

2 Rare valve replacement done at Chest Hospital



3 Crown Prince attends Riyadh camel festival



11 CBK to distribute 20% cash dividends, 10% bonus shares



28 Harden equals career-high 61 points; Lakers' James fails to make playoffs



Islamic State's 'caliphate' defeated, yet threat persists

Syria force captures last IS bastion of Baghouz



(Left) An image grab released yesterday shows the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) raising their flag atop a building in the Islamic State group's last bastion in this eastern Syrian village of Baghouz. (Right) A female fighter of the US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) flashes the victory gesture while celebrating near the Omar oilfield in the eastern Syrian Deir Ezzor province yesterday. — AFP

BAGHOUZ, Syria: Kurdish-led forces pronounced the death of the Islamic State group's nearly five-year-old "caliphate" yesterday after flushing out diehard militants from their very last bastion in eastern Syria. Fighters of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces raised their yellow flag in Baghouz, the remote riverside village where militants of a variety of nationalities made a desperate, dramatic last stand. The SDF's victory capped a deadly six-month operation against the final remnants of the caliphate which once stretched across a vast swathe of Iraq and Syria, and held seven million people in its sway.

World leaders hailed the victory as a major landmark in the fight against IS and its ideology, but warned that the group that spurred a spate of global terror attacks was far from defeated. "Syrian Democratic Forces declare total elimination of so-called caliphate and 100 percent territorial defeat of ISIS," spokesman Mustafa Bali said in a statement, using another acronym for IS. In Al-Omar, an oilfield used by the SDF as a staging base, fighters in their best fatigues laid down their weapons and broke into song and dance. They joined top Kurdish and Arab tribal officials, as well as a leading US envoy, for a ceremony unveiling a monument to their fallen comrades and celebrating the landmark victory.

The state proclaimed in mid-2014 by fugitive IS supremo Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi started collapsing in 2017 when parallel offensives in Iraq and Syria wrested back its main hubs Mosul and Raqqa.

Continued on Page 24

Washington on edge for Mueller's findings on Trump

WASHINGTON: US Attorney General Bill Barr was expected to hand Congress as early as yesterday the key findings of the Russian meddling probe with Washington anxious to learn if President Donald Trump is implicated in serious wrongdoing. Chronic tweeter Trump, who headed out from his Florida residence early for a round of golf, remained uncommonly silent after spending two years repeatedly labeling Special Counsel Robert Mueller's

Continued on Page 24

Mideast anger over Trump's Golan pledge

DAMASCUS: Syria, its allies, and fellow states in the region condemned US President Donald Trump's pledge to recognize Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights slamming the move as a violation of international law. Trump said Thursday it was time for Washington to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the strategic territory, which it seized from Syria in the Six-Day War of 1967 and annexed in a move never recognized

internationally.

His abrupt tweet triggered delight in Israel, but outrage from other countries in the region as well as powerhouses such as Russia and Turkey. Moscow warned the policy U-turn could spark new conflicts. "Such appeals can considerably destabilize an already tense situation in the Middle East," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "Hopefully it will remain (just) a call."

Any such move would break with UN Security Council resolutions and with more than half a century of US foreign policy, which treated the Golan as occupied territory whose future would be negotiated in talks with Syria on a comprehensive peace.

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MAJDAL SHAMS: People stand on top of an old Israeli tank near the Israeli-Syrian border in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights yesterday facing the Syrian city of Quneitra. — AFP



DUBAI: A handout image obtained yesterday shows the Burj Khalifa lit the previous night with an image of New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. — AFP

Dubai projects NZ PM's image on iconic skyscraper

DUBAI: Dubai has projected the image of New Zealand premier Jacinda Ardern onto its iconic Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest skyscraper, in thanks for her response to last week's mosque shootings. Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum praised Ardern's "support to the Muslim community" after a white supremacist gunman attacked two mosques on March 15, killing 50 people.

Continued on Page 24

'March for love' as New Zealand mosques reopen

CHRISTCHURCH: Muslims held emotional prayers inside Christchurch's main mosque yesterday for the first time since a white supremacist massacred worshippers there, as New Zealand sought to return to normality after the tragedy. The Al Noor mosque had been taken over by police for investigations and security reasons after alleged gunman Brenton Tarrant gunned down Muslims gathered

there and at a smaller mosque for Friday prayers on March 15, killing 50 people.

Al Noor was handed back to the local Muslim community yesterday and began allowing small groups onto its grounds around midday. "We are allowing 15 people at a time, just to get some normality," said Saiyad Hassen, a volunteer at Al Noor, adding that there were no plans yet to fully reopen. Among the first to enter was massacre survivor Vohra Mohammad Huzef, who said two of his roommates were killed and that he managed to live only by hiding under bodies. "I could feel the bullets hitting the people and I could feel the blood coming down on me from the people who were shot," said Huzef, a Christchurch civil

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CHRISTCHURCH: Members of the local Muslim community enter the Al Noor mosque after it was reopened yesterday. — AFP

T rex found in Canada is world's biggest

MONTREAL: The towering Tyrannosaurus rex discovered in western Canada in 1991 is the world's biggest, a team of paleontologists said Friday, following a decades-long process of reconstructing its skeleton. Nicknamed Scotty for a celebratory bottle of scotch consumed the night it was discovered, the T rex was 13 meters long and probably weighed more than 8,800 kilos, making it bigger than all other carnivorous dinosaurs, the team from the University of Alberta said.

"This is the rex of rexes," said Scott Persons, lead author of the study and post-

doctoral researcher in the Department of Biological Sciences. "There is considerable size variability among Tyrannosaurus. Some individuals were lankier than others and some were more robust. Scotty exemplifies the robust," Persons said.

While the giant carnivore's skeleton was discovered in 1991, paleontologists spent more than a decade just removing the hard sandstone that covered its bones. Only now have they been able to study it and realize its uniqueness, which is not limited to its size. "Scotty is the oldest T rex known," having lived into its 30s, Persons said. "By Tyrannosaurus standards, it had an unusually long life. And it was a violent one," Persons said. "Riddled across the skeleton are pathologies - spots where scarred bone records large injuries." An exhibit featuring the dinosaur's bones is to open in May at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. — AFP



EASTEND, Canada: This undated handout photo shows Dr W Scott Persons looking at the skeleton of the Tyrannosaurus rex "Scotty" at the T-rex Discovery Centre. — AFP

Local

Austrian chancellor set to make important visit to Kuwait today

Austria hails Amir's humanitarian role

VIENNA: Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz is set to make an official visit to Kuwait today, the second one for an Austrian chancellor since the late Bruno Kreisky visited the country back in the 1980s. Kurz's visit coincides with the 54th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relationship between the two countries, which has been based on mutual respect and trust. It aims to expand their bilateral ties to higher horizons.

The Austrian chancellor's visit takes place less than a month since his meeting with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at an Arab-EP summit in Egypt's resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh last February. The visit holds a great importance on the Kuwaiti-Austrian relationship in terms of backing and boosting bilateral ties in various fields, particularly commercial as Kurz tends to expand the current "modest" volume of commercial exchange between the two countries.

During his visit, he is to hold talks with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and several other senior Kuwaiti officials. Talks will focus on significant common issues and affairs as well as bilateral economic cooperation in the areas of infrastructure, hospitals, power plants and oil refineries.

Distinctive cooperation

Ex-Chancellor Kreisky's first official visit to Kuwait in 1981 contributed greatly in laying the cornerstone for the distinctive Kuwaiti-Austrian cooperation march. The two countries' relationship had seen significant developments over the past years, notably the official opening of the first Austrian embassy in Kuwait only

four years after Kreisky's maiden visit to the country. Furthermore, Kuwait is the first Arab state to establish political, diplomatic, and economic relationship with Austria, opening its embassy in Vienna officially in 1984 and had had six ambassadors who contributed in bolstering ties with the EU-member state.

The first-ever head of Kuwaiti diplomatic mission to Vienna was Ambassador Abdulhameed Al-Awadhi, who personally took up the task of establishing the Kuwaiti embassy in Austria and forming its staff. He was succeeded later on by Ambassador Faisal Al-Ghais, who carried out his diplomatic duties for seven years. In 1999, Nabeela Al-Mulla became Kuwait's ambassador to Austria. She also became ambassador extraordinary, plenipotentiary, and permanent representative of Kuwait at the UN and other international organizations in Vienna. Mulla was also the first woman from the Middle East and South Asia region to chair the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2003. In 2004, Fawzi Al-Jasem became Kuwait's ambassador to Austria and contributed in completing all

Visit chance to boost ties

construction works for the embassy's new building in Vienna. He was succeeded later on by Ambassador Mohammad Al-Sallal. In 2013, Sadeq Maarafi became and still is Kuwait's ambassador to Austria. He continues to carry on the same diplomatic approach as did his predecessors and exerts great efforts to boost bilateral ties with the European country, UN bodies, and Arab diplomatic corps in Vienna.

Throughout the past 54 years, Kuwait and Austria signed several cooperation agreements, including

MoUs, in political, economic, scientific, air transport, promotion and protection of investments, and double tax avoidance fields, in addition to signing of various cooperation protocols between Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and its Austrian counterpart. Moreover, Kuwait News Agency has played an effective role in boosting the two countries' relationship as the first Arab news agency to open and operate a bureau in Vienna since the early 1980s. KUNA's reporters have also contributed greatly in strengthening Kuwait's relationship with Austria and UN bodies in Vienna over the past decades through their extensive coverages of various events. Such great journalistic efforts have prompted the Austrian government to award KUNA a certificate of merit in 2006 in appreciation for its role in boosting the EU-member state's relationship with Kuwait and Arab countries.

Amir's humanitarian role

Kurz said his country strongly appreciates the role of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a Humanitarian Leader and mediator for resolving regional issues. His Highness the Amir is a wise leader and an expert in foreign politics, since he had previously served as Foreign Minister for about 40 years, Kurz said yesterday prior to his official visit to Kuwait. He hailed His Highness Sheikh Sabah's efforts in mediating to resolve the ongoing crisis among the GCC countries. Kurz also underlined the strong Kuwaiti-Austrian ties that go back to 1965, adding that there are thousands of Kuwaitis visiting Austria each year to enjoy its beauty.

Speaking on Kuwait's humanitarian work, the chancellor applauded the country's hosting of several donors' conferences for Iraq and Syria. The Kuwaiti aid saved lives and eased the suffering of people in so many countries including Syria, Iraq, Chad, Somalia,



Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz

and Ethiopia, Kurz added. The Austrian diplomat also underlined Kuwait's contribution to the Ban Ki-moon Center for Global Citizens (BKMC). Meanwhile, Kurz noted that his country is willing to take part in Kuwait Vision 2035 through executing projects for infrastructure, medical care or energy.

Chance to boost ties

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Envoy to the UN Sadiq Marafi underlined the importance of the Austrian Chancellor's upcoming visit to Kuwait for boosting bilateral ties. Marafi noted the strong Kuwaiti-Austrian ties on different levels. He added that the Austrian Government strongly appreciates Kuwait's successful neutral foreign policy. The ambassador also said that the two countries' relations are growing stronger, mentioning in this respect the visit of Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl to Kuwait last December. — KUNA

Rare valve replacement done at Chest Hospital



KUWAIT: The medical team that performed the surgery at the Chest Hospital. — KUNA

KUWAIT: A medical team headed by Chairman of the Cardiology Department at the Chest Hospital Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi carried out a valve replacement surgical procedure, considered as the first in the Middle East. Enezi said the procedure was done for a patient in his twenties. The old valve was damaged inside the heart and a new valve was installed by catheterization without the need for open-heart surgery, as done currently. He said the patient is in very good condition and will leave hospital in two days if the flow of blood is normal.

Enezi said a balloon was used to break the old damaged valve and a new one was installed in 45 minutes. The operation was done in cooperation

with the dean of the congenital defects units Dr Muath Al-Anbue, who expressed pride in the continued successes made by Kuwaiti doctors at the chest hospital. He said the outstanding achievements made by doctors is the result of efforts and perseverance for the sake of Kuwait.

Enezi said the chest hospital follows developments around the world and is considered among the best hospitals in the Middle East. It uses the most modern medical and technological developments in the field of heart diseases. The chest diseases hospital is distinguished with a heritage and experience that spans over 50 years in the field of diagnosing and treating all heart diseases, and is still in the lead. — KUNA



Chest Hospital Director Dr Reem Al-Asousi

Amir's envoy condoles with New Zealand shooting victims

CHRISTCHURCH: Envoy of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Advisor Abdullah Al-Maatouq conveyed condolences to families of the victims of the terrorist shooting in New Zealand's Christchurch city mosques and visited the injured yesterday. Maatouq had attended on Friday the funeral of victims of the recent terrorist gunfire attack on two mosques in New Zealand's city of Christchurch.

On Thursday, Maatouq met in the city of Christchurch with New Zealand's

Defense Minister Ron Mark. During the meeting, Maatouq conveyed the condolences of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Kuwaiti government and people to the victims of the terrorist shooting attack. Maatouq also met with Mayor of the city of Christchurch in New Zealand Lianne Dalziel. — KUNA



CHRISTCHURCH: Amiri Diwan Advisor Abdullah Al-Maatouq visits a man who was injured in New Zealand's Christchurch city mosques' terrorist shooting.



Amiri Diwan Advisor Abdullah Al-Maatouq visits an injured man in hospital.



Amiri Diwan Advisor Abdullah Al-Maatouq conveys condolences to families of the victims of the terrorist shooting.



ISTANBUL: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is seen among participants posing for a group photograph during an emergency meeting of the OIC in Istanbul on Friday. — AFP

Kuwaiti FM urges measures to counter Islamophobia

ISTANBUL: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on Friday urged Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states to appropriately counter Islamophobia and promote Islamic tolerance and values. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled made the call while addressing an emergency OIC ministerial meeting held in Istanbul to weigh the aftershocks of the recent attack on two Mosques in New Zealand. He said the meeting aims to deliver a message of solidarity and condolence from the Muslim world to the families of the 'martyrs' and the wounded as well as the entire people of New Zealand following this dreadful act. However, the Kuwaiti minister appreciated the efforts and measures taken by New Zealand to tackle the ramifications of the incident, which reflected unprecedented tolerance and civilized response to the disaster, thus easing out the anguish of Muslims around the world. He decried

the phenomenon of Islamophobia and discourse of hatred, discrimination and violence as key serious scourges that target secure communities. He quoted the OIC member states as having repeatedly sounded the alarm about this growing scourge and called for countering it in order to maintain security, peace and harmony among world peoples, citing relevant OIC and UN recommendations and resolutions.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled emphasized that in the light of this horrible terrorist act and other similar terrorist acts worldwide, which broke the hearts of all Muslims, mechanisms should be put in place in order to fight extremism and bigotry, just as was the case with the international counterterrorism alliance. He went on to say that the recent terrorist attack shows that terrorism has neither religion nor homeland, and that the Muslim world has suffered enough from misconceptions about Islam and its principles and values,

along with relevant negative effects, which have sparked a state of hatred, religious intolerance and discrimination against Islam and Muslims. Therefore, Kuwait, through its non-permanent UN Security Council membership, and Indonesia managed to produce a UNSC press statement condemning this terrorist act and calling for fighting such terrorist acts, he noted. He urged OIC member states to work together to counter this abhorrent phenomenon through dialogue with other societies and to promote the principle of moderation.

The Kuwaiti minister concluded by appreciating the efforts of New Zealand's government in curtailing the negative impacts of this painful terrorist incident and ensuring the recurrence of similar incidents. At least 50 people were killed in the twin attack on March 15th by an Australian gunman who showered worshippers with a hail of gunfire at the two mosques. — KUNA

Local

Crown Prince attends Camel Festival in Riyadh



RIYADH: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the final ceremony of King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in Riyadh yesterday. — KUNA photos



Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: Representing His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation attended the final ceremony of King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in Riyadh yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince had arrived earlier in Riyadh, answering an invitation, addressed to His Highness the Amir, from Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz, to attend the final ceremony of King Abdulaziz Camel Festival. His Highness and his entourage were received upon arrival in Riyadh by Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz, the Amir of Riyadh, Advisor at the Royal Court Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahad bin Abdulaziz, the State of Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and personnel from the Kuwaiti Embassy. — KUNA



Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Al Saud.



DOHA: Minister of Health Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah meets with Qatar's Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Al-Kuwari. — KUNA

Healthcare, patient safety priority: Minister

DOHA: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Sheikh Basel Humoud Al-Sabah yesterday underlined the importance of healthcare and patient safety as top priority in the ministry's programs and state development drive. Speaking on the sidelines of participating in the seventh Middle East Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare in Doha, Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah emphasized the ministry's eagerness to develop up-to-date patient safety programs. This is part of the ministry's commitment to holistic health coverage and healthcare-bearing global sustainable development goals, as well as Kuwait's 2035 vision, he explained. The

Kuwaiti minister thanked the Qatari Ministry of Public Health for providing an opportunity to get familiar with the latest international developments and exchange experiences with representatives of international organizations. Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah said he met with Qatar's Minister of Public Health Dr Hanan Al-Kuwari, discussing ways to strengthen and develop bilateral ties, especially in terms of health. Appreciating Kuwait's hospitality, he assured that the forum, attended by experts, consultants and specialists, will be a starting point for putting healthcare quality and safety in place. Co-organized by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and American-based Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), the forum attracted 3,000 healthcare experts from various international institutions to discuss the latest in medical care. The forum includes over 50 lectures and workshops, supervised by local and international experts in healthcare development. — KUNA

Burgan Bank organizes community engagement workshop for employees

KUWAIT: Continuing on its dynamic 18-month partnership with En.v this year, Burgan Bank recently held a high-impact internal workshop named 'Making a Difference Through Teamwork, Community and Employee Engagement.' Designed to aid the Burgan Bank Volunteer Group, the workshop enabled employees from different departments to identify shared values, increase interdepartmental affiliation and teamwork, as well as develop agency over volunteering priorities at the bank. The workshop was held at the L&D Center in Al-Enzi Tower and delivered by En.v, an organization dedicated to fostering social development and civic engagement in the Middle East.

Recognizing that community volunteering is a strong tool for employee engagement, teambuilding, increased employee productivity, retention, and job satisfaction, En.v facilitated a series of staged exercises, to help participants share, reflect on, define and refine the key social areas which they hope to contribute to through volunteering. Through experiential and shared group activities, with content to contextualize these activities, En.v encouraged the participants to think deeply about what community means to them and identify key priority areas. Twenty staff from the Burgan Bank Volunteer Group enjoyed the interactive workshop, which included team building exercises, story-telling, and content-driven lectures covering a wide range of issues - the importance of diversity to drive creativity, innovative employee volunteer models, and needs assessment survey.

These initiatives are part of Burgan Bank's strategic long-term partnership with En.v, which will run till March 2020 as part of its commitment to strengthen social networks and raise the standards



of social responsibility in Kuwait.

En.v's programs focus on building capacity and creating strategic networks among local civil society organizations (CSOs), youth initiatives, the private sector and governmental actors. Through collaborative efforts and educational outreach, En.v enables communities to identify and pursue innovative approaches to local and regional challenges.

Falling in line with its community program,

'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change, Burgan Bank sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.

Speaker hosts senior German MP

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem met yesterday with visiting Vice President of the German Bundestag Thomas Oppermann and his accompanying delegation. During the encounter, which was attended by German Ambassador in Kuwait Karlfried Bergner, they discussed Kuwaiti-German relations, ways of promoting them and

sharing of expertise between Kuwaiti and German parliaments. They also considered a number of issues and subjects that serve both countries and their friendly people, along with the latest regional and international developments. The senior German legislator and his accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Friday on a three-day official visit. — KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Vice President of the German Bundestag Thomas Oppermann. — KUNA



KUWAIT: The Embassy of Pakistan hosted an event yesterday to celebrate Pakistan's National Day, during which Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Ghulam Dastgir delivered a speech to a cross section of the Pakistani community in attendance. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Local

US official predicts women ‘at core’ of greater cultural cooperation with Kuwait

Sports can serve as a universal language that can build bridges: Royce

KUWAIT: A ranking US official says a freshly inked statement of intent between Kuwait and her nation will pave way for greater cultural cooperation, saying it will also facilitate partnerships between cultural organizations of the two countries. Asked whether women play a role in the forecast wider cooperation in the field, Marie Royce, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, said in an exclusive interview that they are the “core of exchange programs,” noting that societies that empower women are more prosperous and peaceful.

Speaking on sidelines of the Third United States-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, she confirmed the signing of a Statement of Intent on cultural cooperation between Kuwait and the US during the meeting — which will encourage more cultural exchanges between the two countries. She explained that the Statement will promote the visit of experts in museum curation, artists, athletes, and speakers from the US to Kuwait, and vice versa. “We also hope that this agreement will facilitate partnerships between US and Kuwaiti cultural organizations,” Royce added. She stressed that cultural and educational exchanges are a path to a peaceful world, and to create mutual understanding among countries. Royce said that she chaired the education working group of the bilateral Strategic Dialogue with officials from Kuwait’s Ministry of Higher Education, and discussed the chances available to increase academic and cultural exchanges between the US and Kuwait. “My commitment is to increase academic and cultural exchanges between Kuwait and the US,” she added.

12,000 students

Royce pointed out that the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs works in the area of educating English teaching skills, and college admissions exchanges between Americans and Kuwaitis. She said that another area the bureau would like to arrange is working with Alumni groups. “The US remains the first destination for international students,” she said, pointing out that

there are around 12,000 Kuwaiti students in the US. She confirmed that the US Embassy’s Education adviser offers free advising services to all students and can help provide resources and guidance for interested students to find their own best-fit institution in the US. In addition, the bureau and the US embassy also offer Kuwaitis professional exchange programs to promote entrepreneurship, STEM education, intellectual property rights, disability rights and gender equality. “We encourage more Americans to come to Kuwait to study and conduct academic research and to engage in various projects, such as college preparation programs, and teaching English to English teachers,” she said.

Royce confirmed that in the next year, the US State Department will work with the Kuwaiti government to sponsor training for English teachers and scholarship advisors who advise Kuwaiti students on how to apply to US colleges. “We will also be bringing a diverse range of artists, athletes and experts to Kuwait to work on areas such as girls’ empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, and STEM education. In the fall, we plan to offer after school English class for high school students, called the English Access Micro-Scholarship Program,” she pointed out.

“Another goal is to increase the number of students who participate in classroom exchange in Kuwait, they can work on projects together. This was applied between students from Arizona University and students in Egypt,” Royce said. She confirmed that she received a lot of support for this program, stressing that “it is another example where we can collaborate in many subjects.” She pointed out that over 2,000 Kuwaitis have participated in US sponsored exchange programs, primarily the International Visitor Leadership Program

and the Youth Exchange and Study Program, and many of them have become leaders in a variety of fields. She said that she is willing to increase virtual exchanges between Kuwaiti and American students through programs such as the Stevens Initiative, which connects students in the US with students around the world to work on projects to protect the environment and strengthen STEM education. “We will soon launch an association of Kuwaiti alumni of these exchange programs, to provide mentorship, networking and knowledge sharing opportunities,” she indicated

Special cultural events

Responding to a question about arranging special cultural events for women, US Assistant Secretary said that the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs is committed to women’s empowerment, which is core to exchange programs in both cultures and education. She stressed that “societies that empower women and promote inclusion are more prosperous, peaceful and stable.” She mentioned that last year the bureau com-

mitted over \$25 million and reached over 150,000 women around the world in programs specifically designed to empower women and girls. Royce added that (TechWomen) is another initiative of the US Department to connect and support leader women in science, technology, engineering and math. Women participating in this initiative are from Africa, Central and South Asia and the Middle East. It provides them with the access and opportunity needed to advance their careers, and inspire women and girls in their communities. Similar flagship programs supporting women that have been running for decades include, Fulbright Program and International Visitors Leadership Program.



KUWAIT: Marie Royce, Assistant Secretary Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. — KUNA

Sport exchange programs

Answering another question about sport exchange programs with Kuwait, Royce expressed her belief that sports can serve as a universal language that can build bridges and mutual understanding. She revealed that the US Bureau is intending to arrange a visit for Sarah Huffman, a former US Women’s Soccer Team member, to Kuwait as Sports Envoy at the end of April. Sarah will give soccer workshops for young girls and women to promote sports as means for them to develop self-confidence and leadership skills. She said that the bureau works to empower women through its Sports Diplomacy programs that include the bureau’s (espnW) Global Sports Mentoring Program initiative to promote women in sports from grassroots to the leadership level. This program was recognized in 2018 with both the ESPN Stuart Scott ENSPIRE Award and the Peace and Sport “Diplomatic Action of the Year” Award. —KUNA

163,000 Kuwaitis applied for US visa in last five years

KUWAIT: The United States of America is one of the Kuwaitis’ favorite destinations for tourism, study, business and medical treatment. US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services, Edward J. Ramotowski said in an interview that over a 163,000 Kuwaitis applied for US visa in the last five years. “We welcome and strongly encourage the Kuwaiti citizens to visit the US whether for business or pleasure or studying or any other legitimate purpose,” Ramotowski added. The Deputy Assistant Secretary pointed out that those wishing to obtain the US tourist or student or medical visa can visit the online site to submit the applications and follow the required instructions.



Edward J Ramotowski

Ramotowski pointed out that the applicants need to book an interview appointment after submitting the online application and then visit the Embassy headquarter with all the required documents, noting that the process takes a week. He noted that not following the instructions properly, not completing the required forms and submit a photograph that doesn’t meet the requirements are the most common issues that cause a delay for getting the visa. “Students must apply as early as they can because there are periods of time where the Embassy is very busy,” he added.

Regarding the electronic visa waiver, Ramotowski said that the US has a visa waiver program but each country needs to meet its certain requirements and at the meantime many countries are working to meet these requirements, noting that in future Kuwaiti citizens might get an electronic visa waiver. “Kuwait is an important strategic ally with the US,” the Deputy Assistant Secretary said, adding that the Consular Services Department was part of the third US-Kuwait strategic dialogue and they had productive discussions with the Kuwaiti consular officials.

Ramotowski affirmed that The American Citizen Services section at the US Embassy in Kuwait provides a range of services, including the issuance and renewal of passports, reports of birth abroad, and other routine and emergency services. The Embassy staff is ready to provide any assistance and information to those wishing to travel to the United States, he added. As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, the United States welcomed about 75.9 million international travelers in the past few years. The USA has the world’s largest international student population, with more than 1,000,000 students choosing to broaden their education in the United States due to its world’s finest university systems, with outstanding programs in virtually all fields. —KUNA

Kuwait firm supporter of global cooperation

BUENOS AIRES: Kuwait reaffirmed it has always supported cooperation among countries of the world to eliminate poverty, address the piling debts, curb climate change and alleviate the suffering of people. Kuwait Ambassador in Buenos Aires Abdullah Al-Yahya, addressing UN’s 2nd High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation in Argentina’s capital, said his country was participating in the meeting out of its keenness to promote international cooperation in line with instructions of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, Kuwait’s Embassy said in a statement.

Yahya noted the conference, inaugurated by Argentina’s President Mauricio Macri, was an excellent venue for developing countries to explore solutions for pressing challenges towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Participation of Kuwait, he said, stemmed from its desire to cooperation with other countries to tackle challenges of sustainable development in south countries. Kuwait has always been supporting global collaboration to eliminate poverty, reducing debts on countries, addressing ramifications of climate change, alleviating humanitarian suffering of people in crises and offering assistance for least developed countries, said Yahya. Since Kuwait’s independence in 1961, said the Ambassador, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has been offering financial assistance for developing countries. “Indeed Kuwait provided over the past years development aid more than double the internationally-agreed percentage of 0.7 percent,” he said. —KUNA



BUENOS AIRES: Kuwait Ambassador in Buenos Aires Abdullah Al-Yahya addresses the UN’s 2nd High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation. —KUNA

ABK honors outstanding employees

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) held its annual employee appreciation awards event to recognize the most outstanding individual and team employees for 2018. The prize categories included

the ‘Team of the Year’ and the outstanding performance employees.

Michel Accad, the Group Chief Executive Officer, ABK, congratulated the winners for the exceptional contribution they had all made towards ABK’s success in 2018 and their outstanding commitment throughout the year to living the core values of the bank and delivering on the strategy of ‘Simpler Banking’.

Accad said: “The success of our people is the success of ABK - they are key to everything we achieve here at the

bank, and this event recognizes the hard work, dedication to customer service and passion for excellence that they have shown throughout 2018. We are committed to supporting the development of our employees and we endeavor to show our appreciation for our most outstanding people. I cannot thank them enough for their contribution and we look forward to another excellent year ahead.”

For the year that ended on December 31, 2018, ABK reported an 18.1 percent increase in net profit and a record oper-

ating profit of KD 103.7 million, exceeding KD 100 million for the first time in the history of the bank, as the bank continued to expand its capabilities and drive growth. Throughout the year, ABK continued to invest in technology, innovation and customer service under its ‘Simpler Banking’ strategy, and launched a number of digital products, in line with its digital transformation strategy. ABK won a number of awards in 2018 including ‘Employer of the Year’ from Naseba for the third consecutive year.



Local

Roads repair process to start with highways in April

Minister to approve 'special mixture' of asphalt to repair damaged roads

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Housing Affairs Jenan Bushehri will approve the use of a special mixture of bitumen and modified polymer manufactured by local factories on recommendations made by a previous committee and the recent investigation committee to be used in repairing roads in April, well-informed sources at the Ministry of Public Works said. The sources added that the process to repair roads damaged by heavy rain will start with highways, King Fahad Expressway and the Sixth Ring Road, adding that the minister had ordered the formation of a special committee to follow up the process. The sources said this part of the plan will be in conjunction with repairing internal roads in various governorates after taking all the needed measures with regards to contracts that are still under process or those within guarantee periods.

Treatment abroad

Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah said the total number of Kuwaitis receiving medical treatment abroad dropped in 2018 to 6,837 patients compared to 7,024 in 2017, 16,249 in 2016 and 16,819 in 2015. Responding to a parliamentary inquiry, he said the budget set for treatment overseas for the current fiscal year (April 2018-April 2019) is KD 308 million, including KD 120 million for the health offices in London and Washington and KD 40 million as health insurance for students abroad, which

requires an additional KD 200 million budget to cover overdue bills of various hospitals and medical centers abroad from 2016-2017.

KD 8.9 million

The foreign ministry said revenues made from selling revenue stamps abroad during the fiscal year 2018-2019 were KD 8.9 million, including KD 6.6 million during the period of April-October 2018. Responding to a parliamentary inquiry about its commitment to the plans of automated connection between missions abroad and the finance ministry systems, the ministry stressed that the KD 1.39 million contract will be concluded during the fiscal year 2021-2022, adding that the project involves linking transactions made in 107 missions abroad with the ministry, improving employees' capability to handle over 3,500 documents daily in various missions worldwide, cutting losses resulting from delayed correspondence, achieving swift and fast dataflow, facilitating easy and immediate issue of audit reports and fast archiving.

Planting trees

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi stressed the significance of regional and national parks and ecological tree perimeters. Responding to a proposal made by municipal council member Ahmed Hadyan about the project of planting trees in various desert areas in Kuwait, Manfouhi stressed that in collaboration with the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish

Resources (PAAAFR), the municipality has been working on providing places to plant trees as recommended in previous structural plans. Manfouhi also said that the proposal made to build a roundabout and a traffic light between blocks number 5 and 6 in Kaifan was rejected by the Interior Ministry, because the U-turns on that street are enough to achieve easy traffic flows.

Exempted employees

The Ministry of Education has set special regulations for employees exempted from punching in and out using biometric access control devices, on top of which is full commitment to official working hours, which will be documented at various centers. In this regard, educational sources explained that employees' bosses and those next in the chain of command will follow up employees' commitment. In other news, Kuwait's cultural office in Cairo said Kuwaiti students desiring to register in various Egyptian universities will have to submit endorsed study leaves from their workplaces, their original certificates and birth certificates, in addition to a recent endorsed passport copy.

Social allowances

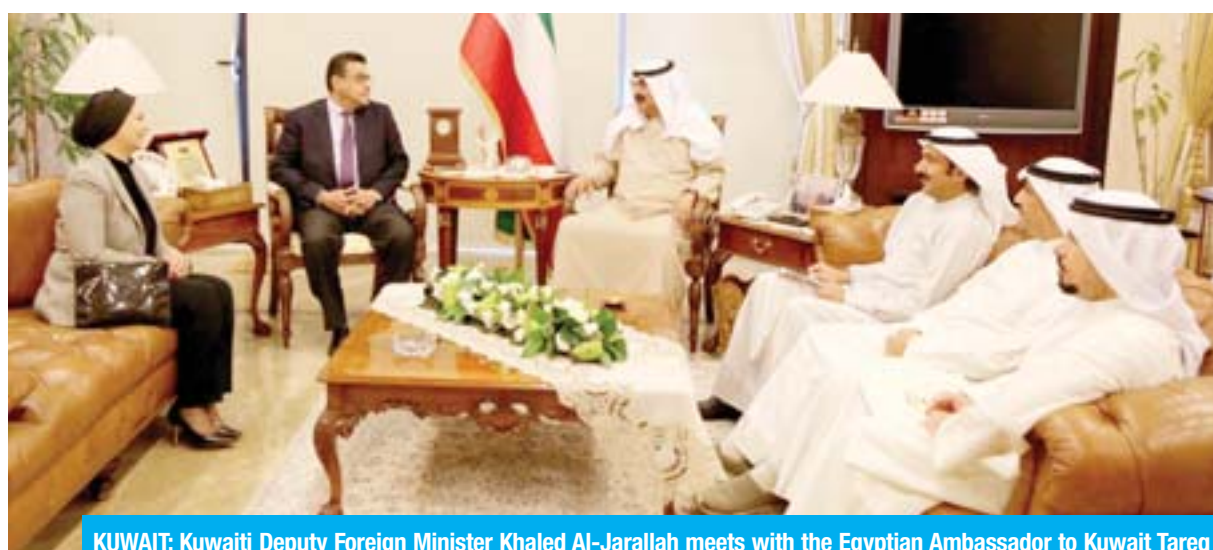
The Civil Service Commission (CSC) issued a directive to various government bodies urging updating Kuwaiti employees' marital status data every six months so that the data can be used in processing the employees' social allowances.



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and Minister of Housing Affairs Jenan Bushehri attends a parliament session this past Wednesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait sends security team to Cairo for murder probe

KUWAIT: A senior Kuwaiti official said on Friday a security team will be sent to Egypt to join investigations in the recent appalling murder of Kuwaiti Citizen Khaled Al-Reesh in Cairo. Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah said in a press statement that the Foreign Ministry, through its embassy in Cairo, has been following up the circumstances of the regrettable incident since it took place on March 13. The embassy has already participated in initial investigations carried out by Egyptian authorities, he said, thanking Cairo for arresting the criminals immediately and giving a copy of the forensic report to the Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo. As part of efforts in this regard, the ministry on Friday morning summoned Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tareq Al-Qoni to inform him that Kuwait, which appreciates the relevant efforts of Egyptian authorities, would dispatch a security team to join the probe of the dreadful murder. While voicing confidence in Egyptian judiciary, Kuwait calls for applying the maximum punishment to anyone involved in such an outrageous criminal act, Jarallah stressed. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Tareq Al-Qoni. — KUNA

Nine fire stations battle Sulaibiya blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen battled a huge blaze that gutted a number of warehouses in Sulaibiya farming area yesterday. Firefighters from nine different fire stations helped extinguish the flames which spread over an area of 4,000 sq m, as the warehouses contained coal, clothes, liquid petroleum material and wood, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said in a statement. No injuries were reported in the incident, while the warehouses were in violation of all prevention conditions, KFSD said, noting that all the necessary measures towards such violations will be taken.

Separately, firefighters put out flames which erupted in the ninth floor of a Hawally apartment building yesterday. Firemen rushed to the scene after receiving an emergency call at 1:15 pm, and they evacuated the building as soon as they arrived before battling the blaze. No injuries were reported, and an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



Call to remove Udayri camps for US drills

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) Friday urged camps' owners in Udayri range, north of Kuwait, to eliminate them as the US army will carry out some drills. At 05:00 am today, the US army will begin exercises with live ammunition in the range, the ministry's security media department said in a press statement. The ministry appealed to all residents and citizens to hastily throw out their camps, it added. It also stressed the necessity of cooperation and caution for the safety of both residents and citizens, the statement noted. —KUNA

local spotlight

Silk City under fire

By Muna Al-Fuzai

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

The Silk City is supposed to be a development project that is needed by Kuwait, but it seems that this project will not be implemented soon, unfortunately. I believe that Kuwait needs such projects to have partnerships with major countries such as China. Last week, the finance committee of the National Assembly rejected the project and a number of MPs presented several reasons for their reservations.

Some of the MPs said the document that was submitted to the committee was not enough. It was seen as a mere vision and does not constitute an integrated development project. Some said it is not right for members of the planning committee to have a connection or interest in the project. I can't confirm or deny this statement, however, but I think every project should have expert members, otherwise they will not advocate it. Some MPs had concerns and fears that this project will facilitate the entry of liquor in Kuwait, which they see as contrary to the constitution, sharia and traditions of the society.

The important thing is that the phrase "no" has been repeated by many MPs for various reasons, which made some citizens wonder about this attack and not giving sponsors more time for reviewing the remarks before this media campaign against the project and stirring public opinion, who do not know what is going on in the corridors of politics.

As a citizen, a voter and a journalist, I wonder whether the project is intended as a personal attack against the main parties in the project - the first of which is First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the technical team members. I trust that they have decent ethics, experience and integrity, so I wonder why this strong media attack.

The economic initiative will revive transit trade because of the geographical nature of Kuwait's participation in the Silk Road project that reflects the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to turn Kuwait into a financial, commercial and international center. Compatibility between Kuwait's 2035 vision and the initiative of China to revive the Silk Road and establish a vital commercial area serving the world's countries by land and sea will contribute to the prosperity of the world economy.

If there is a big "no" towards a single project such as Silk City, which can still be discussed and its gaps addressed, what about other "dangerous" and serious grievances in the society? For example, stealing public funds is forbidden by law and socially unacceptable. Don't we need all these "noes" and a strong attack from the deputies of the National Assembly over the infringement of even one inch of land of the country or millions of Kuwaiti dinars looted from the people and the country?

I am surprised by the fact that the situation remains as if accepting the mistake is something that we must deal with. I wonder how we accept the deterioration of our educational situation, the health and administrative decline, the daily difficulties we suffer due to the broken streets, the imbalance in the population structure and wasta. A youth currently studying at university does not know how to build himself after graduating and what will his future be after 20 or 30 years.

People in Kuwait are talking and complaining about the situation, but it does not seem anyone is listening. What can we do? What we call for is a legitimate demand. I believe that Kuwait needs investments in huge projects. Kuwait and China were the first countries in the world to sign a cooperation and partnership agreement in the Chinese project.

I hope to give this project a new opportunity away from media statements that distorted the project and hurt its members, whose expertise cannot be questioned. I agree with the absolute right of all deputies to say "no" to the Silk City project. It is their legitimate right. This is their role, and we cannot argue with that. But in return we have the right to ask a question about not saying "no" to other problems.



Pakistan shows off military might, calls for peace with India

Page 9

Accepting Golan annexation, Trump risks new precedents

Page 8



BAGHOUZ: Photo shows a body reported to be of a slain Islamic State (IS) group fighter, in the IS's last bastion in the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz after defeating the jihadist group. — AFP

Islamic State: Pioneers of ‘digital caliphate’

Barbaric catalogue of grisly execution videos haunt global imagination

PARIS: The Islamic State may have lost its self-styled caliphate, but its barbaric back catalogue of grisly execution videos will continue to haunt the global imagination and serve as a template for how to sow terror, analysts say. At the height of its reign over a vast chunk of Iraq and Syria in 2014-2015, the Sunni jihadist group had a huge digital footprint, flooding social media with slick videos lionizing their fighters and showing the gruesome executions of “infidel” soldiers and civilians.

Today, its once-sophisticated propaganda machine, like its proto-state, has been reduced to rubble. But the images of a Syrian soldier being crushed with a tank, a Jordanian pilot being burned alive in a cage, and countless other IS atrocities, including Western reporters and aid workers being beheaded, will endure. “It clearly will stick with us, rather like how Al-Qaeda stuck with us persistently even after Osama bin Laden was killed,” Charlie Winter, senior research fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King’s College London said.

Propaganda pioneer

The group was not the first to use gore as a propaganda tool, with Al-Qaeda releasing a video of the beheading of US journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi in 2002 and Mexican drug cartels also regularly sharing decapitation

videos. But IS’s Hollywood-style action clips – and use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the encrypted service Telegram to reach millions of viewers – took graphic terror videos into the mainstream. IS invested “a lot more time, a lot more money, a lot more energy, and a lot more human capital in the production of propaganda than other groups have before it,” Winter said.

“It was the pioneer in terms of really upscaling and industrializing the production of propaganda.” Analysts say the group was particularly savvy in its use of social media to cement the radicalization of thousands of disenfranchised Muslim youths by projecting an image of invincibility on the battlefield. To expand its audience, it piggybacked on popular hashtags on social media, such as those linked to the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and one linked to singer Justin Bieber.

And while the videos and pictures of crucifixions and decapitations dominated international headlines, other IS videos tried to show a softer side of life in the caliphate. “Most of the videos, and broadly, most of the web con-

tent produced by ISIS at the time, were actually utopian content, trying to show that they were trying to build a utopian state, a utopian society,” Marc Hecker, foreign policy expert at the French Institute for International Affairs said.

‘Frontline selfies’

Foreign fighters were also the forefront of the propaganda drive, snapping grinning selfies of themselves with assault rifles slung across their chests, on what David Thomson, author of a best-selling book of interviews with French jihadists, called their “LOL jihad”. Pointing to the likes of Junaid Hussain, a young British hacker who enlisted and died in Iraq, Raffaello Pantucci, director of international security studies at RUSI, noted: “Their communications people were kids in their twenties operating in a terror group the way they do back home.” “They weren’t doing anything exceptional.”

Their social media presence made IS propagandists a prime target for international intelligence agencies, with a

US airstrike killing IS spokesman Abu Mohamed al-Adnani in northern Syria in August 2016 and another hit taking out its media centre in the Iraqi city of Mosul. Under pressure from Western governments, Facebook, Twitter also clamped down on jihadist propaganda, establishing filters on violent content that IS and other terror groups struggle to circumvent.

These days IS propagandists mostly use the “dark web” – a heavily encrypted part of the internet which is almost impossible to regulate, or the Telegram app – to encourage supporters to launch attacks on their own initiative. A research note in November from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think-tank, said the group retained a “digital caliphate” to support its insurgency in other countries.

Noting its launch of a new series of weekly videos providing statistics on purported IS activity across the world, author Maxwell B. Markusen noted: “This propaganda effort also may indicate an ongoing effort to over-emphasize its real role on the battlefield, and to recruit new fighters.” Winter described the group’s impact on terrorist propaganda as “enormous”. “It has globalised its ideology in a way that was never really feasible before. And that will definitely stand to have an impact in how the global insurgency in terms of jihadists will look for years to come,” he said. — AFP

Priest stabbed live on TV at Canada’s biggest church

MONTREAL: A priest was stabbed in front of his congregation live on television during morning mass on Friday at Canada’s biggest church, in what police described as an isolated incident. Footage broadcast on a Catholic television station and picked up by the top-rated CTV network showed a man in jeans, parka and white baseball cap approach Claude Grou at St Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal, in front of 60 horrified parishioners.

He is seen chasing the priest around the altar and standing menacingly over the 77-year-old as he falls to the ground, scattering candles and a banner, before stabbing his victim. Witness Adele Plamondon told public broadcaster Radio-Canada the priest-who escaped with minor injuries was about to start reading the gospel, when “this man drew a knife and ran up to stab him.” “I’d thought he was just going to kneel in front of the altar to pray, like many people do,” she said.

The suspect remained silent during the assault but appeared “very determined,” Plamondon added. Grou recovered enough to get to his feet and is seen backing away as security officers surround the assailant, who drops his knife. Three guards restrained him while others tended to Grou, who appeared to be in shock. The priest was taken to hospital,



MONTREAL: Catholic Priest Claude Grou speaks at a press conference about the work to be done at Saint Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal. Grou was stabbed during a livestreamed morning mass at the church. — AFP

where his condition was said to be stable, with police reporting to AFP that he had been “slightly wounded in the upper body.”

‘Horrible and inexcusable’

The church was cordoned off, but services resumed later in the day. The 26-year-old suspect, whose name was not released, was scheduled to appear in court on Saturday via videolink from a detention facility. Police did not reveal a motive for the attack, but spokeswoman Caroline Chevretil told AFP he is “known to police.” “This was an isolated attack, and there is nothing to link it to terrorism,” she added. Church spokeswoman Celine Barbeau said Grou was conscious when he was rushed from the scene. “We are hopeful he will pull through,” she added. Prime

Minister Justin Trudeau spoke out to condemn the “horrible attack” while mayor Valerie Plante called the assault an “inexcusable act that has no place in Montreal.”

“We are all in shock over this act of violence in a place dedicated to peace,” Montreal archbishop Christian Lepine said in a statement, lamenting that places of worship could be targets of violence. Saint Joseph’s Oratory, built from 1920 to 1955, sits atop the north face of Mount Royal overlooking Canada’s second-largest metropolis, and attracts some two million pilgrims and tourists each year. The national shrine was founded by Brother Andre Bessette, a central religious figure among French-Canadians, who was canonized by Pope Benedict in 2010 for his devotion to the sick and disabled. — AFP

Baghouz, where the last black flag came down

BAGHOUZ: It once flew over a chunk of the Middle East larger than Britain but yesterday the Islamic State group’s sinister black banner lay crumpled in the dust of its final bastion. A few meters from the reedy banks of the mighty Euphrates, what was likely one of the last flags of the “caliphate” had been torn and trampled. Near it was one of at least 10 discarded explosives belts spotted by AFP reporters in the last strip of land conquered by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

In a small and remote village near the Iraqi border, the nightmare of the “Islamic caliphate” has ended. The encampment on the edge of the village of Baghouz where the jihadists made their last stand is a churned-up wasteland of tents and truck carcasses. Music rings out from one of the SDF cars, and the applause of male and female fighters echoes across the hills surrounding the fallen jihadist encampment. “Three days ago we clutched our weapons, trying to break forward even a few meters,” a fighter called Rami says. But “now we’ve finished with IS and its black banner and we’ve hoisted our own instead,” the 33-year-old tells AFP. On the rooftop of a battle-scarred building near

the Euphrates, a large yellow SDF flag now flies in the breeze. A small group of fighters have already removed their military uniforms, to slip on jeans, tracksuits and sandals.

‘Get married’

Just two days ago, they were combing the camp for holdout jihadists, when suddenly three suicide bombers jumped out from a tunnel wearing explosives belts. “They were running, we were scared. We killed one, and the other two blew themselves up,” says a 25-year-old fighter who gives his name as Ashkarani.

A fellow fighter was wounded and he had to carry him off to their armoured vehicle for evacuation, says the fighter from a small village in the wider province of Deir Ezzor says. His wounded comrade is now in the Kurdish-held city of Qamishli further north and recovering, he says. “It was just a light wound,” adds Ashkarani, wearing a track suit rolled up above his ankles and sandals on his feet.

When victory was declared, he emptied his last cartridge into the air. “We put music on. We started to dance,” one of his friends interjects, laughing. Ashkarani has already told his fiancée he and his comrades have finally won after a grinding months-long battle. “I told her we’d finished and we were coming home. She was happy,” he says. “We’re expecting to get married in 10 or 20 days time.” At the foot of a hill, only charred cars and abandoned canvas remain of the cross-border “caliphate” that the extremist group declared in 2014 across large swathes of Syria and neighboring Iraq. — AFP

International

Anger, grief sweep Iraq’s Mosul; Ferry disaster toll death hits 100

Residents demand justice; PM decrees 3 days of mourning

MOSUL: The capsizing of a Tigris River ferry packed with families celebrating Kurdish New Year in Mosul left at least 100 people dead, mostly women and children, the Iraqi interior ministry said yesterday, as grief and anger swept the city. Residents of Iraq’s second city, scarred by years of jihadist rule, demanded justice as Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi decreed three days of national mourning following Thursday’s accident.

Mosulites had resumed the annual festivities this year for the first time since Iraqi forces ousted the Islamic State group following years of brutal jihadist rule. But the celebrations turned to tragedy when the overcrowded vessel ran into trouble as it headed to a popular picnic site across the River Tigris. Mosul security officials blamed the accident on high water levels and overcrowding on the boat. Hundreds of relatives of victims and residents gathered Friday at the scene of the accident, where prayers were held for the dead.

Many said the disaster could have been avoided, and chanted “corruption is killing us!” “We want those responsible to be brought to justice,” said Mohammed Adel, 27, whose father was among those who died. He accused officials of failing to enforce safety standards. Abu Salem, who lost his wife and two children in the accident which also coincided with Mother’s Day in Iraq, pinned blame for the tragedy on profit motives and the corruption that is endemic in Iraq.

The managers of the picnic site were “criminals... I want them to pay up and I won’t leave here until they do”, the 50-year Iraqi said. Hundreds of demonstrators later gathered at the city’s amusement park to stage an

impromptu protest against “the thieves” running the city. Reflecting the popular mood, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, spiritual leader of Iraq’s Shiite Muslim majority, in his Friday sermon accused “the authorities in charge of supervision of not doing their job”. Transparency International ranks Iraq in 12th place in its list of the world’s most corrupt countries.

‘Investigation must produce results’

Video footage from cameras at the picnic site, posted online, showed a severely overcrowded vessel beginning to list as water comes aboard. As it capsizes completely, it traps dozens of people under its hull. Authorities had warned people to be cautious after several days of heavy rains led to water being released through the Mosul dam, causing the river to rise. Videos showed a fast-flowing, bloated river and dozens of people floating in the water or trying to swim around the partly submerged boat.

Abdel Mahdi announced Friday that a crisis team was being set up, comprised of top provincial officials but not the governor of Nineveh, of which Mosul is the main city. The team would have “executive powers... to carry out an investigation as quickly as possible, punish those responsible and decide on compensation”, the prime minister said. He and President Barham Saleh have visited the site of the accident as the search continued for bodies, some of which were carried far downstream by the strong current.

While war and jihadist attacks have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in Iraq in recent years, such accidents are relatively rare. But corruption and the dis-



MOSUL: Iraqi women cast flowers into the Tigris River in remembrance for the victims of the capsized ferry in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, following the incident which left at least 100 people dead. — AFP

mal state of public services in Iraq were triggers for widespread protests last year. IS turned Mosul into its de facto capital after sweeping across much of the country’s north in 2014. The city spent three years under the group’s iron-fisted rule until it was recaptured by Iraqi troops backed by a US-led coalition in 2017.

Survivors of Thursday’s disaster were treated in hospitals heavily damaged by the months-long military

campaign against the jihadists. A mortuary was receiving bodies wrapped in white shrouds, many bearing the names of women. A forensics official said many had yet to be identified. Iraq’s justice ministry said it had ordered the arrest of nine ferry company officials and banned the owners of the vessel and the picnic site from leaving the country. Officials implicated in various scandals have fled Iraq in recent years. — AFP

Does Islamic State still pose a threat?

BEIRUT: US-backed fighters say they have captured Islamic State’s last shred of ground in eastern Syria - but while its era of territorial rule may be over for now, there is near universal agreement that IS remains a threat.

What 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 still have a presence in



MOSUL: In this file photo, a Humvee passes over the body of a jihadist in west Mosul. Kurdish-led forces announced yesterday they had fully captured the Islamic State group’s last bastion in eastern Syria and declared the total elimination of the jihadists’ ‘caliphate’. —AFP

sparsely populated territory west of the Euphrates River in an area otherwise held by the Syrian government. The US Pentagon’s internal watchdog released a report last month saying Islamic State was regenerating functions and capabilities more quickly in Iraq than Syria. “Absent sustained (counterrorism) pressure, ISIS could likely resurge in Syria within six to 12 months and regain limited territory,” the report said.

IS leaders, fighters and followers

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. The SDF said over the past

two months, more than 60,000 people had left the Baghouz enclave, including 29,000 surrendering Islamic State supporters, 5,000 of whom were 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 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”.

At least 60 killed in Ghana bus collision

ACCRA: At least 60 people were killed on Friday in a head-on collision between two buses in Ghana, police said, in the latest deadly crash on the country’s roads. Survivors of the deadly smash told rescuers the driver of one of the buses had been feeling sleepy before the crash but refused to take a break. They said they shattered the vehicle’s windows and escaped with just seconds to spare before flames took hold with other passengers still inside.

The accident happened at about 2:00 am in the Bono East region, some 430 kilometers by road north of the capital, Accra. “The vehicles were travelling in separate directions when the collision occurred,” police commander Joseph Antwi Gyawu said. “At least 60 people have been confirmed dead and one of the buses caught fire, with the other seriously mangled,” he added. The buses were each carrying about 50 passengers at the time of the crash. One of the buses caught fire, leaving victims burned beyond recognition.

Emergency services were at the scene, including firefighters who put out the blazing vehicles, which were still smoldering hours after the crash. Video footage of the crash site indicated that one of the buses was completely gutted. The road was strewn with debris over several hundred meters. Bags and belongings of passengers from the second bus were in piles on the roadside. The side of the vehicle, which was at an angle into the embankment, appeared ripped off.

Kwame Arhin, a doctor at the Kintampo Government Hospital, said 28 people were being treated for head injuries and multiple fractures. “Seven out of the 28 passengers who were rushed here are in critical condition,” he added.

Ghana’s Vice-President Mahamudu Bawumia said action was required to prevent such accidents. “As a country we need to put in place appropriate measures to drastically reduce the occurrence of such mishaps,” he wrote on his Twitter account. “We wish the injured speedy recovery and may the souls of the departed rest in perfect peace.”

Road safety fears

The cause of the crash was yet to be established but local media said a driver of one of the vehicles lost control after falling asleep. “Some of the survivors are telling us that their driver was feeling sleepy at some point during that time of the night so he was asked to park but he refused,” Kintampo fire service commander Ankomah Twene told local station TV3. “We believe it contributed to the accident,” he added. A survivor, Rose Anane, said: “I was fast asleep then I heard a loud bang. We managed to break the glass and it was just a few of us - about 10 - who managed to move out. “In a matter of seconds then the vehicle went on fire with the others still trapped in the car. We watched on as the fire consumed them. It was late into the night.”

The crash has renewed calls for the authorities to enforce traffic rules to reduce deaths and injuries on the country’s poorly-maintained road networks. “We’ve been speaking to the local assembly to fix rumble strips on the road but they said this is a highway so it’s not possible,” said local resident Gifty Mintah. Rumble strips are a noise-making safety feature that alerts drivers when their cars are at the edge of the road. “But people keep dying and for how long are we going to look on for people to keep dying?”

Crashes are common on highways in Ghana because of poor maintenance, disregard of traffic regulations and unroadworthy vehicles. An average of six people die on the roads every day, according to the Motor Transport and Traffic Directorate (MITD) of Ghana police. —AFP

Kamnan Style: Thailand ‘godfathers’ resurgent

CHONBURI: Itthipol Khunpleum grabs the mic, bounds onto the stage and flashes a winning smile as he works the crowd gathered for a final rally: “Chonburi... show me your hands!” he says to wild applause. But he need not have bothered. The feared and revered Khunpleums have run eastern Chonburi province for decades and - like the other ‘godfathers’ who preside over swathes of Thailand - carry voter loyalty wherever they go. This time the Khunpleums have thrown their lot in with Phalang Pracharat, the party of the Thai junta which is scheming a return as a civilian government after Sunday’s general election.

In an unpredictable poll whose outcome

has pundits in a spin, Chonburi’s eight seats could prove invaluable to a potential junta-led coalition. “We are confident of winning,” Itthipol said, chuckling at the question of where the political loyalty of his family truly lies after years of taking posts in governments of all stripes. “We are on the side of the people... and not the parties who divide the people by promising democracy or dictatorship.”

The Khunpleums are the source of local power in Chonburi province, southeast of the capital Bangkok. They are gatekeepers to political office, fixers of problems and businessmen whose name has been earned through cultivation of their constituents and a reputation for ruthlessness with their rivals. The smooth, US-educated Itthipol, a two-time former mayor of Thailand’s boisterous sex capital Pattaya, was hired to advise the junta in early 2018, as it raced to cement pre-election alliances.

The junta installed his gruffer older brother, Sonthaya, as mayor of Pattaya, while the notorious family patriarch - nicknamed ‘Kamnan Poh’ - was freed early from jail on a murder conviction. The family’s

vote bank is with the junta, for now. In return, the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), Thailand’s biggest ever investment scheme worth nearly \$60 billion, has been signed off, promising to upgrade the Khunpleums’ patch into a tech, industrial and state-of-the-art tourism hub.

‘Kamnan Poh’

The Khunpleums are among the most famous of Thailand’s influential families. Father Somchai — nicknamed ‘Kamnan Poh’, as kamnan is a term for a head of a cluster of villages — is a storied bootlegger and smuggler turned local bigwig. He carved out the family name and built a political and business empire, which sweeps in the lucrative resort town of Pattaya, visited by millions of tourists each year. “He is a real ‘godfather’, he does exactly what he says... he helps his people the very best he can, and he competes his hardest against his opponents,” a veteran Pattaya politician told AFP, requesting anonymity. Kamnan Poh was given a 25-year sentence for masterminding the 2003 murder of one of those opponents, a business rival.



CHONBURI PROVINCE: Supporters of the Phalang Pracharat party hold placards in support of their candidates during a campaign rally in Chonburi province. —AFP

But made a dash across the Cambodian border before he could be arrested. His impunity ended in 2013 when he was caught at a tollway in Thailand. But in late

2017 as the junta came knocking for Khunpleum support, he was suddenly freed early on medical grounds. Months later his family was working for the military. — AFP

International

US lawmaker seeks whistleblowers, some MAX 737 orders in jeopardy

Flight control system MCAS at centre of investigations

WASHINGTON: A US lawmaker has urged current or former Boeing Co and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees to come forward with any information about the certification program for the 737 MAX, which has suffered two fatal crashes in five months. Boeing and the FAA are under global regulatory scrutiny over software and training on the signature aircraft. Boeing risked losing a \$6 billion order for the jet on Friday, its first since the world's entire fleet was grounded last week.

Indonesian airline Garuda said it plans to scrap its order because some passengers are afraid to board the plane, although industry analysts said the deal was already in doubt. In the United States, the chairman of the US House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Peter DeFazio urged people to use the committee's whistleblower web page.

"It is imperative we continue to ensure we have the highest level of safety for the traveling public," DeFazio said. American Airlines pilots were preparing to test Boeing's planned software upgrade for an anti-stall system on MAX simulators this weekend, saying they want their own safety guarantees on the software fix. The 737 MAX was Boeing's fastest selling jet before an Ethiopian Airlines crash near Addis Ababa on March 10, which followed a Lion Air crash in Indonesia on Oct 29.

Ethiopian and French investigators have pointed to "clear similarities" between the two crashes, which killed 346 people, putting pressure on Boeing and US regulators to come up with an adequate fix. No direct link has been proven between the crashes but attention has focused on whether pilots had the correct informa-

tion about the "angle of attack" at which the wing slices through the air. Ethiopia has shared limited information with foreign investigators, Reuters reported on Thursday, and an industry source said Boeing had not yet received any black box and voice recorder data.

Meanwhile, US Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, on Friday raised concerns in a letter to the FAA about regulations that allow aircraft manufacturers to effectively self-certify the safety of their planes and "left the fox guarding the henhouse." The FAA declined to comment. The US Justice Department opened a separate investigation this week.

The FBI has declined comment. Garuda CEO Ari Askhara told Reuters on Friday: "Many passengers told us they were afraid to get on a MAX 8." However, the airline had been reconsidering its order for 49 of the narrowbody jets before the Ethiopian crash, including potentially swapping some for widebody Boeing models.

Southeast Asia faces a glut of narrowbody aircraft like the 737 MAX and rival Airbus A320neo at a time of slowing global economic growth and high fuel costs. "They have been re-looking at their fleet plan anyway so this is an opportunity to make some changes that otherwise may be difficult to do," CAPA Centre for Aviation Chief Analyst Brendan Sobie said. Indonesia's Lion Air has also said it might cancel 737 MAX aircraft, though industry sources say it is also struggling to absorb the number of planes on order.

Boeing and FAA employees urged to come forward



RENTON: A Boeing 737 MAX 8 airliner takes off from Renton Municipal Airport near the company's factory in Renton, Washington. — AFP

not match - meaning at least one must be wrong -, according to two officials briefed on the matter. Investigators suspect a faulty angle-of-attack reading led the doomed Lion Air jet's computer to believe it had stalled, prompting its anti-stall system, called MCAS, repeatedly to push the plane's nose down.

Norwegian Air played down the significance of the compulsory light, saying that, according to Boeing, it would not have been able to prevent erroneous signals

that Lion Air pilots received before their new 737 MAX plane crashed in October. Boeing must be cautious with how it characterizes the safety alert, risking legal claims by saying it could have made a difference in the crash while not wanting to suggest that the retrofit is meaningless, legal experts said. The Lion Air plane did not have the warning light installed, and Ethiopian Airlines did not immediately comment on whether its crashed plane had the alert.—Reuters

News in brief

China tour bus fire kills 26

BEIJING: Twenty six people were killed and 30 injured after a tourist bus caught fire in central China, local officials said. The vehicle burst into flames as it drove through Hunan province Friday with 56 people on board-including 53 passengers, two drivers and a tour guide-according to local authorities. The injured, including five in a critical condition, were rushed to hospital for treatment. The two drivers were detained and an investigation into the cause of the accident is under way, according to a statement posted on the city of Changde's official social media account on Weibo. Grisly car accidents are common in China, where transport authorities struggle to enforce safety regulations, which are often flouted. Some 58,000 people were killed in traffic accidents across the country in 2015, the latest year for which the data is available publicly.—AFP

Germany foils 'Islamist plot'

BERLIN: German police arrested 11 people accused of having planned an "Islamist terrorist attack" using guns and a vehicle, prosecutors said. The suspects, whose nationalities were not specified, had plotted to "kill as many 'non-believers' as possible," Frankfurt prosecutors said in a statement. Some 200 police commandos carried out raids in the states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate. The chief suspects were two brothers aged 31 from the city of Wiesbaden and a 21-year-old from Offenbach. They had allegedly made contact with various arms dealers, rented a large vehicle and amassed cash to cover the expenses. Police were investigating 10 of those detained for terror-financing and criminal conspiracy. They were aged between 20 and 42 and lived in Frankfurt, Offenbach, Wiesbaden and Mainz.— AFP

Blasts hit Afghan ceremony

KANDAHAR: At least three people were killed and 30 wounded in twin explosions inside a stadium hosting an agricultural show in southern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said. The blasts happened in Lashkar Gah, the capital of volatile Helmand province, as people marked Farmers' Day as part of Persian New Year celebrations, provincial governor spokesman Omar Zhwak said. People had put their agricultural products on display in the city's main stadium when the explosions happened, said witness Omidullah Zaheer. "First a small explosion happened inside a tent in the stadium. People started to run towards the gates, when a second blast hit the crowd," he said. "I saw some wounded people taken out of the stadium," he said. Zhwak said the casualties from the second blast had been minimal as people fled the area after the first. — AFP

Dozens dead in Burkina Faso

ABIDJAN: An offensive by Islamists in northern Burkina Faso has left dozens of civilians dead and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. "Atrocities by Islamist armed groups in Burkina Faso's northern Sahel region and by security forces during counterterrorism operations have left scores dead and created widespread fear and displacement," the group said in a 62-page report. "The violence has forced tens of thousands of villagers to flee since early 2019," it said. "Scores of people have been murdered in what amounts to a dramatic deterioration in the rights situation in northern Burkina Faso," said Corinne Dufka, Sahel director at Human Rights Watch "Villagers are living in fear as both armed Islamists and government forces have demonstrated utter disregard for human life." — AFP

Accepting Golan annexation, Trump risks new precedents

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump is again breaking diplomatic norms in backing Israel's capture of the Golan Heights, with experts warning that he risks justifying expansionism by other countries. Israel conquered the Golan from Syria in the Six-Day War of 1967 and annexed it in 1981, but until now, the international community has not accepted the move, hoping the territory could serve as a bargaining chip in a future peace deal between the countries.

But Trump on Thursday turned to Twitter for the abrupt diplomatic turnaround, saying that after 52 years, "it is time for the United States to fully recognize" Israeli sovereignty. The move - which came as Trump's ally, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, faces elections - has caused dismay

Conspiracy, collusion: What Mueller's probe has said us so far

WASHINGTON: Special Counsel Robert Mueller has remained silent for nearly two years about his Russia meddling and collusion investigation, which wrapped up on Friday. But a vast story of conspiracy, possible collusion and obstruction has been told in documents that have emerged from the probe, particularly court filings in Mueller's indictment of 34 individuals and convictions of five former Trump associates. Here's what we have learned up until now:

The Russian conspiracy

In two conspiracy indictments Mueller described a cohesive effort under the auspices of Russian President Vladimir Putin to interfere in the 2016 presidential election to undermine Democrat Hillary Clinton and aid Republican candidate Donald Trump. One charged 12 hackers of the GRU military intelligence agency with stealing specifically Democratic Party materials and leaking them to WikiLeaks.

The hackers "targeted over 300 individuals affiliated with the Clinton Campaign, DCCC, and DNC," it said, referring to two key national Democratic bodies. The second indictment named 13 Russians with the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a St. Petersburg troll farm controlled by Evgeny Prigozhin, a close associate of Putin. They were accused of running a massive "fake news" campaign on social media targeting US voters beginning in 2014.

The IRA "had a strategic goal to sow discord in the US political system.... By early to mid-2016, defendants' operations included supporting the presidential campaign of then-candidate Donald J. Trump... and disparaging Hillary Clinton." WikiLeaks was not charged, but court filings said it actively communicated with the GRU hackers offering to help publish the stolen Democratic materials.

Trump campaign collusion with Russia

The investigation showed frequent, willing contacts between members of the Trump campaign and Russians or intermediaries with Moscow, more than 100 by some counts. Trump campaign aides made multiple efforts to arrange a pre-election meeting between him and Putin and to obtain Russian "dirt" on Clinton. "Have been receiving a lot of calls over the last month about Putin wanting to host him and the team," foreign policy advisor George Papadopoulos told an unidentified senior campaign official in an April 2016 email.

even among US allies, with Britain and France both saying they still considered the Golan Heights to be "occupied" by Israel. Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, feared the consequences of walking away from UN Security Council Resolution 242, which stressed the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." The measure was passed after the Six-Day War. "This is the most fundamental principle of international order and was the basis of US opposition to Saddam's conquest of Kuwait and Putin's of Crimea," Haas said, referring to the 1991 Gulf War in which a US-led coalition freed Kuwait and Russia's 2014 seizure of the Ukrainian peninsula.

It is not the first time that the real-estate mogul turned president has brazenly dismissed international conventions. In December 2017, Trump recognized passionately contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital, fulfilling a major goal for the Jewish state. In a television interview Secretary of State Mike Pompeo rejected the suggestion that the United States was using a double standard by recognizing Israeli sovereignty in the Golan while imposing sanctions on Russia for annexing Crimea.

"What the president did with the Golan Heights is recognize the reality on the ground and the security situation necessary for the protection of the Israeli state. It's that



WASHINGTON: The sun begins to rise behind the US Capitol building yesterday in Washington, DC. Yesterday special counsel Robert Mueller delivered his report on alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election to Attorney General William Barr. — AFP

He also told the campaign the Russians proposed to give him information damaging to Clinton. The investigation also revealed the June 9, 2016 Trump Tower meeting between top members of the campaign and a Russian lawyer offering dirt on Clinton. "If it's what you say I love it," Trump's son Don Jr wrote in an email to the publicist who arranged the meeting.

The indictments detailed secret communications between Trump national security advisor Michael Flynn and Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak. In them Flynn urged cooperation that effectively would undermine the policies of still-president Barack Obama. Court documents also showed campaign chairman Paul Manafort sharing polling data with a man with Russian intelligence links. And two associates of the campaign, Roger Stone and Jerome Corsi, communicated with WikiLeaks about its plans for releasing hacked communications from Clinton's operations.

Obstruction

Mueller's team meanwhile investigated actions by Trump that could support charges of obstruction of justice. That began with Trump's pressing FBI director James Comey in early 2017 to pull back on the investigation, and then his firing of Comey that May. Trump also reportedly repeatedly pressured then attorney general Jeff Sessions to reverse his decision to recuse himself from the Mueller probe; sought several times to have Mueller fired; and allegedly encouraged associates to lie about Russia contacts and other behavior. Trump also allegedly dangled pardons to indicted associates to prevent them from providing evidence against him.—AFP



GOLAN HEIGHTS: Israeli soldiers prepare at the Quneitra border crossing of the Israeli annexed-Golan Heights yesterday. — AFP

simple," he told Sky News. Pompeo characterized the US as a "force for good" in the region, with "noble" intentions. "We want good outcomes... for all nations in the Middle East, and the decision the president made will increase the opportunity for there to be stability throughout the region," he said.—AFP

Trump drops N Korea sanctions because he 'likes' Kim Jong Un

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Friday abruptly announced the cancellation of sanctions imposed by his own Treasury Department to tighten international pressure on North Korea. "It was announced today by the US Treasury that additional large scale Sanctions would be added to those already existing Sanctions on North Korea. I have today ordered the withdrawal of those additional Sanctions!" Trump said in a tweet.

He appeared to be referring to measures unveiled Thursday that targeted two Chinese companies accused of helping North Korea to evade tight international sanctions meant to pressure Pyongyang into ending its nuclear weapons program.

But The Washington Post reported, citing Trump administration officials, that the president's tweet referenced future sanctions that had not been announced and were scheduled for "the coming days." The Thursday sanctions were the first new sign of pressure since talks between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un broke down in Hanoi less than a month ago.

However, Trump, who has previously spoken of "love" for the totalitarian leader, appears to retain hope that his strong personal relationship will bear fruit. "President Trump likes Chairman Kim and he doesn't think these sanctions will be necessary," the president's spokeswoman, Sarah Sanders, said. Adam Schiff, a Democrat who heads the intelligence committee in the House of Representatives, blasted Trump for cancelling sanctions "imposed only yesterday and championed by his own national security advisor, because he 'loves' Kim."

"Foolish naivete is dangerous enough. Gross incompetence and disarray in the White House make it even worse," Schiff tweeted. On Thursday, Trump national security advisor John Bolton had tweeted that the sanctions were meant to put an end to "illicit shipping practices" by North Korea. "Everyone should take notice and review their own activities to ensure they are not involved in North Korea's sanctions evasion," he said.

China complained, saying that it did enforce all UN resolutions and opposed "any country imposing unilateral sanctions and taking long-arm jurisdiction against any Chinese entity according to their own domestic laws." This was Trump's second major, unexpected foreign policy announcement by Twitter in two days. On Thursday, he sent a tweet reversing decades of US policy and pledged to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the hotly contested Golan Heights border area with Syria.—AFP

International

India's watchmen question whether Modi embrace will improve their lot

‘Main bhi chowkidar or I am also a watchman’ campaign

NEW DELHI: For over a decade Arvind Singh has worked as a watchman in New Delhi, doing the rounds of the streets with a whistle and a wooden stick to keep vigil at night. Watchmen like him are so ubiquitous in India, guarding everything from offices to homes and stores to factories, that their presence goes almost unnoticed. But over the past week, the watchman has dominated India's headlines.

That's because the latest campaign to be launched this week by Prime Minister Narendra Modi just before a general election beginning on April 11 is the "Main bhi chowkidar" or "I am also a watchman" campaign. He tied an appeal to tens of millions of often poorly paid watchmen to the priorities of his own job, following a suicide bomb attack that killed 40 paramilitary policemen in the northern region of Kashmir last month. "We both work day and night. You guard homes and I guard the nation," Modi said in an audio speech addressed to watchmen on Wednesday.

"The watchman has become a symbol of the country's nationalism," he said, equating everyone from teachers and doctors to watchmen guarding the coun-

try in their own way. The campaign came in response to the opposition Congress party's slogan "chowkidar chor hai", or the nation's "watchman is a thief", which it began using late last year to refer to Modi in connection with allegations of irregularities in the awarding of a defense contract. Modi has denied any wrongdoing.

In recent days, leaders and supporters of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have launched a coordinated effort to popularize his watchman campaign, with many changing their social media names to add the prefix 'chowkidar'. But for many watchmen, who are among the millions in India's vast informal economy where workers are often poorly paid and barely protected by labour laws, Modi's campaign is a political gimmick that is unlikely to improve their lives. "I don't know why they started it," said Rakesh Yadav, a 37-year-old watchman from India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh.

"In the last four years they have done nothing for us," he said, looking up from a newspaper while on duty outside a residential complex in New Delhi. "If PM was a chowkidar, would Nirav Modi run away?" said

another watchman, Mohammed Nayyar, referring to a billionaire jeweler who fled to Britain last year before an alleged \$2 billion loan fraud he is accused of being involved in came to light. The jeweler is not related to the prime minister. The cash-based economy suffered a serious hit from the Modi government's shock move to ban high-value currency notes in 2016.

'Done a lot'

Singh remembers being unable to feed his children for some days and standing in long queues at the banks to exchange the voided currency for new notes. "What has changed in our lives? We are doing the same duty we were doing some years ago," he said, adding that his salary had not increased from about \$130 a month in three years.

The chowkidar campaign is a distinct reminder of Modi's 2014 "chaiwallah" campaign in which he flaunted his past working for his father as a chaiwallah, or tea vendor. It may be a gimmick, but such things have worked for Modi in the past, said Priyavadan Patel, a veteran political scientist from Modi's home state of Gujarat and scholar at the Lokniti research program of

Delhi's Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

"The chaiwalla campaign worked in a big way," Patel said. Such connections with the common man helped the BJP to gain a big parliamentary majority, the likes of which had not been seen in three decades in India, in 2014. But that's unlikely to be repeated this time. Polls predict Modi might win a second term but with a much smaller majority, amid concerns about a lack of jobs growth and millions of farmers dissatisfied over depressed crop prices.

Some of the most challenging battleground states for Modi's party are those that depend on the farm economy. "The chowkidar campaign may not work in such areas," Patel said. One of those states is Bihar, where the watchman Singh migrated from 12 years ago. He said he wouldn't go back because working on the farm back home was not profitable. Yet, he said he believes in Modi, and praised him for air strikes on neighboring Pakistan in response to last month's bomb attack. "I feel like Modi ji has done a lot," he said, using a suffix that denotes respect. "And I think he will do a lot more in the coming years." —Reuters

Pakistan shows off military might, calls for peace with India

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan wants peace with India and they should focus on health and education, the Pakistani president said yesterday during a parade to show off its military might following a tense standoff between the nuclear-armed neighbors. Conflict between the rivals erupted last month following a suicide bomb attack claimed by a Pakistan-based militant group in the Indian party of the disputed and divided Kashmir region that killed 40 paramilitary police. "We do not believe in war and want to solve problems through dialogue," President Arif Alvi said in his Pakistani Republic Day speech. "Instead of war we should focus on education and health."

Pakistani warplanes engaged in a dogfight with Indian aircraft over Kashmir on Feb. 27, a day after a raid by Indian jets on what it said was a militant camp in Pakistan. In their first such clash since their last war, in 1971, Pakistan downed an Indian plane and captured its pilot after he ejected over Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The pilot was later released by Pakistan as a peace gesture. The president, who largely holds ceremonial duties, said India had blamed Pakistan for the suicide-bomb attack without evidence, which he said was irresponsible.

Yesterday's military parade included an air show featuring the Pakistani-built JF-17 fighter jet. One of the aircraft shot down the Indian plane last month. "Today's parade is sending the message that we are a peaceful people but we will never be oblivious of our defense," Alvi said. The parade



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani President Arif Alvi (center) arrives at the Pakistan Day parade in Islamabad yesterday. —AFP

was attended by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who was invited to attend as the chief guest, and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Khan said on Twitter earlier that he had received a message from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his best wishes for Republic Day and calling for peace and regional cooperation. "I welcome PM Modi's message to

our people," Khan said. "I believe it's time to begin a comprehensive dialogue with India to address and resolve all issues. The dispute over the former princely state of Kashmir sparked the first two of three wars between India and Pakistan after independence in 1947. They fought the second in 1965, and a third, largely over what become Bangladesh, in 1971. —Reuters

Italy, China ink new 'Silk Road' protocol

ROME: Italy yesterday signed a "non-binding" protocol with China to take part in Beijing's new "Silk Road" of transport and trade links stretching from Asia to Europe. In doing so, Italy became the first G7 country to sign up for the massive project which has sparked unease in the US and the European Union as China aspires to a greater world role. Visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte both attended a ceremony for the signing of 29 memoranda of understanding which Italian media said were worth 5.0 to 7.0 billion euros (\$5.6 to 8.0 billion).

Also signing the accords were the chairman of China's chairman of the National Development Commission He Lifeng and Italian deputy prime minister and Minister of Economic Development Luigi Di Maio. Italian financial daily Il Sole 24 Ore said the value of the Chinese investments could rise to 20 billion euros but would for now be limited to the strategic ports of Genoa and Trieste. Italy has rolled out the red carpet for Xi, who Friday sought to allay Western unease over his transformational infrastructure initiative by emphasizing the \$1 trillion project's mutual benefits.

Italian firms to benefit include the Ansaldo group, which wins a contract for making turbines, and the Danieli group, which lands a 1.1 billion euro deal to build an iron and steel plant in Azerbaijan. The accords also foresee the opening up of the Chinese market for Italian oranges as well as a

partnership for Chinese tourism giant Ctrip, notably with Rome's airports. Cultural tie-ups including town twinnings are also on the agenda while Beijing is pushing to have several Serie A football matches played in China - although that would currently contravene regulations of the game's governing body FIFA.

'Opportunity - and risk'

"We are well aware, with this memorandum of understanding, that there is risk as well as opportunity," said secretary of state for the economy Michele Geraci, who spent a decade working in China. Italy has made a point of giving a full welcome to Xi, despite the misgivings in Washington and Brussels. Critics say Beijing's ambitious maritime, rail and road venture is "predatory" and overwhelmingly favors China and Chinese companies. —AFP

China factory blast death toll jumps to 64, man rescued

BEIJING: The death toll in a chemical plant explosion in China rose to 64 yesterday but rescuers found a survivor among more than two dozen still missing in the debris of one of the country's worst industrial accidents in recent years. Thursday's explosion in the eastern city of Yancheng injured hundreds and flattened an industrial park. The local fire brigade pulled a man in his 40s from the rubble of the destroyed chemical plant around dawn yesterday, according to a statement on the city government's official Weibo account.

He was taken to hospital for treatment, the statement said, without giving further detail of his status or injuries. Rescuers are looking for 28 people who are still missing, Yancheng mayor Cao Lubao said in the statement. "The identities of the dead and the missing are being confirmed through interviews with family members, home visits and DNA tests," Cao said. More than 600 people have received medical treatment following the blast, according to the city government.

Among them, 21 are critically injured and 73 are seriously injured, the statement said. The explosion toppled several buildings in the industrial park and caused a huge fire that raged through the night, while rescuers scrambled to find survivors in the plant's wreckage. Hundreds of rescuers were dispatched to the scene, local authorities said, and some 4,000 people have been evacuated from the blast site.

The force of the explosion - which was so powerful that it apparently triggered a small earthquake - blew out windows and dented metal garage doors of buildings as far as four kilometers from the site. Nearby residents - many of them elderly - were seen sweeping up glass, and in some cases appeared to have abandoned their homes entirely. The city government said some 89 houses were damaged beyond repair and families were resettled after demolishing those structures.

The government said it was also repairing blown-in doors and windows in 10 school buildings near the site so that all schools in the area can resume classes Monday. Local authorities investigating the cause of the accident said an unspecified number of people were taken into police custody on Friday. —AFP



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Washington Watch

Pitzer College and the struggle for real academic freedom

By Dr James J Zogby

On March 14th, the College Council, the governing body of Pitzer College in California, overwhelmingly passed (67-28) a resolution suspending its relationship with the University of Haifa until Israel ended its policy of restricting entry on the basis of "legally protected political speech or race or ancestry." The resolution had earlier been approved by the both student body and the faculty. Within a few hours of the College Council's vote, Pitzer's President took the unprecedented step of vetoing the resolution creating a crisis of confidence between the college's governing body and its chief administrator. In the lead up to the vote, I was asked to write a supportive letter.

In my letter, I expressed my "...support for Pitzer faculty's decision to stand up for justice and equality. By suspending Pitzer College's exchange with the University of Haifa until the state of Israel ends its discriminatory entry policy at the border and grants visas for individuals to participate in exchanges with Palestinian universities, the faculty has affirmed its commitment to ensuring that Pitzer College values equality of educational opportunity and the rights of all to engage in the 'dialogue and intercultural understanding.' Israel's discrimination against people based on their ethnicity or advocacy isn't just a problem for Palestinians living inside Israel as second-class citizens or in the occupied Palestinian territories without political rights or dignity. It is also a problem that impacts Americans traveling to Israel.

"For decades, many Arab Americans, because of their ethnicity, and other Americans, because of their support for Palestinian human rights, have been systematically targeted and subjected to discriminatory screening, harassment, detention, and deportation when attempting to enter Israel and/or Palestine. Israel's discrimination appears to be a matter of practice and policy. Indeed, it has become so commonplace that it has warranted US government action. Four years ago, the US Department of State expressed concern regarding the 'unequal treatment that Palestinian-Americans and other Arab-Americans receive at Israel's borders and checkpoints.' Secretaries of State Albright, Rice, and Kerry have spoken out on this matter, objecting to Israel's treating Arab Americans as less than full US citizens.

"It was precisely because of this Israeli policy of discrimination against American citizens of Arab descent, that the State Department opposed and blocked efforts by some in Congress to grant Israel 'visa waiver status.' We were, therefore, heartened by the resolution of the Pitzer College Faculty Council, precisely because we know from direct experience that persons of Arab descent will not easily be able to participate in any exchange program established with Israel and that Palestinian colleges and universities in occupied lands encounter great difficulty when they attempt to establish exchange programs of their own.

"We appreciate that the resolution was smartly crafted to encourage Israel to change its policies. It was not a flat out boycott. Rather it was a call for the University of Haifa and Pitzer College to take a stand in support of ensuring that the opportunity to participate in educational exchanges is open to all. In doing so, you are sending a signal to Israel that discrimination is not acceptable. Further, this resolution passed by the faculty makes clear that the fair treatment of all of our citizens is a minimum requirement for any Israeli institution that seeks engagement with a US institution.

"I was especially pleased to see that the resolution includes exchanges with Palestinian universities. These academic institutions exist in areas under Israeli military occupation. They and their students should have the same opportunity to participate in exchange programs as do students in Israel, and yet they do not. Israel places obstacles on their hiring faculty from abroad and from students securing visas to participate in their programs.

"If Pitzer College is to foster a relationship with a university abroad, it should ensure that those relationships and associated resources are equally available to all eligible Pitzer students, regardless of ethnicity, national origin, or political views. This equal opportunity requirement is not only a central American value, it is inextricably bound to academic freedom - a freedom that all Israelis and Palestinians deserve, and a freedom they are more likely to enjoy equally if Pitzer College remains on the right side of history by supporting the faculty resolution."

What was especially galling about the Pitzer College president's veto was the way he so flagrantly mischaracterized the College Council's action. He termed their action as one that "curtails the academic freedom of those students who wish to study at the University of Haifa", terming it as "a form of academic boycott of Israel" that "sets us on a path away from the free exchange of ideas." In fact, the faculty resolution embraced by the College Council did not call for a boycott of Israel or restrict the free exchange of idea. What it did do was call on Israel to not restrict students or faculty from participating in programs in Haifa because of their political views or ethnicity. In vetoing this resolution, the Pitzer president has attempted absolve Israel of its discriminatory policies and has failed in his duty to protect the rights of Pitzer's faculty and students who are either of Arab descent or who hold views on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that by Israeli law would exclude them from entry to the country. This is the real violation of academic freedom.

The good news is that the battle is far from over. Hundreds of Pitzer faculty and students have mobilized to respond. They are calling on the president to reverse his decision or face a "no confidence motion" or even legal action by Jewish and Arab American students who will argue that their right to equal access to educational opportunity is being denied.

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



A boy looks as forensic investigators comb the ground for DNA evidence near a pile of twisted airplane debris at the crash site of an Ethiopian Airways operated Boeing 737 MAX aircraft on March 16, 2019 at Hama Quntushale village near Bishoftu in Oromia region. —AFP

Suspicion, strife strain Ethiopian crash probe

At the headquarters of the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority, a paper sign balanced above room 107 and a threadbare square of carpet welcome a stream of foreign visitors to the Accident Investigation Bureau. The office - with three investigators and an annual budget of less than 2.5 million Birr (\$89,000) - is leading a multi-party, multi-nation probe into what caused an Ethiopian Airlines flight to crash on March 10, killing all 157 people on board.

Brusque foreign investigators in cargo pants and Ethiopians in suits or reflective vests wave away questions from reporters on how their inquiries are progressing. This modest agency is under intense international scrutiny because the results of its investigation could have far-reaching consequences for the global aviation industry. If the investigators highlight flaws in the 737 MAX 8 that echo a recent crash of the same model in Indonesia, their report could deal a major blow to Boeing, the world's biggest planemaker and a massive US exporter.

But if investigators find Ethiopian Airlines fell short in maintenance, training or piloting, that could damage one of Africa's most successful companies, a symbol of Ethiopia's emergence as a regional power. Disagreements have broken out in Addis Ababa between Ethiopian authorities and foreign investigators over issues including the handling of evidence and crash site management, according to several sources close to the investigation.

Kevin Humphreys, a former Irish regulator who founded the country's air investigation agency, told Reuters the high stakes involved tend to make probes like this one particularly tough. "There are tensions because it is unrealistic to assume that international protocols are always going to work. There is a potentially important economic impact from such investigations."

An 18-strong team of American investigators has been sent to aid the Ethiopians with the inquiry, including representatives from

the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Boeing, and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which certified 737 MAX planes as safe. US and some other foreign investigators are unhappy because Ethiopia is so far sharing only limited information, the sources said. "There is no opportunity for the international community to benefit and learn from this," said one of them, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Some foreign officials are also unhappy about the prominent role Ethiopian Airlines played in the probe, suggesting a possible conflict of interests, they said. But one Addis Ababa-based source said the carrier's role in the investigation does not necessarily indicate it is trying to exert undue influence. The airline is more likely involved because it is the most well-funded and staffed state enterprise able to help the over-stretched inquiry team, he added. "When you have a vacuum, someone has to fill it," he said.

Ethiopian Airlines' spokesman Asrat Begachew said the carrier was supporting the investigation. "We are not taking the lead," he added, declining to comment further. Under global aviation rules, interested parties like airlines and manufacturers are discouraged from speaking publicly about the investigation. Yet in the first days after the Flight 302 crash, Ethiopian Airlines made all of the public statements, including announcing the black box recorders would be sent overseas for data extraction.

It was not until six days after the tragedy that the Ministry of Transport began briefing the media and public. Hours after the crash, Ethiopian Airlines tweeted a picture of its CEO Tewelde Gebremariam holding a piece of debris in the crater of the crash site, surprising aviation experts who said the site should have been preserved for investigators. Musie Yehyies, spokesman for Ethiopia's Ministry of Transport, said the government had been quick to share information about the crash. He denied there was

any mistrust between the Ethiopians and other parties. "Our friendship with the United States is obvious," he told Reuters. "Plenty of governments have been offering assistance, and some of them have helped practically."

Black boxes

The cockpit voice and flight data recorders were recovered the day after the crash, but it took Ethiopian investigators three days to decide where to send them for the information to be extracted and decoded. Like many fast-growing players, the Ethiopians do not have the technology to perform the task. In a sign of the distrust between the parties, the Ethiopians turned down an American offer to perform the analysis in the United States, according to two sources.

Ethiopian Airlines CEO Tewelde personally approached German authorities to request to send the black boxes to Germany to have the data extracted there, a separate source with knowledge of matter told Reuters. Airlines are not usually involved in such decisions, according to current and former investigators. However German officials said they too did not have the most recent software needed to extract the data, so the devices were eventually sent to France.

Partial data from the flight data recorder was shared informally late on Monday with US and French investigators in Paris, but nothing from the cockpit voice recorder, three sources familiar with the matter said. It is common for the host investigator to closely guard voice recordings to protect privacy but unusual for relatively little data to be available a week after being downloaded. "As an investigator, it is hard to understand the logic behind withholding safety-of-flight information," Greg Feith, a former senior air safety investigator with the NTSB, said on Facebook on Thursday.—Reuters

Syria Kurd autonomy under threat after IS 'caliphate' falls

Now the Islamic State group's "caliphate" has fallen, the hard-won limited autonomy of Syria's Kurds will be left in peril if their key US ally goes ahead with its announced pull-out. Yesterday, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces announced the end of the proto-state that the extremist group declared across large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq in 2014. The Kurds have largely stayed out of Syria's eight-year civil war, instead building their own institutions in a third of the country under their control.

But a planned US military pullout has left them exposed to an attack by Turkey and in need of protection from Damascus, in a massive blow to their dreams of self-rule. "The Kurds have been caught between a Syrian rock and a Turkish hard place," Syria expert Fabrice Balanche said. Kurdish fighters have spearheaded the fight against IS since late 2014, but neighboring Turkey views them as "terrorists".

The presence of American troops in areas held by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had acted as a shield against any Turkish offensive. But US President Donald Trump in December shocked Washington's allies by announcing a full withdrawal of all 2,000 US troops from Syria as IS had been "beaten". "The Kurds are facing an uncertain future. The most urgent threat appears to be from Turkey," analyst Mutlu Civioglu said. After his announcement, Trump attempted to ease tensions by speaking of a 30-km "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the border. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said his country would establish the "security zone" itself if it took too long to implement.

'Recognition?'

The Kurds have rejected any Turkish implementation, especially since any such buffer would include their major cities. They are demanding instead the deployment of an international observer force. "Kobane, Tal Abyad, Darbasiya, Qamishli, Dehik, Derbassiyeh - most of the Kurdish cities are on the border line," Civioglu said. Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies have led two previous offensives inside Syria, most recently seizing the north-western enclave of Afrin from the Kurds last year.

Syria's civil war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the brutal

repression of anti-government protests. It has since spiralled into a complex conflict, with rebel backer Turkey and regime ally Russia emerging as key powerbrokers. Beyond American approval, Civioglu said Turkey would likely need a green light from Russia before any Turkish offensive in Syria. "Russia's position is going to be very important, because Russia has a strong power over Turkey," he said.

President Bashar Al-Assad's regime now controls two-thirds of Syria thanks to Russian military backing since 2015, and it seems determined to also return to oil-rich northeastern Syria. To protect themselves, the Kurds have dispatched delegations to Washington and Moscow. And in ongoing talks, they have scrambled to mend ties with Damascus.

After decades of marginalization, the Kurds have developed their own political system in northeast Syria - holding elections, collecting taxes and running schools teaching the Kurdish language. "In a war-torn country, the Kurdish system is working fine," Civioglu said. "The Kurds want this to be recognized." They want "Kurdish education to be offered officially", he said, after decades of an effective ban on their mother tongue.

'Carved up?'

But talks so far have failed to bear fruit, and Balanche warns the Kurds are in a weak position. "The regime is demanding an unconditional surrender. Damascus does not want to let them retain any autonomy," he said. Syrian Defence Minister Ali Abdullah Ayoub said Monday that the government would recapture all areas held by the SDF "in one of two ways: a reconciliation agreement or... by force".

Although the end of the IS "caliphate" has been declared, IS is still present in eastern Syria's vast Badia desert. The US Defense Department has warned that without sustained pressure on the jihadists, they could resurge in Syria within months. In the end, the future of the Kurds mainly depends on the United States, says analyst Nicholas Heras of the Center for a New American Security. "Every other actor in Syria cannot make a move until there is greater clarity on what the United States ultimately decides to do," he said.

And after any troop pullout, the United States could still stay on with a paramilitary force, he added. "The best hope for the SDF is for the Americans and the coalition to stick it out in Syria for the long haul." The White House has said that around 200 American "peace-keeping" soldiers would remain in northern Syria indefinitely. Acting Pentagon chief Patrick Shanahan said he would be discussing with NATO partners the potential to establish an "observer force" in the area. —AFP

IS loss affirms Pentagon plan, but endgame vague

Now that the Islamic State group has officially lost its geographic "caliphate", the Pentagon is marking a historic moment in its years-long campaign to defeat the jihadists. From a military perspective at least, the United States can claim significant success in its strategy of working "by, with and through" local proxy forces, where a Kurdish militia in Syria and security forces in Iraq bore the brunt of the fighting - and dying.

But IS still has thousands of battle-hardened fighters across several countries, and questions loom over whether the group's territorial loss can be parlayed into an enduring defeat - or whether President Donald Trump's decision to pull most troops from Syria is premature, and risks ruining the end game. "I'd be hesitant to use the term winning," General Raymond Thomas, who heads US Special Operations Command, told lawmakers recently.

The objective is "to be able to maintain persistent capabilities so that an external threat cannot emanate from that in the future". Asked if he was satisfied the United States was at that point, Thomas said: "I do not think we're there yet." How much the United States can influence things will only diminish after the Pentagon withdraws all but 200 of the 2,000 or so special forces from Syria that have been helping the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Trump in December declared victory over IS, saying the US had "beaten them badly", as he announced the pullout. John Spencer, a scholar at the Modern War Institute at West Point, said things were not so simple. IS "is a terrorist organization, all they have to do is put down their weapons and try to blend in with the population and just escape," he told AFP. "They're not gone, and they're not going to be gone," he said.

Started under Obama

The US-led mission began in late 2014 under president Barack Obama, after IS fighters seized an area the size of Britain across Iraq and Syria. In an effort to "degrade and ultimately defeat" the black-flag-flying jihadists, the United States formed a coalition that grew to more than 70 nations, several of which started bombing IS positions in 2014. In the years since, the coalition has conducted about 34,000

air strikes in Syria and Iraq.

Instead of committing large numbers of troops, the coalition combined its air campaign with training and advising to local forces. The decision stemmed partly from the Iraq War, which saw more than 4,400 US troops die. An American public wary of additional deployments did not want Obama committing more combat troops. The strategy paid off fastest in Iraq, where a national military that had neared collapse in the face of the IS advance morphed into an army that ousted the jihadists from one city after another until retaking their stronghold of Mosul in 2017.

When Trump took office, he essentially continued Obama's strategy, albeit with tougher talk and looser constraints on air strikes. "Overall, the US strategy was effective at pushing back the Islamic State," Daniel Byman, a senior Fellow at the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, told AFP. However, he noted, it has not solved the problem of local governance in Syria, where the grueling civil war gave rise to the conditions that allowed IS to blossom in the first place. "So the Islamic State is remaining active - hundreds of killings this month alone - as an insurgency," Byman said. The toll on US-backed local forces has been brutal, with thousands of Syrian and Iraqi fighters killed.

It's just no'

Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria has left Kurdish partners scrambling for safeguards, and they are hoping a "safe zone" in the north can provide them cover. A US departure makes Kurdish fighters more vulnerable to attack by neighboring Turkey, which considers them to be "terrorists," and dashes their dreams of autonomy. The New York-based Soufan Group, which compiles security assessments, cautioned against claims of beating IS. That would "only serve to offer a false sense of security while showing that the United States remains out of touch with realities on the ground," Soufan said.

General Joseph Votel, who heads the US military's Central Command, said the military cannot take its eye off IS. "The coalition's hard-won battlefield gains can only be secured by maintaining a vigilant offensive against a now largely disbursed and disaggregated (IS) that retains leaders, fighters, facilitators, resources and the profane ideology that fuels their efforts," said Votel, who is about to retire, adding that Trump never checked in with him about a Syria withdrawal.

Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has tried to convince skeptical allies to help secure Syria. But "it is totally out of the question to have French troops on the ground without the Americans there," one French government source told AFP. "It's just no." —AFP

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CBK to distribute 20% cash dividends, 10% bonus shares

Commercial Bank holds AGM, approves BoD's recommendations



KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK)'s Board of Directors during the Annual General Assembly (AGM) yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) held its Annual General Assembly (AGM) yesterday and approved the Board of Directors' recommendation of distributing 20 percent cash dividends and 10 percent bonus shares to shareholders. Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Jaber Al-Sabah, CBK Chairman, opened the meeting by welcoming the shareholders and highlighting the bank's major business throughout 2018.

Message from the Chairman

In the name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Dear shareholders,

It is both an honour and a privilege to deliver my first statement as the Chairman of the Bank. Bank's results in 2018 demonstrate the solid progress being made to advance our customer-focused growth strategy, digitalization drive, cleaning the loan portfolio, recovery of previously written off loans and building a quality balance sheet. Bank's business plans continue to deliver sustainable results and value to shareholders. The Bank witnessed 15.0 percent increase in the net profit and the board recommended the highest ever dividend distribution in the last ten years (20 percent cash and 10 percent bonus). I am pleased to share with you that achieving the Zero non-performing loans level is a demonstration of our commitment to operate within our risk appetite and maintaining strong capital and liquidity positions.

One of the board's most critical roles is to provide oversight on strategic direction. We provide guidance to management in order to focus on markets and segments where Commercial Bank is positioned to succeed. In order to anticipate and respond to a dynamic marketplace, we advise management on strategic plans, challenge assumptions, and assist in identifying and building pathways to sustainable growth, within the bank's risk appetite. In 2018, we supported the Management Team while challenging appropriately in order to ensure that the Bank continues to fulfil its obligations to our customers, regulators and employees. Besides achieving these objectives, the board focused to create value for investors over the medium and longer term.

A customer-first approach

In banking, relationships matter more than ever. This helped shape our thinking about every interaction we have with our customers and how we manage and invest in our bank. In 2018 we continued focusing on our customers and innovating for the future. These priorities have enabled us to invest in our business with the goal of further enhancing our



Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Jaber Al-Sabah speaks to the media

relationships with our customers. We have stayed close to our customers to understand what's important to them and how we can best serve them. We continued to invest in our technology and digital platforms to meet the evolving needs of our customers. This includes our investments in online and mobile banking to deliver industry-leading functionality. We concentrated on improving the information security systems of the bank to protect our customers. New measures were introduced on our website to incorporate more effective security features. Mobile banking application was enhanced significantly in 2018, offering a host of new features and allowing customers to conduct their banking transactions more easily and efficiently. Security and user functionality continue to be the primary focus as we enhance our online and mobile banking applications.

Talent Management

Talent management, including senior management succession planning, is vital to achieving the Bank's strategic objectives over the long term. We take a comprehensive approach to pipeline development that includes early identification of key candidates and in-depth evaluation of the skills and expertise required for both the short and medium term. The Bank's staff training and motivation programmes remained top priority during 2018. We identified "High Performers" to unveil their leadership potential and



accordingly provided them with targeted personal development training opportunities to grow their professional skills. As the banking industry continues to evolve, diversity of experiences, perspectives and backgrounds at all levels of management becomes a competitive advantage and the key to successful execution of the bank's strategy.

Robust risk management

The board assesses management's plans to ensure business opportunities are balanced with sound risk management priorities and an effective enterprise-wide framework. Board Risk Management Committee actively engages with management to assure that a strong risk culture is supported at all levels and that the bank's risk management function is independent from the businesses. We also provide guidance on, and approve the bank's risk appetite, and maintain open two-way lines of communications with regulators.

Synopsis of 2018 Financials

The results of our customer-first approach, talent development and robust risk management are reflected in the financial statements of the bank as we generated a net profit of KD 63.8 million in 2018 compared to KD 55.4 in 2017, a growth of 15.0 percent. These results have reflected positively on the performance ratios, where return on average equity reached 9.7 percent and the

return on average assets reached 1.4 percent. The earnings per share are 35.4 fils (compared to 30.8 fils for the last year). Shareholders' equity reached KD 729.0 million with a growth of 11.4 percent. Cost of funds was maintained at a reasonably low level. The cost/income ratio is 29.7 percent for year-ending 31 December 2018, which is amongst the lowest in Kuwaiti banks.

A concentrated effort to recover the previously written-off loans yielded results: KD 78.5 million were recovered during the current year.

Looking at the future

Since I took on the Chairmanship of Commercial Bank, I am very proud of how we have evolved our culture, re-focused on our customers and enhanced shareholder value. We are well positioned to deliver growth for our shareholders by executing our strategy to build a relationship-focused bank.

I am incredibly proud of all the work our team is doing together to focus on our customers, delivering value to our shareholders, and strengthening our economic environment. We are committed to continue to provide effective and efficient services every single day to our valued customers, and we appreciate the trust our customers place in us. Last but not the least, thanks to all the regulatory authorities, especially the Central Bank of Kuwait for their constant support.

Business

KIPCO announces 20% net profit increase to KD 28.3m for 2018

Our long-term strategy of portfolio diversification pays off: Al-Ayyar

KUWAIT: KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - has announced a net profit of KD 28.3 million (\$93.3 million) for the year ended 31 December 2018, an increase of 20 per cent on the KD 23.6 million (\$77.8 million) reported in 2017.

Earnings per share was up 30 per cent from 11.5 fils (\$3.8 cents) per share reported in 2017 to 15 fils (\$4.9 cents) per share at the end of 2018.

KIPCO's Board of Directors is recommending a cash dividend of 12 per cent (12 fils per share) subject to approval by the

company's General Assembly and regulatory authorities. Total revenue from continuing operations in 2018 increased by 13 per cent to KD 774 million (\$2.55 billion) compared to the KD 686 million (\$2.26 billion) reported in 2017.

KIPCO's consolidated assets stood at KD 10.4 billion (\$34 billion), compared to KD 10.3 billion (\$34 billion) reported at year-end 2017.

Faisal Al-Ayyar, KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), said that the business environment continued to be difficult in 2018, but

the company was able to perform well despite these circumstances:

"The performance we achieved in 2018 reflects our sound operations and long-term strategy of portfolio diversification. We predicted earlier that we will face challenges that are not structural, but rather the result of external elements such as competition, weakened operating environment, as well as regional economic and political struggles. Despite all this, the performance of our core businesses has exceeded our expectations thanks to the

internal discipline we adhere to and our focus on streamlining our operations."

He added: "During 2018, our banking operations reported record profits and strong growth in revenue and net income. Meanwhile, our insurance network successfully increased its profit, gross written premiums and shareholder equity. While we look to 2019 with caution, we believe that our prudent internal practices and strategy of diversified investments will guide us towards a more positive outcome this year."



Faisal Al-Ayyar

Economic gloom hits world stock markets

NEW YORK: Worries about economic growth prospects hit global stock markets on Friday, causing sharp price drops on both sides of the Atlantic. In bloodletting on Wall Street, US stocks suffered their worst day since early January.

The closely watched "yield curve" flashed a warning sign that a recession could be looming while monthly US, French and German manufacturing indices all fell-rattling investors who were already uneasy after this week's surprisingly weak outlook from the Federal Reserve.

"A series of worse-than-expected economic releases from Europe have sounded the alarm bell not just for the bloc, but also the global economy, by providing further evidence of a worldwide slowdown in economic activity," said XTB analyst David Cheetham.

The so-called yield curve, which tracks the spread between short- and longer-term rates on US Treasury bonds, briefly inverted on Friday, with yields on three month bonds falling below those for 10-year notes-the first time this had happened since before the global financial crisis in 2007.

The yield curve is closely watched since it has inverted prior to recessions in recent decades.

But Justin Lederer, interest rates strategist at Cantor Fitzgerald, told AFP the flip was not cause for so much alarm. "The yield curve inversion reveals more what is going on in the global landscape, the fact that global growth is slowing down," he said.

"I don't think it is an immediate signal that a recession is approaching."

Also weighing on the benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average were poor showings for Boeing and Nike, which fell 2.8 percent and 6.6 percent.

An Indonesian air carrier on Friday became the first to announce it was canceling a multi-billion-dollar order of 737 MAX aircraft in the wake of recent fatal crashes in which nearly 350 people perished.

In foreign exchange, sterling rose again after Brussels gave Britain a Brexit deadline extension.

Signs of a weak first quarter for the eurozone also mounted on Friday as a closely-watched survey pointed to March output being dragged further down by manufacturing weakness, especially in Germany, Europe's largest economy.

The German data were "shockingly bad", said Angel Talavera, an economist with Oxford Economics, and "a timely reminder that the European industrial sector continues to be dominated by worries and potential negative shocks, including the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, trade concerns and problems in the auto industry."

The pound however pushed higher one day after European Union leaders agreed at a crucial summit to delay Brexit following a request from Prime Minister Theresa May. —AFP

AUB holds seminar on investment outlook for 2019

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank has organized a seminar for its Private Banking Services and Wealth Management customers under the theme "Investment Outlook for 2009 and the Impact of Brexit on British Taxes", as part of AUB's continuous efforts to provide its customers with investment services. The seminar was held to enhance awareness regarding the expected performance of global markets and investment opportunities in a number of promising markets as well as the effect on UK taxes of Brexit and the expectations of the way in which it going to take place.

Held at the Four Seasons Kuwait, the seminar targeted a select segment of AUB's Private Banking Services and Wealth Management customers who are keen to attend this series of seminars regularly organized by Ahli United Bank for its customers in order to keep them aware of the changes in the finance and investment field.

In his opening speech, Senior General Manager for Private Banking Services and Wealth Management at Ahli United Bank, Medhat Tawfik, said: "By organizing these forums we seek to give our Private Banking Services and Wealth Management customers the opportunity to benefit from the studies related to global investment opportunities and highlight the numerous risks associated with investment and market performance" against the backdrop of global events that affect world trade and the consequences of the UK's leaving the European Union (Brexit).

Tawfik added: "The sources and advice that AUB provides to its customers help them better manage their investments successive changes in the market environment. These are a key element of our specialized services." In her lecture at the seminar, Sara Maccallum, Senior Partner - Head of Commercial Tax at Boodle Hatfield Law Firm in London, outlined the expected tax effects on non-residents in the United Kingdom, including the Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED) (residential properties) owned by offshore companies, with a value exceed Stg. Pound 500,000 , the Non-Resident Capital Gains Tax (NRCGT), which was introduced and applied in 2015 on residential properties and subsequently expanded in 2019 to include all real estate properties and indirect disposals, in addition to the Income Tax on rental income and the Non-resident Landlord Scheme, and finally, the switch to the Corporation Tax which will include rental income (from April 2020) and capital gains on real estate properties (from April 2019) .

Sara Maccallum then addressed the matter of Inheritance Tax in the United Kingdom and the expected changes in this tax as well as the predictable effect of the political and tax changes on investors. She concluded by giving a number advices to those who wish to invest in the UK.

Shaima Jilloud, Partner in the sector of Real Estate Investment Middle East at Boodle Hatfield Law Firm then gave a detailed presentation outlining the various stages of a real estate purchase transaction, starting with the offer, negotiation of the contract,



Medhat Tawfik delivers the opening speech



Sara Maccallum



Alistair J Macdonald

report on the title to the property prepared on the basis of title / searches investigations, reservation of the property, followed by the exchange process which includes signing the contract, payment of a part of the price and specifying the completion date, and ending with handover of the balance of the funds and collection of the keys from the agent.

In her presentation, Shaima Jilloud outlined the situation in the event of late completion by the buyer, the role of lawyers in the final stage of collecting the keys by the buyer, land registration and payment of the stamp duty land tax.

Alistair J. Macdonald, CFA, Vice President at Franklin Templeton Emerging Markets Equity, then gave a detailed presentation on the global economic situation and its effect on the markets in terms of gross domestic product, growth, the performance of the economic indicators of advanced and emerging countries, key market indicators and how opportunities can be seized given the risks threatening emerging markets.

At the conclusion of the seminar, Medhat Tawfik said: "we are very happy with the results of this event, which reaffirms the desire of Ahli United Bank



Shaima Jilloud

to provide quality services to its customers and highlight the latest developments in global markets. Needless to say, the bank will continue to offer first-class banking services to its customers."

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.	
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	304.300
Euro	346.900
Sterling Pound	405.020
Canadian dollar	229.140
Turkish lira	56.560
Swiss Franc	306.140
US Dollar Buying	303.100
ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.729
Indian Rupees	4.417
Pakistani Rupees	2.208
Srilankan Rupees	1.701
Nepali Rupees	2.769
Singapore Dollar	225.910
Hongkong Dollar	38.765
Bangladesh Taka	3.604
Philippine Peso	5.762
Thai Baht	9.624
Malaysian ringgit	77.826
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.201
Qatari Riyal	83.633
Omani Riyal	790.903
Bahraini Dinar	808.560
UAE Dirham	82.904
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.500
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.552

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.222
Tunisian Dinar	102.800
Jordanian Dinar	429.800
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.030
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.338
Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd	
Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.940
Canadian Dollar	228.675
Sterling Pound	405.930
Euro	347.430
Swiss Frank	306.720
Bahrain Dinar	83.155
UAE Dirhams	808.290
Qatari Riyals	84.390
Saudi Riyals	81.945
Jordanian Dinar	429.975
Egyptian Pound	17.465
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.703
Indian Rupees	4.441
Pakistani Rupees	2.179
Bangladesh Taka	3.612
Philippines Peso	5.767
Cyprus pound	18.085
Japanese Yen	3.731
Syrian Pound	1.589
Nepalese Rupees	2.782
Malaysian Ringgit	75.400
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.670
Thai Bhat	10.590

Turkish Lira

Singapore dollars

56.195

224.844

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.396013	0.419913
Czech Korune	0.005446	0.014746
Danish Krone	0.042163	0.047163
Euro	0.337496	0.351195
Georgian Lari	0.112737	0.112737
Hungarian 0.001011	0.001201	
Norwegian Krone	0.031555	0.036755
Romanian Leu	0.056487	0.072337
Russian ruble	0.004725	0.004725
Slovakia	0.009095	0.019095
Swedish Krona	0.028947	0.033947
Swiss Franc	0.297661	0.308651
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.206827	0.218827
New Zealand Dollar	0.201495	0.210995
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.222791	0.231791
US Dollars	0.300200	0.305500
US Dollars Mint	0.300700	0.305500
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003051	0.003852
Chinese Yuan	0.043813	0.047313

Hong Kong Dollar	0.036676	0.039426
Indian Rupee	0.003825	0.004597
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002641	0.002821
Korean Won	0.000259	0.000274
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070595	0.076595
Nepalese Rupee	0.002609	0.002949
Pakistan Rupee	0.001597	0.002367
Philippine Peso	0.005781	0.006081
Singapore Dollar	0.219515	0.229515
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001363	0.001943
Taiwan	0.009746	0.009926
Thai Baht	0.009277	0.009827
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.792591	0.809091
Egyptian Pound	0.017643	0.020243
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.424290	0.433290
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022112	0.046112
Omani Riyal	0.784071	0.789751
Qatar Riyal	0.079294	0.084234
audi Riyal	0.080060	0.081360
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.096623	0.104623
Turkish Lira	0.049222	0.060722
UAE Dirhams	0.081425	0.083125
Yemeni Riyal	0.000989	0.001069



KUWAIT: Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Yousef Abdul Hamid Al-Jassim, Kwang So Lee, Isam Jassim Al-Sager, Salah Al-Fulaij, Mohammed Al-Othman and officials from Ministry of Interior during the opening of NBK branch at Terminal 4 of the Kuwait International Airport on Thursday.

NBK opens second branch at Kuwait International Airport at Terminal 4

DGCA president, KAC chairman among dignitaries attend ceremony

KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait inaugurated on Thursday its second branch at Kuwait International Airport during a ceremony attended by Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, President of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Yousef Abdul Hamid Al-Jassim, Chairman of Kuwait Airways, Kwang So Lee, CEO - Incheon Korea Airport Cooperation, as well as leaders from National Bank of Kuwait which comprised Isam Jassim Al-Sager, NBK Group Chief Executive Officer, Salah Al-Fulaij, NBK Chief Executive Officer-Kuwait, Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, and officials from Ministry of Interior.

Located at Terminal 4 (T4), the branch inaugura-

- **Al-Othman:** "We are committed to providing a unique banking experience to our customers all day long and every day of the week."
- **Al-Mulla:** "The second branch at Kuwait International Airport comes as part of our strategy to be present in popular locations to serve our customers."
- **Al-Nasrallah:** "NBK is the only bank to have two branches at the Kuwait International Airport to cater to our customers."

tion comes as part of the Bank's strategy to expand its network locally to better serve and cater to the needs of its customers at any place and any time. The new branch operates 24/7, every day of the week and is equipped with a reception area where travelers can rest before completing their transactions.

The new branch also offers a wide range of services that cater to travelers from the Terminal, including an Interactive Teller Machine (ITM), the second to be deployed by the Bank following the first ITM that is available at The Avenues. The branch also provides

currency exchange services while a Multi-Currency ATM will soon be available in the duty free area.

Speaking at the inauguration, Mohammed Al-Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait said, "We are pleased to be opening our newest branch at Kuwait International Airport and specifically at the new Terminal T4 which will enable us to be closer to our customers and offer them the best banking experience when completing their transactions conveniently at any time."

Al-Othman added that the new branch welcomes all segments of customers all day long, ensuring they receive an exceptional banking experience that reflects the Bank's commitment to a superior customer service while upholding its leadership position in satisfying its customers' needs with the most advanced, innovative and safe products and services.

Also speaking of the inauguration, Ali Al-Mulla, Area Manager, National Bank of Kuwait, said that NBK is today the only bank in Kuwait serving travelers and customers in two terminals at Kuwait International Airport, the first located at T1 and the newest at T4. The expansion of the network responds to a strategy to be present in popular locations where the needs of customers can be served. The new branch does not only cater to traveler but also to customers who would require a service at any time of the day and to which the branch would be closer to them."

On his part, Homoud Al-Nasrallah, Area Manager, National Bank of Kuwait, reaffirmed NBK's commitment to customers with the opening of the new branch. He added: "NBK is the only bank that offers its services to customers in two branches at Kuwait International Airport, and has made Multi-Currency ATMs available for customers to withdraw cash in six currencies that are the Kuwaiti Dinar, US dollar, Euro, British Pound, UAE Dirham and Saudi Riyal. These ATMs have been strategically placed at the arrival and departure areas to serve everyone."

NBK continues to strengthen its leadership position in the banking sector by maintaining the largest network of banking services in Kuwait, provided through branches, ATMs and Point of Sale (POS).



Business

Al-Safat Investment Co Chairman Al-Terkait wins ‘CEO Today Middle East Awards 2019’

In an interview, Al-Terkait speaks about his journey as a young leader in a competitive market

KUWAIT: Chairman of Al-Safat Investment Company Abdullah Al-Terkait has won an award for his achievements and efforts at the ‘CEO Today Middle East Awards 2019’, that was held in February 2019. In a detailed interview that was published in the magazine’s Middle East issue, the chairman talks about the company, its history and his experience while being the Chairman since 2013.

Al-Terkait spoke about his struggles with the company when he first joined and how his role as a leader evolved from there. Al-Safat’s financial crisis back then was in a state of despair and chaos, with the company having to tackle the pressures from its shareholders, clients and the banks. He also spoke about how he worked together with the company’s senior management and departments to restructure and revive Al-Safat.

In his interview, Al-Terkait said, “Loyalty towards our clients and determination to succeed was what drove us to being able to have high profits for the next three to five years after the crisis. Our priorities now are to have the company listed again, grow our equity base through solid and constant profits and cash dividends distributions to our shareholders.”

Today, the Al-Safat Holding Group has over 1,000 employees and around 25 companies under it, in the investments, real estate, energy, oil and gas, F&B, industrial, chemicals and carpet manufacturing sectors. Al-Safat Investment is the mother company with 25 employees at its head office, where the chairman officiates from.

The article also throws light on Al-Terkait’s work ethic and his journey as a young leader in a competitive market. According to him the two most vital factors in leading a company are communication and having a clear vision. The chairman stressed on how important team work and harmony between departments are and how he encourages open communication in the workplace.

When asked what the award means to him and the company, he simply stated that the award will be the embodiment of everything Al-Safat has worked for and accomplished to date and congratulates his team for their undying support and hard work and hopes the award motivates them to reach their new heights and their goal of being amongst the ‘best investment company’ in Kuwait in the next five years. Al-Terkait also spoke about his vision for the company to not only grow in the finance sector in Kuwait but also on the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) front. In relation to his October 2017 article in ‘The Investor’ magazine about start-ups in Kuwait, he detailed one of Al-Safat’s ongoing projects to support young entrepreneurs and SMEs through financial advice, investment opportunities and sponsorships. Al-Terkait concluded the interview by expressing how grateful he is for the award and to represent Kuwait internationally.

The CEO Today Middle East awards are dedicated to recognizing strong and innovative businesses oper-



ating in the Middle East across all key sectors and industries. The CEO Today Middle East Awards recognizes the companies and leaders who are driving success in their respective fields and beyond. The magazine is committed to providing C-level executives with the latest corporate developments, business news and technological innovations.



Twenty14 Holdings to debut South Asia’s first Tribute Portfolio hotel

KUWAIT: Twenty14 Holdings, the leading global hospitality investment firm, yesterday announced that they would soon launch Port Muziris - South Asia’s first Tribute Portfolio hotel, part of Marriott International, Inc, near the Cochin International Airport. The 55-room property is all set to be opened to the public in April.

Port Muziris encapsulates the rich culture, history and art of the port town of Kochi. Elegantly designed with imprints of the city, Port Muziris also boasts a large collection of artworks from local artists.

“We are thrilled to debut the first Tribute Portfolio in South Asia.

At Twenty14 Holdings, we share the vision of offering a unique experience for guests,” said Aadeeb Ahamed, Managing Director, Twenty14 Holdings. “Kerala has long been one of the most sought-after destinations worldwide, and we are excited to be part of the state’s flourishing tourism sector. We look forward to extending our legacy of providing outstanding hospitality to guests across Kerala and India through our bespoke properties.”

Tribute Portfolio, launched by Marriott, is a collection of exceptional independent hotels around the globe. Tribute Portfolio is designed for travelers seeking fresh travel experiences that reflect their own unique individual point of view. With a focus on expressive design moments, vibrant public spaces, and a flexible food and beverage model, Tribute Portfolio is for full-service developers keen on creating spaces that connect people and places. Diverse in experiences and robust with personality, each Tribute Portfolio hotel is a magnet for the colorful and quirky, much like the travelers who choose to stay at them.

“We are delighted to announce the first Tribute Portfolio hotel in India, with the opening of Port Muziris hotel in Kochi. This will also mark the debut of our 16th brand to join the Marriott International portfolio in India,” said Neeraj Govil, Area Vice President, South Asia, Marriott International, Inc. He added, “We are honored to partner with Twenty14 Holdings for their first hotel in India. With its unique design and vibrant social spaces, we are sure this hotel will become a preference for leisure travelers.”

Port Muziris which includes 55-keys, 2 F&B outlets and a 150-pax capacity ballroom is Twenty14 Holdings’ first property in India. Currently, the hospitality investment firm has over \$750 million portfolio of properties around the world, including the Waldorf Astoria Edinburgh - the Caledonian in Scotland, Sheraton Oman in Muscat and Steigenberger Hotel Business Bay in UAE.

Earlier this year, Twenty14 Holdings’ had announced its entry into mainland Europe with their first property in Switzerland - the InterCityHotel Zurich Airport. The firm is also in the final stages of development of a luxurious five-star hotel at 1-5 Great Scotland Yard, the former headquarters of London’s Metropolitan Police.



Aadeeb Ahamed



NBK meets Governor of Riyadh, Prince Faisal bin Bandar

KUWAIT: A delegation from National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) met with Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz, Governor of Riyadh province at his office in the Royal Palace to discuss a number of topics related to investment and business.

The meeting was attended by NBK senior executives: Isam Jassim Al-Sager - Group Chief Executive Officer at National Bank of Kuwait, Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO, NBK Capital, Malek Khalife, Head of Global Private Banking, and Musaad Al-Sudairy, CEO, NBK Wealth Management.

“Saudi Arabia is a market that carries a wealth of opportunities that are aligned with NBK Group’s expansion

strategy, focused on seizing regional investment opportunities,” said Isam Jassim Al-Sager, Group CEO, noting that the Kingdom is undergoing a major economic transformation that will help in positioning it as an attractive business investment environment across various key sectors for global participant.

Al-Sager added that the Saudi market is a cornerstone in the Group’s regional expanding strategy, as we expanded our presence through launching three new branches in Riyadh, Jeddah and Damam. We also entered Saudi Arabia’s wealth management market, through the launch of Al-Watani Wealth Management Company, as it has already finalized hiring staff and started to attract Assets Under Management (AUM).

He also highlighted that NBK will continue to focus on growing its client base and expanding it AUM in Saudi Arabi through Al-Watani Wealth Management Company, which aims to leave a distinguished footprint in the Saudi Capital Market, in line with the Kingdom’s “Vision 2030” and CMA’s “Financial Leadership 2020” program



aimed at stimulating investments, actively contributing to raising the attractiveness and efficiency of the financial market and enhancing its competitiveness on the regional and international fronts.

Last year, Al-Watani Wealth Management acquired CMA’s license to

operate in the Saudi capital market after fulfilling all the requirements and conditions to conduct Dealing as Principal, Investment Fund Management, Discretionary Portfolio Management, Arranging, Advising and Custody activities in the securities business.

KFH wins ‘Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait’ and ‘Best Islamic Bank in Bahrain’ awards

KUWAIT: In recognition of its outstanding performance and excellence in Kuwait and Bahrain, the global EMEA Finance Magazine Europe, Middle East and Africa has awarded Kuwait Finance House Group the “Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait” and “Best Islamic Bank in Bahrain” awards.

The awards of EMEA Magazine are based on professional criteria that measure quality, leadership, contributions of the bank, financial fundamentals and indicators, excellence, initiatives, innovation in products and services, performance efficiency, geographical spread, capital adequacy, total assets, customer satisfaction and strategic relationships. The criteria were evaluated by a world-class panel of judges.

Group Chief Treasury Officer, AbdulWahab Al-Roshood and General Manager Treasury Kuwait at KFH, Ahmad Eissa Al-Sumait received the awards in a ceremony held in Dubai.

Al-Roshood said that the awards highlight the KFH’s leadership in the Islamic banking industry and its success locally, regionally, and globally. Also, they confirm the bank’s outstanding services and products and its efforts in innovation, development, and technology, making KFH a



Al-Roshood and Al-Sumait receive the awards from EMEA Finance Magazine

pioneer Islamic bank in the region. Characterized by high professional performance, approach, diversity and competitiveness, KFH offers comprehensive banking and finance services enabling it to be a global pioneer, supported by sustainable growth, profitability, high value assets and prudent management.

Al-Sumait said that KFH-Bahrain places great importance on strengthening its market share, focusing on trust and quality of services, and enhancing its position in the Bahraini market. KFH-Bahrain enjoys the elements of success which enable the bank to attract new customers, face the competition in a market characterized by strength pow-

ing they will walk off the job if salaries do not arrive soon.

The airline, India’s number two carrier by market share, says it has been badly hit by fluctuating global crude prices, a weak rupee and fierce competition from budget rivals.

In February, it secured a \$1.19 billion bailout from lenders including State Bank of India to bridge a funding gap. But the crisis has since deepened due to a stalemate in talks between Jet founder Nareish Goyal and the airline’s other major stakeholder, Etihad Airline.

Local media said yesterday hope was fading that Goyal would be able to raise the funds needed to save the airline he launched 26 years ago. “Banks may wait for a couple of days and if Goyal is unable to do the needful, the former will ask him to quit from the board with his nominees,” the Times of India daily quoted sources as saying.

A spokesman for Jet however told AFP the carrier was hopeful of “successfully resolving the current situation in the coming days.” The airline and its key stakeholders were working towards finalizing a bank-led plan to “ensure that the airline emerges financially strong and resilient”. —AFP

Burgan Bank announces winner of KD 125,000 cash prize in Yawmi draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced Fadhil Abbas Reda Murad as the new KD 125,000 cash prize winner in the Yawmi quarterly draw. The winner expressed his excitement for being the winner of the rewarding cash prize with Yawmi Account from Burgan Bank.

The Yawmi quarterly draw offers customers chances to win higher rewards, entitling one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 cash prize every three months. To enter Burgan Bank’s Yawmi quarterly draws, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for 2 months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning.

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks which include Gulf Bank Algeria - AGB (Algeria), Bank of Baghdad - BOB (Iraq & Lebanon), Tunis International Bank - TIB (Tunisia), and fully owned Burgan Bank - Turkey, (collectively known as the “Burgan Bank Group”).

What's On



Egyptian band Masar Egbari performs in Al Shaheed Park

On their second visit to Kuwait with the beginning of the Arab Youth festival organized by LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) in collaboration with Al Shaheed Park, the Egyptian Masar Egbari musical band recently enchanted the

park audience with an outstanding performance. Band members expressed joy on performing in Kuwait for the second time noting that their first performance here was during the Qurain Cultural festival 2011. The band also announced launching its third album in its six

year career which includes ten songs. Notably, Masar Egbari is an Egyptian band from Alexandria which plays a mixture of rock, jazz, blues and Egyptian heritage music. It includes Hani Al-Daqqaq, Ayman Mas'oud, Ahmed Hafez and Tamer Attallah.



The ambassador of the Public of Tajikistan Dr. Zubaydullo hosted a reception on the occasion of International Nauruz Day at the embassy. Higher officials, diplomats, Tajik students and media persons attended the event. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



Ambassador of Guyana to Kuwait Dr. Shamir Ally invited Kuwait Times photographer Joseph Shagra to the embassy to bid him farewell, and honor him in recognition of his efforts throughout his long stay in Kuwait.



Jaber Al-Ali holds workshop on Philosophy

By Hassan Abdul Bari

Under auspices of the school director, Dr. Abdullah Al-Ajmi and the social studies supervisor, Ali Mataqi, Jaber Al-Ali Secondary School for boys recently organized a workshop on

'Philosophy between Theory and Implementation', which was delivered by the head of the school's philosophy department, Salah Al-Shaikh. The workshop was attended by various teachers from the school and other schools at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Area.



People celebrate the festival of colors (Holi) at Samiya Park, Kuwait. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Health & Science

Brazilian physicist Gleiser bags Annual Templeton Prize

WASHINGTON: The annual Templeton Prize, which recognizes outstanding contributions to "affirming life's spiritual dimension," was awarded Tuesday to Brazilian Marcelo Gleiser—a theoretical physicist dedicated to demonstrating science and religion are not enemies. A physics and astronomy professor whose specializations include cosmology, 60-year-old Gleiser was born in Rio de Janeiro, and has been in the United States since 1986. An agnostic, he doesn't believe in God—but refuses to write off the possibility of God's existence completely.

"Atheism is inconsistent with the scientific method," Gleiser said Monday from Dartmouth College, the New Hampshire university where he has taught since 1991. "Atheism is a belief in non-belief. So you categorically deny something you have no evidence against." "I'll keep an open mind because I understand that human knowledge is limited," he added. The prize is funded by the John Templeton Foundation—a philanthropic organization named after the American Presbyterian who made his fortune on Wall Street, and who set on "seeking proofs of divine agency in every branch of science", as The Economist put it.

Gleiser joins Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama and dissident Soviet author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as recipients of the prize, first awarded in 1973. At \$1.1 million, the prize money well surpasses that of the Nobels. The physicist focuses on making complex subjects accessible. He has written on climate change, Einstein, hurricanes, black holes, the human conscience—tracing the links between the sciences and the humanities, including philosophy.

The author of five English-language books and hundreds of blog and press articles in the US and Brazil, Gleiser has also explored in depth how science and religion both try to respond to questions on the origins of life and the universe. "The first thing you see in the Bible is a story of creation," he said. Whatever your religion, "everybody wants to know how the world came to be." This fundamental curiosity unites science and religion, though each provides very different answers: science has a methodology, where hypotheses are eliminated.

"Science can give answers to certain questions, up to a point," Gleiser pointed out. "This has been known for a very long time in philosophy, it's called the problem of the first cause: we get stuck," the physicist, a father of five, said. "We should have the humility to accept that there's mystery around us."

Scientific arrogance

So, what does he think of people who believe that the Earth was created in seven days? "They position science as the enemy ... because they have a very antiquated way of thinking about science and religion in which all scientists try to kill God," he said. "Science does not kill God." On the other hand, he accuses the "new atheists" of doing a disservice to science by making an enemy out of religion: notably British scientist Richard Dawkins—who called for the arrest of Pope Benedict XVI over pedophilia in the Catholic Church—and the late journalist Christopher Hitchens, who criticized Mother Theresa.



HANOVER: This handout photo courtesy of Eli Burakian/ Dartmouth College shows Marcelo Gleiser, Physics Professor. —AFP

For Gleiser, who grew up in Rio's Jewish community, religion is not just about believing in God: it provides a sense of identity and community "At least half of the world population is that way," he said. "It's extremely arrogant from scientists to come down from the ivory towers and make these declarations without understanding the social importance of belief systems." "When you hear very famous scientists making pronouncements like ... cosmology has explained the origin of the universe and the whole, and we don't need God anymore. That's complete nonsense," he added. "Because we have not explained the origin of the universe at all." —AFP

Rare albino penguin makes debut at Polish zoo

WARSAW: A rare three-month-old albino penguin made its first public appearance at a zoo in the Polish Baltic port city of Gdansk, where its keepers claim it is the only one of its kind in captivity. The all-white African black-foot penguin was born on December 14, but zoo staff decided to keep its arrival secret as they were unsure the vulnerable newborn would survive. Zoo staff are waiting until they are able to determine its sex to name the youngster.

"As far as we know, there is no other such specimen alive (in captivity) in the world," Michal Targowski, director of the Gdansk Zoo, told the TVN24 commercial news channel. "The baby is active, in good health, eats well and, what's very important, its parents are taking very good care of it," Targowski said. To ensure its safety, the youngster is being kept with a small group of six adults, including its parents, part of a group of 70 penguins living at the Gdansk Zoo.

"We're really doting on him so that nothing bad happens to him", Targowski, explaining that other penguins in the troop could take exception to the baby's unique look and harm it. African black-footed penguins, also known as jackass penguins due to their braying noise, have been rated as endangered since 2010 after suffering from commercial fishing, shortage of prey and pollution. —AFP

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- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo – Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

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Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American
Board in Pediatrics-Canadian
Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368 **Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B**

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

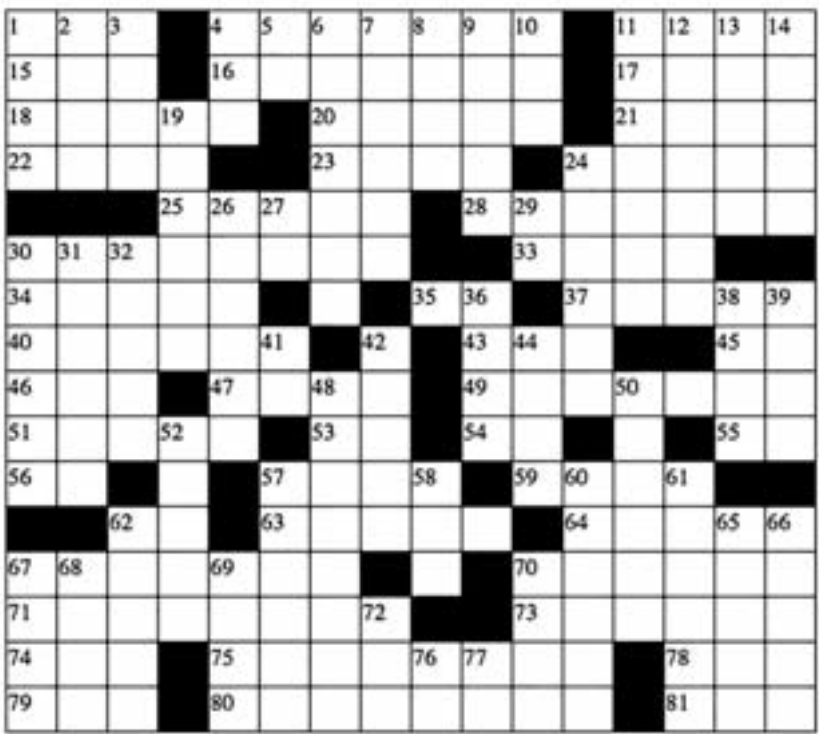
- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

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

CROSSWORD 2165



ACROSS

- 1. A benevolent aspect of Devi.
- 4. A Bantu language spoken by the Chaga people in northern Tanzania.
- 11. A short labored intake of breath with the mouth open.
- 15. Any of various dark heavy viscid substances obtained as a residue.
- 16. Full of fun and high spirits.
- 17. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- 18. The fourth month of the Hindu calendar.
- 20. A river that rises in central Germany and flows north to join the Elbe River.
- 21. Soft white semisolid fat obtained by rendering the fatty tissue of the hog v l.
- 22. The lean flesh of a fish similar to cod.
- 23. A three-tone Chadic language.
- 25. Large heavily built goat antelope of eastern Himalayan area.
- 28. English writer (born in Scotland) of children's stories (1859-1932).
- 30. Any plant of the genus Caragana having even-pinnate leaves and mostly yellow flowers followed by seeds in a linear pod.
- 33. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
- 34. The mission in San Antonio where in 1836 Mexican forces under Santa Anna besieged and massacred American rebels who were fighting to make Texas independent of Mexico.
- 35. A hard brittle blue-white multivalent metallic element.
- 37. (Babylonian) A demigod or first man.
- 40. (heraldry) Applied to a fish depicted horizontally.
- 43. Consisting of or made of wood of the oak tree.
- 45. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- 46. Of a dull grayish brown to brownish gray color.
- 47. Type genus of the Amiidae.
- 49. Speak unfavorably about.
- 51. An episode of such pastoral or romantic charm as to qualify as the subject of a poetic idyll.
- 53. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.
- 54. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
- 55. A public promotion of some product or service.
- 56. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
- 59. Unusually short.
- 63. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- 64. A popular island resort in the Netherlands Antilles.
- 67. Express strong disapproval of.
- 71. A person who sins (without repenting).
- 73. Any of several plants of or developed from the species Dahlia pinnata having tuberous roots and showy rayed variously colored flower heads.
- 74. The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
- 75. Of or relating to or characteristic of Alsace or its inhabitants.
- 78. An antiviral drug used in the treatment of AIDS.
- 79. Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
- 80. The wanton killing of many people.
- 81. United States architect (born in China in 1917).

DOWN

- 1. A state in the western United States.
- 2. An independent group of closely related Chadic languages spoken in the area between the Biu-Mandara and East Chadic languages.
- 3. Any of various strong liquors distilled from the fermented sap of toddy palms or from fermented molasses.
- 4. The ratio of the distance traveled (in kilometers) to the time spent traveling (in hours).
- 5. Being nine more than forty.
- 6. Object formed by a mold.
- 7. Doglike nocturnal mammal of Africa and southern Asia that feeds chiefly on carrion.
- 8. (old-fashioned) At or from or to a great distance.
- 9. A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
- 10. Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
- 11. (Arthurian legend) The most virtuous knight of the Round Table.
- 12. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
- 13. Leave immediately.
- 14. 'Father' is a term of address for priests in some churches (especially Roman or Orthodox Catholic).
- 19. Small genus of mediterranean shrubs.
- 24. United States writer of poems and plays about racial conflict (born in 1934).
- 26. Pertaining to or associated with agony (especially death agonies).
- 27. Unknown god.
- 29. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
- 31. Type genus of the Alaudidae.
- 32. (of weather) Wet by periods of rain.
- 36. A training program to prepare college students to be commissioned officers.
- 38. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- 39. In bed.
- 41. A soft silvery metallic element of the rare earth group.
- 42. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
- 44. A river that rises in northeastern Turkey (near the source of the Euphrates) and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea.
- 48. Having no employment.
- 50. Sorghums of dry regions of Asia and North Africa.
- 52. United States tennis player (born in Czechoslovakia) who won several singles championships.
- 57. Remote city of Kazakhstan that (ostensibly for security reasons) was made the capital in 1998.
- 58. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
- 60. A tranquilizer (trade name Navane) used to treat schizophrenia.
- 61. Coarse jute fabric.
- 62. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
- 65. A bright green fabric napped to resemble felt.
- 66. Italian violin maker in Cremona.
- 68. Rounded like an egg.
- 69. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls.
- 70. The sixth month of the civil year.
- 72. The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
- 76. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
- 77. Being nine more than ninety.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

On your birthday you'll be reminded of what you planned for your future. You might even wonder if you'll be able to complete those plans, when and how. Don't allow doubt even when frustrated. You can't control everyone, only your life. Your mind is working well but you can't seem to make it bring ideas together easily, almost as if you're walking mentally in water. Try to spend the day doing something you like without interference from those you love. That is your best option now. If you like gardening, then get to it. Hopefully, the weather is wonderful on this day. You'll be back in tip top mental condition with coworkers, friends and family working with you soon.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Though you have no problem communicating with others, you're not in the mood. If you don't have to work today, stay home or go to the country. When challenged by others you may make poor choices in order not to be around them long. Do something to enjoy rather than something you need. Try to keep from taking offense when your lover or someone you respect puts down your choice on decorating around the house. Keep your cool. Even though you know others aren't automatically right about decisions they make you don't have to bring it to a friend or family member's attention that they have made poor choices too. Smile and stay alone as much as possible today.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

If this isn't a workday, great! Today get with some of the family's children whether it's yours or nephews and nieces. You need to be with children who conjure ideas with ease. Games might be in the making either indoor or out, preferably both. When a child challenges your thinking processes you can lay it off to the game without taking offense. You tend to forget to play with abandon at times in life especially the last few days. Remember it with your babies. Let work go and keep your mind clear of it. Any problems at home need to be forgotten while you let go of your inhibitions with those with whom you're playing now. There's time for challenging thoughts later.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

On this day you can take the time to think on how you can push on for future success. What you think in your present is your future within ten years' time. Always think with prosperity in mind. You've got a lot of nervous energy and thoughts are racing around your brain like a run-away train. Don't try to stop it. Believe it or not your great computer, the brain, is measuring ways in which to assist you by those roaring meditational thoughts. Maybe you should start a social group with material success as the agenda. Where you have two or three who think alike, you can create thought and energy which then can manifest prosperity.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Get to know your love interest today if you haven't already. Love at first sight is great but that doesn't mean you know their character. Take the time to have long talks and discuss anything that comes to mind. Don't worry about the issue. Look over your lover's answer and see if you two fit in your morals, thoughts about money, family matters and anything else that strikes your fancy. You want to stay married if you do decide to go that far and if you're not married currently. So why not get it right before you fall hopelessly in love. Otherwise take it for what it is and have fun!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your confidence levels are high even though you still might have trouble at home. Your assertive nature makes others want to listen. You're tired of staying home and want to get out with friends and acquaintances. People find you fascinating and you have no small amount of people wanting to be in your presence, playing with you. That only tends to make your ego larger but that's what you need right now. Play some today but be thoughtful of any decision that might make an unhealthy impact on your life right now. You may wish you'd refrained tomorrow.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Adverbs 1 - Word Search



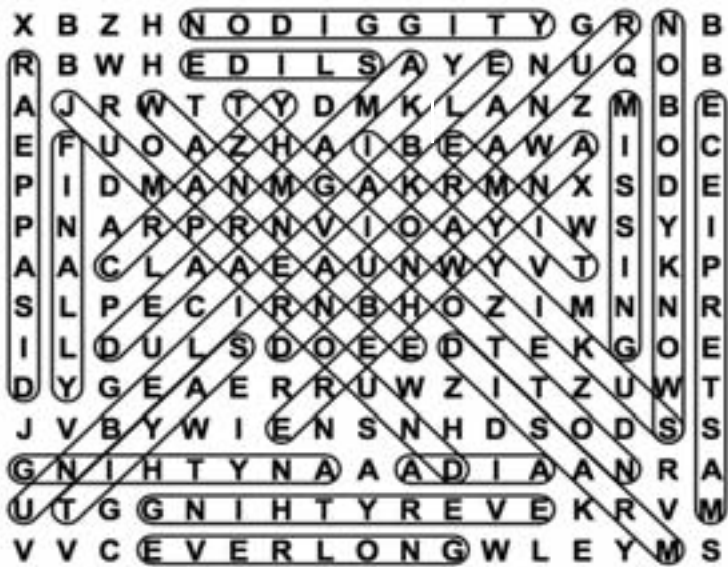
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SOON
THEN
TODAY
TOMORROW
UPWARD

Friday's Solution

90's Songs 8 - Solution

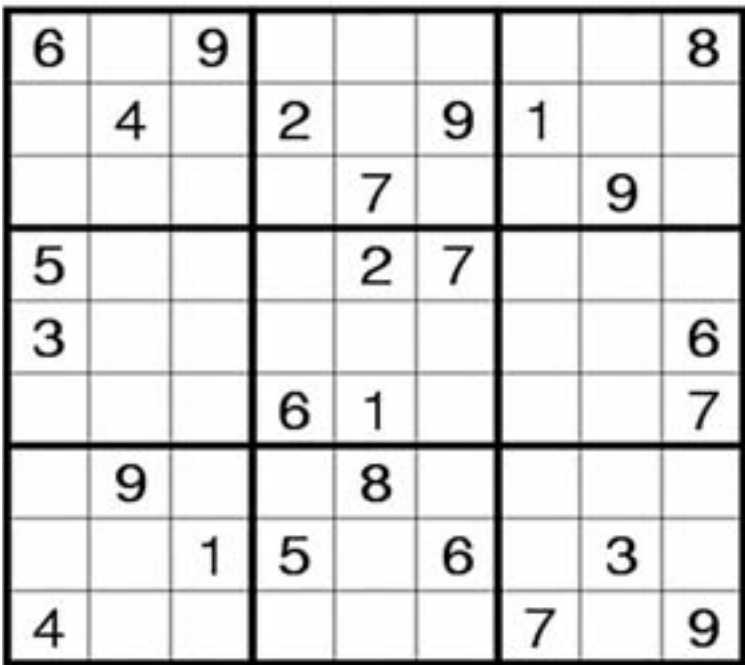


ADIA
ANYTHING
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DEAR MAMA
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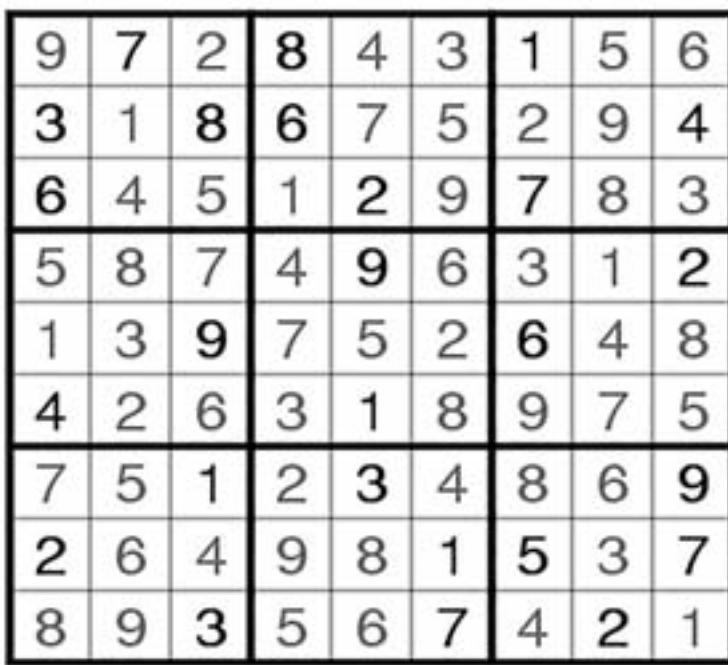
EVERYTHING
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JUMP AROUND
MASTERPIECE
MISSING
NO DIGGITY
NOBODY KNOWS
NOT TONIGHT

RUN-AROUND
SAY IT
SLIDE
SUKIYAKI
TIME
UNBELIEVABLE
WANNABE

Daily SuDoku



Friday's Solution



Lifestyle

SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2019



This undated handout photo released by the University of Alberta shows Dr W Scott Persons looking at the skeleton of the Tyrannosaurus rex “Scotty” at the T rex Discovery Centre in Eastend, Canada. The towering Tyrannosaurus rex discovered in western Canada in 1991 is the world’s biggest, a team of paleontologists said on March 22, 2019, following a decades-long process of reconstructing its skeleton. Nicknamed Scotty for a celebratory bottle of scotch consumed the night it was discovered, the T rex was 13 meters long and probably weighed more than 8,800 kilos, making it bigger than all other carnivorous dinosaurs, the team from the University of Alberta said. — AFP

The scent of soap making returns to Aleppo

After years of war, the scent of laurel oil once again wafts from a small soap workshop in Aleppo, signaling the revival of a landmark trade in the battered northern city. Surrounding soap workshops in the Al-Nayrab district still lie in ruins, badly damaged in the four-year battle for the former rebel stronghold. But for Ali Shami, hanging up his apron was not an option.

Beside them, another five workers slice cooled and hardened green paste into cubes and stack them in staggered racks. Shami says he was able to resume operations quickly because Aleppo soap is handmade. Its production “relies on manual labour, a successful mixture, the passion of Aleppo’s residents, and their love of the profession”, he says.



“I never stopped making soap throughout the war—even if it was just a little,” says the 44-year-old, who fled his home city during the fighting. “But this workshop is special,” he tells AFP. “It was here that I started more than 30 years ago.” Shami reopened his soap workshop last month after shutting it down in 2012, when Syria’s second city became a main front in the eight-year-long conflict. The scars of war are still visible on the building, its walls punctured with holes caused by shelling. Rushes of wind gust through the gaps.

Shami carried out limited renovations—just enough to produce more than half of his pre-war output of around 800 tons a year. He installed a new metal door and refurbished the main rooms where the soap mixture is heated and then poured out to dry. He watches as five workers stir a thick mixture of olive and laurel oil in a large vat.



Home is where the soap is
After closing down in 2012, Shami tried to continue his work in other major Syrian cities. “My existence is tied to the existence” of soap, he says. He moved to the capital, Damascus, and the regime-held coastal city of Tartous, but Shami says the soap was not as good. “Aleppo’s climate is very suitable for soap production and the people of Aleppo know the secret of the trade and how to endure the hardship of the many stages of its production,” he says.

Shami, who inherited the soap business from his father and grandfather, boasts about the superior qualities of Aleppo soap, the oldest of its kind in the world. “Aleppo soap distinguishes itself from other soaps around the world as it is made almost entirely of olive oil,” he says. “European soap, on the other hand, includes animal fats,

while soaps made in Asia are mixed with vegetal oils but not olive oil,” he says. The Aleppo region is well-known for its olive oil and sweet bay oil, or laurel.

Shami says the Aleppo soap industry was hit hard by the fierce clashes that rocked his home city, before ending in late 2016 when the army took back rebel districts with Russian military support. While conditions are less dangerous today, soap producers still grapple with shortages of raw material and skilled labor, he says. “We are struggling with the aftermath of the battles,” he says.

‘National treasure’

Dozens of soap producers are still waiting to complete renovations before reopening their workshops. Hisham Gebeily is one of them. His soap making centre in the Old City of Aleppo, named after the family, has survived for generations, dating back to the 18th century. The three-storey stone workshop covers a space of around 9,000 square meters, and is considered among the largest in the city. But the 50-year-old man was forced to close it in 2012.

The structure still stands, although damaged by the fighting: parts of it have been charred by shelling and wooden beams supporting the roof are starting to fall apart. “Before the conflict, the city of Aleppo housed around 100 soap factories,” he says. But only around 12 are still operating today. The soapmaker says that many of Aleppo’s soap producers have moved to Damascus and Tartous, while others have crossed the border to Turkey.

Gebeily, who heads a committee of Aleppo soap producers, says the province used to produce around 30,000 tons of soap per year before the conflict. “The smell of laurel oil would waft out of this workshop and others like it into Aleppo,” he said. “No one would visit the city without buying its soap.” This figure dropped to less than 1,000 tons after 2012. Today, figures are back up to 10,000 tons a year, he says, as factories once again churn out a Syrian “national treasure”. “Saudi Arabia exports oil, Switzerland chocolate, and Germany cars.” “Aleppo exports laurel soap.” — AFP



Pakistani finds fame as ‘Game of Thrones’ doppelganger

Pakistani waiter Rozi Khan had never heard of the Game of Thrones—or its hugely popular character Tyrion Lannister—until his striking resemblance to the dwarf anti-hero got heads turning at home.

The 25-year-old so resembles actor Peter Dinklage—who has played the witty and wily nobleman since the hit series’ first season in 2010 — that he gets regularly stopped by strangers desperate for a picture.

“I don’t mind. A lot of my pictures have been taken, that’s why I have become very famous everywhere,” he said. Not only are Khan and Dinklage’s faces strikingly similar, they are also the same height at around 135 cms. Photographs of the pair have unsurprisingly made their way onto social media showing the doppelgangers side-by-side. “Wherever I go, someone says to me: ‘Sir, who is this man with you on Facebook’, I say that he is my friend. ‘He looks like you’. I tell them he is my brother. It’s not a bad thing,” said Khan.



(COMBO) This photo combination created on March 14, 2019 shows (L) Pakistani waiter Rozi Khan posing for a photograph at Dilbar Hotel in Rawalpindi on February 22, (R) US actor Peter Dinklage at the HBO premiere of “My Dinner With Herve” at the Paramount Studios in Los Angeles. — AFP

The television series has won 47 Emmys—more than any other fictional show in history—along with a Golden Globe for Dinklage, 49, for best supporting actor in 2012. A much anticipated final series is set to premiere on April 17. Khan works at a small Kashmiri restaurant down a narrow line in Rawalpindi, serving customers hearty dishes such as mutton and spinach curries. Owner Malik Aslam Pervez described him as a hard-worker—and also a drawcard for the eatery.

“When he takes a day off or gets sick, people look for him and ask where did he go? They get upset. They love him. There is always a crowd here but it has boomed because of him,” he said. Born in Mansehra in northern Pakistan, Khan says he would love to meet Dinklage, describing him as a friend and brother. “I love him very much, he is my friend... he is my height so I like him a lot,” said Khan. For customers, seeing Tyrion Lannister in the flesh is also a thrill. “When I saw him, I’m happy, I feel that I met with Lannister in real [life],” said Zain Hadri, 20. “Game of Thrones” tells the story of noble families vying for control of the Iron Throne, all the while keeping one eye on the “White Walkers” leading hordes of the undead toward an invasion from the North. — AFP

Almodovar 'emotionally naked' in new introspective film

Spanish director Pedro Almodovar's new movie "Pain and Glory" about a melancholic filmmaker played by Antonio Banderas opened in cinemas across Spain on Friday, the most retrospective work in his 40-year career. The Oscar-winning writer and director behind films such as "Women on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown" and "Julieta" had long vowed never to publish an autobiography, but he admits he is "emotionally naked" in his 21st film which deals with the themes of love, mourning and reconciliation.

"I felt the need to provide a very introspective look, including into my darkest parts and to mix that with the brightest memories of my childhood," the 69-year-old said during an interview with Spanish public television TVE on Wednesday. The movie cuts back and forth in time as it follows the filmmaker in his twilight years reflecting on the choices he's made in life. It features scenes of a young boy discovering he is gay in a rural and deeply Catholic Spain and of two mature men who kiss each other tenderly on the mouth.

"I am master of my stories and I impose my universe with all the pride and all the arrogance that this allows. And in my universe there are two older gentlemen who kiss with passion, and after one of them returns to his life with his wife and children," Almodovar told online Spanish newspaper eldiario.es.

'My Mastroianni'

The movie stars longtime Almodovar favorite Penelope Cruz who plays the main character's young mother, a woman engulfed in sadness who lights up and sings while washing clothes in a river. Spanish actress Julieta Serrano, who appeared in his first feature film, the 1980 camp comedy "Pepe, Luci, Bom", depicts the mother when she is elderly. "I don't want you to put

anything about me in your films," Serrano's character says at one point. Almodovar picked Banderas, 58, who rose to Hollywood stardom after starring in his movies, to play his double. The actor sports Almodovar's trademark spiky white hair and bright clothes but does not imitate the director's mannerisms.

"It took me time to understand that Antonio was my most legitimate Mastroianni," Almodovar told daily El Mundo in a reference to the role of a depressed film director played by Marcello Mastroianni in Italian director Federico Fellini's "8 1/2", which won the best foreign language film Oscar in 1963. Almodovar first cast Banderas in his 1982 film "Labyrinth of Passion". He went on to give him leading roles in six other movies.

'Most sincere' movie

While reviews in Spain for Almodovar's recent movies have been mixed, this time around critics have been mostly positive about "Pain and Glory" (Dolor y Gloria). Spanish daily El Mundo said the film "achieves a level of perfection which is difficult to surpass", while online newspaper El Espanol called it Almodovar's "most sincere" movie.

Almodovar has stressed in several media interviews ahead of the film's release that it contains many fictional moments which bear no resemblance to his own history. For example, the director in the movie falls in love with a builder as a nine-year-old boy. Almodovar says this never happened to him, though he admits it could have. In the movie the director becomes hooked on heroin. Almodovar said he never touched the drug, preferring instead cocaine in his younger days. The film features a cameo appearance by Latin Grammy winner Rosalia, 25, who is being praised globally for her groundbreaking fusion of flamenco with urban and



In this file photo taken on March 12, 2019 (From left) Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, Spanish film director Pedro Almodovar, Spanish actor Antonio Banderas and Spanish actor Asier Etxeandia pose during the photocall of the film "Dolor y Gloria" (Pain and Glory) in Madrid. — AFP

In this file photo taken on March 12, 2019 (From left) Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, Spanish film director Pedro Almodovar, Spanish actor Antonio Banderas and Spanish actor Asier Etxeandia pose during the photocall of the film "Dolor y Gloria" (Pain and Glory) in Madrid. — AFP



In this handout photograph from Tolo TV taken on March 21, 2019, Afghan female singer Zahra Elham holds the trophy after she won the finale contest of the television music competition 'Afghan Star' in Kabul. — AFP

'Afghan American Idol' won by a woman for the first time

An Afghan woman has become the first to win a popular singing competition, with her victory coming as fears grow that women could lose hard-won rights if the US does a peace deal with the Taliban. Zahra Elham, in her 20s and from Afghanistan's Hazara ethnic minority, snatched first place from her male runner-up on Afghan Star — a local version of American Idol — in which hundreds of men and women have competed for 14 seasons.

"I popped the hearts of men out of their chests today," a happy Elham told the audience during the contest's finale late Thursday. "I am so so happy, I cannot even find words to express my feelings... Today, I represent all the girls of Afghanistan. Today not only Zahra Elham but all the girls in Afghanistan have won," she said amid cheers, applause and even tears from the admiring audience.

Known for her high pitch and raspy voice, she had previously said she wanted to break the grasp of male winners on the competition, first launched in 2005 and one of Afghanistan's most popular television shows. "Your win is a slap in the face of jealous Afghan men," Sonita Rasa

wrote on Zahra's Facebook page. "Hope you don't disappear after this big win and hope the situation allows you to continue to get to your dreams," Tanin, another user, wrote.

As talks between Washington and the Taliban aimed at ending the long war progress, many Afghans fear a premature US withdrawal could see the Taliban return to some semblance of power. Young women, keenly aware of how their gender was banished behind doors and beneath burkas under Taliban rule, are among the most vocal in warning they will not compromise their hard-won rights if the insurgents return.

The Taliban have given few details of what they want in Afghanistan, and it is unclear what a post-conflict government would look like — but under their strict interpretation of Islam the militants have never been in favour of women, or shows like Afghan Star. "Peace is on its way, hope the future peace has the Afghan Star contest in it," Mustafa Azizyar, the show's presenter said, after presenting the trophy. — AFP



Bring a hankie: Heartwarming 'Dumbo' may also bring tears

Bring a hankie to the new movie version of Disney's flying elephant tale "Dumbo" because it may be a little dark for some people. The movie, a live-action remake of the 1941 animated Disney classic, is centered on a circus baby elephant who is ridiculed for having huge ears and, whose mother, like in the original, is forcibly removed.

"That is still very much the launching point for our story," actor Colin Farrell, who plays the father of two children who adopt Dumbo, told reporters on Thursday at the London premiere of the film. "They both deal with topics and issues that children and families and grown-ups face in the world every day - loss, grief, guilt, shame, all those things. But at the same time, it's done in the context of making it accessible to children, and not too much to bear," Farrell added.

Danny DeVito, who plays circus owner Max Medici, warned that the film was a tearjerker. "You look at that baby (elephant) and it's just ... you melt. When you see this movie, bring a Kleenex. But it's a good movie, it's funny and happy," he said. "Dumbo," directed by Tim Burton, arrives in movie theaters worldwide starting next Wednesday. — Reuters

Does #nomakeup trend help women or is it bare-faced cheek?

From the skies to the stage, women are taking a stand for equality by wiping off their make-up, sparking a bare-faced trend that won rising numbers of followers globally but also triggered vocal defenders of the benefits of cosmetics. An online #nomakeup campaign dates back about three years to when US singer Alicia Keys vowed not to wear make-up anymore but it has gained momentum this year with other celebrities and industries following suit.



In this file photo musician Alicia Keys arrives at the 2016 MTV Video Music Awards in New York. — Reuters

British singer Jess Glynne made headlines in February when she took off her make-up during a Brit Awards performance while singing "Thursday", a song about not wanting to wear makeup. Airlines Virgin Atlantic and Aer Lingus this month updated guidelines stating air hostesses no longer had to wear make-up. A spokeswoman from Virgin Atlantic said the move was made to reflect a change in the aviation industry, where highly coiffeured female hostesses were once nicknamed trolley dollies, and Aer Lingus said it reflected "changing dress norms".

University student Yim Ji-su helped spark a debate in February about daily sexism in beauty-obsessed South Korea by ditching her make-up and shaving her hair into a buzz cut. Abi Wright, founder of UK-based Inspiring Margot, a company working to build women's confidence in the workplace, said wearing make-up should be a choice, not an expectation. "If, as women, we're expected to wear make-up then that simply says our appearance is more important than our skills and abilities," Wright told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It highlights yet again that our society associates a woman's worth by appearance and nothing more."

Laws on dress

In Britain, discrimination at work over make-up or clothing is illegal under the Equality Act 2010 but this law has come under scrutiny since a 2016 campaign by Nicola Thorp who was sent home from work without pay for refusing to wear high heels. This prompted a parliamentary inquiry that led to guidance setting out how the law might apply when an employer required female staff to wear high heels, make-up, or revealing clothing.

The United States has similar laws with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission stating standards can be different for men and women as long as it is generally consistent but there has not been many challenges to sex-based employee dress codes. The trend to go bare-faced has been picked up by the global cosmetics industry, which was worth at least \$48.3 billion last year, according to market research group Mintel.

New cosmetics companies like Glossier Inc, which was valued at over \$1 billion this week, are offering products that cater to various skin tones and emphasize a natural "no-make-up" look. "No make-up is really a symbol of being empowered and being comfortable in your own skin, not having to hide behind something," said British make-up artist Lee Pycroft. "It's positive because it's taking away the association that women have to look a certain way to fill a certain role," said Pycroft, who has worked with celebrities like actresses Anne Hathaway and Laura Linney and supermodel Elle Macpherson. — Reuters

GOT's Emilia Clarke reveals near-fatal brain aneurysms

"Game of Thrones" star Emilia Clarke suffered two nearly fatal brain aneurysms in the early years of filming the hit series, she said in an essay published Thursday. The British actress-who plays Daenerys Targaryen on the blockbuster show about to enter its final season-wrote that the first aneurysm rupture struck while she was at the gym in February 2011, just after filming the first season.

"At some level, I knew what was happening: my brain was damaged," the 32-year-old wrote in The New Yorker magazine in her piece entitled "A Battle For My Life." "For a few moments, I tried to will away the pain and the nausea," she continued. "To keep my memory alive, I tried to recall, among other things, some lines from 'Game of Thrones.'" Clarke was rushed to the hospital and diagnosed with a subarachnoid hemorrhage-a form of stroke triggered by bleeding into areas that surround the brain, which kills about one third of the patients it strikes.



In this file photo taken on February 25, 2019 British actress Emilia Clarke attends the 2019 Vanity Fair Oscar Party following the 91st Academy Awards at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills. — AFP

She was 24 at the time of her first brain surgery, and said the recovery period in which she could not even recall her own name-a condition called aphasia-gave her "a sense of doom." "In my worst moments, I wanted to pull the plug. I asked the medical staff to let me die," Clarke said. "My job-my entire dream of what my life would be-centered on language, on communication. Without that, I was lost."

The condition passed and Clarke left the hospital one month after her admission-but doctors had found she had a second aneurysm that could rupture at any moment. "Even before we began filming Season 2, I was deeply unsure of myself. I was often so woozy, so weak, that I thought I was going to die," Clarke wrote, saying she took morphine between interviews while promoting the acclaimed show.

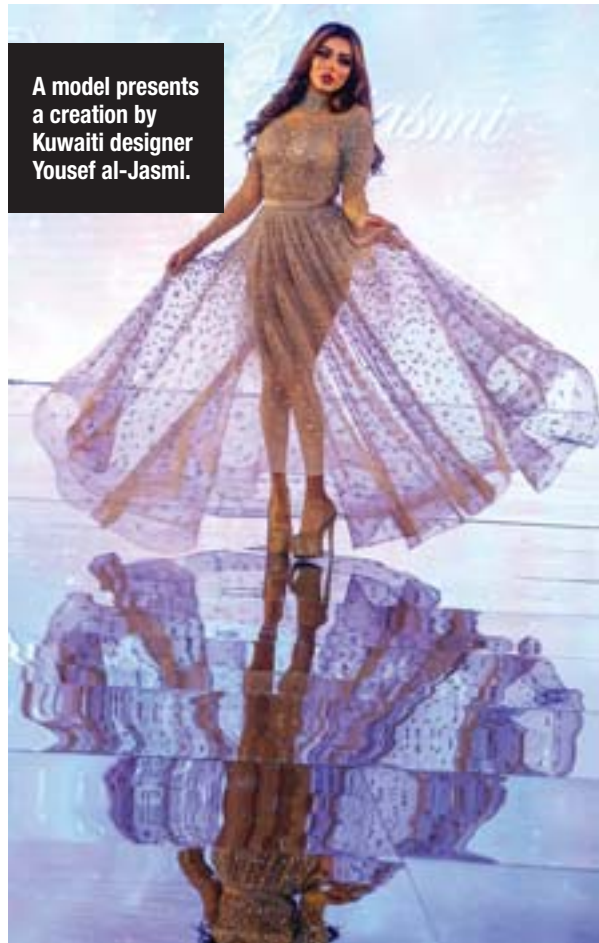
During a routine brain scan doctors found her growth had doubled in size and decided to operate-a seemingly simple procedure that resulted in major complications and another month in the hospital. Today, Clarke says she has "healed beyond my most unreasonable hopes," and helped develop a charity to offer treatment to patients recovering from stroke and brain injuries. "There is something gratifying, and beyond lucky, about coming to the end of 'Thrones,'" Clarke wrote. "I'm so happy to be here to see the end of this story and the beginning of whatever comes next." — AFP



Kuwaiti designer Yousef al-Jasmi poses with models presenting his creations during the Gulf emirate's 'Sehr al-Sharq' or 'The Magic of the Orient' fashion show, in Kuwait City. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwaiti designer Maram al-Najem, 4th right, poses with models presenting her creations.



A model presents a creation by Kuwaiti designer Yousef al-Jasmi.



A model presents a creation by Kuwaiti designer Maram al-Najem.



Kuwaiti designer Wasmiya al-Harbi, center, poses with models wearing her creations.

The Magic of the Orient fashion show in Kuwait



Models present creations by Kuwaiti designer Wasmiya al-Harbi.



Models present creations by Kuwaiti designer Najwa al-Fadhli.



Models present creations by Kuwaiti designer Hadeel al-Mzyad.



CASIO Middle East launches new CT-X and AT-3 series of musical keyboards in Kuwait

CASIO Middle East & their partner in Kuwait Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Company has launched its recently improved AT-3 and brand-new CT-X series keyboards specifically designed for the Arab market, marking the company's formal entry to the growing Arab electronic musical instrument industry. The formal unveiling of the two products took place at Radisson Blu Hotel - Dasman Hall, and was attended by a company guests and top senior managers in addition to the press and media, the one-stop music experience showroom and academy, at Radisson Blu Hotel.

In conjunction with the launch was the rolling out of Casio Middle East's Arabic YouTube channel to serve as its official platform in the hugely popular video-sharing website. The channel will broadcast footage of its latest top-of-the-line musical instruments and their features, as

well as easy-to-follow tutorial videos for beginners and professionals alike in keeping with the company's commitment to help nurture music geniuses in the region.

The CT-X series features a right mix of unique Western, Oriental and Gulf sources capable of playing different styles of music such as R&B, Rock, Jazz, Saidi, Maksoum and Katakofiti, while the upgraded version of the competitively priced AT-3 series offers a new set of Oriental rhythms with a professional arranger to support new beginners and a veteran musician performing a one-man show. Both strong Oriental keyboard products are integrated with pre-set Arab music and oriental rhythms to appeal to local and regional artists.

Koji Naka, Managing Director, CASIO Middle East, said: "The two new products launched is a boost to our initiative to highlight the role of music, a universal lan-

guage, in bringing people together regardless of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds. In the Middle East, we aim to attract Arab musicians, listeners, and fans by offering them a product that fits their needs. On the business side, the unveiling provided us with an opportunity to show our strong interest and desire to capture a large portion of the Arab market amid the rising opportunities in the electronic musical instrument industry here."

Ammar Aho Hassoun, Manager of the music department, Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Company, said "The Kuwaiti market are eager for such range of CASIO musical products and will surely be used by most of the music lovers, the improved AT-3 is a great keyboard in today's musical instruments market for learning or playing Oriental music. Live performances by Adham (Keyboard), Mohammad (Nay) and Yazan (Violin) Mustapha (Qanun)

dominated the launch event attended by key CASIO and Al-Yousifi executives and teachers from Ministry of Education. According to Maestro Mohammad Al-Fakahani the new changes that has been made on AT-3

Improved its performance because it is loaded with advanced features that give flexibility for users to get creative with the rhythms, tones and music. The outstanding quality of the keyboard will meet a large group of the musicians especially in the education sector.

The enthusiastic audience also tried their hand on the new keyboards and other Casio musical instruments during the launch, giving them an opportunity to experience the power of the high-quality and exceptionally made instruments. These CASIO ranges of musical instruments are sold in Kuwait at BEST Al-Yousifi Electronics showrooms & all authorized distributors.

Back to the future: Cassettes launch comeback tour

The humble cassette-that tiny little plastic rectangle containing the homemade mixtapes of yesteryear-is back, joining vinyl as a darling of audiophiles who miss side A and side B. But as top musicians including Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber release their music on tape and demand continues to climb, the niche revival has faced a global shortage of music-quality magnetic tape needed for production. Now, two facilities-one in the American Midwest and the other in western France-have stepped in to meet the need. "It's a good place to be-there's plenty of business for both of us," said Steve Stepp, who founded the National Audio Company in Springfield, Missouri with his father 50 years ago. He said that around 2000 the "imperial hegemony of the CD" cut his business, which stayed alive as a major manufacturer of books on tape that remained popular.



This picture taken on March 14, 2019, shows an audio cassette made with magnetic stripes in the production plant of Mulann, in Avranches, northwestern France. — AFP

But despite the astronomical rise of streaming, Stepp said rock bands like Pearl Jam and The Smashing Pumpkins began seeking to manufacture anniversary tapes in the mid-2000s, launching a cassette comeback tour. "That convinced major record labels that there was still life in the cassette as a music form," he said. Several years ago National Audio bought 300,000 reels of tape from a South Korean company that gave up music-grade tape production.

As that stockpile began to shrink, his facility in November 2016 was faced with a choice: either make reels, or fold. His business invested several million dollars buying up old equipment from defunct production facilities, and last year National Audio manufactured 18 million audio cassettes, Stepp said, selling to 3,500 record labels globally. "I think it's got a bright future," Stepp told AFP of the cassette market. "It died in 2000, as far as conventional wisdom was concerned, and it has made a strong comeback since." "Reports of its death were greatly exaggerated."

90s vibes

Since November, Mulann-a small French company near Mont Saint Michel-has also rebooted production, the country's first manufacturing of music-grade tape in two decades. Already selling magnetic tape for metro tickets or military recording studios, the Mulann group acquired a plant to produce analog audio tapes under the trademark Recording The Masters. For Jean-Luc Renou, Mulann's CEO, there's still a place for analog sound in today's ephemeral music world.

"Take the example of heating: you have radiators at home. It's comfortable, it's digital-but next to you, you can make a good fire." "Pleasure" is the goal, he said. "That's the cassette or vinyl." The company sells tapes for 3.49 euros each, producing them by the thousands each month and exporting 95 percent worldwide, according to commercial director Theo Gardin.

The 27-year-old admits he didn't know in his youth the joys-and pains-of the Walkman personal tape player, or the delicate strip of tape that tangles up and must be rewound with, say, a pen. Or a finger. According to Stepp, it's precisely 20-somethings like Gardin fast-forwarding demand, as young people seek something tangible in the internet age.—AFP



Mexican Totonac natives perform a ceremony to request permission from the gods, to hold the Tajin Summit Festival -aimed at preserving the Totonac legacy- in Papantla, Veracruz state, Mexico. — AFP photos



MEXICO'S 'VOLADORES' SEEK TO KEEP ANCESTORS' FLYING SPIRIT ALIVE

Four teenagers climb to the top of a towering pole, fasten themselves to ropes and throw themselves, head-first and backwards, into the air. No, it's not the latest social media challenge. It's the "danza de los voladores," the dance of the flyers, a more than 2,500-year-old ritual practiced by the Totonac people of central Mexico, who are fighting to keep the tradition alive by giving it some modern tweaks.

Spinning in widening circles around the pole as they fly upside-down through the air, the four dancers slowly descend to the ground, dressed in white tunics, red pants and conical hats with rainbow-colored streamers that trail across the sky. A fifth dancer balances atop the pole — a 30-meter tree trunk — playing a festive tune on a reed flute while beating a small drum. Every aspect of the tradition has deeper meaning for the Totonac, who use the dance to ask the gods for rain and fertility.

The four flyers represent the four cardinal points of their cosmology, and the fifth dancer the center. The 13 circles they spin around the tree trunk, multiplied by four, equal the number of years per cycle in their ancestors' highly advanced calendar: 52. And their colorful streamers represent the rainbow that appears after the rain.

"The dance is an offering that the Totonac people invented to end a terrible drought. The job was given to five chaste young men, who climbed to the top of the tallest tree and threw themselves off like birds," says Cruz Ramirez, 58, a veteran flyer. But in the year 2019, leaping backwards off a 30-meter pole is not for everyone — one reason why Ramirez and the other grandfathers who are the keepers of the tradition decided they had to bring it into the modern world.

They founded the Papantla Flying School, where young voladores now learn the art from professional teachers,

with benefits such as life and accident insurance, legal safeguards and labor laws to protect them when they graduate. "We were thinking about whom we would leave this heritage to, trying to make sure the ceremony wouldn't be lost," says Ramirez. "Ten years ago, we didn't have life insurance, accident insurance, we had absolutely nothing."

Gift of the birdman

But the essence of the ritual — which was named to UNESCO's list of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009 — remains. "Young people come to the school to learn to value the ritual again, as something essential in life, to integrate the spiritual, the mental and the emotional," says Francisco Hernandez, 51, another teacher. The tradition is on full display every year around this time — the spring equinox — at the Tajin summit, a cultural festival held in the town of Papantla, in Veracruz state, which wraps up Sunday.

The Papantla flyers have also toured the world, performing in Britain, France, Switzerland, Italy and the United Arab Emirates. Thanks to their persistence and their lobbying efforts, they now have life and accident insurance that protects them in Mexico and abroad, under an agreement reached with the state government in 2009. Eugenio San Martin is one of the students at the flying school. The shy 14-year-old comes from a family of voladores: his father and grandfathers were also flyers. He is studying to be a "caporal," the dancer who balances atop the pole while playing the flute. "I started when I was seven, because I liked it," he said.

"The first time I climbed the pole, I was really scared. But the teacher climbed up with me." The school welcomes around 100 new students each year, ages eight to 10. But only about 20 in every class have what it takes to become

professional flyers, says Hernandez. "Not everyone has the gift," he says. "When a child has that power, you can see it in his eyes." There is no set time period to learn the ritual, says Hernandez. At a minimum, it takes 10 years. But in reality, "you never stop learning it," he says. "Ironically, flying is the easy part. What it's really all about is learning the symbolism of the tradition." — AFP

Giant floating mouse sculpture arrives in Hong Kong harbor

A massive inflatable floating sculpture reminiscent of Mickey Mouse was towed into Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour on Friday, as a crowd of curious locals looked on. The 37-metre piece called KAWS:HOLIDAY-about the length of three double-decker buses-is the work of American artist KAWS, who is known for his whimsical characters which have Xs for eyes. Tugboats towed the macabre grey figure-a character named COMPANION, floating on its back-into the harbor and stationed it off Hong Kong's busy Central district. Part of an art festival in the city, it will remain there until the end of the month. KAWS, whose real name is Brian Donnelly, said he hopes his work will help people to relax. "Hong Kong's such a busy city... I thought it would be a good juxtaposition to have a work like this just floating in Victoria Harbour," he told reporters.

"I just thought about... for myself, what's a really relaxing position, and that's really when you just zone out and look at the sky and think about nothing else," Locals and visitors, some wearing t-shirts designed by KAWS, took photos and looked on excitedly as the sculpture was brought to its display site. The figure has been compared to a huge floating yellow duck that was displayed in the Hong Kong harbor in 2013.

That work-smaller than the KAWS piece-by Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman was hugely popular, inspiring special duck dishes in restaurants and even copies in several Chinese cities. "The yellow duck is more attractive, more lively," said Fung Foon-yung, 67. "I don't know what this one looks like, it's just lying there," she added, saying it reminded her of a corpse. Cheer Chen, 31, a self-described KAWS fan and Sichuan resident, said she came to Hong Kong especially to see the sculpture after missing out on its previous stops in Seoul and Taipei. "Maybe there are some things in the world it doesn't want to see," said Hong Kong resident Leung Kin-ye, referring to the figure's eyes. "Inequality, human selfishness, greed." — AFP



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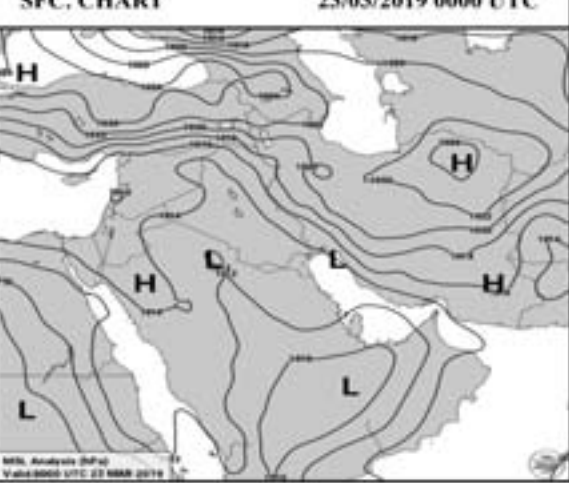
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north easterly wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 30 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain.

BY NIGHT: Cool and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 10 - 30 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	<div>SFC. CHART23/03/2019 0000 UTC</div>	
KUWAIT CITY	29 °C	19 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	29 °C	15 °C		
ABDALY	30 °C	12 °C		
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C		
JAHRA	30 °C	16 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	26 °C	19 °C		
SALMIYAH	25 °C	20 °C		
AHMADI	24 °C	19 °C		
NUWAISIB	27 °C	17 °C		
WAFRA	30 °C	13 °C		
SALMY	30 °C	14 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	03/24	Warm and Cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	27 °C	17 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h
Monday	03/25	Unstable and Cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	32 °C	18 °C	SE-SW	25 - 55 km/h
Tuesday	03/26	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	28 °C	21 °C	SE-NW	15 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	03/27	Warm	27 °C	17 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 24 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:29
Sunrise	05:48
Zuhr	11:55
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:01
Isha	19:18

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	15 °C
MAX. RH	63 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	E 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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I, VISHNU MANOJ (given name) holder of Indian Passport N7014140 do hereby change my name to VISH-NU (given name) MANOJ (surname) for all purposes. I also undertake to effect the change in all my other public documents. (C 5504) 20-3-2019

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Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
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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
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Arrival Flights on Sunday 24/3/2019										Departure Flights on Sunday 24/3/2019									
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	JZR	KAC	714	Sohag	Dammam	12:35	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25		
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05	KAC	515	Tehran	12:00	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	JZR	407	Ahmedabad	00:05	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
KAC	504	Beirut	00:45	AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	MSR	2615	Cairo	00:30	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
KAC	102	London	00:50	QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	TRQ	231	KRT	00:30	JZR	113	Doha	13:30	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KAC	774	Riyadh	14:00	BBC	044	Dubai	00:40	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	KAC	792	Madinah	14:05	JZR	707	Luxor	01:00	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15	AXB	394	Bahrain	14:40
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	FDB	059	Dubai	14:20	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:15	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	KAC	672	Dubai	14:25	JZR	111	Doha	01:45	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25	KAC	673	Dubai	15:40
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	KAC	364	Colombo	14:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	01:50	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05	KAC	619	Doha	16:10	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	KAC	618	Doha	14:40	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40	KAC	563	Amman	16:10	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45	KAC	417	Manila	01:50	KAC	646	Muscat	16:35	OMA	646	Jeddah	16:40
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	692	Muscat	14:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:25	KAC	785	Sharjah	16:45	ABY	128	Damascus	17:00
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	KNE	529	Jeddah	15:05	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	KAC	675	Dubai	17:05	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:10	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:30	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	IGO	1758	Kochi	02:55	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05	KAC	619	Doha	16:10
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05	KAC	563	Amman	16:10	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
RJA	648	Amman	02:55	KAC	562	Amman	15:35	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40	KAC	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55	KAC	646	Muscat	16:35	OMA	646	Jeddah	16:40
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	JZR	732	Cairo	15:50	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	KAC	785	Sharjah	16:45	ABY	128	Damascus	17:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:10	SAW	705	Damascus	16:00	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00	KAC	128	Sharjah	16:45	SAW	706	Damascus	17:00
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	118	New York	16:05	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00	KAC	675	Dubai	17:05	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15
JZR	704	Asyut	03:25	ABY	127	Sharjah	16:05	KKK	1269	Istanbul	04:00	KAC	675	Dubai	17:05	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	KAC	516	Tehran	16:20	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	KAC	502	Beirut	16:30	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KAC	542	Cairo	16:30	JZR	701	Asyut	04:30	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15	KAC	052	Dubai	17:40
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	QTR	1072	Doha	16:35	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00	KAC	283	Doha	17:50	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	FDB	051	Dubai	16:40	KAC	103	London	05:10	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	JZR	114	Doha	17:10	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10	KAC	721	Alexandria	18:00	JZR	721	Alexandria	18:00
UAE	873	Dubai	04:55	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30	KAC	733	Cairo	18:10	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30	FDB	070	Dubai	05:50	KAC	511	Riyadh	18:15	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45	JZR	215	Jeddah	06:00	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	104	Bahrain	17:45	JZR	713	Sohag	06:15	KAC	621	Doha	18:25	KAC	621	Doha	18:25
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15	THY	771	Istanbul	06:40	JZR	501	Lahore	18:40	JZR	501	Lahore	18:40
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	FDB	063	Dubai	18:15	UAE	874	Dubai	06:50	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	JZR	124	Dubai	18:20	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	MSR	620	Cairo	18:30	RJA	649	Amman	07:15	KAC	253	Amman	19:15	JZR	253	Amman	19:15
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30	JZR	115	Doha	07:30	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	SYR	341	Damascus	19:00	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:10	UAE	876	Cairo	19:30	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	RJA	640	Amman	19:00	KAC	165	Rome	08:20	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25	QTR	8512	Doha	08:40	UAE	876	Cairo	19:30	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	8511	Doha	06:40	RBG	555	Alexandria	19:25	FDB	054	Dubai	08:50	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	KAC	616	Bahrain	19:30	IGO	1756	CNN	09:00	RJA	641	Amman	20:00	RJA	641	Amman	20:00
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:30	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00	SYR	342	Damascus	20:00	SYR	342	Damascus	20:00

At New York mosque, UN chief pledges to protect religious sites

NEW YORK: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday pledged action to help protect religious sites worldwide, during a visit to a New York Islamic center one week after the New Zealand mosque shootings that shocked the world. "Mosques and all places of prayer and contemplation should be safe havens, not sites of terror," Guterres said. "Worshippers must feel safe to worship."

Guterres met with worshippers at the Islamic Cultural Center's mosque in Manhattan as they gathered ahead of Friday prayers and offered "solidarity with the Muslim community from New York to New Zealand and beyond". Speaking to reporters, the UN chief announced that he had tasked Spanish diplomat Miguel Moratinos with the drafting of an action plan for the United Nations to support efforts to protect religious sites. Moratinos heads the UN Alliance of Civilisations, a group led by Spain and Turkey that seeks to foster better understanding between cultures and societies.

The group will reach out to governments, religious leaders and organizations to explore actions to prevent such attacks as the Christchurch shooting that left 50 dead. Addressing a meeting in Istanbul of Muslim countries, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on the world to fight Islamophobia in the same way it fought anti-Semitism after the World War II Holocaust. Guterres said the attack in New Zealand was "utterly appalling" but "perhaps not utterly surprising", citing the rise of anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Semitism and bigotry. "Hate speech is spreading like wildfire," he said.

Social media is being exploited to spread bigotry while many political movements either openly admit to being neo-Nazi or are "lip syncing their words," he added. The UN chief spoke of the victims of the Christchurch shooting, some of whom lost their lives saving others, and said he was "deeply moved by the extraordinary display of leadership, love and community from the people of New Zealand". — AFP



NEW YORK: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visits the Islamic Cultural Center on Friday to make remarks on the New Zealand attack and the need to address Islamophobia. — AFP

‘March for love’ as New Zealand...

Continued from Page 1

engineer originally from India. "Everyone wants to get back in again to give praise and to catch up. This is the central point of our community."

The attacks shocked a country of 4.5 million that is known for its tolerance and prompted global horror, heightened by Tarrant's cold-blooded livestreaming of the massacre. New Zealand came to a standstill on Friday to mark one week since the bloodshed, with the Muslim call to prayer broadcast across the country followed by two minutes of silence. The ceremonies saw poignant scenes of Maoris performing the traditional haka war dance, and non-Muslim New Zealand women donning makeshift Islamic headscarves in solidarity.

A day earlier, the country outlawed the military-style rifles used in the assault with immediate effect. But one of four concert sites at a music festival in the capital Wellington was evacuated yesterday night just before a planned minute of silence for Christchurch, underlining lingering apprehensions. Police cited unspecified "concerns about a person", but later called it an "innocent misunderstanding" and the concert was slated to proceed.

In Christchurch, police also handed back Linwood Mosque, the second killing zone several kilometres away from Al Noor, but no plans to allow visitors were announced. An armed police presence will remain at both mosques, as well as others around New Zealand. Workers have rushed to repair the mosques' bullet-pocked walls and clean blood-spattered floors.

At Al Noor, visitors knelt at a garden tap to wash their feet and faces in ritual pre-prayer ablutions. Some wept quietly inside the mosque, where bright sunlight streamed through windows and the air smelled of fresh paint. No bullet holes were seen. Men and women then knelt and prayed on a padded carpet underlay taped to the floor, still awaiting replacements

Islamic State's 'caliphate' defeated...

Continued from Page 1

The nearly five years of fighting against the most brutal militant group in modern history left major cities in ruins and populations homeless.

The territory administered by the remnants of IS continued to shrink month after month and in September 2018 the SDF launched a final offensive on the last drags of the "caliphate" in its Euphrates Valley strongholds. SDF fighters last week expelled IS fighters who refused to surrender from an encampment on the edge of Baghouz and have since been hunting down a few survivors hiding on the reedy banks of the Euphrates. "Those who lasted the longest were mostly foreigners... Tunisians, Moroccans, Egyptians," Kurdish fighter Hisham Harun, 21, told AFP.

Around him, the former militant encampment was littered with bullet-riddled truck carcasses, discarded suicide belts and torn tents where the caliphate's last families sheltered for weeks. Some bodies of suspected IS fighters could also be seen. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the offensive has left 630 civilians, 750 SDF fighters and around 1,600 militants dead.

Kurdish officers and aid groups were flummoxed by the number of people who poured out of Baghouz, a small village even few Syrians knew of until this year. As SDF forces pummeled IS positions and US warplanes dropped huge payloads on the riverside village, tens of thousands of people fled over a rocky hill. For weeks, the ghostly figures of the caliphate's last denizens hobbled out of the besieged village, famished, often wounded but sometimes still defiantly proclaiming their support for IS.

The Kurdish-led force and foreign intelligence have screened more than 60,000 people since January, around 10 percent of them militants turning themselves

for the mosque's bloodstained rugs.

Several members of Christchurch semi-professional football club Western AFC arrived in team colors to honor three victims who were known to the team due to their interest in the sport. The players left a bouquet of flowers outside the entrance to the mosque's grounds. The victims included 14-year-old Sayyad Milne, who dreamed of playing in goal for Manchester United, according to his father. "We all love playing football and the best thing we can do is just to go out and enjoy it really, and obviously play for those guys that have been lost and think about them while we are doing it," said team member Aaron McDonald, 20.

The mosque's imam Gamal Fouda arrived draped in a New Zealand flag. The day before, Fouda delivered an impassioned memorial service at a park next to the mosque that was watched globally and in which he praised "unbreakable" New Zealand for uniting in the tragedy's wake. Around 2,000 people gathered yesterday at the same park to join a "March for Love" procession through Christchurch.

Officials and police said two relatives of victims had died, with New Zealand identifying one as 65-year-old Suad Adwan, who had arrived from Jordan for the burial of her son Kamel Darwish, 38. The grief-stricken mother was found yesterday morning having apparently died in her sleep, just hours after her son's burial, of what police called a "medical event". No other details on the deaths were given.

But normality slowly returned to Christchurch as children played cricket near Al Noor and a previously scheduled 100-km cycling race went ahead as planned. New Zealand, which has already charged two people for distributing the gruesome livestreamed video of the attack, has now also made it a crime to share the alleged killer's "manifesto", local media reported. In the document, Tarrant says the killings were in response to what he termed a Muslim "invasion" of Western countries. "Others have referred to this publication as a 'manifesto', but I consider it a crude booklet that promotes murder and terrorism," Chief Censor David Shanks was quoted as saying. — AFP

in. Most of the people evacuated from the smoldering ruins of Baghouz in recent days were relatives of IS members who now fill overcrowded camps further north in Syria's Kurdish-controlled region. The biggest of them, Al-Hol, is struggling to host 74,000 people, including at least 25,000 school-aged children.

Among them are thousands of foreigners from France, Russia, Belgium and 40-plus countries that are in most cases unwilling to take them back. "The needs are huge and the camp is overwhelmed," Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross said Friday upon returning from a five-day visit to Syria.

Speaking at the ceremony in Al Omar, top SDF commander Mazloum Kobane warned that a new phase had begun in anti-IS operations. The US has vowed to draw down its forces in Syria, but Kobane appealed for sustained coalition assistance to help smash sleeper cells "which are a great threat to our region and the whole world". US coalition envoy William Roebuck agreed and said "we still have much more to do to achieve an enduring defeat" of IS.

French President Emmanuel Macron hailed the fall of Baghouz saying "a significant threat to our country" has been "eliminated". British Prime Minister Theresa May chimed in, calling yesterday's victory "a historic milestone". The militants retain a presence in eastern Syria's vast Badia desert and various other hideouts from which they could wage the kind of deadly guerrilla insurgency that accompanied the rise of the Islamic State group.

John Spencer, a scholar at the Modern War Institute at West Point, warned that while the geographic caliphate had been dismantled, IS was far from defeated. IS "is a terrorist organization, all they have to do is put down their weapons and try to blend in with the population and just escape," he told AFP. "They're not gone, and they're not going to be gone." After almost five years of fighting and heavy losses, the Kurds are now exposed to threats from both Damascus and Turkey. Kobane appealed for dialogue with both as another page of the deadly eight-year-old Syrian conflict is being turned. — AFP

Dubai projects NZ PM's image on...

Continued from Page 1

"Thank you PM @jacindaardern and New Zealand for your sincere empathy and support that has won the

Washington on edge for Mueller's...

Continued from Page 1

investigation an illegal witch hunt - suggesting the White House has still not seen the report.

Meanwhile Democrats in Congress, many of who are hoping for evidence to support a presidential impeachment, were preparing to meet as they pressed hard to ensure the report's full contents are made public, and not just a summary prepared by the Trump-appointed Barr. "It is imperative for Mr Barr to make the full report public and provide its underlying documentation and findings to Congress," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said late Friday in a statement, adding that Barr should not give Trump any "sneak preview."

Barr was reportedly in his Justice Department office early yesterday to review Mueller's conclusions and decide what to do next. The secret report, the result of a 22-month investigation by Mueller into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia and obstruction of justice, was handed to Barr Friday with the announcement that no new indictments were forthcoming. That produced sighs of relief from the White House, where members of Trump's family - Don Jr and son-in-law Jared Kushner in particular - had been feared possible targets of the probe.

With Mueller prevented by longstanding Justice Department policy from indicting the president himself, there were no hints on whether the report damns or clears Trump of criminal behavior. In a brief letter to Congress late Friday, Barr announced that the long-awaited report had been submitted to him and that he would send its "principal conclusions" for Congress as early as this weekend.

Mueller, a 74-year-old veteran criminal prosecutor and former FBI chief, was required to produce a confidential

Mideast anger over Trump's...

Continued from Page 1

The territory's return has always been a key Syrian national demand, championed by government and rebels alike throughout the bloody civil war that has ripped the country apart since 2011.

In an angry retort, the Syrian government said Trump's comments disregarded international law. "The American position towards Syria's occupied Golan Heights clearly reflects the United States' contempt for international legitimacy and its flagrant violation of international law," a foreign ministry source told the official SANA news agency. Trump's comments showed the extent of his administration's "blind bias" towards Israel. "The Golan was and will remain Arab and Syrian," the source said. The foreign ministry sent a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, urging him to reiterate the UN's rejection of Israeli claims over the Golan, SANA said.

Turkey, which hosted the last indirect peace talks between Israel and the Syrian government in 2008 but has backed Syrian rebels, said the change risked plunging the region into a "new crisis". "We will never allow the occupation of Golan Heights to be made legitimate," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted he was "shocked by @realDonaldTrump continuing to try to give what is not his to racist Israel." And France added its voice to the chorus of outrage, saying the Golan had been "occupied by Israel since 1967" and it did not recognize Israel's annexation.

In his tweet, Trump said the Golan was "of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!" "After 52 years it is time for the United

respect of 1.5 billion Muslims after the terrorist attack that shook the Muslim community around the world," he wrote on Twitter.

A photo from Dubai's Public Diplomacy Office showed Burj Khalifa lit up with a picture of Ardern in a hijab, warmly embracing a Muslim affected by the tragedy, under the word "peace" in Arabic and English. Ardern has been widely praised for her handling of the tragedy, meeting victims' families and moving quickly to tighten gun laws while calling for global efforts against extremism online. — AFP

report that explained why he decided to indict or not indict subjects of the probe. Barr decides himself how much of the report he releases to Congress and the public, though he said in his letter Friday that he is "committed to as much transparency as possible". The special counsel regulations "give Barr lots of discretion about what to disclose to Congress and the public," said Andrew Coan, a University of Arizona law professor. "The selective release of exculpatory material is a possibility worth watching for."

Mueller investigated whether members of Trump's 2016 election campaign colluded with Russians to skew the election. In addition, he studied whether actions by Trump, including the May 2017 firing of FBI director James Comey, amounted to criminal obstruction of justice. But what he has concluded remained a mystery yesterday. "We don't, at this stage, know anything about what information the Mueller Report contains. We don't know what form the document takes. We don't even know how many pages comprise it," Benjamin Wittes, a prominent Washington legal analyst, wrote on the Lawfare website. "The president should wait before popping the champagne corks over this and tweeting in triumph."

Mueller indicted 34 individuals during the probe, among them six Trump associates, including his former national security advisor Mike Flynn, his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen, and campaign chairman Paul Manafort. Five of the six have pleaded guilty to the charges against them. Court filings in those cases painted a broad picture of a cohesive Russian effort via hacking and social media manipulation to swing the election in Trump's favor against Democrat Hillary Clinton.

The investigation has revealed scores of contacts between the campaign and Russians, with members of the team readily talking to the Russians about obtaining dirt on Clinton. Hours before Barr's announcement, Trump repeated his accusation that the entire investigation was a hoax and questioned Mueller's credentials for investigating him. But Mueller, who was director of the FBI for 12 years, has the respect and support of Democrats and Republicans alike as a straight-shooting, disciplined and fair investigator. — AFP

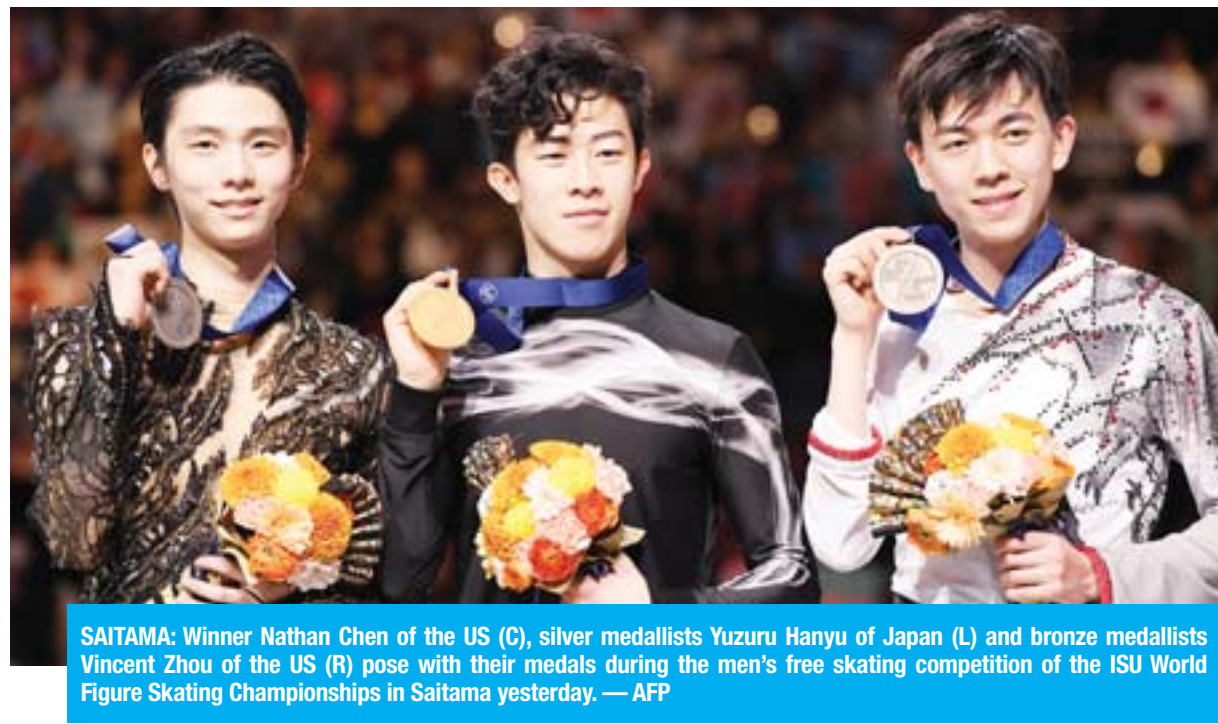
States to fully recognise Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights," he said. The Arab League said Trump's comments were "completely outside international law". The Gulf Cooperation Council said Trump's statement would not change the internationally recognized fact that the "Golan heights are Syrian lands forcefully occupied by Israel".

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said lasting peace in the region requires Israel to withdraw from all Arab territories it occupies, including the Golan. Egypt urged "respect (for) legitimate international resolutions and the United Nations Charter on the unacceptability of land appropriation by force". Following decades of calm along the Golan armistice line after the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973, tensions flared with the eruption of civil war in Syria in 2011. Israel provided medical assistance to wounded rebel fighters and repeatedly struck government positions in response to stray fire across the frontier. It has also targeted suspected positions of Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, which have intervened militarily to back President Bashar al-Assad.

Since the Syrian government decisively defeated rebel fighters near the armistice line last year with Iranian and Hezbollah support, Israel has repeatedly vowed to prevent its arch enemies from establishing a long-term military presence. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is seeking re-election next month, swiftly thanked Trump for his announcement. "At a time when Iran seeks to use Syria as a platform to destroy Israel, President Trump boldly recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights," the right-wing prime minister wrote on Twitter.

Leon Panetta, a veteran Democrat who served as CIA director and defence secretary among other roles, blasted Trump for "tweeting out another policy that obviously has not been worked out with our international partners". The Golan move is Trump's latest diplomatic bombshell as he seeks to redraw the fraught Middle East in Israel's favor. In 2017, Trump went against decades of practice in recognizing the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, rather than the previously accepted Tel Aviv. — AFP

Sports



SAITAMA: Winner Nathan Chen of the US (C), silver medallists Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan (L) and bronze medallists Vincent Zhou of the US (R) pose with their medals during the men's free skating competition of the ISU World Figure Skating Championships in Saitama yesterday. — AFP



SAITAMA: ISU World Figure Skating Championships Ice Dance winner Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France pose with their national flag during the victory ceremony in Saitama, northern suburb of Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Chen defends title with record-setting skate, Japan's Hanyu takes second

Papadakis and Cizeron of France dance to fourth championship

SAITAMA: America's Nathan Chen successfully defended his world figure skating title yesterday with a spectacular, record-setting free skate in a nail-biting contest with hometown favourite and Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan.

Chen built on a strong lead in the short programme with a dynamic free skate that included four clean quadruple jumps and had the crowd at Saitama Super Arena, just north of Tokyo, clapping along by the end.

The 19-year-old Chen broke the world record for both the free skate and total points, set moments before by Hanyu, surging to victory with 216.02 and a total of 323.42. "As soon as I stepped on the ice, I felt that energy already there. He (Hanyu) has been pushing the sport making the sport so enjoyable, so competitive, and that definitely made me so much better of a skater," said Chen.

Hanyu, 24 and competing in Japan for the first time in several years, brought the house down with a routine that began with a clean quadruple loop and hit two more clean quads, with a quad Salchow under-rotated.

In a routine that was haunting and energetic, Hanyu, who had not competed for four months due to an ankle injury, racked up 206.10 points in the free skate and 300.97 in total, breaking the record he set in a Helsinki Grand Prix event in 2018.

Yet it was only enough for silver.

"I had one mistake in my free programme but I am pleased I could perform well at the world championships," said Hanyu, whose fans cheered ecstatically when he landed his jumps. Hanyu, who is known as a perfectionist, added that he was far from satisfied with the result. "I really want to win. I think I did my best, but the problem is that in figure skating competition con-

sists of two days, and I am losing in both," he said.

"I am a really competitive person and want to compete with a strong opponent. I respect Nathan in this sense," American 18-year-old Vincent Zhou finished third with a dynamic and powerful routine that helped him rise a place from the short programme, claiming 186.99 points for a total of 281.16.

"It wasn't perfect but I am more than happy with that. It felt unbelievable doing that out there," he said.

FOURTH CHAMPIONSHIP

Unstoppable French ice dance duo of Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron took their fourth world championship crown and set a new world record with a sensual routine that won a standing ovation.

The two, who were narrowly edged out of gold at the Pyeongchang Olympics after Papadakis's costume came

unfastened in the short dance, surged to victory at the Saitama Super Arena after tango-ing to a substantial lead in the rhythm dance short skate. With a new scoring system in place this season, Papadakis and Cizeron seemed to mirror each other through a series of spins and gravity-defying lifts and finished with 134.23 in the free dance and 222.65 altogether.

They ended up roughly 10 points ahead of their nearest rivals and eclipsed their own world record set at this year's European Championships after a season dogged by back problems for Cizeron.

"We were exactly here five years ago in Saitama (for the World Championships) and remember the whole experience from those five years. It is incredible," said Papadakis. Russians Victoria Sinitsina and Nikita Katsalapov finished second ahead of Americans Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue. — Reuters

Ooredoo's ambassador Al-Jeraiwi wins Abu Dhabi World Triathlon

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait's brand ambassador, triathlete Najla Al-Jeraiwi, won first place in the Abu Dhabi World Triathlon which was held in Abu Dhabi, which included a very competitive race between the world's best triathletes. The Abu Dhabi World Triathlon is the largest and most inclusive triathlon in the Middle East. The 2019 elite race boasted the strongest field in Abu Dhabi's history, with the best-of the best lining up race for precious Olympic qualifying points. Also, for the first time Najla Al-Jeraiwi took 15 Kuwaiti juniors to compete in the international Olympic kids' race.

In a press statement, Ooredoo Kuwait lauded the achievement, noting that her victory brings pride to all the youth of Kuwait. The sponsorship of athlete Al-Jeraiwi comes in alignment with the company's core values of caring, connecting, and challenging. It further underscores the company's commitment to empowering women.

Al-Jeraiwi has a long track record of key achievements. She won the gold medal in the Sierra Nevada Triathlon, in the Spanish district of Granada last June. She won the bronze medal in the African Triathlon Union Cup - the Pan Arab Competition, held in Sharm Al Sheikh last March. She was the first Arab female triathlete representative in the 17th Asian Games, South Korea and the first GCC representative in UCI Road World Championships 2016. She was also the runner-up in the ATU African Triathlon & Pan Arab championship and the GCC cycling champion in both Time Trial and Road race. Al-Jeraiwi is currently the



national champion of Kuwait in both triathlon and cycling. She has come in the top 3 in multiple regional triathlons.

Supporting youth and empowering women is among Ooredoo's top priorities through its CSR strategy. The company signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs in 2017 to support youth projects and initia-

tives. Ooredoo is continuously working with the different entities in both private and public sectors to enrich youth experience in a variety of fields. The company's commitment to supporting youth is deep-rooted within the core values in Ooredoo Kuwait. Ooredoo is especially proud of the young athletes that it sponsors, such as Kuwaiti champions Abdulaziz Al-Rashed and Rakan Al-Hasawi.

Pacquiao polls Twitter on who to fight next

MANILA: Philippine boxing legend Manny Pacquiao took to social media to poll millions of fans on who they think should be his next opponent, having brushed off calls to hang up his gloves after turning 40.

"Who should I fight next?" the world's only eight-division champion asked in a Twitter survey that drew 27,380 votes after five hours and listed Floyd Mayweather, Keith Thurman, Danny Garcia and Shawn Porter as the choices.

The poll, also linked to Pacquiao's Facebook wall, has 18 more hours to run. It did not indicate how the voting had gone so far. Pacquiao, who has 2.51 million followers on Twitter and 11.76 million on Facebook, is known to have been angling for a rematch with Mayweather, who beat the Filipino on points in the world's richest prize fight in 2015.

Pacquiao's decisive victory over American fighter Adrien Broner in January was supposed to have opened the door to that route. But the unbeaten Mayweather, officially retired, has been non-committal. Many Facebook users urged Pacquiao, who has 61 wins including 39 knockouts against seven losses and two draws in a 24-year career, to fight Mayweather. "Floyd of course then retire," Carlos De Luna Lagunsad added.

But another fan urged the 40-year-old to face International Boxing Federation welterweight champion Errol Spence, who easily beat challenger Garcia in a match between two previously undefeated boxers yesterday. "Show this young guys why u r a living legend," Meg Osh Tin Oniuka said. — AFP

Top-ranked Park, Liu share LPGA Founders Cup lead

LOS ANGELES: China's Liu Yu made the most of her early morning start, firing an eight-under par 64 on Friday to join world number one Park Sung-hyun atop the leaderboard of the LPGA Founders Cup. Liu matched France's Celine Boutier-a former teammate at Duke University-for low round of the tournament to seize a share of the halfway lead on 12-under par 132.

South Korea's Park posted her second straight 66 at Wildfire Golf Club in Phoenix, Arizona. She and Liu were two strokes clear of a group of eight players on 10-under 134 that included overnight leader Boutier as well as former world number one Lydia Ko of New Zealand.

They were joined by Americans Angel Yin and Cheyenne Knight, Sweden's Linnea Strom. That group is headlined by top-15 players Amy Yang of South Korea and Lydia Ko of New Zealand. It also includes Boutier, Americans Angel Yin and Cheyenne Knight, Sweden's Linnea Strom, Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen and South Korean Hur Mi-jung.

Defending champion Park In-bee of South Korea

headed a group of five players on 135. Liu was in the first group off the tee at 10, bouncing back from an opening bogey with three straight birdies. She followed another bogey at 14 with birdies at 15 and 18, and birdied five holes coming in.

"Just everything kind of clicked all together," said Liu, who admitted that it's not something she would expect to happen every day. "When a day like this comes, I just am glad I was able to take advantage of it," she said, adding that the chilly temperatures that greeted her group slowed her early.

"My putting definitely helped me a lot on the front nine," she said. "On the back nine the weather warmed up and I was hitting it close and I was able to capitalize on those short- and mid-range birdie putts."

Park also teed off on 10 and after playing her first nine holes in two-under. She came alive over her final nine, with birdies at five of six holes that included a run of four straight from the first through the fourth.

A bogey at the ninth prevented her from holding the solo 36-hole lead. "Overall I'm really happy with the play today, especially putting was really good and the shots were better than yesterday," Park said.

Strom was eyeing a share of the lead with nine birdies and no bogeys through 17 holes before a double bogey at 18. Boutier, who fired eight birdies without a bogey on Thursday, was as low as 13 under after three birdies and an eagle at the par-five 15th. But she fell back with a bogey at 16 and a double bogey at the last. — AFP

Defending champ Paul Casey holds share of Valspar halfway lead

MIAMI: Defending champion Paul Casey fired a five-under par 66 to grab a share of the 36-hole lead alongside American Austin Cook at the US PGA Tour Valspar Championship on Friday.

England's Casey and Cook each stood on six-under 136 after two rounds at the Innisbrook Resort Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida.

England's Luke Donald, South Korean Im Sung-jae and American Scott Stallings were a stroke back on 137. Donald had five birdies and four bogeys in his one-under 70, surrendering a one-shot lead with two bogeys in his last four holes. Im posted a 67 and Stallings a 68.

Casey, who edged Tiger Woods and Patrick Reed by a stroke last year for the crown, began on the back nine and promptly birdied three of his first four holes, sinking a 10-foot putt at 10 and landing his

third shot inches from the cup before a tap-in at the par-5 11th.

Casey scored on the other par-5 holes as well, sinking a three-foot birdie putt at 14, a six-footer at the first before holing a 27-footer for eagle at the fifth. "I feel really good about (my game) because last week was rubbish," said Casey, who was stung by a missed cut at the Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass.

"I struggle a little bit around Sawgrass and that frustrated me, annoyed me, coming in here trying to defend my title, which I would love to do because I never defended a professional title, I've defended amateur titles, English Amateurs and PAC 12 titles, I would love to do that here.

"So I worked very, very hard on the game and for whatever reason it's slowed things down. Quietened the transition at the top of the swing," Casey said. "Nice to turn it around after last week to suddenly be not in control of this event but I'm near the top, which is good."

Casey's lone bogey came on his closing ninth hole, finding bunkers with his first two shots and missing a six-footer for par. "Disappointing on nine," Casey said. "But everybody's going to make bogeys. If you can just minimize those, it puts you in a good position." — AFP

South Africa seal Sri Lanka series despite Isuru Udana heroics

S Lanka lost their first four wickets in first four overs

CENTURION: Isuru Udana’s astonishing 84 for Sri Lanka wasn’t enough to stop South Africa from clinching their Twenty20 international series with a 16-run win in the second match at SuperSport Park on Friday.

Udana thrashed his not out score off 48 balls to take Sri Lanka from a seemingly hopeless position to one where they had an outside chance of winning. It initially looked easy for South Africa, who scored 180 for three after being sent in, with Reeza Hendricks hitting a fluent 65 and Rassie van der Dussen a powerfully-struck 64.

Sri Lanka lost their first four wickets in the first four overs and were floundering at 62 for six when Udana walked in to bat in the 10th over. But, as he did in the fourth one-day international, Udana overshadowed the recognised batsmen with a superb display of clean hitting, although he had a let-off when he was caught on the long-on boundary off JP Duminy when on 31, only for Duminy to be no-balled for over-stepping. Udana hit eight fours and six sixes.

“He’s the kind of player we need. He showed his character,” said Sri Lankan captain Lasith Malinga, who was disappointed with yet another top-order batting failure. “It’s really frustrating. We always talk about getting a partnership.”

Duminy praised a “really good team performance” and the way Dale Steyn and Chris Morris had struck twice each with the new ball. “There are a few things we can improve in the middle and end overs. Udana played a fantastic innings but we gave him a few life-lines,” he said.

ting, although he had a let-off when he was caught on the long-on boundary off JP Duminy when on 31, only for Duminy to be no-balled for over-stepping. Udana hit eight fours and six sixes.

“He’s the kind of player we need. He showed his character,” said Sri Lankan captain Lasith Malinga, who was disappointed with yet another top-order batting failure. “It’s really frustrating. We always talk about getting a partnership.”

Duminy praised a “really good team performance” and the way Dale Steyn and Chris Morris had struck twice each with the new ball. “There are a few things we can improve in the middle and end overs. Udana played a fantastic innings but we gave him a few life-lines,” he said.



PRETORIA: Sri Lanka's Isuru Udana plays a shot during the second Twenty20 international (T20I) cricket match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park Stadium, on Friday, in Pretoria. — AFP

Hendricks and Van der Dussen put on 116 off 78 balls for South Africa’s second wicket. Hendricks started the season as one of the favourites to make South Africa’s squad for the Cricket World Cup later this year but a run of poor form, together with the resurgence of Aiden Markram, put his chances in doubt.

Markram opened the batting with Hendricks on Friday but was out for three in the second over. While man of the match Van der Dussen’s innings was marked by power hitting, which brought him four fours and three sixes, Hendricks oozed class as he struck nine fours in a 46-ball innings marked by fluent off-side drives. —AFP

SCOREBOARD			
Scoreboard in the second T20 international between South Africa and Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park yesterday:			
South Africa			
A. Markram c Malinga b Udana	3	Kusal Mendis b Steyn	4
R. Hendricks c Kamindu Mendis b Malinga	65	T. Perera c Qeshile b Pretorius	22
H. van der Dussen b Dananjaya	64	Kamindu Mendis c Qeshile b Morris	0
J. Duminy not out	33	A. Perera c Duminy b Shamsi	11
D. Miller not out	8	D. de Silva run out (Duminy)	10
Extras: (b1, lb1, nb1, w3)	6	I. Udana not out	84
Total: (3 wkts, 20 overs)	180	A. Dananjaya b Shamsi	1
Fall of wickets: 1-9 (Markram), 2-125 (Hendricks), 3-139 (Van der Dussen)		L. Malinga b Morris	8
Bowling: Malinga 4-0-26-1 (1nb, 1w), Udana 4-0-39-1 (2w), Dananjaya, Vandersay 4-0-25-0, T. Perera 2-0-30-0, Kamindu Mendis 1-0-12-0.		J. Vandersay not out	0
Did not bat: C. Morris, D. Pretorius, S. Qeshile, D. Steyn, L. Sipamla, T. Shamsi		Extras: (nb1, w3)	4
		Total: (9 wkts, 20 overs)	164
		Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Fernando), 2-5 (Kusal Mendis), 3-31 (Dickwell), 4-31 (Kamindu Mendis), 5-56 (T. Perera), 6-62 (A. Perera), 7-83 (De Silva), 8-129 (Dananjaya).	
		Bowling: Steyn 3-0-34-2, Morris 4-1-32-3 (w1), Sipamla 4-0-42-0, Pretorius 4-0-22-1 (2w), Shamsi 4-0-16-2, Duminy 1-0-18-1 (1nb).	
Sri Lanka		Result: South Africa won by 16 runs	
N. Dickwella c Sipamla b Morris	20	Series: South Africa 2-0	
A. Fernando c Shamsi b Steyn	0		

Malinga to retire after T20 WCup

CENTURION: Sri Lankan limited overs captain Lasith Malinga will retire from international cricket after next year’s Twenty20 World Cup, he revealed on Friday. Malinga said that he would quit one-day internationals after the World Cup in England and Wales this summer before calling time on his career following the Twenty20 tournament, being played in Australia over October-November 2020.

“After the World Cup, my cricketing career is ending,” the 35-year-old said after his side were beaten by 16 runs by South Africa in the second Twenty20 international at SuperSport Park.

“I want to play in the T20 World Cup and then end my career.” Malinga dismissed South African top-scorer Reeza Hendric.

Earlier, Malinga says he is ready to sacrifice his earnings from the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) in order to win a place in the country’s World Cup squad. Selectors have made it mandatory for Sri Lanka players to participate in a 50-overs tournament at home if they want to be considered for selection in the 15-member squad for the May 30-July 14 Cricket World Cup in England and Wales.

“I had asked the board for the No-Objection Certificate for me to play in the IPL, and they had said that was fine, but that all players who want to go to the World Cup would need to stay back for the provincial tournament,” Malinga told ESPNcricinfo.

“So I told them I’d play in the provincial tournament, and I asked the board to inform Mumbai Indians and IPL, since it was their decision. I’m ok with losing those earnings from IPL. I’m doing it for the country.”

The 35-year-old fast bowler, who has taken the most wickets (154 in 110 matches) since the first edition of the IPL in 2008, was bought by the Mumbai franchise for 20 million Indian rupees (\$289,184.50) in the January auction for the upcoming season. He had worked as a bowling mentor for the same team after going unsold in 2018.

“Once I become available for Mumbai Indians, I would have missed seven or eight games,” Malinga added. “So there’s probably no point in them waiting around for me. Better for them to find someone else to replace me with.”

The IPL kicked off yesterday with a match between India captain Virat Kohli-led Royal Challengers Bangalore and champions Chennai, who are led by India wicketkeeper and former skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni. — Agencies

Finch’s century helps Australia to eight-wicket win over Pakistan

SHARJAH: Aaron Finch’s fine century drove Australia to a convincing eight-wicket win over a new-look Pakistan in the first one-day international on Friday. The Australian skipper scored 116 off 135 balls for his 12th one-day international century that helped his team overhaul the 281-run target in 49 overs on a flat Sharjah stadium pitch.

The win gives Australia the lead in the five-match series and comes on the back of their 3-2 series win in India earlier this month. “To be able to chase down the target for the loss of two wickets is nice. It’s nice to keep the momentum with a fourth win in a row,” Finch said.

Finch’s match-winning knock overshadowed Haris Sohail’s maiden one-day hundred (101 not out) which helped Pakistan to 280-5 in their 50 overs. “We needed wickets at the top which did not come our way because Finch and Marsh handled the chase very well,” stand-in captain Shoaib Malik said.

“Congrats to Haris for getting a hundred but we did not push Australia hard,” he added. The 32-year-old Australia smashed Malik for a huge six towards deep mid-wicket to complete his century-his first since June last year against England at Chester-Le-Street-off 120 balls.

Finch, who knocked four sixes and eight boundaries, added an innings-building 172 runs for the second wicket with Shaun Marsh who scored an unbeaten 91 off 102 balls with four boundaries and two sixes.

With 46 needed Finch became Mohammad Abbas’s maiden wicket but Peter Handscomb hit 30 not out to help Marsh cross the line. Finch and Marsh came togeth-



SHARJAH: Shan Masood of Pakistan bats during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and Australia in Sharjah on Friday. — AFP

er after opener Usman Khawaja fell for 24 to medium pacer Faheem Ashraf, the only other success Pakistan’s new-look bowling attack could achieve.

Pakistan rested six of their key players including regular skipper Sarfraz Ahmed in order to keep them fresh for the World Cup starting in UK from May 30. But the young and inexperienced Pakistan led by Malik proved no match for Australia, who are on a roll after their win in India earlier this month.

Left-hander Sohail, who reached 1,000 runs in his 27th one-day international when on 40, anchored Pakistan’s innings, adding 98 for the third wicket with Umar Akmal who made a 50-ball 48 in his first international match for two years.

Sohail took a single to complete his hundred in the last over, finishing with six boundaries and a six. Pakistan had

handed one-day debuts to opener Shan Masood and Abbas—who have played 15 and 14 Tests respectively.

Masood put on 35 in an opening stand with Imam-ul-Haq (17) before off-spinner Nathan Lyon dismissed Imam in the seventh over, caught and bowled. Masood, who hit five boundaries in his 62-ball 40, was then bowled by paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile who finished with 1-38 in his 10 overs.

Umar smashed three sixes in one Jhye Richardson over but fell one short of his half century. Malik fell for 11 and Ashraf and Imad Wasim scored 28 each. Wasim hit four boundaries and a six during his 13-ball unbeaten knock, helping Pakistan to 55 runs in the last five overs.

Today’s second ODI is also being played in Sharjah, with the third in Abu Dhabi (March 27) and the last two in Dubai (March 29 and 31). — AFP

Folau equals try record as Crusaders win streak ends

SYDNEY: The Canterbury Crusaders’ 19-game win streak was brought to a halt yesterday by the NSW Waratahs, with star Wallabies fullback Israel Folau equalling the all-time Super Rugby try record. Defeat culminated a traumatic week for a team left reeling by the Christchurch mosque massacres.

Based in the New Zealand town where a white supremacist killed 50 people a week ago, the Crusaders were playing their first game since the tragedy. But the reigning champions were unable to get the win they desperately wanted, crashing 20-12 in a scrappy match on a wet night at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Folau wrote himself into the record books with a 59th touchdown, matching the mark held by Doug Howlett during his stints at the Highlanders, Hurricanes and Blues between 1997-2007.

“I’m very proud. We’re building wins off defence and really happy that we were able to get tries then create a good wall to stop these guys,” said Waratahs skipper Michael

Hooper. “Another really good performance.”

In a show of solidarity, both teams ran onto the field at the same time before linking arms in a minute’s silence to commemorate those who died in the mass shooting that stunned rugby-mad New Zealand. The Crusaders, who wore armbands with the words “United 15-03-2019”, marking the day of the tragedy, cancelled their match last week against the Highlanders so the players could return home.

“Full credit to these guys (Waratahs), they came out early and put pressure on us and we were chasing the game straight away,” said Crusaders captain Sam Whitelock. Asked if he had a message for Christchurch, he replied: “Obviously it hasn’t been a great week but we stayed pretty tight. That’s what we’re trying to do as a team and we’re doing it as a city too.”

Many of the players admitted the shootings hit them hard and the Crusaders’ focus was lacking as Jed Holloway powered through two tackles to dive between the posts after just three minutes. The Waratahs got another try eight minutes later when Folau won a ball in the air and offloaded to Cameron Clark who scorched down the line.

Stunned, the Crusaders, minus the experienced Owen Franks and Kieran Reid, woke up and pulled one back when George Bridge sliced through the defence after a line-out win. But a Bernard Foley penalty saw the home team head to the break with a 15-7 lead and on a greasy pitch, the Crusaders couldn’t find a way back.



SYDNEY: Waratahs player Israel Folau (L) is tackled by Crusaders player Ryan Crotty (R) during the Super15’s rugby match between Australia’s Waratahs and New Zealand’s Crusaders at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

The Tahs dominated in the second stanza with Folau’s late touchdown putting the game beyond reach. Will Jordan pulled one back for the Crusaders on the siren, but it was too late. Earlier, a late try and conversion from Beauden Barrett saw the Hurricanes end the Stormers’ three-game win streak 34-28 in Wellington.

The two teams also linked arms during a moment’s silence ahead of a see-sawing eight-try game. “They put a lot of pressure on us, so we have to take our hats off to

that,” said skipper Barrett. “We did well to slow them down and put them under pressure.”

South Africa’s Stormers came into the match with plenty of confidence, but playing in New Zealand is a tough assignment and they failed to make the most of their opportunities.

The visitors took a six-point lead with SP Marais slotting two easy penalties but the Canes, who rested All Blacks trio Dane Coles, TJ Perenara and Ngani Laumape, soon settled. — AFP

Sports

Sterling downs Czechs as France sweep past Moldova

Griezmann shines for France with a comfortable 4-1 victory

PARIS: Raheem Sterling showed that he is coming of age on the international stage as his hat-trick saw England start their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign by hammering the Czech Republic 5-0, while Antoine Griezmann inspired France to a battering of Moldova.

Manchester City attacker Sterling had scored just two goals in his first 45 caps, but he now has five in his last three international appearances following Friday's treble, which helped England storm to the top of Group A ahead of Monday's trip to Montenegro, who drew 1-1 at Bulgaria.

Sterling opened the scoring in the 24th minute when he tapped home Jadon Sancho's cross, and struck twice more in the second half to put the result beyond doubt after Harry Kane fired home his 21st England goal from the penalty spot.

"It was a beautiful team performance and I was happy to help the team get the win," Sterling said. Sterling has 24 goals for club and country this term and his impressive form is a fry cry from the dark days when he was vilified as England crashed out of Euro 2016. "I'm just being confident in myself, I'm trying to get in areas and take shots, not to worry about anything," he added. England carried the momentum from a run to the World Cup semi-finals and qualification for the last four of the Nations League into the Euro qualifiers and blooded young hopeful Sancho, who impressed on his full England debut.

The 18-year-old who has shone in the Bundesliga for Borussia Dortmund, gave England fans further cause for excitement, with his potential adding to that of Sterling and Kane coming into their prime.

"I thought Raheem was electric. He has looked like that all week in training. I'm pleased for him, it is a special night for him," coach Gareth Southgate said. "I think he's really matured as a person and a footballer.

He's hungry for goals and hitting things instinctively without thinking too much."

France also got off to a perfect start after an older head in Antoine Griezmann spurred the world champions on to a comfortable 4-1 victory at Moldova. Griezmann opened the scoring with his 27th France goal in the 24th minute of their Group H encounter before crossing for Raphael Varane to double the scores three minutes later.

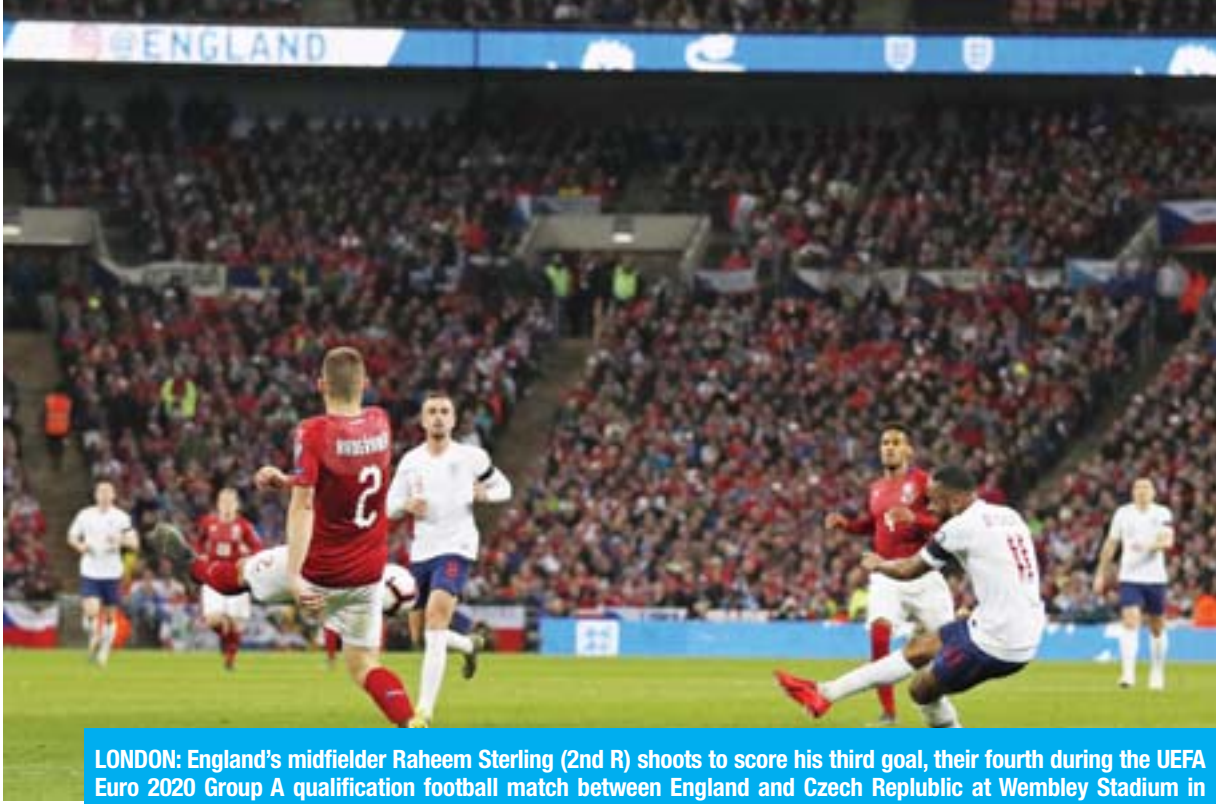
Olivier Giroud equalled David Trezeguet as Les Bleus' third highest scorer of all time with his 34th international goal nine minutes before the break and Kylian Mbappe completed the rout with three minutes left, before Vladimir Ambros claimed a late consolation for Moldova.

Griezmann would have had two more assists had Giroud and Paul Pogba been more clinical in front of goal, but France's display was easily enough for the three points and top spot in the group ahead of Iceland and Turkey, 2-0 winners against Albania and Andorra respectively.

"We played a very consummate first half in terms of control and attacking organisation. The second half was less fulfilling due to substitutions," said coach Didier Deschamps. "We've opened our campaign well and the second game comes around quickly. In three days we have to do it again."

Cristiano Ronaldo drew a blank on his return to international football after nine months away, as Ukraine battled to a goalless draw in Lisbon. The draw was the first time Santos' side have failed to score at home in 19 matches and leaves them second in the group behind Luxembourg, who beat Lithuania 2-1.

William Carvalho had a fine header ruled out for offside in the 16th minute and Ronaldo, Pepe and Andre Silva all went close to opening the scoring, but



LONDON: England's midfielder Raheem Sterling (2nd R) shoots to score his third goal, their fourth during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group A qualification football match between England and Czech Republic at Wembley Stadium in London on Friday. — AFP

Ukraine stopper Andriy Pyatov was on fine form to deny them.

In the end the away side could have snatched the three points through Junior Moraes, only for the debutant to fluff a golden chance to grab a shock win.

inside the box and crashed a shot past keeper Franco Armani. Rondon should have made it two with a header in the 40th but the second goal was only moments away as Murillo took advantage of a quick free kick to scamper to the edge of the box and curl a lovely right-foot shot into the far corner of the net.

Lautaro Martinez finished off a superb counter attack to pull Argentina back into the game after 59 minutes but their hopes were short lived and Venezuela's Josef Martinez made it 3-1 from the penalty spot with a quarter of an hour remaining.

"In the first half we created chances but they scored twice when we made mistakes," said Lautaro Martinez. "In the second half we did well and moved the ball about but they got that penalty. We need to keep improving." Argentina face Morocco in Tangier on Tuesday, while Venezuela's next face Catalonia in Girona tomorrow. — Reuters



Scott Davies

bling. You are either going to die or break up (your parents') marriage", he said.

"I thought 'I am not going to be the reason for breaking up their marriage'. That was my go-to reference. "My self-worth was the lowest of the low and I went back that night and held a knife to my chest.... That story I tell the players as it hits home."

Davies, who credits his mother for making the call to the rehabilitation clinic that kickstarted his process of recovery, said the betting addiction was as though someone had taken possession of his body.

"It is like I had a foreigner in my body," said Davies, who would bet on Hungarian handball in the early hours of the morning to keep himself stimulated. "I am now a completely different person to what I was back then. It was almost like the devil had taken me over and forced me to gamble."

Davies, who has a degree in broadcasting and professional writing, regrets wasted opportunities after a career spent playing sporadically at lower-level clubs but said he gets a buzz out of public speaking.

"Some of my mates are playing in the Premier League" he said ruefully. But he said dozens of first-team players have been in contact after he had made visits to clubs. "They will ring when they feel the time is right, when they hit rock bottom." — AFP

Messi injured on return as Argentina lose to Venezuela

MADRID: Lionel Messi returned to Argentina duty for the first time since the World Cup on Friday but it was a disappointing outing for the forward as they lost 3-1 to Venezuela and he was ruled out of their next match with a groin problem.

Messi showed flashes of brilliance but it was not his night as Venezuela put three past their more illustrious rivals for the first time with goals from Salomon

Rondon, Jhon Murillo and Josef Martinez. Lautaro Martinez got Argentina's consolation.

Messi finished the match but felt some pain in his groin and will sit out Tuesday's friendly against Morocco in Tangier, the Argentine Football Association said after the game.

The injury, described as a flare up of an existing problem, was not thought to be serious. Midfielder Gonzalo Martinez will also miss the Morocco match with a thigh strain.

Messi took a sabbatical after his country's last-16 exit from the 2018 finals in Russia but he returned with a clean shaven new look to captain the side in the all-South American affair at Atletico Madrid's Metropolitano stadium.

Venezuela had only beaten Argentina once in 23 previous encounters, but they got the perfect start after five minutes when Rondon brought down a long pass

Ex-footballer turns gambling own goal into net gain for others

LONDON: Scott Davies stood in his kitchen and held a knife to his chest as he contemplated the wreckage of his football career due to an obsession with gambling. Now he makes a career out of warning other players of the perils of betting.

The 31-year-old former Ireland under-21 international, who describes himself as a "pathological gambler", has found salvation and a vocation working for EPIC Risk Management, touring English Football League clubs.

EPIC chief executive Paul Buck was jailed in 2012 after stealing more than £400,000 (\$525,000,) from a client at the bank he worked for to help pay his gambling debts. Davies, who estimates in seven years he lost £300,000, including £60,000 he borrowed from his parents, told AFP he began playing poker when he went on loan to Aldershot from Reading aged 19 as he wanted to feel part of the group.

"Obviously you put three things together-time, money and opportunity. It is a recipe for disaster," he said after appearing on a panel at the Betting on Football conference at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge ground this week.

"When I did have the time I would not use it wisely. The money, I wasted it and any opportunity I had to gamble I gambled." He said the lies that addicts tell eventually prove costly, as happened with him at Reading, where he was playing under then-manager Brendan Rodgers, now boss at Leicester City.

All seemed rosy after the midfielder broke into the first team and played the first four league games of the 2009/10 campaign, and he somehow hid his addiction from Rodgers. "Brendan Rodgers said 'You are younger than the other players in the first team so I think you should stay later and do extra training'," said Davies.

"I could not do that as I had a date with the roulette machine or at the bookmakers for horse racing so I shot out of training at the earliest opportunity. "It cost me my place as he (Rodgers) took me aside and told me I was dropped after I lied to him about my whereabouts, saying I had a dentist's appointment. Instead I went to the bookies.

"I never played another game for Reading and my career spiralled downhill." Davies said the turning point came on another foray to a bookmaker, when saw his mother standing at the door. "She broke down in the middle of the street and said 'You need to stop gam-



Jose Mourinho

Mourinho targets June return to club management

LISBON: Former Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho is targeting a return to club management during the close season in June and has an idea about the type of club he wants to take charge of, the Portuguese has said.

Mourinho has been out of a job since he was sacked by United in December following a dismal run of results that left the club sixth in the Premier League standings, 19 points behind league leaders Liverpool.

"What I have in mind is that I would like to be back in the summer, in June, for a new club, for a new pre-season," Mourinho told BeIN Sports. "I know exactly what I don't want. That's the reason why I had to say (no) already to three or four different offers. And I know what I want, in terms of not a specific club but the nature of the job, the dimension of the job."

Mourinho had said in January that he was not sure if he would manage another club in England after stints with Chelsea and United. The 56-year-old, however, ruled out taking the reins of a national team as he prefers the day-to-day work that comes with being a club manager.

"I don't think so," Mourinho said, when asked if he would take charge of a national team. "I think a national team job is a very specific job. "I like daily football, I like daily work, I like many competitions, I like matches and I want to stay in football club level. But who knows?" — Reuters

New-look Germany face first big test against Holland

BERLIN: Marco Reus has called on Germany to win back the trust of their fans when they launch their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign against old rivals the Netherlands today. Germany were booed by fans in Wolfsburg during their 1-1 friendly draw against Serbia last Wednesday, and Reus has said that it is up to the players to change the mood.

"We need patience from the fans, but it is our job to make sure the atmosphere improves," he said on Friday. Germany have not won a competitive game since they beat Sweden at the World Cup last summer. They crashed out of the World Cup shortly after that game, and were relegated from the top tier of the UEFA Nations League in the autumn.

Coach Joachim Loew declared the beginning of a "new era" last week, having brought in several young players and made the controversial call to drop three experienced stars in Thomas Mueller, Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng.

Yet Reus warned that the new-look Germany would take time to reach their full potential. "We are all ambitious enough to want to win every game, but it won't just start working from one day to the next," he said.

The change of personnel means that Reus, 29, is among the most senior players in the team. "I am at an age where I have to take on leadership roles, both here and at my club," said the Borussia Dortmund star. "Everything will take time, we have a lot of young players who need to find their feet."

Reus is expected to return to the starting line-up, along with Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos today in Amsterdam. He warned that the Netherlands were a step ahead of Germany at the moment.

"They have a lot of quality. They have lots of good youngsters, but also a few older players. They have a good mix at the moment, and that is what we are aiming for as well." The Dutch cruised to a 4-0 win over Belarus in their opening qualifier on Thursday.

Oranje captain Virgil van Dijk was on the score-sheet with a header, and Germany's Niklas Suele has identified the Liverpool defender as a threat. "We can't allow him space to run onto headers," said Suele, who watched van Dijk do just that when Liverpool knocked Bayern out of the Champions League earlier this month.

Van Dijk has made a habit of scoring against German sides. He hit a late equaliser for the Netherlands against Germany when the two sides met in Gelsenkirchen last November. He also scored in a 3-0 win over Germany a month earlier.

Those results have rekindled the old rivalry between the Dutch and the Germans. On Sunday, Germany will be hoping to get the fans back onside with a win over their neighbours. "It is always a special game, partly because of how close we are geographically," said Germany and Bayern Munich midfielder Leon Goretzka on Friday.

"As a boy, I used to go on holiday with my family in Holland, and I grew up with the rivalry." "We will be really motivated on Sunday. It's going to be a fiery game." — AFP

25 Chen defends title with record-setting skate, Japan's Hanyu takes second



26 S Africa seal Sri Lanka series despite Isuru Udana heroics



27 Sterling downs Czechs as France sweep past Moldova



Harden scores 61 as Rockets stop Spurs

Nets eliminate Lakers from postseason contention



HOUSTON: Gerald Green #14 of the Houston Rockets shoots the ball during the game against the San Antonio Spurs on Friday at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. — AFP

HOUSTON: James Harden matched his career high with 61 points, delivering early and late to bail out the host Houston Rockets in their 111-105 win over the San Antonio Spurs on Friday. Harden, who also scored 61 points on Jan. 23 at Madison Square Garden against the New York Knicks, finished 19 of 34 from the floor while drilling 9 of 13 from 3-point range. After the Rockets coughed up a 19-point, third-quarter lead and fell into a 100-94 hole late in the fourth, Harden responded with three successive 3-pointers and a pair of drives to the basket to secure the victory, the Rockets' third consecutive win over the Spurs. Bryn Forbes led five Spurs in double figures with 20 points while Derrick White added 18 with eight rebounds. DeMar DeRozan posted 16 points, eight rebounds and eight assists while LaMarcus Aldridge paired 10 points with five blocks for San Antonio, which captured its first lead at 85-84 on a Patty Mills reverse layup with 10:48 to play.

NETS 111, LAKERS 106

Joe Harris scored 26 points, and visiting Brooklyn made enough plays down the stretch to earn the victory and eliminate Los Angeles from postseason contention. The Nets followed up their historic comeback win in Sacramento and improved to 2-3 on a season-high, seven-game road trip that continues tomorrow in Portland. D'Angelo Russell had 21 points and 13 rebounds for Brooklyn. JaVale McGee led Los Angeles with career highs of 33 points and 20 rebounds. The Lakers lost their fifth straight, dropped to 2-12 in their last 14 games and will miss the playoffs for the sixth straight season. The loss officially ensured that LeBron James will miss the postseason for the first time since his second season with the Cleveland Cavaliers in 2004-05. James had 25 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds.

THUNDER 116, RAPTORS 109

Russell Westbrook had his 28th triple-

double of the season as he scored 18 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and added 13 assists, and visiting Oklahoma City came back to defeat Toronto and end a four-game losing streak. Paul George added 28 points, and Dennis Schroder had 26 points for the Thunder, who lost to the Raptors in overtime on Wednesday and overcame a 13-point deficit on Friday. Kawhi Leonard scored 37 points for Toronto. Pascal Siakam added 25 points while Danny Green had 19 points.

NUGGETS 111, KNICKS 93

Nikola Jokic scored 21 points and pulled down 17 rebounds night for surging Denver, which moved back into a tie for the top seed in the Western Conference by cruising past host New York. With their sixth straight win, the Nuggets (49-22) tied the idle Golden State Warriors for the best record in the West. Denver has never earned the top seed in the West and has yet to make an appearance in the NBA Finals. Jamal Murray scored 18 points for the Nuggets, who also received

14 points from Gary Harris.

BUCKS 116, HEAT 87

Giannis Antetokounmpo posted 27 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to lead host Milwaukee over Miami. The Bucks' Khris Middleton contributed 18 points, a game-high 10 assists and eight rebounds. The Heat, who were led by Hassan Whiteside's 14 points, nine rebounds and a game-high three blocks, had closed their deficit to 63-58 early in the third quarter before falling apart. Their three-game winning streak ended. The Bucks have the best record in the NBA at 54-19. Their 29-6 home record is the best in the Eastern Conference.

CLIPPERS 110, CAVALIERS 108

Danilo Gallinari scored 27 points, and Los Angeles hung on to beat host Cleveland. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 16 points, adding five assists and two steals as the Clippers earned their ninth win in 10 games. Lou Williams scored 15 and had six assists off the

bench for Los Angeles. Montrezl Harrell scored 14 and had a crucial offensive board late in the game to stave off the Cavaliers. Kevin Love led Cleveland with 22 points and had eight rebounds. The Cavaliers had their four-game home winning streak snapped.

MAGIC 123, GRIZZLIES 119 (OT)

Evan Fournier gave Orlando its first lead of the game with 4:05 to go in overtime, then gave the Magic the upper hand for good with another hoop with 1:14 remaining, giving the Eastern Conference postseason hopefuls a much needed victory over visiting Memphis. The come-from-behind win allowed the Magic to stay within arm's length of the seventh and eighth playoff positions in the East, spots currently held by Brooklyn and Miami. Fournier finished with 27 points, eight rebounds and six assists while teammate Terrence Ross led all scorers with 31 points. Memphis lost despite a 23-point, 24-rebound performance by Jonas Valanciunas. — Reuters

Djokovic, Osaka win Miami openers as Thiem tumbles

MIAMI: Novak Djokovic put his Indian Wells disappointment behind him on Friday at the ATP and WTA Miami Open with a ruthless 7-6 (7/2) 6-2 destruction of Australian Bernard Tomic to move into the third round. The Serbian world number one endured a meek exit at the hands of German Philipp Kohlschreiber in the California desert but arrived desperate to land what would be a record seventh title in South Florida.

Tomic, the current world No. 81, gave the 31-year-old a few problems yet the Australian struggles to consistently challenge the best players and this was evident once again as Djokovic eased through the gears at Hard Rock Stadium with just one hour and 13 minutes on the clock. "In Indian Wells I wasn't feeling my best," conceded Djokovic who won 81% of points on his first serve and hit 11 aces.

"Everyone has nerves coming onto center court regardless of how much experience you have and what your ranking is. You care about it and if you are nervous that means you care. "I commonly feel like that. This was my first time playing at this new stadium, it felt like being indoor a little bit. It's unique.

"Now hopefully," he added, "I can build some momentum." On a day that saw Djokovic, top-ranked woman Naomi Osaka and 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams advance, the shock of the day was the departure of Indian Wells Masters winner Dominic Thiem, who was beaten 6-4, 6-4 by highly rated Polish 22-year-old Hubert Hurkacz. Elsewhere, there was disappointment for Kei Nishikori. The fifth seed lost to Serbian Dusan Lajovic 2-6, 6-2, 6-3 but reigning champion John Isner outlasted Italian qualifier Lorenzo Sonego 7-6 (7/2), 7-6, (9/7).

Japanese star Osaka had to keep her emotions in check as she opened her campaign by outlasting Yanina Wickmayer 6-0, 6-7 (3/7), 6-1. Since winning her second consecutive Grand Slam title in January at the Australian Open, Osaka has failed to go deep in Dubai or Indian Wells.

But she appeared in solid form against 141st-ranked Wickmayer, despite losing her way in the middle of an entertaining match at Hard Rock Stadium. The 21 year-old was forced to dig deep

after the Belgian, who reached the Miami Open last eight in 2010, forced a third set as Osaka's game badly dipped. "In the second set, I got really emotional, so in the third, I just tried to shut off my feelings," Osaka said. "I started thinking about winning and not the things I could do in order to win. I had a dip and she started playing really well. "I just had to breathe and regroup," she said. "I find myself doing it often when I am in emotional situations, it's like an energy saver."

Next up in the third round is Taiwan's Hsieh Su-Wei, who defeated American Alison Riske 6-2, 7-5. The pair had a rollercoaster clash in the Australian Open at the start of 2019 with Hsieh a set and 4-1 up in Melbourne only to lose a dramatic third-round encounter.

Serena Williams survived a second-set lull to beat Sweden's Rebecca Peterson 6-3, 1-6, 6-1, and elder sister Venus also advanced with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 win over Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro. There will be a repeat of last week's WTA final in Indian Wells between Bianca Andreescu and Angelique Kerber. Canadian 18-year-old Andreescu, who brilliantly won her maiden WTA title in California, beat American Sofia Kenin 6-3, 6-3 to book a third-round meeting with three-time Grand Slam winner Kerber, who saw off Russia's Karolina Muchova 3-6 6-3 6-3. — AFP



MIAMI GARDENS: Naomi Osaka of Japan plays Yanina Wickmayer during the Miami Open Presented by Itaú at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP