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MPs call on government to cut expat numbers by 50%

Expats blamed for poor services, traffic jams • Govt dithers on increased annual leave

KJA holds meeting, elects new board members



KUWAIT: Members and supporters of the Al-Jamee group celebrate after winning the elections for the board of directors of Kuwait Journalists Association after its general assembly meeting yesterday. (Inset) The list of the winners is seen. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A number of lawmakers yesterday called on the government to adopt serious measures to drastically reduce the number of expatriates and stop what they called "their onslaught on public services". MP Khalil Al-Saleh, who heads a parliamentary committee to speed up the process of finding jobs for nationals, called on the government to implement a proposal stipulating deporting half of the 3.3 million expatriates over the next five years.

Saleh said that the higher committee for demographic structure must play a more effective role in reducing the number of expatriates, adding that his committee has not seen a clear policy on this issue, especially in replacing expatriates with nationals in public and private jobs. He stressed that the government must adopt serious measures to "save the country from the (expatriate) typhoon that has taken up services and jobs".

The lawmaker said the government is required to apply its plan on the demographic structure, which the former social affairs and labor minister said was with the economic committee at the council of ministers. "We have to work with the plan immediately so as to reduce the number of expatriates by 50 percent over the next five years, especially since a majority of them are marginal laborers," Saleh said.

MP Khaled Al-Otaibi blamed the large number of expatriates for the deterioration of daily life in the country because of their "rush for public services after their numbers multiplied, and they currently form more than two-thirds of the population, which is an extremely dangerous development". "What encourages expatriates to stay in Kuwait and not leave under any circumstances is what they get here and can't find in their home countries," Otaibi said.

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News in brief

Photography banned in cemeteries

KUWAIT: Municipality Director Ahmed Al-Manfouhi has issued directives to all cemeteries banning photography there and instructed them to place warning signs everywhere, said informed sources, noting that the decision was effective on issue and that violators will be held legally accountable. — Meshaal Al-Enezi

Search still on for missing Kuwaiti

VIENNA: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Romania Talal Al-Hajri affirmed that his embassy is continuously following up on the case of missing Kuwaiti citizen in Romania Mohammad Al-Baghli. Romanian officials are exerting great efforts to resolve this case, Hajri said in a statement yesterday after meeting Prahova county's police chief. Baghli went missing in Prahova - north of the capital Bucharest - on Aug 5, 2015. His family has announced a reward of Å500,000 for anyone who provides information on him. — KUNA

46 militants killed in Sinai

CAIRO: Egypt's army yesterday said 46 suspected militants were killed in clashes in the restive Sinai Peninsula, where troops are fighting the Islamic State group. The "extremely dangerous" militants were killed in shootouts in north and central Sinai, the army said in a statement. About 100 "criminal, wanted elements and suspects" were arrested, and security forces destroyed dozens of hideouts and vehicles. Three soldiers also died in fighting in "various areas of operations", the army said but did not identify those locations. — AFP

Trump: Call time on daylight savings

WASHINGTON: Americans pushing for an end to the annual ritual of losing an hour's sleep on changing clocks to daylight savings time got a new ally yesterday: President Donald Trump. Left groggy by the disruption, critics say the back-and-forth of the clock is unnecessary and maybe even dangerous. Trump seems to agree. "Making Daylight Saving Time permanent is O.K. with me!" he wrote on Twitter. — AFP

Rouhani hits back at US on first Iraq visit

BAGHDAD: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani hit back yesterday against pressure from the "aggressor" United States on Iraq to limit ties with its neighbor, during his first official visit to Baghdad. Shiite-majority Iraq is walking a fine line to maintain good relations with its key partners Iran and the United States which themselves are arch-foes. It has

been under pressure from Washington not to get too close to the Islamic republic next door, particularly after the United States last year withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and hit Tehran with sanctions.

Baghdad was given limited waivers to continue buying electricity and natural gas from Iran, but Washington has urged Iraq to partner with US companies to become energy independent. Rouhani, who is on his first trip to Iraq since becoming president in 2013, hailed his country's "special" ties with its neighbor. These relations could not be compared to Iraq's ties "with an aggressor country".

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Barham Salih (right) meets his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani upon his arrival at the presidential palace yesterday. — AFP

Airlines ground Boeing MAX 8 jets after crash

TULU FARA, Ethiopia: Safety doubts over Boeing's best-selling 737 MAX 8 drove several carriers to ground the aircraft yesterday after a new jet crashed in Ethiopia, killing all 157 people on board. Investigators recovered the black-box flight recorders from the Nairobi-bound jet that crashed early Sunday near Addis Ababa, the carrier Ethiopia Airlines said. Flight ET302 went down into a field just six minutes after takeoff as the pilot

alerted controllers of "difficulties".

Those on board included people from 35 countries, including some two dozen UN staff. Ethiopia decreed a day of mourning. It was the same type of jet as the Indonesian Lion Air plane that crashed in October, killing 189 passengers and crew. Airlines in Ethiopia, China, and Indonesia said yesterday they were suspending operations by their 737 MAX 8 fleets. The move caused Boeing shares to tumble 11.7 percent to \$373.23 at opening on the Dow Jones Industrial Average, sending the benchmark index into the red.

Ethiopia Airlines said investigators had found the plane's flight data and cockpit voice recorders yesterday.

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ADDIS ABABA: Women mourn during a memorial ceremony for the seven crewmembers who died in the Ethiopian Airlines accident at the Ethiopian Pilot Association Club yesterday. — AFP

Taleban leader Omar lived next to US Afghan base

KABUL: Taleban founder Mullah Omar lived within walking distance of US bases in Afghanistan for years, according to a new book that suggests embarrassing failures of American intelligence. US and Afghan leaders believed the one-eyed, fugitive leader fled to and eventually died in Pakistan, but a new biography says Omar was living just three miles from a major US base

in Zabul province, where he died in 2013. The Afghan government has vehemently denied the claims in "Searching for an Enemy", by Dutch journalist Bette Dam, - but the Taleban, who are currently in talks with Washington in Doha, told AFP the book's claim that Omar remained in Afghanistan is "true".

Dam - who spent years reporting in Afghanistan and has also written a book about former Afghan president Hamid Karzai - described the Taleban chief as a virtual hermit, refusing visits from his family and filling notebooks with jottings in an imaginary language. She spent more than five years researching the book and interviewed Omar's bodyguard Jabbar Omari, who claimed to have hid and protected him after the Taleban regime was overthrown.

Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 which led to the fall of the Taleban, the US put a \$10 million bounty on Omar and he went into hiding in a small compound in the regional capital Qalat, Dam wrote. The family living at the compound were not told of the identity of their mystery guest, but US forces almost found him twice. At one point, a US patrol approached as Omar and Omari were in the courtyard. Alarmed, the two men ducked behind a wood pile, but the soldiers passed without entering. A second time, US troops even searched the house but did not uncover the concealed entrance to his secret room.

Omar decided to move when the US started building Forward Operating Base Lagman in 2004, just a few

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Local

Zain partners with WiDS Conferences in Kuwait, Lebanon to inspire, educate

We need to have more women at center of digital transformation: Kharafi

KUWAIT/BEIRUT: Zain Group, the leading mobile telecom innovator in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces its partnership and support of Women in Data Science (WiDS) Conferences held in Kuwait City and Beirut earlier this month. The two events were organized jointly by Kuwait's Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and American University of Beirut (AUB) for their respective events, both in coordination and linked with the annual Global WiDS Conference held at Stanford University and an estimated 150 plus locations worldwide.

In recent years, Zain has heightened its strategic focus on women empowerment, promoting gender diversity and inclusivity within the company. The company's support of the WiDS conferences is in line with this outlook, as both the Kuwait and Beirut-based events invited both genders to attend, which feature outstanding women doing outstanding work as well as attracting women leaders in the field of data science from across the Arab world and internationally.

The event seeks to inspire and educate global and regional data scientists, regardless of gender, and to support Arab women in the field. The technical conference provides an opportunity to hear about the latest data science research in different fields; learn how leading-edge companies are leveraging data science to their benefit; and connects individuals with potential mentors, collaborators, and peers in the field.

Echoing the call for having more women participate at the center of digital transformation and the company's support of the Women in Data Science Conferences in Kuwait City and Beirut, Zain Group Vice-Chairman and CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi said, "This event is of prime relevance to Zain Group as developing the skills and participation of women at all levels with our organization is a far-reaching initiative within Zain, and we are already seeing substantial benefits from its

implementation. We are also strong supporters of innovation as a differentiator and keeping abreast with developments in critical areas such as data science to leverage the right technologies to further improve customer experience and loyalty, supports our digital lifestyle strategy."

Data science encompasses scientific methods, processes, algorithms, and systems to extract knowledge or insights from data in various forms to deliver more accurate decision-making, policy, and planning. It is a growing industry given that technological developments such as machine learning and artificial intelligence are forecast to reduce current employment globally by as much as 50 percent, while various areas in data science are expected to see a 28 percent rise in demand in the coming two years.

The WiDS conferences involved talks, presentations, and discussions and were led by many global shapers-renowned women leaders in data science—from leading global and regional entities such as Google, Amazon, Netflix, IBM, OMD, MBC, United Nations Foundation and the World Bank who presented and were involved in discussions on the use and impact of data science.

The two-day event in Kuwait saw Zain holding a one-day specific Data Science workshop that focused on the benefits of employing business analytics and how to develop a structured approach to improve decision making in the business landscape.

Kuwaiti entities who participated and made keynote presentations on the second day came from Petrochemical Industries Company, Kuwait Oil Company, Environment Public Authority, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, Ibtakar Strategic Consultancy, the Central Agency for Information Technology, Kuwait University and Zain.

The program included a series of focused presentations and breakout roundtable discussions, with Zain having representatives at both events. Khawla Al-Jaber,



A group photo taken as part of a Women in Data Science conference.

Zain Group Director Technology- Strategy and Performance presented on the topic of "Big Data Approach for the Telecom Industry" at the Kuwait City event. In Beirut, Tamara Albsoul, Zain Jordan, Business Intelligence and Advanced Analytics Team Leader participated in the "Integrating data science into the business: strategy and solutions" panel, while Munifah Akasha, Zain Group Head of Talent Acquisition, co-chaired a roundtable discussion on "Diversity Matters: Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Women in STEM".

Furthermore, the agenda witnessed presentations and roundtable discussions on various significant topics including: 'On Making Data Science Useful'; 'On Where Have I Seen This Before? Building Data Science Intuition'; 'On Conversational AI: Speech-based Virtual Assistants'; 'On New Business Order: Data - Technology - Transformation'; 'Digital Health and

Artificial Intelligence'; 'The Fourth Industrial Revolution: A Transformative Strategy for the Public Sector' and 'Unlocking Government Innovation Through Data Science Infrastructure'.

Furthermore, in Kuwait topics included: The Synergy Between the Knowledge-Based Economy and Data Analytics; eMisk and Environmental Data Management in Kuwait; The Genomics Revolution- Convergence of the Biological and Computational Sciences; Data, the Fuel for Decision Making- An Oil Industry Perspective; Change the Game: Learn how to win with Data; and a panel session on Careers in Data Science. The WiDS Conferences in both cities attracted over 2,000 attendees representing more than 500 organizations. The global conference is the largest data science conference in the world; and took place in more than 50 countries concurrently this year, garnering over 100,000 participants.

Kuwaiti women lynchpin of development plans: Official

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women's vast intellect and qualifications make them an integral part of the country's 2035 broad vision of sustainable development, said an official

yesterday. Kuwait's 2035 development plan takes into account women's efforts and contributions, the Ministry of Information's assistant undersecretary of the television department Saud Al-Khalidi told a conference over Kuwaiti women's growing presence in the media. Women have become a force to be reckoned with on the political and economic scenes, in addition to other realms such as sports, according to educational consultant Sheikhha Shaila Al-Sabah. She went on to say that the accomplishments of Kuwaiti women are "endless," pointing out that four women won seats in parliament back in 2009 as soon as they were given the right to run for office. As



Saud Al-Khalidi



Sheikhha Shaila Al-Sabah

among the "pillars of society," the portrayal of women has increasingly become more positive, said the president of Kuwait Lawyers Association Sharyan Al-Sharyan.

On the conference, he said it fits into His Highness the Amir's vision of women empowerment, giving them the credit they rightfully deserve. — KUNA

'Tijari Neighborhood' held at Grand Avenues

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently opened its two-day 'Tijari Neighborhood' at the Grand Avenues, as part of its ongoing 'Ya Zeen Turathna' (our beautiful heritage) campaign targeting the revival of Kuwait's traditions and heritage. CBK's deputy director for corporate communication Amani Al-Wer'a said that the activity's idea came about in order to introduce Kuwaiti traditions to the Grand Avenues' visitors, noting that function attracted a considerable number of visitors who were received by CBK's CEO Elham Mahfouz and a number of CBK employees at CBK booth. Live displays of traditional Kuwaiti crafts were shown, in addition to having a number of boys and girls in traditional costumes present some traditional recreational activities.



Kuwait hosts Mideast Psychological Association Conference

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the attendance of Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah, the Middle East Psychological Association (MEPA) will organize its 3rd annual Conference and Expo from Thursday 14th until Saturday 16th March 2019 at Al-Hashemi Conference Center in Kuwait Radisson Blu Hotel. This year's conference brings a unique educational event with more than 50 international experts from around the world for the first time in Kuwait to also feature the President of the American Psychological Association (APA), Dr Rosie Phillips Davis, as one of the keynote speakers. Each presenter will share their expertise with attendees who are interested in developing a healthier lifestyle and coping mechanisms.

The Middle East Psychological Association Conference and Expo aims to raise awareness and change perceptions of mental health within the region. The conference is also an invaluable networking opportunity to professionals along with providing updates on current topics, trends, theories, techniques, products, and research within the field.

This unique conference will feature three different tracks: professionals, students, and the general community. Each track will address the needs specific to the groups. Attendees will be able to earn continuing education credits from the American Psychological Association (APA) and a certificate of participation from MEPA whilst enjoying the opportunity to meet face-to-face with international high-level professionals exhibiting the latest in publishing, educational programs, technology, and career opportunities within the wider Mental Health industry.

Commenting on this announcement, MEPA President Dr Joanne Hands says, "As an industry, we are working very hard to change the way how Mental Health is viewed in the Middle East. In the recent years, we have seen the mainstream acknowledgement of Mental Health issues, something that was seen before as part of a Western culture and today we strive to transform how Psychology and Mental Health are viewed in the Middle East region."



Dr Joanne Hands

Local

Amir receives Kuwait Airways board on carrier's 65th anniversary

Minister introduces new undersecretary, board members to Sheikh Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Kuwait Airways Chairman of the Board Yousef Al-Jassem and members of the board on the occasion of the carrier's 65th anniversary of establishment. Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah attended the meeting. Jassem and members of the board also met with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Delivering a speech on the occasion, Kuwait Airways Chairman Jassem said that he and his fellow board members were honored to have been received by His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince on the occasion of the Airways establishment in 1954. This reception reflected the leadership keenness on improving the quality and services of the airways, a request that will be heeded by the board members, said Jassem. He affirmed

that people responsible for the national airliner will continue to follow the guidelines set by His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, and His Highness the Prime Minister. Recently, Kuwait Airways achieved around 95 percent in meeting flight schedules and there are moments when it reaches 100 percent thanks to the diligence of Kuwait Airways employees, revealed Jassem, indicating that the best way to commemorate the anniversary was to head forward to provide the best flight services to the customers of the airways.

Earlier yesterday, Minister Hajraf introduced to His Highness the Amir the new undersecretary at the ministry Saleh Al-Saraawi. Furthermore, Minister Hajraf presented to His Highness Sheikh Sabah, the newly appointed Deputy Directors at the Public Institute for Social Security (PIFSS) Mohammad Al-Nisf, Eman Al-Ahmad, and Khaled Al-Fadhala. Minister Hajraf also introduced the new undersecretary and PIFSS Deputy Directors to His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento from Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Kuwait Airways Chairman of the Board Yousef Al-Jassem and members of the board. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and the newly appointed Deputy Directors at the Public Institute for Social Security (PIFSS).



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and the new undersecretary at the ministry Saleh Al-Saraawi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Finance Minister Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Kuwait Airways Chairman of the Board Yousef Al-Jassem and members of the board.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Finance Minister Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, Kuwait Airways Chairman of the Board Yousef Al-Jassem and members of the board.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with a Kuwaiti State Audit Bureau team tasked with monitoring His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan budget. —KUNA photos



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Journalist Association (KJA) General Assembly held its meeting the board of directors' elections for the years 2019-2020 yesterday at its temporary premise. Nine candidates had competed for seven seats. They include seven candidate representing Al-Jamee list: Fatima Hussein, Adnan Al-Rashid, Jassim Kamal, Dhairan Aba Al-Khail, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan, Rabiaa Al-Jumaa, and Owayed Al-Enezi; In addition to two independent candidates: Hiba Al-Taweel, Najem Al-Shimmar.

Crown Prince meets team monitoring diwan's budget

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday a Kuwaiti State Audit Bureau team tasked with monitoring His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan budget. During the meeting, His Highness praised the bureau's role in protecting public funds and overseeing and saving public spending. He also stressed that the Diwan's doors are always open for any suggestions in order to help the team complete their missions. The meeting was attended by Undersecretary of His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan for Administrative

and Financial Affairs Khaled Salim Al-Sultan.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Chairman and members of General Union of Students and Trainees of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), on forming a new board. His Highness the Crown Prince congratulated the students on this occasion, calling on them to equip themselves with science and knowledge that will help them achieve their scientific excellence.

His Highness Sheikh Nawaf stressed the importance of technical, vocational education, which is one of the most important goals in Kuwait 2035 vision. His Highness assured that students are supported by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the political leadership, who spare no effort in overcoming all the obstacles facing their scientific progress. Also yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince received Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani. —KUNA

Local

Interpellation should be within constitutional legitimacy: Cabinet

Ministers briefed on Lavrov's visit; mourn plane crash victims

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti cabinet stressed yesterday that it is the right of MPs to lodge an interpellation motion against ministers, but it should be practiced in the context of constitutional legitimacy. The cabinet said in a statement following its customary weekly meeting that the practice of this right should also serve public interest and relevant requirements. This support comes as Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan is facing a parliament query tabled by MPs Al-Humaidi Al-Subaie and Mubarak Al-Hajraf. The cabinet thoroughly discussed the five aspects of the query motion and vowed that it would stand side by side with the minister in his replies at parliament.

At the onset of the weekly meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed the ministers on the outcomes of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's recent visit to Kuwait as part of a regional tour. Then, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Fahad Al-

Afasi kept the cabinet posted on his participation in the 36th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers held in Tunis, during which His Highness the Amir was awarded the Order of Prince Naif for Arab Security in recognition of his efforts in bolstering Arab fraternity and integration. In this context, the cabinet voiced much appreciation to this good gesture that reflected the recognition of His Highness the Amir's distinguished status and long experience.

Also locally, the cabinet spoke highly of the efforts of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Capital Market Authority and Kuwait Municipality in the improvement of Kuwait's Doing Business Index of the World Bank. Internationally, the Kuwaiti cabinet voiced heartfelt sorrow and sadness over the crash of an Ethiopian plane during its flight from Addis Ababa to Nairobi on Sunday, killing all passengers and crewmen onboard. The ministers expressed much sympathy and condolence to the friendly Ethiopian people over the victims of the tragedy. —KUNA



Cabinet praises Amir's recognition



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet's meeting yesterday. —KUNA

Minister stresses importance of modernizing army

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday stressed importance of supplying Kuwait army with modern equipment in order to keep pace with the progress reached by the armies in the world. Sheikh Nasser discussed with the Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lt Gen Mohammad Al-Khedhr, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief of Staff General Staff Abdullah Nawaf Al-Sabah plans, armament strategies and maintenance of the Kuwaiti army, the Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations of the Kuwaiti Army said in a press release. The members of the Military Defense Council and members of the Finance Authority of the Ministry attended the meeting. Separately, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad met with Chairman of the Central Agency for Remedying Illegal Residents' Status Saleh Al-Fadhala at Bayan Palace yesterday. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour and top army officials attended the meeting.



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs a meeting with top ministry and army officials yesterday. — Ministry of Defense photos



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Central Agency for Remedying Illegal Residents' Status Saleh Al-Fadhala.

Woman faces 30 lawsuits for Twitter slander

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti woman is facing 30 cases filed against her for using fake Twitter accounts with fake names to insult and make groundless accusations against others, including her husband and her boss. One of the plaintiffs used to be the defendant's lawyer, before he dropped the case after she reportedly slandered him as well.

Administrative building

Kuwait Ports Authority signed a consultancy study contract to design its unified administrative building at Shuaiba Port, in an official ceremony attended by the ports authority director, construction projects and tenders committees and Gulf Consult House (Dar Al-Khaleej) representative Abdullah Al-Ghanem. Ports Authority Director Sheikh Yousef Abdullah Al-Sabah said the project is part of the authority's strategic construction plan set to develop infrastructure in Shuwaikh, Shuaiba and Doha ports. He added that the project will create a new business environment suitable for the endless efforts exerted by port staff as well as integrate the anticipated work development. Sheikh Yousef explained that once the study is concluded, a special tender will be offered for public bidding within six months to execute the project that comprises of 13 floors, an automated port operations control center, the port administration, three basements, reception, public relations department, an auditorium, a multipurpose meeting room, employees' cafeteria and a spa.

Two dead, nine injured in Kabd Road accident

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

KUWAIT: Two people were killed while nine others were injured when their vehicle was involved in an accident on Kabd Road. Ambulances and a helicopter were dispatched to the site after an emergency call was received on 4:30 pm about an SUV carrying a number of Egyptian workers that flipped over on the road. Most of the cases were rushed to Farwaniya Hospital, while one person with a head injury was medevacked to Jahra Hospital and another to Sabah Hospital.

Half lorry impounded

The relations and security information commented on a video clip that went viral online showing a half lorry driver climbing on a pavement designated for pedestrians. It said that traffic patrols went to the area and took legal action against the driver. His vehicle was impounded.

Rapists arrested

A Syrian boy in Fahaheel was kidnapped by three men at knifepoint and taken to Sabahiya, where they took turns raping him. Two of the suspects were arrested, and the third is being sought, Al-Rai reported yesterday.

'Millions of dinars'

An informed source at the municipality revealed a case in which companies allegedly took large amounts of sand and gravel from state property in Subbiya and Salmi and sold them for construction purposes, without having the proper licenses to do that. The companies in questions made 'millions of dinars' from that illegal practice, Al-Qabas reported yesterday, quoting the source. According to the source, a governorate official had issued licenses to the companies, only to cancel them a few days later, giving municipality inspectors the illusion that the operations were licensed.

Smoke bomb

The explosives department confiscated a smoke bomb that arrived in a parcel from Germany at Sulaibkhat post office. The parcel was addressed to the social care department of the social affairs ministry. The concerned department was contacted to make sure whether the parcel belongs to it.

Fugitive nabbed

A citizen sentenced to seven years in jail attempted to attack policemen when they went to arrest him at his home, reported Al-Rai. But the man was brought under control and taken to the criminal sentences implementations department.

Thief caught

Security cameras in a market led to a thief who was unable to leave as employees returned to work, so he hid in a cupboard on display. The thief entered from a backdoor of a Farwaniya mall and broke open the door



KUWAIT: The vehicle seen after the accident.

of a store. He searched the place - breaking two tables - and stole the money. When he attempted to leave, he was surprised by employees returning, so he entered the cupboard. Meanwhile, employees who discovered the break-in called police, who saw the suspect entering, stealing the money and hiding in the cupboard on the security tapes. They opened the cupboard and found him inside. He was charged with break-in and theft. He was taken to the police station for further legal action.

Official inspects 'residency sticker' cancelation procedures

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Director General of Residency Affairs Department Brig Abdelqader Al-Shaaban held an inspection tour of residency affairs departments to check the procedures of renewal and issuance of residencies and follow up the implementation of ministerial decision no. 135/2019 cancelling residency stickers. Shaaban met some citizens and expats, explaining the necessity to benefit from online services the department is implementing in cooperation with the Public Authority for Civil Information.

In other news, the traffic department, in cooperation with Public Authority for Roads and Transport, announced the opening of a new entrance from Ghazali Road (through the service road) to Khalid Eqab Al-Ashab Street leading to Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh as part of the final works of the 6.5 Ring Road project with two lanes from March 11.



Fingerprints, face-recognition for MoH staff

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health's (MoH) electronics and communication control department is currently setting the technical specifications for biometric staff access control devices to be used in various MoH facilities and coordinating with relevant bodies to purchase, install and maintain them. The new devices will use fingerprints and face-recognition and will be monitored by surveillance cameras, explained informed sources, noting that the contract will include a three-year maintenance period.

Contracts delayed

Well-informed sources at the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) said

offering the overhead power lines and land cables maintenance contracts for public bidding had been delayed by the tender agency and warned that the delay might lead to further problems. The sources said that this particular part of the power grid is being currently maintained through temporary orders, which will only cover the summer period. The sources also noted that maintenance contracts of distribution units are waiting until the company that won the tender gets the needed clearances, because it is one of the 12 companies suspended over the recent rain crisis.

Officers insulted

Three female employees working at the Public Institution For Social Security filed complaints at Zahra police station accusing three people of insulting, assaulting and threatening them while on duty. A police patrol was immediately dispatched to the authority's premises and three suspects were detained and referred to relevant authorities.

Local

Prime Minister says ready to listen to youth ideas, needs

Entrepreneurs, ministers discuss proposals to materialize new vision

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Sunday called on the youth to give rein to their energy and zest for life in order to realize their aspirations. Speaking at a meeting with youth entrepreneurs at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, the Prime Minister affirmed his readiness to listen to the thoughts and suggestions of the youth, meet their needs and remove any obstacles facing their aspirations for success. The meeting, organized by the National Youth Project (Kuwait is Proud) under the auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister, gathered also Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, and Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri, as well as a number of other cabinet members and advisors to the Amiri Diwan and the Prime Minister's Diwan.

"The Kuwaiti youth have to invest in their age, which is full of energy and zest, to realize their aspirations and dreams," His Highness the Prime Minister stated. Affirming his government's commitment to facilitating the youth projects, His Highness the Prime Minister wished success for the entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, Dr Youssef Al-Ibrahim, advisor at the Amiri Diwan, noted that the National Youth Project came at the behest of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a view to introducing Kuwait Vision 2035 to the youth. He thanked the government for supporting the recommendations of the youth project since it was launched six years ago, noting that the suggestions of the project are now 80 percent complete.

In the meantime, a number of entrepreneurs set forth their suggestions for realizing the development targets of Kuwait Vision 2035 (New Kuwait) in such areas as commerce, environment, management, technology, education and archaeology. The concerned ministers and officials presented their respective views about these suggestions.

Fourth Kuwait Awards

At the end of the meeting, Minister Jabri announced



Fourth Kuwait Awards winners announced

the names of winners of the Fourth Kuwait Awards. The awards, sponsored by His Highness the Amir, cover 10 areas of academic and scientific achievement. In the field of jurisprudence, Nasser Al-Ajmi won the top award, followed by Harbiya Al-Azmi in the second place and Abdulrahman Al-Dekheel in the third, Al-Jabri said. In the entrepreneurship field, Sadeq Qassem, Abdulwahab Al-Refa'ei and Khaled Al-Mutawa' won the first, second and third awards respectively, the minister noted. In the field of science and technology, Suleiman Al-Otaibi, Rowan Al-Kandari and Asmaa Al-Ateeq won the first, second and third awards respectively. In the media field, Mutlaq Al-Ameeri, Ali Al-Dhefeeri and Youssef Al-Abdullah won the first, second and third awards respectively. In the field of architecture and urban planning, Sara Faisal, Abdulaziz Al-Ureifan and Manahi Adel won the first, second and third awards respectively.

In the educational field, Nora Al-Humaidy, Sara Al-Hosainan and Fatma Al-Shemmary won the first, second and third awards respectively. In the sports field, Ali Al-Kharafi, Abdullah Al-Mezayen and Sara Al-Hawal won the first, second and third awards respectively. In the field of culture, arts and literature, Dalal Nasrallah, Fahad Al-Qu'ood, Youssef Al-Baqshi won the first, second and third awards respectively. In the field of health promotion, Abdulrahman Al-Qash'an, Mohammad Al-Azmi and Dr Hadeel Al-Saleh won the first, second and third awards respectively while Zainab Al-Qarashi won the voluntary action award. The cash awards are KD 10,000 for the first winner (some \$33,000), KD 5,000 (nearly \$17,000) for the second winner and KD 3,000 (\$10,000) for the third. Minister Al-Jabri noted, congratulating the award winners.

New Kuwait vision

A coterie of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs have presented to ministers and state officials a variety of proposals to turn Kuwait Vision 2035 into a reality on the ground. The entrepreneurs and the ministers thoroughly delib-



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks during a meeting with youth entrepreneurs at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center. — KUNA

erated the initiatives in the meeting held at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister. Entrepreneur Dr Manar Al-Jazaf presented an initiative for improving school food to help cut the rising obesity rates among students. Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Hamid Al-Azmi welcomed her initiative and pointed out that the ministry has formed a special committee with the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company to provide healthy food for school students.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah stressed need for promoting healthy diet and lifestyles among school students. He noted that there was a proposal from the Council of Ministers of Health of the GCC countries to add a full hour of sport practicing to the school day to achieve this goal. Entrepreneur Abdulrahman Al-Duaj presented an initiative about managing risks in small projects. Duaj argued that his idea would help increase job opportunities in Kuwait, rationalize funds, encourage investment and manage risks for all SME financing entities.

Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan stressed the importance of the idea of risk management in small and medium-sized enterprises, adding that the Credit Information Exchange Act had been approved and it would help reduce risks and boost economic growth. Hamad Khalaf introduced a proposal for privatizing the management of medical facilities to solve the problem of overcrowded hospitals and primary care centers and reduce the budget of overseas treatment.

Health Minister Sheikh Bassel Al-Sabah said the initiative was in line with the government's vision of strengthening health care system in the country. Abdul Aziz Al-Lughani presented initiative about "governance in boards of government bodies" and Dr Zahra Al-Ali presented an initiative on using drones to monitor Kuwait's natural reserves. Entrepreneur Ahmed Nabil proposed the creation of new mechanism to provide job opportunities for talented Kuwaitis and the Minister of Education said a ministerial decree had been taken in this regard. — KUNA

Private sector important to business atmosphere improvement: Minister

KUWAIT: The role played by the private sector in improving the local business atmosphere is important, said Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Minister of State for Services Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan yesterday. In his speech to the fifth dialogue on open business atmosphere, organized by Kuwait Chamber for Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), minister Roudhan said that various laws and legislations were implemented to improve business atmosphere in Kuwait, noting that amongst the laws were the ones connected with exchange of credit data and commercial registration. Countries are now racing to

improve their business atmosphere indices, indicated the minister, affirming that the launch of the Kuwait Business Center (KBC) was one of the positive steps taken by the state towards a better business atmosphere. He commended the role played by KDIPA to attract investments to Kuwait, adding that such policy will improve overall business in the country. Meanwhile, KDIPA's Director General Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stressed the importance of holding events to encourage dialogue on business atmosphere improvement. The current event focuses on the 2019 report on business atmosphere, said KDIPA's Director who hoped that the data in the 2020



Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan

report would show vast improvements in the business atmosphere in Kuwait. — KUNA

Conference calls for establishing toxicology center



KUWAIT: A group photo of the conference's attendees.

By Abdullatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Organizing Committee of Middle East and North Africa Conference on toxicology Dr Abdellatif Al-Oumi said toxicology awareness needs to be highlighted more because "we have many answers to the public's questions." He said the conference saw 50 speakers from 15 countries who lectured on toxicology, and held workshops on how to

deal with victims of chemical wars as well as petrochemical accidents. Dr Oumi was speaking at the conclusion of the conference which was held under the patronage of Health Minister Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah, and featured an elite group of doctors in attendance. He said that establishing a toxicology center in Kuwait, which would account for the number of the injured, deal and help them, was among the conference's goals.

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International

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019



Does Islamic State still pose a threat?

Wedlocked: tangled webs trap Cambodian 'brides' in China

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PANBARI: Indian laborers working on road construction sweep the ground in Panbari in Chirang district some 191 km from Guwahati in India's northeastern state of Assam yesterday. — AFP

Jobless millions to haunt India election

India's sluggish jobs market - a major headache for Modi

NEW DELHI: Vishal Chowdhary is young, bright and armed with an MBA. But he has spent two years struggling to find work in India's sluggish jobs market - a major headache for Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of looming elections. The government's failure to create enough jobs in Asia's third-biggest economy is a key issue for voters in the polls that are set to take place between April 11 and May 19 with results on May 23.

"I went for 50 job interviews in the last year but with no success. One company I did join laid off most of its staff, bringing me back to square one," Chowdhary, 27 said. Increasingly desperate, late last year he became one of 23,000 applicants for five government jobs as a "peon" or "office boy" with duties like making tea and photocopying, well below his qualifications. The shocking figures are not unusual in 1.25-billion-strong India, particularly for secure government jobs with perks that attract hordes of overqualified candidates like Chowdhary. Last year 19 million applied for 63,000 positions at Indian Railways.

'National disaster'

Modi swept to power in 2014 pledging to modernize India and create jobs for the one million young people estimated to enter the labor market every month. Some 65 percent of Indians are under 35, and economic

growth has in recent times fallen below the eight-percent level seen as essential to create enough employment. A newspaper recently published what it said was an official report buried by Modi's government showing unemployment at its highest since the 1970s.

Rahul Gandhi, head of the opposition Congress party, attacked Modi for creating a "national disaster". The report—which the government said was not finalized—added to evidence that the economy was hit hard by two of Modi's signature policies: demonetization and a new Goods and Services Tax (GST). The first saw 86 percent of banknotes withdrawn overnight in 2016 to bring the cash-only black economy out of the shadows. The second in 2017 was to simplify India's stultifying thicket of a tax code.

Asian laggard

Almost half the workforce toils in agriculture, and although workers are moving to manufacturing and

services as the economy modernizes, the rate is slower than elsewhere in Asia. These sectors are not creating enough jobs, hampered by stringent labor laws and insufficient investment in skills training, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Another factor is a sharp fall in private investment, resulting in "very little" job creation in the private sector, said Santosh Mehrotra, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

This lack of investment is caused in part by the "huge crisis" of bad debts at India's state-owned banks, making them reluctant to lend, Mehrotra told AFP. Red tape and corruption also make buying land for factories difficult, and infrastructure is often poor. Furthermore India is battling a dearth of decent data on which to base policy, not helped by vast numbers of people working in the shadow, cash-only economy who are therefore not counted. "(More) than a lack of jobs, the issue is a lack of data on jobs," Modi said last year.



19 million applied for 63,000 positions at Indian Railways

Turkish PM accuses women's march of disrespecting Islam

ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has accused a women's march in central Istanbul on Friday of disrespecting Islam by booing the Islamic call to prayer. Erdogan accused International Women's Day protesters of being led by political rivals and of "disrespect" during the Islamic call to prayer, after Friday's march was broken up by police firing tear gas. Thousands of people took to the streets of Istanbul on Friday in defiance of a ban by authorities, crowding the famous Istiklal avenue, before a police crackdown brought the demonstration to a chaotic end.

In his comments on Sunday, Erdogan referenced an unverified viral video showing women and men continuing to chant during the call to prayer. "A group which came together in Taksim led by the (main opposition Republican People's Party) CHP and (pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party) HDP supposedly for women's day behaved rudely with whistling and chanting during the call to prayer," Erdogan said.

The avenue is close to Taksim square, a traditional rallying point. The president has been holding daily rallies across the country and often slamming the opposition ahead of local elections on March 31. He has accused the CHP of being in an alliance with the HDP, which Erdogan says is a political front for Kurdish insurgents. The "March 8 Feminist Night march" group issued a statement on Sunday decrying the attempt to use Friday's rally as "election material" in the press and on social media. "Police violence against tens of thousands of women taking part/trying to take part in the



DIYARBAKIR: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks on stage during a local election rally of his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in Diyarbakir, eastern Turkey. — AFP

night march cannot be covered up with polarizing language... fake news and hate," the group said, without making any direct reference to Erdogan.

In his statement the Turkish leader also played a short clip of the video as well as footage of an opposition rally from 2011 and said that participants did not carry the Turkish flag. "(The opposition is) attacking our liberty and our future with this disrespect to our flag and our call to prayer," he said during a rally in the southern city of Adana. Although polls suggest Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) remains dominant, the opposition may make larger gains as the economic slowdown and the weaker

Turkish lira impacts households.

Erdogan often says that his Islamic-rooted party has given greater freedom to Muslims in Turkey where until a few years ago, women were banned from wearing the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab, in state institutions and universities. But he has been accused by critics of eroding the secular pillars of modern Turkey. The call to prayer has been at the centre of controversy in the Turkish republic since its foundation in 1923. From 1932 to 1950, the call to prayer was banned in Arabic in Turkey. Most recently in 2018, there was a row after CHP MP Ozturk Yilmaz called for it to be in Turkish rather than Arabic.—Agencies

Arriving two minutes late, Greek man saved from Ethiopia crash

ATHENS: A Greek man said he would have been the 150th passenger on the Nairobi-bound Ethiopian Airlines Boeing plane that crashed killing all on board, except he arrived two minutes late for the flight. "I was mad because nobody helped me to reach the gate on time," Antonis Mavropoulos said in a Facebook post entitled "My lucky day" in which he includes a photo of his ticket. Mavropoulos, president of the International Solid Waste Association, a non-profit organization, was travelling to Nairobi to attend the annual assembly of the UN Environment Program, according to Athens News Agency.

He was supposed to board the plane but he reached the departure gate just two minutes after it was closed. He booked a later flight but was then prevented from boarding by airport staff. "They led me to the police station of the airport. The officer told me not to protest but to pray to God because I was the only passenger that didn't board the ET 302 flight that was lost," Mavropoulos said in his post in which he admits being in shock. The airport authorities explained that they wanted to question him because he was the only passenger booked onto the doomed flight who wasn't on board.

"They said they couldn't let me go before cross-checking my identity, the reason I hadn't boarded the plane etc." The Nairobi-bound Boeing 737 crashed just minutes after an early-morning takeoff Sunday from Addis Ababa. People holding passports from more than 30 countries were on board including a number of UN workers. State-owned Ethiopian Airline had taken delivery of the Boeing 737-800 MAX plane on November 15. It was of the same type as a plane that crashed in October after takeoff from Jakarta, killing all 189 people on board.—AFP

International

Malaysia court frees woman in North Korean murder case

Indonesian woman accused of assassinating Kim's half-brother

SHAH ALAM: An Indonesian woman accused of assassinating the North Korean leader's half-brother was freed yesterday after Malaysian prosecutors dropped a murder charge against her, in a shock decision that delighted her friends and family. Siti Aisyah smiled as she was ushered into a car outside the court, where she had been on trial for a year and a half alongside a Vietnamese woman for the 2017 murder of Kim Jong Nam at Kuala Lumpur airport.

"I feel happy. I did not know this will happen. I did not expect it," said the 27-year-old, who earlier hugged her tearful Vietnamese co-accused, Doan Thi Huong, in the dock when the news was announced. Indonesian officials mounted a major diplomatic effort to free Aisyah, which included pressure from the president. The Indonesian justice minister had written to Malaysia's attorney general seeking her release, citing problems with the case, and he agreed last week.

The women had always denied murder, saying they were tricked by North Korean spies into carrying out the Cold War-style hit using VX nerve agent, and believed it was a prank for a reality TV show. Their lawyers presented them as scapegoats, saying that authorities were unable to catch the real killers. Four North Koreans-formally accused of the murder alongside the women-fled Malaysia shortly after the assassination. The trial, which began in October 2017, had been due to resume yesterday with the defense stage of proceedings after a break of several months. But at the start of the hearing at Shah Alam High Court, prosecutor Muhammad Iskandar Ahmad requested that the murder charge against Aisyah be withdrawn and she be given a discharge, without providing a reason.

The judge agreed to a discharge not amounting to an acquittal, and ordered Aisyah's immediate release. This means Aisyah has not been formally cleared of the charge and could, in theory, be re-arrested. The news

was a surprise as the court had only been scheduled to hear Huong testify, and the Vietnamese woman was left in shock that she was not released alongside Aisyah. "I do not know what will happen to me now. I am innocent-please pray for me," the 30-year-old said. Her testimony was adjourned yesterday as her lawyers said they would also apply to get the charge against her dropped.

Homecoming party

Aisyah arrived later in Jakarta, where she was reunited with parents. In her hometown of Sindangsari on Java island, there was shock and delight as word spread of her release. "We've heard the news and we're so happy. We're getting a celebration ready!" her aunt Darmi, who goes by one name said. Indonesia often makes concerted diplomatic efforts to free its citizens detained overseas, particularly those who may face the death penalty.

Speaking at the Indonesian embassy in Malaysia, Indonesian Justice Minister Yasoma Laoly reeled off a list of figures in government-from President Joko Widodo to the foreign minister - who had pushed for Aisyah's release. A murder conviction carries a mandatory penalty of death by hanging in Malaysia. The government vowed last year to abolish capital punishment but has yet to amend the law. There does not appear to have been any such aggressive lobbying effort from Vietnam for Huong, however.

Vietnam generally does not get publicly involved in individual criminal cases overseas, and foreign affairs officials did not respond to AFP's request for comment yesterday. In the first stage of the trial that ran until August last year, prosecutors presented their case. Witnesses described how the victim-the estranged half-brother of Kim Jong Un and once seen as heir apparent to the North Korean leadership-died in agony



JAKARTA: Indonesian Siti Aisyah waves after a press conference in Jakarta yesterday. Shock and delight rippled through the Indonesian town of Sindangsari as residents got word that a local woman accused of assassinating the North Korean leader's half-brother had been freed. — AFP

shortly after being attacked.

Prosecutors said Aisyah and Huong were well-trained assassins but their lawyers argued the four North Koreans were the masterminds, and provided them with poison on the day of the murder. South

Korea has accused the North of ordering the hit, which Pyongyang denies. Malaysia had been one of the nuclear-armed North's few allies but the assassination badly damaged ties, and led to the countries expelling each other's ambassadors.— AFP

Does Islamic State still pose a threat?

BEIRUT: Islamic State looks about to lose its last foothold - on the banks of the Euphrates near the Iraq border - but while its era of territorial rule may be over for now, there is near universal agreement that IS remains a threat.

What has defeat accomplished?

Islamic State's possession of land in Iraq and Syria set it apart from other like-minded groups such as Al-Qaeda and became central to its mission when it declared a caliphate in 2014, claiming sovereignty over all Muslim lands and peoples. The destruction of the quasi-state it built there has denied the group its most potent propaganda and recruiting tool as well as a logistical base from which it could train fighters and plan coordinated attacks overseas. It also freed its former subjects from summary executions and draconian punishment for breaking its strict laws or, for some minorities, sexual slavery and slaughter. Warfare wiped out thousands of its fighters. And, financially, its defeat deprives it of greater resources than any modern jihadist movement has enjoyed, including taxes on its inhabitants and the proceeds of oil sales.

What threat does IS still pose?

In its previous guise as an Al-Qaeda offshoot in Iraq a decade ago, IS navigated adversity by going underground, biding its time to rise suddenly again. Since suffering devastating territorial losses in 2017, IS has steadily turned again to such tactics. Sleeper cells in Iraq have staged a scatter-gun campaign of kidnappings and killings to undermine the Baghdad government. The group has also carried out many bombings in northeast Syria, which is controlled by US-backed Kurdish forces, including one

that killed four Americans in January. Kurdish and US officials say it remains a menace there. In Syria, IS fighters are on the brink of losing their last foothold of Baghouz at the Iraqi border. But they still have a presence in sparsely populated territory west of the Euphrates River in an area otherwise held by the Syrian government.

What has happened to IS leaders?

The fate of the IS leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, remains a mystery. The US government's top experts strongly believe he is alive and possibly hiding in Iraq, US sources recently said. Other top-echelon leaders have been killed in air strikes. Thousands of Islamic State insurgents and civilian followers have also been killed and thousands more captured. An unknown number remain at large in both Syria and Iraq. Iraq is putting on trial, imprisoning and often executing IS detainees. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) holds many hundreds of Islamic State fighters and followers, but the numbers have ballooned as the SDF advanced into the area near Baghouz.

A senior US defense official in Washington said in early March that about 20,000 Islamic State fighters and family members had come out of Baghouz. An SDF official said SDF forces were holding about 4,000 suspected Islamic State fighters from Iraq and Syria and more than 1,000 foreign fighters. Many low-level local operatives have been released in Syria. The SDF complains that Western states are reluctant to take back the foreign fighters, who are widely seen as a security threat at home but who might be hard to legally prosecute.

Can IS inspire attacks overseas?

As Islamic State clung to its last scrap of land, the head of Britain's spy agency MI6 warned that the group would return to "asymmetric" attacks. Even after it began losing ground militarily, IS still claimed responsibility for attacks made in different countries, though often these have been blamed on "lone wolves" without its direction. It started years ago to call on followers abroad to plan their own attacks, rather than



DEIR EZ-ZOR: Fighters with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) sit on a motorcycle at a makeshift camp for Islamic State (IS) group members and their families in the town of Baghouz. — AFP

focusing purely on ones staged by trained operatives supported by the group's hierarchy. In early 2018 the head of US military central command said Islamic State was resilient and remained capable of "inspiring attacks throughout the region and outside of the Middle East".

The future of global jihad

Although Islamic State's core territory was in Iraq and Syria, jihadists fighting in other countries, notably Nigeria, Yemen and Afghanistan, pledged their allegiance to it. Whether those groups will still wear its mantle, especially if Baghdadi is captured or killed, is an open question, but there seems little chance they will soon end their campaigns. Al-Qaeda also retains numerous franchises around the world, and other militant Islamist groups operate in countries where normal governance has broken down. Jihadist ideology has long proven itself able to mutate as circumstances change, and there is no shortage of warfare, injustice, oppression, poverty, sectarianism and naked religious hatred for Islamist militants to exploit. — Reuters



OMDURMAN: Sudanese protesters chant slogans during an anti-government demonstration in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman. — AFP

ter, "five other leaders of our party have also been taken away by security agents," Mohamed al-Mahdi said. After her sentencing, Mariam al-Mahdi was taken to a women's prison in Omdurman. "Goodbye, I have decided not to pay the fine, so see you after three weeks," she wrote on her Facebook page. Her sister Rabah Al-Mahdi was fined 500 Sudanese pounds and the other five leaders were fined 1,000 pounds each. The latest sentences come a day after another emergency court in Khartoum sentenced nine women to 20 lashes and a month in prison for joining protesters.

The rulings by emergency courts came despite Bashir on Friday ordering the release of all women detainees held during demonstrations. Protests initially broke out on December 19 after a government decision to triple the price of bread, amid a broader economic crisis in the country. Demonstrations have since escalated to nationwide rallies against Bashir, who came to power in a 1989 coup that toppled the government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi. Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far, while Human Rights Watch says the death toll is at least 51 and includes medics and children. — AFP

Series of satellite images in North Korea spark alarm

SEOUL: South Korea's military said yesterday it was closely monitoring North Korean facilities after a series of satellite images triggered international alarm that Pyongyang might be preparing a long-range missile or space launch. Any launch would send the stuttering talks on denuclearization into disarray, after a high-stakes second summit between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un collapsed last month without a deal. But some analysts suggest the North might be stage-managing activity at certain key sites, to stoke concern and secure "better terms" when the two sides next meet.

Washington wants what administration officials have called a "big deal", with the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction in return for the dropping of sanctions that have strangled the isolated North's economy. North Korea favors a more step-by-step approach, with Kim proposing dismantling its Yongbyon nuclear complex in exchange for lifting the main sanctions-a notion Trump refused in Hanoi despite the vaunted "chemistry" between the pair.

"The North could be trying to show the US it can always turn back to aggressive posture by rebuilding missile sites in order to gain leverage in future talks, but without actually firing a missile or rocket," said Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute. "It is hard to rule out the possibility of a rocket launch at the Sohae station at this point as North Korea has proven time and time again it can do unexpected things."

'All possible scenarios'

Satellite analysis now indicates increased activity at two key sites-the Samundong missile research facility and the Sohae rocket launch centre. Located on the outskirts of Pyongyang, Samundong was built in 2012 to support development of long-range missiles and space-launch vehicles. As well as developing the Hwasong-15 ICBM, which analysts agree is capable of reaching the whole US mainland, Samundong constructed the long-range rockets that were then transported and successfully launched from the Sohae satellite launch station in 2012 and 2016. Images of Samundong taken on February 22 showed cars and trucks at the site, as well as rail cars and cranes at a yard, US news outlet NPR has reported.

South Korea is "closely tracking and looking into all activity for possible scenarios including a missile launch" across the border, said Kim Joon-rak, spokesman of the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff. Experts are divided over Pyongyang's plans, but whatever its intentions, a launch would shatter the fragile US-North Korea relationship and revive the angry language that had stoked fears of a military conflict at the start of the Trump presidency. "This is North Korea's classic brinkmanship on display again," said Lim Eul-chul, professor of North Korean studies at Kyungnam University.

"The North's intention is clear. It wants early resumption of talks with the US, but on better terms." Veteran North Korea watchers said that any activity is likely to be finely calibrated and could also be intended to send a clear message within the isolated regime. "Kim could use a launch to demonstrate at the 14th Supreme People's Assembly, probably in mid-April, that he has not been cowed by sanctions," said former US negotiator Joel Wit, now the director of the respected 38 North website.—AFP

Zuma used intel services to target Ramaphosa: Probe

JOHANNESBURG: Former South African president Jacob Zuma used the country's intelligence services for his own political and personal interests, most notably against his successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, a government report charges. Published Saturday on Ramaphosa's initiative, the report of about 100 pages details "serious breaches of the Constitution, policy, law, regulations and directives" by Zuma during his nearly nine years in office.

The State Security Agency (SSA) targeted Ramaphosa in the run-up to his becoming head of the ruling African National Congress in 2017, and then president, it said. Zuma stepped down in early 2018 amid charges of massive corruption. The agency was "able to infiltrate and penetrate the leadership structure" of the movement against Zuma, said the report, drawn up by a team under former minister Sydney Mufamadi said.

The SSA became a "cash cow" for many, both inside and outside the agency, it added. In response, Zuma accused the committee that drew up the report of having two apartheid-era spies. "I have never been asked any questions by this committee..." he tweeted Sunday. "I've never sold out nor written letters" to the security services. "I hope people are not opening a can of worms which they might regret," he added. Ramaphosa has promised to root out corruption and, in a strong statement on the report, condemned the way the intelligence services had been politicized.—AFP

Sudan opposition leader sentenced to week in prison

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese emergency court has sentenced an opposition leader to a week in jail, as police detained several people intent on marching on parliament to protest a state of emergency. Mariam al-Mahdi said she will spend a total of three weeks in jail after refusing to pay a fine of 2,000 Sudanese pounds (\$42).

Deputy chief of the opposition Umma Party, led by her father and former premier Sadiq al-Mahdi, she and her sister Rabah were among those arrested earlier on Sunday. Protest organizers had called for a march to challenge the state of emergency, imposed nationwide by President Omar al-Bashir on February 22. Bashir's move came after a crackdown on rallies against his iron-fisted rule failed to deter demonstrators.

The president has ordered a slew of tough measures to quell the protests, including banning all unauthorised rallies and setting up the emergency courts to probe offences. Sunday's procession was to start at the Umma Party offices in the capital's twin city of Omdurman. "As some of our leaders came out of the party office to lead the march, security agents arrested them," said Mohamed al-Mahdi, a party leader who is not related to the former premier's family.

Riot police fired tear gas at those who had gathered outside the party offices, witnesses said, prompting the crowd to disperse before the march could begin. "Protesters have now launched demonstrations in some areas of Omdurman. Many of them have been arrested," one onlooker said. Later on Sunday, protesters also rallied in some areas of Khartoum, including in the eastern district of Burri that has become a regular site of demonstrations, according to witnesses.

Alongside the two daughters of the former prime minis-

International

Boeing 737 MAX safety record questioned after 2 tragedies

737 MAX test flights halted due to quality concerns

WASHINGTON: For the second time in less than six months, a Boeing 737 MAX 8 has crashed minutes after takeoff and killed everyone on board, raising fresh questions about the safety of a model that is crucial to the US giant's future plans. On Sunday, the 157 passengers and crew members of a 737 MAX operated by Ethiopian Airlines were killed. Last October, the same model of plane, operated by Lion Air, crashed in Indonesia, killing 189. China - an important market for Boeing - became the first country to ground the 737 MAX 8 yesterday. Ethiopian Airlines did the same, saying the decision came as an "extra safety precaution."

Only the flight data and cockpit conversation contained in the doomed aircraft's two black boxes can provide tangible evidence of what may have caused the latest accident - technical problems, pilot error or a combination of factors. "The pilot mentioned that he had difficulties and he wants to return. He was given clearance" to turn around, Ethiopian Airlines chief executive Tewolde GebreMariam told reporters in Addis Ababa. Weather conditions were good in the Ethiopian capital at the time of the flight.



Second deadly crash in less than 6 months

Chinese aviation authorities also noted the "similarities" between the two deadly incidents, saying operations would only resume after "confirming the relevant measures to effectively ensure flight safety." Boeing has delivered 76 of the aircraft to Chinese airlines, and another 104 are on order, according to data from the company's website. But Michel Merluzeau, director of Aerospace & Defense Market Analysis, noted that "these are the only similarities, and the comparison stops there as we do not have any other reliable information at this juncture."

In both cases, the air carriers have solid reputations. Since the Lion Air accident, the 737 MAX has faced growing skepticism from the aviation community. The program had already encountered problems during development. In May 2017, Boeing had halted 737 MAX test flights due to quality concerns with the engine produced by CFM International, a company jointly owned by France's Safran Aircraft Engines and GE Aviation. In late January, 350 of the narrow-body, twin-engine planes were delivered to customers out of 5,011 orders from Boeing.

The latest accident is a major blow for Boeing, whose MAX carriers are the latest version of the Boeing 737, its bestseller of all times with more than 10,000 aircraft produced. "MAX is a very important program for Boeing in the next decade. It represents 64 percent of the company's production to 2032, and has significant operational margins," said Merluzeau. "It is an essential tool to global transport and trade." He said the next 24 hours are "key" for Boeing to manage the crisis with both travelers and investors worried about the reliability of its plane.



RENTON: Boeing 737 MAX 7 taxis at Boeing Field, in Seattle, Washington. Tumbling shares in US aviation giant Boeing yesterday tore a hole in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, sending the benchmark index into the red for a sixth day. —AFP

Market backlash expected

Boeing said it was "deeply saddened" by the Ethiopian Airlines incident, adding that a technical team would be providing assistance to investigators. The expert who requested anonymity said Boeing will likely face some backlash in the markets, but the damage will likely be limited for the group, whose only significant competitor is Airbus. The plane's future is so important for Boeing that if any technical corrections are needed, it will make them.

Following the October 29 incident in Indonesia, the

aerospace community raised questions about the lack of information on the plane's anti-stall system. After investigators said the doomed aircraft had problems with its airspeed indicator and angle of attack (AoA) sensors, Boeing issued a special bulletin telling operators what to do when they face the same situation. An AoA sensor provides data about the angle at which air passes over the wings and tells pilots how much lift a plane is getting. The information can be critical in preventing an aircraft from stalling. —AFP

News in brief

Iran rights lawyer jailed

GENEVA: Jailed Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes, her husband Reza Khandan wrote in a post on Facebook yesterday, without specifying what charges she faced. Sotoudeh's lawyer, Payam Derafshan, told the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) in December that Sotoudeh - arrested last June - had been charged with spreading information against the state, insulting Iran's Supreme Leader and spying. The news of Sotoudeh's sentencing came only days after hardline cleric Ebrahim Raisi was appointed the new head of the judiciary. Judicial officials were not immediately available on Monday to comment on the Facebook post. Sotoudeh had previously served about half of a six-year jail sentence imposed in 2010 for spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security - charges she denied - before being freed in 2013. —Reuters

Malawi death toll hits 30

BLANTYRE: Floods in southern Malawi have killed 30 people and left over 230,000 people without shelter, a minister said on Sunday. Homeland Security Minister Nicholas Dausi, whose ministry is also responsible for disaster management affairs, on Sunday visited people affected by the deluges in two of the 14 southern districts affected. He said his ministry had received reports of 30 deaths and about 238,000 villagers losing their homes since the start of the incessant downpours earlier this week. "Their immediate needs are food, tents, blankets and chlorine to treat drinking water and anti-malaria medication," he said. —AFP

Azerbaijan launches drills

BAKU: Azerbaijan yesterday launched major military drills in a move denounced by Armenia as sabre-rattling ahead of planned talks between the countries' leaders over a disputed region. Arch foes Baku and Yerevan have been locked for decades in a simmering conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. The region is surrounded by Azerbaijan's territory but was seized by Armenian separatists in a war that claimed some 30,000 lives in the early 1990s, ending in a fragile 1994 truce. "In the course of the drills, army units will accomplish various tasks aimed at preparing an offensive operation (against) a conventional enemy," Azerbaijan's defense ministry said in a statement. The five-day drills will involve 10,000 troops, 500 tanks and armored vehicles, up to 300 missile artillery units and volley fire reactive systems, and 20 warplanes, the ministry said. —AFP

Japan marks tsunami 'sary

TOKYO: Bells rang and sirens sounded yesterday as Japan observed a moment of silence to commemorate the eighth anniversary of a massive earthquake and tsunami that left more than 20,000 people dead or missing, and triggered triple nuclear meltdowns. The quake of magnitude nine on March 11, 2011 struck north of the Japanese capital, unleashing a tsunami that engulfed large swathes of the Pacific coast and caused the world's worst nuclear accident in 25 years. "Even now, 14,000 people are enduring protracted, inconvenient lives in such places as temporary housing," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a memorial service in Tokyo. "We will provide seamless support ... and accelerate reconstruction." At the ceremony, Yuki Takahashi, who lost his mother in the tsunami, said, "Keeping in mind precious lives that were lost, I'll keep on going to pass on lessons learned from the disaster." —Reuters

Protests in Nigeria's Port Harcourt over vote suspension

PORT HARCOURT: Several thousand people yesterday protested against the suspension of governorship elections in Nigeria's volatile Rivers state following widespread disruption to the vote. The All Progressives Congress and African Action Congress marched with civil society groups in the state capital, Port Harcourt, calling for results to be announced.

The Independent National Electoral Commission halted the count on Sunday, citing violence at polling stations, kidnapping of staff, confiscation and destruction of results. "As a stakeholder in peace, we are not happy that this process was aborted mid-way," protest organizer and APC member of the Rivers state parliament Victoria Nyeche told AFP.

"INEC should conclude the elections by announcing results. If there are issues

the election tribunal is there to resolve them. "What INEC has done is illegal and an invitation to crisis." AFP reporters in Port Harcourt said the atmosphere was tense, and soldiers manned roadblocks throughout the city, which has long been a flashpoint for political violence. The APC of President Muhammadu Buhari - which is in power nationally but in opposition in Rivers - had no candidate in the governorship election because of irregularities in its primaries. It urged supporters to back the AAC's candidate.

Many of those protesting on Monday chanted slogans against the incumbent governor Nyesom Wike, of the Peoples Democratic Party. The PDP has described the suspension of the count as a "barefaced assault... akin to a coup d'etat" and condemned the use of soldiers to "ambush the electoral process". "Army, police and INEC are working with APC to subvert the will of Rivers people," added Wike. But the military said it had "credible intelligence" that armed thugs in army uniform had impersonated soldiers to commit electoral crimes for their political paymasters.

Situation Room, an umbrella group of more than 70 civil society organizations monitoring the vote, renewed its call for

in need of basic food and medicine - vowed not to back down. "This macabre strategy to bring us to a confrontation will fail," he wrote on Twitter. Power was restored late Sunday in some areas of the capital Caracas, sparking enthusiastic cheers. But already twice so far, the restoration of electricity has been fleeting. Businesses and schools remain closed yesterday. In any event, the ongoing lack of public transport made travel difficult, even in Caracas.

Military stance

Guaido has called for more street protests to pressure Maduro to step down, following up on Saturday's rally. "You have the right to go into the street, to protest, to demand, because this regime is letting Venezuelans die," he said Sunday, appealing to the armed forces "to stop covering for the dictator." Guaido is recognized by more than 50 countries as Venezuela's acting president, which have backed his calls for new polls, but the military high command has so far stood by Maduro despite a plummeting economy and deep discontent.

In Washington, National Security Advisor John Bolton suggested members of the military were reconsidering their support for Maduro. "There are countless conversations going on between members of the National Assembly and members of the military in Venezuela, talking about what might come, how they might move to support the opposition," Bolton said in an interview on ABC's "This Week." One reason the security forces have refrained from arresting Guaido, he said, "is Maduro fears if he gave that order, it would not be obeyed."



PORT HARCOURT: Policemen stand as a protester shouts slogans and waves a placard to protest against the suspension governorship elections in Port Harcourt, Rivers State yesterday. —AFP

an independent inquiry into the entire election. It said Saturday's vote, and the presidential and parliamentary polls of February 23, failed to meet the threshold for credible polls. Dozens of people have been killed, including in Rivers, where it said since 2011 the "environment for

elections feels like a war, disenfranchising citizens who want to participate". "This has gravely undermined governance and security in the state," it added, calling for an end to the impunity enjoyed by those who orchestrate the unrest. —AFP



CARACAS: People gather to collect water in Caracas, during the fourth day of a massive power outage which has left Venezuelans without communications, electricity and water. —AFP

Electromagnetic attack?

Maduro blames "imperialism" for the country's accumulating woes, and claims the power outage was caused by an electromagnetic attack on the Guri hydroelectric complex, which supplies 80 percent of Venezuela's electricity. Guaido dismissed that explanation as "Hollywoodesque." Critics blame the government for failing to maintain the power grid, as did the Lima Group, a primarily Latin American bloc.

For ordinary Venezuelans, the blackout - one of the worst and longest in recent memory - has piled misery upon an already agonizing day-to-day struggle to survive in a country now in economic freefall. "Every day is worse," said Edward Cazano, a 20-year-old who lives with his mother and three brothers in a poor Caracas neighborhood called Pinto

Salinas. "We have the worst services in the world: no light, no water, sometimes no gas." Hospitals with back-up generators were using them for emergency services, leaving patients to cope in the dark.

Dialysis patients at risk

No national data was available about the impact of the power outage, but the Codevida health rights group reported the deaths of the 15 kidney dialysis patients - a toll the government denied. Francisco Valencia, the group's director, said some 10,200 people were at risk because dialysis units had switched off. "This is agony. They're imposing a curfew on us from 5:00 pm. We head out early to buy what we can and we hurry home," said Yadira Delgado, a 49-year-old who lives with her mother and teen daughter. —AFP

International

Wedlocked: Tangled webs trap Cambodian 'brides' in China

Thousands of Cambodians fall prey to criminal matchmakers

KAMPONG CHAM: On the Chinese messaging service WeChat, Ol En scrolled back through time. Call unanswered. Call unanswered. Call declined. The last she'd heard from her teenage daughter was a voice message on Feb 10. "Mum - they don't give me a penny. They just keep me in the house. Maybe things will change when I give them a baby," it said. Sitting stonefaced in her one-room shack in rural Cambodia, chickens clucking and wind kicking up red dust, the mother of three recalled how her first-born was trapped in China.

"She escaped once and the brokers almost beat her to death," En said. "If she dares to run again, there are no guarantees." The 16-year-old is one of thousands of Cambodians fallen prey to criminal matchmakers who scour the poorest pockets of Southeast Asia for young brides to send to China. Some 40 million men in China will need to look abroad for a wife by 2020, according to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences think tank - the legacy of Beijing's one-child policy, which has seen families abort female foetuses for decades.

Hundreds of thousands of women from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar have gone to China to wed, activists say. Some end up happily married; others speak of violence and forced labor. With few employment avenues for young women and ballooning debt levels, rural Cambodian families make soft targets for brokers who ensnare the relatives of potential brides in their schemes, blurring the lines between victims and accomplices.

The matchmakers are near impossible to track down, police say, hiding behind nicknames and throwaway "burner" phones while employing a network of local

elders to coax young women out of the village by offering huge sums of cash to their families. In En's case, it was a neighbor - and distant relative - who paved the way to China. She received \$2,100 in cash, and promises that her daughter would find love, work and wealth in China to funnel back to debtors threatening to repossess her house and land. But it was all a ruse. The girl was sold, then held as a sex slave and servant by a man she had never met. "Day and night, he demands sex from her," En said. "I cannot live in peace - the one who sent her lives freely in this village but my daughter is lost in China."

Bounties

Thol Meng has been working to stop human trafficking for 16 years, now as deputy chief of a specialized police bureau in Kampong Cham province - one of the nation's hardest-hit regions. He has seen waves of Cambodians being tricked, from men sold on to Thai fishing boats to women held as domestic slaves in Malaysia. But "brides to China" is the biggest concern, he said.

"A few years ago, it was about \$500 for one girl," he said. "Now families can get up to \$3,000." Prices have skyrocketed along with rising awareness of the dangers and penalties for human trafficking. But in a country where the average annual income is \$1,200, the boun-

ties on offer prove hard to turn down.

"Human trafficking starts with the parents," Meng said. "The mothers control everything ... (they) receive the benefits." "In fact, we can say that they sell their daughters." While the mothers are culpable, they are victims, too, according to Meng - preyed upon by sophisticated networks running a criminal enterprise worth millions of dollars. "We mostly arrest the small fish, the locals. The big fish cut off communication, leaving the locals with no details."

As such, trafficking stories in the media often feature photos of police apprehending middle-aged women wearing pyjamas. A Cambodian 'bride' in China made a fresh cry for help every other day in 2018, said five charities working to end the trade. Helping them escape is another matter. Most victims do not know their whereabouts in China, cannot read or speak the local language, and have limited access to phones and internet.

"Without an address, it is almost impossible to help," said Teng Seng Han, a monitor with the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association, which works to repatriate 'brides'. Those who make it home - some with stories of being raped by multiple men or being sold from one house to another - rarely go to the police, as immediate relatives are usually complicit.

Kompong Cham had four trafficking convictions last year - down from 20 in 2015 - despite the demand for Cambodian brides in China "rising sharply" in recent years, according to Meng.

Outstanding loans, Seng Han said, are the main reason families send their daughters to China - and brokers know this. "The brokers look for people who are in debt. First they try to convince the daughters, and then they influence the mothers," he said. "It's always about money." In 2016, the Cambodian government said 6,900 undocumented women had been identified in China. The real number ensnared by the bride trade could easily be double that, campaigners say.

No remorse

In rural Cambodia, the demand for 'brides' in China is tearing apart families - and not just those of the victims. Sim Chhom used to spend his waking hours laboring on building sites in town. He would earn \$6 on a good day. Now he spends his time looking after his children and the child of his oldest daughter, who is happily married in China.

"I have no time to go to work," he said, looking frail and ill. "So I just stay here and catch fish to feed my family." His wife, Chhieng Ly, was arrested in May and charged under human trafficking laws for assisting a relative who had heard of the good life in China and wanted to send their daughter. "I have not seen my children since I was arrested," Ly told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview at the provincial prison. "I only shared a phone number - is that so wrong?" —Reuters

“She escaped once and the brokers almost beat her to death”

Eight years on after Fukushima nuclear crisis, water woes threaten cleanup

OKUMA: Eight years after the Fukushima nuclear crisis, a fresh obstacle threatens to undermine the massive clean-up: 1 million tons of contaminated water must be stored, possibly for years, at the power plant. Last year, Tokyo Electric Power Co said a system meant to purify contaminated water had failed to remove dangerous radioactive contaminants.

That means most of that water - stored in 1,000 tanks around the plant - will need to be reprocessed before it is released into the ocean, the most likely scenario for disposal. Reprocessing could take nearly two years and divert personnel and energy from dismantling the tsunami-wrecked reactors, a project that will take up to 40 years.

It is unclear how much that would delay decommissioning. But any delay could be pricey; the government estimated in 2016 that the total cost of plant dismantling, decontamination of affected areas, and compensation, would amount to 21.5 trillion yen (\$192.5 billion), roughly 20 percent of the country's annual budget. Tepco is already running out of space to store treated water. And should another big quake strike, experts say tanks could crack, unleashing tainted liquid and washing highly radioactive debris into the ocean.

Fishermen struggling to win back the confidence of consumers are vehemently opposed to releasing reprocessed water - deemed largely harmless by Japan's nuclear watchdog, the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) - into the ocean. "That would destroy what we've been building over the past eight years," said Tetsu Nozaki, head of the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Associations. Last year's catch was just 15 percent of pre-crisis levels, partly because of consumer reluctance to eat fish caught off Fukushima.

Slow progress
On a visit to the wrecked Fukushima Dai-ichi plant last month, huge cranes hovered over the four reactor buildings that hug the coast. Workers could be seen atop the No. 3 building getting equipment ready to lift spent fuel rods out of a storage pool, a process that could start next month. In most areas around the plant, workers no longer need to wear face masks and full body suits to protect against radiation. Only the reactor buildings or other restricted areas require special equipment.

Fanning out across the plant's property are enough tanks to fill 400 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Machines called Advanced Liquid Processing Systems, or ALPS, had treated the water inside them. Tepco said the equipment could remove all radionuclides except tritium, a relatively harmless hydrogen isotope that is hard to separate from water. Tritium-laced water is released into the environment at nuclear sites around the world. But after newspaper reports last year questioned the effectiveness of ALPS-processed water, Tepco acknowledged that strontium-90 and other radioactive elements remained in many of the tanks. Tepco said the problems occurred because absorbent materials in the equipment had not been changed frequently enough. The utility has promised to re-purify the water if the government decides that releasing it into the ocean is the best solution. It is the cheapest of five options a government task force considered in 2016; others included evaporation and burial.

Tepco and the government are now waiting for another panel of experts to issue recommendations. The head of the panel declined an interview request. No deadline has been set. NRA chief Toyohsi Fuketa believes ocean release after dilution is the only feasible way to handle the water problem. He has warned that postponing the decision indefinitely could derail the decommissioning project.

Storing indefinitely

Another option is to store the water for decades in enormous tanks normally used for crude oil. The tanks have been tested for durability, said Yasuro Kawai, a plant engineer and a member of Citizens' Commission on Nuclear Energy, a group advocating abandoning nuclear energy. Each tank holds 100,000 tons, so 10 such tanks could store the roughly 1 million tons of water processed by ALPS so far, he said.



FUKUSHIMA: People throw leaves into the sea to commemorate 2011 tsunami disaster in Soma, Fukushima Prefecture yesterday. On March 11, 2011, a devastating 9.0-magnitude quake struck under the Pacific Ocean and the resulting tsunami caused widespread damage and claimed thousands of lives. —AFP

The commission proposes holding the tritium-laced water, which has a half life of 12.3 years, in tanks for 123 years. After that, it will be one thousandth as radioactive as it was when it went into storage. Although experts caution that tanks would be vulnerable to major quakes, Japan's trade and industry minister, Hiroshige Seko, said the committee would consider them anyway. "Long-term storage ... has an upside as radiation levels come down while it is in storage. But there is a risk of leakage," Seko told Reuters. "It is difficult to hold the water indefinitely, so the panel will also look into how it should be disposed of eventually."

Space is also a problem, said Akira Ono, Tepco's chief decommissioning officer. By 2020, the utility will expand tank storage capacity by 10 percent to 1.37 million tons, and about 95 percent of total capacity will probably be used by the end of that year, he said. "Tanks are now being built on flat, elevated spots in stable locations," Ono said. But such ideal space is getting scarce, he added. Many local residents hope Tepco will just keep storing the water. If it does get released into the ocean, "everyone would sink into depression," said fishing trawler captain Koichi Matsumoto. —Reuters

Modi advertising blitz dries up as poll rules kick in

NEW DELHI: An advertising blitz by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, which saw more than 150 newspaper ads exulting over its performance in 10 days, stopped yesterday, a day after the schedule for the next general election was announced. The election will be held over seven stages from April 11 in what will be the world's biggest democratic exercise, the Election Commission said on Sunday, when a code of conduct over election campaigning came into force.

Citing the code, the commission said "no advertisements shall be issued in electronic and print media highlighting the achievements of the govt. at the cost of public exchequer". Leading English-language national dailies including the Times of India, the Hindustan Times and the Indian Express carried no government ads yesterday.

The New Delhi editions of the same three newspapers had 162 government ads between March 1 and March 10, according to Reuters calculations. Of those, 93 were full page. Most included a picture of Modi and highlighted government initiatives from rural development and solar power to airport infrastructure and social security benefits, among others. One of the full-page ads took a broad view to highlight 12 achievements in different sectors, saying it was "putting farmers first" and "national security is top priority". It ran with a slogan: "impossible is now possible".

Some people took to Twitter to express their frustration with what they regarded as the excessive advertising. One user, Dhruv Rathee, last week tweeted a video in which he flipped pages of the Times of India newspaper and said: "Every page you turn has Modi's face on it". —Reuters



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Analysis

Popularity sky-high, Mexico's president runs a one-man show

Three months into his presidency, Mexico's Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has already spent more time facing the press corps than his predecessor did in his entire six-year term. And the people love it. Standing at the center of a stage for his news conferences at 7 am every weekday, Lopez Obrador has used the platform to swat at initial skepticism from financial markets and cement his hold on Mexico after a landslide election win last summer.

The president's approval rates are soaring. But if in time things go wrong, he will still be out in front on his own. Dictating debate much as US President Donald Trump has via Twitter, the news conferences have muscled aside breakfast news programming and reduced other political leaders, including his own cabinet, to bystanders at Lopez Obrador's parade. "There's nothing between him and the people, not even oxygen," said Jesus Ortega, an erstwhile ally who ran the 2006 presidential campaign that Lopez Obrador lost by a whisker.

As promised, the veteran leftist has slashed public sector pay, given up presidential perks and launched one welfare program after another at rallies around the country, replacing existing social security schemes with more direct transfers. Throughout, he has kept a steady stream of verbal fire trained on dissenting voices or checks on his power, including critical media, civil society groups or independent regulatory bodies - while reaffirming his belief in free speech and transparency.

Relentlessly hammering home his commitment to end Mexico's chronic inequality, he has often used his media gatherings to denounce previous "neo-liberal" administrations he accuses of ruining Mexico, such as that of his predecessor Enrique Pena Nieto, who very rarely faced reporters at live news conferences. Voters have lapped it up. "He's doing well," said Joel Carrillo, a 52-year-old car valet in Mexico City who supports Lopez Obrador. "He's taking away lots of privileges from the politicians."

In his July election, Lopez Obrador triumphed with 53 percent of the vote. Now, as his administration reaches the 100-



Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador speaks during his daily morning press conference at the National Palace in Mexico City yesterday. —AFP

day mark on Sunday, the president has the support of almost four out of five Mexicans, according to one recent opinion poll. "For the moment, he is completely invulnerable and completely indestructible," said Agustin Barrios Gomez, a former lawmaker and board member of the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (COMEXI). "He owns the country."

Financial markets are not impressed. Rating agencies have issued a series of warnings that Mexico's creditworthiness may be downgraded if Lopez Obrador cannot turn around state oil firm Pemex, which ended 2018 with more than \$100 billion of financial debt. Lopez Obrador said the agencies were punishing Mexico for failed policies from the "neo-liberal" era. Still, a government official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the president was more concerned than he let on about the agencies' views. If economic problems do arise, Lopez Obrador would struggle to evade blame, said car valet Carrillo. "He's not taking help from his ministers," he said. "He's taking all the responsibility on himself."

Achilles' heel

Diplomats, politicians and members of his own government tend to agree the economy is Lopez Obrador's Achilles' heel. The president has pushed consumer confidence to its highest level since at least 2001. But that has yet to translate into tangible gains for the economy. Forecasters are paring back their growth expectations for 2019. Car sales dropped in February by over 5 percent. By Friday, Mexico's main share index had fallen for 10 consecutive days. Meanwhile, the latest data for Mexican retail sales and fixed capital investment showed significant declines in December.

Business leaders were furious when Lopez Obrador scrapped a part-built, \$13 billion new Mexico City airport and triggered billions of dollars of losses on Mexican markets. His steps to undo measures by Pena Nieto aimed at luring private capital to the oil and gas industry further soured sentiment. Lopez Obrador argued the airport was tainted by corruption. And he has long espoused the belief Mexico must keep its own oil - even if he has yet to entirely rule out continuing the auctions of oil and gas fields that Pena Nieto started.

The problem for Mexico, said Barrios Gomez at COMEXI, is that the rhetoric of Lopez Obrador and his more ideological allies have almost made investment a dirty word. "When somebody says investment, in their minds they translate it as bourgeoisie getting rich," he said. And the more moderate aides were unlikely to pick a fight with Lopez Obrador over the economy because they owed him their jobs, noted Ortega, his former campaign chief. For now, the president would continue to blame previous governments for economic difficulties, he added. But in due course, others would pay the price. "When something goes wrong, he won't hesitate to make heads roll," said Ortega. —Reuters



Local mechanic Mervyn Johnston looks out from his garage workshop alongside the River Termon, which forms the border between Northern Ireland (right) and the Irish Republic and divides the village in two, in Pettigo of County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, on March 6, 2019. —AFP

Winds of change for Irish village bisected by Brexit

In a sleepy village bisected by the Irish border, the local post office is flooded with applications for Irish citizenship as the Brexit endgame looms. Pettigo's Irish postmaster James Gallagher said the applications doubled soon after Britain voted to leave the European Union in a referendum in 2016. "Since then it seems to be doubling every year. It's up even in the last few months. Since new year's we had another 40 or 50 percent on last year again," the 60-year-old told AFP as he greeted customers at the counter.

Residents of the British province of

Northern Ireland are entitled to citizenship of the Republic of Ireland under a 1998 peace accord that brought an end to three decades of sectarian violence in the region. Since that time, village life has brought Pettigo's two halves together across an invisible border that could become a hard frontier once again if Britain crashes out of the EU on March 29.

Gallagher's office - twinned with a British Royal Mail office only open on Monday afternoons - gets a third of its business from the other side of the village. The majority of his lottery tickets are sold

to the British, he said - a hangover from a time when Ireland offered the lottery but its northern neighbour did not. Such quirks are typical in the village. In the north the post boxes are red, to the south they stand green. The Irish side, by a stroke of luck, has all of the pubs.

On its morning rounds, the red Royal Mail van crosses briefly into the Republic - the quickest way to complete its British route. Surrounded by craggy outcrops and panoramic loughs, Pettigo is bisected by the Termon River which flows along the territorial dividing line. One stone bridge is marked with

a barely visible arrow - the only demarcation of a border that has become the main point of contention between Britain and the EU.

Village life was not always so calm. During the decades of sectarian violence known as "The Troubles" Pettigo was bombed several times. Local mechanic Mervyn Johnston, 79, a specialist in tuning Mini Coopers for rally competitions, used to serve in the British army's Ulster Defence Regiment and had his garage blown up twice. "It was a bit hectic for a few years," he said. "I don't think it'll ever come back to as bad as it was." —AFP

Oyster farmer frets about Brexit in Irish grey area

For 20 years, William Lynch has farmed oysters in disputed waters along the Irish border. With Brexit looming, a convenient grey area which has allowed him to flourish could be coming to an end. "If everybody would leave us alone we'd have a great business here," he said, watching the tide creep up over cages of shellfish installed on dozens of trestles. "The oysters are doing well but there always has to be something to put you down," the 64-year-old said.

Lynch's Foylemore Oysters is based on the shores of Lough Foyle - the estuary out of the Northern Irish city of Derry/Londonderry. Rich with nutrients and dark silty sands that give his oysters a trademark "nutty" taste these are prime waters - allowing him and his employees to export 500 bags a week. Britain claims the entire waterway, including land to the high tide mark on Irish shores to the west, said Lynch - pointing to the waters where he makes his living.

The Republic of Ireland, an EU member state, is not so sure. "The issues involved are complex and involve a range of different actors," an Irish foreign office spokesman said in a statement to AFP. While the claim remains unsettled, legislation cannot be brought forth to regulate the fishing. Lynch said he adheres to the "best practice" required anyway.

But post-Brexit he fears the conflict could boil over from a disagreement between two EU member states to a lopsided power struggle between one nation and the 27 remaining EU members, with potentially conflicting aquaculture policy. The outcome is hard to predict - but uncertainty and disruption seem likely. "The agenda will be totally changed," he said. "I think it would be a pity to let politics ruin a very good fishery here."

Lynch's business is perhaps one of the most exposed to Brexit along Ireland's 500 km border - currently vexing Britain's bid to leave the EU on March 29. In addition to the territorial dispute, Lynch faces potential cross-border checks moving between his sites - requiring him to travel by road from Northern Ireland to the Republic at least six times a day. He also exports primarily to France where his oysters are processed



William Lynch poses at his Lynch's Foylemore Oysters farm in Lough Foyle in County Donegal, Ireland, on March 7, 2019. —AFP

before most are sent on to big export markets such as China, Dubai and Hong Kong.

That means he also faces being considered a "third country" exporter when Britain leaves

the EU. "I know I have a good product here, I know I have a good workforce, and I know I have good customers in Europe," said Lynch. "All I want to do is grow oysters." —AFP

Brexit cloud hangs over Irish racing ahead of festival

Irish racegoers will flock to England for the Cheltenham Festival this week with the threat of a no-deal Brexit looming over their industry. Cheltenham has been a lucrative advertisement for Ireland's racing prowess, with Irish-trained horses often beating their English rivals in what is the most prestigious meeting in the jumps racing calendar starting today.

The Festival also showcases many of the small breeders who are most at risk from a disorderly Brexit on the scheduled departure date of March 29. Ireland's former Europe minister Lucinda Creighton told AFP. "The Irish-trained horses running at Cheltenham will have largely been produced by small breeders and owned by syndicates who will not be flying in by helicopter. "For those small producers with tiny margins, delays and costs loaded on by transport and logistics poses problems post Brexit and risks potentially eliminating that part

of the industry," she said.

Creighton, who is on the board of Horse Sport Ireland, said Brexit also threatens a wider racing ecosystem that employs 28,000 people and is worth some 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) to the Irish economy. "It is the farriers, the farmers that supply the hay and the people who provide the shavings and the grooms, the riders, people who supply the tack, the horse transportation," said Creighton. "It is a huge business," she said, calling the industry "part of rural life in Ireland." "It is a real priority and the consequences of Brexit damaging the racing industry are very real."

'Like falling off a cliff edge'

As well as causing confusion for British and EU expatriates, a no-deal Brexit later this month could halt free movement of horses between the three powerhouses of European racing - Ireland, England and France - currently governed by a special tripartite agreement. Henry Beeby, group chief executive of Ireland's premier bloodstock auction house Goffs and Goffs UK, said a no-deal Brexit would be "like falling off a cliff edge."

Beeby, whose company had turnover of nearly 200 million euros in 2017, said there is a proposed replacement for the tripartite agreement called the High Health Horse (3H) status. No

deal would mean that is off the table. If British MPs in a vote on Tuesday approve the deal negotiated by Prime Minister Theresa May, that would allow for a transition period that would give politicians a chance to agree on the horse deal.

60 percent of sales under threat

Beeby said he was concerned about the potential impact of no-deal also for his own company. "Over 60 percent of our turnover last year at Doncaster Sales came from Irish horses," Beeby told AFP. "We had a turnover of £50 million, so you are looking at £30 million being under threat. "I am not saying all that business would stop but breeders or vendors would be more reluctant to come over if they have long queues to get them across as it becomes incredibly time consuming. "It will have a major impact on bloodstock sales in the United Kingdom and Ireland."

Others are more plegmatic about the future. Leading trainer Jessica Harrington, 72, said she does not "lose sleep over things which are out of my control." The endless debate has had at least some effect on Harrington, who trained Cheltenham Gold Cup winner Sizing John. The ongoing uncertainty and political turmoil over Brexit in recent weeks had prompted her to name one of her horses "What Next?" —AFP

Paintballs and politics on Ireland border

Since the end of "The Troubles", a paintballers' paradise has thrived on the site of an old British army base on the Irish border. But Watchtower Adventures owner Mark Rice fears he could go bust if Brexit brings back controls along the currently free-flowing frontier. "It's the unknown," said Rice, 31, on whose family land the base was built. "The professionals don't even know or the politicians they don't know what they're talking about either. "You just don't know, you could wake up some morning the next day with the road blocked," he said. "It would probably close me down, that is the big fear, and I've put everything I have into it."

Where stag dos and hen parties trade luminous paintball volleys, British Army base "Romeo 21" once loomed during the conflict that tore the British province of Northern Ireland apart for three decades. Three watchtowers and a helicopter pad

commanded a panoramic view of the border between County Armagh in Northern Ireland, and County Louth in the Republic.

Republican paramilitaries would open fire from the Irish hillside to the east and Rice has childhood memories of British soldiers patrolling his back garden, interrupting his playtime on a trike. "You woke up in the middle of the night with the helicopters flying over your house," Rice remembered. "There were checkpoints everywhere you went, it was pretty heavy."

'Toxic issue'

The region's turbulent history is now part of the paintballing park's marketing strategy. The company's logo features the silhouette of the old army installation wreathed in barbed wire and Rice is currently building an additional mock watchtower for use in paintball battles. At the same time, the haunting hidden remnants of the army base have surfaced again after a heat wave last summer that kindled gorse fires in the area.

Coils of rusted barbed wire, heavy metal bolts and wiring are now visible - a reminder that the past in this troubled zone lies just under the surface. "The status of the border, that was always the toxic issue that had destabilized politics," said



Watchtower Adventures owner Mark Rice poses on the site of the former British Watch Towers army base, known as Romeo 21, where he has established a paintball and clay pigeon business, at Jonesborough in the Irish border area of County Armagh, on March 5, 2019. —AFP

Conor Patterson, head of the local Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency, a business association. "We're now again talking in the language of orange and green, British and Irish, nationalist and unionist, republic-

can and loyalist." "All those differentiations with all that goes with them and the history of conflict, we thought we had left behind long ago to build a new common future." —AFP

Business

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Gulf Bank announces 10 fils/share cash dividend

Bank holds annual general meeting with a 75.40% quorum



KUWAIT: Gulf Bank's Chairman Omar Kutayba Alghanim addresses the Ordinary Annual General Meeting at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel- Kuwait, yesterday.

Chairman's message

The Bank's commitment towards its core strategy of customer service excellence in the Kuwaiti market continues to accelerate and drive the performance and profitability of Gulf Bank.

Accelerated profitability

Net profit increased from KD 48 million in 2017 to KD 57 million in 2018, an increase of 18%. This is the fifth straight year of double digit growth in net profit for the Bank. Earnings per share increased to 20 fils per share and the Board of Directors is recommending a cash dividend of 10 fils per share for shareholders' approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held in March, 2019.

Strong assets base

Loans and advances to customers reached an all-time high of KD 4.2 billion at the end of 2018, an increase of nearly KD 0.5 billion or 13 percent over the last two years. This growth was well balanced as 57 percent came from the Bank's Corporate segment and 43 percent came from the Bank's Consumer segment.

Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) reached an all-time low of 1 percent. This was driven mainly by the settlement of two legacy corporate loans in the second half of 2018, one of which led to a recovery of KD 36 million recorded in the fourth quarter of 2018.

The IFRS9 accounting standard on credit facilities was implemented by the Central Bank of Kuwait in 2018 and, as of year-end 2018, the Bank's total credit provisions of KD 312 million were greater than the IFRS9 requirements by KD 112 million.

The Bank's regulatory capital ratios remained strong as the Tier 1 ratio of 14.1 percent was 2.1 percent above the regulatory minimum of 12 percent, and the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) of 17.5 percent was 3.5 percent above the regulatory minimum of 14 percent.

Business environment & growth

With a focused strategy to deliver excellent service and innovation to our retail and corporate customers, Gulf Bank has enabled both business segments to grow and maintain their market share.

To serve its retail customers, the Bank now has 58 branches in Kuwait and has plans to open more in 2019 and beyond. In addition, the Bank has enhanced its credit card offering by introducing a new range of credit cards with benefits tailored to each of its customer segments and a new cashback card to supplement the Bank's popular rewards program. In addition, the Bank signed agreements with several retailers in Kuwait to offer an interest-free program to their customers to drive more sales for them and more customers for the Bank. Gulf Bank also launched the "WISE" investment platform for its wealth



Chairman Omar Kutayba Alghanim

and priority customers, and a new state-of-the-art website.

On the corporate side, Gulf Bank continued to deliver loan growth despite the challenging market environment during 2018. The Bank is actively financing government projects, particularly in the oil & gas and construction sectors. As an example, Gulf Bank participated in financing KNPC's Clean Fuels Project and the resultant new refinery at Al-Zour as well as the Jaber Al-Ahmad causeway and the Sabah Al-Ahmad housing project, to name just a few.

The Bank has also financed the contractors building some of the iconic projects in Kuwait such as the Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center and the Abdullah Al-Salem Museum. To focus on our corporate customer experience, Gulf Bank launched the Corporate Partner initiative, which provides a one-stop shop catering to clients' needs in a holistic approach. This initiative aims to build long-term partnerships by enhancing the overall customer experience through improved services and product offerings, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and retention.

Kuwait Capital Market development

During the year 2018, Kuwait witnessed major milestones in terms of developing its capital markets. Boursa Kuwait has completed its second stage of market development by classifying the market into three classes: Premier Market, Main Market and Over the Counter Market. Gulf Bank is classified under the Premier Market segment, the elite segment that is occupied by large companies in terms of liquidity and market capitalization. Being part of this segment provides our shareholders and investors with ample transparency and an increased level of disclosure, including quarterly conference calls with analysts and bilingual regulatory disclosures.

Another milestone is the inclusion of Gulf

Bank shares in the MSCI Frontier Markets Index during its May, 2018 semiannual review. This event and similar international index inclusions will attract regional and international investors to support the liquidity and attractiveness of Gulf Bank's shares.

During 2018, two additional sell-side equity research houses initiated coverage on Gulf Bank. In addition to Arqaam Capital, Gulf Bank is now covered by EFG Hermes and QNB Financial Services, both of which are well respected research houses that service reputable international and regional investors. For the first time in its history, Gulf Bank obtained 'buy' recommendations from all three of those research companies covering the bank during the year 2018.

"A" Ratings from the four major credit rating agencies

The Bank maintained its 'A' ratings from the four major credit rating agencies. Moody's Investor Service maintained a rating of A3 and upgraded the outlook of the Bank to 'Positive' from 'Stable' while Capital Intelligence upgraded the rating to 'A-' from 'BBB+'. Fitch Ratings have also affirmed their ratings at 'A+' with a 'stable' outlook and S&P Global Ratings also affirmed the Bank rating at 'A-', with a 'Stable' outlook.

Sustainability

Sustainability has taken a lead in Gulf Bank's success, playing an integral role in its corporate social responsibility initiatives. Gulf Bank's social responsibility program supports events focusing on youth and education; women's empowerment; health and fitness and Kuwait's heritage. We aim to engage with our partners to promote social and economic prosperity that drive sustainable growth and invest in our communities.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to express our gratitude to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for their wise leadership and vision for Kuwait. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Markets Authority for their dedicated efforts in supporting and promoting Kuwait's Banking sector.

I would like also to offer our sincere thanks to our valued customers for their continued trust in Gulf Bank as their business and loyalty is at the core of our success. Finally, I would like to thank the entire Gulf Bank team for their dedicated service. Our growing success is down to their commitment as part of the Gulf Bank family.

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank concluded its Ordinary Annual General Meeting No. 58, held at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel-Kuwait, yesterday with a 75.40 percent quorum.

Gulf Bank's Chairman Omar Kutayba Alghanim commenced the meeting by welcoming the shareholders by displaying a short video highlighting the Bank's major business and strategic accomplishments throughout 2018. Alghanim then added: "We are extremely happy with our Bank's performance in 2018. We have delivered strong financial results to our shareholders, and we continue to be relentless in our mission to deliver value, service, and innovation to our customers who live and do business in Kuwait and beyond". Alghanim continued: "This level of profitability enabled us to recommend distributing 10 fils cash dividend to our shareholders, a 51 percent payout ratio."

Following Alghanim's opening remarks, Gulf Bank's CEO, Antoine Daher, presented key financial highlights of Gulf Bank's performance during 2018.

Daher stated that the Bank recorded a net profit of KD 57 million for the year ended 31 December 2018; an increase of 18 percent over the previous year. He also shed light on the growth of Gulf Bank's gross loans portfolio to KD 4.2 billion and the improvement of its asset's quality, represented by a reduction in the non-performing loans ratio to 1 percent, the lowest level in its history. Daher added: "Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength internationally. During 2018, Gulf Bank was able to achieve "A" level ratings from the top four international credit rating agencies: Moody's, S&P Global Ratings, Fitch Ratings and Capital Intelligence."

After the presentation, Omar Alghanim went through the rest of the agenda items, including the approval of a cash dividend distribution of 10 fils per share. The shareholders approved all the agenda items and Alghanim concluded the meeting by thanking the shareholders for their continuous support and trust in Gulf Bank.



KUWAIT: Shareholders attend the annual general assembly meeting.



Central banks hint at policy shift amid weaker growth signals

Mixed news for GCC private sector activity

KUWAIT: The strong start to the year in financial markets extended into February, with global equities rallying further despite continued signs of slowing growth in major economies including the US, Europe and China. The rise partly reflects a rebound after December's heavy sell-off, but also optimism on an end to the US-China trade dispute after the US agreed to postpone tariff hikes scheduled for March, signaling that a deal was inching closer. There was also growing confidence that policymakers are moving to support growth, with central banks in the US and Europe adopting less hawkish stances and China announcing fresh stimulus measures. And in positive news for the Gulf region, oil prices have hit three-month highs, boosted by signs that OPEC is delivering on output cuts agreed last December.

US growth slows

The first estimate of 4Q18 GDP (delayed by a month due to the government shutdown) showed growth at an annualized 2.6 percent - slightly above the consensus of 2.2 percent but nevertheless slower than the 3.4 percent recorded in Q3. Consumer spending - worth around 70 percent of the economy - grew a solid 2.8 percent though slower than in Q3, while net exports remained a drag on growth due to export softness. The figures meant that growth in 2018 overall reached 2.9 percent, up from 2.2 percent in 2017 but slightly below the 3 percent targeted by President Trump despite a large fiscal stimulus earlier in the year. As this stimulus continues to fade and the lagged impact of earlier interest rate hikes feeds through, growth is seen slowing further going into 2019. 'Nowcasts' by both the Atlanta and New York Federal Reserve banks point to growth of below 1 percent in 1Q19.

Indeed as data releases begin to return to normal following delays due to the shutdown, evidence of moderating growth has continued to build. Retail sales growth dropped to a more than two-year low in December as households rebuilt savings, while personal incomes in January fell month-on-month for the first time since late 2015. The housing market also continues to suffer, with home prices rising more slowly in December (4.2 percent, a six-year

low) and existing home sales down 8.5 percent y/y in January.

Consumer confidence bounced back in February following the end of the shutdown, but remains well below its peak of last year. Still, with the labor market in decent shape (unemployment at 4 percent and wage growth above 3 percent), any downturn in consumer spending seems unlikely to be severe.

Away from the household sector, business activity is also decelerating, though from levels that pointed to overheating through much of last year. The downturn is most pronounced in manufacturing - often considered a lead indicator of overall economic health - amid softer global growth and concerns over the US-China trade dispute. The ISM manufacturing index, for example, hit a more than two-year low of 54.2 in February, and signaled that cost pressures are easing.

Service sector growth is also trending lower, though the surprisingly robust ISM non-manufacturing index score of 59.7 in February points to a gentler pace of deceleration than in industry. Optimism in both sectors would be boosted by a US-China trade deal.

Signs of a slowdown, together with tame inflationary pressures, appear to vindicate the Fed's recent decision to 'pause' further monetary tightening. As well as holding off from hiking the Federal Funds interest rate above its current 2.25-2.50 percent range, it now plans to end its 'quantitative tightening' or balance sheet reduction program sometime later this year, sooner than previously expected. More details of the plan are expected to be announced following the Fed's meeting on 19-20th March, with markets likely to pay close attention to complex questions over the targeted end-size and structural composition of the Fed's holdings. Once it has finished running down its balance sheet, the central bank may still look, for example, to continue to reduce its \$1.6 trillion holdings of mortgage backed debt, thereby implying greater purchases of US treasuries.

Eurozone manufacturing

Concerns over growth in the Eurozone persist, also with particular worry over the region's

important manufacturing sector which is exposed to the global slowdown and heightened trade tensions. February's Eurozone composite PMI score of 51.9 points to economic growth of around 0.2 percent q/q in 1Q19 - unchanged from Q4 - though did at least edge up for the first time in six months suggesting a degree of economic stabilization. The manufacturing component fell to below 50, signaling contraction, with new orders declining by their most in six years, and the closely-watched German Ifo index points to a steep decline in business investment ahead. However the relative



strength of both the services sector and the labor market - unemployment remained at a decade low of 7.8 percent in January - provide some grounds for optimism that the region will avoid a recession.

Having ended its asset purchase stimulus program in December and signaled possible rate hikes in 2H19, the European Central Bank, like the Fed, appears to be shifting in a more dovish direction. Its growth forecasts for the region are expected to be revised down at its March meeting, and it looks likely to discuss restarting its program of offering cheap long-term loans to banks ("TLTROs") to support credit growth. Also important is the persistent weakness in inflation: core inflation fell back to 1.0 percent y/y in February, well below the ECB's "below but close to 2 percent" target.

Just weeks ahead of its scheduled exit from the EU, the UK has yet to agree the terms of its departure. Prime Minister Theresa May is seeking improved terms with the EU following the overwhelming rejection of her negotiated deal by parliament in January, but the chances of securing satisfactory changes to the contentious 'backstop' component currently look slim. Assuming that any new deal is again voted

down, parliament looks likely to press for an extension to the UK's exit date. This would have to be agreed by the EU, and is complicated by the UK's uncertain participation in the EU parliamentary elections in May. It is also unclear what any extension would achieve. Brexit uncertainty is not helping the UK economy, with the PMI index showing growth in the dominant services sector at 51.3 in February, consistent with near stagnation in 1Q19.

Japanese exports

Japan's external sector continues to face headwinds. Exports registered their largest decline, at -8.4 percent y/y, in over two years in January, mainly on the back of weaker Chinese demand. Imports also fell by 0.8 percent y/y, reflecting continued softness in domestic demand. Retail sales and industrial production growth also remained subdued during the same period, at 0.6 percent y/y and 0.0 percent, respectively. With core inflation, which excludes food costs, holding steady at 0.8 percent y/y in January, far below the central bank's target of 2 percent, and economic activity remaining weak, this further reaffirms the Bank of Japan's ultra-loose monetary policy stance.

China lowers growth target

In a bid to prop up its slowing economy amid weaker external demand and the ongoing trade dispute with the US, China has vowed to cut taxes and fees, boost infrastructure investment and up its lending efforts to small firms. During its annual Congress meeting, the government announced that it is penciling in a slower growth target range of 6.0-6.5 percent versus reported growth of 6.6 percent in 2018. Indeed, factory activity continues to struggle to eke out gains. According to the official PMI, factory activity was at its weakest in three years in February, and fell for the third consecutive month. Meanwhile, consumer price inflation continued to decelerate, slowing from 1.9 percent y/y in December to 1.7 percent in January while producer price inflation slowed to a multi-year low of just 0.1 percent, paving the way for further government policy stimulus.

Brent crude oil continued its early year rally last month, closing February up 7 percent m/m

at \$66/bbl following a 15 percent rise in January. The rise has been driven primarily but not exclusively by the efforts of OPEC and its Vienna agreement partners to drain excess supplies from the market by the end of 1H19. OPEC-II compliance hit 85 percent in January, thanks to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who quickly pared back production to within quota levels. Oil's rise prompted US President Trump to tweet that prices were "getting too high" and that OPEC should "relax and take it easy". The imposition of US sanctions on Venezuela in January, the impending expiry of the 180-day US sanctions waivers on Iran in May and crude rationing in Canada due to pipeline bottlenecks, also supported prices, as has the seemingly improving prospects of a US-China trade deal.

Mixed news for GCC business

It was a mixed bag for GCC private sector activity in February. While the Saudi non-oil economy continued to gain traction, with the PMI rising to a 14-month high of 56.6 on stronger domestic business, the UAE PMI retreated to a more than two-year low of 53.4 on a slowdown in new orders and output. Employment growth, though, was weak across the board. Saudi private sector credit growth also underwhelmed, moderating to 2.4 percent y/y in January from 2.9 percent y/y in December.

In Dubai, the deflationary trend in residential real estate prices continued into 2019, with price declines accelerating to 9.4 percent y/y in January due to a combination of more stringent loan-to-value regulations, increased supply and changing demand patterns. In Bahrain, the cabinet approved a draft state budget for the next two years that should see the fiscal deficit shrink from \$2.3 billion (6 percent of GDP) in 2018 to \$1.6 billion (4 percent of GDP) by 2020. Subsidy cuts are on the cards, while revenue-generating measures such as VAT have been introduced. Outside the GCC, Egypt's PMI fell to 48.2 in February. This was the lowest reading since September 2017 and the sixth consecutive month in contractionary territory. The soft PMI highlights some weakness in the recovery of the non-oil private sector, as Egypt's economic reform program continues.



Infiniti Al-Babtain announces national sales and service skills contest winners

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co (AABC), the authorized dealer of Infiniti vehicles in the State of Kuwait, recently held its 2018 Infiniti national sales and service skills contests. The annual event serves to motivate and maintain the highest level of professional performance by our sales and service frontline staff to deliver an even better INFINITI Total Ownership Experience.

The contests aim to highlight staff skills, grow the spirit of competition and motivate the contestants by being part of something bigger, enhance communication/collaboration between Sales and Aftersales teams and ultimately, refine skills to provide the best customer service in the industry.

The competitions, modeled on the regional skills contests included a variety of exercises ranging from 'Face the Trainer' sessions to 'Role Play' and 'Team Test' as well as written tests. The participants were tested in several areas including brand, product, customer journey, and general automotive knowledge.

Mohd. El Shafy won the Infiniti Sales contest and the Infiniti Aftersales contest first place was bagged by Mudassar Hussain. Chief Human Resources Officer,



Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, and Chief Finance Officer, Jihane Bou Hamdan distributed the awards to the winners. The contest was attended by senior management of the Al-Babtain Group and dignitaries from Nissan Gulf which included NGF Aftersales Director David Graves, Aftersales General Manager, Surendra Acharya and Aftersales Deputy General Manager, Shaileendra Singh.

"Our commitment to accommodating local market demands with world-class capabilities and services remains a top priority. Such dynamic platforms encour-

age our employees to stay on top of their game and deliver exceptional results across the board. The INFINITI Total Ownership Experience encapsulates everything we do down to the last detail to provide customers with tailor made services for individual needs when they purchase a Certified Pre-Owned vehicle. These contests are designed to review current capabilities, challenges and upgrade each employee potential to accommodate the best results," said Chief Human Resources Officer, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain.

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar/Transfer	304.700
Euro	344.010
Sterling Pound	401.440
Canadian dollar	227.810
Turkish Lira	56.950
Swiss Franc	304.090
US Dollar Buying	303.400

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.743
Indian Rupees	4.359
Pakistani Rupees	2.223
Srilankan Rupees	1.704
Nepali Rupees	2.720
Singapore Dollar	224.950
Hongkong Dollar	38.818
Bangladesh Taka	3.613
Philippine Peso	5.842
Thai Baht	9.637
Malaysian Ringgit	77.928

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.308
Qatari Riyal	81.743
Omani Riyal	791.943
Bahraini Dinar	809.620
UAE Dirham	83.013

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.650
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Egyptian Pound - Transfer

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.224
Tunisian Dinar	102.940
Jordanian Dinar	430.370
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.031
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.380

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer

US Dollar	304.340	Selling Rate
Canadian Dollar	227.535	
Sterling Pound	398.595	
Euro	344.495	
Swiss Frank	309.360	
Bahraini Dinar	809.355	
UAE Dirhams	83.265	
Qatari Riyals	84.500	
Saudi Riyals	82.055	
Jordanian Dinar	430.540	
Egyptian Pound	17.378	
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.706	
Indian Rupees	4.343	
Pakistani Rupees	2.194	
Bangladesh Taka	3.617	
Philippines Peso	5.827	
Cyprus pound	18.105	
Japanese Yen	3.735	
Syrian Pound	1.590	
Nepalese Rupees	2.722	
Malaysian Ringgit	75.315	

Chinese Yuan Renminbi

Thai Bhat	45.730
Turkish Lira	10.580
Singapore dollars	56.375
	223.485

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY

British Pound	0.388153	BUY	0.402053	SELL
Czech Korune	0.005322		0.014622	
Danish Krone	0.041772		0.046772	
Euro	0.334544		0.348244	
Georgian Lari	0.132174		0.132174	
Hungarian 0.000992	0.001182			
Norwegian Krone	0.030775		0.035975	
Romanian Leu	0.055050		0.071900	
Russian ruble	0.004585		0.004585	
Slovakia	0.009113		0.019113	
Swedish Krona	0.028261		0.033261	
Swiss Franc	0.295483		0.0306483	
Australian Dollar	0.206046		0.218046	
New Zealand Dollar	0.210326		0.210326	
Canadian Dollar	0.221409		0.230409	
US Dollars	0.300600		0.305900	
US Dollars Mint	0.301100		0.305900	
Bangladesh Taka	0.003056		0.003857	

Chinese Yuan	0.043839	0.047339
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036727	0.039477
Indian Rupee	0.003633	0.004405
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002658	0.002838
Korean Won	0.000258	0.000273
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070683	0.076693
Nepalese Rupee	0.002612	0.002952
Pakistan Rupee	0.001540	0.002310
Philippine Peso	0.005804	0.006104
Singapore Dollar	0.218661	0.228681
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001365	0.001945
Taiwan	0.009729	0.009909
Thai Baht	0.009267	0.009817
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.793652	0.810152
Egyptian Pound	0.017212	0.019812
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000211	0.000271
Jordanian Dinar	0.424856	0.433856
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022157	0.046157
Omani Riyal	0.785110	0.790790
Qatar Riyal	0.079404	0.084344
audi Riyal	0.080167	0.081467
Syrian Pound	0.001292	0.001512
Tunisian Dinar	0.095913	0.103913
Turkish Lira	0.049611	0.061111
UAE Dirhams	0.081534	0.083234
Yemeni Riyal	0.000991	0.001071

Business

Saudi to cut oil exports in April, OPEC to maintain output policy

US set to become net exporter of oil: IEA

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia plans to cut its crude oil exports in April to below 7 million barrels per day (bpd), while keeping its output well below 10 million bpd, a Saudi official said yesterday, as the kingdom seeks to drain a supply glut and support oil prices. State-owned Saudi Aramco's oil allocations for April are 635,000 bpd below customers' nominations, which are the requests made by refiners and clients for Saudi crude, the official said.

"Despite very strong demand from international waterborne customers at more than 7.6 million bpd, customers were allocated less than 7 million bpd," the official said, adding that Saudi exports in March would also be below 7 million bpd.

Oil prices have been supported this year by output cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies. US sanctions on the oil industries of OPEC members Iran and Venezuela have also tightened supplies.

Benchmark Brent climbed above \$66 a barrel yesterday, helped by comments by Saudi Oil Minister Khalid Al-Falih that an end to OPEC-led supply cuts was unlikely before June and a report showed a fall in US drilling activity. April allocations by Aramco show "a deep cut of 635,000 bpd from customer requests for its crude oil," the Saudi official said.

"This will keep production well below 10 million bpd in April," the official said, adding that this was also below the 10.311 million bpd that the kingdom had agreed as its production target under the

OPEC-led deal on cutting supplies. OPEC, Russia and other producers, known as OPEC+, agreed in December to reduce supply by 1.2 million bpd from Jan. 1 for six months.

"Saudi Arabia is demonstrating extraordinary commitment to accelerating market rebalancing," the official said, adding that the kingdom expected other OPEC+ countries to show similar levels of contributions and high conformity to agreed cuts.

The Saudi energy minister said on Sunday that March oil output was 9.8 million bpd and the country, OPEC's biggest producer, planned to keep its April output at the same level.

Saudi Arabia's oil production in February fell to 10.136 million bpd, a Saudi industry source told Reuters on Friday, down from 10.24 million bpd in January. Saudi crude exports to the US market have slowed in past weeks, according to the International Energy Agency, while Asia's crude demand is set to drop in the second quarter due to seasonal refinery maintenance which would limit supply.

Saudi Aramco plans to shut its Yanbu oil refinery for planned maintenance for one month from early March.

US exports

Crude production is set to continue expanding in the United States thanks to shale oil, with the country becoming a net exporter from 2021, a development which should reinforce global energy security, the IEA said yesterday.

"The second wave of the US shale revolution is coming," Fatih Birol, the executive director of the International Energy Agency, said in a statement. New technology that allows for extracting oil and gas from shale rock formations has led to a boom in oil production in the United States in recent years. With low production costs, that boom is set to continue.

The IEA forecasts the United States will account for two-thirds of the increase in global oil production and some three-quarters of the expansion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) over the next five years.

This will help the United States surpass Russia and nip at the heels of Saudi Arabia as the world's top exporter. "This will shake up international oil and gas trade flows, with profound implications for the geopolitics of energy," said Birol.

Rising US shale production was one of the main drivers in the collapse in oil prices in 2014, from which the oil industry is just recovering. Production outside the OPEC oil cartel is set to continue rising, according to the IEA, which sees it climbing by 6.1 million barrels per day (mmb) to 68.7 mmb in 2024. In addition to the United States, both Brazil and Norway are expected to increase output.

Meanwhile, OPEC output is expected to dip in 2019 and 2020, before resuming modest growth to 32 mmb in 2024. Overall, global output is expected to rise by 5.9 mmb by 2024, with output in Iran expected to drop due to US sanctions and



Venezuela thanks to its deep economic crisis.

The IEA also sees growth in demand for oil to ease, in particular due to slowing expansion in China. Nevertheless, it sees demand increasing by an annual average of 1.2 mmb in 2024.

China and India will still account for nearly half of the global increase in oil demand, which is expected to rise by 7.1 mmb to 106.4 mmb in 2024. Moreover, the IEA continues to see no peak in oil demand.

The petrochemicals sector and jet fuel will be the key drivers of growth, "more than offsetting a slow-down in gasoline due to efficiency gains and electric cars", said the IEA. —Agencies

US retail sales rise in January; December revised sharply lower

WASHINGTON: US retail sales unexpectedly rose in January, lifted by an increase in purchases of building materials and discretionary spending, but receipts in December were much weaker than initially thought.

The report from the Commerce Department yesterday was welcome news for the economy after a raft of weak December data, as well as a sharp moderation in the pace of job growth in February. Still, January's increase in retail sales recouped only a fraction of December's plunge, leaving expectations for a sharp slowdown in economic growth in the first quarter intact.

"Sales managed only a tepid reversal in January from December's deep freeze," said Douglas Porter, chief economist at BMO Capital Markets in Toronto. "While we expect some further comeback in the next couple months, the big story is that the economy's big engine is cooling."

Retail sales rose 0.2 percent. Data for December was revised down to show retail sales dropping 1.6 percent instead of tumbling 1.2 percent as previously reported. The drop in December was the biggest since September 2009 when the economy was emerging from recession.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast retail sales to be unchanged in January. Sales in January increased 2.3 percent from a year ago. The January retail sales report was delayed by a 35-day partial shutdown of the federal government that ended on Jan. 25. February's retail sales report, which was scheduled for publication on Thursday, will be released on April 1.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales rebounded 1.1 percent in January after a downwardly revised 2.3 percent plunge in December. These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product.

They were previously reported to have decreased 1.7 percent in December. The downward revision to December core retail sales could have an impact on the government's fourth-quarter gross domestic product estimate. The government reported last month that the economy grew at a 2.6 percent annualized rate in the last three months of 2018.

However, December reports on the trade deficit and construction spending have led economists to believe the fourth-quarter GDP growth estimate would be revised lower when the government publishes its revision later this month. Growth estimates for the first quarter are below a 1.5 percent pace. The government reported last Friday that the economy created only 20,000 jobs in February, the fewest in nearly 1-1/2 years.

Slowing job and economic growth support the Federal Reserve's "patient"



NEW YORK: In this file photo, Pedestrians walk past Old Navy and GAP stores in Times Square, in New York City. The US economy saw retail sales rebound slightly in January but December's sales were even worse than originally reported, according to government data released yesterday. —AFP

approach toward further interest rate hikes this year. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell reiterated the US central bank's stance on Sunday in a wide-ranging interview with CBS's 60 Minutes news show. Powell said the Fed did "not feel any hurry" to change the level of interest rates again.

The dollar was trading slightly lower against a basket of currencies. US Treasury prices fell, while stocks on Wall Street were mixed. In January, online and mail-order retail sales increased 2.6 percent, the biggest gain since December 2017. Sales at building material stores increased 3.3 percent, the most since September 2017. But receipts at auto

dealerships tumbled 2.4 percent in January, the largest drop since January 2014, after gaining 0.3 percent in the prior month.

Receipts at service stations fell 2.0 percent reflecting cheaper gasoline prices. There were also declines in sales at clothing and furniture stores, as well as electronic and appliance shops.

Discretionary spending rose in January, with sales at restaurants and bars advancing 0.7 percent and purchases at hobby, musical instrument and book stores jumping 4.8 percent, the largest increase since January 2013. Sales at food and beverage stores gained by the most since April 2016. —Reuters

Boeing stock plunges after Ethiopia crash, sending Dow lower

NEW YORK: Tumbling shares in US aviation giant Boeing yesterday tore a hole in the Dow Jones Industrial Average, sending the benchmark index into the red for a sixth day.

About five minutes into the day's trading, Boeing shares were down 11.7 percent at \$373.23 following the most recent crash of one of its aircraft in Ethiopia. The Dow fell 153.81 points to 25,319.42, but the broader S&P 500 rose 0.3 percent to 2,758.27 and the tech-heavy Nasdaq was up an even stronger 0.7 percent at 7,474.61.

The fatal crash of the Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET302 — the second involving a Boeing 737 Max 8 in five months-caused

airlines in three countries to ground all flights involving the popular jet and cast fresh safety concerns on the airline. Shares in Southwest Airlines sank 2.12 percent while American Airlines lost 0.2 percent. United Continental gave up 0.8 percent. Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare said Boeing's impact on the Dow was not indicative of the performance of the wider market. "The Dow Jones Industrial Average is a price-weighted average, and it just so happens that Boeing is its highest-priced component, which means it is going to have some outsized influence on its performance," he wrote.

Shares in iPhone maker Apple, which gained 2.4 percent, were likely to offset Boeing's downward pressure after Bank of America analysts upgraded the company's stock, O'Hare said.

The Commerce Department meanwhile reported US retail sales had recovered slightly after a dismal December. Investors also likely were comforted by the latest public remarks from Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, who



GENEVA: An Embraer 190 commercial plane with registration OH-LKI of nordic carrier Finnair is seen landing above a plane of low-cost carrier Easyjet at Geneva Airport yesterday in Geneva. —AFP

told the weekly television news broadcast 60 Minutes the central bank was

likely to be patient before raising interest rates again. —AFP

Turkey tumbles into recession as polls loom

ANKARA: Turkey's economy fell into its first recession in a decade, official data showed yesterday, just weeks before President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government faces local elections where growth and inflation will be key issues for voters. Economic output contracted by 2.4 percent in the final three months of the year compared to the third quarter on a seasonally and calendar-adjusted basis, the Turkish Statistics Institute (TUIK) said. That followed a revised 1.6 percent contraction in the third quarter. Two consecutive quarter-on-quarter contractions in economic output is widely considered to be the definition of a recession. The lagging economy cou-

pled with a currency crisis last year that battered the lira are sensitive issues for Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) before the municipal vote on March 31. The Turkish leader, in power since 2003 first as prime minister and then as president, has often boasted of the country's strong growth during his time in government.

Growth came in at 2.6 percent for 2018 overall, but that was still much lower than the 7.4 percent recorded in 2017, a turbulent period following the 2016 failed coup and terror attacks. The economy shrank by 3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2018 compared with the same period the previous year.

Inflation still high

Inflation has also remained high. It struck a 15-year peak in October at 25.24 percent before falling below 20 percent in February, with food prices hit particularly hard. Erdogan's government has sought to curb consumer prices, especially for produce consumed every-

day in Turkish households. Turkish authorities last month set up their own vegetable stands in a bid to force markets to lower food prices.

But analysts said economic data showed inflation was still weighing on household consumption, and domestic demand was weak. Turkish Finance Minister Berat Albayrak, who is also Erdogan's son-in-law, said on Twitter the data was as expected, but "the worst is behind us". That analysis was shared to some extent by the London-based Capital Economics research firm, but they offer cold comfort for Turkey's economic outlook.

"While the worst of the downturn may now have passed, the weak carryover means that we expect GDP to decline by 2.5 percent this year," said Jason Tuvey, senior emerging markets economist at Capital Economics. Albayrak blamed the recession on "speculative attacks" and the current global economic slowdown. —AFP

Court 'bars Ghosn from attending' Nissan board meeting

TOKYO: A Japanese court yesterday barred Carlos Ghosn from attending a Nissan board meeting, according to local media, as the bailed former chairman prepares his defense against charges of financial misconduct. Nissan removed Ghosn as chief shortly after his shock arrest in November, but he cannot be officially removed from his seat on the board without an extraordinary shareholders' meeting—expected to take place on April 8.

Both public broadcaster NHK and the Nikkei business daily reported the decision but the court could not be immediately reached for confirmation. The Japanese carmaker is holding a board meeting on Tuesday in Yokohama, near Tokyo. And Ghosn's lawyer Junichiro Hironaka said earlier yesterday that his client "had a duty" to attend the board meeting and wanted to do so—if the court gave the green light.

Ghosn was released on March 6 on bail of nearly \$9 million. Under the terms of his release, he is forbidden from contacting people who could be involved in his case, including Nissan executives likely to attend board meetings, such as CEO Hiroto Saikawa.

Other conditions of Ghosn's bail include living in a residence monitored from outside by camera. He can only access a non-internet connected computer at his lawyer's office.

The former high-flying auto tycoon stepped out of a Tokyo detention center after more than 100 days. —AFP

Zimbabwe CB head hints at more weakening of new currency

HARARE: Zimbabwe's central bank governor yesterday said the exchange rate for the new transitional currency is unlikely to remain at 2.5 per US dollar by the time tobacco auctions open next week, suggesting the local unit will be devalued further. The southern African nation faces a dearth of dollars that has caused shortages of fuel, drugs and food and hobbled an economy yet to recover from the disastrous rule of Robert Mugabe, who was removed in a coup in 2017. The Reserve Bank scrapped its discredited 1:1 dollar peg for surrogate bond notes and electronic dollars last month, merging them into a lower-value transitional currency called the RTGS dollar, which has been stuck at a rate of 2.5 to the greenback. Many companies have, however, continued to hold onto their dollars waiting for the RTGS rate to weaken further, while most individuals sell their greenbacks on the black market, where US\$1 bought 3.8 RTGS dollars yesterday.

Central bank chief John Mangudya said the official exchange rate was expected to change by the time auctions for tobacco, Zimbabwe's second-largest earner of foreign currency after mining, open on March 20. "We do believe that before or on that date the rate will have reached its equilibrium. We don't believe it will still be 2.5 (to the US dollar)," Mangudya said.

Mangudya maintained that the market would determine the exchange rate, after accusations of manipulation by the central bank. But he ruled out a sharp devaluation, which he said would result in a further spike in annual inflation. The governor said average annual inflation was expected to fall to 10 to 15 percent by the end of this year. He also said that any huge salary increases for public workers would add to inflationary pressure. —Reuters

Business

Al-Sayer, Toyota Genuine Spare Parts reinforce anti-counterfeit campaign

Spreading awareness about the danger of using counterfeit parts



Toyota genuine parts at Avenues



Interaction at the stand



Visitors at the stand

KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer, a subsidiary of Al-Sayer Holding and Toyota Genuine Spare Parts recently hosted a display stand at Avenues Mall to spread the awareness about the danger of using counterfeit parts. Members from the Group Parts Division interacted with the visitors and explained the key benefits of using genuine quality parts to support long engine life and improve overall vehicle performance.

The specially designed stand featured touch and feel display of genuine and counterfeit parts where spare parts specialists educated the various ways it harmed the car. Visitors at the stand were keen to understand the different grades and quality of products available in the market and the importance of checking the genuine trademark label and the appropriate product codes during their purchase.

Al-Sayer has been active with seminars and workshop involving concerned government and customs officials in the field of campaigning against anti-counterfeit parts entering the market. The main objective of the seminar was to associate the strategic objective of fostering partnership among the official authorities directly concerned with matters corresponding to intellectual property rights such as private sector companies represented by MNNS, professional experts and government agencies.

Fake versus Genuine - Almost look similar

The spread of counterfeit parts has become a growing problem that threatens the manufacturers, sellers and consumers alike. The offenders of these illegal activities have become more professional, they use

packaging materials and posters to conceal being absolutely counterfeit or change it slightly so that the average consumer can't distinguish it because of the difficulty of discovering these differences in any pieces.

Unique and Advanced Toyota Patented Technology

Toyota believes that improving levels and standards of safety and performance requires proper employment of technology, innovation and continued pursuit of perfection to provide new solutions through its own efforts or in cooperation with leading world organizations, basically to reduce casualties in comparison with world accident figures.

Therefore, Toyota recruits massive numbers of qualified technicians and engineers with best training at reputed universities, and technology institutes who have

demonstrated best hands on performance and achievements in development and innovation using most advanced equipment and technology to further improve innovation and inventions which positively impact our life.

Decade-long anti-counterfeit campaign by Al-Sayer

Al-Sayer Group has been promoting customer and overall public awareness about counterfeit parts and their damaging effects and life-threatening risks over the past 10 years. These are aimed at educating customer and enhancing his awareness of the existence and risks of using such counterfeits, and to encourage customers to shun such products and go for Toyota genuine parts for safe driving and trouble-free vehicle performance. Al-Sayer is using special labels to identify and distinguish Genuine parts for its customers.

Ahli United Bank congratulates winners of Al-Hassad draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank announced on the 06th of March 2019 the winners of its weekly draw of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait that has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners. Al-Hassad has have over 850 prizes, over a 12 month period. The weekly draw announced the grand prize winner of KD 10,000 as Mohammed Ali Ashknani.

20 other winners won prizes of KD 1,000 and are as follows: Huma Aslam, Mona Hamzah Ibrahim Albuloushi, Ameen Majeed Ameen, Amirah Abdurredha Abdullah, Ahmed Abbas Abdulla, Sarah Rashed Altukhaim, Abdulhakeem Ibrahim Mubarak, Mohammad Yousef Alsaif, Mahdy Khorsany Yadhlahy, Hanan Salem Alsaem, Souti George Qyumajian, Nayif Matrouk Almutiril, Haifa Assy Dydan Najm, Deepesh Mangwani, Mohamed Abdelalim Mohamed, Anisa Abdulaziz Al-Tajer, Hamza Yusuf Mohamed, Safa Mohamed Baqer, Fatima Fadhel Dadalla, Suad Abdulla A.Rahman.

Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents 21 weekly prizes comprised of a grand prize of KD 10,000, 20 prizes of KD 1,000 each in addition the monthly draw to win a prize of KD 100,000.

Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also 4 quarterly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners achieve their dreams and aspirations. One powerful new aspect of the Al-Hassad Islamic Account is the prize draws on the holy occasion of both Eid ul-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, when the winning customers will receive the Eid prizes of KD 100,000 each. May the Eid always bring prosperity and blessings to the Islamic nation.

In addition to the highly attractive package of the prizes, there will be the annual expected profits on, which makes the Al Hassad account a useful tool: for family and other savings, both for the short term and for the longer term - a fact which well appreciated by a large multitude of new and old customers.

To be eligible to participate in the draw, the customer should have a minimum balance of KD 100, whereby the customer has two chances to participate, with a maximum of 30,000 chances per draw, in addition to annual profits for all participants. Every KD 50 invested for at least 15 days entitles the customer to one chance in the each draw. The longer the customer keeps his balance the bigger the changes of participation in the draw. Draws are held every Wednesday at AUB Kuwait or AUB Bahrain depending on the draw plan.

UTC celebrates sales of 2 million O-General ACs

KUWAIT: Union Trading Company (UTC), the exclusive distributor of O-General Air-conditioning products in Kuwait, celebrated the sale of 2 million air-conditioners by holding a convention for its dealers, retail partners and air-conditioning consultants at the JW Marriott hotel, Kuwait City.

The event was attended by guest of honor Etsuro Saito, President of Fujitsu General Ltd, Japan. The event was also attended by Junji Yanagimoto, Chairman of Fujitsu General Middle-East, Africa and Asia.

During the Convention, O-General Dealers were provided an overview of the global Fujitsu-General business followed by a presentation outlining the new energy efficient O-General Air-Conditioning models, now using R410a refrigerant. Presentation plaques were awarded to the dealers in recognition of their support for O-General. The evening was rounded off with the ceremonial cutting of a giant 'Celebration Cake', shared among the 250 attendees.

KIB introduces new 'Visa Signature' credit card

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the launch of its new Visa Signature credit card. The announcement came at a joint press conference held on Sunday at the Bank's head office, which featured representatives from both KIB and Visa. This latest addition to the KIB suite of credit cards serves to reaffirm the Bank's unwavering commitment towards continuously developing its products and services and enhancing the banking solution on offer to its customers. The Visa Signature card will offer the Bank's premium customers a comprehensive package of exclusive benefits and bespoke services, designed specifically to suit their lifestyles and offering them an advanced and comfortable banking experience both in Kuwait and abroad.

The Visa Signature credit card can be used for all travel, shopping, and leisure needs anywhere in the world, as well as for all online purchases. Amongst the card's main benefits is that it gives cardholders access to more than 1,000

Etsuro Saito (President Fujitsu-General Ltd) commented: "Since the first O-General air-conditioner was delivered to Kuwait in 1971, Union Trading Company has sold over two million air-conditioners. Congratulations! I am happy and proud to be associated with this long term partnership and look forward to our innovative new products growing O-General's market share in the future."

Hisham Al-Razuqi (General Manager, Union Trading Company) said "I am delighted that Saito was able to join us and celebrate this milestone in our partnership. O-General continues to be Kuwait's favorite brand of Air-Conditioning and the new range of products being introduced highlight that O-General leads the field in developing higher efficiency air-conditioning solutions."

Andrew Denby (CEO, UTC) stated: "Following the introduction of the first window air-conditioner 48 years ago, UTC has consistently worked with O-General to provide reliable, best in class cooling performance. Our new model line-up continues to deliver this objective whilst at the same time improving energy efficiency. Union Trading Company has been distributing O General air-conditioners for 48 years and was the first Agent for O-General in the Middle-East."



airport lounges in over 300 cities worldwide. The card also offers free travel insurance benefits and the ability to enjoy exclusive concierge service at home and abroad. KIB customers will also be able to enjoy exclusive services at numerous luxury hotels around the globe.

On this occasion, General Manager of the Retail Banking Department, Othman Tawfeeq, said: "KIB always seeks to enrich its suite of banking services, expanding their benefits and enhancing their added value, in order to offer our customers a comprehensive banking experience that brings them a wealth of unique privileges and great overall value. We are committed to keeping up with our customers expanding and ever-changing needs, offering them a wide range of credit solutions that fulfill their financial needs with a flexible payment option. Our ultimate goal is make sure we deliver a next-level banking experience that is innovative and keeps the customers' needs at the forefront."



Othman Tawfeeq



On his part, Ankush Devadason, Kuwait Country Manager at Visa, said: "We are delighted to partner with KIB to launch the Visa Signature card, which is uniquely designed to cater to the Bank's premium clientele, providing a comprehensive package of exclusive benefits and services in line with their lifestyle and banking preferences. As a trusted partner of choice, Visa is committed to delivering innovative payment technology solutions to our partners so that they can strengthen their offerings and ensure customers have access to secure and seamless payment experiences."

Huawei Kuwait celebrates HCIE Night 2019 amidst industry experts

KUWAIT: Huawei Technologies Kuwait, a leading global Information and Communication Technology solutions provider, recently held a first-of-its-kind event to honor the distinguished engineers who have achieved the highest level of Huawei certification. The event brought together prominent figures from the ICT industry including government officials, academia, technology institutes, business partners, and customers to celebrate Huawei Certified ICT Experts - HCIE Night 2019.

HCIE 2019 served as a forum for participants to engage and network with Huawei ICT industry experts. The audience was introduced to Huawei's vision, mission and core values, followed by an introduction to its newest Trainings & Certifications and the benefits of attaining the HCIE certification.

Committed to building a generation of high quality local ICT professionals, and innovative thinkers, Huawei Kuwait aims at unearthing and recognizing 400 ICT qualified engineers in 2019 alone. To support the ICT talent eco-system and in line with the government's digital transformation agenda, Huawei interlocutors encouraged local ICT engineers and the youth to undergo ICT training and self-study programs to attain Huawei certification.

"I would like to thank the whole Huawei Team for organizing such a fruitful event to appreciate the HCIE certified engineers in Kuwait. I am sure this will inspire more ICT professionals to gain knowledge, become more digital savvy and seek industry recognition", said Amjad Iqbal, the first HCIE certified engineer in Kuwait.

Mohammed Y MullaYaqoub, Assistant Director General for Business Development at KDIPA said during the ceremony, "Today's event showcases Huawei's integral role in advancing Kuwait's digitization agenda. It falls in line with our mutual interest to nurture national ICT capacities and establish a league of highly qualified engineers and young technological leaders of tomorrow. As a long standing partner, we are proud of the many world-class opportunities that Huawei is opening up for our local youth, enabling them to compete internationally."

Ezz Heggy, VP Enterprise business of Huawei Technologies Kuwait said, "Huawei Technologies advocates openness, collaboration, and shared success. This platform demonstrates our commitment to the development of the ICT infrastructure in Kuwait, as it remains an integral part of the government's 2035 strategy. It is our belief that such events help address current gaps and uncover areas of potential technological evolution to establish a fully connected and intelligent world."



What's On

Light Business Lunch Offer at the La Mamma Pizzeria



Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait invites you to discover La Mamma's contemporary Italian cuisine during its "Light Business Lunch Offer" that has been recently launched to satisfy the needs of many business people in search for a calm and pleasant place with a modern atmosphere during their lunch break and enjoy La Mamma's freshly made pizza that is baked from its wood fired ovens, as well as a wide variety of lavish Italian appetizers and dishes straight from the kitchen.

La Mamma's "Light Business Lunch Offer" introduces light and hearty menus to choose from, a variety of appetizers, main courses and desserts of your

choice from a newly conceptualized Italian menu, catered for corporates and clientele during busy weekdays.

With an exceptional view of the Sheraton Hotel roundabout and the Al Jahra doors, the La Mamma Pizzeria continues to offer a wide range of Italian appetizers and pasta dishes in a modern dining atmosphere with wooden furniture and colorful decor to represent the culture of a simple Italian village and its traditional delicious home-made food. The "Light Business Lunch Offer" is available from Sunday to Thursday starting at 12:00 noon until 4:00 pm. Located at the 2nd floor of the Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait.

KIPCO Group supports 4th Gulf Studies Symposium at AUK

The Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - and its Group companies are supporting the 4th Gulf Studies Symposium, organized by the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait. The symposium, themed "The Gulf and Arabian Peninsula: Production and Consumption Systems", will be held on 15-17 March at the university campus.

The event is supported by KIPCO, Burgan Bank, Gulf Insurance Group, United Real Estate, KAMCO Investment Company and Qurain Petrochemical Industries. The biennial symposium provides a platform for regional and international scholars to discourse on timely research contributions that are particular to both the region and the field of Gulf studies. This year, the discussion will focus on the inputs, processes and outcomes of production and

consumption systems within and across the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula in historical and contemporary contexts.

Ms Eman Al Awadhi, KIPCO's Group Communications Director, said: "KIPCO is delighted to be supporting the Center for Gulf Studies at AUK in organizing an academic conference of this international scale for the fourth time. The event has become an important platform from which scholars contribute and add value to the field of Gulf studies. As part of our Group approach, KIPCO encourages its companies to leverage opportunities to work on mutual corporate citizenship projects. We would like to thank Burgan Bank, Gulf Insurance Group, United Real Estate, KAMCO Investment Company and Qurain Petrochemical Industries for being the lead supporters of this symposium."



Eman Al Awadhi



Kuwait Autism Center unit workshop

Kuwait Autism Center' training unit recently organized a workshop presented by Dr Abdul Rahman Jarrah under the title of "Preparing Educational programs for individual students with special needs". The workshop addressed a number of teachers, social workers and supervisors who were all trained on utilizing assessment in setting educational goals and determining the best methodology suitable for each student. The center will also organize a workshop on design and application of conduct remedial programs with students with special needs from the period of March 31 till April 2. The workshop activities will be on at the center's auditorium from 5-8 pm and will tackle the most effective remedial plans for behavioral disorders such as hyperactivity, violence, lack of concentration and introversion.

COSTO store outlet opens in Khaitan



Regency Group, one of the leading players in the Middle East retail sector has launched its new retail brand- Costo with the opening of its pilot store in Khaitan on Thursday, 7th March 2019. Costo is a cost-efficient neighborhood daily store where everyday requirements of customers are met. Costo Khaitan outlet is strategically located on road 55 and is easily accessible from all major roads like Fifth and Sixth ring roads.

Situated in the basement floor of Naser Al Geean Complex (Block 8, Nasser Sanhath Al Usaimi Street), this 14,000 sq ft store, unlike normal supermarkets and hypermarkets, will feature only a limited set of products across categories that caters to the daily needs of a customer. Costo plans to be a customer centric daily purchase store where customer feedbacks determine the future, giving customers the delight to buy exactly what they want - be it any brand or product.

Costo stores will feature categories like fresh, food and non-food, butchery, fishery, household, fashion, footwear, electronics, mobile and laptops. All the perishable goods, farm produces and meat are exclusively flown in from around the globe on a daily basis to offer uncompromised quality standards and to ensure they are available fresh to the end users.

On the opening of the new brand Dr. Anvar Ameen- Group Managing Director said "It gives us immense joy to announce the launch of our new revolutionary retail store brand in Kuwait. The concept of Costo was arrived after a lot of in-depth research done by our internal research wing along with consultants from Europe and Turkey. The research studies indicated a space in daily or regular purchase market where there is a scope to provide products directly to customers with better price and quality. This triggered the very idea of Costo."

Ayyoob Kachery, Kuwait Regional Director stated that the new concept store differentiates itself by providing consumers with high-quality products, uniquely selected to suit their tastes and price sensitivities. "This way we make sure the consumers enjoy a complete shopping experience," he added. Namith, Chief Executive Officer - UAE region said "Our vision at Costo is to be the daily shopping destination for cus-

tomers. The planned format of each store will have majority area allotted for daily use products across each category."

Mohammed Suneer, Chief Executive officer - Kuwait region said, "Final customers reap the maximum benefits on shopping from Costo as the group has its own sourcing centers in Europe, Turkey, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, eliminating the middle men from the entire supply chain. This ensures that best quality products reach customers in minimum time at the lowest prices."

The promoters state that the launch of Costo in Kuwait is yet another landmark in the history

competitive prices possible. Costo, Khaitan is strategically located and is easily accessible from all the major roads like Fifth and Sixth ring roads.

Explaining the group's strategy in retailing, Thehaseer Ali, General Manager, Kuwait, said, "Our newest venture in Kuwait is in line with our policy to go closer to our customers and offer an unmatched experience with regard to quality of products, standard of service and pricing. In fact, we are planning to open more outlets of both Costo and Grand brands in this country as well as other GCC nations and select other markets."



of retail operations of the group. They conveyed their sincere gratitude and best wishes to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, generous Kuwaiti public and business friendly systems. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's wise leadership has steered Kuwait to self-sufficient and investor friendly destination, one of many reasons to pick Kuwait over other GCC countries.

In order to achieve their mission of reaching every customer, the promoters, Regency Group, aim to spread their retail stores in all the major areas of Kuwait and serve the Kuwait population with the right mix of products at the most

Having experience in Kuwaiti market for more than eight years, the promoters were convinced that the growing population, the constant growth of the economy, the increase in the GDP, and the support from the Government of Kuwait to the business community here bode well for them to choose this market and spread their business footprint. Rahil Bassim, Chief Operating Officer said "Over years, Kuwait has grown into a mature retail market with customers exposed to high standards of organized retail, hence without doubt Kuwait was the right place in GCC for us to launch COSTO."



PwC in Kuwait partners with the UN Migration

PwC Kuwait, in collaboration with the UN Migration Agency celebrated International Women's Day by pledging their commitment to supporting Kuwait's Government Shelter for Foreign Workers. Through this partnership, PwC Kuwait has committed to funding the provision of essential supplies to the shelter's residents - comprised of female migrant domestic workers who had fled hardship at the hands of their employers. The donation was presented by PwC Kuwait's Chairman, Khaled Al Shatti and Managing Partner Sherif Shawki, as part of the firm's commitment to support the country's ongoing efforts to combat human trafficking and prevent future abuses. In his comments, Khaled Al Shatti, Partner and Chairman of PwC in Kuwait, noted:

"Women all over the world are being celebrated today. We consider women a key part of our diverse and inclusive culture within PwC and hope that through initiatives like these, we are able to shed the light on those whose voices may not always be heard and from all walks of life, many of whom have endured countless hardships over the course of their lives. We are committed to working with the Kuwaiti Government and with International

Organizations like UN Migration, whose values align with ours, to bring to light this important matter in the hope for a better future, living and working conditions for women (and men) in Kuwait and beyond."

For his part, Sherif Shawki, Managing Partner at PwC in Kuwait said: "Supporting and serving the communities in which we live and work is very important to us; so is celebrating diversity and inclusion in all its forms. These are values we try to live by at all levels - at home but also at work. Today, almost 40% of our PwC colleagues across the Middle East are female; that number is up to 50% at the graduate level - we've come a long way in our effort to drive gender equality and have further still to go no doubt."

Recognizing the involvement of more private sector in support of the government-run shelter, Ms Iman Eriqat, Chief of Mission for UN Migration office in Kuwait, said: "In recent years, women have represented an increasingly larger percentage of overseas contract workers in Kuwait. The Government of Kuwait has made considerable progress in labor mobility management, enhancing protection of migrants' human rights and actively working to combat trafficking in persons - most notably by establishing the Government Shelter for Foreign Workers in 2014. The Shelter can house up to 500 residents who are provided with accommodation, food, psycho-social support and sustainable exit strategies. The Agency is pleased to scale up the support for the women at the shelter and to get more actors involved."

NAFO Kuwait reconstitutes Ladies Wing

National Forum (NAFO-Kuwait) democratically and unanimously re-constituted its Ladies Wing during a family get-together held on February 1, 2019, at the Indian Public School auditorium, Salmiya. This organizational task was successfully executed under the guidance of Advisory Board/Election Committee. A large number of

NAFO family members attended and witnessed this event. An overwhelming number of 17 ladies voluntarily offered to serve as members of the new Ladies Wing Coordination Committee, having its new tenure of office from year 2019 to 2022.

Sreekala Dileep was elected as the Chief Coordinator, Sindhu Rajiv and Rajasree Uday as Vice-Chief Coordinators. Anitha Murali, Devi Remesh, Sajitha Madu, Preeti Rajiv, Lekha Suresh, Roshna Satheesh, Sheeba Shaiju, Ajitha Vinay, Vidya Anil, Radha Rajendran, Udaya Unni, Reshmi Ajay, Bijuna Rajeev and Athira Praveen were elected as coordinators.

Outgoing Ladies Wing committee mem-

bers were thanked and widely appreciated for their previous commendable contributions and initiatives taken for the smooth re-constitution of the new committee. New Chief Coordinator, Sreekala Dileep, while assuming the responsibility mentioned that the new Ladies Wing in accordance with the set policies of NAFO would perform its duties with a new outlook through unique ideas and contribute maximum towards its socio-cultural activities and value education scheme "Gurukulam". A meeting of NAFO ladies' and parents of Gurukulam disciples convened in order to plan activities mainly to educate and empower children with India's traditional culture, civilization, philosophical values and social principles.



Health

Top five tips for securing the healthcare industry

By Harish Chib

The global healthcare industry remains one of the most vulnerable to security incidents, organizational breaches, and data compromises, with both internal external issues impacting the situation. Internally and healthcare organizations have low levels of data encryption and invest little in increasing the awareness of security best practices, which leads to weak management and protection of patient data. Externally, the cost of reselling hacked patient health records remains lucrative and strong, which drives the interest levels of global and regional threat actors to compromise these organizations.

Recent research reports by couple of organizations, provided empirical evidence of this wide spread malaise in the industry. Weak security practices not built into employee job descriptions, lack of understanding of the importance of data privacy, and malicious insider activities remain the principal drivers of the high levels of security incidents in the healthcare space.

Similar healthcare surveys, revealed insiders were responsible for network attacks. Insiders using mis-configured servers and employees falling victim to phishing scams accounted for two third of the incidents. Industry executives continue to point out that too many breaches are the result of accidental or negligent actions of end-users.

Cyber security is undoubtedly a board level issue now, as the need to keep key systems and data protected is now front of mind within the boardroom, as breaches make unwelcome headlines in the media. Working to deliver change is

never simple and it takes time to develop the strong defenses required to protect your organization, here are our top five tips to get you started:

#1 Map your risk profile

Healthcare organizations need to undertake a comprehensive assessment of their vulnerabilities including compromise scenarios. A comprehensive risk audit will help to define the required cyber security policies and frameworks, which will be easier to map out.

#2 Identify best practices

Once a cybersecurity solution has been implemented in end-user healthcare organizations, it is necessary to develop best practice guidelines and educate all users on them to ensure the new solution and processes are as effective as possible.

#3 Undertake breach and response simulations

All organizations live under the threat of a possible breach or compromise. Simulation testing allows every organization to improve their ability to protect the business from a real breach, but also ensure staff are able to work and maintain continuity of service in parallel. Response to such a breach, healthcare end-user organizations can improve their ability to protect business and maintain continuity of operations.

#4 Identify the crown jewels

Healthcare end-user organizations need to classify data on the basis of associated levels of privacy and importance. Based on the levels of importance around data, they can define levels of



Harish Chib

security protection and the associated levels of investment required to protect that data.

#5 Educating employees about cybersecurity

Education is key. Ensuring employees understand the importance of following basic cyber security best practice will help ensure systems are compromised less often. Global research continues to indicate that weak employee awareness is the cause of more than half of all healthcare breaches. With a focus on the above areas, healthcare organizations should find that improvements in employee security awareness and adoption of security best practices will deliver positive returns over the medium- to long-term horizon. —Harish Chib is the Vice President of Sophos in the MENA region

WHO planning to fight 'inevitable' flu pandemics

GENEVA: The World Health Organization yesterday launched a strategy to protect people worldwide over the next decade against the threat of influenza, warning that new pandemics are "inevitable". Influenza epidemics, largely seasonal, affect around one billion people and kill hundreds of thousands annually, according to WHO, which describes it as one of the world's greatest public health challenges.

WHO's new strategy, for 2019 through 2030, aims to prevent seasonal influenza, control the virus's spread from animals to humans and prepare for the next pandemic, WHO said. "The threat of pandemic influenza is ever-present," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. The world has suffered through a number of devastating influenza pandemics, including the Spanish Flu, which in 1918 killed tens of millions of people globally.

Three pandemics have occurred since — in 1957, 1968 and in 2009 — when the H1N1 swine flu pandemic claimed around 18,500 lives in 214 countries. "Another influenza pandemic is inevitable," the UN health agency said, adding that "in this interconnected world, the question is not if we will have another pandemic, but when." Launching the new strategy, the WHO chief stressed the need for vigilance and preparation. —AFP

CLINIC

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ACROSS

1. The month following March and preceding May.
4. A nonstandard form of American English spoken by some American Black people.
11. A written agreement between two states or sovereigns.
15. Towards the side away from the wind.
16. Of deserts of northern Africa and southern Asia.
17. Largest known toad species.
18. Jewelled pendant worn on a chain around the neck.
20. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
22. A Dravidian language closely related to Tamil that is spoken in a hilly section of southwestern India.
23. A doctor's degree in optometry.
25. Consisting of or of the nature of frozen or partially frozen rain.
30. Ribbon-like flatworms that are parasitic in the intestines of humans and other vertebrates.
35. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
38. The inner germ layer that develops into the lining of the digestive and respiratory systems.
40. A unit of pressure equal to one newton per square meter.
42. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
43. Derive or receive pleasure from.
46. Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
47. A ludicrously false statement.
50. The mints.
53. Swelling from excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue.
55. The basic monetary unit in many countries.
59. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
63. The state of being under the control of another person.
66. Jordan's port.
69. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
70. Water soaked soil.
71. A flammable alcohol derived from butanes and used for solvents.
73. A person regarded as arrogant and annoying.
74. Something that remunerates.
75. Not angry.
76. The capital and largest city of Yemen.

DOWN

1. European shad.
2. Relating to or resembling or made of or adorned with pearls or mother-of-pearl.
3. A variety show with topical sketches and songs and dancing and comedians.
4. Enthusiastic approval.
5. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
6. Chocolate cookie with white cream filling.
7. An aromatic ointment used in antiquity.
8. Being nine more than ninety.
9. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
10. Pile of waste matter from coal mining etc.
11. Writing that provides information (especially information of an official nature).
12. An impure form of quartz consisting of banded chalcedony.
13. Adherents of an exclusive system of religious beliefs and practices.
14. The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
19. One of the three Furies.
21. (prefix) Coming before or being preliminary or preparatory.
24. Tropical starchy tuberous root.
26. Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
27. A plant lacking a permanent woody stem.
28. Jordan's port.
29. Water accumulated in the bilge of a ship.
31. Give qualities or abilities to.
32. A support or foundation.
33. State of disgrace resulting from detestable behavior.
34. A Mid-Atlantic state.
36. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
37. Singing jazz.
39. Informal terms for a mother.
41. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
44. Having an oblique or slanted direction.
45. Salt of potassium (trade names Kaochlor and K-lor and Klorvess and K-lyte).
48. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
49. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
51. A small pellet fired from an air rifle or BB gun.
52. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
54. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
56. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
57. A trivalent metalloid element.
58. Naked freshwater or marine or parasitic protozoa that form temporary pseudopods for feeding and locomotion.
60. A shade of blue tinged with green.
61. A polite name for any woman.
62. Used as a Hindi courtesy title.
64. Have confidence or faith in.
65. A girl or young woman who is unmarried.
67. The 7th letter of the Greek alphabet.
68. An adult male person (as opposed to a woman).
72. An organization of independent states to promote international peace and security.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Good thing it's Monday and you're at work because you're in the mode to make things happen now. Motivation has struck with a vengeance but it's really a good thing for you because your boss notices. You've made it obvious that you have your work security and protection of your job as a very high priority. Your boss loves your attitude. New ways of doing your job is only part of the equation when you also use uncommon behaviors in which to get your work done. You'll be in an even better mood tonight when you go home to family or your lover. You're looking good.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Good friends and family give you the needed assurance to step out and do something which frightens you. Change for you is hard but you need to get rid of some dated items at work and home which keep your material growth at a minimum, or so you think. If you think it then you need to fix it. Get on with the spiritual, material and mental evolution you're working towards now. Closeness with loved ones is the only thing you're really sure of now. Taurus. That's because family generally always loves you. You feel secure in the arms of those you love. Let them help you with all that's needed here. You've got the mental oomph to accomplish this task.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

At work today you feel as if you can't get anything accomplished because your ideas aren't getting a good reception from anyone. It's hard to buckle down and work under these conditions. You feel as if the walls are closing in on you and you day dream about yesterday at home. You may feel so bad that you decide a sick day is in order. It won't be better at home unless you're alone. You and your pets can do something together where you get all the love you want without question. That's the unconditional love you need just now. Gemini. Revel in it.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A situation at work could find you the odd-man-out because of your beliefs in relativistic expectations. You see the work situation in a genuine manner and he or she sees it in an impractical way that you feel sure won't work. Others tend to agree with you unless the dreamer is your boss. Then only time will tell. You love the back and forth of exploring issues and being able to see all sides of the equation. Today you get plenty of that. Cancer. Tonight, neighbors or your brothers or sisters might find you talking late just to catch up.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Anything having to do with the law may be on your agenda for the day. You may have to sign a contract for your services or perhaps you got stopped by a well-meaning policeman. He or she may have given you an invitation to court or for payment. You want to get out an about today instead of being tied down to work. When you can safely do so, go out and enjoy being with friends. Leo. Even though you're with your friends, you may feel left out. Don't worry that sensation won't last long. Spirituality is part of your thinking process now too.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You make the best of work especially if you're working with others now. You can understand concepts when they can't. Moreover, you can explain them in such a manner as to make them easily understood for implementation. Thinking of others first is a priority today especially if they're having emotional or mental concerns. You make the work and home environment run with harmony and care. Others consider you a joy to be around. Virgo. Tonight, do something for you that you think is special, maybe a long warm bath or sitting in the yard with the dog.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You want more from life. You may decide to change your appearance as much as you possibly can now from dress to body parts. What you're unsatisfied with is you. That's really not your outward appearance, it's your inner self. You want to study something others may frown upon but who's life is it anyway? Think of what matters to you and go for it. You may be able to create a job that gives you the items you desire after you complete a mental inventory of past problems, their causes and how the issues were solved. Libra. You'll be happy after working your emotional stress out.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You have lots of energy for getting work done today and you also have the ambition. As long as work goes smoothly, you're happy with the situation. You may feel a little tenseness but don't let that pile up on you now. You have a plan and you need to see it accomplished. Work towards your goal without feeling rushed. Breathe in, breathe out and let the world go on. You may not see all the support you'd like just yet but don't worry about it. Your plans will come to fruition.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Work be damned, well not that much, but you'd rather stay at home and enjoy the day as you did yesterday. Family and friends mean so much more to you now. You want security and love. You need to feel needed but you don't want it to be at work. There's still that little issue of tension left over and you know you could explode given the opportunity. Sagittarius. You also know you'd rather have the peaceful quietness you enjoyed and want to enjoy today. Sometimes practicality and love of food and shelter dictate we have to be adults and face the day head on though. Try to make it great.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You're in your element at work today. Your managerial talents show early and complete the rest of the day. Your boss, if you have one, notices and compliments you on decisions you're making. This makes you feel great. You tend to work harder when you feel as if you're accomplishing great things. Today you even sympathize with coworkers and can understand why they act as they do. You may not tell them that but you have those work mates hanging on your every word anyway. Capricorn. This is a good day, one that shows you where you should be, on top.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

If you're looking for a new job, today is the time to interview or at least request that interview. It's also a day for asking for that date. You're entertaining, intelligent and charming. It shows and you feel it. That gives you added oomph to anything you go for now. You feel as if you've made a mental breakthrough. Additionally, you may have put those emotional decisions you're working on into action and now you want to celebrate it with close friends. Go out and have fun. You know what you want and you're on your way to getting it.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Today you're in the mood for some hard work without distraction by the water cooler. Gossip has no place in your life. It can't be trusted. You deserve and like truth. Moreover, you don't think much of anyone who stretches truth to fit their needs. It's not that you feel better than them but you can't trust anything they serve up in life. You need confidence in those you work with and with friends. Ambition is one of the items topping your to do list both at work and at home. You want to make hay while the sun is shining. This evening enjoy some friend and family time. Laugh and have fun.

Wordsearch Puzzle

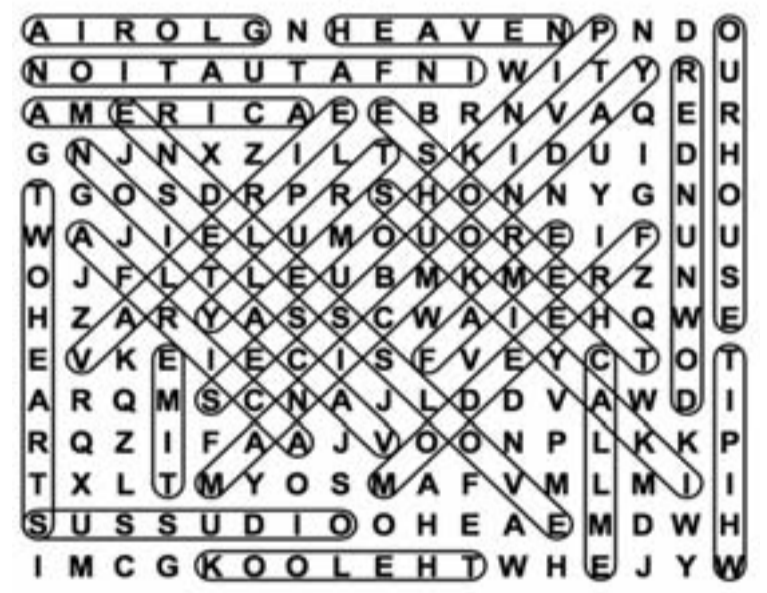
80's Songs 4 - Word Search



- | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| BATDANCE | FAST CAR | NASTY |
| AMANDA | FUNKY TOWN | NIGHTSHIFT |
| BILLIE JEAN | HEARTLIGHT | ROCK ON |
| COME DANCING | HOLD ME | SLEDGEHAMMER |
| CONTROL | HUMAN | SMALL TOWN |
| DANGER ZONE | JESSE | VOICES CARRY |
| DESIRE | KISS | YOU ARE |
| FAITH | LUKA | |

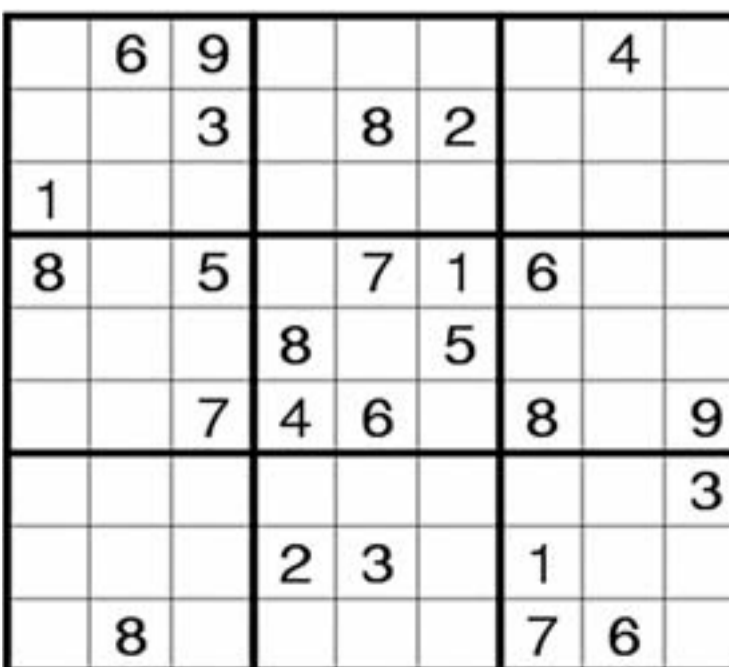
Yesterday's Solution

80's Songs 3 - Solution



- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| AFRICA | HEAVEN | THE ROSE |
| AMERICA | INFATUATION | TIME |
| CALL ME | MANIC MONDAY | TRULY |
| DOWN UNDER | OUR HOUSE | TWO HEARTS |
| ENDLESS LOVE | PINK HOUSES | VACATION |
| FAME | SUKIYAKI | VALERIE |
| FREEDOM | SUSSUDIO | WHIP IT |
| GLORIA | THE LOOK | |

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2019



A woman dressed in a traditional Russian costume talks on the phone next to giant dolls during the celebration of Shrovetide (Maslenitsa) in Kaluga, some 200 km away from Moscow, on March 10, 2019. Shrovetide or Maslenitsa is an ancient farewell ceremony to winter, traditionally celebrated in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. — AFP

Quirky Australia flying contest makes big splash with DIY devices



A competitor jumps into the Yarra River with his homemade flying device during the annual Birdman Rally at the Moomba Festival in Melbourne.

Strapped to homemade flying devices shaped as gliders and even houses, competitors jumped into a river in the heart of Australia's second-largest city Sunday as part of a quirky annual competition to raise money for charity. The Birdman Rally held at Melbourne's Yarra River sees participants jump off a four-meter (13-foot) platform flying homemade gliders without mechanical assistance. While the goal is to stay in the air for as long as possible before plunging into the river, contestants are also judged on their costumes, pre-jump performances and how much they have raised for their nominated charity. This year's winner Mark Rees, who man-

aged to jump seven meters (23 feet), literally had his charity strapped to his back.

Rees raised just over Aus\$16,000 (US\$11,300) to support a water filtration system for schools in Asia-Pacific developing nations, with the donations to be matched by his local rotary club in Melbourne. The filtration device is called a "SkyHydrant", a white rocket-shaped object about half his body length. "It's very exciting. As you walk up there and there's pyrotechnics going off and music," Rees told AFP after his plunge into the Yarra. "It's just a wonderful event and ... it's what Melbourne is all about." — AFP



A competitor lands in the Yarra River with his homemade flying device.



A competitor jumps into the Yarra River with his homemade flying device during the annual Birdman Rally at the Moomba Festival.



An acrobat performs for the crowds during the Moomba Festival in Melbourne.



A competitor jumps into the Yarra River with her homemade flying device during the annual Birdman Rally.



A competitor jumps into the Yarra River with his homemade flying device.

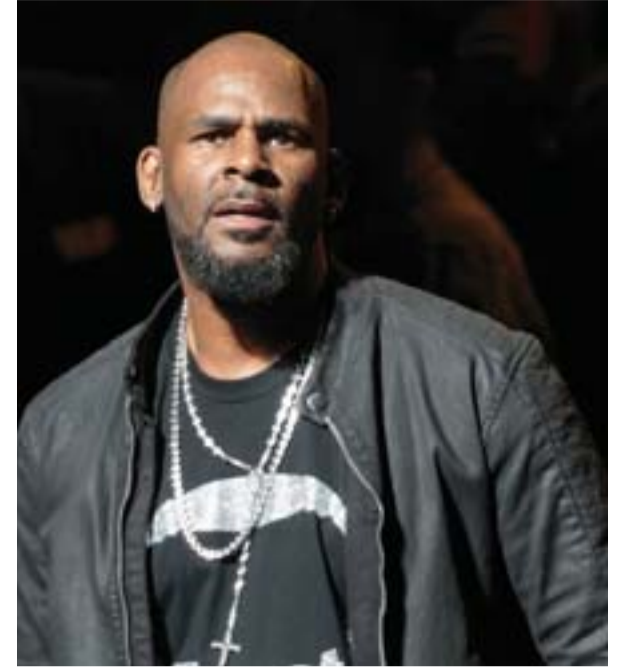
Lifestyle | Gossip

New R Kelly sex abuse tape discovered

One of the lawyers representing women who claim they were abused by R&B star R. Kelly said Sunday a new video tape had emerged which showed the singer "sexually abusing children." Kelly is currently on bail after being accused of sexually abusing four women, including three teenagers, between May 1998 and January 2010. The latest discovery was announced by lawyer Gloria Allred at a press conference where she told journalists it was found by couple Gary and Sallie Dennis in a box of old VHS cassettes at their home. Neither Allred nor Dennis elaborated on how the tape came to be in the couple's possession. "Prior to learning that such a tape was in their possession, Sallie had viewed the Lifetime documentary called 'Surviving R. Kelly,'" said Allred. "She was emotionally very disturbed by what the women in the documentary alleged had happened. "Sometime after that, Sallie and her husband discovered to their surprise that they

had a VHS tape that could be helpful in learning what had happened to these young girls who had come into contact with R. Kelly." Allred said that while she had not viewed a previous tape that had been widely reported in the media, she did not believe it was of the same act. She said it showed "what appeared to be R. Kelly sexually abusing children" but declined to go into further detail. But she urged others who possess such tapes but may be reluctant to admit that they have them to come forward to her or to law enforcement. Gary Dennis said he had made the discovery while going through old sports tapes and trying to decide which ones to keep and which to throw out. "He was telling them what to do and what to say, and it appeared that he was controlling the camera," said Dennis. Dennis said that as a father to two daughters himself, he reacted in horror and his first instinct was to throw the tape out, but after discussing the matter with his wife contacted Allred. The tape is the third to pur-

portedly show Kelly engaging in such acts. The first two have been reported by Michael Avenatti, a lawyer representing other women involved in the case. Multiple women have come forward since the airing of the six-part documentary in January to say the 52-year-old singer had sexual relations with girls under the age of 16 and kept sex slaves. The details of the current criminal case echo previous accusations of sexual misconduct that have dogged the artist for the last two decades. In 2002, he was criminally charged for allegedly filming himself having sex with a 14-year-old girl. He was tried in that case and acquitted of child pornography charges in 2008. A 2017 BuzzFeed report later alleged he had kept women as virtual sex slaves at homes he owns in Chicago and Atlanta.



Inquest reveals Flint died from hanging

Keith Flint's death has been recorded as hanging. The Prodigy singer's body was discovered at his home in Essex on March 4, and an inquest into the cause of his passing was opened then adjourned yesterday. Coroner's officer Lynsey Chaffe revealed his provisional cause of death in the two-minute hearing. She added: "Police attended, all protocols were followed and his death was confirmed as not suspicious." A post-mortem examination was carried out at Broomfield Hospital three days after the 49-year-old singer's death, and further investigations are still under way. A full hearing will take place on July 23 when toxicology results are in. The 'Firestarter' hitmaker's bandmate, Liam Howlett, previously told fans his friend had taken his own life. He wrote on Instagram: "The news is true, I can't believe I'm saying this but our brother Keith took his own life over the weekend. I'm shell shocked, angry, confused and heartbroken r.i.p brother Liam #theprodigy." The 'Breathe' group - which also includes Maxim Reality - hailed Keith as a "true pioneer" and a "legend" in a tribute post on Twitter. They wrote: "It is with deepest shock and sadness that we can confirm the death of our brother and best friend Keith Flint. A true pioneer, innovator and legend. He will be forever missed. We thank you for respecting the privacy of all concerned at this time." In the wake of the tragic news, his band mates have decided to axe their upcoming tour dates.

Lipa won't play festivals in 2019

Dua Lipa is taking a break from festivals in 2019. The 'New Rules' hitmaker has revealed she is focusing the rest of the year on her second studio album - the follow-up to her hugely popular 2017 self-titled debut record - which is due out later this year, and is almost complete, as well as its accompanying tour, which she teased will see her perform on "bigger stages". She said: "I'm not doing any festivals [in 2019], this year is just wrapping up the album and then hopefully release something this year." The 23-year-old star has played the likes of Reading and Leeds and even launched her own Sunny Hill Festival with her father Dukagjin Lipa, in her parents' home city of Prishtina, Kosovo, in 2018. However, getting to play the John Peel Stage - which is named after the legendary late BBC Radio 1 DJ - at Glastonbury, after her album was released, was a huge highlight for the Grammy-winner, who admitted she feels "invincible" on stage. Speaking at the International Live Music Conference (ILMC) in London, she said: "My first ever Glastonbury, just because I'd been

going to the festival for so many years and to get to be that person on stage - the John Peel Stage. "I played that same stage the year after and my album came out and there's no feeling quite like it, it's just the most amazing, exciting butterfly mental thing that happens to you. "It's pretty surreal and I get really nervous before I get on stage and when I get on stage there's something about it, I just feel invincible I guess." The 'Swan Song' hitmaker explained that album number two is "conceptual" and that it will influence her shows. She said: "Now that I've toured and felt that live environment, I make everything with that in mind. "This album, I guess, is a bit more conceptual, but if I told you the concept then I'd have to tell you the album title. "But in that world I'm really thinking about the live show and something new and something different. "Hopefully now I'll get to do shows that are a bit bigger and stages that are a bit bigger and we'll get to play around a bit more with that."



Clarkson enjoyed challenge of playing cop in Out of Blue

Patricia Clarkson enjoyed playing a character who wasn't "traditionally feminine" in 'Out of Blue'. The 59-year-old actress portrays homicide detective Mike Hoolihan in the crime drama and after previously playing the overly feminine Adora Crellin in HBO thriller series 'Sharp Objects' she enjoyed the challenge of being "stripped of all her feminine wiles". In an interview with The Observer newspaper, she said: "I had to shed all of Adora. I had to take those nails off, hair, eyelashes, dresses, undergarments, and just to be stripped of all of my feminine wiles. And I loved it. It was such a seismic shift as an actress, and as a woman - just to walk in every day and put on those heavy, thick-soled boots. To suddenly have no adornments, no frills, nothing to fuss about. It's sexier than I imagined playing a masculine type. Though I never thought of Mike as masculine; I think of her as not feminine

in the traditional way." The upcoming film, which is based on Martin Amis' novel 'Night Train', follows Mike as she investigates the death of an astrophysicist (Mamie Gummer) and realizes that her own childhood memories relate to the case. The 'Untouchables' actress explained that she was originally drawn to her character but was soon hooked on the story, and added that the original novel is "very different" to the film. She said: "I'm always first drawn to the character, because that's the journey that I have to take, and that's the journey that will cause me grief. Then I started to realise the unusual disparate worlds I was in. This very grounded, unadorned, monosyllabic, insular woman, with astrophysics, the cosmos, existentialism and Martin Amis! The film is very different from the book, and that's also beautiful."

Theron has empathy for Kelly after Fair and Balanced

Charlize Theron has "empathy" for Megyn Kelly after playing her in 'Fair and Balanced'. The Academy Award-winning actress plays the American TV presenter in an upcoming drama about the fall of Fox News CEO Roger Ailes, who under advice from a supervisor didn't speak out against the alleged sexual harassment and assault she faced at the hands of the disgraced CEO. The 'Atomic Blonde' star explained that she wasn't aware of "how complicated" the entire story was and says many people didn't understand the "complicated place" Megyn, 48, was in. Speaking to Variety, Charlize, 43, said: "I didn't know how complicated her situation was and I think for a lot of people, they didn't understand why she didn't just speak up. "She was in a complicated place and as a human being, I have empathy for that. I don't think a lot of people truly understood that." Charlize went on to explain that she didn't attempt to meet Megyn before making the film - which focuses on the story of a woman at Fox News who decided to fight back against harassment and intimidation, which led to Ailes being fired by the TV network - as she wanted to keep her "perspective" and a meeting could "get emotional". She said: "I think it's important for us to tell the story from afar and I think it's hard for me as an actor to have perspective. I don't know. It could get emotional, but other people on our crew [did meet her]. The 'Monster' actress previously stated that the movie, helmed by Jay Roach, is an "important story" and insisted the project is "in the right hands". She explained: "I think it's an important story. It was written really well, and I think it was the writing, and the filmmaker, that made me realize it was in the right hands."



Eisenberg hopes Zombieland 2 has heart of first film

Jesse Eisenberg wants 'Zombieland 2' to be as "personal and funny" as the first film. The 35-year-old actor has revealed that shooting on the sequel to the 2009 horror comedy, which is currently known as 'Zombieland: Doubletap', is going "really well" and says that the cast are working "so hard" to replicate the positive fan reaction that the first movie garnered. Speaking at the SXSW Conference and Festival, he said: "It's

going really well. Just resting on our laurels and being really cocky! "No, the opposite. We're working so hard. It's one of these movies that, people loved it for personal reasons. So it's not just a big hit movie. People love it for personal reasons so you want to make sure it's as funny and as personal as the other one." The 'Social Network' star will return as Columbus alongside Woody Harrelson, Emma Stone and Abigail Breslin who all reprise their roles from the original movie. Luke Wilson, Zoey Deutch and Rosario Dawson have been confirmed as new characters, but it is not yet known who they will play. The film will be set in a post-apocalyptic world which sees slayers facing new breeds of zombies, as well as encountering some fresh human survivors. The first movie was a huge success when it was released a decade ago, and in the US it over-performed with a box office haul of \$75 million from a budget of under \$25 million. Production is set to start this month, and a release this coming October will mean the project will fall on the 10th anniversary of its predecessor. 'Deadpool' writers Paul Wernick and Rhett Reese will be back penning the scripts, while they will be reunited with director Ruben Fleischer at the helm.



DEVITO'S STRONG BOND WITH BURTON MADE DUMBO 'EVEN BETTER'

Danny DeVito says his long-standing working relationship with Tim Burton made 'Dumbo' "even better". The 74-year-old Hollywood legend portrays circus ringmaster Max Medici in Disney's upcoming live-action remake of the classic tale about a flying elephant, and he says his history with the iconic filmmaker, having been under his helm in movies such as 'Mars Attacks' and 'Batman Returns', made their time on set a breeze because they have so much "trust" for one another. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', DeVito said: "Because of the fact that you can come onto the set and talk about things like remember 'Batman Returns' and things that we did together, 'Big Fish' and 'Mars Attacks', him visiting my set, me visiting his set. "All this kind of stuff that you do in the



movie business, those things are adding to the fact that you trust each other and you are able to move forward, and maybe contribute and make it even better." The 'Matilda' actor's co-star Michael Keaton - who plays entrepreneur V.A. Vandevere in the movie - added that whenever he gets a call from Burton to star in one of his films, he never turns him down. Keaton added: "When I personally get a call, and I bet Danny would say the same, you pretty much say, 'Yeah, I'm gonna be there.' "So you just kind of show up and it's never disappointing." The 'Jack Frost' star - who also starred in Burton's 1992 sequel 'Batman Returns' and the original, plus his fantasy horror franchise 'Beetlejuice' - quipped that even if they make a bad film one day, it will still be a blast to work together. He laughed: "Some day we are going to make a really horrifically bad movie - and it's still going to be fun to make." Burton also agreed with his colleagues that their strong bond of more than two decades has been crucial to making great movies together, and admitted that it was "very strange" how he got on with Keaton immediately the first time they met. He explained: "But, also, I've seen the guy for 20 years, right. "And all of a sudden, the next day I worked with him, it was like I'd just seen him the other day and that is a very strange feeling to have in your life when you haven't seen someone in so long and it's boom, like I saw him yesterday. "It's a very strange feeling." — Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Features

Slovakia's ice church draws visitors closer to heavens'

A young nun breathes deeply as she peers up at a statue of an angel bathed in softly coloured light streaming through a church, and as she exhales, you can see her breath. Instead of wood or bricks and mortar, this chilly house of worship perched among the snowy peaks of Slovakia's High Tatra Mountains has been built from massive crystal-clear blocks of ice. At 1,285 meters (4,200 feet) above sea level, the ice replica of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome is higher than any of Slovakia's 4,158 churches, more than half of them Roman Catholic. Although it has not been consecrated, another visitor, Zlatica Janakova from southern Slovakia, says it feels like a real church. "It's so good for your soul: it provides you with tranquillity," she whispers.

"I'm glad to see people crossing themselves and praying inside," says Slovak chief sculptor Adam Bakos. The interior boasts sculptures modelled on the works of Italian masters side-by-side with those of chamois, marmots and other wildlife native to the High Tatras. "I gave them a free hand with the decoration, so each artist added their signature style to the sculptures," Bakos said.

Slovak-Greek artist Achilleas Sdoukos designed and produced stained-glass decorations incorporated into the temple's icy walls. The building material, namely 1,880 ice blocks weighing a total of 225 tons, was imported from neighboring Poland. "We tried different suppliers, from the Netherlands, England, Norway and Hungary, but Polish ice seemed to have the highest quality,

'All of nature is inside and around this temple'

"All of nature is inside and around this temple," she adds, gazing at the surrounding alpine vistas. Englishman Martin, who declined to give his surname, describes it as a "beautiful, religious place, so peaceful and calm". Since 2013, ice sculptors have flocked to the Slovak Tatra mountain hamlet of Hrebienok every winter to build a Tatra Ice Temple, or scaled-down replica of a famous church using only crystal-clear ice blocks. This year, it's an 11-metre (36-foot) tall version of the 16th-century Vatican basilica, complete with the imposing two half-circle wings of Bernini's colonnade. A quarter of a million tourists last year took the short funicular ride up the mountain to see the ice replica of Barcelona's soaring and intricate Sagrada Familia.

Ice almighty

A team of 16 sculptors from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Wales and the United States worked 12 hours a day for a month to create this year's ice temple. On Sundays, the venue vibrates with the sounds of sacred music con-

it really looks like glass if kept cold enough," says Rastislav Kromka, technical director of the Tatra Ice Temple.

Challenging

With an unusually warm winter threatening to melt details on their sculpture, Bakos and his team covered it with a geodesic dome, measuring 25 meters in diameter. They also installed refrigeration units to ensure a bone-chilling minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit) to keep the ice solid. "Cold wind was blowing in our faces from the AC (air conditioning) all day long. "It was like a chopper ride in January.

"Once we were done, I didn't even want to open the freezer at home anymore," he jokes. More than 15 carpenters helped sculptors with the demanding task of stacking the ice blocks, each weighing 125 kilograms (275 pounds). "It took us more time to stack the blocks than to carve them," Bakos said. "Ice is also an extremely fragile material, you must be very gentle with it or details tend to fall off. We used only water to glue



the pieces together," he said.

Cool wedding

Visiting the ice temple is free. It is funded by the Tatra tourism organization, the transport and construction ministry and other partners. Only cold air and water are used to maintain the ice church. "It is not only that visitors touch the walls of the temple, they also breathe out warm air and come in sipping hot tea," Kromka said. When winter is over, the ice structure is smashed to pieces, the cooling system switched off and the ice carried outside to melt on the ground.

Open annually from November until late April,

the ice temple is also becoming a hotspot for destination weddings. "Here... we are perhaps the closest to our spiritual selves and our respective religions," says Veronika Littvova, head of tourism for the High Tatra region, much of which is pristine and protected national parkland. She is also convinced that ice temple weddings lead to long, lucky unions. "Thanks to that huge amount of ice, I believe that marriages entered into here will be preserved and last forever." — AFP

Tourists sledge in front of Tatra Ice Temples at Hrebienok, High Tatras mountains resort in eastern Slovakia. — AFP photos



A tourist visits a Tatra Ice Temple at Hrebienok, High Tatras mountains resort in eastern Slovakia.

World's first graffiti-busting laser helps Florence's 'Angels'

A beam of silver light erases scrawled black letters on Florence's historic Ponte Vecchio, as "Angels" wielding a revolutionary new laser wage war on graffiti in the UNESCO site. Gold glints in the windows of the tiny jeweler boutiques that line the medieval stone bridge, but it is the scribbled messages left by tourists, and passionate declarations by would-be Romeos, that catch the eye. "My big cat, I love you," reads one, while others feature interlocking hearts or clumsily drawn flowers.

Now a team of volunteers in the Tuscan city dubbed the "Angels of Beauty" is determined to restore famous monuments to their former glory thanks to a latest-generation infrared wand, donated by Italian laser developer El.En. Group. "The laser evaporates the graffiti, without damaging the stone underneath," Daniela Valentini, who heads up the Angels' team of cultural heritage restorers, told AFP as she pointed the fiber laser's beam at a scrawled signature.

"Some graffiti is more difficult to remove, certain colours like silver and red for example. And it also depends how long it has been there and how porous the stone is," she said. There is a sizzle as a white "I was here"

message is burned off the grey stone by the 56-year old, a professional restorer who dons protective glasses for the painstaking task, as curious tourists stop to watch.

"We have cleaned up areas in at least 28 UNESCO world heritage sites around the world," said El.En general manager Paolo Salvadeo. The lasers strip dirt from everything from frescoes to statues and bronzes. The company, which specializes in designing and manufacturing medical and industrial lasers, has donated devices capable of restoring artwork to museums around the world, including the MOMA in New York and the Vatican.

Love-struck vandals

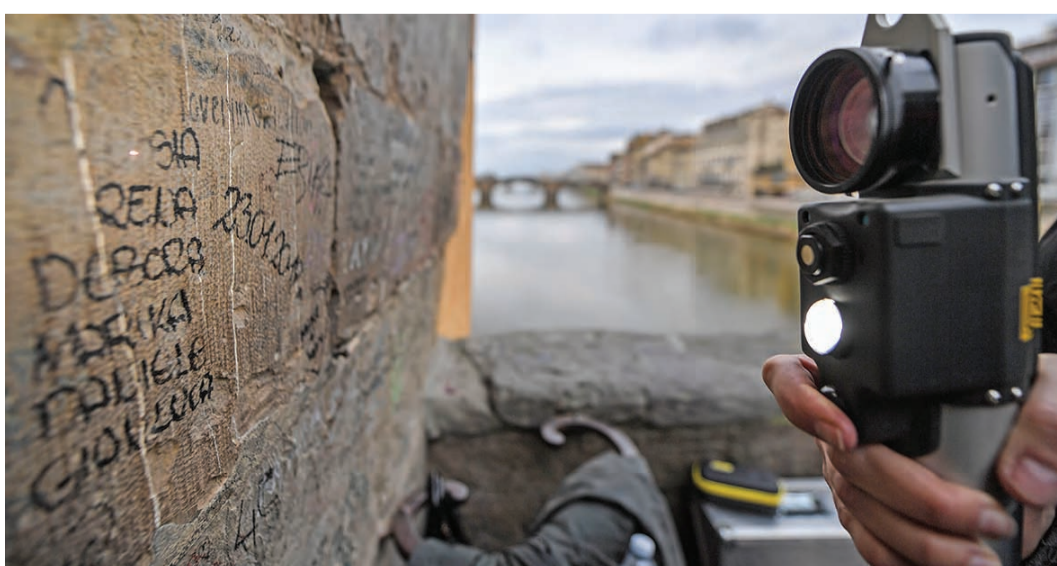
But the laser given to the Angels in Florence is the first to be designed to strip graffiti away—and do so quickly. It is still a relatively lengthy task: restorers using the device, which has a market worth of some 70,000 euros, can take up to 20 minutes to clean a 10 centimeter square piece of wall. "The (common) technique of sand-blasting always removes a tiny part of the surface being treated... whereas the laser can restore monuments in a city once home to great masters like Botticelli and Michelangelo," Salvadeo said.

Pensioner Roberto Lepri, 67, is on his second day as an Angel. The former electrician, who was born just a stone's throw from the bridge, underwent special training to prepare him for his new role as a graffiti-eraser. "We all need to do what we can to stop the city being degraded by spray paint. It'll take time, but I have lots of that now," he said. The laser, which has also been tried at the Tuscan city's Galleria della Carrozze (Coaches Gallery), will be the Angels' weapon of choice wherever hooligans with pens or spray cans strike.

An area of the bridge cleaned in January has already been re-vandalized, a situation Valentini admits is "very frustrating". "I'd like the kids to see how long it takes them to scribble their message, and then how much time and energy it takes for us to remove them," she said. But Salvadeo is more sympathetic to those who act foolishly because they are in love. "People fall for someone, get a tattoo of their new love's name, or graffiti it on a wall. They then split up and their new partner wants the tattoo or message gone. That's where we come in," he said. —AFP



Paolo Salvadeo, general manager of Italian laser industry group El En, poses by graffiti on the Ponte Vecchio medieval arch bridge over the Arno river in Florence, Tuscany. — AFP photos



A volunteer from the Beauty Angels (Angeli del Bello) environmental association, uses a powerful laser blaster to remove a graffiti from the Ponte Vecchio medieval arch bridge over the Arno river in Florence, Tuscany.

Algeria museum vandalized during protests

Algeria's oldest museum, home to some of the country's most valuable art, was vandalized during protests against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term, the culture ministry said Saturday. "Criminals" took advantage of thousands-strong demonstrations on Friday to break into the National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts in Algiers, founded in 1897, the ministry said in a statement. "Part of the museum was ransacked, objects stolen and administrative offices burned, as well as documents and records being destroyed," the ministry said.

Firefighters arrived promptly and prevented the blaze from spreading, while police had managed to retrieve a sabre dating from the time of the Algerian resistance to the French conquest of Algeria in the early 19th century, it said. Tens of thousands protested across Algeria on Friday in the biggest rallies yet against ailing Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in April polls. The police fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse those who tried to force their way through a police cordon, but most demonstrators dispersed calmly as darkness fell.

The ministry called the acts at the museum "a crime against a historical heritage that covers several important stages of Algerian popular history". Founded during the French occupation of Algeria, which lasted from 1830 to 1962, the museum is one of the oldest in Africa and covers over 2,500 years of history and art. Police had not yet identified those responsible, the ministry said, adding that security had been reinforced Saturday and that "criminals" had already attempted to enter the site during a previous protest on March 1.

The museum lies at a major crossroads close to the presidential palace in Algiers. The junction was the scene of clashes Friday between young protesters and police, while demonstrations elsewhere in the city passed off in relative calm.



An Ethiopian Orthodox priest Mekonnen Fatne (right) poses near the church of Saint Mary which is covered by a shelter to protect its rock-hewn structure from erosion in Lalibela, Ethiopia. — AFP photos



An Ethiopian Orthodox pilgrim sits near a shelter protecting the rock-hewn structure of the House of the Saviour of the World church from erosion in Lalibela.



Ethiopian Orthodox devotees walk between the rock-hewn churches of Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael.

Macron Ethiopia visit raises hopes for ancient stone-carved churches

Priest Mekonnen Fatne stood among his Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, looking upon a nine-centuries-old church they feared could be wrecked at any minute. Over the church loomed a massive tarpaulin screen supported by a lattice of metal, one of four shelters erected to protect the northern Ethiopian town of Lalibela's historic churches, but which residents worry—despite experts' assurances—could obliterate them. "If this were to collapse, do you think there

from rock and sit below ground level, surrounded by deep, dry moats, with only their roofs visible. The courtyards surrounding these extraordinary places of worship are reachable only by staircases and tunnels.

Preservationists say the shelters erected in 2008 to keep rain off the churches pose no threat, but the structures have nonetheless become a symbol of the neglect Lalibela residents say they, and the complex, endure. "We are

The rock-hewn churches stand up to 15 metres (42 feet) tall, replete with ornate designs and windows carved in the shape of crosses, but their rock composition leaves them vulnerable to erosion from the intense downpours of Ethiopia's rainy season. The Italian-built shelters that protect some of the churches have earned the ire of residents who claim they are ugly and could collapse in strong wind.

"It's like revenge by the Italians!" Negash Adamu, a 27-year-old Lalibela resident, said in reference to Ethiopia's repeated conflicts with Italian colonizers. Priests and worshippers at the complex complain the shelters' heavy support pillars have damaged the underground Trinity chapel, its roof cracking under the weight of the support pylon.

The chapel is not open to the public. Locals also worry about the soundness of the shelters, which came with a 10-year guarantee. "We want a permanent restoration, and we want the shelter to be removed," said Tsigieslassie Mazgebu, the complex's parish priest. "There is a big possibility that if it falls on the treasure, it would demolish it."

Lack of trust

Last year, Lalibela residents sporting shirts reading "save Lalibela", staged a protest over the churches' condition, according to Negash. Hailu Zeleke Woldetsadik, director of cultural heritage conservation at Ethiopia's Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, insisted there was no cause for alarm. He denied any damage had been done to the Trinity chapel, and said the shelters were designed to stand safely beyond their 10-year warranty. "There is no imminent danger," he told AFP, adding that the structures were designed to sway in heavy winds, rather than strain to breaking point.

Kidanemariam Woldegiorgis, an archaeologist who grew up in Lalibela, blamed the controversy on a lack of consultation with town residents, which stoked suspicion. "It's not clear, it's not transparent what they are doing," he said. Hailu said Abiy and Macron will sign an agreement for the temporary shelters' maintenance and the hiring of scientists to look into permanently restoring damaged churches. This could pave the way for the shelters' replacement with lighter structures, possibly ones that can open and close depending on the weather, while repairs are done. — AFP



Ethiopian Orthodox devotees chant near the rock-hewn church of Saint Emmanuel in Lalibela.

would be any piece of the church left?" the priest asked, gesturing to the thick metal rods plunging into the red earth around Bete Maryam church.

French President Emmanuel Macron is set to arrive in Ethiopia on Tuesday afternoon as the country grapples with the aftermath of a plane crash close to capital Addis Ababa, which killed all 157 people on board. Macron and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed are scheduled to travel to Lalibela later this week, for a visit locals hope will result in a new plan, money and expertise for the complex's renewal. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1978, the Lalibela churches are unique. They are carved

here because of the heritage," said Yitibek Getu, a deacon at the complex. "If there's no heritage, imagine what will happen?"

Ancient history

Lalibela takes its name from King Gebre Mesqel Lalibela, a 13th-century leader who local lore holds built 11 churches with the help of angels after God ordered him to build a "New Jerusalem". Located 680 kilometers (420 miles) north of Addis Ababa, Lalibela is a popular destination for foreign tourists and followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith—the country's largest religion.



Tsigieslassie Mazgebu, an Ethiopian Orthodox priest, poses in front of the church of the House of the Savior of the World.



An Ethiopian Orthodox artist paints postcards in Lalibela.



People walk near an entrance of the church of Saint Mary.



Ethiopian Orthodox devotees enter inside a tunnel leading to the rock-hewn church of Saint Emmanuel.



Tourists walk next to the rock-hewn church of Saint George in Lalibela.



An Ethiopian Orthodox priest steps out of a room of the rock-hewn church of the House of the Savior of the World.



Ethiopian Orthodox pilgrim sit near the church of the House of the Saviour of the World.

Classifieds

Tuesday, March 12, 2019



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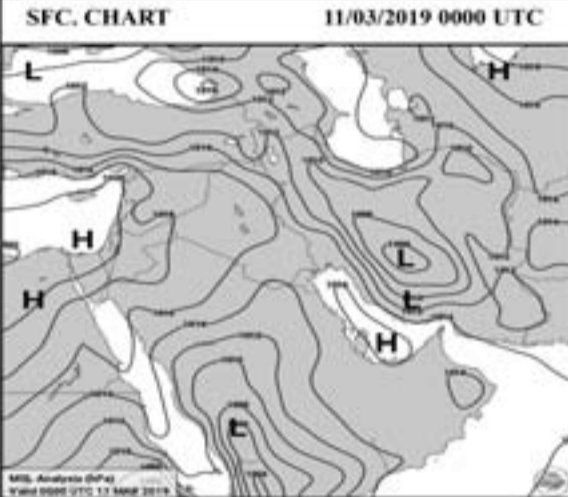
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cool with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 11/03/2019 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	14 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	07 °C			
ABDALY	25 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C			
JAHLA	26 °C	10 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	24 °C	13 °C			
SALMIYAH	24 °C	16 °C			
AHMADI	22 °C	15 °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	11 °C			
WAFRA	25 °C	09 °C			
SALMY	24 °C	07 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	03/12	Warm	26 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Wednesday	03/13	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain later on	27 °C	12 °C	SE	10 - 40 km/h
Thursday	03/14	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundersy at times - rising	27 °C	13 °C	SE	25 - 60 km/h
Friday	03/15	Warm	27 °C	12 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:43
Sunrise	06:02
Zuhr	11:58
Asr	15:21
Sunset	17:54
Isha	19:10

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	25 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	64 %
MIN. RH	17 %
MAX. Wind	NW 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

SITUATION VACANT

A maid is needed to work as a part time in a house in Salmiya, must be well organized and can speak English. Tel: 66417504. (C 5450) 12-3-2019

EMERGENCY

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Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	
22418064/5/6	
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Indian Airlines	22456700
Oman Air	22958787



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

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Tuesday 12/3/2019				Departure Flights on Tuesday 12/3/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	KAC	545	Cairo	13:30
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	JZR	113	Doha	13:30
THY	766	ISL	00:30	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	MSC	412	Asyut	13:30
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	JZR	611	Tbilisi	13:40
JZR	722	Alexandria	00:55	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10
KAC	102	London	01:20	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:40
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	743	Dammam	15:55
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
JZR	1736	Cairo	03:00	KAC	619	Doha	16:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:05	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
RBG	211	Luxor	03:05	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	FEG	342	Sohag	16:25
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	606	Luxor	03:10	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:40
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:45
LMU	5510	Cairo	04:00	JZR	105	Bahrain	16:55
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	SYR	342	Damascus	17:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	FDB	052	Dubai	17:40
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	KAC	283	Dhaka	17:45
UAE	873	Dubai	04:55	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	QTR	1073	Doha	17:50
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	JZR	253	Amman	18:15
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:30	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	JZR	501	Lahore	18:40
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55
KAC	362	Colombo	06:10	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	JZR	721	Alexandria	19:20
THY	6376	Istanbul	06:30	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	MSR	2621	Cairo	19:30
BAW	157	London	07:05	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
KAC	204	Lahore	07:10	RJA	641	Amman	20:00
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
KAC	358	Kochi	07:35	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
FEG	241	Alexandria	07:40	JZR	1735	Cairo	20:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	NIA	0162	Cairo	20:30
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	304	Mumbai	08:20	KAC	301	Mumbai	20:35
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:55
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	JZR	401	Mumbai	21:00
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	KAC	357	Kochi	20:55
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
IRA	675	Lar	09:40	DLH	624	Dammam	21:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	QTR	1089	Doha	22:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	KAC	1543	Cairo	22:15
IRC	6507	Shiraz	10:30	KAC	205	Islamabad	22:15
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
KAC	624	Doha	10:40	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
JZR	116	Doha	11:10	KAC	383	Delhi	22:30
JZR	122	Dubai	11:10	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	303	Mumbai	22:50
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	UAE	860	Dubai	23:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	JAI	573	Mumbai	23:00
MSC	411	Asyut	12:30	KAC	411	Bangkok	23:00
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	RBG	214	Sohag	23:10
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	KAC	795	Madinah	23:15
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
JZR	142	Al Najaf	12:50				

New Assad statue triggers protest in cradle of revolt

Major investors eye opportunities in Saudi Arabia

DUBAI/RIYADH: Big investors in Saudi Arabia are pushing ahead with deals and pouring money back into its stock market as the kingdom tries to move on from the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. His killing at the hands of Saudi agents in October strained ties with Western allies and Riyadh is keen to repair its image. It wants to attract foreign capital and knowhow as part of its Vision 2030 plan of reforms to diversify the economy of the world's top oil exporter and create jobs for Saudis.

Deterred by the case, some Western firms in the technology and entertainment sectors have distanced themselves from Saudi Arabia. But several US multinationals told Reuters they are building on their plans in the largest Arab economy. Dow Chemical said it was committed to construction of a \$100 million polymer plant in Jubail and will complete a feasibility study by the end of 2019 for another complex to produce siloxanes and silicones.

Technology and manufacturing group Honeywell International Inc is going ahead with projects as part of a \$3.6 billion agreement in 2017 to deliver projects localizing goods and services for state oil giant Saudi Aramco. General Electric Co said it was building on \$15 billion of Saudi deals it signed in 2017. "We continue to build upon our agreements to support local infrastructure and growth across the power, oil and gas, healthcare, aviation and digital sectors," a GE spokesman said.

Riyadh wants to show it is business as usual. It sent a senior delegation to the World Economic Forum in Davos and packed executives' agendas with meetings. Last month it announced \$54.4 billion in deals and offered fresh incentives under a 10-year industrial program that aims to attract \$427 billion in investment. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is the driving force behind the reforms, agreed several deals last month during an Asian tour including \$28 billion with China. Riyadh also wound down a 15-month anti-corruption campaign that netted scores of senior princes, ministers and top businessmen and unnerved investors.

Foreign investors appear to have taken note. They poured 6.94 billion riyals (\$1.85 billion) into the Saudi market in the first two months of 2019, according to Saudi stock exchange data. The index is up more than 8 percent, outper-

forming its Gulf peers, compared to a fall of about 9 percent within two weeks of Khashoggi's disappearance and killing. Several executives pulled out of a major investment forum in Riyadh last year but a Western diplomat said this year's event is expected to attract big names. "Business tends to forget more quickly than social conscience," the diplomat said.

Investors are now looking ahead to the inclusion of Saudi stocks in the MSCI's emerging markets benchmark this year and focusing on the pace of economic reforms, bankers say. "There's too much opportunity for investment in Saudi Arabia," said Nick Wilson, chairman of the \$100 million Gulf Investment Fund which plans to increase its exposure to the Saudi stocks it sees benefiting from reforms. "A nasty thing like that happens and shakes people up for a couple of weeks but at the end of the day business is business." He pointed to projects to boost the economy such as the \$500 billion business zone NEOM.

Thomas Barrack, executive chairman at US investment management firm Colony Capital told a conference in Abu Dhabi last month it was a mistake "to dictate what we think is the moral code". Colony Capital has agreed to buy a stake in the property business of France's Accor alongside Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), the financial vehicle behind Vision 2030.

Other Western firms have distanced themselves from the PIF, which has more than \$250 billion in assets under management. British billionaire Richard Branson in October said his Virgin Group suspended talks with the PIF over a planned \$1 billion investment in the group's space ventures and suspended his directorship in two Saudi tourism projects. A Virgin Group spokesman said the statement still stands.

Hollywood talent agency Endeavor and PIF "parted ways" after talks on the fund investing \$400 million, a source familiar with the matter said. Hollywood companies had concerns about the reputational impact on their businesses after Khashoggi's killing, a second source said. The PIF had been eyeing up to a \$700 million stake in US movie studio Legendary Entertainment but is facing resistance from executives at Legendary. Reuters had reported earlier. A source familiar with the matter said the deal still faced the same issues.

The bad publicity has deterred some potential entrants to the market fearing a backlash at home, another Western diplomat said, while firms new to Saudi need "hand-holding". "I think it's going to take one year or two before people really begin to say Saudi Arabia is the place we want to be," Mark Mobius, a prominent emerging market investor, told reporters in Dubai this week. — Reuters

AMMAN: Hundreds of Syrians in the southern city of Daraa protested on Sunday at the erection of a new statue of President Bashar Al-Assad's late father, nearly eight years after the original was toppled at the outbreak of Syria's civil war. Demonstrators and witnesses said residents walked through the war-ravaged old quarter of the city calling for Assad's overthrow, days before the eighth anniversary of the start of the conflict.

"Syria is ours, not for the house of Assad," protesters chanted as security forces closed off the area to stop residents from other parts of the city joining the demonstration. Daraa was where peaceful protests against 40 years of autocratic Assad family rule began in 2011, and were met by deadly force, before spreading across the country. The Syrian army, aided by Russian airpower and Iranian militias, retook control of Daraa from rebel forces in July on its way to regaining control of the bulk of Syrian territory.

But since then, residents of Daraa say disaffection has been growing as Assad's secret police once more tighten their control and a campaign of arrests has sowed widespread fear. The government had given schools and government employees a day off on Sunday to attend a pro-government rally to inaugurate the new bronze statue of late president Hafez Al-Assad, erected on the site of the previous statue felled by protesters.

That rally broke up after gunfire from near the square caused panic among attendees, a witness said. A group of youths protesting in Daraa's old quarter carried a placard reading: "It will fall. Your statue is from the past, it's not welcome here." Lawyer and activist Adnan Masalma said: "People have gathered without organization and to peacefully demonstrate over just demands."

Taleban leader Omar lived next...

Continued from Page 1

hundred metres from his hideout. He later moved to a second building but soon afterwards the Pentagon constructed Forward Operating Base Wolverine - home to 1,000 US troops, and where American and British special forces were sometimes based - close by. He dared not move again, Dam says, rarely going outside and often hiding in tunnels when US planes flew over.

Though he listened to the BBC's evening Pashto-language news broadcasts, even when Omar learned about the death of al-Qaeda supreme Osama Bin Laden he rarely commented on the outside world, the book says. It says he delegated Taleban leadership after 2001, acting more as a spiritual leader to the group. The book claims that Omar became ill in 2013 and refused to travel to Pakistan for treatment, later dying in Zabul.

The Afghan government said it "strongly" rejected the "delusional" claim. "(W)e see it as an effort to create and build an identify for the Taleban and their foreign backers," tweeted Haroon Chakhansuri, a spokesman for the Afghan presidency. "We have sufficient evidence which shows he lived and died in Pakistan. Period!" Former CIA director and US military commander in Afghanistan David Petraeus also appeared skeptical. "I would be very surprised if Mullah Omar would have taken the risk that we could come calling some evening," said Petraeus, according to

Airlines ground Boeing MAX 8...

Continued from Page 1

It said it had grounded its fleet of six remaining Boeing 737 MAX 8 planes pending analysis of the black box data. China also ordered domestic airlines to suspend commercial operation of the MAX 8. There were eight Chinese nationals among the 149 passengers and eight crew on the Ethiopia flight.

Indonesia, which has 11 of the MAX 8 model planes, said it would "carry out inspections and temporarily prohibit Boeing 737 Max 8 from flying". Cayman Airways grounded both of its new 737 MAX 8 jets temporarily too, while India announced a safety review. South Korea ordered an inspection of two MAX 8 planes flown by low-cost Eastar Jet. Some other airlines said they were not cancelling MAX 8 flights, including Oman Air, flydubai, Turkish Airlines, and Russia's S7.

Boeing has described the MAX series as its fastest-selling aeroplane ever, with more than 5,000 orders placed to date from about 100 customers. State-owned Ethiopian Airlines, Africa's largest carrier, had ordered 30 MAX 8 jets in total, and China has received 76 from an order of 180. The plane that crashed on Sunday was less than four months old. Ethiopian Airlines said it was delivered on Nov 15.

The jet fell near the village of Tulu Fara, some 60 km east of Addis Ababa. "The plane was already on fire when it crashed to the ground. The crash caused a big explosion," one witness, Tegegn Dechasa, told AFP. Another, farmer Sisay Gemechu, said the plane seemed to be aiming to land on an open field, but crashed before reaching it. Inhabitants of the remote area looked on from behind a security cordon as inspectors searched the crash site and excavated it with a mechanical digger. The single-aisle Boeing left a deep, black crater at the impact site.

"The plane was very close to the ground and it made a turn. We looked and saw papers falling off the plane," Malka Galato, the farmer whose land the plane crashed on, told Reuters from the rural area where horse-drawn

After Daraa surrendered to government forces last summer, many residents chose to stay rather than head to remaining rebel-held areas in northern Syria, where tens of thousands of others displaced from recaptured areas have gathered. "The country has been destroyed and, instead of reconstruction, we place memorials," read another protest placard.

The Syrian authorities have reinstalled several large statues of the elder Assad after military victories that have seen his son regain most of the territory once held by rebels. Many residents in Daraa province complain that services have not been fully restored and that there are chronic power shortages, while many young men fear a campaign of military conscription to fight the remaining rebels.

Some residents say Iranian-backed local militias now hold sway in strategically located southern Syria, bordering Jordan and Israel's Golan Heights to the west, and that the militias act with impunity since the central government is too weak to impose its authority on the area. The growing dissent in the province is blamed for a spate of attacks on army checkpoints, which the authorities blame on rebels operating covertly.

On Twitter, Syria's opposition chief praised the demonstrators' bravery. "What can we say to those under the rule of iron and fire and who daringly and bravely step out raising the slogans of the first revolution," Nasr Al-Hariri wrote. "After years of torture, suffering, killing, displacement and destruction, Syria's spring is again blooming." The war has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests. Hafez Al-Assad ruled Syria with an iron fist for 30 years before he died in 2000 and was succeeded by his son. — Agencies

the Wall Street Journal.

"I have piles & piles of evidence which shows he lived & died in Pakistan," tweeted Amrullah Saleh, who was head of Afghan intelligence from 2004-2010. Afghan officials have repeatedly accused Pakistan of harboring Taleban insurgents. For their part, the Taleban - who at times have been criticized in Afghanistan for their alleged links to Pakistan - said the claim was accurate. "This is true," militant spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP. "The late Mullah Sahib was in Zabul province all along, and there was an American base nearby, the Americans did carry out a raid there, and he passed away there."

Omar's Taleban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, and has waged an insurgency since then. The US and Taleban have remained tight-lipped about the most recent round of talks in Doha, which have been ongoing for two weeks, sparking expectations that they may be inching closer to a deal that could see Washington exit the nearly 18-year conflict.

"The book underlines the failure of Western intelligence at a time when US and Taleban officials are holding peace talks to end the 17-year-old war in Afghanistan," Dam said. In July 2015, the Taleban officially confirmed Omar had been dead for more than two years. Omar's eldest son, Mohammad Yaqoob, said in an audio tape released in Sept 2015 that his father had been suffering from hepatitis C and died in Afghanistan. Dam has previously published a book on Afghanistan and is a guest lecturer on Afghanistan at Sciences Po in Paris. Dam's book was published in Dutch last month, and will be available in English shortly. — Agencies

carriages ply rough roads. "Cows that were grazing in the fields ran in panic ... There was smoke and sparks coming from the back of the plane." The plane tried to climb but failed, then swerved sharply trailing white smoke and objects including clothes before crashing, said farmer Tamarat Abera, who was walking nearby.

Ethiopian Airlines said the pilot was given clearance to turn around after indicating problems shortly before the plane disappeared from radar. The airline's chief executive Tewolde Gebremariam said the plane had flown in from Johannesburg early Sunday, spent three hours in Addis and was "dispatched with no remark", meaning no problems were flagged, before leaving for Nairobi. A committee comprising Ethiopian Airlines, aviation and transport authorities was set up to lead the crash investigation. US experts and Boeing will also take part. Boeing cancelled the scheduled presentation today of its new long-haul jet, the 777X.

The crash cast a pall over a gathering of the UN Environment Program, which opened in Nairobi yesterday. At least 22 staff from several UN agencies were on the doomed flight. Delegates hugged and comforted one another as they arrived at the meeting with the UN flag flying at half-mast. Details of the passengers, including tourists, business travellers and humanitarian workers, have started to emerge.

Among them was Cedric Asiavugwa, a Kenyan third-year student at Georgetown University Law School in Washington. He was heading for a visit home ahead of his graduation in the spring, he university said. Kenya had the highest death toll among the nationalities on the flight with 32, according to Ethiopian Airlines. Canada was next with 18 victims. There were nine Ethiopians and eight each from Italy and the United States. The airline said Britain and France each had seven people on board, Egypt six, and Germany five. France, however, put its death toll at nine.

Italian archaeologist Sebastiano Tusa, 66, died in the crash, his wife Valeria Patrizia Li Vigni was quoted as saying by the Corriere della Sera newspaper. On Sunday, "the friends I met at mass said I shouldn't worry because bad news travels fast", she said. "In the end it arrived anyway, and it destroyed my life. I felt the disaster coming... He hadn't even wanted to go." — Agencies

Rouhani hits back at US on...

Continued from Page 1

like America", he said before flying yesterday to Baghdad for the three-day visit.

"America is despised in the region. The bombs that the Americans dropped on Iraqis, Syrian people and other countries cannot be forgotten," he added. Iran is always ready to help its neighbors, he said, in a nod to the role Tehran played to help Iraq battle the Islamic State group (IS). Iraq's President Barham Saleh, at a joint news conference with Rouhani in Baghdad, thanked Iran for its "support" and said he was "lucky" to have it as a neighbor, without making any reference to the US. Rouhani, who is heading a large political and economic delegation, said relations between the two countries should be further "reinforced and developed".

The Iranian president later had a meeting with Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, during which he highlighted the political, trade and energy links between the two neighbors. After Turkey, Iran is the top supplier of imported goods to Iraq, including cars, gas, home appliances and vegetables. Iran was the first country to respond to Iraqi calls for help after IS militants in June 2014 captured the main northern city of Mosul as they threatened to overrun the capital Baghdad and the oil-rich region of Kirkuk.

It dispatched "military advisors" and equipment

along with the famous Revolutionary Guards elite Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani. Rouhani yesterday said Iran has supported the Iraqi people "during difficult times" and would continue to back them "through times of peace and security". Relations between the two countries were not always close - they fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988. Tehran's influence in Baghdad grew after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq toppled the government of Saddam Hussein. Iran now has significant leverage over Iraq's Shiite political groups.

Rouhani is also set to meet Iraq's chief Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who is revered by many Iranians. The meeting in the Shiite shrine city of Najaf will be the first between the top cleric and an Iranian president. In 2013 the grand ayatollah refused to receive Rouhani's controversial predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Analysts say talks between Sistani and Rouhani are aimed at bolstering the ranks of Shiite Muslims in the face of Iraq's warming ties with Iran's Sunni-ruled rival Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is keen to develop relations with Baghdad to counter the influence of Iran in Iraq, which is seeking economic benefits to rebuild after the defeat of IS. Iraqi political analyst Hisham Al-Hashemi said Rouhani is seeking to bolster trade with Baghdad and discuss ways "to circumvent US sanctions". "In addition, there are electricity, water and other files," he said. Trade between Iran and Iraq now stands at around \$12 billion a year - tilted toward Iran with gas and energy exports - and Rouhani has said he would like to see it rise to \$20 billion. — AFP

ers for money, adding this is like money laundering. He said the first step to reform the demographic imbalance is to fight influential people who traffic in people and then apply laws to stop the sharp increase in the number of expatriates.

Damkhi called for applying the quota system and percentages for various expatriate communities so that no single community dominates the rest, adding that only highly skilled workers should be recruited. He criticized the government for not presenting its plan on measures to stop the influx of expatriates into the country.

Meanwhile, head of the Assembly's health and labor committee MP Humoud Al-Khudhair called on the government not to change its mind on a key amendment to the labor law, in which annual leave was increased to 35 days from the current 30. The amendment was passed overwhelmingly by the Assembly last week in the first round and the Assembly is expected to have the second and final round of voting next week in order for it to become law. The government had accepted the amendment which applies to expatriates and Kuwaitis working in the private sector.

MPs call on government to...

Continued from Page 1

The lawmaker called for reforming the demographic structure immediately, adding that "it's time to reduce the number of marginal laborers that have overwhelmed the country and are competing with citizens for public services, and are the cause for the traffic menace".

Otaibi said Kuwait should recruit only highly qualified foreign workers, especially in the health and education sectors, while ensuring that no single community controls any profession.

MP Adel Al-Damkhi, the head of the Assembly's human rights committee, said the first step to tackle the demographic imbalance is to fight against trafficking in persons, especially since there is a law for this but it is not implemented. He said the law must be activated to penalize influential people who recruit labor-

Sports

Past champions Nadal, Federer advance at Indian Wells Masters

Federer next faces compatriot Wawrinka, Nishikori survives a scare

INDIAN WELLS: World number two Rafael Nadal raced into the third round of the ATP Indian Wells Masters as Roger Federer made a less speedy but still successful start to his quest for a sixth title on Sunday.

Nadal, a three-time Indian Wells winner, needed just 72 minutes to get past overmatched Jared Donaldson 6-1, 6-1. Federer, who is seeking to break out of a tie with top seed Novak Djokovic for most titles in the California desert, looked set for a similarly easy time of it, but had to turn back a second-set challenge from German Peter Gojowczyk in a 6-1, 7-5 win.

Fourth-seeded Federer said he was relieved not to go to a second-set tiebreaker after falling behind 3-1 to the free-swinging German who is ranked 85th in the world. The Swiss regained the break and, after saving four break points to make it 4-4 he cruised home.

"I struggled a little bit with my serving in that second set and that gave him chances. Because he was serving better he started to swing more freely and then it was tough," Federer said. "I'm really happy I found a way in that second set." Federer next faces compatriot Stan Wawrinka, a three-time Grand Slam champion currently unseeded as he continues his return from injury. Wawrinka won a taut thriller against 29th-seeded Hungarian Marton Fucsovics 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, finally sealing it on his fifth match point after three hours and 24 minutes when Fucsovics lofted a lob long.

Nadal, playing his third tournament of a year that started with a crushing loss to Djokovic in the Australian Open final and included an early exit in Acapulco, converted five of his six break chances

against Donaldson and never faced a break point himself. He next faces Diego Schwartzman, who beat Spain's Roberto Carballes 6-3, 6-1. Nadal is 6-0 against the Argentinian. "Today was a very positive step for me, and next one going to be against a player that we know each other very well, we practiced a lot of times, and we played some tough matches," Nadal said. "(He is) one of the best talents of the sport today so it's going to be a tough one against Diego."

In other early matches, sixth-seeded Kei Nishikori of Japan survived a scare in a 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4) victory over France's Adrian Mannarino. Mannarino, ranked 52nd in the world, served for the match at 6-5 in the third. He couldn't muster a match point and double-faulted on break point and that was enough of a window for Nishikori. "I think in the tiebreak I played the best tennis of the match. I was really focused," said Nishikori, who opened 2019 with a title in Brisbane and then reached the quarter-finals of the Australian Open.

Nishikori next faces 67th-ranked Hubert Hurkacz of Poland, who defeated France's Lucas Pouille 6-2, 3-6, 6-4. Eighth-seeded American John Isner routed Australian qualifier Alexei Popyrin 6-0, 6-2, the most lopsided win of Isner's career.

He'll play Guido Pella, who won his first title at Sao Paulo last week. Pella ended the hopes of another Aussie qualifier, Alex Bolt, 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 6-3.

Tenth-seeded Croatian Marin Cilic downed Serbian Dusan Lajovic 6-3, 6-4 to book a meeting with 19-year-old Canadian Denis Shapovalov, the 24th seed who beat American Steve Johnson 6-3, 6-4. — AFP



INDIAN WELLS: Rafael Nadal of Spain plays a backhand volley against Jared Donaldson of the United States during their men's singles second round match on day seven of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 10, 2019 in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Diamond League to cut meetings, disciplines

DOHA: Athletics' Diamond League circuit will have a trimmer look and fewer meetings beginning in 2020 as the one-day competitions aim for a more consistent, fast moving format, the IAAF said yesterday.

Meetings will be reduced from 14 to 12 competitions plus a final under concepts approved by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Council in Doha. The number of disciplines will also be cut from 32 to 24 with 12 each for men and women and the longest event will be 3,000 metres.

There will also be a new focus on out-of-stadium/city centre field events where fans can be closer to the action and meetings will be limited to one per week. "This elite circuit of quality events (will) attract the best athletes which in turn gives our fans a compelling reason to tune in and follow their stars over the next decade and beyond," IAAF president Sebastian Coe said in a statement. There was no indication which meeting would be dropped or what disciplines would be eliminated. An end of the season examination this year will assess the quality of each meeting with the aim of focusing on the best 12 meetings plus a final with all 24 disciplines, the IAAF said.

The Diamond League, which will celebrate its 10th season beginning in May, currently features nine races for men and women, including the 3,000m steeplechase and 5,000m, and seven field events - high jump, pole vault, long jump, triple jump, shot put, discus throw and javelin throw. Not all events are held at each meeting.

The circuit, the IAAF's top competition outside the Olympics and world championships, at present has two end-of-season finals, with Zurich hosting one-half of the disciplines and Brussels the other.

"The market very much told us at the moment the current two finals should be replaced by one thrilling night of athletics," IAAF chief executive Jon Ridgeon, who co-chaired a year-long review of the circuit, told a news conference.

Qualification and entry standards for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics also were approved by the IAAF Council at its weekend meeting. Athletes will be able to qualify for the next Olympics either by meeting entry standards or by virtue of their position in the new IAAF world rankings. The Council also agreed to change race walking distances for senior competitions from 20 and 50km to two of the following - 10, 20, 30 or 35km - after 2022 while maintaining four medal disciplines with two for men and two for women.—Reuters

IAAF maintains ban on Russian athletics over doping scandal

DOHA: World athletics governing body IAAF has decided not to lift a ban on Russia's athletics federation over doping, saying yesterday it was still waiting to receive data collected from Moscow and financial compensation for its investigations.

Russia's athletics federation (RUSAF) has been suspended since 2015 following a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) report that found evidence of widespread doping in the sport. The IAAF's governing council discussed the possibility of lifting the ban at a meeting in Doha on Sunday and Monday. But Rune Andersen, chair of the IAAF's Russia Taskforce, said Moscow had yet to meet two conditions.

"Logistical" issues had held up financial compensation, including for the taskforce's costs and legal costs in cases Russia had brought to the courts, he said, adding that the IAAF had also not yet received analytical data and samples from a Moscow lab, which are still being assessed by WADA.

"Those (issues) need to be resolved. As soon as we have everything we need... we will seriously reconsider and recommend to the IAAF council for reinstatement (of Russia)," Andersen said. Russian authorities have denied their doping programme was state-sponsored but have accepted that senior officials were involved in providing banned substances to athletes, interfering with anti-doping procedures or covering up positive tests.

The IAAF also said the Taskforce had noted comments made to German television network ARD over the weekend that some coaches, with links to the doping affair, were involved again with coaching Russian national team athletes. "This runs counter to assurances the Taskforce has previously received from RUSAF that it is disassociating itself from the old regime," the IAAF said.

"The Taskforce will be asking RUSAF for urgent clarification." Russia's reinstatement has been rejected several times by the IAAF over the past three years. The athletics body is the only other major sports organisation to keep Russia banned for at least the coming months.

Both WADA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have revoked their suspensions of Russia while the International Paralympic Committee has said it will reinstate Russia by March 15. "Of course, we have worked and are working to finding sources of funding to pay the debt," Dmitry Shlyakhtin, president of Russia's athletics federation, said in a statement.

"This is quite an ample sum for the federation. Let's not forget that the federation lost sponsors in connection with the doping scandal. You cannot call the federation's financial situation simple. In parallel we are in talks with the IAAF regarding payments."

Russia's sports ministry did not immediately reply to a Reuters request for comment. Should it fail to meet IAAF conditions in the coming months, Russia could risk missing out on sending a team to September's world athletics championships in Doha, Qatar.

Some individual Russian athletes have been allowed to compete internationally as neutrals since 2015 provided they met certain criteria that showed they had operated in a dope-free environment. — Reuters

Halep claims tough win, Serena retires ill at Indian Wells

INDIANA WELLS: World number two Simona Halep survived a tough challenge from Ukrainian qualifier Kateryna Kozlova to win their third round match 7-6(3) 7-5 at the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California, on Sunday.

The Romanian finally put away the 114th ranked Kozlova with eight consecutive points in the second set, a backhand winner proving the decider just as it had in the first set. The tournament lost 23-times Grand Slam winner Serena Williams, who retired against Garbine Muguruza with what organisers described as a viral illness. The Spaniard was ahead 6-3 1-0 at the time. Halep said her opponent had been tough to put away. "It was difficult for me to close out those sets," she told reporters. "When I was leading the match, she played without fear." The victory advanced the French Open champion, who won Indian Wells in 2015, to the fourth round for the fifth time in six years.

The meeting was the first between the pair and featured big momentum swings. After Kozlova claimed a 3-2 advantage in the first set, Halep won three consecutive games to go to set point at 5-3 on Kozlova's serve. With the former world number one's groundstrokes failing her, Kozlova reeled off 11 of the next 12 points, breaking back for 5-5 with a forehand winner. Halep finally won the set on her third opportunity with another trademark backhand down the line.

The Romanian took four successive games for a 5-2 lead in the second set, but Kozlova again rallied to even the match at 5-5 before Halep reeled off the eight straight points to seal the win. Former Wimbledon and French Open champion Muguruza was happy with the way she had been playing against Williams before the American's retirement.

"I think I played well," she said. "I'm going to take the positive side of that." Sixth seed Elina Svitolina,



INDIAN WELLS: Simona Halep of Romania plays a forehand against Kateryna Kozlova of Ukraine during their women's singles third round match on Day 7 of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

looking for her first title of the year, beat Daria Gavrilova 7-5 6-4 to advance while world number seven Kiki Bertens reached the fourth round at Indian Wells for the first time after a 7-6(10) 6-4 win over Briton Johanna Konta.

Bertens will next meet Spain's Muguruza. "Konta

today, she can play really aggressive, and I think with Muguruza it's the same," she said. "So I have to serve well, go for my shots myself again where I can, and hopefully play a little better than today." China's Qiang Wang and Australia's Ashleigh Barty also advanced. — Reuters

Dauids inspires SA to Vancouver Sevens glory

LOS ANGELES: Selwyn Davids scored one try, set up another and kicked three conversions to inspire 2018 World Sevens series champions South Africa to their first tournament since Paris last year with a 21-12 victory over France in Vancouver on Sunday.

The two teams had never previously met in a Cup final and Pierre Gilles Lakafia's early try for France

forced South Africa to come from behind. "It was a great final," said 24-year-old man-of-the-match Davids, who ran half the length of the field to set up Impi Visser beneath the posts for the opening Blitzbokke score.

"We knew France would be coming for us. We got a lot of youngsters but like the coach says, if we can gel together then anything is possible." Werner Kok stole the ball to set up Davids for a long run to the line three minutes after the first-half siren. And it was Kok himself who sealed the match with the third try on the left flank in the second half.

"It was a much-needed win for our team," said South Africa's Philip Snyman, who said it was an important stepping stone as they look to retain their series title. "I am really happy with the win. Hopefully we can build on this one."

Stephen Perez scored a late consolation try for France, who had reached a final for the first time since 2012. Last year's Vancouver champions Fiji beat series leaders USA 24-14 in the bronze final to take third place.

It was the first time this season that the USA had failed to reach the final after they were dominated 33-5 by France in the last four. South Africa beat Fiji 33-12 in the other semi.

New Zealand finished outside the top four for the first time this season, but beat England 26-19 to take fifth place. USA remain top of the series standings with 113 points, seven ahead of New Zealand. Fiji are third with 101 but South Africa have leapfrogged England into fourth on 89 points. The series now travels to Asia for the Hong Kong Sevens from April 5-7. — AFP

Sports

Taylor's double ton raises NZ victory hopes in rain-hit Test

Ross surpasses Crowe with 200 in rain-shortened second Test

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard after New Zealand's first innings yesterday, day four of the rain-shortened second Test against Bangladesh in Wellington:

Bangladesh first innings 211 (Tamim Iqbal 74, Liton Das 33; Wagner 4-28, Boult 3-38)

New Zealand first innings (overnight 38-2)

J. Raval c Soumya b Jayed	3
T. Latham c Liton Das b Jayed	4
K. Williamson c&b Taijul	74
R. Taylor c Liton Das b Mustafizur	200
H. Nicholls b Taijul	107
C. de Grandhomme not out	23
B. Watling c Soumya Sarkar b Jayed	8
Extras: (lb5, w7, nb1)	13
Total: (for 6 wickets dec: 84.5 overs)	432

Fall of wickets: 1-5 (Latham), 2-8 (Raval), 3-180 (Williamson), 4-396 (Nicholls), 5-421 (Taylor), 6-432 (Watling)

Bowling: Jayed 18.5-2-94-3, Ebadat 16-2-84-0 (5w), Mustafizur 14-2-74-1 (2w, 1nb), Soumya 6-0-35-0, Taijul 21-0-99-2, Mominul 9-0-41-0.

Bangladesh second innings

Tamim Iqbal b Boult	4
Shadman Islam c Watling b Henry	29
Mominul Haque c Southee b Boult	10
M. Mithun not out	25
Soumya Sarkar not out	12
Extras:	0
Total: (for 3 wickets: 23 overs)	80

Fall: 1-4 (Tamim), 2-20 (Mominul), 3-55 (Shadman)

Bowling: Boult 8-1-34-2, Southee 5-1-18-0, Henry 4-2-17-1, de Grandhomme 2-0-3-0, Wagner 4-2-8-0.

Series: New Zealand lead 1-0

WELLINGTON: A double ton from Ross Taylor and three quick Bangladesh wickets yesterday put New Zealand in a prime position to pull off an exceptional victory in the rain-shortened second Test in Wellington.

At stumps on day four at Basin Reserve, where the first two days were washed out, Bangladesh were hurting at 80 for three, still 141 from making New Zealand bat again. "We didn't play the first two days. If the result goes against us, we will feel bad," Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal said.

Taylor, dropped twice on 20, proceeded to punish the Bangladesh attack with a rollicking 200 from 212 balls before New Zealand declared at 432 for six. He said he was determined to make the most of his two lives but it took a while to realise 200 was on the cards.

"If you'd told me that at the start of the day, especially how the first 10 overs went, I would have said 'you're kidding'," he said. "I thought 'well my luck's got to change sooner or later let's make it pay'."

"The game situation, being a three-day Test, we had to be a bit more proactive and score quickly and try first of all to get a lead and try to build it up as quick as possible to give our bowlers a bit of a chance."

Bangladesh made a disastrous start to their second innings when Tamim, their leading run-scorer, was out for four. Mominul Haque followed for 10 and Shadman Islam for 29 leaving Mohammad Mithun on 25 with Soumya Sarkar not out 12.

Tamim said letting Taylor off the hook early really hurt. "It was sad that we dropped catches of someone, twice in the same over, who went to hit a double-hundred," he said. "They ended up scoring five an over. It is hurting us."

New Zealand piled on 394 runs in 73 overs yesterday before sending Bangladesh back in for 23 overs before stumps. Taylor clouted Taijul Islam for six over the long-on boundary to bring up his century which took him past his mentor, the late Martin Crowe, to become New Zealand's second most prolific century-maker with 18, two behind Kane Williamson.

He put on 172 with Williamson for the third wicket



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Ross Taylor plays a shot as Bangladesh's wicketkeeper Liton Das (L) looks on during day four of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

and then 216 with Henry Nicholls for the fourth. But after reaching 200 for the third time in his career, and raising his bat in salute, he was dismissed from the next ball he faced, caught behind off Mustafizur.

Williamson, who batted with a painful shoulder injury, made it through to 74 before he was dismissed and taken for a scan which proved inconclusive. He will have a second scan today morning.

Nicholls swept Taijul Islam to the boundary to bring up his fifth century in the second over after tea, but only faced another seven deliveries before Taijul

bowled him for 107. Mahmudullah had varied his attack as best he could but for most of the day Taylor, Nicholls and Williamson had an answer for every move. Apart from the two dropped catches off Abu Jayed in the third over, the raw Bangladesh seamers, with only 17 Tests between, they were unable to make full use of the green strip.

When they failed to make inroads, spinners Taijul and Mominul Haque were called on to stem the run flow. Although Taijul removed Williamson and Nicholls, his two wickets cost 99 runs. — AFP

Willey steers England to series sweep against WI

BASSETERRE: David Willey spearheaded another rout of an indisciplined West Indies batting line-up as England completed a 3-0 sweep of the series with an eight-wicket victory in the third and final T20 International at Warner Park in St Kitts on Sunday.

Medium-pacer Willey knocked over the top-order in finishing with career-best T20I figures of four for seven from three overs to take the man of the match award as the hosts were demolished for 71 off just 13 overs.

Willey's teammate and fellow all-rounder Chris Jordan was named man of the series. Jonny Bairstow, man of the match in the first fixture in St Lucia five days earlier, then sped the visitors toward their target with 37 (31 balls, two sixes, four fours) as the whitewash was completed with almost ten overs to spare.

Bairstow fell to Devendra Bishoo with victory in sight leaving captain Eoin Morgan to cart the leg-spinner for a six and a four off successive deliveries to seal the comprehensive result. "It's been outstanding to see guys come in and take full advantage of the opportunity in this series," said Morgan in reflecting on his team's complete dominance of the three matches.

"It takes some time to get accustomed to conditions and I thought we got better for those who were part of the ODI series as well." Fast bowler Mark Wood, playing his first game of the T20 series in place of the fast-medium Liam Plunkett, maintained the pressure after Willey's early successes in taking three for nine while leg-spinner Adil Rashid finished off another pitiful batting effort by the world champion Caribbean side with two wickets in two overs.

Dismantled for their lowest T20 total ever, 45, on the way to a 137-run thrashing in the second match two days earlier at the same venue, Jason Holder's decision to bat first on winning the toss made no difference with Shai Hope falling to the very first ball of the match from Willey to set the tone for another collapse.

Hope's opening partner, John Campbell, making his T20I debut in place of the rested Chris Gayle, was one of four players to get into double-figures-twice as many as on Friday-although it made no meaningful difference to the innings.

For the West Indies, who were impressive and competitive in the preceding Test and One-Day International series, this was another piece of unwanted history as they became the first team in T20I history to be dismissed for under 75 in successive matches.

"I don't think there was a drop in intensity from us, we just didn't bat properly in the last two matches," said Holder in dismissing suggestions that his team lacked focus in the T20 fixtures. "We just didn't adapt to the conditions properly and that's something for our batsmen to sort out." —AFP



BASSETERRE: Eoin Morgan of England hits 6 during the 3rd and final T20I between West Indies and England at Warner Park, Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis, on Sunday. — AFP

Pakistan welcomes foreign cricket stars for T20 league

KARACHI: Cricket-mad Pakistan is welcoming a host of foreign stars who defied security fears and Indian-Pakistani tensions to feature in the last eight matches of its domestic Twenty20 League, starting in Karachi on Saturday.

The first 26 matches of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) were played in United Arab Emirates, and there had been speculation that remainder would also have to be held there as soaring tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi sparked fears of an all-out conflict.

But with the situation easing the matches will go ahead, though three that had been planned for Lahore-close to the Indian border-will now be held in the southern port city of Karachi. Some 40 foreign players-led by former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson, current New Zealand opener Colin Munro and West Indian stars Dwayne Bravo, Darren Sammy and Kieron Pollard-arrive in Karachi Friday to join the six-team competition.

Watson, who plays for Quetta Gladiators but declined to visit Pakistan for the PSL final and three play-off matches in 2017, said he consulted his family before taking the trip. "It was a tough decision to make," said Watson, who played 59 Tests, 190 one-day and 58 Twenty20 internationals for Australia before retiring in 2016.

"It's been 14 years since I last visited Pakistan, a place with some of the most passionate fans in world cricket. Can't wait to give it our best shot in winning the trophy," Watson said in a video message released by the Gladiators.

He was part of the last Australian "A" team that toured Pakistan in 2005. The chief executive of the International Cricket Council David Richardson and Cricket Australia head of security Sean Carroll are among the foreign offi-



KARACHI: Pakistani cricketer of Multan Sultans Shahid Afridi (L) plays a shot during the third match between the Lahore Qalandars and Multan Sultans yesterday. Cricket-mad Pakistan is welcoming a host of foreign stars who defied security fears and Indian-Pakistani tensions to feature in the last eight matches of its domestic Twenty20 League. —AFP

cialists who are also set to visit.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ehsan Mani said the matches will help improve the country's chances of reviving international cricket. "I am delighted to welcome the foreign players who have come here for the PSL and I am sure it will help us bringing more international matches to the country," said Mani.

Pakistan has gradually revived international cricket since it was suspended following attacks on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore ten years ago. It was six years before Pakistan hosted any international cricket when minnows Zimbabwe toured in 2015, while the Gaddafi Stadium hosted the PSL final in March 2017, and a World XI also played three Twenty20 internationals in Lahore.

But the biggest event was Sri Lanka's return for a one-

off Twenty20 international in October 2017. Mani said holding the remainder of the PSL this year, including the March 17 final, and a possible 16 PSL matches next year will add to the momentum. "The perception that foreigners have about the safety situation in Pakistan will change and they will be satisfied with the security arrangements," he said. Some 13,000 policemen and 2,500 para-military personnel will be on duty in Karachi, and police said fans will be required to show their tickets and national identity cards. England's Liam Dawson, part of the Peshawar team, said he looks forward to playing before passionate crowds. "I toured Pakistan last year and the atmosphere was unbelievable. We played three games and the crowd was electric," he recalled. "It will be the same this time as well and I am happy to be part of that cricket revival." —AFP

Pakistan calls for ICC action over India army camouflage caps

MUMBAI: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have urged the International Cricket Council to take strong action against India after their cricketers wore army camouflage-style caps in a match against Australia on Friday.

Indian cricketers sported olive-and-black caps bearing the cricket board's logo (BCCI) in solidarity with Indian paramilitary police killed last month in a militant attack by a Pakistan-based group.

The suicide bombing killed 40 in Indian-controlled Kashmir and prompted India to launch an air strike inside Pakistan, which responded with an aerial attack the next day.

PCB Chairman Ehsan Mani told reporters in Karachi late on Sunday they had taken up the matter with the ICC.

"We believe that cricket and sports should not be used for politics and we have said this very clearly," he said. "Their (India) credibility in the cricketing world has gone down very badly."

The idea to sport the caps came from former Indian captain and current wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni - one of the game's biggest names and an honorary lieutenant colonel with the Indian army - who distributed them to the team before the toss.

The BCCI said they had sought permission from the world governing body before Friday's match, Indian media reported. The reports also said the ICC had confirmed the caps were allowed as part of a charity fundraising effort.

India captain Virat Kohli said all the players would donate their fees from the match to a national defence fund to help out the families of defence personnel who die on duty. Kohli also urged all Indians to contribute to the fund.

Nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars since independence over Kashmir, which both sides claim in full but rule in part.

Mani said the ICC had in the past acted against England all-rounder Moeen Ali and South Africa leg-spinner Imran Tahir for breaching ICC clothing and equipment regulations to make political statements.

"The ICC had taken strong action against them and we have sought similar action against India," he added. "The permission they took was for a different purpose but they acted differently."

"We have been in touch with ICC from day one, sent one letter already and another is being followed up in next 12 hours. There should not be any ambiguity as we are taking this very strongly." —Reuters

Sports

Solari uncertain over Real Madrid future despite victory

Real stay third in La Liga, 12 points adrift of Barcelona

VALLADOLID: Real Madrid's losing run is over but Santiago Solari offered no assurances over his future after a chaotic 4-1 victory over struggling Real Valladolid on Sunday. Asked afterwards if it could have been his final game as coach, Solari said: "I cannot answer that. Tomorrow we have a training session and that is what I focus on."

Karim Benzema scored twice, including one from the penalty spot, between strikes from Raphael Varane and Luka Modric as Madrid came behind at the Jose Zorrilla Stadium, after Anuar Tuhami had given Valladolid a deserved first-half lead.

They could have been four up had VAR not twice cancelled out goals from Sergi Guardiola, who later also hit the post, while Ruben Alcaraz blasted an early penalty over the crossbar.

It was a frantic opening half an hour to a frenzied night, which began with the lights going out after a power failure before kick-off and ended with Casemiro being sent off, only for Modric to add Madrid's fourth.

Real stay third in La Liga, 12 points adrift of Barcelona and five behind Atletico. Valladolid were the opponents for Solari's first league game in charge back in November when another rather flattering 2-0 victory set the team off on a run of eight wins from nine games.

But three consecutive defeats at home, to Barcelona twice and Ajax in the Champions League, meant any sense of success this time was muted. "It has been a difficult week for everyone, for the players too," Solari said.

"The first 20 minutes reflected that and it cost us, but the rest of the game they showed their professionalism, their spirit and how well they have reacted to adversity." The result was emphatic but, against a Valladolid side that had scored only once in their last

five games, the performance less convincing, with club president Florentino Perez watching on in the stands.

"It is difficult for everyone," said Real defender Nacho. "The relationship (with Solari) right now is complicated because things are not working out." Solari's tenure will almost certainly end in the summer and perhaps sooner, if either results take another turn for the worse or a suitable replacement can be found. Jose Mourinho and Zinedine Zidane were both linked with returns last week.

Gareth Bale, Vinicius Junior and Lucas Vazquez were all injured but there was still no place in the squad for Isco while Sergio Ramos also missed out suspended. Valladolid might have been four up in the first 29 minutes but Madrid had to VAR to thank, twice, after Alcaraz had already blasted his second-minute penalty high over the crossbar.

Alvaro Odriozola had been caught the wrong side of Oscar Plano after a simple ball over the top as Valladolid were cutting through with ease, particularly down the flanks. Guardiola was on the receiving end but saw two goals ruled out for offside, the first a tap-in and the second a header, as Valladolid's fans could hardly believe they were not ahead.

Finally, they were, as Guardiola this time supplied the cross from the right, with Anuar unmarked at the back post. The cheer for Madrid kicking off, confirmation VAR had not intervened, was almost as loud as for the finish.

Solari shook his head but his team improved and were somehow level at half-time, as Nacho's jump for a high ball prevented Jordi Masip from a clean catch and Varane was perfectly-placed to poke in. Anuar could have put Valladolid back in front but, through one-on-one, was put off by Thibaut Courtois and Madrid responded by scoring twice in eight minutes.

Benzema claimed both, the first from the spot after



VALLADOLID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema shoots a penalty kick to score a goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Valladolid FC and Real Madrid CF at the Jose Zorrilla stadium in Valladolid on Sunday. —AFP

Odriozola proved too quick for Plano and then from six yards, with a superb, albeit unchallenged, glancing header. Guardiola's rotten night continued as he volleyed onto the post before Casemiro earned a second yellow card with ten minutes left for standing in

front of a free-kick.

But Valladolid were running on empty and Modric wrapped it up. One step-over was enough to fool Joaquin Fernandez as the Croatian guided a fourth into the far corner. — AFP

UAE FA fined for crowd trouble in Asian Cup s-final

DOHA: The United Arab Emirates Football Association was fined \$150,000 and its national team ordered to play a home game behind closed doors after sandal-throwing local fans marred an Asian Cup clash against Qatar, the Asian Football Confederation said yesterday.

Eventual champions Qatar defeated hosts UAE 4-0

in the semi-final of the continental championship on Jan. 29, a game in which forward Almoez Ali was pelted with footwear as he celebrated his team's second goal.

Qatar's last two scorers—captain Hassan Al-Haydos and Hamid Ismail—were also the target of missiles at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. The AFC said the UAE FA was penalised under a number of articles under its disciplinary code, including liability for spectator conduct (article 65) and organisation of matches (article 64).

"The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee has sanctioned the UAE FA with a fine of \$150,000 following the incidents that occurred during their Asian Cup semi-final match against Qatar," Asian soccer's governing body said in a statement.

"In addition, the UAE FA has also been ordered to play one match without spectators... which will come into effect during their next match played on the territory of the UAE during the AFC Asian Cup 2023 (qualifiers)." Fans had also jeered throughout the Qatar national anthem with dozens of Emiratis sitting for its duration before standing for the UAE anthem. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt cut political and trade ties with Qatar in June 2017 over allegations Doha supports terrorism, a charge that Qatar denies.

The AFC said the UAE FA must settle the fine within 30 days and warned that any future violations may lead to more severe punishment. Qatar sealed their first continental title with a stunning 3-1 win over four-times champions Japan in the final. — Reuters

Pitch invasions raise fears for player safety

LONDON: Weekend pitch invasions in England and Scotland have raised fears for player safety with those in the game warning of potential tragedy unless firm action was taken to tackle the problem and the governing FA saying a line had been crossed.

Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) chief executive Gordon Taylor said there was real concern after "cowardly and criminal" attacks on players by spectators running onto the field of play.

Aston Villa's Jack Grealish was punched in the face by a man in a Championship (second tier) game at local rivals Birmingham City while Manchester United defender Chris Smalling was shoved at Arsenal.

In Scotland, Rangers captain James Tavernier was attacked at Hibernian. Individuals have been charged in relation to all three incidents. "We have seen an increase in such behaviour at clubs this season. It's been racist abuse, anti-Semitism and now its real fear for the safety of players," Taylor told Sky Sports News television.

"We have been warned now on too many occasions. This has got to be dealt with by the football bodies, the police, the stewards and the clubs. There is a total responsibility. We have got to address it now. If not, it is going to be too late and there is going to be a tragedy."

The English Football Association condemned Sunday's incidents as entirely unacceptable. "We will be working with the clubs, the leagues and the police to discuss what collectively needs to be done to protect players and officials on the pitch," it added.

The FA said it had also written to Birmingham City and Arsenal for their observations and details of the security measures they had in place. Sports Minister Mims Davies had earlier called on the football authorities and clubs to take strong action.

"Protecting players' safety is of paramount importance and every possible step must be taken to ensure that they are not put at risk," she added in a statement. Taylor mentioned a range of possible options, including fines, points deductions and playing behind closed doors and said spectators also needed to be educated about the consequences of their behaviour.

Rangers' manager, and former England captain, Steven Gerrard said there was 'huge concern' and agreed fans had to play their part. "Fans have to take responsibility and think before they do these type of things, because if it continues someone is going to get hurt and hurt badly, and no-one wants it to get to that stage," he told reporters.

With rising knife crime and deaths from stabbings in the headlines, former England striker Alan Shearer feared an escalation. "If we don't stamp it out now, next time it could be a knife," he warned in the Sun newspaper.—Reuters



DORTMUND: File photo shows Tottenham's Argentine coach Mauricio Pochettino gestures as Dortmund's German midfielder Mario Goetze controls the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between BVB Borussia Dortmund and Tottenham Hotspur on March 5, 2019 in Dortmund, western Germany. —AFP

Spurs slump offers Arsenal, Man Utd, Chelsea Champions League hope

LONDON: As Arsenal played out the final stages of a hugely significant 2-0 victory over Manchester United to propel themselves back into the Premier League top four, cries of "Tottenham Hotspur we're coming for you" rang out around the Emirates.

A 10-point gap between the north London rivals has been whittled down to one in the space of four games courtesy of defeats for Spurs against Burnley, Chelsea and Southampton. With eight games of the campaign to go, the fight for automatic Champions League qualification next season looks set to go down to the wire, with Spurs, Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea in desperate need of the revenue and prestige that brings for their own reasons.

Only four points separate Tottenham in third and Chelsea in sixth, but the Blues also have a game in hand at home to Brighton, where victory would allow them to move level on points with Arsenal in fourth.

A first domestic defeat for caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer on Sunday has interrupted

United's momentum but they remain the form side of the chasing pack since the Norwegian took charge in mid-December—cutting the gap to the top four from 11 points down to two.

Tottenham defied World Cup fatigue, injuries to key players and coped with no new signings and a second season in their temporary home at Wembley for so long that just two weeks ago they were still being touted for an unlikely title challenge.

Despite reaching the quarter-finals of the Champions League, however, it appears the effects of a long season for a small squad may finally be starting to take hold as after dominating the first 45 minutes against struggling Southampton on Saturday, Spurs imploded after the break to manager Mauricio Pochettino's ire.

"In the first half we played like the quarter-finals, or the best eight teams in Europe, but in the second half we need to watch the game, analyse, and be critical of ourselves," said the Argentine, hinting he needs to be backed with funds to improve his squad in the summer, should he remain in charge.

"Maybe we need to understand that it is our limit to be there (fighting for top four). If it is our limit we need to take some decisions in the future." Yet, with the club's new stadium finally ready, at a reported cost of £1 billion (\$1.3 billion), the level of investment in the squad will be highly dependent on securing Champions League cash. Pochettino's men do have the slight relief of a three-week break now to regroup, but their next league game is a daunting one away to Liverpool and they also travel to title-chasing Manchester City next month.—AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
Manchester City v Schalke 04	23:00	
beIN SPORTS HD 2		
Juventus FC v Atletico de Madrid	23:00	
beIN SPORTS HD 1		

PSG stars face fury, abuse after European exit

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain players ran a gauntlet of hate and abuse after they invited 500 of their diehard fans to witness a training session on Sunday having earlier been blasted as "shameless" and "spineless".

Just days after their last-minute exit at the hands of Manchester United in the Champions League, the French giants' decision to invite some fans back to the Parc des Princes spectacularly back-fired. The squad's first get-together since Wednesday's last 16 defeat was switched after the words "Shameful! Spineless" and "Respect us" were graffitied at their Camp de Loges training base on Friday.

The 500 or so PSG 'Ultras' allowed into the ground on Sunday then screamed "Bunch of bastards" and "Show us your balls" towards the players on the field, according to videos posted on social media.

Captain Thiago Silva and defender Marquinhos attempted to calm the crowd by pleading on the public address system but their pleas were drowned out by further verbal abuse, newspaper Le Parisien reported.

The taunting, as well as the noise of firecrackers and smoke bombs, echoed around the stadium and could be heard outside the ground. PSG's game at Nantes this weekend was postponed although they remain well clear of second-placed Lille and all but assured a sixth Ligue 1 title in seven seasons.

Earlier in the day PSG's star striker Kylian Mbappe said he was left "stunned" by PSG's gut-wrenching mid-week exit. Marcus Rashford's 94th-minute penalty gave the Red Devils a 3-1 win to send the English club through on away goals after becoming the first team in the competition's history to overturn a 2-0 home defeat.

"I'm stunned. I haven't been able to sleep," Mbappe told TF1 in an interview. "It's difficult, we'd worked so hard to get to this point and we're disappointed. We're going to try and pick ourselves back up."

Thomas Tuchel's men are also through to the last four of the French Cup, but Mbappe admitted it was hard to look ahead to the rest of the season with the pain of Wednesday's defeat still raw.

"Honestly, it's hard to give it too much thought because the Champions League was our goal. The stadium was full for a magnificent occasion, we spoiled the party. We didn't want to ruin it but in the end we did."

However, the 20-year-old allayed any fears among PSG fans that his immediate future could lie elsewhere in the wake of the club's latest European failure. "I think I will be here, that's guaranteed even," he said.

"With this elimination and all the problems it's going to create, there's no point in my personal situation being added to it. So there, that's clear and precise." Meanwhile, in Ligue 1 on Sunday, Lille kept a firm grip on second place, 14 points behind PSG, as Nicolas Pepe scored his 17th league goal of the season to beat nine-man Saint-Etienne 1-0.—AFP

25 Halep claims tough win, Serena retires ill at Indian Wells



26 Taylor's double ton raises NZ victory hopes in rain-hit Test



27 Solari uncertain over Real Madrid future despite victory



Suns end 18-game losing streak

Lowry scores 24 points as Raptors rout Miami Heat



OAKLAND: Andre Iguodala #9 of the Golden State Warriors rebounds the ball against the Phoenix Suns on Sunday at ORACLE Arena in Oakland, California. — AFP

OAKLAND: Devin Booker's jumper with 5:01 remaining gave Phoenix the lead for good Sunday night as the Suns snapped an 18-game losing streak to the Golden State Warriors with a 115-111 victory in Oakland, Calif. Playing the second night of a back-to-back, the Suns found the energy to outlast the Warriors after having trailed by as many as 16 points. The Suns hadn't beaten the Warriors since November 2014, and hadn't won in Oakland since February 2011. The loss was the Warriors' second in six days, sandwiching a 122-105 home win over Denver on Friday. Booker finished with a game-high 37 points, including 13 consecutive Suns points during a stretch of the fourth quarter in which Phoenix took charge of the game. Klay Thompson had 28 points and Kevin Durant 25 for the Warriors.

76ERS 106, PACERS 89

Joel Embiid returned from an eight-game absence to score 33 points and grab 12 rebounds as host Philadelphia defeated Indiana. Embiid had been out with a sore left knee but came back to post his league-best 49th double-double of the season as the Sixers snapped a two-game losing streak. With the win, the Sixers moved into third place in the Eastern Conference, holding a tiebreaker over the Pacers. Bojan Bogdanovic led the Pacers with 18 points while Darren Collison added 14.

RAPTORS 125, HEAT 104

Kyle Lowry scored 24 points, making six 3-pointers, and added 10 assists and seven rebounds as Toronto defeated host Miami. Kawhi Leonard did not play Sunday because of "load management" for the Raptors, who ended the Heat's four-game winning streak. Pascal Siakam added 20 points for the Raptors, who have won all three meetings with the Heat this season. Bam Adebayo scored 19 points with six rebounds and five assists for the Heat, Dwyane Wade and Dion Waiters each added 15 points, Rodney McGruder had 13 points, Goran Dragic had 11 and Justise Winslow scored 10.

SPURS 121, BUCKS 114

LaMarcus Aldridge poured in 29 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, and DeMar DeRozan added 28 points as host San Antonio turned back Milwaukee for its fifth straight win. The Spurs trailed the entire first half but took the lead in the third quarter and led by four points heading to the fourth. Marco Belinelli and Patty Mills hit for 16 points each for the Spurs, while

Bryn Forbes added 12. Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 27 points and 13 rebounds. Eric Bledsoe scored 21 points, Khris Middleton tallied 15, Pat Connaughton hit for 14 points, Brook Lopez added 11 points and 10 rebounds, and Nikola Mirotic contributed 10 points.

ROCKETS 94, MAVERICKS 93

Eric Gordon scored a game-high 26 points as Houston extended its winning streak to a season-best eight games by edging host Dallas. James Harden, who picked up his fifth foul in the opening seconds of the third quarter, missed 18 of his 25 shots and took just three free throws in finishing with 20 points. Center Clint Capela added 17 points and 12 rebounds.

Luka Doncic, who was hobbling late in the game, led the Mavericks with 19 points, 15 rebounds and nine assists. He didn't have a good shooting game, going 5 of 16 overall and 1 of 6 from beyond the arc. Rookie Jalen Brunson scored 18 points with seven rebounds.

MAGIC 105, GRIZZLIES 97

Mike Conley brought host Memphis from behind to steal a win from Orlando, giving the Grizzlies their fourth win in their last five games. Memphis trailed 95-88 with 3:06 remaining but closed out the game on a 17-2 run. Conley had 26 points, eight assists and five rebounds, and Avery Bradley added 21 points for the Grizzlies. Nikola Vucevic led Orlando with 26 points and 10 rebounds, and Terrence Ross added 15 points off the bench. The Magic have lost three of their last four games, though they sit just one game out of the eighth and final seed in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

HAWKS 128, PELICANS 116

John Collins had his second straight double-double and Kevin Huertter scored 27 points to help host Atlanta break its three-game losing streak by knocking off New Orleans. Collins followed Saturday's performance of 33 points and 20 rebounds against Brooklyn by getting 23 points and 10 rebounds for his 27th double-double. He also had four blocks, two of them in the final quarter when the Pelicans were trying to mount a comeback. New Orleans center Anthony Davis returned after a missing a game with back spasms and finished with 15 points and eight rebounds. Davis played only 21 minutes. The Pelicans were led by Frank Jackson and Julius Randle, who each scored 23 points.

TIMBERWOLVES 103, KNICKS 92

Taj Gibson scored a season-high 25 points and

filled in nicely for injured center Karl-Anthony Towns, as Minnesota ran its home winning streak to six games at the expense of New York in Minneapolis. Towns (right knee inflammation) missed the third game of his career after injuring his knee with eight seconds left in Saturday's overtime win over Washington. The injury appeared significantly worse when Towns limped off the floor but and was held out of Sunday's game as a precaution after participating in pregame warmups. Jeff Teague collected 20 points and 10 rebounds for his 11th double-double as the Wolves shot 44.7 percent while playing without Andrew Wiggins (right quad) for the second straight game. Damyean Dotson scored 26 points for

the Knicks, whose losing streak reached six games.

PISTONS 131, BULLS 108

Blake Griffin racked up 28 points, six rebounds and five assists and streaking Detroit defeated Chicago for the second time in three days and completed a four-game sweep for the season. Reggie Jackson and Langston Galloway had 21 points apiece and Andre Drummond supplied 16 points and 15 rebounds for his 18th double-double for the host Pistons, who won their fifth straight and 12th in their last 14. Wayne Selden scored 18 points off the bench to lead the Bulls. Otto Porter Jr. and Lauri Markkanen added 17 points apiece, while Shaquille Harrison tossed in 11. — Reuters

Zidane returns to Real Madrid

MADRID: Zinedine Zidane has made a sensational return as coach of Real Madrid after Santiago Solari's sacking was finally confirmed yesterday. Zidane has been given a contract until June 2022, just nine months after he resigned at the end of last season, having led Madrid to an historic third consecutive Champions League triumph.

Madrid president Florentino Perez has reportedly met with the board and resolved to dismiss Solari, with Zidane set to be his replacement, nine months after he resigned at the end of last season.

Zidane could take training as early as today and be in charge for Madrid's La Liga game at home to Celta Vigo on Saturday. His priority will be to secure Madrid's place in the top four after a turbulent fortnight that has seen them lose twice to Barcelona and knocked out by Ajax in the Champions League.

Zidane won that tournament in each of his three seasons in charge at the Santiago Bernabeu, as well as La Liga in 2016-17, while enjoying a strong relationship with the majority of the players.

Gareth Bale was one of the few not to see eye-to-eye with the Frenchman and Bale's future will become even more uncertain, should Zidane's appointment be confirmed. Sergio Ramos had said earlier yesterday he accepts blame for the club's



Zinedine Zidane

"deeply disappointing" season but insists the players have no say on the coaching situation.

Ramos posed a series of questions to himself on social media after Madrid had beaten Real Valladolid 4-1 in La Liga on Sunday night.

"As footballers we like to do our talking on the pitch but this season is not turning out that way," Ramos wrote. "Recent events have been disastrous and I'm not hiding. We are not hiding. We the players are primarily responsible and I, as captain, more than anyone."

On Solari's position, Ramos said: "It's a decision that's not ours to make and in which we never interfere. We have enormous respect for the position and we always support the Real Madrid coach. "These reflections are, without doubt, the result of a deeply disappointing season but if success didn't stop us, we're not going to let defeat stop us. It's our obligation to carry on, to work and to evolve." — AFP