middle East at end of this month, during which he will make a stop in Saudi Arabia.

The Trump administration faces a difficult task in selling any deal to the Palestinian Authority, which



RIYADH: Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz greets Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas before a meeting yesterday. — AFP

remains livid over his landmark 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem - claimed by both peoples - as Israel's capital. The Palestinian government - which has labeled the Warsaw conference an "American conspiracy" - has refused talks with the United States until it starts what

calls a more balanced policy.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is expected to announce investments in energy and infrastructure during a visit to India and Pakistan in coming days as part of his efforts to wean the Saudi

economy off oil exports. He is also expected to visit China, Malaysia and Indonesia during the tour.

Prince Mohammed is expected to sign agreements, mostly linked to a refinery and the power sector, during

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MAKKAH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wipes the marble wall inside the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine, at the Grand Mosque in this holy city during his inspection of expansions to the site. — AFP

News in brief

Burial bill dies on council floor

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council rejected a proposal to bury expatriates in cemeteries according to the governorate they resided in, as some council members abstained from voting. Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi said "abstaining is considered a rejection according to the law and there were not enough votes to pass the proposal". "I reject this discrimination, as there should not be any divisions in burying the dead. Matters should be left as they are - this does not befitt the image of Kuwait," Councilman Meshal Al-Hamdan said. — Al-Rai

New parking fees at Terminal 4

KUWAIT: Directorate General of Civil Aviation Director Yousef Al-Fauzan announced new parking fees at Terminal 4 parking lots, noting that the first hour would cost 500 fils, 500 fils for the second hour and KD 1 per hour or part of an hour thereafter in the short-term parking area. He said KD 2 would be collected daily in the long-term parking area. In case of losing the parking ticket or parking without obtaining one, the motorist will pay a fine of KD 10 plus the parking fees. "Vehicles parked in no-parking zones will be towed and impounded," he warned. — A Saleh

OPEC oil production falls

PARIS: Global oil cartel OPEC said yesterday it sharply reduced crude oil production last month, after heavyweight Saudi Arabia slashed output and exports fell in crisis-hit Venezuela. In its monthly report, OPEC said it produced 797,000 fewer barrels per day in January than in the previous month, a decrease in line with the cartel's pledge to curb output in a bid to boost sagging prices. The decrease by the group of 14 producer countries brought total production to 30.81 million barrels per day in the month. — AFP

Russia mulls soldier smartphone ban

MOSCOW: Russian lawmakers yesterday backed a bill that would ban soldiers from using smartphones while on duty to post online or give information to media. The bill bans troops from carrying "electronic devices" that can post video and photos online or reveal their geo-locations. It bans troops, conscripts and reservists from informing media or putting information online that reveals they or others are in the military, describes their duties or gives their location. It also bans giving out information about the actions of military commanders or the locations of military headquarters. — AFP

Adasani: Inflated accounts of two MPs being probed

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said yesterday that the finance ministry has referred the case of two lawmakers whose bank accounts were allegedly illegally inflated to "concerned authorities" for investigation. The lawmaker confirmed that "two cases have been sent to the concerned authorities for further legal investigation," and added that more cases must be followed and referred for investigations.

Trump mulls deal to avert govt shutdown

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers reached a preliminary deal to provide some funding for President Donald Trump's Mexico border wall but waited yesterday to see if he accepts the compromise and cancels a threatened government shutdown. At nearly \$1.4 billion for wall construction, the budget agreed by Republican and Democratic lawmakers was far less than the \$5.7 billion that Trump wanted. Trump has not given a definite answer, telling a crowd of supporters at a rally in the Texas frontier city of El Paso late Monday only that

there was "probably some good news, but who knows?"

The money, along with other border security measures, was presented as a workable deal to satisfy both sides and allow Trump to shelve his threat to shut down swathes of government on Friday. The funds would allow 55 miles of new walls along the border. Hundreds of miles of barriers already run along the US-Mexican border but Trump says far more is needed to bring what he often calls an "invasion" of migrant criminals under control. Democrats say Trump vastly exaggerates the crime problem and uses the issue to whip up his right-wing voter base.

In December, Trump tried to pressure Congress into approving the \$5.7 billion by refusing to sign off on funding swaths of government that have nothing to do

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Freed footballer returns to cheers in Australia

MELBOURNE: Refugee footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi made a triumphant return to Australia yesterday, ending a harrowing two months in Thai detention, as his supporters called for an investigation into why he was arrested in the first place. "I want to thank Australia," said a smiling Araibi, ending an ordeal that saw him jailed during his honeymoon and threatened with extradition to his native Bahrain. "This is my country. I don't have citizenship yet, but my country is

Australia. I will die in Australia and I love Australia," he said.

A throng of well-wishers decked in #SAVEHAKKEEM T-shirts cheered and sang the football anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" as they greeted the 25-year-old defender at Melbourne Airport, after an overnight flight to freedom aboard Thai Airways flight 465. Araibi was detained at a Bangkok airport on Nov 27 at the request of Bahraini authorities who accuse him of offences linked to the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

His detention sparked worldwide outcry and a protracted diplomatic dispute between Bahrain, Thailand and Australia that raised questions about the neutrality of Interpol and the writ of Canberra's refugee protections.

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EL PASO: US President Donald Trump speaks during a rally on Monday. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Supporters receive footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi (center) upon his arrival at the airport with former Australian football captain Craig Foster (left) yesterday. — AFP

Local

Amir set to attend officers' graduation ceremony today

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is set to patronize and attend the 22nd officers' graduation ceremony at Ali Al-Sabah Military College at 10:00 today. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah have separately received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



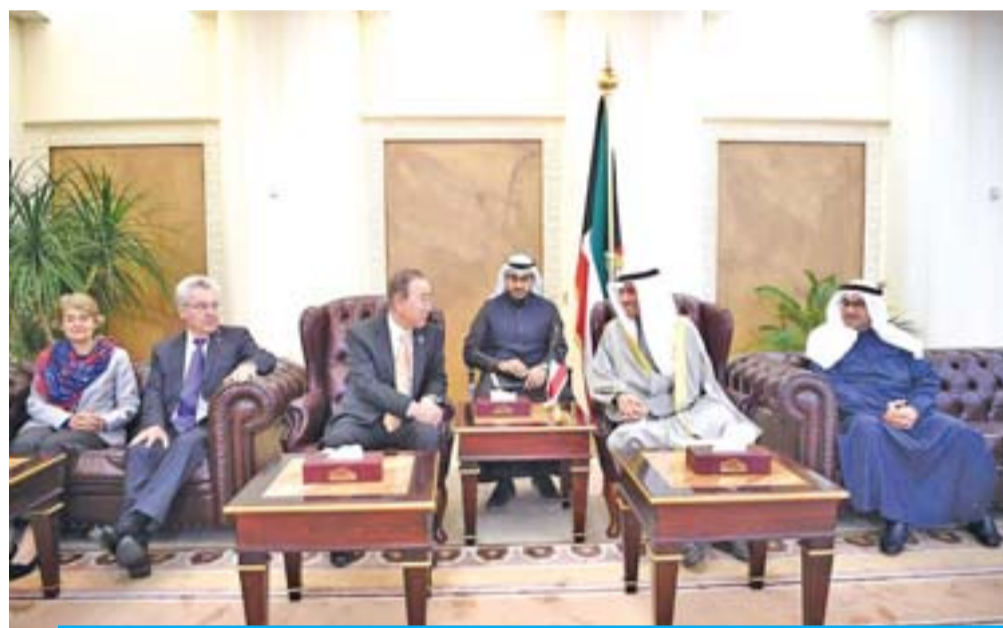
His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Speaker meets ambassadors, other guests

KUWAIT: Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem met yesterday with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Azerbaijan Saud Al-Roumi. He also received Kuwait's Ambassador to Spain Ayada Al-Saeedi, as well as the newly-appointed Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. Furthermore, Ghanem received Kuwaiti cancer activist Shaima Al-Eidi on the occasion of her receiving Kuwait humanitarian ribbon by the Kuwait Charity Forum.

Meanwhile, Ghanem received founders of Ban Ki-moon Center for Global Citizens, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and former President of Austria Heinz Fischer. The meeting was held on the occasion of the third board meeting and the woman empowerment forum, held in Kuwait. The meeting was attended by Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and permanent representative at international organizations Sadiq Maarafi.

Also yesterday, Ghanem received a visiting Jordanian-Kuwaiti Parliamentary Committee delegation headed by MP Haitham Al-Zaidan.



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and former President of Austria Heinz Fischer. — KUNA photos

During the meeting, they discussed the deep relations between the two countries and ways of strengthening parliament-to-parliament cooperation through exchanging relevant expertise. Al-Dustour news network said in a press statement.

Several Kuwaiti members of parliament also attended the meeting. The head of the Jordanian-Kuwaiti Parliamentary Committee arrived in Kuwait on Saturday for a four-day official visit. — KUNA



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with the newly-appointed Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Kuwaiti cancer activist Shaima Al-Eidi.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Azerbaijan Saud Al-Roumi.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Kuwait's Ambassador to Spain Ayada Al-Saeedi.

Gulf sea heritage festival concludes

KUWAIT: Under the auspices of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the closing ceremony for the Gulf sea heritage festival was held late Monday, wrapping up the ninth edition of the maritime spectacle. Addressing the ceremony, Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the head of Kuwait's sea heritage organizing committee, expressed honor and gratitude for His Highness the Amir for sponsoring the festival over the course of the last nine years. Sheikh Salem pointed out that the festival conjures up fond memories of the nation's forefathers, giving the younger generations an inkling of the struggles they have had to endure. He went on to thank the participants from all over the Gulf region for coming out in droves to take part in the event. Meanwhile, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, His Highness the Amir's representative to the event, bestowed awards upon the winners of the contests. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Sheikh Salem Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the head of Kuwait's sea heritage organizing committee (left), presents a memento to Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photo

KNG deputy chief receives Chinese ambassador

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received yesterday the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. The meeting tackled ways of

strengthening military and security cooperation, the National Guard said in a press release. Sheikh Meshaal Al-Sabah stressed the friendly relations between the two countries, it added. — KUNA



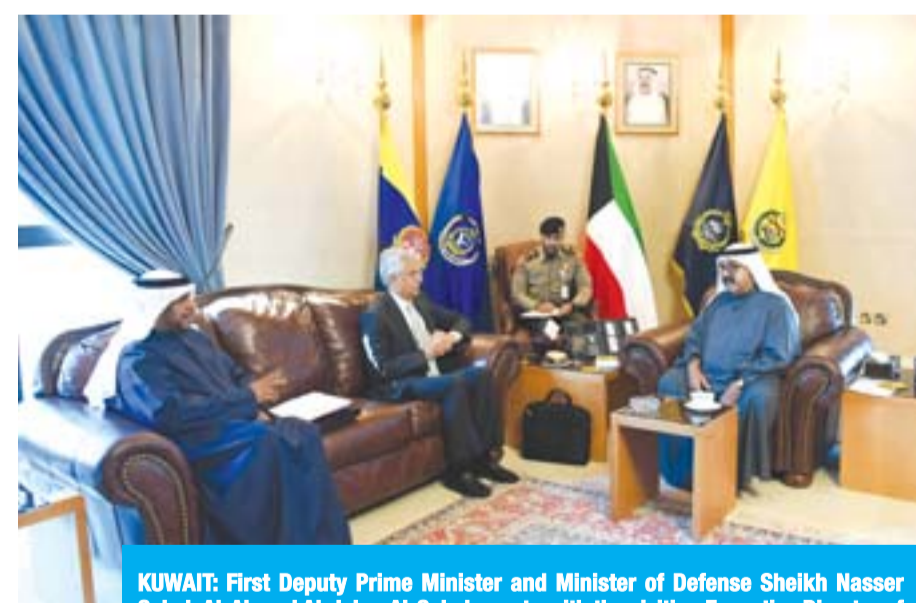
KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with the Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. — KNG photo

Defense Minister meets executive World Bank chief

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah met yesterday the visiting Executive Director of the World Bank Dr

Mirza Hassan. During the meeting, they discussed subjects of mutual concerns and ways to enhance economic cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the World Bank, a press statement by the Ministry of Defense said.

The discussion also included future development efforts in line with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's 'New Kuwait 2035' vision. The meeting was attended by Undersecretary of Defense Ministry Sheikh Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Executive Director of the World Bank Dr Mirza Hassan. — Defense Ministry photo

Expo puts Amir's plan into action: Minister

KUWAIT: An exhibition in Kuwait aiming to promote banks and other financial institutions as alluring workplaces for the nation's youth is an effort to bring His Highness the Amir's vision to fruition, said a minister yesterday. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's development plan revolves around youth support, State Minister of Economic Affairs Mariam Al-

Aqeel told reporters as the expo kicked off. "We want highly competent Kuwaitis who are able to contribute to the development of their nation," she added, touting the private sector as an enticing workplace for job seekers.

The expo has met its objective of establishing a 'link' between the private sector and job candidates, according to the deputy director general for manpower affairs Iman Al-Ansari. She was satisfied with the impressive turnout for the expo, as an increasing number of Kuwaiti youngsters look to foray into the banking sector, which has worked to expedite its hiring process. Youngsters on the lookout for a job should expect similar events in the near future, the minister added, promising to support them amid their pursuit of a meaningful career. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait keen on empowering women for leadership: Official

57 percent of civil servants in Kuwait are females

KUWAIT: Kuwait is keen on empowering women for political and economic leadership, a senior official re-asserted yesterday. Citing a tangible case depicting Kuwait's special concern for women, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel underlined the program for training women leaders, organized by the Secretariat-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development in collaboration with the Women Studies and Research Center at Kuwait University, along with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. More than 120 women have been trained for leadership within framework of the course, she said, addressing inaugural session of a forum, themed 'women empowerment and supporting youth in development and citizenship.' The seminar is held by the foreign ministry in cooperation with the Secretariat-General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the Ban Ki-moon Center for Global Citizens, at Sheikh Jaber Cultural Center.



120 women trained for leadership

Minister Aqeel added that the symposium is aimed at boosting citizenship, security and safety, promoting protection of human rights, bolstering sustainable development that constitute bases of Kuwait's development scheme, the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision. These objectives are in harmony with the ones set by Kuwait, namely with respect of protecting human rights and achieving sustainable development, advocated by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, former Austrian president Heinz Fischer recalled his 2009 visit to Kuwait and re-affirmed His Highness the Amir's keenness on supporting international citizenship and the UN center to empowering and supporting women and the youth. He called on states of the globe to treat men and women equally in terms of payments and opportunities to occupy senior posts. In his address to the forum, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon thanked His Highness the Amir for supporting the UN center, revealing that he was



KUWAIT: (From left) Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development Khaled Mahdi, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and former Austrian president Heinz Fischer, sign a memorandum of understanding yesterday between the supreme council and the Ban Ki-moon Center for Global Citizens. — KUNA photo

the first UN chief to establish an entity for women empowerment. Khaled Mahdi, the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, said 57 percent of the civil servants in Kuwait are females, who also occupy 12 percent of the senior posts. — KUNA

Increasing global awareness of child issues due to crises

KUWAIT: The first conference of the World Organization for Protection of Children, in cooperation with the Faculty of Basic Education, commenced at the Arab Planning Institute (API) yesterday. Held under the title 'Social, Psychological and Educational Protection of Children,' the conference lasts until tomorrow. Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information for Tourism Sector Yousef Mostafa assured Kuwait's keenness on and interest in protecting children rights and providing a safe environment for them. He said that holding such important event came out of belief in the importance of scientific research, which is a key objective of Kuwait's strategic plan. He also referred to the importance of implementation of protection policy, which reflects the society's commitment to providing a safe environment for children. Meanwhile, Director of the World Organization for the Protection of Children Abdulaziz Al-Subaiei said global awareness of child issues are increasing due to wars, conflicts, and crises, which led to aggressive violations of children's rights worldwide.



KUWAIT: Information Ministry Undersecretary Yousef Mostafa speaks during the conference. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Subaiei stressed the importance of spending more efforts worldwide to find new ways to ensure the protection of children from all kinds of maltreatment. In the meantime, Dean of the Faculty of Basic Education Dr Fahad Al-Ruwaished said the conference targets the development of children, protection of their rights, and provision of healthy environment to ensure their dignity and safety. Director of the scientific committee and member of the organization Dr Abdulwahab Al-Hayyes said meanwhile that the conference aims to diagnose the reality of childhood in Middle Eastern communities and identify their needs and risks in this regard. He pointed out that the conference seeks to come up with practical recommendations that contribute to helping the international community with its organizations to formulate legislation and develop policies to safeguard and protect children's rights.

Children's literature

In other news, head of the children committee at the Kuwait Writers Association (KWA) Amal Al-Randi has called for a more gender-balanced children's literature. "I am against ignoring females space in children stories," Randi, also children books author, said Monday after partaking in a two-day conference on female representation in children books in Tunis. "We need a new children literature that is more balanced in terms of gender representation," she stated. Randi, however, voiced opposition to feminist writings that favor females and take biased approach towards males. "In my stories, I always focus on presenting positive heroes, boys or girls, who promote hard-working for building developed societies with good morals," she said. Randi noted that the conferees called for challenging negative stereotypes of females in some Arabic books, especially those directed to children, and increasing writings that educate children about gender equality. She pointed out the Kuwaiti Writers Association was honored during the conference in recognition for its role in enriching and promoting children literature in the Arab region and the whole world. Kuwait was represented at the conference with a big delegation including writers Al-Randi, Fatema Shaaban, Munira Al-Edan, Huzail Al-Hawqal as well as several children's literature specialists. The conference also brought together a large number of children books writers, researchers, cartoonists and publishers from Tunisia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Algeria and Sweden. — KUNA

Ministry suffers shortage in science, English teachers

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi admitted that the Ministry of Education (MoE) suffers from a shortage of teachers in some scientific subjects and English, namely male teachers in intermediate stage schools. Azmi attributed the shortage to students' geographic distribution in new residential cities and opening of new schools at the beginning of the current school year. Azmi said the total number of MoE teachers is 72,292, including 70,133 in public schools, 1,478 in special education schools and 781 in religious education schools. He noted that residency visas of 17,054 private school teachers are sponsored by private companies. Azmi also highlighted the need to consider teachers' circumstances when distributing them to various schools or when opening job vacancies in collaboration with the Civil Service Commission (CSC), prioritizing citizens, followed by GCC nationals, bedoons, expats and finally dispatching committees abroad to recruit expat teachers.



Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi

Many reasons

In this regard, official educational sources said MoE suffers from teacher shortages in some subjects due to many reasons, including Kuwaitis' reluctance in taking up a career in teaching in general, their inability to endure teaching burdens and administrative responsibilities and the endless types of leaves they tend to take including medical leaves, scholarships, escorting patients for treatment abroad and maternity; bad distribution of teachers, difficulty in attracting expat teachers from abroad due to the low salaries and financial incentives, the annual resignation of expat teachers due to the high cost of living in Kuwait and the random implementation of the policy of replacing expats with Kuwaitis. The sources also denied social media reports about the recent resignation of English teachers and stressed that most resignations take place at the end of the school year. In another educational concern,

informed sources announced that MoE had warned some private schools, urging them to pay overdue rent for ministry buildings they use to avoid legal actions. The sources justified the move by MoE in an attempt to avoid remarks made by the Audit Bureau about collecting overdue debts and squandering public funds, adding that the finance ministry asked MoE to form special inventory committees to conduct inventories during the next fiscal year (2019-2020).

Jaber Causeway

The Ministry of Public Works and Public Authority for Roads and Transportation are preparing to offer two agreements to operate and maintain Jaber Causeway and to supervise operations for public bidding. The first agreement includes using developed electromechanical systems, others for firefighting and maintenance of concrete structures, buoys, land constructions and operational buildings. In other news, Minister of Social Affairs Saad Al-Kharraz said the ministry is currently working on finalizing the charity law as soon as possible, noting that the committee working on it had already finished discussing and amending some of its clauses. Separately, Minister of Commerce and Industry, State Minister for Services Khaled Al-Roudhan issued a resolution granting judicial powers to 22 ministry employees working in the competition protection bureau.

KFSD hosts 'hazardous material' workshop

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) held a workshop yesterday for government departments and engineering offices to raise the awareness level about hazardous material. The workshop was conducted in presence of Deputy Director General for Prevention Sector Maj Gen Khalid Abdullah Fahd and the participation of the union of engineering offices and consultation houses. The workshop discussed the requirements for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) networks, requirements for containers of combustible liquids and prevention condi-



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate staff attend a workshop to raise the awareness level about hazardous material.

tions of power generators. Meanwhile, KFSD carried out an exercise at Mubarak Hospital in the nuclear medicine department about a fire in the gamma 1 ray room with missing persons. Hawally fire center responded, led

by Major Jassem Al-Saqqai. After they arrived at the scene, they divided into two groups - one to fight the fire and the other for rescue. Two injured persons were found and handed to paramedics.

IS poses threat to int'l peace, security: Kuwait

NEW YORK: Despite the international community efforts to counter the so-called Islamic State (IS) group, the global coalition success in significantly degrading it, the terrorist organization still poses a real threat to international peace and security, Kuwait's Representative to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi said. Though the number and scale of terrorist attacks carried out by IS has recently declined due to many factors including the efforts of the international community, especially the Global Coalition to Defeat IS/Daesh, the group continues to pose a real and direct threat, Ambassador Otaibi said at a special UN Security Council session on the terror threats to the international peace and security held on Monday. He noted that the global coalition's efforts had resulted in

a remarkable decrease in the group members in Iraq and Syria to 14,000-18,000, according to some reports. The group, however, had shown keenness to quickly adapt and transform to use available resources and cooperate with other terrorist groups to execute its plots whenever an opportunity arises, he warned. He stressed that the international community had to take into account that a great IS members were foreign fighters who were returning, relocating or released. "Without unifying the international community efforts to target its financial, logistical, military, intelligence, security and media networks, the group will re-emerge in hotspots and conflict zones causing the international community to incur heavy losses," Otaibi cautioned. He reiterated Kuwait's commitment to the global Coalition's Guiding Principles adopted in Kuwait in 2018, which were renewed by the Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat IS/DAESH in their meeting in Washington on February 6, 2019. Otaibi clarified that the most prominent threat is IS's ability to organize and finance its terrorist activities through financial assets

ranging between \$50 million and \$300 million. This requires international and national preventive measures such as comprehensive strategies to fight the financing of terrorism and terrorist narratives, he asserted. He went on to stress the need to reassess the situation of relocating fighters, reaffirming the need to hold perpetrators accountable, including those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. At the international level, he continued, exchanging information, addressing the root causes of terrorism, preventing terrorism incitement, training law enforcement officers, taking care of young people and signing bilateral agreements are vital. Otaibi renewed Kuwait's firm stance condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and regardless of its motives and describing it as unjustifiable criminal acts, that should not be linked to any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. He underlined the need to mobilize international efforts to counter this scourge by taking necessary measures to ensure respect for human rights, the rule of law and good governance. — KUNA

Candidate calls for better freedom of speech

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The total number of candidates running for parliamentary by-elections in the second and third constituencies has reached 33, including four women. Speaking to the press after filing his candidacy application yesterday, third constituency candidate Saleh Redha Jarman called for amending media-related legislations to stop sending people to prison over posts they make on Twitter. "A blogger is in prison while those who stole millions are free,"



KUWAIT: Candidate Saleh Redha Jarman registers yesterday to run for parliamentary by-elections. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

he said, calling for amending and updating old laws to serve both the society and maintain parliamentary control. Jarman also called for resolving educational, health and housing problems as well as reconsidering the amount paid to citizens in pension, women protection laws, controlling prices and paying more attention to youth.

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken from Kuwait Towers shows a family enjoying a day out at the beach. Fair weather is predicted through the weekend with temperatures ranging between 20 and 24 degrees Celsius, according to the Kuwait Meteorological Department. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Charity launches poverty relief project in Tunisia

TUNIS: The Kuwait-based Direct Aid Society yesterday delivered food aid worth \$327,000 to some 10,000 impoverished families across northwestern Tunisia. The Kuwaiti initiative reflects the amicable relationship

between both countries, the Gulf state's ambassador to the North African nation said. He highlighted such endeavors as crucial to usher in development in Tunisia, promising the Kuwaiti charity will continue to carry out such projects. "We have grown accustomed to Kuwait's humanitarian endeavors," said the governor of Tunisia's Ariana governorate Mukhtar Nefzi, pointing out that Kuwaiti charities have been Tunisia's biggest benefactors. The Kuwaiti charity recently sent teams to assess the scope of aid needed in Tunisia's northwestern areas, according to the director of the charity's Tunisia office Saad Al-Mdadal.

Separately, Prime Minister of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Nechirvan Barzani hailed the Kuwaiti

humanitarian aid for displaced people and refugees in the Kurdistan region. This came during a meeting between the Prime Minister and Kuwaiti Consul General to Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari, KRG said in a statement on Monday. During the meeting, the two sides discussed strengthening relations between the Kurdistan Region and Kuwait in various fields. Barzani expressed his sincere gratitude to

Kuwait, topped by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for securing the delivery of such aid to the region. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti consul praised the efforts made by KRG to host large numbers of displaced people and refugees, stressing that Kuwait will continue to provide support and assistance to Iraq and the Kurdistan region. — KUNA



CONDOLENCES

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

deepest condolences to

Al-Fulaij Family

on the sad demise of

**Wafa Khalid Fulaij
Al-Ali Al-Fulaij**

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her

Dasman Diabetes Institute, Sanofi host workshop

KUWAIT: Dasman Diabetes Institute (DDI), in collaboration with Sanofi, is hosting a two-day training workshop titled 'Fundamentals of Clinical Research and Good Clinical Practice' in the Courtyard Marriott. This workshop will be delivered by the Brookwood International Academy on February 18-19, 2019.

Brookwood International Academy of Healthcare Research aims to provide excellence in clinical-based research and good clinical practice (GCP). By developing a workshop centered around clinical research and clinical trials, participants will learn how to setup clinical trials and the importance of understanding and complying with GCP during this process.

This course is for healthcare professionals working in the Ministry of Health, who care to improve research quality and patient outcomes. It involves interactive pre-

sentations and exercises and qualifies participants for the optional examination for the Certificate in Clinical Research and GCP. GCP is a pre-requisite to conducting any clinical trial. DDI and Sanofi signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) last year, with the first cooperation being the World Diabetes Day in November 16, 2018. The MoU provides for continued strengthening of future collaborations between the Sanofi and DDI in achieving common goals, fostering education, and encouraging innovative research. "Such courses targeting any healthcare professional are fundamental for good clinical practice. We look forward to future collaborations and advanced courses to improve clinical research practices," said Dr Ebaa Al-Ozairi, Chief Medical Officer at Dasman Diabetes Institute.

"At Sanofi, we are pleased to partner with Dasman Diabetes Institute to further our commitment towards improving patient lives and contributing to the growth of healthy societies. Through this workshop, we aim to empower the scientific community in Kuwait by equipping them with the highest standards of skills and expertise in clinical research. Our endeavor is to advance and encourage scientific thinking, which can drive the best results for maximum patient benefit," said Jean-Paul Scheuer, Country Chair and General Manager for Sanofi Gulf.



Local

Premier winds up Amman tour; Kuwait, Jordan bolster ties with chain of accords

Kuwaiti-Jordanian talks chance to assess common challenges

AMMAN: His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday concluded his two-day official visit to Jordan. He was seen off at the airport by Jordanian Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani and Kuwaiti embassy staff. Upon his arrival to Kuwait, His Highness the Prime Minister was received at the airport by Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Essa Al-Kandari, First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and a number of sheikhs, advisors, and senior officials of the State and Prime Minister's Diwan.

During his stay in Amman, His Highness the Prime Minister met with Jordan's King Abdullah II and handed him a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on ways of promoting bilateral ties and issues of mutual interest. Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak also held talks with his Jordanian counterpart in presence of his accompanying delegation, tackling a further development of Kuwaiti-Jordanian ties to serve common interests. Both sides also inked a total of 15 documents for bilateral cooperation in various domains as part of the joint committee's meeting held in Amman between February 10-12.

Chain of accords

The Higher Jordanian-Kuwaiti Committee concluded its scheduled works yesterday with the two countries' foreign ministers inking minutes of the commission fourth session. The commission's latest session saw Kuwaiti and Jordanian officials signing documents covering agreements, memorandums of understanding and joint executive programs in various fields. The cooperation documents addressed four economic realms and the rest deals with information, education, teaching, finance, law, judiciary, housing, environment, social affairs, planning and meteorology.

Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) signed an agreement with the Jordanians, granting \$6 million to the kingdom to fund construction and equipment of two schools for Syrian refugees. The two sides inked an amendment of a debt reschedule treaty, a cooperation MoU for cooperation in oil, gas, renewable

energy and geology sectors. Moreover, they agreed on an executive program aimed at promoting tourism, training cadres and exchanging expertise. As to the one in the industries, it aims at activating a memo inked in 2012 for swap of expertise, technology transfer, studies and supporting national manufacturing.

Furthermore, they agreed on a media document for cooperation, exchanging news items, films and programs. In higher teaching, the Kuwaiti officials and their Jordanian counterparts inked an executive program for cooperation and scientific research. It is aimed at swapping studies and researches and facilitating contracts for Jordanian teachers in Kuwait. In meteorology, they inked a MoU designed to regulate cooperation and coordinate at regional and international conferences, in addition to exchanging information and experience with respect of weather forecast.

At the judicial level, they signed a memo stipulating expertise swap, particularly in civil and criminal cases, training judges and exchanging studies in disputes' settlement. In housing and urban development, they agreed on exchanging expertise, consultations with respect of policies and legislations as well as training. They approved an executive program for protecting the environment (2019-2020), aimed at supporting executive programs in the two countries, executing projects and exchanging expertise in legislations.

In social affairs, they inked a memo for swapping expertise, information, studies and legislations in sectors such as productive families, small and medium enterprise and social legislations. Additionally, a memo was signed between King Abdullah II Center for Excellence and the Secretariat General of the Higher Council for Planning and Development, aimed at cementing cooperation at the level of developing civil servants' capacities.

Trade volume

Also, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a protocol with the Jordanian counterpart body for broadening cooperation and launching business partnerships. Kuwaiti Minister of Commerce and Industry as well as Minister of State for Services Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan, who was present at the signing, said in his speech to the Kuwaiti-Jordanian economic gathering that trade exchange in 2017 reached \$280 million and it was around \$270 million until last November. The volume of Jordanian exports to Kuwait worth \$228 million. Kuwaiti exports to Jordan reached

\$41 million, the minister revealed. He added that Kuwait investments in Jordan ranked first amongst Arab investors with \$18 billion, while Kuwaitis were fourth when it came to number of real estate properties.

Minister Roudhan touched on the challenges facing the development of commercial exchange, indicating that it was important to come up with innovative plans and strategies to achieve more for Kuwaitis and Jordanians. The Kuwaiti official called on the private sectors in both countries to look into means to expand their mutual economic horizon, affirming that Kuwait had made vast improvements on its business atmosphere, which will hopefully attract more regional and international businesses. Law 116/2013 in Kuwait provides huge incentives for investors, he affirmed, calling on investors from Jordan to benefit from the current situation especially with the establishment of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), which attracted \$2.9 billion worth of capital. He noted that the Kuwait Vision 2035 was an ambitious plan that invites investors to take part in the country's development and transforming into an international hub for commerce and trade.

Jordanian Minister of Industry and Trade and Supply Tareq Al-Hamouri said meanwhile that Kuwait and Jordan were eager to pursue ventures of economic and commercial cooperation. The Jordanian and Kuwaiti economic gathering had reflected a serious intention to look into venues of cooperation, said the Jordanian minister who called on both sides to take the opportunity to look into projects offered by both sides.

In the meantime, the Kuwait Public Authority for Industry (PAI) and Jordanian government signed an executive program for industrial cooperation and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) regarding industrial zones. PAI said in a statement the executive program would implement an MoU signed in 2012, and stipulated exchange of information, technical and administrative expertise, and transfer of technology and skills. The program, it added, would support national industries, and participation in workshops, seminars, conferences and training courses. It added the MoU would promote cooperation between the Jordanian Industrial Zones company and PAI. The MoU, to cover the period between 2019 and 2021, aimed at boosting cooperation in engineering, administration and marketing, as well as exploring means to attract investors.

Common challenges

His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak's visit to Jordan is an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the wider Arab region, said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry official yesterday. The visit comes amid 'trying times,' making the talks all the more significant, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry's undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah said in a statement. He acknowledged the Hashemite Kingdom's pivotal contributions on both global and regional scales, citing instability and terrorism as among the challenges the region has had to contend with.

The Kuwaiti official went on to say that a wide array of deals sealed between both nations is a 'positive step' towards stronger bilateral ties. Kuwait and Amman's illustrious relationship has seen some 70 deals signed over the course of the last 58 years, according to the Gulf state's ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani. He said bilateral relations have reached exceptional levels thanks to the efforts of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Jordan's King Abdullah II. The Kuwaiti prime minister's visit to Jordan yielded a plethora of deals over sectors running the gamut from the economy to energy and tourism.

Significant visit

Dr Fahad Al-Afasi, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, noted in a statement the importance of His Highness the Prime Minister's visit, marked with signing new accords and activating old ones between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Jordan. He has affirmed that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for judicial and legal cooperation, inked by Kuwaiti and Jordanian officials, aims at exchanging experience, upgrading mechanisms of cooperation in the judicial realm, notably with respect of civil and criminal cases. It is also designed to swap researches, legal and judicial journals, information about legislation, achievements, organize training courses for judges, expertise in educational and teaching curriculums at judicial academies as well as studies for alternative means for resolving disputes. On his meeting with his Jordanian counterpart, Bassam Al-Talhouni, minister Al-Afasi said the talks with his host dealt with issues related to implementation of the inked MoU, pending completion of necessary constitutional measure's. Meanwhile, Khaled Al-Roudhan reiterated the significance of the inked accords with Amman for enhancing Kuwait's international status and boosting commercial exchanges between the two countries. — KUNA

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Nigerian widows confront Shell in Dutch court

N Korea may have made more nukes, but threat reduced: Study



MADRID: Former Catalan separatist leaders including (from front row right-left) Oriol Junqueras, Raul Romeva, Joaquim Forn, Jordi Sanchez, Jordi Turull, Josep Rull, Jordi Cuixart, Carme Forcadell, Dolors Bassa, Carles Mundo, Santi Vila and Meritxell Borrás attend their trial at the Supreme Court yesterday. — AFP

Catalan separatists face trial

Defendants' supporters say they are political prisoners

MADRID: Twelve Catalan separatist leaders went on trial in Madrid yesterday over a failed independence bid that laid bare historical divisions and triggered Spain's biggest political crisis in decades. Flanked by hundreds of police, pro- and anti-separatist demonstrators gathered outside the Supreme Court, where the defendants face charges of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds. Their supporters carried signs reading "Freedom for political prisoners" while a small rival group shouted "Golpista" or "coup plotter", portraying the region's independence declaration of October 2017 as an attempt to dismantle the Spanish state.

In his opening remarks to the trial, which is being transmitted live on television, a lawyer defending two of the accused said they had the right to seek independence for their region. "It (self-determination) is a synonym of peace, not of war," Andreu Van den Eyndehe told the court. The politically charged trial, which is expected to last at least three months, comes at a pivotal time for Spain's government. A snap national election is likely unless Catalan nationalist lawmakers change tack by ending their opposition to the 2019 budget in a vote today.

Democracy under spotlight

The case also exposes the workings of Spain's democracy - relatively young by western European standards - to their widest scrutiny since a failed coup in 1981. That attempt, ended by an intervention by King Juan Carlos, occurred three years after the current constitution was approved to complete the democratic transition that followed dictator Francisco Franco's death in 1975. The constitution bans any Spanish region from seceding. Supporters of the defendants, who face up to 25 years in jail if convicted, say they are political prisoners. The government says they are being judged strictly in line with the rule of law. None of the 12 are scheduled to speak in the first day of the trial. Meanwhile, seven other politicians involved in the independence declaration - including former leader Carles Puigdemont - are in self-imposed exile abroad.



Nationalists key for budget vote

In Berlin yesterday, Puigdemont said the trial marked a stress test for Spain's democracy and reiterated a call for another independence referendum. The October 2017 declaration followed a plebiscite that Catalan authorities defied a judicial ban to carry out, angering some in the region and much of the rest of Spain. But there was widespread shock when police used batons and rubber bullets on protesters on the day of the vote. The Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists, a rights group, said the trial risked restricting rights and could set a precedent.

Budget bill backdrop

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has adopted a more conciliatory stance towards Catalonia than the conservative government that preceded him. But so far, nationalist lawmakers from the wealthy northeastern region have said they will block the budget bill, citing Sanchez's

refusal to include an independence option in talks between them.

Budget Minister Maria Jesus Montero said yesterday the government would "not give in to blackmail" over the budget and that Catalan self-determination was not on the agenda. With the Socialists holding less than a quarter of seats in the lower parliamentary house, the absence of Catalan support for the budget would almost certainly sink the bill and in turn likely prompt a snap election in the spring. In an early morning tweet, Sanchez said he expected both the right and pro-independence lawmakers to vote against his budget. "They both want the same: A divided Catalonia and a divided Spain," he said.

Secessionists have called on Catalans to briefly stop work at midday yesterday in protest against the trial, and join a rally in Barcelona in the evening. Another demonstration is planned for Saturday and a general strike on Feb 21. After imposing direct rule on Catalonia in response to the independence declaration, the then conservative government called regional elections. But the move backfired as the secessionists retained a slim majority in the Catalan assembly. — Reuters

Russia seeks to vindicate Afghan war, 30 years after pullout

MOSCOW: Soviet authorities themselves condemned the USSR's bloody occupation of Afghanistan, but 30 years later some in Vladimir Putin's Russia are coming to see the operation in a more positive light. After a decade of military intervention to bolster Kabul's embattled Communist government against Islamist fighters, the USSR finally pulled out its last units on February 15, 1989. The withdrawal, ordered by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, was a humiliating defeat for the Union and helped lead to its collapse.

Mikhail Kozhukhov, who covered the conflict as a correspondent for the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper, remembered how the final Russian troops left without joy or bitterness. "The soldiers were dreaming only of one thing: getting home safe and sound," Kozhukhov, now 62 said. The reporter remembered crossing the "Friendship Bridge" across the Amu Darya river separating Afghanistan from then-Soviet Uzbekistan in the second-last armored vehicle of the last Soviet convoy, flying red flags.

One of the armored vehicles carried the body of 20-year-old Igor Lyakhovich, who was killed a day earlier and is officially the last of more than 14,000 Soviet war dead in a conflict that killed more than one million Afghans. "Along the route you could see the 'ghosts' who had come down from the mountains to watch our retreat from a distance," said Kozhukhov, using a Russian term for elusive Afghan partisans. "The eyes of the inhabitants of the snow village were full of hate or spite because they were being left to the mercy of fate," Kozhukhov said. The journalist, who briefly served as

Putin's press secretary in 1999 and 2000, says that "the intervention in Afghanistan was always a tragic and senseless escapade."

'Reviving Soviet past'

The intervention was extremely unpopular with the Soviet public and was officially condemned in 1989 at the height of Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost", or transparency. But this judgment is now being reassessed, under pressure from veterans. Putin in 2015 appeared to back the intervention, saying that the Soviet leadership was trying to confront "real threats" even though he acknowledged "there were many mistakes." In late January, Russia's parliamentary defense committee backed a draft resolution saying that "the moral and political condemnation of the decision to send in Soviet troops" was "against the principles of historical justice."

The Soviet troops helped the Afghan authorities fight "terrorist and extremist groups" and curbed the growing security threat facing the USSR, the draft resolution says. The draft resolution, however, has yet to be voted on in full session, reflecting the authorities' reluctance formally to revisit this traumatic episode. Historian Irina Shecherbakova of Memorial rights group says that amid heightened tensions with Western powers in recent years, "Russia is reviving its Soviet past to justify its new opposition to the West."

'No napalm'

For political analyst Pyotr Akopov from pro-Kremlin site Vzglyad, "the ex-combatants and the whole of Russian society need vindication for this war." "We have nothing to apologise for, we didn't use napalm... and we even managed to leave Afghanistan with our supporters replacing us, which the Americans have never managed to do." Alexander Kovalyov, president of the association of ex-combatants for the CIS region including most ex-Soviet countries, insists the invasion of Afghanistan was justified and says Gorbachev "betrayed all the dead" by condemning it. — AFP

Afghanistan: 40 years of conflict

KABUL: The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 40 years ago kicked off decades of war that endured long after the Red Army's retreat, which ended on February 15, 1989. Here is a timeline.

1979-1989: Soviet occupation

In December 1979, at the height of the Soviet-US Cold War, Moscow invades the country - which is poor and mountainous, but also strategically situated - to prop up a communist regime. It faces fierce resistance from Afghan mujahideen fighters backed by the United States and others. Moscow eventually withdraws after a decade of fighting.

1992-1996: Civil war

The fall of Mohammad Najibullah's communist government in 1992 unleashes a bloody power struggle that kills nearly 100,000 people in two years and partly destroys the capital, Kabul. From 1994 the Pakistan-backed fundamentalist Taliban movement begin to emerge in the south.

1996-2001: Taliban in power

The Taliban, led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, seize power in 1996 and install a regime based on their hardline interpretation of Islamic law. They forbid women from working, close girls' schools, and ban music and other entertainment. Under severe United Nations sanctions, the regime becomes close to the Al-Qaeda jihadist network and shelters its leader, Saudi national Osama bin Laden.

2001: US-led invasion

In October 2001 the United States leads an invasion of Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11 attacks on Washington and New York blamed on Al-Qaeda. Washington and its NATO allies drive out the Taliban regime and bring Hamid Karzai to power, funneling in billions of dollars of aid to rebuild the war-ravaged country. They deploy up to 150,000 soldiers to help the government assert control and bring security. The Taliban go into hiding or flee to neighboring countries, especially Pakistan, and then launch an insurgency against Kabul and NATO.

2014: NATO withdraws

NATO pulls out its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) combat troops at the end of 2014, with the Taliban insurgency raging. Some NATO soldiers remain to carry out anti-terrorist operations and train Afghan forces. The Taliban continue to make gains, while carrying out major deadly attacks, as the Islamic State group begins to make inroads in Afghanistan in 2015.

2018-2019: Peace talks

In late 2018 US President Donald Trump says he is withdrawing half of the 14,000 US soldiers stationed in Afghanistan, though officials caution they have received no order to begin drawdown plans. Washington steps up negotiations with the Taliban to end the conflict, with both the militants and US officials touting "progress" after talks culminate in a six-day meeting in Qatar in January. Afghan hopes for peace are tempered by fears the US could withdraw before a lasting deal is reached with Kabul, however. Russia and Iran also hold talks with the militants. — AFP

International

Fear paralyzes Haiti capital

Sporadic gunfire echoes through the streets

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Sporadic gunfire echoed through the streets of Port-au-Prince yesterday as the government remained silent in the face of protests that have paralyzed the Haitian capital and triggered rising violence. The normally traffic-clogged streets were largely empty as schools, shops and municipal offices were shuttered for fear of more violence that has already left several people dead and an air of uncertainty hanging over the government of President Jovenel Moise.

Barricades have sprung up in some areas of the capital and other cities, as protesters have taken to the streets demanding the president step down over reports of mismanagement and possible embezzlement of development funds in the impoverished Caribbean nation. After a quiet but tense start to the day, hundreds of youths from the capital's poorer quarters marched toward Petionville, the wealthiest neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, throwing stones at houses until police opened fire with tear gas rounds to break up the march. Police also thwarted an attempt to attack a bank during the demonstration, dragging away several blood-stained suspects and making five arrests.

Since the opposition organized widespread demonstrations last week to mark two years of Moise's presidency, smaller and more spontaneous protests have broken out in key urban centers. In some places, young men have erected barricades and seized bypassers for ransom, while vehicles have been torched, and shops damaged and looted, creating a climate of fear and intimidation alongside the opposition protests. Taking advantage of the chaos, there was some looting Monday-but traders still felt anger only toward the president.

"What we are enduring today is because of Jovenel (Moise)... they are hungry," said Joseph, whose stock of fish was totally depleted, of those who stole his goods. "By selling what they took from me, they are going to be able to relieve their families a bit." "We don't have good leaders: if there was work in the country, this would never have happened," he said. Later on, private sector associations deplored what they described as "legitimate popular anger that is unfortunately wrongly directed to companies that create jobs," and called for political dialogue. Meanwhile, Catholic bishops appealed to the "civic conscience of the different parties" to make a "patriotic decision."

Demonstrators are demanding Moise quits over a scandal centering on the Petrocaribe fund, under which Venezuela supplied Haiti and other Caribbean and Central American countries

with oil at cut-rate prices and on easy credit terms for years. Investigations have shown that nearly \$2 billion from the program were misused. A report released in January on the misuse of the money also named a company that was then headed by Moise as a beneficiary of funds from a road construction project that never had a signed contract. During his election campaign, Moise promised "food on every plate and money in every pocket," yet most Haitians still struggle to make ends meet and face inflation that has risen 15 percent since his election.

'A danger and a threat'

"We call on the police to arrest Jovenel Moise because he represents a danger and a threat to the life of every Haitian," said Andre Michel, one of the main opposition leaders. "He no longer has any legitimacy: the country will remain deadlocked until Jovenel Moise resigns." A mediation group composed of a senior UN official, the ambassadors of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany and the United States, and representatives of Spain, the EU and the Organization of American States, has called on Haiti's politicians to enter dialogue over the crisis, lamenting the loss of life and damage caused by the protests. The US State Department expressed concern for its personnel in the country. "The safety and security of

our personnel and their families is our top priority. We are monitoring the security situation in real time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week," a spokesperson said, declining to discuss any potential security measures.

"We are prepared to do the things we need to do to make sure we keep our people safe." The Haitian administration has remained mute in the face of rising unrest over the past five days, with only Eddy Jackson Alexis, the secretary of state for communication, issuing a brief statement on Twitter. "The government recognizes the right of every person to demonstrate and exercise their rights according to the law, but looting shops, blocking streets, burning tires, smashing car windows or throwing oil on the road do not fall into that category," he said.

While the government has offered no response to the demands of demonstrators, opposition groups have also failed to spell out any concrete solution to the crisis, beyond calling for the president to step aside. "We are facing the biggest crisis since 2008," said Haitian economist Etzer Emile, recalling riots that rocked the country a decade ago. After racking up a record budget deficit of 24 billion gourdes (\$306 million) in 2018, the government can no longer fund social welfare programs without slashing spending. — AFP

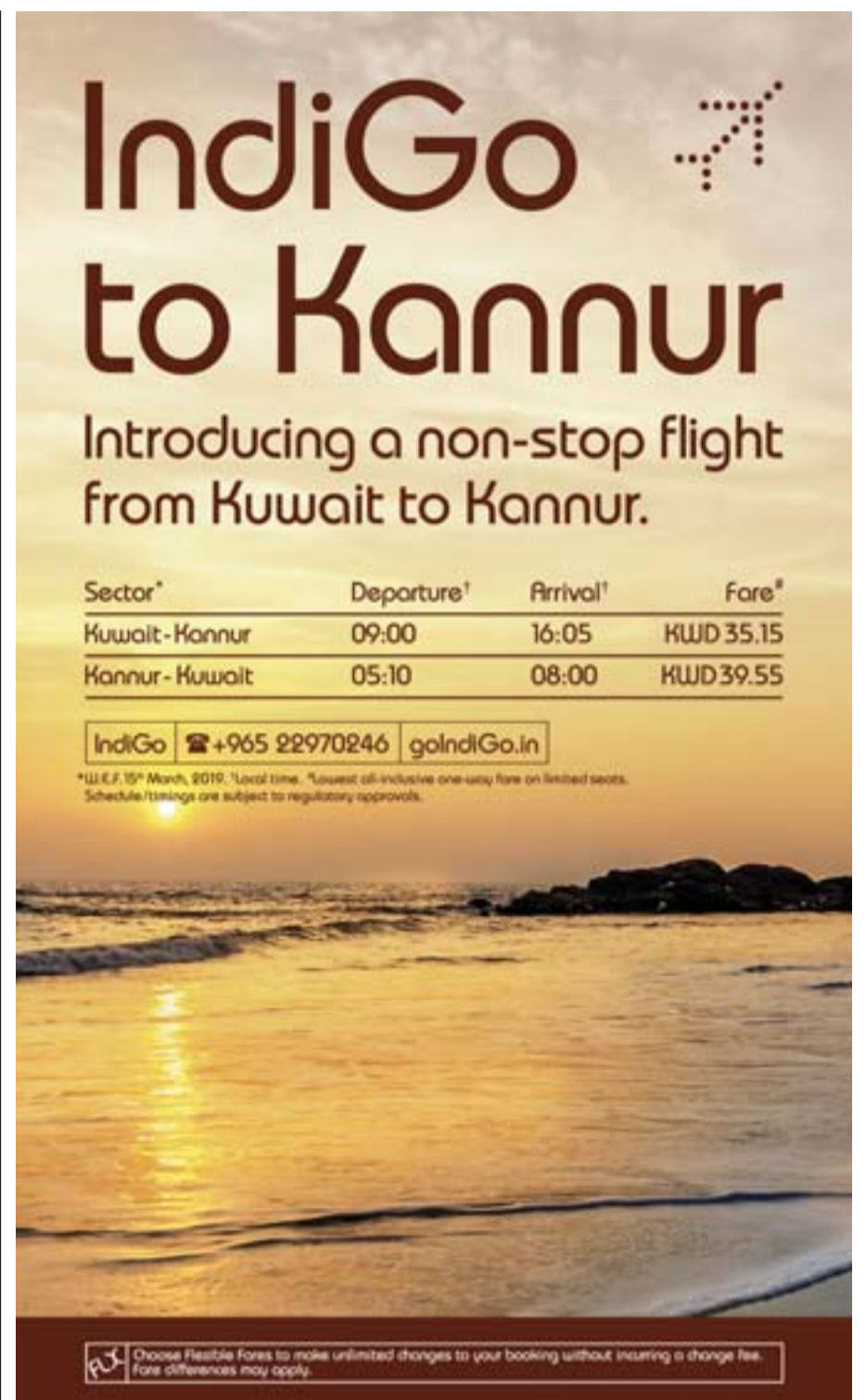
Acting Pentagon chief in Baghdad


BAGHDAD: Acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan made an unannounced visit to the Iraqi capital yesterday for talks on the sensitive issue of a continued US troop presence after Washington withdraws from neighboring Syria. Shanahan is keen to reassure Iraqi leaders after President Donald Trump angered many by saying he wanted to maintain some troops at the Al-Asad airbase, northwest of Baghdad, to keep an eye on Iran.

The acting defense secretary, who flew in from Afghanistan on his foreign tour since taking office last month, was due to hold talks with Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi and top military advisers, as well as Lieutenant General Paul LaCamera, the commander of anti-IS coalition forces. "Our main partner-

ship and military activity in Iraq is the de-ISIS (IS) mission," a senior Pentagon official told journalists travelling with Shanahan, keeping the focus on the fight against Islamic State jihadists. Washington was also pressing its allies to repatriate their nationals captured and taken prisoner after fighting fought for IS in Iraq and Syria, the official said.

"We think coalition members need to take responsibility for their citizens who are fighters. It's been a message we've delivered time and time again. And we are seeing hopeful progress," he said. Trump's comments about Iran, in an interview with CBS television aired on February 3, drew a stern rebuff from President Barham Saleh, who said the use of Iraq as a base against a third country violated its constitution. They also sparked renewed calls for a US withdrawal both from pro-Iran factions within the government and from Iran-trained armed groups whose power has risen sharply during the fightback against the Islamic State group that culminated in December 2017. — AFP



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International

Exposure of bullying 'boys club' brings #MeToo to French media

'League of LOL' set up on Facebook in 2009

PARIS: A secret "boys club" of journalists in France has been accused of harassing women writers and feminists during a near-decade long campaign of online bullying. The closed Facebook group "League of LOL" taunted women, cracked jokes about rape and used pornographic memes to attack its victims. Men were also sometimes targeted. The left-wing Liberation newspaper on Monday suspended two of its journalists, including Vincent Glad, who founded the group, after its own CheckNews fact-checking unit revealed the League of LOL's existence.

The affair has been dubbed the French media's #MeToo, a movement that has seen women speak out about sexual violence and revealed the prevalence of sexual harassment and attacks against women around the world. "Shameful. The treatment inflicted on numerous young women or young men by a certain informal group known as League of LOL makes you feel sick. Harassment, insults, cruel hoaxes, a whole array of digi-

tal attacks were used by this group," Liberation's Editor-in-Chief Laurent Joffrin wrote in an editorial on Tuesday.

He said Liberation would review social media policy for its journalists. His paper described the group as a macho "boys club". Others being disciplined include Liberation's online editor Alexandre Hervaud and David Doucet, the web editor at music and culture magazine Les Inrockuptibles. "The idea behind the group was not to harass women. Only to have fun. But very quickly, our way of having fun became very problematic and we didn't realise," Glad wrote in a lengthy apology posted on Twitter. Glad said he had

distanced himself from the group five years ago, but recognized he should have shut it down. "I created a monster that I lost control of," he said.

'Losers'

Sexism has for decades been rife in French political circles, though only in the past few years have women politicians, journalists and businesswomen felt more emboldened to speak out about harassment in the upper echelons of power and beyond. In his online apology Doucet wrote that he had been a member of the group for two years: "In the small world that was Twitter then, I saw that certain people were being regularly targeted

but I had no idea of the scale and the trauma suffered. "I was cowardly and too happy to be a part of this band that the Twittersphere at the time admired to intervene." Filmmaker Florence Procel said she had been humiliated after the group recorded a hoax call offering her a job.

She responded to Doucet's apology, writing on Twitter: "Thank you, David. It's a good start. I will be able to start forgiving you." She added: "When I say 'a good start', I mean that your apologies were necessary (and appreciated for what they are) but not enough on their own." France's junior minister for digital affairs, Mounir Mahjoubi, branded the men "losers". Hervaud wrote in his Twitter mea culpa: "The group's constant spirit of mockery and cynicism clearly influenced the actions of some of its more borderline members, especially under anonymity, which snowballed and inspired others." "I offer my apologies that are as sincere as they are late." — Reuters



Founder says he created 'monster'

What next for Brexit?

LONDON: With Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday asking MPs to give her more time for talks with Brussels to renegotiate her Brexit deal, it remains unclear how Britain will leave the European Union. EU officials have ruled out re-opening the withdrawal agreement—the legally binding part of the Brexit deal—but British officials are hopeful that some compromise will be found. Three ultimate scenarios remain—leaving the European Union with a version of the existing deal, crashing out with no deal, or no Brexit at all. Here are five potential next steps:

Try to alter the deal

MPs last month roundly rejected the deal negotiated by May in the biggest ever parliamentary defeat for a government. The key sticking point is the agreement's "backstop" solution to keep the Irish border open, which has the potential to leave Britain indefinitely tied to some form of EU customs union. Brexit hardliners from the Conservative Party's European Research Group have urged May to try and secure legally-binding changes to the backstop. Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, which May relies on for a majority in parliament, has also said it will not vote for a deal with the backstop as it stands.

The main opposition Labor Party has signaled that it could support the deal if the government commits to a permanent customs union with the EU but May has ruled this out. EU leaders have said they are willing to talk further, including on plans for the future trading relationship, but have repeatedly said they will not reopen the withdrawal agreement itself.

No deal

Britain is legally on track to leave the EU with or without a deal on March 29, unless it delays or stops the process. Leaving with no deal in place threatens to trigger a recession in Britain and markedly slow the EU's economic growth, as well as causing significant legal disruption. One of the world's biggest

Singapore vows to prosecute American over HIV data leak

SINGAPORE: Singapore vowed yesterday it will bring back and prosecute an American man accused of leaking data on thousands of people with HIV, after the breach caused widespread anger. The health ministry announced last month that confidential information of 14,200 people diagnosed with the virus that causes AIDS had been dumped online, with foreigners a majority of those affected. Mikhy Farrera Brochez, an HIV-positive man who used to live in the city-state, is believed to have obtained the information from his Singaporean doctor partner, who had access to the ministry's HIV Registry.

The data leak, which included people's HIV status, names and addresses, has provoked an outcry, especially among the LGBT community and NGOs involved in the fight against AIDS. Speaking in parliament yesterday, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong described the release of the data as a "reprehensible act" and promised authorities will do all they can to bring him back to the city-state. "Brochez is currently under police investigation for various offences," Gan said. "The police are engaging their American counterparts and are seeking their assistance in the investigations against Brochez. The police will spare no effort pursuing all avenues to bring Brochez to justice."

Singapore and the United States have an



LONDON: Pedestrians walk past the banners and flags of Anti-Brexit protesters outside the Houses of Parliament in London yesterday. — AFP

economies could lose preferential access to its largest export market overnight, affecting every sector, leading to rising costs and disruption at British ports.

Delay

Speculation has been growing that the government will instead seek to postpone the Brexit process. Government ministers have spoken of a technical extension but some reports have suggested the delay could be two or three months or even longer. Political analysts argue lawmakers could still back such a postponement further down the line—although all the other 27 EU countries would have to agree. A potential complication is that elections to the European Parliament are due in late May and the new chamber is set to sit on July 2. Some of Britain's 73 seats have already been reallocated. Brussels also may not be so keen if the delay would simply translate into more months of political gridlock.

Second referendum

Dozens of MPs are seeking a new referendum to reverse the 2016 result, when the

Leave campaign won by 52 percent to 48 percent. But supporters admit they do not currently have the numbers in parliament to make it happen. No law prevents Britain from doing it all over again, but many question whether a re-run would be democratic or resolve anything. May has warned that another vote "would do irreparable damage to the integrity of our politics". It also threatens to be just as divisive as the last one, with opinion polls showing the country is still split over the issue.

General election

It is a long shot but some reports have suggested the prime minister could call a snap vote in a bid to break the impasse. The most recent polls indicate the Conservatives could win a slender majority, meaning that the political rough-and-tumble seen since the 2016 referendum would likely continue.

The only other way for an election to be called would be for parliament to vote no confidence in the government, but at this stage it looks unlikely as Labor already tried and failed to pass such a vote last month. — AFP



SINGAPORE: Photo shows a crowd of people visiting central Singapore's iconic promenade. Those in Singapore with HIV—the virus that causes AIDS—have long complained of prejudice, and campaigners say a data breach of some 14,200 people, whose HIV status was released on the internet in January 2019, has caused widespread consternation. — AFP

extradition treaty. Brochez was jailed in Singapore in 2016 for lying about his HIV status, drug-related offences and fraud. He was released and deported back to the US in 2018 after serving his sentence. Local media have traced his latest whereabouts to Clark County in Kentucky. Gan said authorities did not know at the time of Brochez's deportation that he was in possession of the HIV data, and denied his ministry sought to cover up the incident.

He said the ministry has worked with authorities to disable online access to the data and continues to scour the internet to

prevent it being released again. But he also warned it was possible Brochez still had more files in his possession. Foreigners with HIV were for many years not allowed to set foot in Singapore at all. In 2015, authorities lifted the ban on foreigners with the virus making short visits but those seeking to work in Singapore must still pass a test. The leak of HIV data was the second major breach of confidential information disclosed within months, after the health records of about 1.5 million Singaporeans were stolen by hackers last year. — AFP

Fear and trauma haunt Congolese massacre survivors

YUMBI, DR Congo: Wounded in the head and chest and with her children in tow, Miniunga Bonkita fled to the haven of an island in the Congo River, a sliver of land between two nations. "I stumbled across the assailants as I was returning home," the young mother told AFP. "They shot at me," she said. "I fell and then they started beating me."

More than 500 fellow members of the Banunu community were slaughtered on December 16-17 in Yumbi, a remote region in western DR Congo—a massacre whose full details are only now emerging, almost two months later. Bonkita found refuge with her children and about 100 other Banunus on Moniende island in the river that has given its name to countries on both banks: the vast Democratic Republic of Congo, once ruled by Belgium, and the smaller Republic of Congo, a former French colony. Yumbi, located in Mai-Ndombi province, lies about 400 kilometers north of Kinshasa, reached by a difficult two-day boat trip from the capital.

At least 535 people were slaughtered, according to a UN toll based on a count of the bodies. Almost all the victims were members of the Banunu ethnic group, hunted down by armed men from the Batende

community. Authorities have presented the killings as an act of spontaneous violence—tensions between rival communities that exploded in a dispute over the burial of a Banunu tribal chief. But several sources in the area told AFP that the bloodbath was carefully planned using military-style tactics, and some assailants wore army uniforms.

Paddling from fear

At least 16,000 people have fled over the river to the Republic of Congo, many of them seeking shelter in the district of Makotimpoko, according to authorities in Brazzaville. "They came in dugout canoes, some of them paddling with their hands because they had no oar. They were bare-chested, without clothes," said Father Gicquaire, the priest at Makotimpoko. Bosukisa Montole, cradling a son who had been wounded in the neck, said: "We rushed to the river to try to escape. We were lucky because we didn't run into people with weapons on the way there. But when we were making our way across in the canoe, my child and my wife were shot at." Survivor Lobota Lifuna said: "As we fled, we could see the Batende chopping children into pieces on the river bank." — AFP

Nigerian widows confront Shell in Dutch court

THE HAGUE: Four Nigerian women yesterday launched a court case in the Netherlands against oil giant Shell for alleged complicity in the execution of their husbands by the military regime in the 1990s. The civil case has been brought by Esther Kiobel—the widow of Barinem Kiobel who was hanged in 1995 along with writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and seven others—and is backed by Amnesty International.

"My husband had a good heart. Now I am a poor widow who has lost everything," Esther Kiobel was quoted as telling the court in The Hague by Dutch news agency ANP. "The abuses that my family and I went through were a horrible experience that has traumatized us to this day," added Kiobel, who fled

Nigeria in 1998 and now lives in the United States.

Kiobel and one of the other widows were in court for opening arguments. The other two women whose husbands were killed were denied visas to attend. Kiobel added in a statement issued through Amnesty that "over the years, Shell has continually fought to make sure this case is not heard in court. They have the resources to fight me instead of doing justice for my husband." The Dutch court writ alleges that Shell helped in the arrest of the men, who had sought to peacefully disrupt oil development in the Ogoni region because of health and environmental impacts.

Saro-Wiwa, president and founder of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and eight fellow activists were executed on November 10, 1995 after a military tribunal convicted them of the murder of four traditional Ogoni chiefs. "These women believe that their husbands would still be alive today were it not for the brazen self-interest of Shell, which encouraged the Nigerian government's bloody crackdown on protesters even when it knew the human cost," Amnesty's Mark Dummett said. — AFP



THE HAGUE: Victoria Bera (left) and Esther Kiobel, two of the widows whose husbands died by executions in 1995, stand outside The Hague courthouse yesterday. — AFP

International

Embattled Australia PM suffers a historic defeat over refugees

First administration in nearly a century to lose a vote

CANBERRA: Australia's conservative minority government suffered a damaging political defeat yesterday, becoming the first administration in nearly a century to lose a vote on major legislation and sparking calls for a snap election. Despite a bruising and highly personal lobbying effort, Prime Minister Scott Morrison was defeated by MPs who insisted refugees held in offshore facilities have the right to be transferred to Australia for medical treatment. It is the first time in decades that an Australian government has lost a vote on a substantive piece of legislation, sparking applause and cheers from observers in the parliamentary viewing gallery in Canberra.

Morrison lost his parliamentary majority last year and has been relying on crossbenchers to keep control of the lower House of Representatives. But the 75-74 vote-which came on the first sitting day of parliament this year-in favor of the refugee bill opposed by the government is a blow to the already embattled prime minister and raised questions about whether he can remain in office. When the sitting government last lost a vote on substantive legislation in 1929, then prime minister Stanley Bruce immediately called an election, and lost it. The government of prime minister Arthur Fadden lost a symbolic budget vote in 1941 and immediately resigned.

No snap election

Morrison ruled out calling a snap election, saying the vote was not a no-confidence motion in his government and he was still planning for a national poll in May. "These are not matters that go to issues of con-

fidence and I don't consider them in those terms," Morrison told reporters in Canberra. The bill passed with the support of the main opposition Labor Party and crossbenchers from the left-leaning Greens and independent MPs.

Many of the independent MPs have indicated they want the government to serve its full term, which ends in May. The bill, which is an amendment to government legislation, was first passed by the upper house in December, and will return to the Senate for a vote on Wednesday after several changes were made to it. It is expected to pass as the coalition does not have the numbers in the upper house to block it. The push to speed up medical evacuations was first made by independent MP Kerryn Phelps last year after she won the Liberal Party stronghold of Wentworth when former PM Malcolm Turnbull was ousted in a party coup.

Since then, the government had lurched from crisis to crisis, and a disastrous showing in elections in Victoria state intensified expectations it is heading for defeat in May. The vote in favor of the bill came amid growing concern about the wellbeing of asylum-seekers sent to Nauru and Papua New Guinea, with reports of abuse, suicide and lengthy detention periods. Under a harsh policy meant to deter asylum-seekers from reaching Australia by boat, Canberra sends arrivals to the camps for processing and barred them from resettling in Australia. Rights groups praised the vote, with the Human Rights Law Centre calling it a "watershed moment in refugee politics and Australian history" —AFP



CANBERRA: The Australian Department of Defense shows Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison (center) shaking hands with Australia's Defense Minister Christopher Pyne (left) and France's Defense Minister Florence Parris after signing the submarine Strategic Partnership Agreement in Canberra. —AFP

Sri Lanka seeks hangmen as executions resume

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has started advertising for hangmen, after the president vowed to resume executions for the first time in four decades as part of a headline anti-drugs crackdown inspired by the Philippines. Candidates must have "mental strength" and "excellent moral character," according to job ads placed by prison authorities to fill long-vacant positions. There are two vacancies, and only Sri Lankan men aged between 18 and 45 need apply. Sri Lanka has not hanged any convicts since a moratorium on capital punishment was imposed in 1976, but President Maithripala Sirisena last week announced plans to resume hangings within two months.

Sirisena told parliament he was committed to bringing back the death penalty for drug offenders, after vowing a tougher line on spiraling narcotics-related crime, modeled on a crackdown in the Philippines. Following a visit to the Philippines last month, Sirisena said he wanted to copy President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial strongarm tactics in dealing with illegal drugs. Criminals in Sri Lanka are regularly given death sentences for murder, rape and drug-related crimes but until now their punishments have been routinely commuted to life in jail.

An executioner was in post at the main prison in Colombo until his retirement in 2014, but attempts to replace him failed. Three recruits had quit within weeks with no work to do. "Selected candidates will be referred to a test conducted at the National Hospital to check the mental strength," according to the advertisement. The chosen candidates will be offered a maximum salary of 36,410 rupees (\$208) a month and will be eligible for a state pension. The justice ministry has said that it had completed administrative procedures for the execution of five drug convicts. However, President Sirisena is yet to sign a death warrant of a condemned prisoner. —AFP

In eastern Syria, the infants of a dying 'caliphate'

BAGHOUZ: They were born in a "state" that no longer exists, most to fathers who are dead and mothers whose countries don't want them back. These are the children pouring out of Baghouz. Their grimy faces are the only ones visible in the sea of black veils worn by their mothers, packed in the back of a dozen pickup trucks spitting them away from the Islamic State group's last hold-out in eastern Syria.

There are infants as young as three months old, their ceaseless, hungry wails synching into a single howl. The older toddlers stare in silence at the gathered journal-

ists. They seem to be dressed in everything they could pile on: tiny knit sweaters and hats, puffer jackets, blankets. It is hard to tell how thin or young their mothers are under their all-encompassing black robes, but their eyes are gaunt and sunken, their bone-thin hands blackened with dirt.

Food and safe drinking water have been scarce for weeks as the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces closed in on the last IS enclave near the flat, desolate village of Baghouz. But somehow, even as the "caliphate" was dying, babies were still being born. Khadija is one year old, born under IS in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor. She is swaddled in a thick blanket by her mother, a 17-year-old Syrian girl from 500 kilometers (300 miles) away in the northern city of Manbij. Her father, just as young, has been rounded up by the SDF and placed into another truck with dozens of men.

Asked what she hoped for her daughter, Marah pulled back the blanket from her daughter's face and just stared blankly. There are other nationalities too-Iraqi, Turkish,

Russian, Ukrainian and French.

An uncertain future in a pair of displaced persons' camps run by the Kurdish administration of northern Syria, where thousands of others like them are already being held. To get there, they cross hundreds of kilometers of desert plain in the open-back trucks, exposed to the rain and other elements. On either side of the desolate route lie the tattered belongings of those with little else: a torn suitcase, a ripped grey sweater, a navy blue stroller turned on its side. At least 35 children have died on the route or just after arrival, according to the United Nations, most of hypothermia. In the Al-Hol reception centre, women and children - most of them under five - sit on piles of blankets, waiting for a tent to become available.

In the nearby health clinic, veiled women lay their haggard toddlers on a table for a doctor with worn-out eyes to examine. A 19-year-old with an infant on her hip emerges from the women's clinic. "I just found out I'm pregnant." —AFP

N Korea may have made more nukes, but threat reduced

WASHINGTON: North Korea has continued to produce bomb fuel while in denuclearization talks with the United States and may have produced enough in the past year to add as many as seven nuclear weapons to its arsenal, according to a study released just weeks before a planned second summit between the North Korean leader and US President Donald Trump. However, the country's freeze in nuclear and missile testing since 2017 mean that North Korea's weapons program probably poses less of a threat than it did at the end of that year, the report by Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation found.

Siegfried Hecker, a former director of the US Los Alamos weapons laboratory in New Mexico who is now at Stanford

and was one of the report's authors, told Reuters analysis of satellite imagery showed North Korea's production of bomb fuel continued in 2018. He said spent fuel generated from operation of the 5 megawatt reactor at its main nuclear plant at Yongbyon from 2016-18 appeared to have been reprocessed starting in May and would have produced an estimated 5-8 kg of weapons-grade plutonium.

This combined with production of perhaps 150 kg of highly enriched uranium may have allowed North Korea to increase the number of weapons in its arsenal by between five and seven, the Stanford report said. Hecker's team had estimated the size of North Korea's arsenal in 2017 at 30, bringing a possible current total of 37 weapons. US intelligence is not certain how many nuclear warheads North Korea has. Last year, the Defense Intelligence Agency was at the high end with an estimate of about 50 nuclear warheads, while analysts have given a range of 20-60.

The Stanford report said that while North Korea was likely to have continued work on warhead miniaturization and to ensure they can stand up to delivery via intercontinental ballistic missiles, the halt in testing greatly limited its ability to make

such improvements. "They have continued the machinery to turn out plutonium and highly enriched uranium," Hecker said, "but it also depends on weaponization - the design, build and test and then the delivery."

"When they ended missile testing, those things rolled backwards. So when I look at the whole spectrum, to me North Korea ... is less dangerous today than it was at the end of 2017, in spite of the fact that they may have made another five to seven weapons worth of nuclear material." The Stanford experts said it was their assessment that "North Korea cannot deliver a nuclear warhead with any measure of confidence to the US mainland," although Hecker said its nuclear weapons were a real threat to Japan and South Korea. Hecker said it was understandable that North Korea should have continued its weapons work, given that it had reached no specific agreement in the latest talks with the United States to stop that work.

US Secretary State Mike Pompeo told Congress in July that North Korea was continuing to produce fuel for nuclear bombs in spite of its pledge to denuclearize, even as he argued - as he has continued to do - that the Trump administration was making progress in talks with Pyongyang. — Reuters



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Small firms opt out as India Inc races to be LGBT-friendly

Following India's September move to scrap a colonial-era ban on gay sex, more and more corporations are opening their doors to LGBT+ people and ushering in policies to make them feel more welcome. But smaller firms across industries - textile houses, printing presses, rubber manufacturers, real estate agencies and others - are not racing to diversify just yet.

At a dusty roadside eatery in northern Haryana state, Babu Ram Bhooshne and six of his workers burst into laughter at the idea of hiring lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and introducing LGBT+ policies at their workplace. "Do I want to run my business or do I want to keep worrying about these people flirting with my waiters," said the mustachioed 62-year-old, laughing at the cash register, with pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses on the wall behind him.

"If I have kinners (transgender women) and (gay) men walking around, I will lose all my customers. They are not ready for such things," Bhooshne said, adding that his restaurant is most frequented by truckers, farm laborers and local villagers. Experts say such homo- and transphobic comments are not surprising in India, which despite making great economic strides, remains a largely conservative country where homosexuality and premarital sex are still frowned upon.

And most of India's 60 million small and medium-sized enterprises - which contribute nearly 30 percent to the national GDP - are in rural areas, according to government data. Bhooshne's Goldy Vaishnav restaurant was one of more than a dozen small firms the Thomson Reuters Foundation visited, with most owners unaware of or uninterested in gay- or trans-friendly policies such as health insurance for same-sex couples.

Ashok Row Kavi, a prominent LGBT+ rights activist, said that when most firms, including those in cities and satellite towns, continue to struggle with a wide gender gap, expecting LGBT-friendly policies in smaller ones was "far-fetched". "There are no women in these places, so from where would you get LGBT+ (people) in? If there is an effeminate boy, he's in big trouble. And they won't employ trans (people) for heaven's sake," Kavi told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It won't happen until we accept that the system has gone wrong, that there is a toxic masculine atmosphere all over, and until we learn through the education system to change it," said Kavi, chairman of Mumbai-based charity Humsafar Trust.

Great business sense

India is home to nearly 56 million LGBT+ adults, according to Paris-based firm Out Now Consulting, a marketing company that helps businesses target gay clients. Yet the LGBT+ market remains largely untapped, mainly due to discrimination. That is why large Indian companies are rushing to change policies to include gender-neutral bathrooms, insurance for same-sex couples, leave for sex reassignment surgeries and sensitizing employees.

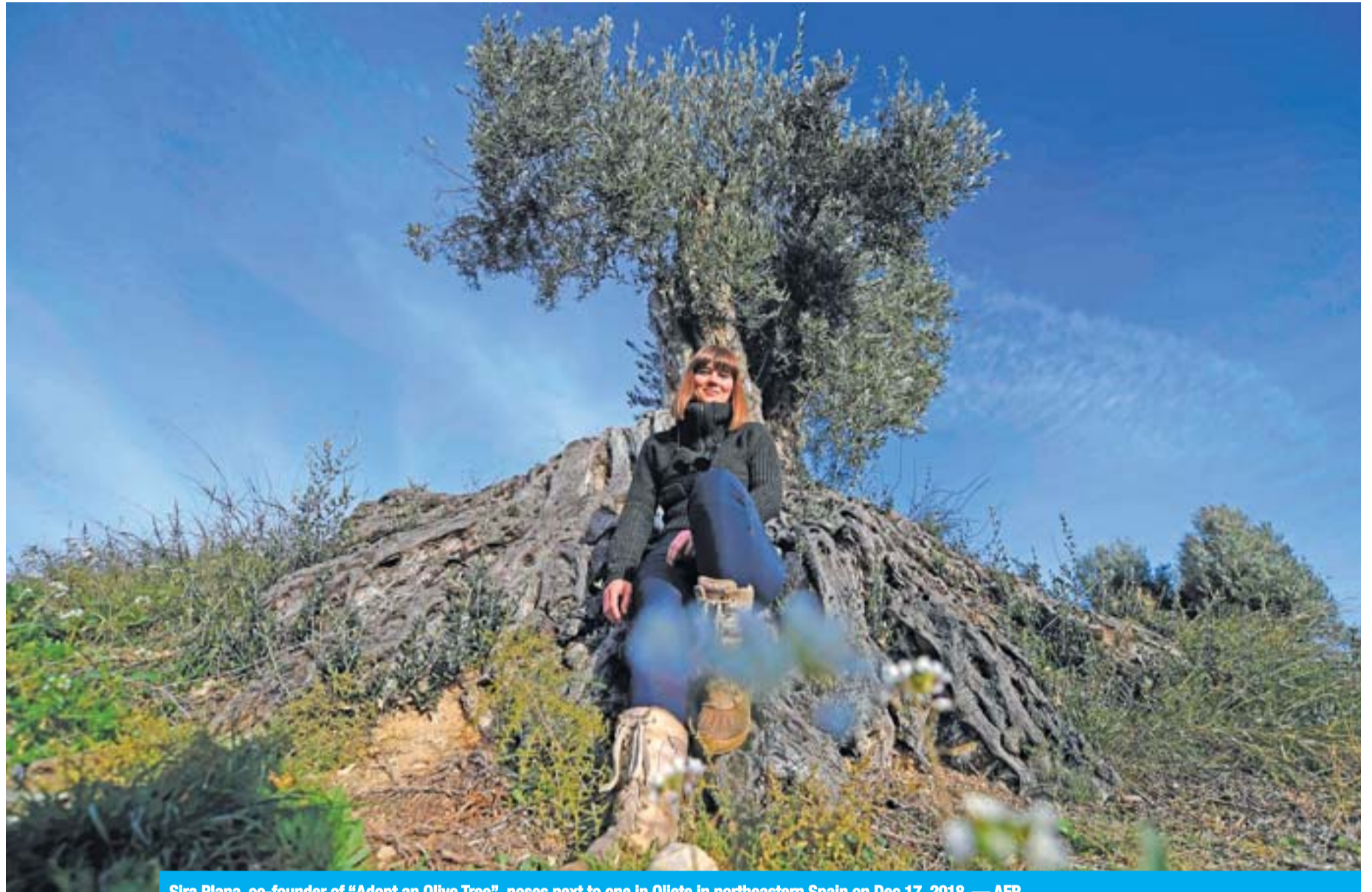
They are finding growing resonance after gay relationships were decriminalized in the world's largest democracy, said Parmesh Shahani, head of the Godrej India Culture Lab, which encourages Indian companies to adopt LGBT-friendly policies. "Corporate India has realized that whichever way you look at it - from an economic or talent perspective - everyone wants to hire millennials and for them, being inclusive really matters; they won't work for homophobic companies," he said.

The World Bank estimates that homophobia costs India \$31 billion a year. While Shahani said he does not see rural or even urban India becoming fully inclusive any time soon, he was hopeful that small businesses would follow in the footsteps of the corporate world, "otherwise they're not going to get the brightest minds". Mumbai-based conglomerate Godrej and a handful of others, such as Tata and the Lalit Hospitality Group, have long offered LGBT+ benefits and workplace support despite the colonial-era law banning homosexuality, with the rest catching up now.

"As a business owner, I think it's very important to have these policies, which for me make great business sense," said Keshav Suri, whose family owns the Lalit hotel chain. Reports, including from Accenture and the Brunswick Group, show that inclusive policies result in benefits such as greater national GDP, talent retention, more productivity and a better reputation that can lead to direct investments.

Not all small businesses are against diversifying. Three of those the Thomson Reuters Foundation visited were on board, but said the time was not right because of problems ranging from a lack of financial resources to fear of backlash from workers. "It has never even crossed my mind. In the past 25 years of running this business, no such case has come up. I don't think any of my workers are (LGBT+)," said Rajiv Mehtani, owner of Indo Farm Implements in Haryana's Karnal district. "It doesn't matter if someone is gay or transgender as long as the job gets done ... We have to evolve with the times, but not immediately."

As Mehtani got up to take a phone call, one of his company supervisors, who refused to give his name, said: "No way, such things are never going to happen here. There is no need or space for such people - men do all the work here." — Reuters



Sira Plana, co-founder of "Adopt an Olive Tree", poses next to one in Oliete in northeastern Spain on Dec 17, 2018. — AFP

Olive trees breathe new life into Spain village

"They're over 500 years old," says Sira Plana proudly as she points to Oliete's olive groves, many of which are thriving now thanks to an adoption scheme that has prevented this northeastern Spanish village from dying out. For an annual fee of €50 (\$57), some 2,500 sponsors receive photos of their olive tree by mobile phone, along with two litres of olive oil annually.

As well as the satisfaction of knowing their money will be ploughed back into the local economy and help create jobs, sponsors also get to name their tree. "We tried to do it in a way that people would get emotionally involved in the project," said Plana, co-founder of "Adopt an Olive Tree", standing between trees loaded with ripe olives.

Spain is the world's largest producer of olive oil and Plana said that when people explain why they decided to sponsor a tree "in the majority of cases, it is very, very emotional... linked to a relative, a child, grandfather, an olive plantation". Her grandfather was once veterinarian in this village, currently home to just 364 people, down from some 2,500 people a century ago. Of around 100,000 centuries-old olive trees abandoned in the area around Oliete, more than 7,000 have been revived by the adoption project launched four years ago.

'More than a tree'

"It's much more than a tree," said Esther Lopez, a 41-year-old accountant, who lives near Madrid and adopted a tree three years ago. "With my 50 euros and the 50 euros

of others, they can get a village which otherwise would be abandoned back on its feet." Residents began moving away from rural towns and villages like Oliete, in the Aragon region, after Spain's 1936-39 civil war to find work in factories in cities.

Some parts of Spain were left with just two people per square kilometer - the same population density as in Siberia. The province of Teruel, where Oliete is located, is slowly dying. It has just 9.1 inhabitants per square kilometer, compared to the national average of 92. Around 3,900 municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants are at "high risk" of disappearing, according to the Economic and Social Council of Spain, a body which advises the government on economic and labour issues.

Eight permanent jobs - including six agricultural workers - have been created in Oliete thanks to a new olive oil mill, helping to keep families in the village and attract new residents. In turn, this prevents the closure of the school. Elsewhere in Spain, similar projects have taken off in villages at risk of dying out. Sarrion, in the same province as Oliete, has built an economy based around truffles. And in Soria, another depopulated region, an NGO has set up an organic farming project employing people in difficulty, while in the western region of Extremadura, cherry trees can be adopted.

'Stay forever'

"If there is work I can stay here forever," said newcomer Cesar Tarradas, 36, after using a machine to shake olives

off the trees. He moved to Oliete a few months ago to join his father, his sister and her four children. "I would like to buy a house and make something of my life," added Tarradas, whose family decided to leave Barcelona because of the soaring rents in Spain's second largest city.

With the arrival of young children, Oliete's small school "will remain alive for another 10 years", says its young teacher, Ana Lomba. "Having a school is what gives strength, maintains the flame of a village, because a village without a school is destined to disappear," added Lomba. She has six pupils under her charge, just two more than the minimum authorized in Aragon.

'See an opportunity'

The school hallways are decorated with pupils' drawings which illustrate popular Spanish sayings about olive trees, such as "To be harder than an olive tree" and "Olive oil cures all". "These olive trees have given a great deal to past generations," said Plana, who quit a job in the cosmetics industry to move to Oliete and launch the tree adoption project. "They have allowed them to feed themselves, warm themselves, conserve many things, provided light," she said.

Spain's high commissioner for the fight against depopulation, Isaura Leal, told AFP that Oliete was proof that "generations of youths are starting to see an opportunity" in living in the countryside. "It's no longer seen as something for failures, for bumpkins, as our parents used to say," she added. — AFP

Cities consult citizens for fresh ideas

Barcelona residents had until the end of January to submit suggestions for a plan to redesign the green spaces of Montjuic, an iconic hill overlooking the Catalan capital. Few people live on Montjuic itself, which sports a stadium built for the 1992 Olympic Games alongside museums, a castle and recreational areas, but there are dense residential streets at the bottom of the hill.

Inhabitants of those neighborhoods were given the chance to add their ideas on things like transport and environmental protection - both online and at meetings - to a draft of the city council's action plan for Montjuic. Barcelona often uses inclusive processes like this to gather citizens' input on municipal projects - a trend that is growing worldwide at city and national levels.

Recent surveys in Barcelona, Spain's second-largest city, demonstrate that people want, and are able, to take part in shaping urban development. But with municipal elections to be held in May, Fernando Pindado, commissioner for democracy and active participation at Barcelona City Council, said working methods needed to be strengthened so they remain consistent, no matter which political party is in charge. And the city is still looking for the best ways to incorporate the views of a wider range of people, he added. "Not all citizens are the same - there are lots of foreigners, some have kids, some don't," he said. "The Internet is very useful for extending social debates ... but not everyone has internet access."

Berlin's refugees

Participatory processes are gradually emerging in cities around the world, as digital technology makes them simpler and faster for local authorities to implement. Getting them to work effectively, however, can be challenging for governments and citizens alike, said Birgit zur Nieden, a commissioner in the Senate of Berlin, which governs the German city. That was the case when the senate trialled a new way of designing a program to improve the lives of refugees in the capital, she said.

"In 2015, many such people came - and Berlin failed in some regards to attend to their needs well," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The process, which lasted about nine months, involved inviting NGOs and other organizations

that interact with migrants to take part in working groups on relevant topics. The goal was to infuse their knowledge and understanding of refugees' needs into the city program, she explained. In practice, the design was complex, and the administration and civil society groups did not find it easy to work productively together, she said. Nonetheless, it was useful to get to know each other and exchange expertise, she added.

Youthful edge

Beth Noveck, director of the Governance Lab at New York University, said harnessing new technology to engage the wider public in drafting laws was "a global phenomenon". But previously authoritarian states like Taiwan and Brazil are experimenting with it the most, she added. "In countries that have long-established and highly rule-based legislative practices, innovation can be difficult in contrast to countries with younger democratic institutions," she said.

In Taiwan, artificial intelligence and other technology was used to engage 200,000 people in crafting legislation on company shareholder requirements and internet alcohol sales, for instance, Noveck said. The government uses an open source tool called Polis, which makes it possible to take the pulse of a large group using an algorithm that clusters their responses. Brazil is using an app called Mudamos to allow ordinary people to digitally sign proposed bills relating to popular issues such as public cleanliness and municipal transport.

Meanwhile, in January, French President Emmanuel Macron launched a two-month "great national debate", in response to ongoing "yellow vest" protests largely rooted in dissatisfaction over growing social inequalities. Through a series of Internet-based consultations, workshops and regional conferences, the government is canvassing citizens' views on key themes including environmental policy, taxation, democracy and public services.

In general, participatory processes are being used more at the local level because party politics are less dominant here, with cities like Reykjavik, Barcelona and Bogota pioneering the use of online engagement, Noveck said. People also find it easier to spot problems, identify solutions and evaluate legislation that directly affects their daily lives, she noted. But in Barcelona, for example, there is still a lack of transparency over how the proposals gathered are used, according to a research project into participatory processes called CrowdLaw Catalog, led by the Governance Lab. In recent years, which ideas made it into the Municipal Action Plan and why has not been clear, the Catalog said, noting a statistical model could be used in future to measure this. — Reuters

Dutch scientists probing mystery of mass bird deaths

It was late on a stormy Saturday night when marine biologist Mardik Leopold's phone rang at his home on the remote northern Dutch island of Texel. On the line was a coast-watch volunteer calling to tell him of reports of hundreds of dead guillemots washing up along the country's shores. "The next morning, my phone rang red-hot from callers all over reporting dead birds," Leopold, based at Wageningen University's marine research department in the northern port city of Den Helder, told AFP. "Alarm bells started ringing."

Since early January, more than 20,000 dead guillemots have washed up dead on Dutch beaches - from the northern Wadden Islands to southwestern Zeeland. "All the birds show signs of severe starvation and we don't know why," said Leopold. On Thursday, Leopold, other marine biologists and veterinary pathologists will gather in the central city of Utrecht to perform a mass autopsy on some 100 birds, hoping to find an answer.

Scientists like Leopold say they are in the dark as to why this phenomenon has struck the North Sea's guillemot population, which numbers about two million. One possible cause being probed is a recent spill from a container ship, the Panama-registered MSC Zoe, in January. The spill littered the Dutch and German coastlines with debris, including plastic toys, polystyrene, shoes and at least one bag with a dangerous powder identified by authorities as "organic peroxide".

But there is no proof of a link and the container theory raises as many questions as it would answer. Why, for example, are only guillemots dying all along the Dutch coastline? Leopold said he has received no similar reports from Belgium or Germany. Also, guillemots are a cliff-breeding species who raise their chicks mostly along the rugged coasts of Scotland, Norway, Iceland and the German island of Heligoland, said Leopold. "They are pretty robust birds," he said, equipped with small wings which enable them to "fly" underwater as they chase fish like sprat and herring.

'Something wrong at sea'

But now, dead birds are washing up "in their thousands", Leopold said at a warehouse in Den Helder, where dozens of the dead birds are being kept on ice. "That's pointing out that there is something wrong at sea, and that's alarming." Their mysterious deaths are turning marine biologists like Leopold into the equivalent of animal crime-scene investigators. There are several theories circulating.

One is that rough weather caused the birds to become too tired to chase fish underwater, eventually causing them to starve. But, said Leopold, "this winter was not particularly rough or severe and also, surely the birds would also have washed up elsewhere?" As for the container theory, Leopold said an initial autopsy on a small number of birds showed "no plastic" in their stomachs. Similarly, if the birds were affected by a chemical, other animals would also have shown symptoms, the marine biologist said. Nor are the birds covered in oil or any other visible substance, which rules out an oil spill. This is not the first time guillemots have died off in their thousands, said Leopold. There were similar events in the 1980s and 1990s. While Leopold and other scientists are puzzling out the mysterious deaths, some 120 km to the east, animal rescuers have been hard at work saving many weak guillemots still alive when they washed up. "They arrive here very sick. They are in poor condition," said Hetty Sinnema, manager at the Fugelhellung bird sanctuary in the small northern Frisian village of Ureterp. — AFP

Business

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Ahli United Bank Kuwait records KD 51.3 million in net profit

2018 another successful year for AUB; net profit grows 15.3% y/y

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (Kuwait) recorded a year on year growth of 15.3% with Net profit reaching to KD 51.3 Mn.

Ahli United Bank K.S.C.P. ("AUB") has marked 2018 as another successful year by delivering a net profit of KD 51.3 Mn (2017: KD 44.5 Mn) for the year, a net growth of 15.3%.

The Bank achieved a growth in total operating income of 1.2% to reach KD 121.6 Mn at the end of 2018 (KD 120.1 Mn in 2017), while the equity attributable to shareholders has increased by 5.9% reaching KD 430.8 Mn, up from shareholder's equity of KD 406.9 Mn posted at the end of 2017. Net operating income has increased by 3.3% reaching KD84.4 Mn as compared to KD 81.7 Mn for 2017.

Beside these accomplishments, the Bank has maintained a sound capital adequacy ratio, before dividend distributions, of 16.6% (18.0% in 2017), comfortably higher than the required regulatory level. This provides room for future expansion in both customers' credit facilities and core businesses. Moreover, the Bank achieved a return on equity and a return on assets of 12.4% and 1.4% respectively at the end of 2018 being amongst the highest key performance indicators in the local market. Earnings per share increased from 23.3 fils in 2017 to 27.1fils per share at the end of 2018.

Total assets, total customer deposits and net financing receivables stood at KD 3,914Mn, KD 2,425Mn and KD 2,800Mn respectively at the end of the year. Finance receivables and deposits are prudently managed by maximizing returns. The Bank maintained a conservative risk approach which helps in robust asset quality and lower NPF ratio at 1.27% (1.39% in 2017) and with a coverage ratio of 334%. During the year, the Bank implemented IFRS 9 guidelines issued by CBK.

Commenting on the results, Dr. Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, Chairman said: "With God Almighty willing, Ahli United Bank has succeeded in 2018 to continue its success at a steady pace and to establish its unique position as one of the leading Islamic banks not only in Kuwait but also at the regional level."

Dr. Al-Mudhaf said that despite the challenging global operating environment, Ahli United Bank continues to pursue its role as a leading financial institution that is keen to play an active role in contributing to economic growth within "Kuwait's New Vision 2035", based on the strengths of Kuwait's operating environment which includes political stability and the size of the large sovereign assets, which is reflected



Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf

ultimately on the strength of Kuwaiti banks in general.

Dr. Al-Mudhaf pointed to the advanced capabilities enjoyed by AUB and its commitment to the highest professional standards that are most appreciated by global ratings agencies and place the Bank at the forefront of banking and financial service providers in the State of Kuwait, which enables the Bank to continue to receive these superior ratings from agencies such as Fitch, Moody's and Capital Intelligence.

The Bank maintained a credit rating of "A+" on the long term and "F1" on the short term with stable outlook by Fitch Ratings Agency, and "A2" on the local currency with stable outlook by Moody's. Capital Intelligence affirmed the Bank's long term credit rating of foreign currency to "A+" and enhanced the short term foreign currency rating to "A2". All these ratings confirm the credit standing, capital quality, and stability of the Bank for future growth.

The Chairman attributed the Bank's success year after year to the efforts made by the Executive Management to provide integrated banking services and solutions to customers, which contributed to maintaining customer confidence and enhancing the Bank's presence in the corporate banking, retail banking, private banking and wealth management sectors, and the treasury sector, stressing that this success has contributed to putting the bank among the list of the best Islamic banks in Kuwait.

On the back of this success, the Board has recommended a cash dividend of 15% (15 fils per share) of the share capital and 5% bonus shares (5 shares for each 100 common equity shares) subject to the final approval of the Bank's General Assembly.

Mr. Tareq Muhmood, Acting Chief Executive Officer, expressed his pride in achieving these financial results for the year 2018, stressing that this results in a new year of success as part of the implementation of the five-year strategic plan of the bank, launched in 2015 based on a comprehensive development and growth.

Based on our success, we are proud to have received a number of awards for excellence in 2018, including The Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait 2018, Islamic Banker of the Year 2018 - Kuwait, and the Best Premium Banking in Kuwait 2018 by Islamic Business & Finance International Magazine. Mr. Muhmood added in line with the bank's keenness to fulfil its client's expectations, we have made significant strides in 2018 using technology to make the lives of our customers easier.

policies aimed at forcing the transfer of technology to Chinese companies, and curb industrial subsidies.

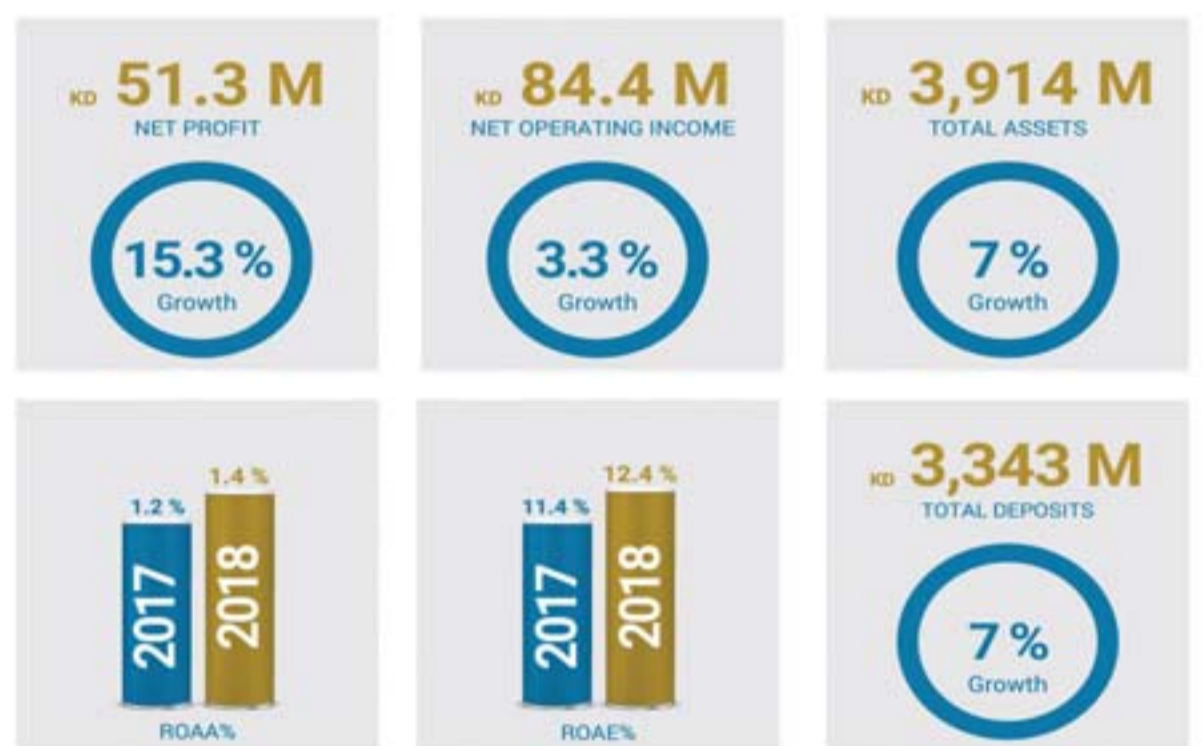
Talks kicked off in Beijing with discussions among deputy-level officials on Monday before minister-level meetings later in the week. A round of talks at the end of January ended with some progress reported - but no deal and US declarations that much more work was needed.

US President Donald Trump said last week he did not plan to meet with Xi before the March 1 deadline, dampening hopes that a trade pact could be reached quickly. However, White House senior counselor Kellyanne Conway said on Monday a meeting was still possible soon, telling Fox News Channel that Trump wants a deal with China, but it must be "fair to Americans, and American workers and American interests".

Meanwhile, Beijing called the latest US warning against using Huawei equipment "groundless" yesterday, as the Chinese telecom giant faces espionage fears in a growing number of countries. The world's second-largest smartphone maker and biggest producer of telecommunications gear has been under fire in recent months after the arrest of a top executive in Canada and a global campaign by Washington to blacklist its equipment.

"The US has spared no effort in unscrupulously fabricating all kinds of groundless charges," said Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a regular press briefing in Beijing yesterday. She also accused the US of "sowing discord" between China and other countries, and called the actions of Washington "neither fair nor moral." — Agencies

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2018



البنك الأهلي المتحد
ahli united bank

We continue to upgrade the capabilities and user experience of our mobile delivery, whilst also continuing to invest in our internet banking. We also used technology to introduce our most advanced branch in Avenues Phase 4 which showcases many of our technology developments.

The bank has been able to cater for those needs most efficiently by designing banking solutions and services on the basis of those analysis. Our most outstanding success in this regard has been the launching of POS devices for the first time in Kuwait on Kuwait Airways flights, exclusively. This service is a new development in POS usage as it allows travelers to use these devices in flight to buy various products available in onboard KAC flights by using credit cards or debit cards most conveniently and safely. Customers can now upgrade their seats from "Economy" to "Business" or "First" class when available in flight at special rates,

thereby enabling customer to enjoy luxury on KAC flights. This has been a new initiative launched by AUB to employ its technical and technological potentials and capabilities to provide an unsurpassed banking experience to customers wherever they may be.

The bank has taken wide steps toward developing its electronic services provided to individuals with special needs, thereby catering for all the needs of this segment of our customers, while fulfilling all control requirements in this regard.

Finally, in concluding his statement, Dr. Al-Mudhaf extended his thanks and appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Bank's Board of Directors, customers, shareholders, management and staff for the confidence and support they have conferred upon the Bank. This has enabled the Bank to realize these continued achievements and maintain its preeminent position in the Kuwaiti Banking sector.

Top US officials arrive in China for trade talks as deadline looms

BEIJING: Top US officials arrived in the Chinese capital yesterday ahead of high-level trade talks as the world's two largest economies attempt to hammer out a deal ahead of a March 1 deadline and avoid another escalation of tariffs.

US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are scheduled to hold talks on Thursday and Friday with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, top economic adviser to President Xi Jinping. If the two sides cannot reach a deal by March 1, US tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports are scheduled to increase to 25 percent from 10 percent. China will likely respond by raising tariffs on \$60 billion worth of US goods that it announced last year in retaliation.

"We're looking forward to several important days of talks," Mnuchin told reporters after arriving at a Beijing hotel. Lighthizer, who arrived at the hotel earlier in the day, did not answer reporters' questions. Washington is expected to keep pressing Beijing on long-standing demands that it make sweeping structural reforms to protect American companies' intellectual property, end



BEIJING: US Undersecretary for International Affairs David Malpass (center) leaves a hotel with members of a negotiation team on the way to trade talks in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

Business

KFH earnings conference call highlights financial results, shares bank's strategy

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House held an earnings conference webcast on Monday in which speakers from KFH executive management Mazin Al-Nahedh, Group Chief Executive Officer, KFH Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer, KFH and Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer, KFH led the discussions. Fawaz Al-Sirri, Bensirri was the moderator.

The transcript of the conference call: Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem:

Thank you Fawaz and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. We are glad to welcome you to the Year End 2018 earnings call for Kuwait Finance House Group. Today, we'll be covering highlights of the Kuwait operating environment with an overview on KFH. We'll also share with you KFH's strategy, as well as the year-end financial results.

The Central Bank of Kuwait left its key discount rate steady at 3 percent in December of 2018 despite the FED's decision to hike the rates by 25 bps. On another front Fitch Ratings recently affirmed Kuwait's sovereign rating at AA. Standard & Poor's credit rating for Kuwait also stands at AA with Stable Outlook. Moody's did adjust Kuwait's score upwards both for economic strength and fiscal strength, setting it at Aa2 with stable outlook. Kuwait's commitment to its development plan projects can be seen by the continued capital spending and project launches with the support of the private sector, and more specifically the Kuwaiti banking sector.

As an overview of Kuwait Finance House Group, the bank maintains its top position ranked first in 2018 by Global Finance Magazine as the safest Islamic financial institution in the GCC. We are the first and largest Sharia compliant bank in Kuwait and second largest Islamic Bank in the world by assets and we are the First Islamic Bank in Germany. Currently we have more than 500 branches in Kuwait and around the world.

As confirmed by this year's financial results, Kuwait Finance House Group continues to capitalize on its strong retail franchise with a consistent track record of profitability and dividend payment, an improvement in its cost to income ratio and low NPF rates, thus affirming our customers' confidence in KFH's leading role in the international development of Islamic Banking and Financial Services industry.

Spending on building IT platforms, infrastructure, and front end technology has characterized KFH's business activities in 2018, which we can call the "FinTech Year." KFH succeeded in providing 20 high-tech banking services, most of which are unique in Kuwait. KFH launched the first fully-automated 24/7 e-branch with an advanced and wide range of technical services and self-service tools under the name of "KFH-Go". The e-branch provides more than 30 services representing about 80 percent of the services provided by the traditional branch. Also, KFH launched a Chatbot service in cooperation with Microsoft, to improve interaction with customers. We also upgraded a centralized SWIFT network system for global payments at the group level. For the first time in Kuwait, Also KFH launched Visa Checkout to facilitate fast and secure online purchases. Along with developing the other ATMs, it also launched the mini branch which we call the XTM with seven new services, some of which are the first offered locally, including card-less withdrawals using a QR code. The Bank also introduced a fast cross-border transfer service (KFH Xpress) and an instant remittance service using the RippleNet network based on Blockchain technology.

KFH Group CEO Mazin Al-Nahedh:

KFH realized a net profit of KD 227.4 million for the year 2018 for KFH shareholders compared to KD 184.2 million last year i.e. an increase of 23.5 percent. Total financing income reached KD 862.1 million, i.e. an increase of 16.4 percent compared to last year. Net financing income reached KD 527.3 million, i.e. an increase of 18.5 percent over the last year. Net operating income increased to reach KD 453.5 million, i.e. a growth of 11.1 percent over the last year. Earnings per share for 2018 reached 36.36 fils compared to 29.46 fils last year i.e. an increase of 23.4 percent. Total operating expenses decreased by KD 12.6 million i.e. a drop of 4.1 percent over the same period last year. Cost to income ratio dropped for the fourth year in a row to reach 39.2 percent for the current year, compared to 42.8 percent for the last year.

KFH has been progressively in line with its plans and overall performance of the group, which confirms that KFH is steadily moving towards achieving sustainable profitability by focusing on operating profits from key banking activities while maintaining the advantage of



Mazin Al-Nahedh



Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem



Shadi Zahran

diversification in its resources. KFH has also opened up to new segments with innovative and competitive products in accordance with its intended strategy. Our 3-year strategy ending in 2020 is based on improving customer experience, digitizing operations, and growing the business.

The year 2018 achieved success in all aspects including innovation of new products as outlined by my colleague Fahad, application of the highest standards of quality and governance, assimilation of banking technology, improvement of the Bank's internal capabilities such as technology development and technical infrastructure. This has contributed to keeping pace with "digital banking" and investment in human resources (through a flexible and professional structure) especially investing in the national capabilities of the youth.

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has a leading position in the Islamic Sukuk and Financial Services market. The International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation (IILM) has officially announced that KFH has been ranked "Top Primary Dealer" on top of 11 IILM Primary Dealers of regional and global banks and financial institutions. The ranking is based on the allocated amount for 15 issuances in 2018 with a total of \$8.11 billion.

KFH's has positioned itself as a leader in the sukuk market by using its substantial capabilities and playing a significant role in activating the sukuk market. This ranking came for the fourth time in a row, which confirms KFH's leadership and its prominent role as a market maker.

KFH has also been awarded the "Fastest Growing Debit Portfolio in Kuwait for 2018" award by Visa International. This award is proof of the success of KFH's strategy to motivate and encourage customers to switch from conventional cash payments to electronic payments via bank cards and payments through smart technologies.

As for year 2019, a noticeable bolstering will be witnessed of KFH's capacity in local and international markets and direction towards a capacity to increase financing large government projects and develop its role towards supporting SMEs. This is a target that is in line with the ongoing efforts to achieve sustainable profits and focus on excellence in customer service. Furthermore, KFH continues its efforts towards innovation in Islamic finance, which will ensure the Bank's reputation as the most trusted Islamic bank to grant share-

holders and depositors the highest profits, best returns and the most innovative services.

Regarding the potential Acquisition and Merger with AUB Bahrain, we have disclosed to the regulatory authorities and the market the latest developments in this regard and there are no further updates at this time. All these disclosures were published via the official website of Boursa Kuwait and any new development will be updated as and when it comes available.

Group's CFO Shadi Zahran:

The group net profit after tax (NPAT) attributable to Shareholders for the period ended 31st Dec 2018 stood at KD 227.4 million and is higher than FY 2017 by 23.5 percent, that's mainly from an increase Net Finance Income by KD 82.4 million and decrease in operating expenses by KD (12.6) million, offset by a decrease in investment income by KD 43.3 million and other income by KD 9.1 million.

Net Financing Income at KD 527.3 million represents an increase of 18.5 percent as compared to last year which resulted from the increase in YoY average yielding assets portfolios by 7.9 percent and improvement in NFM by 40 bps.

Total Operating income at KD 746.0 million increased by KD 32.7 million or 4.6 percent resulted mainly from the increase in net finance income by KD 82.4 million contributing 70.7 percent to the total operating income compared to 62.4 percent contribution in 2017, (as you can see on the right side of the slide) accordingly the non-financing income (including investment income) contribution to total operating income has dropped by 8.3 percent to reach 29.3 percent (investment income contribution dropped from 14.9 percent to only 8.5 percent), and that is due to lower divestment of non-core assets as compared to last year.

Total Non-Financing Income decreased from KD 268.4 million to KD 218.7 million, that was mainly due to lower investment income by KD 43.3 million (dropped from KD 106.6 million to KD 63.3 million). Accordingly, the contribution of investment income to total non-financing income dropped from 39.7 percent to 28.9 percent as we see on the right top corner of the slide

Operating expenses

The Total Operating Expenses at KD 292.5 million has decreased by KD (12.6) million or (4.1) percent.

Staff cost at KD 177.6mn decreased by KD 10.0 million mainly from Kuwait "the Parent" (was main contributor) due to impact of labor law amendments in 2017. Other operating expenses decreased by KD 1.3 million or (1.6) percent. Which although its marginal and considering the business growth shows further cost improvement for the fourth year in a row due to the continuous Group efforts towards cost optimization

Mazin Al-Nahedh:

We spoke about the potential merger and we said that we do not have any new information other than the published information. We are currently awaiting the regulatory approvals to start the due diligence process. And then from that point on, we would carry on the exercise and naturally, if it would make sense we would present it to the board, they will look at the outcome and based on it we would apply to the regulatory authorities for final approval and then it goes to the AGM, for their absolute final approval. So, we will update you as and when there are new developments in this regard.

Shadi Zahran:

With regards to the cost to income ratio for Turkey, I can confirm that it's improved. The improvement in cost to income ratio came from all subsidiaries with no exception. And now Turkey is in line with the Group cost to income ratio and much better than the market there. With regard to the cost of risk also in Turkey is better than the market. And we are still the second lowest NPL ratio in Turkey in the market. Now with regards to the deterioration that occurred in the currency and its impact. And that's I think one of the questions is the contribution to the profitability for the Group, Turkey maintained the same level of contribution to the Group because as we mentioned in the third quarter, while the currency impacted the Turkish operation, the trading gain from foreign currency in Turkey due to the trading in foreign currency in Turkey itself has compensated for that. And for 2018, the contribution maintained at the same level of Turkey. So I think I covered the quality cost income ratio and the Turkish lira impact.

Mazin Al-Nahedh:

Outlook for Turkey, we believe that the measures taken by the Turkish government, particularly in the fourth quarter of this year, in raising the base rate by about six and a quarter percentage points, in order to slow down credit growth and the expansion that's taking place there. We anticipate 2019 to be a lower growth trajectory than the previous year, but given that the base rate there is at the level where it is, we still expect a decent growth, I will say in the double digits in Turkey during 2019. As a matter of fact, we're seeing more, more stability in the Turkish operation than the fourth quarter and the turbulence that occurred then. Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA)

Representatives from Derayah Financial, Arzan Financial Group, EFG-Hermes, Franklin Templeton Investments, Schroders, Belfone Asset Management, Al-Rayan Investment, Fitch Rating, The National Investor, SICO Bank, HSBC, Arqaam Capital, ADCB and Dark Horse Capital attended the webcast conference.

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.600
Euro	345.110
Sterling Pound	393.240
Canadian dollar	230.150
Turkish lira	58.920
Swiss Franc	305.360
US Dollar Buying	297.300

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.754
Indian Rupees	4.296
Pakistani Rupees	2.223
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.710
Nepali Rupees	2.676
Singapore Dollar	224.960
Hongkong Dollar	38.814
Bangladesh Taka	3.589
Philippine Peso	5.840
Thai Baht	9.726
Malaysian ringgit	77.903

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.281
Qatari Riyal	83.716
Omani Riyal	791.683
Bahraini Dinar	809.350
UAE Dirham	82.986

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.700
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.270

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.223
Tunisian Dinar	103.960
Jordanian Dinar	429.920
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.003
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.473

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.240
Canadian Dollar	229.562
Sterling Pound	393.780
Euro	345.630
Swiss Frank	308.270
Bahrain Dinar	809.085
UAE Dirhams	83.235
Qatari Riyals	84.475
Saudi Riyals	82.025
Jordanian Dinar	430.395
Egyptian Pound	17.303
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.708
Indian Rupees	4.288
Pakistani Rupees	2.192
Bangladesh Taka	3.626
Philippines Peso	5.828
Cyprus pound	18.099
Japanese Yen	3.750
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.689
Malaysian Ringgit	75.475
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.250
Thai Bhat	10.685

Turkish Lira	58.045
Singapore dollars	223.412

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.384467	0.398367
Czech Korune	0.005268	0.014568
Danish Krone	0.041963	0.046963
Euro	0.335736	0.349438
Georgian Lari	0.132130	0.132130
Hungarian 0.001148	0.001338	
Norwegian Krone	0.030942	0.036142
Romanian Leu	0.065285	0.082135
Russian ruble	0.004647	0.004647
Slovakia	0.009109	0.019109
Slovenia	0.028699	0.033699
Swedish Krona	0.296478	0.0307478
Swiss Franc		
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.207070	0.219070
New Zealand Dollar	0.198373	0.207873
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.223754	0.232754
US Dollars	0.300500	0.305800
US Dollars Mint	0.301000	0.305800
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003055	0.003856
Chinese Yuan	0.043389	0.046889
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037062	0.039812

Indian Rupee	0.003731	0.004503
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002674	0.002554
Korean Won	0.000260	0.000275
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070760	0.076760
Nepalese Rupee	0.002611	0.002951
Pakistan Rupee	0.001569	0.002339
Philippine Peso	0.005817	0.006117
Singapore Dollar	0.218752	0.228752
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001342	0.001922
Taiwan	0.010167	0.010347
Thai Baht	0.009355	0.009905
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.793387	0.809887
Egyptian Pound	0.017130	0.019730
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000211	0.000271
Jordanian Dinar	0.425322	0.434322
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000157	0.000257
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021767	0.045767
Omani Riyal	0.784851	0.790531
Qatar Riyal	0.079376	0.084316
audi Riyal	0.080140	0.081440
Syrian Pound	0.001291	0.001511
Tunisian Dinar	0.095380	0.103380
Turkish Lira	0.051300	0.062830
UAE Dirhams	0.081507	0.083207
Yemeni Riyal	0.000990	0.001070

Business

Al Mulla Automobiles, Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East open Mercedes-Benz Kuwait's showroom operations



Al Mulla Group Board of Directors



(From right to left) Nabeel Al Mulla, Anwar Al Mulla, Najeeb Al Mulla, Talal Al Mulla and Abdullah



Mark De Haes (front left), Talal Al Mulla (front right), German Ambassador (back left) and Najeeb Al Mulla (back right) during a tour of the showroom.



Talal Al Mulla, Chief Executive Officer



Mark De Haes, President & CEO for Middle East & Levant

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Automobiles, the authorized general distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, and Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East officially inaugurated Mercedes-Benz Kuwait's showroom operation in its new facility in Al-Rai. The event was hosted by Talal Anwar Al Mulla, CEO of Al Mulla Group, and Mark De Haes, President and CEO, Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East, in the presence of the Board and Senior Management of Al Mulla Group, management of Mercedes-Benz, and the media.

Speaking during the ceremony, Talal Anwar Al Mulla said: "We are delighted to have our esteemed guests at this historic event. Since we formed this partnership with Mercedes-Benz, we have worked diligently to ensure all customers in Kuwait receive nothing but the best. I am extremely proud of the progress made so far. The opening of this state-of-the-art showroom reflects our commitment to top-quality services and products."

"We are one of the first to adopt Daimler's MAR2020 showroom concept in the design of this facility. We look forward to adding more facilities in the near future, delivering on our commitment to customers, and growing Mercedes-Benz's presence in the Kuwaiti market," Al Mulla added.

Commenting on the opening of the new showroom, Mark De Haes, President and CEO of Mercedes-Benz Cars Middle East said: "We are committed to offering a revolutionary experience to our customers in Kuwait and in the region. By using state-of-the-art digital services, the MAR2020 showroom has been designed to reshape the entire customer journey, from visiting the showroom to purchasing a vehicle of their preference. A new, and modern lobby area combines the best of digital technology with on-the-ground technical support to ensure a more streamlined experience for the customer. Our new partnership with Al Mulla Group has been instrumental in bringing this showroom to life and we look forward to the Al-Rai facility becoming a benchmark for customer experience in Kuwait and across the region."

After the opening ceremony, Talal Al Mulla accompanied the Mercedes-Benz delegates on a tour of the facility, highlighting the technically advanced and modern showroom in

addition to showcasing the service center and car delivery areas. The tour also included a visit of Mercedes-Benz Kuwait's Shuwaikh service centers and spare parts facilities, in which they were briefed about their and their operational capacities and important role in ensuring that customers receive the best service possible.

The new showroom offers an interactive brand and product experience. Customers can find out about the brand and its services and the vehicle range via digital interactions or conversations with the showroom personnel. A lounge and bistro top off the brand experience.

The new showroom concept brings the Mercedes-Benz brand to life in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. A characteristic element is the use of interactive digital technology, which provides visitors with a consistent premium brand experience. Visitors are able to experience the brand interactively: they can use digital touch tables, for example, to configure the car they want. Product presentations and visualizations can also be displayed on floor-to-ceiling LED screens.

A team of Product Experts is always on hand to deal with questions about the technical aspects and to provide practical advice on how to make full use of all the vehicle's features.

The Mercedes-Benz Kuwait Al-Rai showroom aims to provide an exceptional experience to its guests and customers from the moment they enter the showroom until they drive away in their new Mercedes-Benz vehicle. The showroom also showcases an AMG performance center where high performance AMG vehicles are on display. The facility offers a "one-stop shop" for the brand's owners for their sales and fully integrated after-sales services.

Al Mulla Automobiles Company is aiming to expand on its current available locations by providing a wider network of facilities and a variety of new services to its clients in the near future. For more information and queries related to Mercedes-Benz Kuwait passenger cars and vehicles, please contact customer service on 1-887-888, follow it on Instagram @mercedesbenzkuwait, or visit the website www.kuwait.mercedesbenzme.com.



A commemorative snapshot in front of the new showroom



German Ambassador with the executives of Mercedes Benz Cars Middle East



Al Mulla Automobiles Team



Al Mulla Automobiles Team

Business

Even sharper, more refined Lexus reimagines RC Luxury Sports Coupe

Inspiring design for a distinct personality • F Sport variant with exclusive features



KUWAIT: With a dedication to high performance and world-class craftsmanship, Lexus launches today the new Lexus RC in the Middle East, offering a smoother ride, as well as a fresh new look and design. The RC Coupe promises drivers a sharper and more graceful experience.

Since its introduction in 2014, the RC has played a significant role in promoting Lexus' commitment to delivering an "emotional driving experience" in every single one of its vehicles. Thanks to its svelte sporty appearance and versatile driving character, the RC has since become a popular choice in the premium luxury coupe marketplace. The fresh new RC retains all the virtues of the current model and then takes them to the outer limits by adopting Lexus' new signature design language and sharpened driving dynamics.

Furthermore, enhancements have been made to the RC's aerodynamics, tires, suspension, in addition to improvements to engine response and steering feel, all of which result in a sharper and more refined drive introduced by the LC. The new RC is more stable than ever, with a wider stance and lower center of gravity reflecting a high ability to maintain its grip under a variety of road conditions. This provides a high level of driver confidence and a reassuringly flat ride quality, making it the ideal grand tourer, whether they are challenging a twisty mountain road or simply taking a long-distance commute on the open highway.

"We are excited to announce the launch of the new Lexus RC, presenting our customers in the Middle East with a premium luxury coupe that offers a truly distinct and engaging driving experience," commented Yugo Miyamoto, Chief Representative, Middle East and North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation. He added: "With its modern design and sharpened driving dynamics, the new RC delivers on our promise to push the limits of creativity and craftsmanship to develop vehicles that create amazing experiences. I would like to thank our customers for their continued support that fuels our journey to excellence and I am confident that the new coupe will quickly find favor with them."

Dynamic proportions

Lexus designers sought to maintain the RC's dynamic coupe proportions, while adding a high level of elegance to the exterior. This was done, in particular, through the addition of distinctive design elements, such as a new front bumper corner that flows down from the headlamps, and a grille mesh pattern whose shapes gradually transform

from top to bottom. Also, vertically arranged extra-small triple LED headlamps and new L-shaped LED clearance lamps add to the car's new, more classy appearance. Air ducts have been added to the corner of the RC's rear bumpers, resulting in better handling stability and enhanced overall driving response. Also, the rear combination lamps now house more pronounced L-shaped lenses that serve as a new signature design feature for Lexus vehicles.

The RC F Sport is distinguished by its exclusive F Sport styling features inside and out, including the front Spindle Grille with new F Sport mesh pattern, steering wheel, single central 8-inch meter with a G-force monitor, and sports front seats. Additional performance features available on the RC F Sport include an Adaptive Variable Suspension (AVS), Torsen Limited Slip Differential, drive mode select with five levels including Sport S+, and a custom mode that enables drivers to customize the powertrain settings, as well as air conditioning to suit their mood and driving style, among many others.

Complementing the new Lexus RC's progressive design is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options. The RC 350 is powered by a sophisticated 3.5-liter V6 Atkinson cycle engine that produces 311 hp and 380 Nm of torque. The engine integrates advanced technologies, such as a D-4S fuel injection system and Dual VVT-i, to deliver a balance of exhilarating power and superb environmental performance. Meanwhile, the RC 300 is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine that combines a compact high-efficiency twin-scroll turbocharger with an Atkinson Cycle engine with Dual VVT-i, producing 241 hp and 350 Nm of torque. The two powertrains are mated to an eight-speed sport direct-shift automatic transmission that delivers a smooth shift feeling and superb drivability, together with excellent fuel efficiency and outstanding quietness even at high speed.

Exquisite interior

Completing the new Lexus RC's distinct personality is its exquisite interior that invites the driver and passenger to enjoy a range of advanced features offering a refined cabin experience. These include an enhanced in-vehicle 10.3-inch multimedia display, a 4.2-inch color multi-information display (MID), Lexus Climate Concierge with a 2-zone independent temperature control system, 17-speaker Mark Levinson sound system, Auto Location-Tire Pressure Warning System (AL-TPWS), 3-



position memory switches for the driver's seat, 8-way adjustable power and ventilated front seats with one-touch walk-in function, as well as ample luggage space with room for two full-set golf bags thanks to the 60:40 split folding rear seats.

Highlighting Lexus' unrelenting focus on safety, the new vehicle ensures complete peace of mind with Lexus Safety System+, an advanced safety technology package that includes Pre-Collision System (PCS) with pedestrian detection during daylight and certain low-light condition, all-speed range Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC), Lane Departure Alert (LDA) with steering control alert, and Adaptive High Beam System (AHS). Adding to a host of safety features, a pop-up hood system has been adopted to create a space to absorb the impact force in the event of a frontal pedestrian collision, helping enhance their protection. In addition, the new Lexus RC features a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, such as 8 SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRC), Anti-

lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), Rear Cross-Traffic Alert (RCTA), and Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), among many others.

Available in 11 distinctive exterior colors, the new Lexus RC allows customers to express their individuality with four exclusive colors for the F Sport variant, including White Nova Glass Flake, Lava Orange Crystal Shine, Naples Yellow Contrast Layering, and Heat Blue Contrast layering, truly conveying the RC's sporty nature. On the other hand, the interior comes in a total of seven colors, with three exclusive colors for the F Sport - Mustard Yellow, Flare Red, and White. There are also five available ornamentations depending on the grade, along with two exclusive designs for the F Sport - Naguri-style Aluminum and Hairline. Furthermore, the new model has been rearmored with three wheels designs: an 18-inch wheel and two 19-inch wheels - with one aggressively-styled exclusive for the F Sport inspired by those on the LS and LC.

Gulf Bank announces salary account draw winner of the year

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its first monthly Salary Account draw of the year. Alaa Habeeb Murtadha Abdullah was announced as the winner of a cash prize of up to 12 times her salary. The draw was held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

The salary account gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank or an interest-free loan of up to KD 10,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and will be eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a free of charge Visa or MasterCard credit card for a year, as well as a chance to apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

With the new 2019 Kuwaiti salary offer, new customers, who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance of winning cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary, and a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize of 100 times their salary.

Burgan Bank wins Elite J P Morgan Quality Recognition Award for 2018

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently received the coveted 'Quality Recognition Award' for the year 2018 from J P Morgan Chase, in recognition of its consistently high quality performance. The award highlights the bank's advanced standards maintained in the complete range of clients' US Dollar funds transfer operations by the management and staff.

J P Morgan Chase commends the bank for achieving 99.58 percent straight-through processing (STP) in the MT103 category and 99.77 percent for the MT202 category of payments, thus, entitling Burgan Bank to the 'Elite Quality Recognition Award' in both categories. Highlighting the best-in-class straight-through processing (STP) rates, Burgan Bank was among the few banks across the MENA region to receive the Elite level of the award for both its customer and bank to bank transfers.

Upon the methodology and mechanism,

the 2018 Quality Recognition Awards are divided into two groups, within which each award is presented to those who exemplify to optimal level of performance. The MT103 awards are based on a minimum of \$10,000 MT103 debit transactions wherein the Quality Recognition Award applies from 90 percent to 98.9 percent Straight Through Rates while the Elite Quality Recognition Award is applied for 99.0 percent and higher Straight Through Rates. The MT202 awards are based on a minimum of \$8,000 MT202 debit transactions, which constitutes the Quality Recognition Award from 98 percent to 99.69 percent Straight Through Rates followed by the Elite Quality Recognition Award that is 99.7 percent Straight Through Rate and higher.

Commenting on the bank's accomplishment, Venkat Menon - Group Chief Operations and Technology Officer, Burgan Bank - said: "As the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the J P Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award for the period from 2001-2018 consecutively, we are proud of the legacy once again that comes with us achieving one of the highest STP rates for the USD dollar transfers ensuring premium quality, efficiency and reliability, which indicate the leading role Burgan bank plays in this domain."



Sherif Abdelsalam - Executive Director, Treasury Services, and Head of GCC Financial Institutions Coverage added that Burgan Bank is once again amongst the less than 1 percent of their total funds transfer clients qualifying for this prestigious accolade. The J.P. Morgan Chase awards reflect Burgan Bank's commitment to ensuring systematic outstanding financial services and solutions that cater to their customers' requirements.

J.P. Morgan Chase has been supporting the industry by awarding selected US dollar clearing clients since 1997, who have

managed to successfully achieve a first rate level of operational excellence and exemplary straight-through results by properly formatting their SWIFT payments.

J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. is an American multinational investment bank and financial services company headquartered in New York City. They are the #1 US dollar treasury and commercial clearer globally, the #1 Tokyo dollar clearer, and the #3 Euro clearer. They provide robust capabilities and solutions designed to meet treasury, settlement, risk management, commercial and trade business requirements.

ABK partners with Ripple

KUWAIT: In alignment with its digital transformation strategy, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced its partnership with financial technology firm Ripple to enable instant cross-border payments for its customers in and out of Kuwait. As early adopters of this technology, ABK will be one of the few financial institutions in Kuwait to reduce transaction times from days to a few minutes, for its customers.

ABK will integrate Ripple's enterprise blockchain technology into its existing services

to offer its customers immediate confirmations, on the back of a secure infrastructure. The Bank's customers will now be able to send vital funds to family, friends and loved ones faster and more efficiently.

Through this partnership, ABK will join Ripple's network "RippleNet", a decentralised global network of banks and payment providers. This growing network aims at enabling an "internet of value", allowing customers from different banks, to make payments globally with speed and assurance of receipt. The partnership will give ABK access to other "RippleNet" members, enabling the Bank to grow its cross-border payments business.

Speaking on the milestone collaboration, Somnath Menon, Group Chief Operating Officer at ABK said, "This partnership with

Ripple is aligned with our unwavering philosophy of reimagining a simpler bank. We have significant interests in cross border remittances and plan to harness the power of Blockchain technology for making global payments faster and more convenient for our customers. As smart technologies continue to rapidly transform the financial sector, we remain committed to enhancing our offerings to our customers, and staying ahead of the innovation curve."

"ABK is one of Kuwait's leading banks, and we are excited to be partnering with them," said Navin Gupta, Managing Director, South Asia and MENA at Ripple. "We look forward to supporting ABK's ongoing efforts to enhance its digital banking services, by providing our innovative blockchain solutions for speedy cross-border payments."



What's On



CBK sponsors flag hoisting festivity

The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently sponsored the flag hoisting festivity organized by the special education schools in celebration of Kuwait national anniversaries. The festivity was attended by Ministry of Education's special education director, Salman Abdullah Alafi and special school managers. Speaking on the occasion, CBK's deputy director for corporate communication, Amani Al-Wer'a stressed that the bank is very keen on taking part in various social activities, namely those that boost the spirit of patriotism and belonging amongst students with special needs.

PAAET celebrates national anniversaries



The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET)'s director, Dr Ali Fahad Al-Mudhaf and with the attendance of the acting director and PAAET's registration and admission deanery Prof Jassem Al-Ansari recently organized a ceremony to celebrate the national anniversaries at PAAET quarters in Adailiya. Speaking on the occasion, Al-Ansari congratulated the people of Kuwait and stressed that dedicated hard work is the best way to express love and loyalty to Kuwait. On his part, deputy director for financial and administrative affairs, Hajraf Al-Hajraf stressed that the Kuwaiti people's solidarity and unity had helped in overcoming various crises under the wise leadership of HH the Amir. Also speaking on the occasion, dean of admission and registration, Prof Rabah Al-Nejadah thanked the director and his deputies for taking part in the ceremony and congratulated everybody on the national anniversaries.

Suad Al-Sabah Publishing will continue to receive awards entries till Sept

Suad Al-Sabah Publishing and Distribution House announced that they will continue to receive entries that are taking part in the various Sheikh Abdullah Mubarak & Suad Al-Sabah literary and scientific awards till next September. After that, all entries in the various categories would be reviewed by specialized jury committees.

This award was first introduced in the 1980s with the aim of encouraging creative Arab writers. It comprises four categories including scientific, literary and intellectual creation tackling topics such as fast food and its impact on health, social media pros and cons, the history of security in Kuwait, the history of parliamentary



Dr Suad Al-Sabah

life in Kuwait, Arabic poetry, Kuwaiti cinema industry, stories and poetry competitions.

GUST hosts 5th high school mathematics competition

Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) hosted the Annual High School Mathematics Competition for the fifth time on its campus yesterday. The competition, sponsored by That Al-Salasil, brought together nearly 50 students from 12 private schools across Kuwait, aims to promote the importance of mathematics among the youth through a friendly competition that puts their skills to practical use.

The first year just four schools participated in the competition. This year, 12 schools took part including: Canadian Bilingual School, Dasman Bilingual School, American Creativity Academy (Boys), Al-Ru'ya Bilingual School, Ajial Bilingual School (Boys), Ajial Bilingual School (Girls), British School of Kuwait, Universal American School of Kuwait, Lycee Francais de Koweit, Future Bilingual School, Kuwait National English School, and the American International School.

Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr Ali Ansari, said "We are thrilled to be able to connect to the community and organize such an activity to encourage the youth to get more invested in their education in a fun yet practical manner to demonstrate how to implement what they learn in the classroom." Students were able to compete both in teams and individually. Top performing individuals also progressed to participate in a live buzzer round. The questions covered several areas including basic math



skills, logical thinking, and real-life situations with questions ranging from travel distance calculations to valuing metal composites. The winners of this year's competition were:

- Individual Competition**
- 1st Place: Anas Chentouf (American International School)
 - 2nd Place: David Sanwoolu (American International School)
 - 3rd Place: Yousef El-Tantawy (American International School)

Team Competition

- 1st Place: American International School
- 2nd Place: British School of Kuwait
- 3rd Place: Universal American School

GUST is always keen on organizing events such as this competition, as it is directly in line with its mission of connecting and building relationships with the community, boosting development in its areas of expertise, and sparking interest in overlooked areas of education.



Sheikh Duajj Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah, Dr Ibrahim Al-Zair and Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Sakhlawi at the launch of the new International European Universities Toastmaster Club.

Health & Technology

E-cigarette use 'skyrockets' among young Americans

WASHINGTON: The number of young Americans using e-cigarettes grew by 1.5 million in 2018, undermining years of progress in reducing youth smoking, health authorities said Monday. Some 3.6 million middle and high school students were current users of vaping products, up from 2.1 million the year before, according to the report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC said the number of current cigarette smokers and consumers of other tobacco products in middle and high school remained roughly stable from 2017 to 2018.

A current user is defined as a person who has used a product in the past 30 days. The CDC said 4.9 million middle and high school students were current users of some type of tobacco product in 2018, up from 3.6 million in 2017, with the growth attributed to e-cigarettes. "This is the greatest single year-over-year increase that we've ever seen in terms of any tobacco products," said Brian King, deputy director for research translation at the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. "And of course going back, we've seen consistent decline in tobacco product use for two decades," King said.

CDC Director Robert Redfield said the "skyrocketing" growth of young people's e-cigarette use over the past year threatens to erase progress made in reducing youth tobacco use. "It's putting a new generation at risk for nicotine addiction," Redfield said. The CDC said e-cigarette use among high school students who use tobacco products increased from 11.7 percent to 20.8 percent from 2017 to 2018 and from 3.3 percent to 4.9 percent among middle school students.

Amid the rise in youth usage of e-cigarettes, US authorities have tightened regulations, with market leader Juul — particularly its flavored products — coming under

scrutiny. "We are extraordinarily concerned about the ongoing appeal that all flavored tobacco products have on kids," said Mitch Zeller, Director of the Center for Tobacco Products at the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates vaping and in November restricted the sale of certain flavors. "All policy options are on the table," Zeller warned.

Age verification

Vaping began to take off among young Americans in the 2010s, and overtook cigarette smoking in 2014. While the number of middle and high school cigarette smokers has been falling steadily since 2011, the number of vapers has increased dramatically, from 1.5 percent to the 20.8 percent last year. The survey estimates 4.9 percent of college students vape. The US categorizes e-cigarettes as tobacco products, a definition not shared by all countries.

In November, Juul announced it was suspending in-store sales of various flavored products and scrapping its social media presence. Juul flavors such as mango, fruit and creme will now only be available on the company's website, where it said it was adding additional age-verification measures. The FDA has proposed to allow flavored e-cigarette products to be sold in stores only, not online. The changes are open to a public comment period lasting until June before they can take effect.

Battery-powered e-cigarettes heat a nicotine liquid that users inhale, and have been gaining popularity in the United States and abroad. E-cigarettes expose users to significantly lower levels of potentially toxic substances than traditional cigarettes, except for nicotine, the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said last year. — AFP

AI system able to spot disease like a doctor

PARIS: An artificial intelligence (AI) program developed in China that combs through test results, health records and even handwritten notes diagnosed childhood diseases as accurately as doctors, researchers said Monday. From the flu and asthma to life-threatening pneumonia and meningitis, the system consistently matched or out-performed primary care pediatricians, they reported in Nature Medicine.

Dozens of studies in recent months have detailed how AI is revolutionizing the detection of diseases including cancers, genetic disorders and Alzheimer's. AI-based technology learns and improves in a way similar to humans, but has virtually unlimited capacity for data processing and storage. "I believe that it will be able to perform most of the jobs a doctor does," senior author Kang Zhang, a researcher at the University of California, San Diego, told AFP. "But AI will never replace a doctor," he added, comparing the relationship to an autonomous car that remains under the supervision of a human driver. "It will simply allow doctors to do a better job in less time and at lower costs."

The new technology, said Zhang, is the first in which AI

absorbs unstructured data and "natural language" to imitate the process by which a physician figures out what's wrong with a patient. "It can mimic a human pediatrician to interpret and integrate all types of medical data — patient complaints, medical history, blood and imaging tests — to make a diagnosis," he said. The system can be easily transferred to other languages and settings, he added. By comparing hundreds of bits of information about a single patient with a vast store of acquired knowledge, the technology uncovers links that previous statistical methods — and sometimes flesh-and-blood doctors — overlook.

To train the proof-of-concept system, Zhang and a team of 70 scientists injected more than 100 million data points from 1.3 million pediatrics patient visits at a major referral centre in Guangzhou, China. The AI program diagnosed respiratory infections and sinusitis — a common sinus infection — with 95 percent accuracy. More surprising, Kang said, it did as well with less common diseases: acute asthma (97 percent), bacterial meningitis and varicella (93 percent), and mononucleosis (90 percent). Such technologies may be coming in just the nick of time. "The range of diseases, diagnostic testing and options for treatment has increased exponentially in recent years, rendering the decision-making process for physicians more complicated," Nature noted in a press release. Experts not involved in the research said the study is further proof of AI's expanding role in medicine. "The work has the potential to improve healthcare by assisting the clinician in making rapid and accurate diagnoses," said Duc Pham, a professor of engineering at the University of Birmingham. — AFP

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- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com **Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228**
Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Stars

CROSSWORD 2135



ACROSS

1. (informal) Roused to anger.
4. The seed of the chickpea plant.
12. Informal terms for a mother.
15. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
16. Wind blowing opposite to the path of a ship or aircraft.
17. The compass point midway between east and southeast.
18. A loose cloak with a hood.
19. Any of various amines (such as putrescine or cadaverine) formed by the action of putrefactive bacteria.
21. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
22. A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
24. In the Roman calendar.
27. A large crater caused by the violent explosion of a volcano that collapses into a depression.
29. A white crystalline powder (trade name Ethocaine) administered near nerves as a local anesthetic in dentistry and medicine.
32. A person who has lied or who lies repeatedly.
33. A reproach for some lapse or misdeed.
34. A digital display that uses liquid crystal cells that change reflectivity in an applied electric field.
39. Opinion or judgment.
41. Suggestive of the supernatural.
43. A small cake leavened with yeast.
44. Left entirely.
49. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
50. Oldest known reptiles.
51. Any of a group of proteases that mediate apoptosis.
53. A bachelor's degree in science.
54. An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
55. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
57. Above the surround or above the normal position.
59. The branch of engineering science that studies the uses of electricity and the equipment for power generation and distribution and the control of machines and communication.
60. Roman emperor and adoptive son of Nerva.
62. English dancer who danced with Rudolf Nureyev (born in 1919).
66. The chief mountain range of western North America.
70. (nautical) Of an anchor.
71. The verbal act of offering.
74. Using speech rather than writing.
75. A light curved skeleton to spread out a skirt.
78. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
79. A shop selling delicatessen (as salads or cooked meats).
80. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
81. The branch of information science that deals with natural language information.

DOWN

1. Type genus of the Majidae.
2. In bed.
3. (British) An open river valley (in a hilly area).
4. Of or relating to chaetae (setae or bristles).
5. Of or relating to the language of the Hebrews.
6. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
7. Being one hundred more than three hundred.
8. A unit of power equal to 1000 watts.
9. Fine white clay used in making tobacco pipes and pottery and in whitening leather.
10. Board a train.
11. A rapid bustling commotion.
12. English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907).
13. Flexible twig of a willow tree.
14. A faint constellation in the polar region of the southern hemisphere and containing part of the Large Magellanic Cloud.
20. The vein in the center of a leaf.
23. A lyric poem with complex stanza forms.
25. A white trivalent metallic element.
26. In truth (often tends to intensify).
28. A local computer network for communication between computers.
30. Women's stockings made from a sheer material (nylon or rayon or silk).
31. A drama set to music.
35. A hard brittle blue-white multivalent metallic element.
36. A pale rose-colored variety of the ruby spinel.
37. Lower in esteem.
38. Closed with a lace.
40. A rare chronic progressive encephalitis caused by the measles virus and occurring primarily in children and young adults.
42. Order by virtue of superior authority.
45. In a state of sleep.
46. An Australian boomerang.
47. Aromatic Eurasian perennial.
48. (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
52. Emotionally charged terms used to refer to extreme radicals or revolutionaries.
56. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
58. Register formally.
61. Any of several tall tropical palms native to southeastern Asia having egg-shaped nuts.
63. A member of the Siouan people inhabiting the valleys of the Platte and Missouri rivers in Nebraska.
64. A native American tent.
65. Period extending from Dec. 24 to Jan. 6.
67. A theocratic republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
68. A British peer ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount.
69. A blow from a flat object (as an open hand).
72. A federal agency established to regulate the release of new foods and health-related products.
73. A trivial lie.
76. An informal term for a father.
77. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

This is a great day for bucking down and working hard. You'll need it to pay for those new pretties you just bought yesterday. This isn't an adventurous day but rather mundane which I know you think gets boring fast dear Aries. Use your mind to make it a better day than it is. At least you're not having to face some hardship other than working on the same old, same old. Look at it like this. It's one of those skating days in life and be glad that you have coworkers to help you while you work.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Though you really do know you're loved you may feel more alone today. Feeling unsure of your love interest is partly to this feeling not that your lover has given you a reason. This is all on you today. Part of this mood is because you need a change though you, Taurus, are resistant to change. Beliefs you once shared with others have transformed almost overnight. You want love and appreciation but you want to rethink life too. That scares those close to you. When approached about it, it might make this day a bit more difficult.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You're in a good mood and you don't want anyone to ruin it for you. That's understandable but if you have children or young people you work with, be on the lookout because you may have a confrontation without really having issues. It will most definitely come from the younger set. That may create a more somber temperament for you. Try to stay away from the younger set as much as possible today and keep that good disposition intact. Gemini. On the bright side, your love life, unless your lover is much younger than you, is going to be great.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

If you have siblings, they may be calling or visiting. They need the comfort you offer and the good advice. Maybe you just miss them and call. Either way the comfort only siblings can bring is exercised today. You're in a mood of expanding your mind. Anything new and different is something you investigate. It doesn't mean you'll change your views. It only means, Cancer, that you're open to exploration of new ideas. In this time, you have to look at each new concept. It's more than a desire. Your analytical nature helps you at work today. Perhaps dinner with relatives is in order tonight.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Travel may be a yearning today. Either that or study and travel with study is even better. It will help you exercise that need to explore. You might think you're too old-fashioned right now and might be looking for events that create unique focus in your life. Career takes and upper rung on your work ladder and you make the most of it by choosing items to promote you and your ideas. Leo. It works. You're getting the attention you desire. And your home life is not lacking either. As a matter of fact, you've noticed the home fires burning more brightly of late.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

This is a happier time where you and coworkers have come to better terms with your own inner workings, spirituality and more. You've gotten their attention and things are good at work. Your creative instincts tell you there is better ways to make your work environment better. Superiors listen. Things at home might be a little more sensitive right now and you're really not sure how to make that part of your life better. Perhaps you should listen to your loved one, Virgo. Try to enjoy the rest of your day. The first part was good.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Change causes issues sometimes and these past few days have brought change into your life. Embrace it without hesitation though reluctance might be part of your mindset. Friends may feel that you've let them down in some manner. You can't be all things to all people. Libra. You've got changing roles in your life and because of this may lose some you've call friend before. Work is in the same mode. You're working towards creating the best life for you. Others may see these changes as a problem for them because you've changed your thought patterns as well. Stay your course.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Take a day off if you can. You'll be glad you did. If you can be totally alone, it would be better but you know that's not feasible. Try to do your work without too much interruption because you're still not thinking as quickly or as well as you generally do. If you do go to work, take a good, long lunch if you can. Otherwise, do what you can and float through the rest. Try something mundane that doesn't need too many people in your way. Closet up tonight again. It'll be better for you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You feel like being different today and you are. Thinking about finances has made you decide to act appropriately and seek out those who can help. Your emotions and dreams make you giddy from excitement. It's easy for you to find and use the people you need to assist you in creating materialistic gain now, Sagittarius. Today you find yourself putting ideas into practice. You'll receive the benefits soon. Assisting others will help you more. You're all about making life better and for more the merrier. Tonight, you may want to help your lover as well with all the personal attention you can give. Enjoy this day.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Mentally, you're at the top of your game today. Take advantage. Your use of sympathy will assist you in making huge leaps in the work world especially if you're speaking with your boss. It makes you appear less robotic and more like an empathic human who has the other person's emotions on their mind and is willing to take the time to lend a helping hand. Coming to grips with your past can help you in serving another. You give good advice which makes, even you Capricorn, step back and think. "Great, that was good." This will benefit you and the one you're counseling.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today you feel behind the eight ball. People at work, especially the ones that count, don't agree with every idea you have. They may debate the merits of all you bring before them. You're not used to this kind of discouragement particularly when your boss generally agrees with you. You wonder what's going on. The planets are at work and you find you don't like the circumstances. Aquarius. At home it's the same. This isn't one of your best days. Do something you like. Watch television and try to let your mind float away.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Today finds you all about "YOU"! Your hard work and dedication seem to have finally paid off and you are on top of the world. You are admired by your peers and it seems as if the world is raining sunshine directly on you. You are on fire and seem to find sharing the spotlight with others and showering them with kindness, appreciation, and gratitude is extremely rewarding to you. You want to share this feeling and make sure others around you feel your gratitude and love. You feel as if you want everyone to feel this feeling. You are full of love of life and love of those all around you. A sense of pride and accomplishment will fill your world for days to come.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Treasure Island

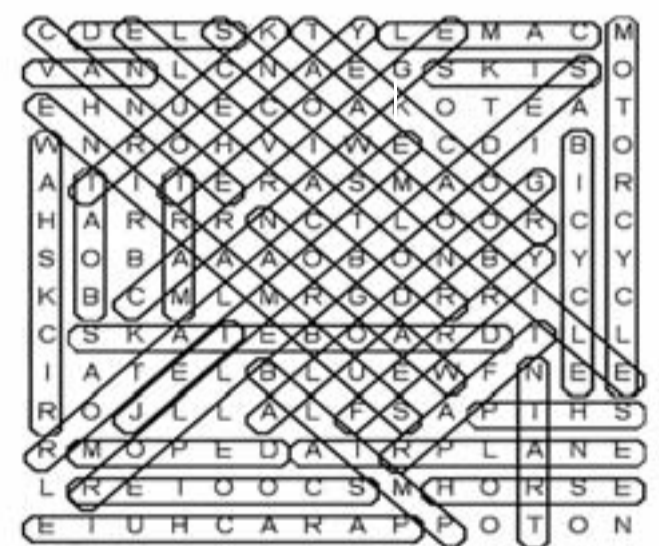
Find and circle all of the words and names from the book Treasure Island. The remaining 46 letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|--------|-----|------|---------|-------|-------|----------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|---------|--------|-------|---------------|------|---------|-----------|--------|------|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|---------|--------|----------|---------|--------|
| ADMIRAL | BENBOW | INN | CAPE | CAPTAIN | FLINT | CHEST | SHOLLETT | ISLAND | ISRAEL | HANDS | JIM | HAWKINS | JOLLY | ROGER | QUARTERMASTER | SAIL | SCHOOER | SEAFARING | SEAMEN | SHIP | SKELETON | SPY-GLASS | SQUIRE | TRELAWNEY | THE | BLACK | SPOT | TREASURE | WALRUS | |
| ASHORE | BEACH | BEN | GUNN | BILLY | BONES | BLACK | DOG | BUCCANEER | BURIED | GOLD | CABIN | BOY | CANNON | GALLS | CANNONS | CAVE | COMPASS | COAST | COVE | CREW | CUTLASS | OIL | LIVESEY | GUINEAS | HISPANIOLA | MARONED | MUSKET | MUTINY | PIRATES | PISTOL |

Yesterday's Solution

Transportation



- | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|-----|-------|------------|-----------|------|----------|--------|--------|--------|------|------------|------|------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| AIRPLANE | FERRY | GONDOLA | HORSE | JET | MOPED | MOTORCYCLE | PARACHUTE | RAFT | RICKSHAW | ROCKET | ROLLER | BLADES | SHIP | SKATEBOARD | SKIS | SLED | SNOWMOBILE | SUBMARINE | TRAIN | TRUCK | VAN | WAGON | YACHT |
|----------|-------|---------|-------|-----|-------|------------|-----------|------|----------|--------|--------|--------|------|------------|------|------|------------|-----------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|

The hidden transportation method is: HOT AIR BALLOON

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2019



Pupils visit the Foundation Vasarely dedicated to the work of Hungarian-French artist Victor Vasarely in Aix-en-Provence, southern France. — AFP

Gotta grab 'em all: Must-snap locations testing Hong Kong's patience

For smartphone-wielding hordes of tourists, Hong Kong boasts a host of must-have Instagram locations—but crowds of snap-happy travellers are testing local patience and transforming once quaint pockets of the bustling metropolis. Tony Hui recalls how elderly residents always used to play cards in a courtyard in the middle of the densely packed housing block where he owns a dry cleaning store. The buildings in Hong Kong's Quarry Bay are one of the city's best known residential complexes, famed for tightly-knit apartments towering above three sides of a thin courtyard.

But in recent years, daily throngs of tourists have relegated the card players to a dark corner of the courtyard. "You might say the elderly have made way for the photo takers' convenience, to not get in their way," Hui concedes. While the building had long been a draw for street photographers and architecture enthusiasts, social media has helped turn it into a mass tourist attraction, fuelled by it featuring as a location in a recent "Transformers" blockbuster and the remake of the Japanese manga classic "Ghost in the Shell".

A sign warning against shooting photos and disturbing residents has done little to deter the chic travellers who usually form an orderly line to wait for a coveted spot in the middle of symmetrical blocks. A high-end cafe opened in November to cater to this new market—its sleek interiors and bright lighting a stark contrast to the more humble-looking neighbourhood shops and the public housing towers above.

Other Instagram hotspots have proven more chaotic. A mural by local graffiti artist Alex Croft featuring rows of tenement houses draws a constant stream of tourists to the steeply sloping Graham Street in downtown Central district. Taxis and cars honk restlessly as the tourists—primarily from mainland China, South Korea and Taiwan but also western nations—spill into the road to get their ideal frame seemingly oblivious to the safety issues.

'Taken aback'

Park Tae and Hwang Seung Min from South Korea had only seen the wall free of interlopers in carefully composed photos on their Instagram feeds so were surprised the street was so busy in real life. "I was taken aback as I



This picture shows a woman (center) standing on the road as she takes a photo at a popular Instagram spot in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

didn't expect the crowds, but it's good for taking photos," Park says. For some shops, this heavy foot traffic brings new business: there are queues outside a famous egg tart store and a dumpling house nearby, as snappers stop to refuel.

But Toby Cooper who runs popular pub The Globe which sits directly opposite the mural, says the sheer number of people loitering on the road is a safety issue. "We have seen a few people hit by cars and vans on Graham Street are going slowly. As far as I'm aware, none of my customers have been hit by cars, yet."

Hong Kong's unique urban aesthetics—especially its public housing estates—have proved enormously popular to social media obsessives. Critics say the crowds help romanticize poverty sharing images that provide only a shallow view of what it is to live in one of the world's most unaffordable property markets. Across the harbor tourists and some locals have taken over the basketball courts surrounded by the now iconic rainbow-coloured housing estate in the Choi Hung district, which means rainbow in Cantonese.



A woman posing for a photo at a popular Instagram spot in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

It is where Korean boy band Seventeen shot a music video and is now being promoted by the government's tourism bureau. Local resident Chow Keung, a 72-year-old kung fu master, is fairly sanguine about the visitors as he watches them from a bench. "Many people have asked me how to get here and I give them directions, I don't mind... but I've had to ask some tourists not to leave their trash behind," he sighs. A grandfather surnamed Liu recalls a bygone era when children actually rode scooters and freely played basketball on the courts. Today's teens have to navigate the groups of photographers as they play. One 14-year-old resident, who gave his name as Yik, says he now fears racking up a bill when he shoots hoops. He adds: "I once accidentally hit someone's phone." —AFP



A woman posing for a photo at a popular Instagram spot in Hong Kong.



A man (top) jumping for a photo next to a sign (bottom) asking people not to take photos unless they have permission from residents at a popular Instagram spot in Hong Kong.



Resident Tony Hui (front left) posing for a photo next to a couple (right) getting their photo taken at a popular Instagram spot in Hong Kong.



A visitor takes pictures of a bonsai displayed at the 8th World Bonsai Convention in Saitama.—AFP

Special branch: Poignant plea after Japanese bonsai burglary

A Japanese cultivator of bonsai trees appealed yesterday for the thieves who made off with his expensive potted plants to take good care of them. Seiji Imura, a fifth-generation bonsai cultivator who runs a garden in Kawaguchi, north of Tokyo, told AFP the seven tiny trees stolen from his garden were his "family treasure". "It's something I would never sell even if I got 10 million yen (\$90,000)," he said. "Of course I hate the thief who stole them, but I want to tell him or her: please pour water on them and please take care of them," Imura said. "I would feel sad if they die." Imura reported to police last month that seven bonsai

trees, worth more than seven million yen in total—including a 400-year-old gnarled juniper—had been stolen from his garden.

His wife Fuyumi wrote in a recent Facebook entry that the couple had raised the bonsai trees "like our children". "I am filled with sadness and heartache," she wrote. Imura keeps some 3,000 miniature trees on display at the 5,000 square-meter (6,000 square-yard) garden so that visitors can appreciate bonsai art. Since the theft he has installed security cameras. "You know, bonsai is nature in miniature. Looking at a bonsai tree is like walking into a deep mountain while staying at home," Imura said.

Bonsai is an Asian art form of sculpting small trees. Bonsai trees often appear as if shaped by wind or the weight of snow. Sculpting them requires a delicate technique of chiseling branches to twist and pull them into shape, all the while battling to keep the tree alive. Exported Japanese bonsai trees have become a hit overseas. In 2018, Japan exported about 12 billion yen worth of trees, bonsai and potted flowers, up from 4.5 billion yen about a decade ago, according to data published by the agriculture ministry. — AFP

Awards, recognition at 'Colors of Palestine' drawing competition

Part 2

'Winners from 6-9 years and 10-13 years category'

Winners from 6-9 years



Judy El Eiwesi, Cambridge English School - Hawally



Freya Firaz, ICSK Khaitan



Malak Amr El-Baih, Cambridge English School



Bader Nasser Saleh, Ibn Al-Jawzi School

By Ben Garcia

The distribution of awards for a drawing competition organized by the Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) was held on Sunday at the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST). The competition with the theme 'Colors of Palestine' was held under the patronage of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and the Embassy of the State of Palestine in Kuwait. Hundreds of students and parents attended the ceremony.

At the start of his speech, Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on 13th anniversary of his assumption as the ruler of Kuwait and for the upcoming celebration of Kuwait National and Liberation Day. He was elated for the participation of hundreds of students who came from various schools in Kuwait mostly Palestinians but also students from the rest of other nations.

He said this remarkable participation reflected sincere love to Palestine and its rich history and cultural heritage. "Thank you and I am pleased to welcome you today and share with us this special Palestinian Day through which I extend my thanks and appreciation to the Kuwaiti Journalists Association represented by Adnan Al-Rashed - Vice President of the Kuwait Journalists Association, and to Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan, Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times, and special thanks to the Gulf University for Science and Technology for its generosity in giving us its stage for this ceremony, and Adnan Saad, the General Coordinator of the "Colors of Palestine Drawing Competition", which was attended by thousands of students from all over Kuwait," he said.

He also thanked all the sponsors who without them this competition would not have been possible. "The idea

of the "Colors of Palestine" competition came to bring our children, from different age groups who participated in this competition, to fly with their imagination in the beloved atmosphere of Palestine and to visualize its blessed land and to enjoy the beauty of its nature and to be familiar of its loyal and devoted people defending its Christian and Islamic faiths," Tahboub noted.



Al-Ward Al-Rashid, Dasman Bilingual School



Khaled Ameer, ACA School Salmiya



Zain Ahmed Saleh, Dasman School



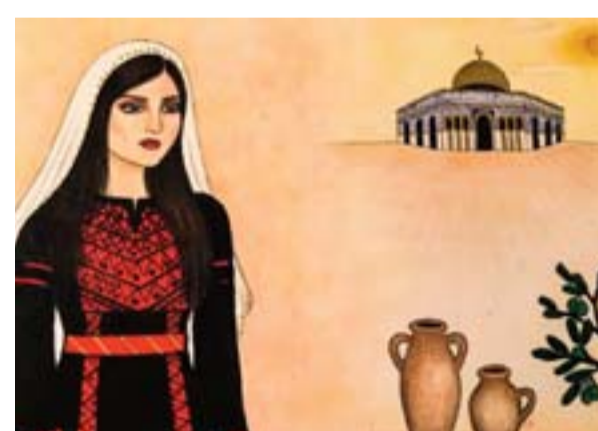
Afraa Khaled Al Daihani, Al Nibras International Bilingual



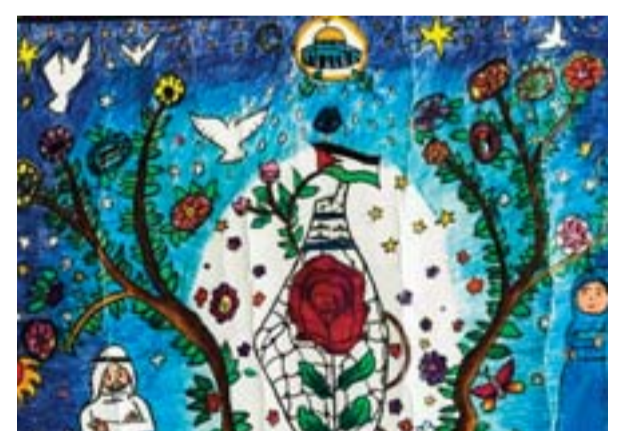
Luluah Mohamed Qratem, Meshref School



Salma Ahmed Said, Al-Najat Girl School Salmiya

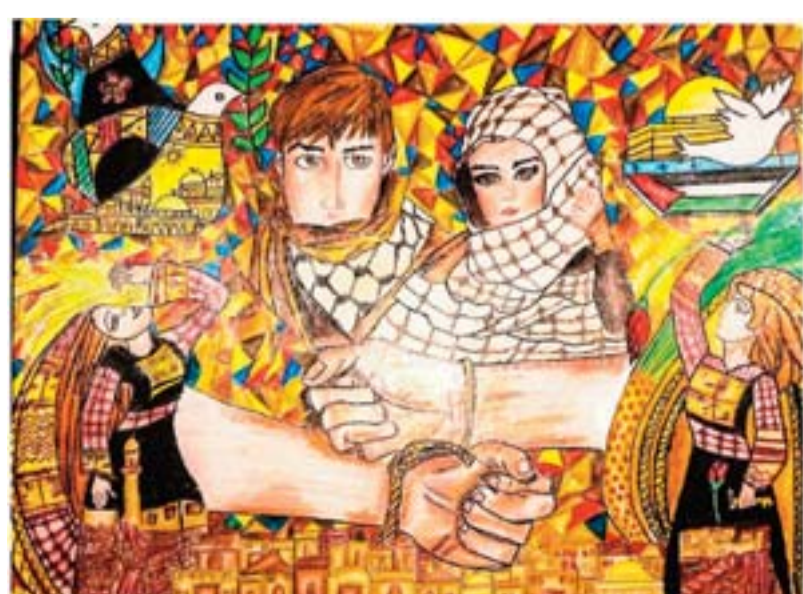


Omar Awad Al-Ramadan, Pakistan Oxford School



Anna Mary Vijjo, Indian Educational School

Winners from 10-13 years



Megha Jijo, Bharatiya Vidya School



Roshni Sara, Indian Educational School

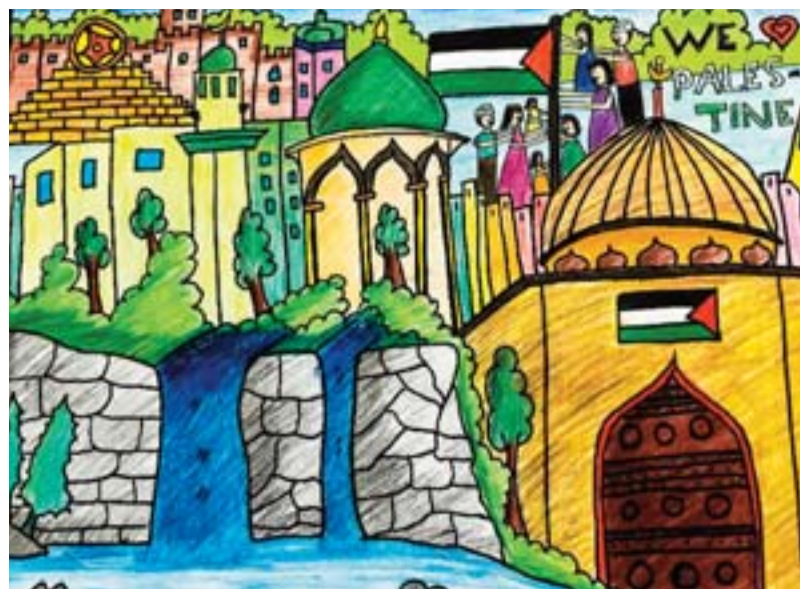


Mera Heirzek, Cambridge English School - Hawally

Lifestyle | Feature



Fathima Sameer, International Indian School



Saleha Afsheen, Smart Indian School



Aisha Ahmed Al-Najar, Al-Resala Bilingual School



Fatma Al-Serafi, Ramlah Om Al-Moaamneen



Karla Tamamian, Armenian School



Qais Mahmood, New Pakistan International School



Omar Alef Diab, Al-Amal Indian School



A group photo with the participants.



A group photo of officials, guests and organizers. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A group photo with the participants.



Participants' paintings are seen during the event.



(From left) The Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub, artist and graphic designer Sherif Ismail, Adnan Saad, the General Coordinator of the 'Colors of Palestine Drawing Competition', Adnan Al-Rashed, Vice President of the Kuwait Journalists Association and Abdulkareem Al-Enezi, head of the panel of judges is seen on stage during the event.



Michael Petersen, 9, is helped to surf by coaches at an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach in Cape Town, South Africa. — AFP photos



Pamela Hanford, 75, is helped by a team of coaches and volunteers to surf at an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach in Cape Town, South Africa.



Surfers, parents, and coaches wait for the start of an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach.



JJ Booyens, 9, (in blue) enjoys surfing with coach at an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach in Cape Town, South Africa.



Alison Edwards (54) is helped off the beach after a surf during an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach.



Pamela Hanford, 75, is helped by a team of coaches and volunteers out of the water after surfing at an adaptive surfing event at Muizenberg beach.

In South Africa, disabled surfers thrill at catching a wave

Pamela Hansford whooped and threw out a thumbs-up as she glided past on a surfboard, propped up by her elbows. A year ago, a steep wave slammed the intrepid 75-year-old into the shore at a Cape Town beach, breaking her neck. Now, a crowd of volunteers and coaches cheered her on before moving in to turn her board around and push it back out to catch the next wave. "It's wonderful," Hansford said. "To be in the water and to feel the movement again, it's really special."

On the beach, South African surf champion Roxy Davis briefed the next group of volunteers. Since 2016, Davis's surf school Surf Emporium has been hosting training clinics to introduce people with both physical and mental disabilities to the thrill of catching a wave. "Whether you are an able-bodied surfer or somebody with a disability, whether it's your tenth time surfing or your very first, that joy and that stoke (thrill) is the same," she said. "It gives me the same goosebumps watching each wave at each session." People with disabilities have been surfing for decades, but it wasn't until the International Surfing Association started the first adaptive surfing world championship in 2015 that the sport began building momentum.

Enjoy, and compete

"Competition always advances a sport," said Ant Smyth, who captained the South African team at the 2015 games. After a car accident when he was five years old left Smyth's right arm paralyzed, doctors suggested he take up surfing—the paddling, they said, would encourage him to use both arms. "I never did paddle with two hands, ever," Smyth said. On his bedroom wall was a poster of legendary South African surfer and 1977 world champion Shaun Tomson. "I would surf on the end of my bed looking at that picture," remembered Smyth, now 48. "I would kneel down and pray, 'I want to be a world champion like Shaun Tomson.'"

At that first adaptive world championship, Smyth took silver in his division. At the most recent event in December last year, he won gold. "The quality of surfers has increased every year," Smyth said. "The event in 2015 was all happy-like a meet-and-greet with a surfing competition on the side. It was more focused towards learning. "This time it was 'let's win this'. In the water, it got quite fierce."

Now a technical advisor to national body Surf South



Ant Smyth, a disabled surfer, surfs at Llandudno.

Africa, Smyth aims to increase the number of adaptive surfers—not only showing people with disabilities that surfing is possible, but making it practically accessible to them. "If we do our job right and get people into the surf often and regularly, you will find talented people who have the drive to compete," he said. Teaming up with Surf Emporium's clinics helped give the project some structure.

Steep learning curve

"We're training coaches and we have equipment on tap and we have the skills and the premises to let adaptive surfers come surfing whenever they want," Smyth said. For Davis, the learning curve going from surf school to adaptive surf school has been steep. "I've been surfing for about 22 years. I feel like I know a lot about surfing, but actually understanding different disabilities and how to put people on a board to facilitate their disability—it's been really incredible," she said.

Mental disabilities are not currently recognized in any of the official categories of competitive adaptive surfing, but Davis has an all-inclusive approach at her clinics. Back at the beach, the coaches showed Chloe Murdoch how to position her autistic son Finn on a board.

Murdoch was concerned—the waves seemed a bit too big, a bit too strong. But within minutes, her nine-year-old was cruising along unassisted, lying down on the board. "With surfing, you're not chasing any educational targets or goals, you're not trying to meet any performance, you're just enjoying your child," Murdoch said. "We get so little opportunity with special needs children to be able to do that." "We felt like we were flying - it was amazing." — AFP

Thousands of dogs vie for Best in Show at New York's Westminster contest

The annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show opens in New York on Monday, with nearly 3,000 competitors vying for an array of trophies, including Best in Show, the most prestigious title in the rarefied world of pedigree dog breeding. This year's two-day event draws challengers from all 50 US states and 14 other countries, including Russia, Mexico, Brazil, Canada and Japan, the club said in a statement about the 143rd Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, held at Madison Square Garden.

It is the second-oldest US sporting event, behind only the Kentucky Derby horse race. The Westminster Kennel Club was established in 1877, before the invention of the light bulb and the automobile, according to the organization. The show has its roots in New York City in the 1870s, when a group of sporting gentlemen would meet at a hotel bar near Union Square in lower Manhattan to trade stories about hunting and the exploits of their dogs. One night, the men decided to put on

a dog show and they named it after the gathering spot, the upscale Westminster Hotel.

This year, some 2,800 dogs are set to compete with the top dog picked as Best in Show yesterday, organizers said. The competition features dogs from 203 breeds and varieties, including two new, tongue-twisting additions: The Nederlandse kooikerhondje - a small dog whose silky coat is white with auburn patches - and the grand basset griffon VendEen - a larger breed known for its short legs, long ears and shaggy coat.

Dogs are divided into seven groups: hounds, toys, non-sporting, herding, working, sporting and terrier. The dogs that emerge victorious from each of the seven groups then vie for the Best in Show trophy. Flynn, a fluffy bichon frise from Michigan, took home the Best in Show trophy at last year's competition. — Reuters



The Pekingese 'Pquest Primrose' and trainer compete during the Toy Group judging at the 143rd Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.



Bichons Frises gather in the judging ring during the Daytime Session in the Breed Judging across the Hound, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding groups at the 143rd Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at Pier 92/94 in New York City. — AFP photos



Madison the Shih Tzu is groomed before Breed Judging.



A Shih Tzu competes in Breed Judging.



The Old English Sheepdog nicknamed 'Elsa' and trainer compete during the Herding Group judging.



The Standard Poodle and trainer compete during the Non-Sporting Group judging.

US presents Mideast vision in Warsaw, but no converts

WARSAW: The United States is seeking this week in Warsaw to rally the world behind a vision of the Middle East that includes maximum pressure on Iran and strong backing of Israel, but it is winning little fresh support. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last month announced the two-day conference starting today, saying that foreign ministers from around the world would come to Poland to take up the "destabilizing influence" of Iran in the Middle East.

A show of unity would serve as a powerful rejoinder to Iran's clerical regime, which just this week is celebrating 40 years since Islamic zealots toppled the Western-oriented shah. But with few RSVPs coming, the United States and Poland have toned down the agenda, stating that the conference is not focused on Iran or on building a coalition against it, but rather looking more broadly at the Middle East. US Vice President Mike Pence will address the conference, whose co-host is Pompeo.

Even though the meeting takes place in the European Union, major European powers are sending low-level representation with the exception of British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who signaled that he primarily wants to address the humanitarian crisis triggered by the Saudi-led offensive in Yemen. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said she had previous commitments and Pompeo instead will have breakfast with her in Brussels on his way home.

Even host Poland - which is eager for strong relations with the United States in the face of a resurgent Russia - has stressed that it still joins the European Union in backing a 2015 deal negotiated by former US president Barack Obama to ease sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear program. President Donald Trump stormed out of the deal last year, calling it "terrible", and has reimposed sweeping US sanctions aimed at strangling Iran's economy and curbing its regional power.

The countries that are sending top officials to

Warsaw are pushing for a tough line on Iran including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Arab allies of the United States such as the United Arab Emirates. Netanyahu said that Iran remained the foremost item on the agenda - "how to continue preventing it from entrenchment in Syria, how to thwart its aggression in the region and, above all, how to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons."

Yet the United States is also expected in Warsaw to offer hints of its proposals for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, who has been putting final touches on a "deal of the century" for the Middle East, will make a rare speaking appearance on Thursday. Kushner, whose family is close to Netanyahu, is not expected to unveil the proposal until after the April 9 election in Israel.

The Trump administration faces an uphill climb in selling any deal to the Palestinian Authority, which remains livid over Trump's landmark 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem - claimed by both peoples - as Israel's capital. The Palestinian government - which has labelled the Warsaw conference an "American conspiracy" - has refused talks with the United States until it starts what it calls a more balanced policy.

Iran was not invited to Warsaw and summoned the Polish ambassador to protest. But in a show of diplomatic clout, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani will travel during the US-led conference to Russia, which declined to attend in Warsaw. In the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Rouhani will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Syria, where Trump is pulling out US troops. Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz said the Warsaw conference should "initiate a process" on finding stability in the Middle East, with a US official saying that countries will hold follow-up meetings.

Ali Vaez, director of the Iran project at the



WARSAW: Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz (right) and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo shake hands during a joint press conference yesterday. — AFP

International Crisis Group think tank, said the United States appeared determined to use Warsaw to expand beyond its anti-Iran coalition of Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "I doubt Washington will succeed in achieving this objective, because while

many in Europe share US concerns with regards to Iran's regional activities and ballistic missiles program, they don't agree with Washington's one-sided and maximalist view that Iran is the source of all evil in the region," he said. — AFP

Fire at Delhi hotel kills 17

NEW DELHI: At least 17 people died when a fire ripped through a budget hotel in Delhi yesterday, prompting authorities to launch a safety check of other buildings in the vicinity. Victims included a woman and a child who jumped from a window to escape the blaze that broke out before dawn at the budget Hotel Arpit Palace. Images showed flames and thick smoke billowing out of the top floor of the hotel, located in a congested part of the Indian capital.

Guests at the hotel - popular with budget and business travellers - were unable to use corridors to escape because of wooden panelling, according to a fire officer. Delhi home minister Satyendra Jain told reporters that rules were flouted to construct extra floors, with a terrace being used as an open air restaurant. He also directed the fire department to inspect other buildings in the congested area and file a report within a week. Three Myanmar citizens staying at the hotel were missing, the NDTV news network reported.

Most of the guests were sleeping at the time the fire broke out and suffocated to death. Four people were injured in the incident. It is estimated around 120 people were inside the hotel - built around 25 years ago - when the fire started. "We have confirmed with hospital authorities the toll is now 17 including a child," Sunil Choudhary, a senior fire brigade official, told AFP.

G C Misra, Delhi fire services director, said the blaze had been brought under control and that 35 people were rescued by firefighters in an operation lasting several hours and involving at least 25 fire engines. "There was wooden panelling on corridors because of which people could not use corridors to evacuate," another fire officer told reporters. Police said they were investigating the cause, and a judicial probe has been ordered into the latest disaster to raise concerns over fire safety in India.

The hotel is in the Karol Bagh district, a busy commercial center crisscrossed by narrow alleys where electric wires dangle overhead. The area, which houses hundreds of hotels, shops and offices, is packed with tourists and shoppers. Three members of an extended family were among the dead. They were part of a group of 13 from southern Kerala state who had come to Delhi for a wedding.

Fires are common across India because of poor



NEW DELHI: Delhi fire and police personnel stand outside Hotel Arpit Palace after a fire broke out on its premises yesterday. — AFP

safety standards and lax enforcement of regulations. Activists say builders and landlords often amend building plans to add space, and ignore safety norms to save costs. Many commercial establishments in the city lack emergency exits or firefighting equipment. Jain said hotels and similar establishments were not supposed to extend beyond four floors in that area. "This hotel had been built up to six floors. It's gross negligence on the part of the officers who allowed the extra floors to be built," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was "deeply saddened" by the loss of life in a statement posted on Twitter. Building fires are particularly frequent in big Indian cities where millions live in cramped and dilapidated properties. In December, eight people were killed when a fire engulfed a hospital in Mumbai. — AFP

Saudi state media said Saudi officials will discuss an investment in NIIF. Saudi Arabia has also flagged a desire to invest in India's farm sector, with products to be exported to Saudi, another official at the trade ministry said.

However, progress on a \$44 billion refinery that Indian state-run oil companies agreed to build with Saudi Aramco on India's west coast has been held up by strong opposition from mango farmers who will lose their land. Since taking office in 2014, Modi has sought to use India's fast-growing economy to attract more investment from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic nations.

As a fellow Muslim country, Pakistan has long maintained strong ties with Saudi Arabia. In late October, Riyadh offered Pakistan a \$6 billion loan to help keep its ailing economy afloat. Saudi Arabia has also announced plans for a \$10 billion refinery and petrochemical complex at the coastal city of Gwadar, where China is building a port as part of its vast Belt and Road initiative.

"They're looking at the energy sector, at some of our privatization plans that they might bid for through our privatization process," Pakistani investment minister Haroon Sharif told Reuters. Sharif, who chairs Pakistan's Board of Investment, said there was also Saudi interest in Pakistan's mining sector. "Saudi Arabia has huge resources. Their investment fund is over \$1 trillion, so we want just a fraction of that," said a second Pakistani minister, who did not wish to be named. Saudi state news said Saudi officials will discuss investments with China, South Korea and Indonesia, in sectors including health-care and telecommunications, without giving further details. — Agencies

Pakistan censors NYT article by critic of military

ISLAMABAD: An opinion piece in the International New York Times criticizing Pakistan's powerful army was censored by its local publisher yesterday, replaced by a blank space in a country where it can be dangerous to reprimand the military. The article by Manzoor Pashteen, the leader of a movement which calls for an end what it says are enforced disappearances and extra-judicial murders of ethnic Pashtuns by security officials, was widely available online, however. It was headlined "The Military Says Pashtuns Are Traitors. We Just Want Our Rights". In it, the former veterinary student detailed how the impoverished northwest, along the Afghan border, has been "desolated" in Pakistan's long fight with militancy.

He described his group, the Pashtun Protection Movement (PTM), as "peaceful". "We held numerous sit-ins and protests and continued to hope that Pakistan's leaders would try to address our concerns. Instead, they responded with intimidation and violence," he wrote. "After every major protest, police arrests and

charges PTM activists and supporters with rioting, treason or terrorism," he continued. He also accused the security establishment of ensuring that "almost nothing is reported about our movement in the mainstream Pakistani newspapers and television networks".

The piece was "removed for print by our publishing alliance in Pakistan. The New York Times and its editorial staff had no role in its removal," a note at the bottom of the empty-single column on the front page said. The New York Times did not immediately respond to a request for comment from AFP. The paper is printed in Pakistan by the local English-language Express Tribune, which regularly censors NY Times articles, including a 2017 piece on an anti-gay crackdown in Chechnya and a piece from 2016 entitled "Sex Talk for Muslim Women".

The Committee to Protect Journalists said in a report last year that the army had "quietly but effectively, set restrictions on reporting" in Pakistani media. Last week, the country's top court warned the military and intelligence agencies to stop manipulating the media. The PTM has rattled the military since it burst onto the scene early last year, unleashing festering anger over the alleged abuses against Pashtuns, who account for roughly 15 percent of Pakistan's population.

The movement remains peaceful, but has been notable for its direct verbal attacks on the armed forces in a country where such criticism is largely seen as a red line. — AFP

Freed footballer returns to cheers...

Continued from Page 1

Araibi had expressed fear that he would be tortured and killed if he returned to Bahrain and supporters allege his prosecution was politically motivated.

Former Australian football captain Craig Foster, who led a campaign in the sporting community for Araibi's freedom, expressed his "deepest gratitude" at his release. But he also launched a broadside against politically linked officials who dominate sports governing bodies and who "played a role in bringing this about". "We're not going to stop until we hold people accountable for what has occurred," he said. "We want to see an investigation in Interpol and the use of red notices."

Araibi has been a vocal critic of Asian Football Confederation president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's ruling family. Prime Minister Scott Morrison welcomed Araibi's release, saying many Australians' prayers had been answered. "We know all Australians will deeply appreciate the decision, allowing him to return to his wife, family and friends."

Morrison thanked the Thai authorities, who had earlier

left his written appeals for Araibi's return unanswered, but abruptly dropped extradition proceedings on Monday at Bahrain's request. The case had also become a cause celebre in the football world, with stars like Didier Drogba calling for Araibi's release and FIFA urging the Thai football authorities to intervene. The international football governing body on Monday thanked Thailand in a statement for "doing the right thing" and said it hoped the athlete "will be able to resume his footballing career soon".

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, said the case had brought the plight of others imprisoned in the country to light. "Two moments captured the world's attention this month: The photo of footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi shackled and barefoot, and the moment of Hakeem breaking the chains and reunited with his beloved wife, friends and the football community in Melbourne."

Thailand's treatment of refugees has been thrust under international scrutiny in recent weeks. In January, an 18-year-old Saudi woman who ran away from her "abusive" family arrived at a Bangkok airport and - armed with a smartphone and a captive Twitter audience - managed to outmaneuver Thai authorities and gain refuge in Canada following her pleas for asylum. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha brushed aside questions about Araibi's detention, saying "everything was proceeded in an orderly way so please stop criticizing - there were many agencies involved in solving this case". — AFP

Saudi king supports Palestinian state...

Continued from Page 1

the trip to Pakistan this weekend, Pakistani officials said. The memorandums of understanding will include renewable energy projects and investments in petrochemicals and mineral resources, Saudi state news agency SPA said. The prince is expected in New Delhi next week, along with leading Saudi businessmen, at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's foreign ministry said yesterday.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was among a handful of leaders who attended an investment conference in Saudi Arabia in October. India's Modi met the prince in November, when they were both in Argentina for a Group of 20 summit. Saudi Arabia is India's top supplier of crude oil but the two countries have expanded ties beyond energy, and their governments have agreed to build a strategic partnership, the foreign ministry said.

In a statement, it cited cooperation in areas including energy security, trade and investment, infrastructure, defense and security. India is expecting Prince Mohammed to announce an initial investment in its National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), a quasi-sovereign wealth fund, to help accelerate the building of ports and highways, an Indian official said.

Trump mulls deal to avert...

Continued from Page 1

with the wall, putting 800,000 jobs, from FBI agents to airport security, on hold for five weeks. The Democrats refused to budge and Trump was forced into an embarrassing climbdown, allowing new negotiations to open with a new deadline of this Friday.

Republicans appear desperate to avoid a second shutdown. Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said the compromise deal was "certainly good news". "It provides new funds for miles of new border barriers," he told senators. By approving this, government could then work "with predictability and certainty". Senator Chuck Schumer, the senior Democrat in the upper house, agreed. "While the details are still being hammered out, the tentative agreement represents a path forward for our country, away from another round of fraught negotiations, up against a government funding cliff, away from a dreaded government shutdown," Schumer said.

Although there's little doubt that organized Mexican

drug crime and people smugglers present a threat along the US border, Trump's fixation on wall building has politicized Americans to the point where the left and right can barely discuss the issue. For Trump, chants of "build the wall" were crucial to his surprise 2016 election victory. At the El Paso rally he introduced a new slogan for his coming 2020 reelection bid: "Finish the wall."

The thousands of devoted Trump fans, many of them wearing his red "Make America great again" campaign hats, cheered at the dire warnings about Mexican criminals and calls for bigger and longer walls. "Walls save lives, walls save tremendous numbers of lives," Trump told them. There was a counter-message a short distance from where Trump spoke when rising Democratic star Beto O'Rourke - a possible challenger in 2020 - held his own rally.

A former congressman who excited grassroots Democrats last November with an against-the-odds near upset of Republican Senator Ted Cruz, O'Rourke is from El Paso. 5 "Tonight, we will meet lies and hate with the truth and a positive, inclusive, ambitious vision for the future from the US-Mexico border," he said. Trump dismissed O'Rourke as "a young man who's got very little going for himself except he's got a great first name". Making fun of what he said was O'Rourke's much smaller crowd, Trump said: "That may be the end of his presidential bid." — AFP

Sports

World number one Osaka in shock split with coach

Osaka is scheduled to compete in Dubai next week

TOKYO: World tennis number one Naomi Osaka has split from her coach Sascha Bajin just 17 days after completing back-to-back Grand Slam victories at the Australian Open.

"Hey everyone, I will no longer be working together with Sascha. I thank him for his work and wish him all the best in the future," the 21-year-old Japanese tweeted in a shock announcement.

Bajin, a former hitting partner to Serena Williams, responded: "Thank you Naomi. I wish you nothing but the best as well. What a ride that was. Thank you for letting me be part of this."

Osaka, who became the first Asian to hold the top ranking after beating Czech Petra Kvitova in the Melbourne final on January 26, had worked with the German for just over a year.

No reason was given for the surprise decision to part ways, but Japanese media cited Osaka's management company IMG in reporting that there had been a breakdown in the player's relationship with the coach since the start of the year.

According to Japan's Nikkan Sports, some practice sessions with Bajin at the Australian Open lasted just 10 minutes and she sometimes hit without him being present. Osaka, who is scheduled to compete in Dubai next week, began sounding out potential replacements late last year, local media reported. The Japanese player captured her first Grand Slam crown by stunning Williams at last year's US Open in a final remembered as much for the American's astonishing rant at the chair

umpire following a coaching violation.

Based in the United States, Osaka linked up with Bajin in late 2017 and enjoyed a breakthrough year, shooting from 72 in the world to the top of the women's rankings. During that period she won the prestigious Indian Wells tournament before scooping her first major in New York, while Bajin was named WTA coach of the year. Osaka's Twitter feed lit up in response to her announcement, with several memes expressing widespread disbelief—including a shrugging Barack Obama, a confused Joey from American sitcom "Friends" and a Minions character screaming "WHAAAAT?"

Osaka, who grew up in the US and speaks little Japanese, melted hearts when she fought back tears after her emotional US Open win over her idol Williams as boos echoed around the stadium. She won more fans with a nail-biting 7-6, 5-7, 6-4 win over Kvitova in the Australian Open final, after which Osaka sobbed tears of joy as the jeers were replaced by cheers.

Former greats Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert have all heaped praise on the new darling of women's tennis.

"Winning back-to-back Grand Slam tournaments is a rare and special achievement, and I'm thrilled these results have propelled Naomi to the top of the women's game," said Evert, the first ever WTA world number one. "Her exciting brand of tennis, coupled with the dignity she displays on and off court, is a winning combination that tennis fans really embrace." — AFP



Kuwait wins two gold, bronze in shooting tourney



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait proved tough during the fourth day of competition of IHH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Eighth International Grand Prix and controlled the clay target event, as Kuwait won two gold and a bronze medals, while Serbia won the air pistol and rifle events.

Asia games champion Talal Al-Rashidi won the trap gold by hitting 42 targets in the final round, while Saudi Arabia's Fahad Al-Mutairi was second with 41 and the bronze was won by Kuwait's Khalid Al-Mudhaf who hit 34.

In the women's trap Sarah Al-Hawal won the gold with 42 hits following a hard competition with Italy's Isabella Cristani who hit 40 targets and her compatriot Giuila Grassia who hit 33.

Omani shooters were on top with the three position rifle as Hamad Al-Khateri won gold with a score of 454.3 defeating Serbia's Milenko Sebie with a score of 454.2, while the bronze medal ended with Oman's Ibrahim Al-Muqabli who scored 435 points. Saudi Arabia's Attallah Al-Enezi won the gold medal of the 10m air pistol, (237.9) defeating Serbia's Damir Mikec who scored 235.7 points, while Kazakhstan Eldar Imankulov won the bronze with 215.4 points. Serbia's Zorana Arunovic won the women's 10m air pistol gold medal scoring 242.4, while Armenia's Elmira Karapeyan won 234.5 points, as Maria Grozdeva from Bulgaria won the bronze medal with the score of 213.4.

Kuwait is on top of the shotgun medals table with two gold and one bronze, while Italy has one silver and one bronze, Saudi

Arabia has one silver, meanwhile, Serbia headed the air pistol and rifle table with four gold and two silver. Oman is second with one gold, one silver and one bronze, Saudi Arabia third with a gold followed by Kuwait and Kazakhstan silver and bronze, Armenia one silver, Bulgaria, Bahrain and Egypt with one bronze each.

Kuwait trap shooter Sarah Al-Hawal said her win is so dear because it came after very strong competition with Italian world champions during the rain and strong winds. She said she was able to concentrate and qualified for the finals then won the gold by hitting 42 out of 50 targets. Meanwhile, shooter Talal Al-Turqi said winning the first and third place is a very good achievement adding that he is proud to win gold while competing with accomplished world champions.



Awarding a group of winners.



From the GulfRun race at Bahrain International Circuit.

Zain strategic partner of GulfRun 14

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership of the 14th edition of GulfRun, the GCC's most popular motorsport event. The event, held in the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Bahrain, continues until next March.

Zain strongly believes in the important role the

private sector plays in developing the youth and sports sectors in Kuwait. The company makes this concept a reality by sponsoring and supporting various major sporting events in Kuwait, including this regional event, as well as sponsoring and encouraging many Kuwaiti athletes who represent Kuwait in local, regional, and international arenas. Many of these athletes, who achieve great titles that Zain takes pride in, are motorsports champions.

GulfRun already kick-started with the sports cars show that took place at Murooj, where participants showcased their exquisite high-speed sports cars and thrilled visitors. In addition, the main GulfRun race, held at Bahrain International Circuit in the Kingdom of Bahrain, was a true test of the

participants' motorsport skills, where they had the chance to take part in several training procedures in preparation for the final race that was extremely popular with professional and amateur racers alike.

Next March, GulfRun will feature the Karting Endurance race that will be held at the recently-opened Kuwait Motor Town Race Circuit in Arifjan, where it will continue over a period of 24-hours, offering racers, both professionals and amateurs, with an exciting and safe atmosphere to compete and win the race title. The Karting Endurance race will also feature the participation of Zain's team. Zain's support to GulfRun comes in line with its keenness on encouraging the various efforts that contribute to developing the Kuwaiti youth and sports sectors. The company puts the support of

Kuwaiti sports at the forefront of its priorities under the umbrella of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, and Zain's support of Kuwaiti champions results in many achievements that the company is proud of one year after another.

GulfRun is considered an ideal and safe alternative to street racing, which threatens the lives of many people, many of them young drivers. Motorsport enthusiasts are able to showcase their talents within professional and certified grounds at the Kuwait Motor Town Race Circuit and Bahrain International Circuit, in addition to having taken advantage of the opportunity to gain valuable insights with the help of qualified trainers and experienced professional instructors.

Sports

Joe Root's century anchors rampant England assault

Unbeaten 111 off 209 deliveries with just nine boundaries

GROS-ISLET: Joe Root's 16th Test century highlighted England's first day of complete dominance in an otherwise disappointing Caribbean campaign as the captain anchored his team to an unassailable position by the end of the third day of the third and final Test against the West Indies at the Darren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia on Monday.

His workmanlike unbeaten 111 off 209 deliveries included just nine boundaries and typified the tourists' effort to make amends for previous failures in reaching stumps at 325 for four in their second innings, an overall lead of 448 runs with two days still available to push for a consolation victory having already surrendered the series and the Wisden Trophy with heavy defeats in the first two matches in Barbados and Antigua.

With the home side short-handed in the bowling department on the day due to an early injury to Keemo Paul, England took full advantage of the situation.

Root had never gone through an entire Test series without at least registering a half-century, and with just 55 runs from the five previous innings against a reinvigorated West Indies team he was due to come good. It happened on a day when a few others in a suspect England batting order managed to get important runs under their belts.

Successive partnerships of 74 for the third wicket with Joe Denly (69), 107 for the fourth wicket with Jos Buttler (56) and 71 so far for the fifth wicket with Ben Stokes (29 not out) ensured that the captain's steady influence was ever-present from the moment he arrived at the crease midway through the morning session.

Eschewing extravagance he compiled his innings carefully while those around him showed a bit more aggression against a depleted West Indies attack which left much of the burden on the shoulders of fast bowlers Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel.

"It's really pleasing to make a start count," said Root at the end of the day. "I was frustrated in the first innings and I'm glad to make it count after getting in. I managed to find ways of scoring runs at times when I didn't feel great but it felt like it clicked today."

EARLY STUMBLE

A morning of misfortune and misadventure saw England ensuring there was no repetition of the collapses which have defined this Caribbean tour so far, although the early signs were not encouraging.

Resuming at the overnight position of 19 without loss, the tourists suffered an immediate setback when Rory Burns clipped the first delivery of the morning to Alzarri Joseph at square-leg to give Paul immediate success.

However the young all-rounder, drafted into the final eleven for this match due to the suspension of regular captain Jason Holder for a slow over-rate offence in the previous match, left the field on a stretcher shortly after as he appeared to suffer a serious leg injury chasing a ball to the boundary.

West Indies did not help their increasingly difficult situation when Shimron Hetmyer put down a simple chance offered by Denly off Gabriel. It proved a costly miss. He lost the other opening batsman, Keaton Jennings, midway through the morning when the left-hander attempted to turn a delivery from Joseph top the leg-side and the ball ricocheted off his body onto the stumps to send him back to the pavilion for 23.

If West Indies felt they had opened a doorway to the vulnerable core of the England batting they were left disappointed as Denly, mindful about increasing questions over his credentials as a Test batsman, played fluently after his early life with the captain alongside. However Gabriel had the last laugh when dismissing the



GROS ISLET: James Anderson (L) of England celebrates the dismissal of Darren Bravo (R) of West Indies during day 4 of the 3rd and final Test between West Indies and England at Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia, yesterday. — AFP

Kent batsman to a catch at the wicket in mid-afternoon.

Like Denly before him, Buttler played the role of the aggressor in his century stand with Root until Roach produced an unplayable delivery to breach the batsman's defences in the final session and claim his 18th

wicket of the series.

Stokes then followed the trend of those who preceded him, ensuring Root reached three figures and leaving England with the luxury of contemplating a declaration at some point on the fourth day. — AFP

KIB celebrates first place at 9th Banking Archery Championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) congratulated Esrar Alenezi for winning first place in the women's category at the 9th Banking Archery Championship. Organized by the Kuwait Banks Club, the championship took place at the Shooting Range Complex in Subhan.

On this occasion, Chairman of KIB, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, congratulated Al Enezi for winning first place, in the presence of Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mohamed El Saka, General Manager of the Retail Banking Department, Othman Tawfeeq and Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit, Nawaf Najja.

KIB noted that it continues to be one of the few banking institutions that seek to nurture and develop its human capital on a professional level. As part of its impactful policy, the Bank is also dedicated to developing its employees' personal skills as well, thereby supporting local talent by opening doors to all activities



and events that target employees in the banking sector.

Moreover, Al-Jarrah expressed his sincere pride in the Bank's employees who hold leadership positions at both a professional level within the Bank and at a personal level in external events such as these. He also noted that KIB remains to be an adamant supporter of its employees' ambitions and goals across various areas, thereby nurturing promising banking competencies that pave the way for a brighter future for the Bank.

At the end, Esrar Alenezi lauded the efforts of the Kuwait Banks Club and all its employees for their out-

standing organization and management of the event, resulting in remarkable success. She also thanked all the participants for their sportsmanship and spirit, which contributed to an atmosphere full of positivity that helped make this a truly admirable and memorable championship.

The championship was divided into three main categories: men, women, and children of employees. At the end, the first, second and third place winners were honored by the Kuwait Banks Club within an exciting and encouraging atmosphere.

Virat Kohli above peers, destined for greatness: Kumar Sangakkara

NEW DELHI: India captain Virat Kohli is well ahead of his contemporaries and destined for greatness, former Sri Lankan batting stalwart Kumar Sangakkara has said. Run-machine Kohli capped a memorable 2018 by becoming the first to win the International Cricket Council's (ICC) cricketer, test and one-day international (ODI) player of the year awards last month.

Considered part of the elite group also featuring Kivi Kane Williamson, Australian Steve Smith and England's Joe Root, Kohli has surged ahead after a stupendous 2018 and is currently the top ranked test as well as one-day batsman. "Everything about Virat's game stands out. I think he is head and shoulders above anyone else in world cricket today," Sangakkara told India Today news channel. "And I think going forward, he will be one of the greatest ever cricketers, if not the greatest ever," said the Sri Lankan batting great.

With 39 centuries from 222 one-day matches, Kohli is second only to compatriot Sachin Tendulkar - who scored 49 from 463 - in the 50-over century makers' list. He has also scored 25 hundreds in 77 Tests.

Sangakkara is amazed by Kohli's ability to success across formats without tinkering his basis game. "He has this incredible knack of scoring runs and has a very, very solid method that he believes in..." said the former Sri Lanka captain.

"... if you see the tempo which he bats with, it hardly changes. He does read the situation very well. "He is a very passionate guy, you see that in his expressions on the field... it's the overall aspect of both the person and how he has sorted his batting and his attitude."

Sangakkara's former team mate Mahela Jayawardene lauded how Kohli handled the pressure of leading the team of a cricket-mad nation of 1.3 billion. "It's not just about the ability Virat has but to understand the way to handle pressure not just on the field but also off the field and the expectations," said the former Sri Lanka captain. "We grew up with Sachin who had to perhaps experience the same thing. And for the next generation, it's probably on Virat's shoulders..." Jayawardene said. — Reuters



PHILADELPHIA: Matt Murray #30 of the Pittsburgh Penguins makes the third period save against the Philadelphia Flyers at the Wells Fargo Center on February 11, 2019 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Penguins defeated the Flyers 4-1.—AFP

Sharks win 6th straight

VANCOUVER: Evander Kane scored two goals as the visiting San Jose Sharks downed the Vancouver Canucks 7-2 on Monday night for their sixth consecutive victory. The Canucks took their fourth loss in five games. Kane now has five goals in his past three games and 15 goals in 16 games since Jan. 1. Tomas Hertl, Joe Pavelski and Melker Karlsson each provided a goal and an assist for San Jose. Timo Meier and Kevin Labanc also tallied for the Sharks. San Jose veteran Joe Thornton recorded his 1,050th career assist, overtaking Gordie Howe for ninth place on the NHL's all-time helper list. Logan Couture had two assists for the Sharks, who got 25 saves from Martin Jones. Bo Horvat and Derrick Pouliot scored for the Canucks. Vancouver goalie Mikey DiPietro, 19, stopped 17 of 24 in his NHL debut.

PENGUINS 4, FLYERS 1

Sidney Crosby had one goal and two assists while Nick Bjugstad, Jake Guentzel and Kris Letang each scored one goal to lift Pittsburgh to a win at

Philadelphia. Matt Murray stopped a career-high 50 shots as the Penguins snapped a four-game losing streak. Jake Voracek scored for the Flyers, who had won nine of 10 games coming in with a 10-game streak of securing points. Philadelphia goaltender Carter Hart made 24 saves and had a personal eight-game winning streak broken.

CAPITALS 6, KINGS 4

Evgeny Kuznetsov finished with two goals and two assists while linemate Alex Ovechkin added one goal and two assists as Washington defeated visiting Los Angeles. The Capitals completed a 4-1-1 homestand while the Kings closed out a 3-2-1 road trip. Brett Connelly, Christian Djoos and Jakub Vrana also scored for Washington. Los Angeles got two tallies from Austin Wagner and one apiece from Tyler Toffoli and Oscar Fantenberg. Washington goalie Pheonix Copley made 29 saves in the win. Los Angeles' Jonathan Quick stopped 25 shots. — Reuters

SA seek to continue home dominance as ailing S Lanka visit

DURBAN: South Africa will be expected to continue their recent dominance over touring sides when they host ailing Sri Lanka in a two-test series starting at Kingsmead today. Their recent 3-0 sweep of Pakistan was South Africa's seventh successive home test series victory, a run that included a triumph over number one ranked India and a 3-0 whitewash of the Sri Lankans on their last tour in the 2016/17 season.

Their supremacy has been built around a fierce fast-bowling attack and lively wickets, the opposite of the conditions they faced when they lost 2-0 in Sri Lanka last July. Although the Kingsmead pitch is expected to be slower and take more turn than it has in the past, the Proteas will be overwhelming favourites against a Sri Lanka side that were well beaten in Australia last month and have not won a game in any format since October.

"Whichever team comes here we're pretty much going to try to dominate them," Proteas spinner Keshav Maharaj told reporters. "Every series you play you want to be dominant and whitewash the opposition. Playing here, this should be our fortress. When people come here they should be on the back foot when they do take the field."

Maharaj played the first test against Pakistan but was dropped for the next two as selectors went for an all-seam attack. He may have more of a role to play in this series, which also includes a test at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth, a wicket that traditionally takes turn.

"At Kingsmead it's not your swing and fast bowling wicket that we were used to 10 or 15 years ago. The wicket will wear down and slow down significantly, I would say. I think it's just a patience game at Kingsmead now."

"It's a little bit slower than expected. But with the sun about, it may make the wicket harden up and get a little bit quicker than what we're used to as well."

Sri Lanka have arrived in some disarray, having dropped experienced captain Dinesh Chandimal and with media reporting there are rifts between the board and coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who has been removed as an on-tour selector.

Whatever the nature of the wickets, Hathurusingha acknowledges that the series will depend on how his side handle South Africa's vaunted pace attack that includes Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Vernon Philander and Duanne Olivier.

"I'm relying on the players who have been with us. Dimuth Karunaratne is the captain, so he has to lead from the front," Hathurusingha told cricket website ESPNcricinfo.com.

"He's one of the best batters with Kusal Mendis. Him, Mendis and Niroshan Dickwella, who is in good form, have to stand up. "Lahiru Thirimanne, who has come back into the team, has a lot of experience."

"I think we have to rely on experience on this tour. Those guys have to step up." — Reuters

Sports

Solari's fledglings breathe life into Real Madrid as Ajax lie in wait

Vinicius is the poster boy of Solari's meritocracy

AMSTERDAM: Real Madrid against Ajax would typically be a clash of stars against prodigies but when they face each other in the Champions League last 16 today, the difference will be harder to distinguish.

Ajax will have their latest crop of young gems at the Johan Cruyff Arena, where Frenkie de Jong and Matthijs de Ligt will attempt to live up to already-swelling reputations while the likes of Donny van de Beek, Andre Onana and Kasper Dolberg could also enhance theirs.

The surprise is less that Ajax's line-up will be sprinkled with emerging talents than the expectation Madrid's will be too. Gareth Bale aside, the galacticos are gone, replaced by a handful of prospects trying to forge their own way through, only at the biggest and most demanding club in the world.

The shift was not so much initiated by the current coach Santiago Solari, whose predecessors Zinedine Zidane and Julen Lopetegui both used youth when they had to, primarily to rest key players or remind them their place was not guaranteed.

But in the biggest games, Zidane and Lopetegui were drawn to experience, while Solari has made youth first choice since being tasked with rejuvenating his team in November. Vinicius Junior has had less time than Ajax's De Jong, with only six starts in La Liga and one in the Champions League, but his impact has been arguably just as dramatic, the hype around the Brazilian already comparable.

Signed last summer for 45 million euros, Vinicius was supposed to spend his debut season settling in with the reserve side, a strategy adhered to, perhaps too rigidly, by Lopetegui. "He's very young and has just arrived in Europe," Lopetegui said. "He's very keen to learn and

we've got to give him the time to settle that every player needs."

Solari, in charge of Real Madrid B at the time, was the coach that received him, witnessing first-hand as the 18-year-old scored twice against Atletico B, curled in a free-kick against Unionistas and equalised against Celta Vigo B.

Vinicius was raw but when Lopetegui was sacked, Solari had greater legitimacy to promote him. He had faith too. Solari gave Vinicius 90 minutes in his first match in charge, more than Lopetegui had in all 14 of his.

Almost four months on, Vinicius has 22 appearances for the first team, the latest pair against Barcelona at the Camp Nou and Atletico Madrid at the Wanda Metropolitano. In both, he was Madrid's greatest threat, to the extent that even Bale's starting spot has been questioned.

"His adaptation has been very fast," Solari said. "He is 18 and he has adapted to a new country, a new culture, a different type of football. He has shown his talent but we have to take care of him."

Vinicius is the poster boy of Solari's meritocracy, an approach that puts reputation far below humility and hard work. Among those to lose out have been Isco, who is yet to start a league game under Solari, and Marcelo, whose form deteriorated at the start of the year. Casemiro has also been relegated to the bench.

Among the fresh faces to come in have been Sergio Reguilon at left back, the Spanish 22-year-old with a wand of a left foot, Marcos Llorente in defensive midfield, and Dani Ceballos, who could make the transition after Luka Modric slightly easier to bear.

Together, Vinicius, Reguilon, Llorente and Ceballos



AMSTERDAM: Ajax Amsterdam's Dutch coach Erik ten Hag gives a press conference at the Johan Cruyff Arena yesterday on the eve of their UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match against Real Madrid. — AFP

have played 64 games since Solari was appointed. "They are the future of Real Madrid," Solari said. "Therefore, they have to be part of the present."

But the present is now a strenuous few weeks when Madrid's season could be defined by matches against the best opponents, both in La Liga and Europe. Jorge Valdano who, like Solari, played for Real Madrid,

coached the youth side and then managed first team, said last month that youngsters should ideally be introduced gradually, allowed to bed in while more experienced players shoulder the responsibility.

Solari has had to fast-track his fledglings and so far that faith has been rewarded. Ajax, and the Champions League knock-out stages, is the next test. — AFP

Pochettino faces defining moment in bid for first trophy at Spurs

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino faces a defining moment in his Tottenham reign as the in-demand Argentine tries to keep his bid for a first major prize alive against Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League.

Pochettino has taken to defending his failure to win silverware in almost five years at Tottenham by insisting he values qualification for Europe's elite club competition more highly than success in the domestic cups.

But for all of Pochettino's protestations that reaching the Champions League is his primary goal, that claim rings a little hollow when they never make it to the business end of the tournament.

Tottenham have never been past the last 16 of either the Champions League or the Europa League since Pochettino arrived from Southampton in May 2014. Now Bundesliga leaders Dortmund, who visit Wembley for the Champions League last-16 first leg today, stand between Pochettino and his first European quarter-final in what could be his last season with the north London club.

Pochettino, yet to win a trophy in his managerial career, has been strongly linked with a move to Manchester United at the end of the season. If that mooted deal may now be less of a sure thing given Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's remarkable impact as interim boss at Old Trafford, there is little doubt Pochettino will still be a man in demand, with Real Madrid also believed to be interested in his services.

Derided as serial underachievers when they struggled to break into the Premier League's top four, Pochettino has made Tottenham into Champions League mainstays capable of ruffling the feathers of Europe's aristocracy.

"We feel so proud and with all the circumstances the team is doing fantastically, the performance of the squad is unbelievable," Pochettino said. "We are showing great character and very good quality, fighting against big sides and being in a position that's very close to the top.



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Argentine midfielder Erik Lamela (L), Tottenham Hotspur's Belgian defender Toby Alderweireld (C) and Tottenham Hotspur's Argentine defender Juan Foyth (R) take part in a team training session at Tottenham Hotspur's Enfield Training Centre, north London, yesterday. — AFP

"We hope to keep going in the same direction, to fight for big things." But for all their undoubted growth in the Pochettino era, there remains a nagging feeling of unfulfilled potential about Tottenham, who have won only three cups in the past 28 years.

Failure to land a big prize with the generation of Tottenham stars he has cultivated so astutely, including Harry Kane, Dele Alli, Christian Eriksen and Son Heung-min, would be considered a missed opportunity.

Tottenham have finished in the Premier League's top three for the past three seasons and they retain an outside chance of winning the title this campaign. But their poor record in domestic cups under Pochettino is a significant blemish and Tottenham's European exploits have been equally confounding. Pochettino's first season featured a

tame Europa League last-32 defeat against Fiorentina and the following year they were outclassed by Dortmund in the last 16 of the same competition.

His maiden voyage in the Champions League was even more rocky as Tottenham failed to qualify from the group stage. Finally hitting their stride last season, Spurs enjoyed a memorable 3-1 win over European champions Real Madrid in the group stage and they also drew in Madrid and twice beat Dortmund. But as the pressure mounted Tottenham melted, blowing the lead in the last-16 second leg against Juventus as two second-half goals sent them crashing out. Vexed by mounting criticism following recent exits from the FA and League Cups, Pochettino said chairman Daniel Levy told him his brief was to finish in the top four while the club build their long-delayed stadium. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE			
Tottenham Hotspur v BV Borussia Dortmund	23:00		
beIN SPORTS HD 2			
Ajax Amsterdam v Real Madrid CF	23:00		
beIN SPORTS			

Australian legend hails #HakeemHome as win in battle for football's soul

SYDNEY: Ex-Socceroos captain Craig Foster was capped 29 times for his country, but believes the fight to free Hakeem al-Araibi was the most important battle of his life and vital for saving football's soul.

The young Bahraini footballer and refugee is on his way back to Australia from detention in Bangkok and it is largely thanks to player-turned-commentator Foster. When the Thai authorities arrested the 25-year-old defender on his honeymoon and looked set to deport him to his native Bahrain—where he feared facing torture and prison—Foster used his considerable public platform to cause a stink.

This, Foster told AFP, was not just about Australia keeping its word to offer a young man refuge from persecution, but about the fate of football itself. The 49-year-old believes it is the start of the process of redeeming the soul of sport from the "sordid" grip of big money and politics.

"It was clear to us in football that this kid was in serious trouble, because football was never going to come to his aid," Foster told AFP. "Modern sport will always take the most politically expedient path over the human rights of one single, unknown, unloved athlete—unless we fight like we are doing now."

Foster is renowned in sports-mad Australia for his outspoken views about local football, and recently launched a campaign to join the board of governing body Football Federation Australia (FFA) before withdrawing his candidacy. So his dogged efforts to rally support for Araibi—including flying to Switzerland to meet world governing body FIFA—is little surprise to local fans. But this is the first time the salt-and-pepper-haired pundit has entered the world of geopolitics.

"None of us have ever done anything like this before, it's completely new," Foster said after visiting the imprisoned Araibi to deliver messages of support. The visit touched Foster personally. "When I met him it was very emotional because I saw a kid who's terrified for his life and I've never ever actually been confronted by that before." Araibi was wanted for damaging a police station in the wake of the pro-democracy Arab Spring protests, but the former national youth footballer insists the case is bogus and tied to his previous criticism of Sheikh Salman.

Foster's relentlessness also stems from another cause close to his heart—refugees. Having seen firsthand the huge contributions migrants have made to growing football on a national sport, the Amnesty International ambassador for refugees believes he has a duty to help Araibi and others like him. While Canberra has in recent years developed a reputation for harsh policies against asylum-seekers arriving by boat, the Araibi case sparked a strong groundswell of support among football fans and the wider community.

It encouraged Foster to keep going even as fatigue sets in after months of campaigning. "It's tiring, it's exhausting emotionally and physically but so what? Hakeem's sitting in a cell with 50 other people and he's sleeping on a concrete floor," Foster said.

"We are fighting a cause that we believe in very strongly... don't underestimate the power of saving this young man and forcing sport to better recognise and uphold human rights in the future." So what does he make of Araibi's release and imminent return to Australia? "We are just warming up," he tweeted defiantly yesterday "whilst a blow has been struck, a great battle lies ahead". — AFP

Qatar unveils falcon Falah as world championship mascot

DOHA: An "aspirational" falcon called Falah, who is also "competitive and courageous", was officially unveiled as the World Athletics Championships' mascot yesterday, which will take place in Qatar this year. "The falcon, to us in Qatar and to all the Arab countries, it means a lot," said Dahlan al-Hamad, president of the Qatar Athletics Federation and vice-president of the IAAF.

"The falcon represents the speed, represents the vision, represents the hunting of the target to be in the front." Hamad added that everything was "on schedule" for the championships, the first ever to be held in the Middle East, and which start on September 28.

Falah was revealed by championship organisers during Qatar National Sports Day, an annual public holiday in the Gulf state used to encourage people to take up an activity. During several sporting events which took place in Doha on Tuesday, FIFA president Gianni Infantino played football with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani at the country's expensive sports training centre, the Aspire Academy.

Sheikha Asma bint Thani al-Thani of the Qatar Olympic Committee said the unveiling of the mascot and approach of

the championships was "very, very exciting". "Falah in Arabic means he who aspires, or she who aspires to achieve their best in everything that they do," she said. — AFP



DOHA: This picture the official mascot for the World Athletics Championships "Doha 2019" in Doha yesterday. — AFP

Arsenal's Ramsey signs four-year Juventus deal

MILAN: Arsenal midfielder Aaron Ramsey has signed a four-year deal to join Juventus on a free transfer from next July, the Italian champions said on Monday. The 28-year-old Wales international will arrive in northern Italy on July 1 with his contract running until June 30, 2023.

As his contract will have ended, Arsenal will not be entitled to a transfer fee. "As a result of the registration of the player, Juventus will incur additional costs of 3.7 million euros (\$4.1 million), to be paid by July 10," the Serie A champions said.

The move brings to an end Ramsey's 11-year spell with the Gunners having moved from Cardiff City in 2008. Over the past decade he has played 256 Premier League games, scoring 38 top-flight goals, and winning three FA Cup and two Community Shield. He also had two loan spells at Nottingham Forest in 2010, and back at former club, Cardiff in 2011. "I wanted to issue a personal statement for all the Arsenal fans who have been extremely loyal and supportive," Ramsey wrote on Instagram.

"You welcomed me as a teenager and have been there for me through all the

highs and lows I have encountered during my time at the club. "It is with a heavy heart that I leave after 11 incredible years in north London. Thank you.

"I will continue to give the team 100 per cent and hope to finish the season strongly, before heading on to my next chapter in Turin." Ramsey has 58 caps for Wales, scoring 14 goals, and was a part of the Welsh side that reached the Euro 2016 semi-finals.

He becomes the third Welshman to play for Juventus following club legend John Charles and former European Golden Boot winner Ian Rush. Ramsey had turned down the offer of a new deal at Arsenal, with clubs including Barcelona, Real Madrid, Paris Saint Germain, Inter Milan and Bayern Munich linked with the player.

"Everyone at Arsenal Football Club wishes Aaron Ramsey a happy and successful future," the London club said in a statement. "Aaron's made a fantastic contribution to our club since joining from Cardiff City in 2008. He has always been a consummate professional and will always have a special place in the hearts and memories of Arsenal fans around the world." Juventus have an 11-point lead on top of Serie A and are on track for an eighth consecutive league title. They are through to the Champions League knock-out rounds and will play Atletico Madrid in the last 16 starting next week.

Ramsey will reportedly become Juventus' second-highest earner behind Cristiano Ronaldo earning 7 million euros (\$7.8 million) a season. — AFP

25 World number one Osaka in shock split with coach



26 Joe Root's century anchors rampant England assault



27 Pochettino faces defining moment in bid for first trophy at Spurs



Westbrook sets triple-double mark

Cavs hand Knicks club-record 17th straight loss



OKLAHOMA CITY: CJ McCollum #3 of the Portland Trail Blazers handles the ball against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Monday at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

OKLAHOMA CITY: Paul George had a 47-point triple-double, and Russell Westbrook set an NBA record for consecutive triple-doubles as the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the visiting Portland Trail Blazers 120-111 on Monday night. George's 3-pointer with 3:52 to play came on the 10th assist by Westbrook, who clinched his 10th consecutive triple-double. Westbrook finished with 21 points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists. Wilt Chamberlain had nine consecutive triple-doubles in 1968. George, who contributed 12 rebounds and 10 assists, has scored 92 points over the last two games. The win was the fourth consecutive and 11th in 12 games for the Thunder. The Trail Blazers took their third loss in four games despite getting 31 points from Damian Lillard.

ROCKETS 120, MAVERICKS 104
Hampered by a strained left shoulder,

James Harden nearly had his streak of consecutive 30-point games end before coming alive down the stretch as host Houston defeated Dallas. Harden finished with a game-high 31 points on 9-for-23 shooting and rounded out his stat line with eight rebounds, seven assists and five steals. The Rockets relied on a collective effort to build a lead against Dallas, with four others scoring in double figures, including guard Gerald Green, who poured in 19 points in 22 minutes off the bench. Luka Doncic posted 21 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists to pace the Mavericks.

CAVALIERS 107, KNICKS 104

New York saw its late comeback bid fall short at Cleveland and took its 17th straight defeat—the longest single-season losing streak in franchise history. The Knicks lost 16 straight during the 2014-15 season.

Kadeem Allen scored a career-high 25 points off the bench for the Knicks, who trailed wire to wire but had chances to tie the score or take the lead in the final minute. Collin Sexton scored a team-high 20 points for the Cavaliers while Larry Nance Jr. registered 15 points and 16 rebounds.

NUGGETS 103, HEAT 87

Nikola Jokic had 23 points and 12 rebounds, Malik Beasley got hot in the fourth quarter and finished with 23 points, and host Denver beat Miami. Monte Morris scored 17 points, and Paul Millsap had nine points and 10 rebounds in his return to the lineup for the Nuggets, who ended a three-game losing streak. Millsap played 20 minutes off the bench after missing the previous three games due to ankle soreness. Justise Winslow had 15

points, and James Johnson scored 14 for the Heat.

BUCKS 112, BULLS 99

Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from a one-game rest to score a game-high 29 points, leading Milwaukee to a victory at Chicago. Antetokounmpo produced his fifth straight game with 29 or more points, a stretch during which he has averaged 33.6 points per game. Eric Bledsoe (19 points) also helped the Bucks win their six straight on the road. Zach LaVine had 27 points for the Bulls, who lost their 11th consecutive home game.

TIMBERWOLVES 130, CLIPPERS 120

Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and 10 rebounds, and Minnesota ended a four-game losing streak with a win over Los Angeles in Minneapolis. Minnesota's

Derrick Rose returned after missing the past three games with an ankle injury and scored 22 points off the bench. The Timberwolves' Andrew Wiggins sat out due to an illness. Lou Williams scored a season-high 45 points off the bench, including 21 in the fourth quarter for the Clippers, who went 3-3 on their six-game road trip.

RAPTORS 127, NETS 125

Kawhi Leonard banked in the go-ahead field goal with 4.2 seconds, and he finished with 30 points and eight assists to help Toronto beat visiting Brooklyn. Marc Gasol added 16 points — 11 in the fourth quarter for the Raptors, who have won five in a row. Toronto's Serge Ibaka added 18 points and 12 rebounds. D'Angelo Russell had 28 points and 14 assists for the Nets. — Reuters

England World Cup-winning 'keeper Gordon Banks' dead

LONDON: Gordon Banks, England's goalkeeper during their triumphant 1966 World Cup campaign, has died aged 81, his former club Stoke City announced yesterday. His family said the 73-times capped Banks, who lost an eye in a car crash in 1972, had passed away in his sleep. "It is with great sadness that we announce that Gordon passed away peacefully overnight," his family said. "We are devastated to lose him but we have so many happy memories and could not have been more proud of him."

Geoff Hurst, who scored a hat-trick in the 4-2 win over West Germany in the World Cup final at

Wembley, tweeted a fulsome tribute to his former team-mate. "Very sad to hear the news that Gordon has died. One of the very greatest," tweeted 77-year-old Hurst.

Banks, who played in every game of the 1966 campaign on home soil, is probably best known for a wonder save he produced to deny Brazilian great Pele in the 1970 World Cup group match. "Once I got my hand to it I hadn't a clue where it was going," he modestly said afterwards.

Pele—who would go on to lift the trophy—admitted later he had said 'gol', so sure was he that the ball was heading into the net. Brazil still won the game 1-0. However, Banks later recounted that he did not appreciate the remark made by one of his teammates that day, midfielder Alan Mullery.

"I patted him on his head, and I said 'why didn't you catch it?' and the abuse that came back was unbelievable," said Mullery. Mullery said Banks was probably the best goalkeeper he had played with or against.

"He was the best at that time. We had some great goalkeepers in those days, and the only person I can think came near was Pat Jennings," said Mullery. "He

was absolutely marvellous goalkeeper. He was a likeable man, and when it came to business, he was probably the best there has ever been."

Banks, whose club playing career revolved largely around Stoke and Leicester City, is the latest of the 1966 team to pass away. Captain Bobby Moore, the baby of the team Alan Ball and Ray Wilson preceded him while several such as Nobby Stiles and Martin Peters suffer from Alzheimer's.

Another former Leicester and England legend Gary Lineker—albeit from a later generation—also tweeted his appreciation of Banks, whose sole trophies at club level were two League Cups, one piece with Stoke and Leicester. "Oh no. Gordon Banks, an absolute hero of mine, and countless others, has died," tweeted Lineker. "@England's World Cup winner was one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, and such a lovely, lovely man. #RIPGordon."

Stoke City chairman Peter Coates said Banks—who played 250 times for The Potters after he joined from Leicester in 1967 — had not been in good health for several weeks. "We've been expecting him, he has been poorly for a number of weeks but it's a very sad day for us, we love him so much," said Coates.



Gordon Banks

"He made his home in Stoke, and was very much part of the fabric of the club. You don't get too many like him, and he was immensely modest for all talent. "He told me when they walked out at Wembley for the final, and he had goose-bumps, he had never seen anything like it." —AFP