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Trump signs US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Golan

Israel launches Gaza strikes after rare rocket attack near Tel Aviv

Amir fetes PAAET graduates



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah cuts the ceremonial cake along with HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other officials during a ceremony to honor outstanding students of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) for the academic year 2017/2018 yesterday. — Amiri Diwan (See Page 3)

WASHINGTON/GAZA: US

President Donald Trump yesterday recognized the Golan Heights as Israeli territory in an election boost for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as his chief political rival sought to appear as a better alternative to lead Israel. During a White House visit by Netanyahu, Trump signed a proclamation officially granting US recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, in a dramatic shift from decades of US policy. Israel seized the strategic land from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war. The recognition, which Trump had announced in a tweet last Thursday, appeared to be the most overt gesture by the Republican president to help Netanyahu, who had been pressing Trump for the move.

Meanwhile, Israel launched strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza hours after a rocket from the Palestinian enclave hit a house near Tel Aviv and wounded seven people, leading to fears of a severe escalation. Israel began its retaliatory strikes around the same time as Netanyahu met Trump. The Israeli prime minister, who faces an election on April 9, earlier yesterday



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump holds up a signed proclamation on the Golan Heights alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House yesterday. — AFP

cut short his US visit after the rocket attack. He arrived in Washington on Sunday, originally for a four-day trip. In comments from the White House, Netanyahu said "Israel is responding forcefully to this wanton aggression."

Signing the document as Netanyahu looked over his shoulder,

Trump said: "This was a long time in the making." He handed the pen that he used for his signature to Netanyahu, and said: "Give this to the people of Israel." Netanyahu welcomed Trump's move and said Israel has never had a better friend.

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News in brief

Uber to buy Mideast rival Careem

SAN FRANCISCO: Uber is set to buy its Middle Eastern rival Careem for \$3.1 billion, financial news agency Bloomberg reported Sunday. The deal, expected to be announced today, will see Uber pay \$1.4 billion in cash and the rest in notes convertible to Uber shares, Bloomberg reported. Dubai-based Careem boasts more than a million drivers and 30 million users across 90 cities. — AFP

Flight ends up in wrong city

LONDON: A British Airways plane flew by mistake from London to Edinburgh instead of Dusseldorf in Germany yesterday. Passengers only found out about the mishap when the pilot said the plane was coming in to land in Edinburgh, which is around 800 km from Dusseldorf. After the crew realized the mistake, the plane was refueled and flown to Dusseldorf, landing in Germany with a delay of more than three and a half hours. — AFP

19 dead as floods sweep Iran

TEHRAN: Major floods across much of Iran have left 19 people dead and more than 90 injured, blocking roads and triggering landslides with warnings of more heavy rain to come, emergency services said yesterday. Seventeen people were killed and 94 injured in the southern city of Shiraz, one person died in the western province of Kermanshah and another in Lorestan, also in the west, rescue services said. — AFP

10 Afghan kids killed in US strike

KABUL: Ten children, part of the same extended family, were killed by a US air strike in Afghanistan, along with three adult civilians, the United Nations said yesterday. The air strike early on Saturday was part of a battle between the Taliban and combined Afghan and US forces that lasted about 30 hours in Kunduz. Sgt Debra Richardson, spokeswoman for the NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, confirmed on Sunday that US forces carried out the air strike. — Reuters

8 face 'terrorism' trial in UAE

BEIRUT: Eight Lebanese citizens have been charged with "terrorism" in the UAE and denied legal representation, Human Rights Watch said yesterday. Families of the eight men say they were charged with terrorism, according to New York-based HRW. UAE media reported that they are linked to Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah. All of the men under trial have lived and worked in UAE for more than 15 years, seven of them for Dubai-owned Emirates Airlines, HRW said. — AFP

Hayef targets interior minister; Damkhi questions release of Tarazi

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Islamist opposition MP Mohammad Hayef, who last week threatened a "heavyweight" grilling of the interior minister, appears to have started the procedures towards the grilling. He asked Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah about the measures adopted by the ministry to safeguard security and eliminate what he called negative practices in Ardiya industrial area. The

Qatar's desert rose museum finally blooms

DOHA: Almost a decade in the making, three years late and at an estimated cost of \$434 million, Qatar's vast national museum, built in the shape of a desert rose, opens this week. A glittering ceremony, expected to include Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, takes place tomorrow, with the doors opening to the public the next day.

"Architecture to give a voice to heritage whilst celebrating (the) future,"

Trump jubilant after Mueller finds no collusion

WASHINGTON: The White House was jubilant yesterday after the massive Russian collusion probe cleared President Donald Trump, freeing him to campaign for reelection - and tell Americans that he was right all along. "It's a great day for America," Trump's spokeswoman Sarah Sanders told CNN. Trump has been under the cloud of potentially historic scandal for two years while special prosecutor Robert Mueller delved into allegations that his 2016 election campaign colluded with Russian agents trying to tilt the polls in his favor.

lawmaker asked the minister about the number of crimes committed in the area since 2012. Hayef warned he will grill the minister next week over security issues and an undisclosed issue if he does not take the necessary procedures to deal with the issues he raised.

Another Islamist opposition MP Adel Al-Damkhi yesterday asked the ministers of interior and finance about the arrest and release of Syrian businessman Mazen Al-Tarazi, who is close to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Damkhi said Tarazi was reportedly arrested on state security and money laundering accusations, but was released four days later. He asked if he was indeed arrested for such accusations and why was he released and under which legal pretext.

The lawmaker inquired if the ministry of interior came under any internal or external pressure to release the Syrian businessman, and asked for the nature of such pressures. Damkhi asked for the names of those who interrogated Tarazi and inquired if he was on US and European blacklists.

tweeted the museum's renowned French architect Jean Nouvel, also responsible for the Louvre Abu Dhabi. The pale, futuristic 52,000-sq-m structure located on Doha's waterfront corniche will be the first notable building visitors to Qatar see as they make their way from the airport to the city center. Even in a country which is being built, rebuilt and utterly transformed for the 2022 football World Cup, the national museum could be the single most eye-catching design of all Qatar's new buildings.

The entrance includes 114 fountain sculptures in a 900-metre long lagoon and the museum's multi-curved roof, which resembles a giant jigsaw puzzle, is made up of 76,000 panels in 3,600 different shapes and sizes. Inside, there is more than 1,500 m of gallery space. Among the exhibits is a 19th century

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DOHA: This handout picture shows a general view of the National Museum of Qatar building designed by French architect Jean Nouvel. — AFP

On Sunday, Attorney General William Barr said in a brief summary of the just-finished report that Mueller had found "no collusion with Russia". Mueller pointedly said that he could not determine whether Trump had committed the crime of obstruction of justice through his highly public opposition to the Russia probe, which he railed against as a "witch hunt". "While this report does not conclude that the president committed a crime, it also does not exonerate him," Barr cited Mueller as saying.

But that was only a wrinkle on an otherwise clear horizon as seen from the White House ahead of 2020 presidential elections. Democrats, who for two years have seen the Mueller report as fuel for potential impeachment, insist they will continue to use powerful congressional committees to probe further into Trump's business and political dealings with Russia. Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway told journalists she had two words for the president's foes. "Move on," she said in the spring sunshine outside the White House.

Trump has been relatively restrained so far, but addressed reporters while greeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Trump said Mueller acted honorably, but also threatened retaliation against his foes. "Yes he did," Trump said after Mueller - whom he often bitterly criticized during the investigation - declared there was no evidence of collusion by Trump or his campaign. Trump, who feels vindicated by the dropping of collusion allegations, said he would favor publication of the wider Mueller report. So far, only a short summary has been released.

"Up to the attorney general. Wouldn't bother me at all," he said at the White House. But Trump blasted the investigation as "a false narrative, it was a terrible thing." "We can never let this happen to another president again," he said. "Very few people I know could have handled it. We can never, ever let this happen to another president again."

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Local

Saudi Crown Prince receives Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker

Ghanem, Saudi Shura Council speaker hold official talks



RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud meets with the visiting Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. —KUNA photos



Kuwait's Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem holds official talks with Saudi Shura Council Speaker Dr Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh.

RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud received the visiting Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation late Sunday. At the onset of the reception, Speaker Ghanem conveyed greetings of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Saudi heir apparent, who, in turn, asked Ghanem to deliver good wishes to His Highness the Crown Prince. The meeting focused on distinguished and historical bilateral relations, where several senior Saudi officials attended.

Meanwhile, Ghanem held official talks yesterday with Saudi Shura Council Speaker Dr Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammad Al-Sheikh. During the meeting, the

two sides stressed strong historical brotherly bonds between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait at the parliamentary level and ways of strengthening them. On the other hand, they also discussed common matters and most recent regional issues. The Saudi Shura Council Speaker then held a luncheon banquet yesterday in honor of Ghanem and his accompanying delegation. The banquet was held on the occasion of their official visit to Saudi Arabia, and was attended by several senior officials from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Ghanem and his accompanying delegation are currently in an official visit to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of Speaker Al-Sheikh.

Ghanem said that his visit to Saudi Arabia has met its

objective, describing the talks he held there as very positive. "The Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation was honored to have met Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud," Ghanem told the press, saying the Saudi monarch bestowed some wise advice on the Kuwaiti lawmakers. He spoke of the Kuwaiti contingent's "lengthy and compelling" encounter with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, emphasizing that no word can adequately describe the impenetrable bond shared by the Gulf neighbors.

Ghanem's fellow lawmakers were equally enthused over the talks, which encompassed political and parliamentary matters, saying it was a testament to the breadth and depth of bilateral ties. "We were honored

to meet Saudi Arabia's political leadership," said the Kuwaiti parliament's Secretary Ouda Al-Ruwaia, in a visit that was "unprecedented" at the wider parliamentary level. He went on to say that His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is "greatly admired" by the Saudi people, which was highly evident during the talks.

Kuwaiti MIP Thamer Al-Suwaid said the talks with senior Saudi officials were "successful in every sense of the word," helping push Kuwait even closer to its larger neighbor. Kuwaiti lawmakers Adel Al-Damkhi and Al-Humaidi Al-Subaie made similar remarks, collectively saying that bilateral ties would reach new levels in the aftermath of the visit. —KUNA



CAIRO: Kuwait's Information Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Tourism Sector Yousef Mustafa (center) is seen on the sidelines of the 45th Meeting of the UN World Trade Organization (UNWTO) Commission for the Middle East. — KUNA

Kuwait's tourism sector made great strides: Official

CAIRO: Kuwait's tourism sector has taken several steps forward to materialize His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's vision to turn Kuwait into a financial and commercial hub, said a senior tourism sector official. The sector is actively backing any initiative to bolster tourism in Kuwait, the Kuwait's Information Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Tourism Sector Yousef Mustafa told KUNA Sunday after partaking in the 45th Meeting of the UN World Trade Organization (UNWTO) Commission for the Middle East, held in Cairo under the auspices of Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mostafa Madbouly. "We are also interested in strengthening partnership with the UNWTO," he added. He underlined that the sector was playing an important role in attracting

tourists and investors to the country to turn the New Kuwait Vision 2035 into a reality on the ground.

Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Mohammad Al-Jabri was eager to develop the tourism sector into a public authority for tourism to give it a remarkable impetus, he stated. On the UNWTO meeting, Mustafa said the conference reviewed the WTO's report about the tourism in the Middle East region. The report showed that the region's share of world tourism had reached 10 percent and it had helped create millions of job openings, he noted. Mustafa described this figure a major leap for the tourism in the region, including Arabian Gulf states. It also proves that the region would be an important global tourist destination in the near future, he concluded. — KUNA

Kuwait's Maatouq re-appointed as UN chief's advisor

KUWAIT: Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) said yesterday that its chairman Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq has been chosen as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' special advisor for the third consecutive year. In a statement, the Kuwaiti official thanked the UN chief for his trust in him, saying he would continue to work diligently to serve humanity at a time where the world is rife with conflicts. He said the UN's renewed confidence in him is a testament to Kuwait's penchant for altruism and an acknowledgement of the Arab region's humanitarian efforts. Maatouq has served as the UN secretary



Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq

general's advisor since 2017, having also been appointed as the UN chief's envoy for four years. — KUNA



Six startups pitch at Erada Business Incubator program held at ZINC

KUWAIT: Zain and Erada Business Incubator have concluded their second pitch day at the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in Kuwait, marking the conclusion of the Erada Startup Program. This initiative sees aspiring entrepreneurs participate in workshops while developing their skills and learning how best to setup their businesses with the guidance of experts.

The initiative is aimed at building a thriving ecosystem for the startup community in Kuwait through private/public sector collaboration. Through the Program, aspiring entrepreneurs spend 60 hours in specialized workshops and numerous hours meeting individually with mentors to refine their ideas and commercial execution strategies.

Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait Chief

Corporate Communications Officer commented, "Zain works tirelessly with industry partners such as Erada Business Incubator to deliver projects that support the Kuwait 2035 vision, empower young entrepreneurs, and give back to Kuwaiti society. Leading the development of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem is important to us and we look forward to further successful collaborations with other incubators and promoters of this strategic ecosystem."

Khashti continued, "Holding such programs supports the development of ZINC and offers Zain a prime opportunity to capitalize on the most promising innovative ideas in the digital space in Kuwait and the region. Our aim is to invest in or partner with vetted entities to offer our customers unique, life-

enriching services."

During the pitch day, six aspiring business owners presented their projects to a panel of professionals from Zain, Erada Business Incubator, Tap Company, FTL Legal, and Seedsters, in addition to private investors.

The projects presented include innovative solutions in sport and fitness; shopping applications; educational products; tracking applications; as well as original gift products. Talal Al-Ajeel, Co-Founder of Erada Business Incubator said, "We are very proud of this cohort and the amazing work they have done in developing their ideas. We look forward to seeing these businesses in the market soon." Erada Business Incubator's next program will launch on 30 March. To apply visit Erada.io/applynow.

South Africa woos Kuwaiti investors, tourists

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Embassy of South Africa together with its Department of Tourism organized a tourism and investment promotion event yesterday at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI). KCCI Assistant Director General Emad Al-Zaid welcomed the delegation and hoped that the effort by South Africa to visit Kuwait will open the floodgates of opportunities for both countries. "We want to assure you that KCCI will support and continue to extend possible cooperation to strengthen our trade relations," Zaid said.

South African Ambassador to Kuwait Mzolisa Bona declared South Africa is open for business and tourism investment. "South Africa has established very strong relations with Kuwait.



South African Ambassador to Kuwait Mzolisa Bona (left) and Deputy Director General of the South Africa Department of Tourism Shamilla Chettiar (center) attend the meeting. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

We signed cooperation agreements in various sectors, including trade and other economic cooperation. We are here to show you the way and help you on how to proceed with investments, especially in our tourism industry, so that you will be part of our successful story," he said.

South Africa is a beautiful country rich in history, culture and nature waiting to be explored, said Shamilla Chettiar, Deputy Director General of the South Africa Department of Tourism. "We want Kuwaitis to visit our country, experience our hospitality and the warm welcoming people of South Africa. We have a large population of Muslims, and we have food that can be served

to these types of visitors. I want everyone to know we have deep respect and understanding of various ethnic groups and people," she said.

"We are here to meet people, to talk to them personally and understand the challenges. We want to know from their end what are their concerns with regards to the South African market. Admittedly, South Africa is not a popular destination for Kuwaitis. This is the primary reason why we are here today, to promote and encourage Kuwaitis to visit and invest in South Africa," Chettiar added. In 2018, the number of Kuwaiti visitors to South Africa reached 1,800. "It is quite a small number, and we want to increase it," she said.

Local

Amir attends PAAET outstanding students' graduation ceremony



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in a group photo during a ceremony to honor outstanding students of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the ceremony to honor outstanding students of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) yesterday. Upon arrival, His Highness was received by Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Board Chairman of PAAET Dr Hamed Al-Azmi, PAAET's Director General Ali Al-Mudhaf and members of the teaching board. The ceremony was also attended by 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, senior state officials and the students' families.

Addressing the ceremony, Minister Azmi said the main goal of establishing the PAAET is to develop the national technical and vocational labor required for different fields of production to meet the requirements of the labor market. He added that one of PAAET's objectives is to absorb the youth energies and invest in it in the best manner, taking into account the need to consider individual differences among them.

Meanwhile, PAAET Director General Mudhaf said in a speech that the Authority will prepare a new strategic

plan in line with Kuwait Vision 2035, through developing a database of colleges and institutes with electronic system, data update, performance measurements and monitoring indicators, which are the basis of all educational and training processes in various forms. He pointed out that a number of PAAET's faculties have obtained certificates from international bodies in academic and institutional accreditation, which ensures the authority's endeavors in implementing international regulations and standards. He stressed the importance of the great care given to students and members of the teaching board; the two main pillars in the educational process.

"We are always working on the development of our curricula and regulations, and we are in constant contact with relevant parties in the government and private sectors to meet the needs of the labor market," he added. In the meantime, valedictorian Ruqaya Al-Zaidani extended utmost gratitude to His Highness the Amir and the political leadership for patronizing and attending the ceremony, vowing at the same time to wield utmost efforts to apply what (they) learned and trained for in the labor market in the future. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets the honored students.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah waves as he arrives to the venue.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento at the ceremony.

Crown Prince attends KU graduation ceremony

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended Sunday the annual graduation ceremony for Kuwait University's 48th batch of the academic year 2017-2018, expressing joy for taking part in such an event. His Highness expressed, in his speech at the ceremony held at KU campus' stadium in Shuwaikh area, joy of taking part in celebrating new graduates of male and female graduates of the academic year 2017-2018. His Highness the Crown Prince also conveyed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's congratulations and good luck wishes to the new graduates. He also expressed appreciation of the alumni for committing to bear their responsibilities throughout their academic years, and exerting great efforts toward attaining their academic degrees and achieving aspirations and ambitions of their families and country.

He also extended utmost appreciation and respect to the parents of graduating students for their contributions in helping their sons and daughters to overcome all obstacles and difficulties, and preparing the appropriate studying atmosphere for them. He also expressed appreciation and gratitude to the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Hamed Al-Azmi, KU President Dr Hussain Al-Ansari, and KU academic staff for their great efforts in enriching the country with such youth potentials, and contributions to the country's development march. He called upon the new graduates to use their academic knowledge for their country's development, and direct the modern communication platforms and technologies to benefit their society.

He also advised them to shield themselves against whatever contradicts the Kuwaiti society's genuine morals, values, and traditions, and adopt moderation approach in their lives. He prayed to Allah Almighty to guide them towards the righteous path, and perpetuate security, safety, progress, and prosperity on Kuwait. Upon his arrival, His Highness the Crown Prince



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addresses the annual graduation ceremony. — KUNA photos

was received by Minister Azmi, Dr Ansari, KU's academic staff, and the ceremony's higher organizing committee. The event was attended by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and National Assembly's Acting Speaker Essa Al-Kandari.

Meanwhile, Minister Azmi expressed appreciation, joy, and pride of His Highness the Crown Prince's patronization and attendance of the annual event, and participation with his sons and daughters in marking their success and graduation. Developing youthful minds through education and science in order to produce a fine generation armed with knowledge and true faith, and graced with good morality is the best investment for which a country ever aspires, he said. KU students' years of studies and efforts in their quest to obtain a higher education have all been paid off, and, thus, the university is proud to present a new batch of competent graduates of various academic majors, said Azmi.

The university provides students with an appropriate environment for innovation and creativity, he noted, adding the school, as a knowledge beacon for humanity and civilization, is keen on building individuals by instilling education and knowledge values into them, he stressed. It also motivates students' potentials

for creative thinking, boosts self-confidence and creativity spirit in them, and teaches them necessary skills they need, particularly in accustoming to constant changes in modern life in light of the massive ongoing technological development, added the top official.

In the meantime, Dr Ansari affirmed KU's keenness and commitment to enhance its programs, as well as academic, research, and administrative activities, in addition to keeping up with global developments and linking its objectives with the society's needs. The university made several notable achievements, including publication of various scientific books, researches, and journals at regional and international levels, in addition to launching its strategic plan for the 2018-22 period and enhancing its organizational and administrative structure, said Ansari.

KU has also won various state awards and other prizes for its distinctive research and education, he said, adding it also launched several graduate programs in various scientific fields. He congratulated the new graduates for their valuable accomplishment and encouraged them to cultivate their new skills and knowledge in serving their country, respecting all members of their society, adopting moderation in their lives and work places, and preserving the Kuwaiti genuine



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the annual graduation ceremony for Kuwait University's 48th batch of the academic year 2017-2018.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrives at Kuwait University campus to attend the graduation ceremony.

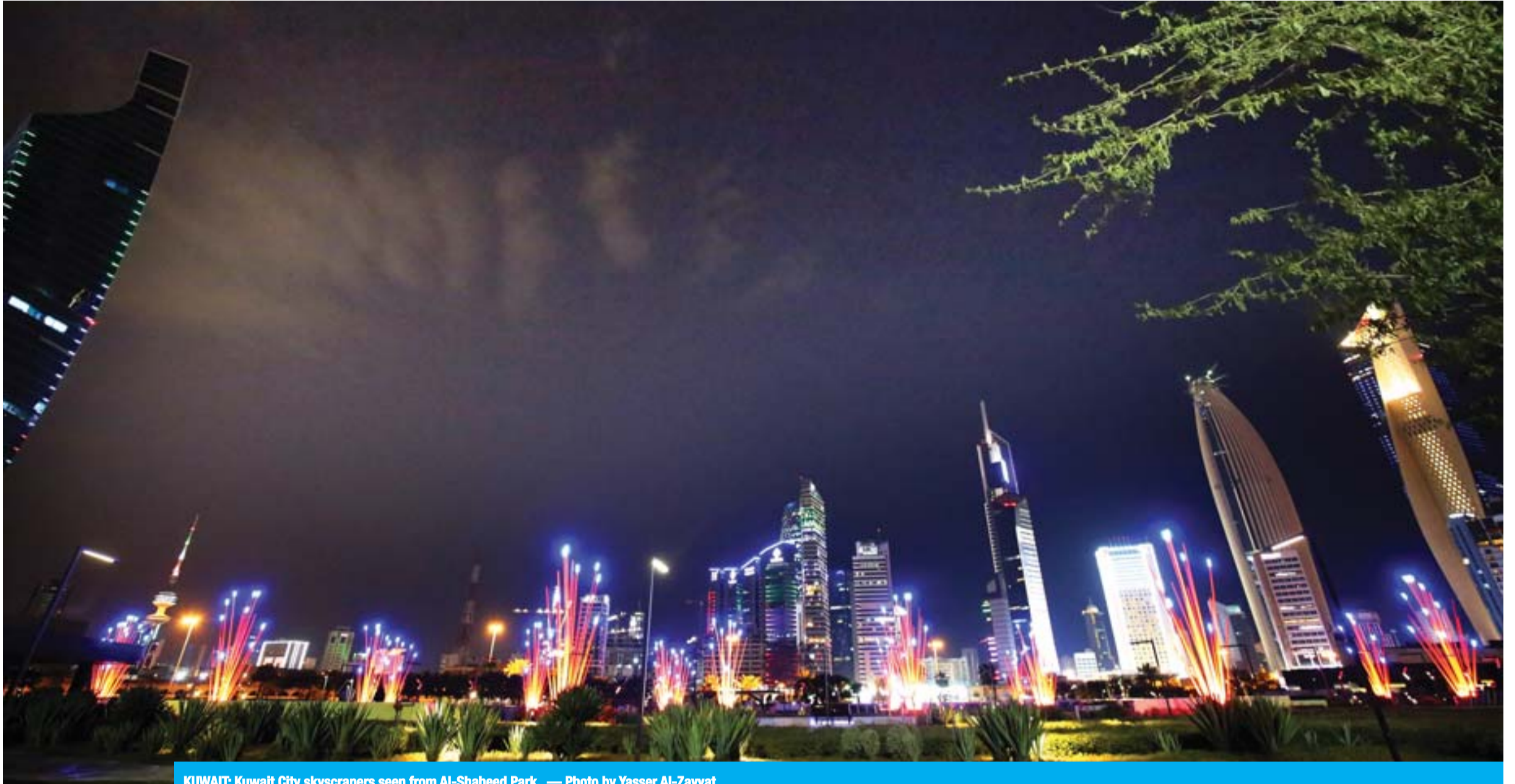
values, morals, and traditions. Dr Ansari also thanked His Highness the Crown Prince for attending and patronizing the commencement ceremony, praying to Allah Almighty to protect His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister, Kuwait, and Kuwaiti people from all harms.

Student Barrak Kankouni expressed, in a speech on behalf of his fellow graduating mates, gratitude and appreciation for His Highness the

Crown Prince's sponsorship and attendance of the annual event. Kankouni also expressed gratitude to all academic teachers for their generous contribution in student's academic development, prosperity, and knowledge. He also thanked all the parents for providing all forms of support for their children's education, dedicating the ceremony to them and prayed to Allah Almighty to reward their efforts with great remuneration and blessing. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City skyscrapers seen from Al-Shaheed Park. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Three consortia qualify for Khairan, Zour projects

Kuwait puts 125 projects out to tender

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects has invited the qualified consortia which passed the technical evaluation, to attend a public session for the opening of the financial envelopes. Each consortium has submitted their technical and financial proposals on March 7, 2019 in response to the Transaction Advisory Services for the IWPPs Az-Zour North Phase 2&3 Project and Al-Khairan Phase 1 Project, the authority said in press release.

The consortia are: Ernst & Young, CMS and Mott McDonald - PriceWaterHouseCoopers, Fichtner, Ashurst - SMSC Bank, ATKINS, DLA PIPPER.

The financial envelopes were opened for the three mentioned consortia which have achieved more than 70 points in the technical evaluation in a public session held by the project's committee that includes representatives from the Ministry of Electricity and Water and Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects, it said.

The project committee commenced the financial evaluation after the conclusion of the public session, according to the release. The projects would be executed according to the design, build, finance, operate, maintain and transfer mode in line with Law 39/2010 and Law 116/2014 as to partnership between public and private sectors, it added.

Development projects

In other news, the Ministry of Public Works said yesterday that it has put out to tender some 125 development projects across the country, as part of its plan for the fiscal year 2019/2020. Among the projects is the construction of aircraft parking stands and transport corridors for Kuwait International Airport's new Terminal 2, the ministry's official spokesperson Iman Al-Omar said in a statement. She cited a new private school complex in Kuwait's southern commercial hub of Egaila, in addition to a sprawling children's hospital as other major projects planned, along with a volunteer center in a country known for its philanthropic endeavors.

Grouping the projects into different categories, she revealed that 23 of them belong to the healthcare engineering sector, while 51 are classified as maintenance engineering projects, in addition to renovation deals including road repair. Renovations will also be carried out across government buildings and on major roads and highways nationwide, the official pointed out, which encompasses clearing sand piles off roads. She went on to disclose that a 'Geoinformatics' system is currently in the works, which deals with science and the technology of cartography used to address the problems of geography. — KUNA

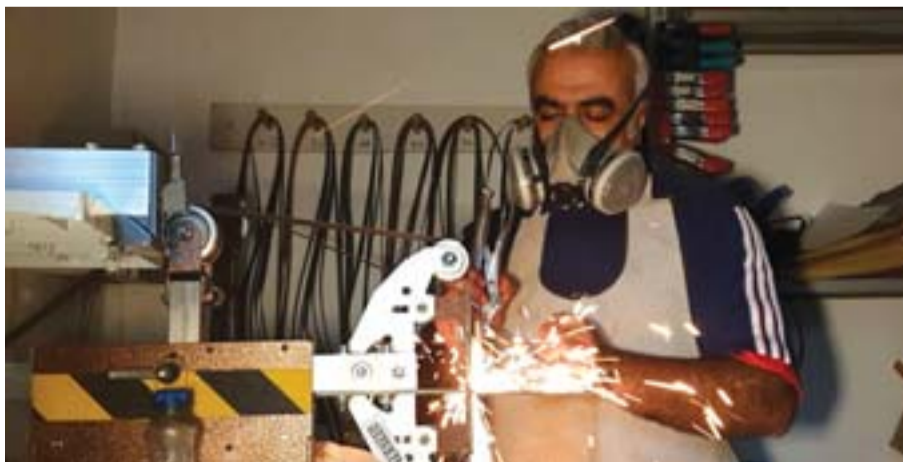


Special live episode featuring Q8 Pulse staff



KUWAIT: An archive photo showing Az-Zour North One Power and Water Plant, the first phase of the IWPPs Az-Zour North mega project. — KUNA

Local bladesmith creatively hones his skills



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti enthusiast Anwar Al-Kandari is not your typical bladesmith. As for him, it is more of a passion and art form. Not limiting his smithing creativity to knives, Kandari is also deeply involved in blacksmithing techniques and woodworking the handles. Usually made of goat and/or gazelle horns for quality and endurance purposes, those handles also produce a sheening beauty all together with the blade. — KUNA



Local

Kuwaiti doctors prioritized in hiring for hospitals' vacancies

417 Kuwaiti internal medicine doctors in public hospitals

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah stressed Kuwaiti doctors will be prioritized when hiring new doctors to cover shortages at various hospitals, especially in view of a lack of Civil Service Commission (CSC) vacancies for non-Kuwaiti doctors. Responding to an inquiry concerning the resignation of 23 doctors, over the past three years, including a female Kuwaiti who moved to the private sector from Sabah Hospital's internal medicine department, he said resignation is an

employee's right, including doctors. He explained that the total number of Kuwaiti internal medicine doctors in various public hospitals is 417.

Integrated system

In other news, well-informed sources said the CSC urged various ministries and state departments to study the condition of their systems and intranets to find immediate solutions for accelerating their system speeds to be able to deal with the new integrated systems for payroll and wages of government employees on various PCs

before the new fiscal year begins. The sources added that some government bodies are very slow in dealing with the integrated system, which delays submitting annual assessments according to schedule.

Staff's children

The Arab Open University (AOU) completed the final touches needed with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to accept its staff's children in public schools starting from the next school year (2019-2020), said educational sources, noting that a meeting was held between AOUE and MoE officials

to discuss the project and its legality.

Technical committee meeting

The Municipal Council's technical committee is scheduled to meet today to discuss a request by the Ministry of Public Works concerning the boundaries of the land allocated for the Mubarak Al-Kabeer port project on Boubyan island. The meeting's agenda also includes the role that can be played by marine public transport in coastal areas, planting trees around jogging areas, the mines washed up by recent rain and supporting entrepreneurs.



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: Firefighters pour sand on fuel that spilled from a truck which was involved in an accident on King Fahd Road, to prevent it from catching fire.



Firemen help free a couple trapped inside an elevator in Mubarak Al-Kabeer.



KUWAIT: Thirteen trainees who were promoted to the rank of officer at Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) graduated under the patronage of Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's (KFSD) Deputy Director General for Human Resources Development Maj Gen Khalid Al-Tarkeet, in the presence of Director of the Firemen's Preparation Center Col Abdullah Al-Ansari and head of firemen officers at KGOC Khalid Al-Azmi. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Fuel truck accident on King Fahd Road

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen dealt with a gasoline tanker truck that flipped over on King Fahd Road. The driver sustained various injuries. Qurain, Mubarak Al-Kabeer hazardous material and backup centers responded under the command of Lt Col Suhaib Al-Kandari. The gasoline was contained with foam and sand. The driver was taken to hospital for treatment. Meanwhile, firemen tackled a blaze in the basement of a Salmiya building. The basement was used as a store for electrical equipment. No injuries were reported. In a separate case, firemen freed a couple who were trapped inside the elevator of a Mubarak Al-Kabeer building Sunday evening.



Heavy damage caused by a fire reported in the basement of a Salmiya building.

Suicide

An Indian man hanged himself to death, Al-Anbaa reported yesterday. Qashaniya police station received a call about the suicide in Rawdatain, so a patrol was sent with an ambulance. The man used to work for a transport company. His colleagues said he was suffering from financial and family problems.

caused many expats who were in need of cash much trouble, Al-Anbaa reported. He used to offer them KD 120 in cash in exchange of signing contracts stating they received lines with commitment to pay bills for two years. Although the suspect said the complainants were fully aware of what he was doing, they said they were conned and he used them and got their signatures. They said they were surprised they had to pay more than KD 500 in exchange of the KD 120 they received in cash. The suspect said he sold the phones that came with the lines.

Conman arrested

Criminal detectives sent an Arab man who works for a mobile phone shop to the public prosecution for illegal financial acts, as he

Snake in the car

Firemen found a snake in the engine of a vehicle parked in a Mubarakiya parking lot. Firemen took 90 minutes combing the area, only to find it in the engine.

Fashion Week canceled due to 'compelling circumstances'

KUWAIT: A local traditional venue cancelled the Kuwait International Fashion Week in Kuwait less than an hour before it was due to begin last Friday, attributing the cancellation of the event to "compelling circumstances," reported Al-Seyassah daily. Executive Manager of Kuwait International Fashion Week in Kuwait Rabab Al-Hamadi explained that the event acquired good reputation since its launch four years ago, and succeeded in hosting most famous world fashion designers. This

year's event featured participation of a large number of world fashion designers from France, Australia, India, Algeria, Armenia and Lebanon, she noted. However, after receiving all the approvals and licenses and preparing the venue, the event was cancelled just 30 minutes before launch by the venue's supervisors. The organizers estimate their losses at nearly KD 50,000, and suggest that the cancellation hurts Kuwait's reputation regionally and internationally.



KUWAIT: Heavy rain hit Kuwait yesterday, reigniting fears of its impact on roads that have already been in bad shape since last November's floods. The rains were coupled with strong southeasterly winds with speeds that reached up to 60 kilometers per hour. Kuwait is currently affected by the 'Wasam' season, which predates the 'Sarayat' season that is notorious for its weather fluctuations. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

CONDOLENCES

The Owners, Management and Staff of



Al-Rashed International Shipping CO.

extend our heartfelt condolences to

Mr Balasubramanyan (Bala)

on the sad demise of his

Father-In-Law

who passed away on

24th March 2019.

May his soul rest in Peace

International

Thai election complaints mount as junta holds popular vote edge

Junta primed to retain its grip on power

BANGKOK: Confusion and complaints over preliminary results in Thailand's election mounted yesterday after the first poll since a 2014 coup, with the junta primed to retain its grip on power despite only having a slight edge in the popular vote. Election officials released the first unofficial preliminary results for seats in the lower house yesterday as a blizzard of complaints over apparent mistakes in the count and possible irregularities at the polls rolled in.

Sunday's election - seen as a referendum on the military - was held under new rules written by the junta to ease its transformation into a civilian government. Despite that headstart, analysts had not expected the army-linked Phalang Pracharat party to win the popular vote, given anger at junta rule and the enduring popularity of Pheu Thai - the party of ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

But preliminary figures showed Phalang Pracharat - with 2014 coup leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha as its candidate for prime minister - ahead in the popular vote. It had racked up more than 7.6 million votes with more than 90 percent of ballots tallied, giving any government it tries to form a claim to legitimacy. That is nearly half a million more votes than Pheu Thai, which nonetheless had earned 137 of the 350 available constituency seats in the lower house compared to Phalang Pracharat's 97, according to preliminary figures released later.

There are still 150 "party list" seats in the lower house up for grabs, which is where the popular vote will matter more. But no matter how the numbers play out, coup leader Prayut's party will benefit from a military-appointed 250-member Senate. That means Pheu Thai would need to cobble together 376 votes in the lower house to override the Senate advantage, while the junta only needs 126.

As rivals scrambled to seize the momentum and per-

suaide other parties to join forces in a coalition, Pheu Thai's prime ministerial candidate Sudarat Keyuraphan said her party had won the "mandate from the people" to form a government. She also pointed to "irregularities" and said her party was "gathering evidence about the election process". Pheu Thai will have to try and build a pro-democracy coalition, lassoing in Future Forward - a new upstart anti-junta party which has won the hearts of millennials, claimed over five million mainly youth votes and 30 lower house constituency seats.

Future Forward leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, whose party is key to any alliance, told reporters yesterday that his "greatest concern" is the junta staying in power. Nearly 1.9 million votes had been invalidated with 93 percent of votes tallied. But the Election Commission defended itself against critics accusing it of bungling the process. "Please wait, this is Thailand, we are not like other countries who have an election one day and form a government the next," said Jarungvith Phumma, EC secretary-general.

The commission sidestepped questions over wildly inaccurate poll returns reported late Sunday in several constituencies, with another official calling it "human error". Thaksin, the self-exiled billionaire ex-cop turned-Thai premier, who is at the crux of Thailand's political breakdown, reached out to shocked supporters in the pro-democracy camp. "As long as we still have breath, we can not give up," he said in a Facebook post yesterday.

The EC has said it will finalise the results by May 9. But questions over the count have billowed out, with social media ablaze with allegations of vote buying, mass invalidation of ballots and bungling by polling staff across the country. About 400,000 people signed a change.org petition to sack EC members, and more dis-

Deep divides

operation is expected across the political spectrum. A coordinator for Thailand-based election monitor We Watch said that voter education was insufficient.



BANGKOK: Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha (right) and his wife Naraporn leave Government House in Bangkok yesterday, a day after the country's general election. —AFP

A candidate in Songkhla province for the Democrat Party, which came in second in the last election in 2011 but was down in fifth this time, said they had evidence of votes bought. "Without vote buying, we wouldn't have suffered such big losses," candidate Sirichok Sopha told AFP. General Prayut's party appears set to get close to the 126 lower house seats it needs to secure a parliamentary majority, in combination with the appointed Upper House that it created when it was in power.

"The people have chosen us," Kobsak Pottrakool, Phalang Pracharat spokesman told reporters. But the

vote has again revealed Thailand's old divisions between Thaksin supporters and arch-royalist, conservatives who look to the army for stability. On the eve of the poll, Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn issued a cryptic statement urging people to support "good" leaders against those who create "chaos."

Thailand's monarchy is protected by harsh royal defamation laws and is nominally above politics. But another royal command in February torpedoed the candidacy of the king's elder sister Princess Ubolratana for prime minister via a party linked to Thaksin. Thaksin was ousted in a 2006 coup, and has lived in self-exile since 2008. The administration of his sister Yingluck was also the victim of a 2014 power grab by the military. —AFP



Blizzard of complaints over apparent mistakes

Gaza: A year of deadly tensions

GAZA: New tensions between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas come days before the first anniversary of the start of massive protests and clashes in the Gaza Strip. Since March 30 last year at least 258 Palestinians have been killed in the violence, along with two Israeli soldiers. Here is a recap:

First deadly day

A mass protest on March 30, 2018 demands the right for Palestinians to return to homes, now inside Israel, that they fled or were expelled from in the late 1940s, while the Jewish state was created. Tens of thousands of Palestinians converge along the barrier that separates Gaza from Israel. Officially organized by civil society groups, the rally is backed by Islamist militant movement Hamas which runs Israeli-blockaded Gaza. Several groups of protesters face off with Israeli soldiers, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. Israeli snipers respond with live fire, killing 19 Palestinians.

Kites on fire

On April 6 thousands of Palestinians gather again near the barrier. Nine Palestinians are killed and nearly 500 injured. Four days later the Palestinians employ a new tactic, sending kites across the border, some carrying explosive devices, to set fire to farmland. Similar kites and balloons have

since torched thousands of hectares (acres) of land.

Bloodbath

On May 14 tens of thousands of Palestinians return to the barrier to protest as the US opens its embassy in Jerusalem after recognizing the disputed city as Israel's capital. At least 62 Palestinians are killed by Israeli fire in the ensuing violence, with more than 2,400 wounded. On June 13 the United Nations General Assembly adopts a resolution, opposed by Washington, condemning Israel for the violence.

Summer of violence

On July 14 Israel unleashes dozens of air strikes, killing two Palestinians, while 200 rockets target Israel. Overnight August 8-9 Hamas fires some 180 rockets and mortars from Gaza, according to the Israeli army, which says it responded by targeting 150 of the movement's military sites. After a brief respite, 10 Palestinians are killed in clashes with the Israeli army during demonstrations on September 28 and October 5.

Aid from Qatar

On November 9-10, as mediation efforts progress, Palestinian civil servants in Gaza receive millions of dollars in salary arrears, funded by Qatar. Since then four installments of Qatari aid have been distributed to Palestinians in Gaza. Under UN auspices, Qatar has also financed deliveries of fuel to the territory's only power plant.

Escalation

On November 11 an Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip leaves seven Palestinians and one Israeli soldier dead. Hamas the next day attacks an Israeli bus, severely wounding a soldier. It is the beginning of one of the worst escalations in years, with hundreds of rockets and mortars fired at Israel and dozens of Israeli strikes against Gaza positions. Seven Palestinians are killed. On November 13 an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire is agreed. A day later Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman resigns, saying Israel is "capitulating to terror". On November 21 four Palestinians are killed by Israeli soldiers.

UN probe

On February 28, 2019 a UN probe says Israel may have committed "war



BEIT HANUN: Mourners attend the funeral of 24-year-old Palestinian Habeb Al-Masri, who according to Gaza's health ministry was wounded previously in clashes with Israeli forces at the Israeli-Gaza border fence, during his funeral in Beit Hanun. — AFP

crimes or crimes against humanity" in responding to unrest in Gaza, as snipers "intentionally" shot civilians, including children. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects the report.

Rockets and strikes

Overnight March 15 Israeli aircraft and helicopters strike dozens of Hamas targets in Gaza after rockets are fired from enclave towards the region of Tel Aviv. Israeli media report that the rockets were fired by mistake. On March 25 a rare rocket hits north of Tel Aviv, wounding seven people. Netanyahu cuts short his US visit, vowing "we will respond with force". The Israeli army accuses Hamas of firing the rocket and says it is sending reinforcements to Gaza. — AFP

Serbia marks 20 years since NATO bombing

BELGRADE: Serbia on Sunday marked 20 years since the NATO air strikes that forced Belgrade to withdraw its troops from Kosovo, ending a conflict that claimed more than 13,000 lives. After the operation to get president Slobodan Milosevic to stop his deadly crackdown on Kosovo separatists, the former Serbian province, mainly ethnic Albanian, was put under UN administration.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in 2008 - which Serbia refuses to recognize. Commemorations were held across the country to recall the start of "NATO aggression", with a main ceremony in the southern town of Nis, which Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic said drew 20,000 people. The sound of an air raid siren kicked off the ceremony at 7:45 pm, the minute when

the strikes began on March 24, 1999, and the airing of scenes of the bombings on a big screen.

"The most tragic days"

"These are the most tragic days of our history," Orthodox Serbian Patriarch Irinej told the crowd, many holding candles. "What is even more tragic is that it involved our former allies, our former friends." Milosevic ordered his troops out of Kosovo on June 10, 1999. NATO forces struck dozens of military targets, as well as infrastructure such as bridges, railways and the electrical grid.

The number of civilian victims has not been officially established, and ranges from 500 according to Human Rights Watch to 2,500, according to Serbian officials. "We were alone in the face of the biggest military power in the world," said Vucic, a former ultra-nationalist who became a centrist and wants his country to join the European Union. "Their goal was clear: to beat us and humiliate us, and then give part of our territory to someone else," he said.

"It will always be a crime"

Citing 2,500 civilians dead including 79 children and a "devastated country", he said the bombing campaign would



STAGOVO: A car drives past a graffiti reading 'Thank You Nato' and featuring the US flag near the village of Stagovo. —AFP

"always be a crime". Earlier on Sunday, the ambassadors of eight Western countries - Canadian, French, Italian, German, Dutch, Norwegian, British and American - paid their respects to civilian victims at a monument in Belgrade. "We remember March 24 as the day diplomacy failed, and we express our sincere regret for the loss of civilian lives during the events of 1999," they said in a joint statement.

"We are saddened for all of those who lost their loved ones during the

Wars of the 1990s. We are here to honour their memory and are determined to work even harder to contribute to lasting peace and stability to the region." Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, for his part, said Saturday that "NATO's intervention in Milosevic's genocidal action against people of Kosovo was crucial humanitarian contribution (that) demonstrated coordinated international action for peace, justice and rules-based world order. — AFP

Saudi sisters hope for a 'beautiful future'

HONG KONG: Two Saudi Arabian sisters are hoping for a "bright, beautiful future" after being granted asylum, fleeing what they describe as an abusive family and a repressive society. The sisters fled from their family last September while on holiday in Sri Lanka and have been stranded in Hong Kong since an aborted attempt to get to Australia, where they hoped to secure asylum.

For reasons of safety, the sisters, aged 18 and 20, who say they were beaten by their father and brothers, asked that their names and faces not be revealed, nor the country to which they have now gone. "Oh my God, I was so happy," the curly haired younger sister told Reuters recently, describing how she felt when told asylum had been secured. "I screamed 'It's real, it's happening' ... It was just relief and unforgettable." The sisters spoke to Reuters in a room on the 22nd floor of a Hong Kong hotel shortly before they left the city. Hong Kong-based rights lawyer, Michael Vidler, who has been helping them, attended. They said they had lived in fear for six months, shuttling between 15 safe houses, staying with a nun, families and at a shelter for abused women.

They feared being intercepted by Saudi officials or relatives and forced to return home, where they believe they could be punished for renouncing Islam, which is punishable by death under the Saudi system of Islamic law. The Saudi consulate in Hong Kong has not responded to requests for comment. In a statement late yesterday, Vidler confirmed the sisters had successfully travelled to a third country on "humanitarian visas".

"To ensure their future security we will not be disclosing the third country where the sisters are now living, nor will we be providing any further details," he wrote on the Facebook page of his law firm. "The sisters will not be giving any further media interviews." The sisters said they were treated harshly, at times beaten, by their brothers and father. "They were like my jailer, like my prison officer. I was like a prisoner," the younger sister previously told Reuters.

They were also critical of Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system that requires women to have a male relative's permission to work, travel, marry, and even get some medical treatment. "Women are just like slaves," said the older sister, adding that her dream was to become a writer one day. "I want to settle down and to feel safe, and (to know) that I have rights and I matter in that country. Just to live normal, and discover myself ... because now I own my life." This is not the first case in Asia this year of young Saudi women fleeing what they said was repression. In January, an 18-year-old Saudi woman was granted asylum in Canada after fleeing her family and barricading herself in a Bangkok hotel to resist being sent home. Her case drew global attention to Saudi Arabia's strict social rules, which rights groups say can trap women and girls as prisoners of abusive families. — Reuters

International

China, France leaders hold talks; France seeks EU unity on China

Series of cooperation deals to be signed

PARIS: Chinese President Xi Jinping and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron were to hold talks in Paris yesterday with the host leader seeking to forge a united European front in the face of Beijing's inroads on the continent. Xi's visit marks 55 years since French leader Charles de Gaulle established diplomatic relations with Beijing.

A series of cooperation deals on nuclear power, aerospace and clean energy initiatives, some involving lucrative contracts, are expected to be signed. Today, Macron and Xi will be joined by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker to explore "points of convergence" ahead of an EU-China summit in Brussels next month.

In an interview with the Nice-Matin newspaper after hosting Xi at a dinner on the French Riviera, Macron said the joint talks "would allow us to establish a common definition for a new international order." Security was tight as Macron and his wife Brigitte hosted Xi and his singer wife Peng Liyuan for a private dinner at the resort village of Beaulieu-sur-Mer near Nice.

Macron offered Xi a French translation of Confucius dating from the 17th century, while Xi gave his host a precious vase depicting images of the two countries including a panda and a rooster. Before the dinner Xi travelled to the nearby principality of Monaco, where he was received by Prince Albert II. Xi had arrived from Italy, whose government became the first G7 state to sign up to his landmark new "Silk Road" infrastructure project, a massive undertaking to join Asia to Europe.

Italy's move came despite misgivings over the huge venture by other European nations wary of China's growing influence. Xi insisted it will be a two-way street of investment and trade. EU Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger in a newspaper interview Sunday expressed "concern that in Italy and other European countries, infrastructure of strategic importance like power networks,

rapid rail lines or harbors are no longer in European but in Chinese hands."

Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas also voiced concern in an interview with the Welt am Sonntag newspaper. "In a world with giants like China, Russia or our partners in the United States, we can only survive if we are united as the EU," he said. "And if some countries believe that they can do clever business with the Chinese, then they will be surprised when they wake up and find themselves dependent."

Walking a tightrope

Macron will treat Xi to a military honor guard at the Arc de Triomphe war monument in Paris yesterday, before further talks at the Elysee Palace and a state dinner. Xi's visit poses a particular challenge for Macron, who wants to deepen EU ties with China while also pushing back against Beijing's growing global clout.

Europe's distrust of Chinese telecom giant Huawei, which is poised to become the dominant player in next-generation 5G mobile technology worldwide, is emblematic of the increasingly rocky relationship. Monaco, which is notably eyeing a share of Chinese luxury tourism and has its own foreign policy, last year signed an accord with Huawei to make the principality the first country entirely covered by the company's 5G mobile network by year end.

The US however is pressuring European allies not to use the Huawei technology, saying it creates a security risk by potentially letting Beijing snoop on sensitive communications. France has not ruled out using Huawei technology. Beijing has accused Washington of trying to escalate President Donald Trump's trade battle with China. As well as addressing commercial cooperation and strategic issues with Xi, Macron has also been urged to deal with the case of Meng Hongwei, Chinese former head of the France-based agency Interpol.

Meng's wife has had no news of her husband since his



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron (2nd right) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (2nd left) take part in a wreath laying ceremony on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe monument in Paris yesterday, as part of a state visit to France. — AFP

arrest in China nearly six months ago. It emerged Sunday she has written to Macron asking him to bring up his disappearance with Xi. Meng is believed to be facing corruption charges. Despite the many sources of friction, France wants to engage China as a closer partner as Washington

makes a pointed withdrawal from global affairs under Trump's "America First" policy. For example, Macron may seek more Chinese support for the French-backed G5 Sahel force fighting Islamist extremists in Western Africa, French presidential aides said. — AFP

News in brief

Iran floods leave 12 dead

TEHRAN: At least 12 people were killed and 68 injured in floods that have swept across most Iranian provinces, the country's emergency services said yesterday. National Emergency Service chief Pirhossein Koolivand told state television the initial casualty toll in the southern city of Shiraz was 11 dead and 68 wounded, while another person was killed in Sarpol-e Zahab in the western province of Kermanshah. Iran has been facing unprecedented floods in 25 of its 31 provinces, the country's Crisis Management Organization said. The latest floods have struck mostly west and southwest Iran and follow major flooding on March 19 in the northeast's Golestan and Mazandaran provinces, for which no official casualty toll has been issued. Emergency services have been hampered by Iranian New Year holidays, with many employees on vacation. — AFP

Sudanese journalists protest

KHARTOUM: Dozens of Sudanese journalists yesterday protested in downtown Khartoum demanding the release of a prominent editor detained for criticizing a state of emergency imposed by President Omar Al-Bashir, witnesses said. Osman Mirghani, editor-in-chief of independent daily Al-Tayar, was taken away by security agents from his office on the night of February 22 after making televised comments on Bashir's decision to impose a nationwide state of emergency. Bashir imposed the state of emergency after an initial crackdown failed to quell widespread protests against his administration that erupted in December. The journalists gathered in downtown Khartoum to express their solidarity with Mirghani and to fight for freedom of expression in the east African country. "We are the voice of our own people and not of the regime," they chanted and carried banners demanding Mirghani's release, witnesses said, before dispersing. — AFP

Shooter kills five in China

BEIJING: A person wielding a gun killed five people in northern China before being arrested by police, local authorities said yesterday. Police seized bullets from the suspect, who was wounded in the incident, said officials in Tongliao - a city in China's Inner Mongolia region - citing a police statement. The shooting took place around 3.30pm and the case is under investigation, according to a statement on the local government's official Twitter-like Weibo account. District police did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment. Gun violence is rare in China, where the government tightly restricts ownership of firearms. There are no official statistics on gun-related deaths. In November 2017, three people were shot dead and six others wounded in southern Guangdong province. — AFP

9,000 foreign IS relatives

AIN ISSA: More than 9,000 foreigners, mostly children, linked to the Islamic State group are present in a camp for the displaced in northeast Syria, a Kurdish spokesman said yesterday. The total number of foreigners in Al-Hol camp includes more than 6,500 children, Luqman Ahmi, official spokesman for the Kurdish authorities said. The figure was from a week ago, he said, before the US-led Kurdish-backed Syrian Democratic Forces announced the end of the IS "caliphate" in the eastern village of Baghouz. Tens of thousands of people fled the shrinking jihadist bastion over the past months. Suspected jihadists have been weeded out and detained. Women and children have meanwhile been trucked up to Kurdish-held camps for the displaced further north including Al-Hol. — Reuters

Brexit fatigue grips UK; saga groans on

LONDON: Keep calm and carry on? Brexit fatigue is permeating Britain as the final moves in the long-running saga create confusion and unease about how it will all end up. EU leaders on Thursday agreed to extend the Brexit deadline triggered two years ago, leaving the final date of Britain's withdrawal in doubt. A British government source earlier this week said it was like witnessing "the last days of Rome" as Prime Minister Theresa May failed to secure Brexit by the original scheduled date of March 29.

The Conservative leader on Thursday persuaded EU leaders to delay Brexit until May 22 if next week — at the third time of asking - they can agree to the divorce deal struck between London and Brussels, and April 12 or a later date if they cannot. Even the normally reserved May snapped on Wednesday, voicing her frustration at MPs' inability to get it "over and done with".

European leaders and analysts believe she still faces a mountain to climb in order to get MPs to back the withdrawal agreement. "It's possible that she will convert enough of the dissenters to enable her vote to pass on the fourth or fifth attempt," Professor Iain Begg, from the European Institute at the London School of Economics

Chinese investment in Europe: A story of cash and concerns

PARIS: Chinese firms have plowed at least 145 billion euros (\$164 billion) into Europe since 2010, but investment has been slowing recently as several European governments tighten rules on acquisitions by foreign firms. As President Xi Jinping makes a crucial visit to Italy promoting China's new Silk Road project, the EU remains divided over the best approach towards Beijing.

Buying spree

Chinese direct investment into the European Union in 2010 totaled just 2.1 billion euros. That climbed rapidly to 20.7 billion in 2015 and then jumped to 37.2 billion in 2016, according to a study by Rhodium Group, as Chinese firms went on a buying spree. Sweden's Volvo Cars, Italian tyre-maker Pirelli, French holiday group Club Med and German machine tool firms Kuka and KraussMaffei have all passed into Chinese hands this decade.

But the volume of Chinese investments has fallen since 2016, declining to 29.1 billion in 2017 and 17.3 in 2018. The study's authors put the drop down to Beijing clamping down on investments made by overindebted firms as well as tightening regulations in Europe. Since 2000, 60 percent of Chinese investment in Europe has come from state-controlled groups.

Going south, and east

While concerns about Chinese investment have grown in France and Germany - countries in southern and eastern Europe still have the welcome mat out. Rome is ready to sign up to China's new Silk Road project, a \$1 tril-

lion infrastructure project, following fellow EU nations Greece, Hungary, Poland and Portugal. Athens ceded its key port of Piraeus to China's freight giant Cosco, which also controls container ports in Valencia and Bilbao in Spain.

Portugal strengthened its ties with China during the financial crisis, with Chinese investment rising to 6 billion euros, according to Rhodium, as Chinese firms made investments into its leading private bank, an insurance firm and the electricity network operator. Lisbon hasn't opposed China Three Gorges trying to take over the nation's leading electricity firm, Energias de Portugal (EDP). In the Czech Republic, a visit by Xi in 2016 sealed massive investments from energy firm CEFC in media firms, an airline and a football club. CEFC's owner Ye Jianming was named an economic adviser to Czech President Milos Zeman.

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US warns allies

The United States, which is locked in a trade war with China, has stepped up its warnings. Washington has put particular pressure on Germany, threatening to stop sharing intelligence if Berlin lets Chinese equipment into next-generation mobile phone networks. The United States also publicly voiced this month its opposition to China acquiring Energias de Portugal. A White House official, Garrett Marquis, earlier this month tweeted that there is "no need for Italian government to lend legitimacy to China's infrastructure vanity project". — AFP

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Paris, Berlin protective

In February, the European Parliament gave its green light to new powers to screen foreign takeovers in Europe's strategic sectors, and member states signed off on the measure this month. Pushed by France, Germany, and originally Italy, the measure was a response to concerns that foreign firms are snapping up key technologies. While EU member states retain the final decision, they will have to supply, under certain



PARIS: A protester wearing a costume of the Chinese President Xi Jinping stands beside people holding Tibetan flags as they take part in a demonstration over China's human rights record near the Eiffel Tower on the Trocadero esplanade yesterday. — AFP

over the coming days, while a petition calling for Britain to stay in the EU has topped more than three million signatures. Liberal newspaper The Guardian said Brexit had revealed a country that was "incoherent, entitled, incapable of compromise... wholly unrealistic and startlingly ignorant" about the European Union.

'I hate them all'

Journalists are not spared Brexit fatigue. "I sat on the train heading into Westminster one morning this week and felt I could cry," wrote Matt Chorley, editor of The Times newspaper's Red Box political website. "Let me tell you which people in politics I can't stand: everyone. 'Nobody has said anything new, interesting or remotely helpful in these debates for about two years. 'It's all so bloody depressing. I hate them all.' Even the government is not immune. 'This could be all over in two months, and we could see our families again,' one government source said Thursday.

The "constitutional crisis", as the government's chief legal advisor describes it, stems from May's lack of a parliamentary majority. She is therefore at the mercy of the various factions within her centre-right party, divided between eurosceptics and europhiles, and of the right-wing Northern Irish allies that the Conservatives rely upon for support. After a meeting of the party's 1922 Committee of backbenchers, one Conservative MP told AFP: "There's no confidence, no leadership - it's a mess". — AFP

Polish dailies print blank front page in EU copyright appeal

WARSAW: Major Polish newspapers printed blank front pages yesterday in an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt controversial copyright reforms that have pitted traditional media firms against internet giants. "Today, we appeal to Polish members of the European Parliament for solidarity in supporting a vote on the Copyright Directive in the digital single market," read a petition signed by editors-in-chief of 30 Polish national and regional dailies backing the reforms.

"Creators do not receive sufficient compensation for disseminating their works on the Internet. They often live in real poverty or leave the profession," said the statement published by the centrist Rzeczpospolita daily and other newspapers including the liberal Gazeta Wyborcza and the Fakt tabloid. The run-up to the European Parliament vote on Tuesday has seen furious lobbying and protests by both supporters and opponents of the law, which is designed to update European copyright legislation that pre-dates most online social media and is now nearly two decades old.

Under the changes, European law for the first time would hold platforms legally responsible for enforcing copyright, requiring them to check everything that their users post to prevent infringement. The reform, two years in the making, is loudly backed by media companies and artists who want to obtain a better return from web platforms - such as YouTube or Facebook - that use their content. The new directive "will support creators, but will not harm Internet users. It will not take away the rights to links, will not ban memes or bring new obligations for non-commercial portals," it argues.

But the directive is strongly opposed by internet giants such as YouTube-owner Google, which make huge profits from the advertising generated on content they host, and also by supporters of a free internet, who fear it will result in unprecedented restrictions to web freedom. Tens of thousands of protesters rallied in cities around Germany on Saturday under the slogan "Save the Internet". — AFP

International

India opposition leader Gandhi vows 'final assault on poverty'

Rahul Gandhi promises basic income for India's poorest if becomes PM

NEW DELHI: Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi yesterday vowed a "final assault on poverty" in India if elected prime minister in May, promising a minimum income for tens of millions of the country's poorest. The Congress Party leader, broadly seen as trailing the incumbent Narendra Modi in the race for top office, described the scheme to pay a guaranteed basic income of \$1,000 a year to 50 million poor families as the largest of its kind on Earth.

The sop to voters comes less than three weeks before Indians start casting their ballots in mammoth elections that stretch nearly six weeks until May 19. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party routed Congress at the last general election in 2014 and his supporters hope the Hindu nationalist leader can deliver another crushing victory.

But Gandhi is trying to close the gap, promising among other things a safety net for Indians living beneath the poverty line in the world's second-most populous nation. "People have suffered in the last five years. We will give justice to them," the scion of the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty told reporters in Delhi. "It is on this day that the Congress

Party launched its final assault on poverty. It will be the world's largest minimum income scheme."

Gandhi, whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all prime ministers, has attacked Modi's economic record, accusing him of failing to create jobs for the nation's youth or aid desperate farmers. His proposed cash handouts for the poor are seen as modeled loosely on universal basic income, a concept attracting growing interest around the world. UBI - supported by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg among others as a way to reduce inequality - involves people being given a flat lump sum by the state instead of subsidies and social security payments.

It has been tried out in several countries including Finland and Kenya, and has been promised by the ruling party of the small northern Indian state of Sikkim as well as Italy's new populist government. Modi has already unveiled a raft of sweeteners for farmers and the middle class in Asia's third-largest economy, hoping to deflect opposition salvos over his 2014 campaign promise to create "good days" for all. — AFP



AGARTALA: Rahul Gandhi, president of India's main opposition Congress party speaks during a public rally ahead of India's general elections at Khumuiwng, on the outskirts of Agartala, the capital of northeastern state of Tripura. — AFP

Forget Taj Mahal what about Modi rally? India markets election tourism

NEW DELHI: India's frenetic cities, historical monuments, tasty food, and beautiful scenery may be among the biggest attractions for foreign tourists. But with election fever hitting India, a few of them are prepared to forgo some of that - and the elephant ride - to meet an election candidate or attend a political rally.

The world's biggest democracy, with about 900 million voters, is set to decide in April-May whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets a second term following his thumping victory in 2014, and that gives the Indian tourism industry a different way to market the country. Some Indian tour companies are courting international visitors with week-long 'election tourism' packages that would try to combine some traditional sightseeing with access to political campaigning.

The packages were first tested during the 2012 state elections in the Western state of Gujarat and have now mushroomed nationwide. "The Indian election is like a festival," founder of Election Tourism India and Chairman of Gujarat Tourism Corporation Society Manish Sharma told Reuters. Election campaigns and rallies in India can be spectacular in terms of scale, reflecting the power of fundraising for the state and national political parties.

Events and rallies headlined by India's Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, the head of his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, Amit Shah, and the opposition Congress party's Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have generated a lot of interest, Sharma said. The Ahmedabad-Gujarat based Election Tourism India, which works with more than 35 tour companies across India, has received nearly 3,500 bookings for election packages from outside India, he said.

The packages consist of popular tourist destinations, political rallies and interactions with election candidates and other local politicians. The length of the election - it takes more than five weeks for everyone to be able to vote - also provides tour operators with plenty of options. The trips offered range from 5 to 8 days, and offer visits to a wide variety of places. The packages are not expected to appeal to the average tourist but more for those who are inclined in politics, such as political students, journalists and researchers. — Reuters

India, Pakistan spar over conversion of two Hindu girls

NEW DELHI: India and Pakistan are quarrelling over reports of an alleged kidnapping and religious conversion of two Hindu girls in mostly Muslim Pakistan last week. The spat began on Sunday when India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj tweeted that she had asked the country's high commissioner in Islamabad to send a report on a news article on the allegations, a rare public intervention by a top Indian official in the neighbor's domestic affairs.

Pakistani police said they had registered a complaint of kidnapping and robbery by the teenagers' parents and that arrests could be made yesterday. Pakistan's Information and Broadcasting Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the country was "totally behind the girls", but asked Hindu-majority India to look after its own minority Muslims. "Madam Minister, I am happy that in the Indian administration we have people who care for minority rights in other countries," Chaudhry replied to Swaraj's tweet.

"I sincerely hope that your conscience will allow you to stand up for minorities at home as well. Gujarat and Jammu must weigh heavily on your soul." Later in a press conference on Sunday, he referred to religious riots in Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat in 2002 during which more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed. In Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, Pakistan accuses India of human rights violations, a charge New Delhi denies.

An Indian foreign ministry source cited three more instances of forceful marriages of Hindu or Sikh women in Pakistan in the past two years and said that the government had raised "intimidation of Sikhs, Hindus, and desecration of their places of worship" with Pakistan on various occasions. The Indian government run by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will seek a second term in a general election starting next month. Modi has taken a tougher stand towards Pakistan in the past five years. — Reuters

Yemen: World's worst humanitarian crisis with thousands dead

SANAA: The war in Yemen has left thousands dead and triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations. The war between Houthi rebels and pro-government troops escalated in March 2015, when a Saudi-led military coalition intervened against the rebels.

Civilians on front line

Around 10,000 people-mostly civilians-have been killed and more than 60,000 wounded since the Saudi-led coalition joined the conflict, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). But the exact numbers are not known and aid groups warn the toll is likely to be significantly higher, with Action Against Hunger putting it at more than 57,000.

On March 18, 2019, the Norwegian Refugee Council said that civilian casualties have risen in Yemen despite a three-month-old truce in the vital aid port of Hodeida. According to French aid group Action Contre la Faim, 3.3 million people have been displaced within Yemen. The country has also been ravaged by cholera, which has killed more than 2,500 people since April 2017. Around 1.2 million suspected cases have been reported, according to the WHO.

'Hell on earth' for children

The UN children's fund (UNICEF) has regularly pointed to the devastating effects of the conflict on children. "It

is a living hell for every boy and girl in Yemen," it said in November 2018. It said 1.8 million aged less than five are suffering from acute malnutrition. Save the Children said that between April 2015 and October 2018 some 85,000 children may have died of severe malnutrition or related diseases. Others have been killed by combat.

Lost generation

According to the UN, two million of the country's seven million children of school age go without education in Yemen. More than 2,500 schools are out of use, of which two thirds have been damaged in attacks, 27 percent closed and seven percent used by the military or as shelters for displaced people. Largely due to their families' poverty, two out of five girls are married before the age of 15 and three quarters before 18, according to UNICEF. Thousands of boys have been recruited as child soldiers.

'Worst' humanitarian crisis

In March 2017, Stephen O'Brien, the UN's under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs, said Yemen was the scene of "the largest humanitarian crisis in the world". The United Nations warned in February 2019 the situation was getting even worse. "An estimated 80 percent of the population - 24 million-require some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million who are in acute need," the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

The number of people in acute need is "a staggering 27 percent higher than last year", it said, adding two-thirds of the country was "already pre-famine". According to Action Contre la Faim 16 million people lack access to water and sanitation and basic health care. Fifty percent of Yemen's clinics are closed and more than 70 percent do not have a regular supply of medicines.



SANAA: Armed Yemeni men raise their weapons as they gather near the capital Sanaa to show their support to the Shiite Houthi movement against the Saudi-led intervention. — AFP

'War crimes'

In March 2018, rights group Amnesty International accused Western countries of supplying arms to Riyadh and its allies, who could stand guilty of war crimes in Yemen. Last August a UN expert mission concluded that all warring parties had potentially committed "war crimes". — AFP

Kuwait Times

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Analysis

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This combination of file pictures shows (from left) US President Donald Trump speaking to reporters on March 22, 2019 in Washington; US Attorney General William Barr testifying on Jan 15, 2019 during a Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing in Washington; and FBI Director Robert Mueller testifying on June 19, 2013 before the US Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington. — AFP

Trump Golan move boosts Netanyahu, but risks for Israel

US President Donald Trump's call for recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights was manna from heaven for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu two weeks before an election. For many Arabs, it crushed any hope that there will one day be a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians and increased doubts that Washington is an impartial arbiter. But allies and enemies can agree on one thing: Trump's statement last Thursday was a turning point in US policy over territory Israel captured from Syria in a 1967 war and annexed in 1981, in a move the UN Security Council declared unlawful.

"I am confident that the Lord is at work here," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was in Israel when Trump made his announcement on Twitter, told the Christian Broadcasting Network in an interview. Netanyahu, who has thanked Trump for the announcement, is seeking re-election on April 9 but faces a tough battle and possible indictment in three corruption cases in which he denies wrongdoing. He was due to meet Trump yesterday on a trip highlighting what Netanyahu calls the strongest ever bond between an Israeli leader and a US president, though Trump has said his decision on the Golan Heights was not connected with the election.

But Trump's decision, following US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in Dec 2017, could tempt other powers to annex land, undermine the roll-out of a US Middle East peace plan and tilt Israel back into conflict with its Arab neighbors. Middle East analysts say, "Donald Trump has made sure that Israel will be in a perpetual state of war with its Arab neighbors for many decades to come," said Fawaz Gerges, professor of international relations at the London School of Economics and author of the book Making the Arab World. "What Trump has done is to hammer a deadly nail in the coffin of the peace process and Arab-Israeli reconciliation. This is a fundamental turning point. There is nothing left to discuss anymore."

Reshaping the Middle East

Trump's move is, according to many analysts, partly intended to boost his own chances of re-election in 2020, by targeting the vast pool of US evangelical Christians. Many of them voted for his in 2016 and they are championed in his administration by Pompeo, Vice President Mike Pence and others. The announcement on the Golan Heights was the latest in a flurry of decisions that are widely seen as intended to redraw the contours of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

Most have ticked the wish-list of Israel's right-wing government and met longstanding demands of its US supporters, including US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital. The Arab east of the city was occupied by Israel and then annexed after 1967 in a move that is legally repudiated internationally. White House officials say the decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights acknowledge the reality on the ground, which they say must be the basis for legitimate peace negotiations. Trump's Middle East envoy, Jason Greenblatt, said it was inconceivable Israel "would allow the Golan to be controlled by the state of Syria or by any of the rogue actors operating in the areas, including Iran". But with Sunni Arab leaders dealing with crises in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Sudan and Qatar, and their standoff with non-Arab Shiite Iran, they are less focused on Israel.

Arabs in disarray

Trump's aides have indicated privately that they believe his moves on Jerusalem have provoked a less severe reaction in the Arab world than experts had predicted, a person familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity. In particular, they did not appear to have blocked behind-the-scenes security contacts developed in recent years between Israel and the United States' Gulf allies over their common enemy Iran, the person said.

Aides' advice to Trump on recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights was that Washington could again weather the storm, the same person said. Support for the move in the Trump administration had gained momentum over the past year as Israel increasingly expressed concern about Iranian forces and their proxies taking up positions in southwestern Syria, the official said.

John Bolton, Trump's national security adviser and one of the administration's leading Iran hawks, was an important proponent of the policy shift, the official said. But sceptics say the move will also give Iran and its local ally Hezbollah what they would see as justification for new attacks on Israel and hamstringing anti-Iranian Arab leaders if they are seen to accept the US move. The Trump administration has identified Iran as its main target in the Middle East, and withdrew from the deal signed by Tehran, the United States and other world powers in 2015 on curbing Iran's nuclear program.

More to come

But after the moves on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, Iran and Hezbollah may feel better able to present themselves as the only steadfast allies of the Palestinian cause. They could also play into the hands of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad by helping him in his portrayals of Israel and the United States as enemies. "This will give further power to the Iran axis of resistance between Iran-Hezbollah-Assad against Israel and the US," said Galip Dalay, visiting fellow at Oxford University and a fellow at Brookings Doha. "This axis has just been given a very strong symbolic victory and this will give them the high ground." — AFP

Findings offer re-election weapon for Trump

US Special Counsel Robert Mueller's conclusion that Donald Trump did not collude with Russia to win the presidency in 2016 gives the president a powerful weapon to use against his Democratic opponents and a potential boost to what is shaping up to be a tough bid for re-election in 2020. Mueller's conclusion that neither Trump nor his aides conspired with Russia in 2016 takes away a central charge that Democrats have flung at Trump for two years - that he did not win the presidency fairly or cleanly. The allegations have played out on an endless loop on cable TV news shows, overshadowing Trump's presidency from day one.

Democrats have vowed to continue congressional investigations into the 2016 election campaign and Trump's business practices. But without the solid foundation of a Mueller report that found evidence of any crimes by the president, they now risk seeming to overplay their hand. "This is a gold star day for Donald Trump," said presidential historian Douglas Brinkley. "Now the shackles are off. He's able to demonize the news media and Democrats as perpetuating what he calls a hoax. And he'll be able to use his innocence as fodder for the campaign trail."

The question for Trump now is whether he will be able to bring a minimum of discipline to his campaign messaging and to the presidency itself. History suggests he will have trouble with self-discipline. Just last week, he was immersed in a strange fight with a dead man, sharply criticizing the late Republican Senator John McCain and falsely accusing him of being at the root of some of the collusion allegations against him. He has also been prone to making baffling abrupt decisions, such as occurred last week when he called off a round of sanctions against North Korea before they had even been imposed.

Indebted hospital in Comoros faces collapse

The Bambao hospital, nestled in a tropical forest on Anjouan island in the Comoros, was meant to bring state-of-the-art medical care to the poor Indian Ocean nation. Just two years later, the hospital is deep in debt and shunned by potential patients who find it too costly. "A poisoned chalice", "a colossus with feet of clay", "a sinking ship" are among the clichés that chief pediatrician Ahmed Rakibou used to describe the facility funded and built under a Chinese aid scheme. "If they had consulted us while building it, this could have been a jewel," the doctor said, regretting that "today it's all going straight to hell".

The hospital is some 30 km east of Mutsamudu, the capital of Anjouan, the poorest of the three islands comprising the Union of the Comoros. The aim was to make the hospital a flagship of Comoran healthcare, with 120 beds in a brand-new building, a team of 167 staff, many recruited locally, and modern equipment including a digital radio scanner.

China's ambassador to the Comoros, Xiao Ming, hailed a "new page in the annals of cooperation" at the opening ceremony, saying "public health has always had a priority place in Sino-Comoran cooperation". But a project that cost four billion Comoran francs (\$9.2 billion) today looks more like a ghost ship, with a handful of patients wandering its corridors in stifling heat. For lack of funds, about 100 staff jobs have not been filled.

'Not many patients'

In the emergency ward, a doctor silently examines a child's injured arm. The lethargic mood is broken only by the arrival of an ambulance carrying the victim of a motorcycle accident. "Our activity is very varied," nurse Ali Mosthadi says cautiously before going further. "In fact, we don't have many patients." Deputy director Sidi Chaanbane was more forthcoming. Since the hospital was opened by President Azali Assoumani in 2017, it has faced mounting difficulties, he said. "At the start, the road from Mutsamudu was in a very bad state and patients had trou-

ble getting here," the administrator said. "It's been repaired since, but our real problem is that we sorely lack equipment and staff."

In addition to staff salaries, the Comoran state provides just five million francs (10,000 euros) a month, but the hospital needs three times as much to pay its bills. "We can't balance the budget," Chaanbane said. Day-to-day management is a nightmare. The scanner broke down soon after it was first used. Repairs were not covered by the Chinese cooperation agreement, so the hospital took out a loan to get the machine working again.

The main problem is the cost of treatment, which is not free in the former French colony, independent since 1975. Much of the funding comes from the French Development Agency (AFD) in its aid budget. France still rules over the fourth major island in the archipelago, Mayotte. The three islands forming Comoros lack the standard of living on Mayotte and are far from able to make up the remaining health budget.

'Expensive'

Rakibou said the hospital charges 125,000 Comoran francs for a Caesarian birth. "What Comoran can pay that?" he asks. "No - this hospital is not made for the population." Kanissa Adbou, 27, brought her eight-year-old daughter who trod on a nail to the hospital. "The treatment is expensive. If I could afford it, I would go to Mayotte because there, hospital is free." Those who believed that providing a modern hospital on Anjouan would dissuade Comorans from trying their luck on Mayotte have been disappointed, although the trip is illegal. "People here prefer to pay 1,000 euros to go to Mayotte by kwassa kwassa (human traffickers' dugouts) than to come to us," a nurse said. "They trust only white doctors."

The failure to put the sophisticated equipment at Bambao to regular good use enrages Ahmed Abdallah, secretary general of the Hombu public hospital in Mutsamudu. "The money spent there would have been enough to repair our buildings, replace our equipment and build roads so that sick people could come from nearby villages," he said. "We don't have even a single ambulance, yet the government has I don't know how many four-wheel drives." Health Minister Fatma Mbaraka declined to respond to requests for comment from AFP. But Rakibou refuses to throw in the towel. He hopes that the winner of Sunday's presidential election and the international community will come up with increased funding. "It wouldn't take much to change our lives!" he said. — AFP



A lab technician checks a broken scanner at the Sino-Comoran friendship Hospital on March 21, 2019 in Bambao-Mtsanga. — AFP

for the past two years," said former Trump campaign aide David Bossie. "We must investigate the investigators." White House spokesman Hogan Gidley said Trump had no plans to request that his attorney general open an investigation into the president's political opponents.

Challenges for Democrats

Trump's path to re-election remains a perilous one. Analysts say he will probably need to win the Midwestern states of Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, just as he did in his improbable 2016 victory, and Democrats are already pouring resources into those states. Trump will foreshadow his campaign message on Thursday night when he headlines a "Make America Great Again" rally in Michigan. Trump supporters viewed the Mueller report as a blow to the more than a dozen Democrats who are campaigning for their party's 2020 presidential nomination.

"This is very problematic for any Democrat who's running for president in 2020 that was hoping they would face a weakened or beaten-down President Trump," former Trump campaign adviser Jason Miller said. "In fact, President Trump will likely see a ratings boost coming out of this and a strong tailwind pushing him towards the upcoming election." Reuters/Ipsos polling has shown that Americans decided early on in Mueller's investigation whether they thought Trump was guilty of collusion or not. The polling found few undecided voters. Brinkley said Democrats will need to adjust their tactics and emphasize their differences with Trump's record on issues ranging from healthcare and climate change to immigration. "Some of those charges are going to have to rise to be the main charges against Trump," he said, noting there was fatigue with the Russia issue. — Reuters

Behind in polls, Gillibrand vows transparency

Branding US President Donald Trump "a coward" who is "tearing apart the moral fabric" of America, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand on Sunday held her first rally for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination outside the Trump International Hotel in New York. Gillibrand emphasized transparency as she presented herself as a candidate defined by the courage and integrity she claims Trump lacks. "Look at this tower!" said Gillibrand, her hair blowing in the wind. "A shrine to greed, division and vanity... We are here to reject the politics of fear and hate."



Kristen Gillibrand

Speaking to a few hundred supporters and curious onlookers, the 52-year-old - who first revealed plans to run in January before launching her campaign last weekend - insisted she was ready to take on lobbyists whose "special interests... prevent us from seeing solutions." Like most of her 15 or so Democratic rivals Gillibrand favors universal health coverage, a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage and access to university for everyone. Also high on her list of priorities is climate change: an "existential threat."

But rhetoric aside, Gillibrand - who is married to a venture capitalist - is closer to the political center than her leftist competitors like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, who are running on ideas like free university tuition. So far, Gillibrand is trailing in the polls - and had the misfortune of holding her first rally on the same day the president's 2016 presidential campaign was cleared of colluding with Russia, according to a released summary of Robert Mueller's probe into Moscow's election meddling.

Can a woman win?

Gillibrand, a mother to two boys, is a champion of causes that matter to women and families, from sexual harassment to paid maternity leave. But polls show that the Democratic favorites at this stage are all men: Sanders, former vice president Joe Biden, and Texan Beto O'Rourke dominate the top tier. Gillibrand's supporters are confident that she can close the gap in the coming months. "It's so early in the primary process... she has so much time to build and grow her coalition," said Zahen Sarker, a 24-year-old finance worker.

Among possible obstacles: Gillibrand started her career aligned closely with conservatives on key hot-button issues, like opposing gun control and pushing for more deportations. She has since changed her positions - leading to charges of being a political contortionist. But for Sarker, Gillibrand's "evolution on these policies shows that she is able to learn and change, which is so important in politics." With only a few hundred people turning out Sunday on her home turf, it seems like she has a steep uphill battle ahead. For some, the fact that she is a woman alone presents problems. "I like Gillibrand, but I don't think she could defeat Trump," said Carol Mitchell, 75. But she suggested Gillibrand could make a good running mate for Joe Biden. "After the Hillary experience, I am really worried about having a woman at the top of the ticket," Mitchell said. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2019

12 ABK named 'Best Retail Bank in Kuwait' for fourth straight year**13** Al-Mulla Automobiles, Mercedes-Benz ME open Mercedes-Benz commercial showroom**14** Agility and MIT Media Lab host 'Data Agility' Hackathon

AUB AGM approves a cash dividend of 15 fils per share

AGM held with 92.174 % attendance, to distribute a bonus of 5 shares per 100 shares

KUWAIT: Chairman of Ahli United Bank, Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf assured that "during the year 2018, the Bank continued to achieve good financial results, which was reflected by a 15.3 percent increase in net profit to reach to KD 51.3 million compared to KD 44.5 million in the previous year.

The Bank also recorded a growth in total operating profit of KD 121.6 million for the year 2018 with a growth of 1.2 percent compared an operating profit of KD 120.1 million for 2017. The Shareholders' equity of the Bank increased by 5.9 percent to KD 430.8 million as of 31 December 2018 which is higher than its KD 406.9 million as of 31 December 2017. The net operating profit grew by 3.3 percent to KD 84.4 million by the end of 2018 compared to KD 81.7 million in 2017.

In addition to the achievements, the Bank maintained a good rate of capital adequacy ratio of 16.6 percent as of 31 December 2018 (compared to 18 percent as of 31 December 2017) this is before dividends exceeds the level required by the regulators. Thereby increasing the chances of future expansion at the level of credit facilities and operations.

The Bank also achieved a return on equity and assets of 12.4 percent, 1.4 percent respectively, by the end of 2018, which is one of the highest in the market and this led to increase the earnings per share from 23.3 fils in 2017 to 27.1 fils for 2018.

Total assets, customer deposits and net financing debts are, KD 3,914 million, KD 2,425 million and KD 2,800 million respectively by the end of 2018. All of them are managed robustly and accurately to ensure maximum financial returns.

The Bank has maintained a conservative approach of risk management, which contributed to improve the quality of assets and reducing the irregular financing ratio to 1.27 percent (in 2017: 1.39 percent) and 33.4 percent coverage ratio. During the year, the Bank has implemented the Central Bank of Kuwait's instructions regarding IFRS 9.

Based on these good results, the Board of Directors proposes to the General Assembly a cash dividend of 15 plus bonus shares of 5 percent of issued and paid up share capital (15 fils per share and 5 shares per 100 shares, respectively).

Corporate governance and risk management

The Bank, through its Board of Directors and Board Committees, was able to adopt and implement a robust governance framework aligned with the regulatory requirements and benchmarked with leading practices and international recommendations. The Bank adopts corporate governance as a business culture which is embedded in its day to day business operations and which serves the best interest of the Bank's shareholders and customers.

The risk governance pillar is a key building block in the overall governance framework of the Bank, this is reflected through an approved risk strategy aligned with the Bank's business strategy governed by a group of policies that ensures driving the Bank's activities within an approved risk appetite statement

Credit ratings

In 2018, Ahli United Bank managed to maintain its high credit ratings of international credit rating agencies, this is due to the advanced capabilities of the Bank and its commitment to the highest professional standards which support the trust of the international rating agencies by considering us as a leading Bank providing banking and financial services in Kuwait. Fitch agency has confirmed the long-term creditworthiness of the Bank at A + rating and F1 valuation for short term with a future stable overview.

Also Moody's agency has fixed its assessment in local currency at A2 with a stable future overview. Capital Intelligence agency has fixed the long term credit assessment of the Bank in foreign currency at A+ rating with a future stable overview, also it strengthen the short-term assessment in foreign currency rating of the bank to A2 . These ratings reflect the quality and the credit worthiness of the Bank's financial position, with stability and ability to achieve good profit rates in the future.

The awards

As the Bank is completing its seventy-seventh year, I am delighted that its journey is appreciated by the global banking community. This is reflected by the achievement of many prestigious awards in 2018, including the Best Islamic Bank of 2018, the Islamic Banking Award of 2018 and the Award "The Best Bank in Private Banking in Kuwait for 2018 by the prestigious



KUWAIT: Chairman of Ahli United Bank Dr Anwar Al-Mudhaf speaks during the annual general assembly meeting yesterday.

Islamic Finance and Business magazine under the supervision of CBI Financial, the magazine's publishers.

Also the award of (The best bank of corporate governance in Kuwait of 2018) issued by Capital Finance International magazine. You may agree with me that the international recognition of the prestigious awards granted to the Bank for successive years is a best proof of its success journey from year to year, so that it was able to take this leading position among the other Islamic Banks across the region.

Increased reliance on fintech

Always we are looking to meet the expectations of our customers. In 2018, we took great strides in employing technology to facilitate the needs of our customers and pave the way for them to achieve a better life. We continue to focus on increasing customer capabilities and enriching their experience in dealing with the Bank by increasing reliance on financial technology (Fintech).

Unique model

Ahli United Bank has been able to provide a unique model for an attractive working environment for the developing its human capital, which is considered the real engine for its success. This has been demonstrated by the ability of the Management to retain many employees who consider the real wealth of the bank for more than 30 years. Also the Bank was able to achieve a promising program to attract the best national resources and develop their skills and qualifications to take over leadership positions through advanced training programs. In addition of providing an attractive working environment to the national calibres. The Kuwaiti leadership positions in Ahli United Bank with the highest professional degrees from the prestigious academic and training institutions are the best example of our confidence in the capabilities and competencies of our young Kuwaiti youth.

Social responsibility

The social responsibility of the Bank is an integral part of its identity being the oldest Bank established in Kuwait and which made many social contributions in various centuries and conditions. Ahli United Bank was keen to develop a premier social program aligned with the vision of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (New Kuwait

2035), which interacts with all matters affecting the Kuwaiti society and contributes to the improvement of citizens' lives. From that aspect, the Bank was keen to support several successful events in different areas with a main focus on the Kuwaiti youth and environmental support programs.

Thanks and gratitude

At the end, on the behalf of myself, the Board of Directors and Executive Management of Ahli United Bank I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Prime Minister, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah for his continuous support to the banking sector of Kuwait.

I would also like to express my appreciation and thanks to the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr. Mohammed Yousef Al Hashil, and to all regulators in the State of Kuwait for their positive role in supporting Ahli United Bank.

I would also like to thank the Bank's Fatwa and Shari'a Supervisory Board as well as the Board of Directors and Executive Management for their outstanding efforts. I would also thank the shareholders and our customers for their loyalty and trust which have played a major role in achieving the growth and success of this prestigious financial institution.

Tareq Muhmood, the Acting Chief Executive Officer, added: During 2018, the Bank continued its upward momentum, achieving a return on equity and assets of 12.4 percent, 1.4 percent respectively, which is one of the highest in the market.

Our focus on operational excellence supported the solid business performance during the year, delivering a growth in total operating profit of KD 121.6 million for the year 2018 with a growth of 1.2 percent compared to an operating profit of KD 120.1 million for 2017.

Net operating profit grew by 3.3 percent to KD 84.4 million by the end of 2018 compared to KD 81.7 million in 2017. This is maintained through a strong focus on core earnings and revenue streams while maintaining sound asset quality and a strong liquidity and capital adequacy position.

Total assets grew by 6.8 percent to KD 3,914 million for 2018. The increase in total assets was attributable to a 4.8 percent growth in the loans portfolio which rose to KD 2,800 million (2017: KD 2,673 million) and a 21.7 percent growth in the investments portfolio to KD 264 million (2017: KD 217 million). All of them are managed robustly to ensure maximum financial returns and efficient management of our balance sheet.

Asset growth was funded through focused balance sheet management and effective liquidity deployment

to optimize yields and ensure funding stability in terms of quantum and duration.

The Bank adopts a combination of prudent credit strategy and focused recovery initiatives, and this ensures our stability during volatility in market conditions. We were able to improve the quality of assets during 2018 and, as a result, the nonperforming loan ratio fell to 1.27 percent at year-end 2018 as compared with 1.39 percent at the prior year-end while the specific provision coverage ratio was maintained at the very solid level of 22.8 percent (2017: 14.1 percent). The total provision coverage, excluding existing available securities and collaterals of KD 124.1 million, stood at 333.8 percent (2017: 292.8 percent) underlining the Bank's conservative cash based provisioning approach.

AUB's overall performance in 2018 was testament to its focused and resilient business model, accordingly the overall credit rating was maintained at a high level by the international credit rating agencies. The Bank continues its strategy towards innovation, partnering with local and global Fintechs, to enhance our products, services and how these are experienced through our various digital and non-digital channels. With constant upgrades to our Mobile Banking applications, active engagement on Social Media and the enhanced Business to Business (B2B) cash management platform, it demonstrates the Bank's commitment towards providing customers with hassle-free and creative digital solutions. A significant enhancement was delivered through the B2B cash management platform being made available via the mobile application for our corporate customers.

During the year, we were recognized by the wider community through prestigious awards granted to us in 2018, including the Best Islamic Bank, the Islamic Banking Award of 2018 and the Award "The Best Bank in Private Banking in Kuwait for 2018 by the prestigious Islamic Finance and Business magazine under the supervision of CBI Financial, the magazine's publishers. This was in addition to the Best Bank in Corporate Governance, Kuwait in 2018 issued by Capital Finance International magazine.

Muhmood added: Looking to the future, AUB will remain focused on its core strategy to pursue business growth through business diversification and cross border investment and trade flows. Operationally, our continued digital transformation journey will be key to enhancing the Bank's competitive edge whilst enhancing the customer experience in using our channels.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Board of Directors for their continued support and guidance. My sincere appreciation is due to all my colleagues in the management and staff of the Bank whose commitment to excellence, dedication and team work, have been, as usual, valuable in delivering the successful performance levels of the past year.

ABK named 'Best Retail Bank in Kuwait' for fourth straight year

Stewart Lockie wins coveted Retail Banker of the Year Middle East award

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) received two prominent awards in the Asian Banker Excellence in Retail Financial Services Awards 2019...

The awards were presented at a gala ceremony held at the Conrad Hotel, Dubai, on 21st March 2019, attended by over 200 senior retail bankers.

'Retail Banker of the Year' is the only individual award, given to the most accomplished leader in the regional retail banking industry each year after an exhaustive

research process. Stewart Lockie received the final award of the event with the international panel acknowledging his achievements in presiding over one of the fastest growing and strongest retail banks in the region...

ABK continues to invest in technology, innovation and customer service under its 'Simpler Banking' strategy, and continuously strives to set new benchmarks for retail banking in the region.



Mutawa AlKazi wins 'Best Offer' award in 2019 Kuwait Motor Show

KUWAIT: Mutawa AlKazi Co, the sole authorized dealer of GAC Motor vehicles in Kuwait, won the "Best Offer" award from the 2019 edition of Kuwait Motor Show.

Mutawa AlKazi's unsurpassed "Grab the Chance to Win Twice" offer enables customers to win a 2019 model GS8 plus 40 valuable prizes such as new iPhone devices, comprehensive insurance and free maintenance up to five years.

In a press release, Mutawa AlKazi said that the recent campaign reflected the company's keenness to reward and give the customers the chance to own the best-ever featured GAC cars.

Mutawa Alkazi noted that the coming draw of "Grab the Chance to Win Twice" campaign will be held on Wednesday at 6 pm, announcing the winner of the grand prize and the winners of the other 40 valuable prizes in the presence of a representative of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Seeking to satisfy all customers, the company confirmed that it is committed to its promotions and campaigns that provide an exceptional driving experience of the reliable GAC vehicles and ensure peace of mind. The offers include an exclusive package of 11 year warranty, 3-year maintenance, 3rd party insurance and window tinting.



facilities, in addition to competitive price for used cars.

As a high-quality built and equipped vehicles by a world-class team, GAC cars won J.D Power Quality award for the 6th consecutive year. The Chinese brand is subjected to a range of tests in a variety of climatic and geographic

conditions, in order to ensure their readiness and suitability for the Gulf markets.

With its skilled technicians and professionals team, the company stressed its keenness to provide high-quality maintenance services in a record time as well as spare parts for all models at the best prices.

China investment in Europe: A story of cash and concerns

PARIS: Chinese firms have plowed at least 145 billion euros (\$164 billion) into Europe since 2010, but investment has been slowing recently as several European governments tighten rules on acquisitions by foreign firms.

As President Xi Jinping makes a crucial visit to Italy promoting China's new Silk Road project, the EU remains divided over the best approach towards Beijing.

Buying spree

Chinese direct investment into the European Union in 2010 totaled just 2.1 billion euros. That climbed rapidly to 20.7 billion in 2015 and then jumped to 37.2 billion in 2016, according to a study by Rhodium Group, as Chinese firms went on a buying spree.

Sweden's Volvo Cars, Italian tyre-maker Pirelli, French holiday group Club Med and German machine tool firms Kuka and KraussMaffei have all passed into Chinese hands this decade.

But the volume of Chinese investments has fallen since 2016, declining to 29.1 billion in 2017 and 17.3 in 2018. The study's authors put the drop down to Beijing clamping down on investments made by overindebted firms as well as tightening regulations in Europe.

Since 2000, 60 percent of Chinese investment in Europe has come from state-controlled groups.

Going south, and east

While concerns about Chinese investment have grown in France and Germany - countries in southern and eastern Europe still have the welcome mat out. Rome is ready to sign up to China's new Silk Road project, a \$1 trillion infrastructure project, following fellow EU nations Greece, Hungary, Poland and Portugal.

Athens ceded its key port of Piraeus to China's freight giant Cosco, which also controls container ports in Valencia and Bilbao in Spain.

Portugal strengthened its ties with China during the financial crisis, with Chinese investment rising to 6 billion

euros, according to Rhodium, as Chinese firms made investments into its leading private bank, an insurance firm and the electricity network operator.

Lisbon hasn't opposed China Three Gorges trying to take over the nation's leading electricity firm, Energias de Portugal (EDP).

In the Czech Republic, a visit by Xi in 2016 sealed massive investments from energy firm CEFC in media firms, an airline and a football club. CEFC's owner Ye Jiaming was named an economic adviser to Czech President Milos Zeman.

Paris, Berlin protective

In February, the European Parliament gave its green light to new powers to screen foreign takeovers in Europe's strategic sectors, and member states signed off on the measure this month.

Pushed by France, Germany, and originally Italy, the measure was a response to concerns that foreign firms are snapping up key technologies.

While EU member states retain the final decision, they will have to supply, under certain conditions, information on foreign investment to other member states if public order or security are concerned.

But some 14 EU countries already have their own measures to screen foreign investments, and the rules are tightening. Following the Chinese acquisition of Kuka, a leading-edge producer of robots for factories, Germany lowered from 25 to 10 percent the stake threshold above which it can block any foreign investor from buying more shares.

China's Yantai Taihai abandoned an attempt to purchase German machine tools firm Leifeld in August following pressure from the authorities.

According to Rhodium, nearly half of Chinese investments in 2018 were in sensitive sectors.

US warns allies

The United States, which is locked in a trade war with China, has stepped up its warnings. Washington has put particular pressure on Germany, threatening to stop sharing intelligence if Berlin lets Chinese equipment into next-generation mobile phone networks.

The United States also publicly voiced this month its opposition to China acquiring Energias de Portugal. A White House official, Garrett Marquis, earlier this month tweeted that there is "no need for Italian government to lend legitimacy to China's infrastructure vanity project". — AFP

Turkey central bank vows to ensure stability after lira slide

ANKARA: Turkey's central bank yesterday vowed to use all the tools at its disposal to "maintain price stability" after a slide in the lira last week amid investor concerns over domestic monetary policy.

The lira lost around 5.2 percent in value against the greenback on Friday, its worst day since a currency crisis last year triggered by a

US diplomatic spat and sanctions. The bank said it "will use all monetary policy and liquidity management instruments to maintain price stability and support financial stability, if deemed necessary". After the bank's statement yesterday, the lira pared back some of its losses to reach 5.64 against the dollar at 0915 GMT, up two percent on the day. The bank suspended one-week repo auctions on Friday for an undefined period after markets reacted to an unexpected drop in the bank's foreign currency reserves.

Analysts described the move as monetary policy "tightening by the back door".

In a bid to ease investor concerns, central bank governor Murat Cetinkaya yesterday said the bank's fundamental policy was to "sustain and strengthen reserves", state news agency Anadolu reported.

Cetinkaya told the agency in an interview that fluctuations in reserves were "not unusual" amid speculation the fall could be a result of the bank propping up the lira.

The Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) and the Capital Markets Board (SPK) on Saturday said they launched probes into JP Morgan over a report by the investment bank's analysts which apparently recommended shorting the lira on Friday.

The BDDK issued two statements on Saturday which said there had been complaints over "misleading and manipulative" guidance from JP Morgan and other unnamed banks. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said that Turkey would "crack down strongly on the banks who conduct such manipulations" before local elections on March 31. JP Morgan representatives in Turkey did not immediately

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes US Dollar, Euro, Sterling Pound, Canadian dollar, Turkish lira, Swiss Franc, US Dollar Buying.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes Japanese Yen, Indian Rupees, Pakistani Rupees, Srilankan Rupees, Nepali Rupees, Singapore Dollar, Hongkong Dollar, Bangladesh Taka, Philippine Peso, Thai Baht, Malaysian ringgit.

GCC COUNTRIES

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes Saudi Riyal, Qatari Riyal, Omani Riyal, Bahraini Dinar, UAE Dirham.

ARAB COUNTRIES

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes Egyptian Pound - Cash.

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes Egyptian Pound - Transfer, Yemen Riyal/for 1000, Tunisian Dinar, Jordanian Dinar, Lebanese Lira/for 1000, Syrian Lira, Morocco Dirham.

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Table with 2 columns: Rate for Transfer, Selling Rate. Includes US Dollar, Canadian Dollar, Sterling Pound, Euro, Swiss Frank, Bahrain Dinar, UAE Dirhams, Qatari Riyals, Saudi Riyals, Jordanian Dinar, Egyptian Pound, Sri Lankan Rupees, Indian Rupees, Pakistani Rupees, Bangladesh Taka, Philippines Pesos, Cyprus pound, Japanese Yen, Syrian Pound, Nepalese Rupees, Malaysian Ringgit, Chinese Yuan Renminbi.

Table with 2 columns: Currency, Rate. Includes Thai Bhat, Turkish Lira, Singapore dollars.

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

Table with 3 columns: CURRENCY, BUY, SELL. Divided into Europe, Australasia, America, and Asia.

Table with 3 columns: Currency, Rate, Rate. Includes Chinese Yuan, Hong Kong Dollar, Indian Rupee, Indonesian Rupiah, Japanese Yen, Korean Won, Malaysian Ringgit, Nepalese Rupee, Pakistan Rupee, Philippine Peso, Singapore Dollar, Sri Lanka Rupee, Taiwan, Thai Baht, Vietnamese Dong.

Table with 3 columns: Arab, Rate, Rate. Includes Bahraini Dinar, Egyptian Pound, Iranian Riyal, Iraqi Dinar, Jordanian Dinar, Kuwaiti Dinar, Lebanese Pound, Moroccan Dirhams, Omani Riyal, Qatar Riyal, Saudi Riyal, Syrian Pound, Tunisian Dinar, Turkish Lira, UAE Dirhams, Yemeni Riyal.

Business



KUWAIT: Talal Anwar Al-Mulla and Kay-Wolf Alden inaugurate the new showroom for the Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles in the presence of Al-Mulla Group's Board of Directors, the management of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles Middle East and the German Ambassador to Kuwait Karl Bergner.



Al-Mulla Automobiles, Mercedes-Benz ME open Mercedes-Benz commercial showroom

Event at Ahmadi showroom highlights advanced specifications of Mercedes-Benz trucks

KUWAIT: Al-Mulla Automobiles, the authorized distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, opened the Mercedes-Benz commercial vehicles showroom at Al-Ahmadi. The launch of the new generation of heavy Mercedes-Benz trucks from the ACTROS and AROCS models also took place.

The opening ceremony was hosted by Talal Anwar Al-Mulla, Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mulla Group and Kay-Wolf Alden, President & CEO of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles - Middle East & North Africa, in the presence of Al-Mulla Group's Board of Directors, the management of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles Middle East and the German Ambassador to Kuwait Karl Bergner.

The event highlighted the advanced specifications of Mercedes-Benz trucks that make it the most efficient in its class, as well as its distinctive designs that feature the latest generation of trucks. The event also included a tour in the premises to present the facilities and the services provided.

In his welcome speech, Talal Anwar Al-Mulla greeted the guests: "We are delighted to see this opening today in the presence of our guests. It is a very significant event to start our partnership with the opening of this showroom and the launching of the new generation of Mercedes-Benz heavy trucks for the first time in Kuwait. Our aim is to meet the market's requirements and to deliver the best products with the highest level of customer service."

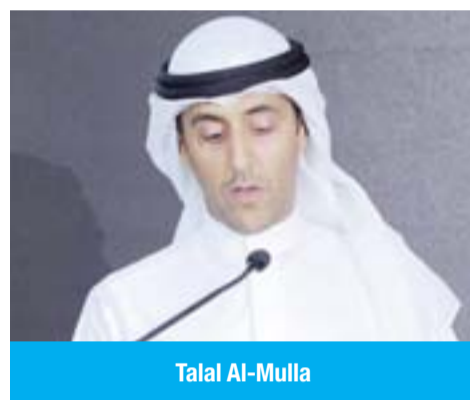
Kay-Wolf Alden, President & CEO of Mercedes-Benz Commercial Vehicles Middle East stated: "We are committed to provide a new and unique experience to our

customers in Kuwait and we are pleased to see that the new showroom is designed to give our customers a unique experience from the moment they enter the showroom till the moment they buy the truck, van or bus they need."

During the ceremony, the new generation of Mercedes-Benz, Actros and Arocs heavy duty trucks, which are assembled at the world's largest truck factory in the Wirth area of Germany, add a new dimension of efficiency and strength, as they were developed specifically for extreme weather conditions in the Middle East and with specifications that make them bear the most difficult operating requirements.

"The Mercedes-Benz, Actros and Arocs trucks have proven to be highly efficient and durable, making it a favorite for many customers around the world," said Marc Legeay, General Manager Mercedes-Benz Trucks Middle East & North Africa.

Tested extensively around the world, on both surfaced roads and in the most challenging terrain, these vehicles are a perfect platform for heavy-duty applications. Testing included a total of more than 6 million kilometers of endurance runs performed by the Mercedes-Benz Trucks Testing Centre based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Distinctive new cabs boast high material quality and perfect ergonomics, while operation is easy and comfortable. Both Actros and Arocs impress with their highly sophisticated and reliable single source drive train. New resilient, powerful and efficient engines are available in Power Shift 3 automated gearbox equipped as



Talal Al-Mulla



Kay-Wolf Alden

standard, the Actros and Arocs achieve highest levels of fuel-efficiency, contributing to the profitability of the fleet operators.

The all-new Actros is made for long-distance haulage as well as heavy-duty distribution haulage. It is available with up to 22 different cab variants and comes in steel or air-suspended versions. For tough opera-

tions, the Actros is available with a heavy-duty 15.6l engine and the 16-speed Mercedes Power Shift 3 automated gearbox.

The impressive new Arocs is there for when exceptional robustness is required - be it on construction sites or away from surfaced roads. The extremely resilient Arocs can work under the toughest off-road condi-

tions, far from any highway. The Arocs is available as Chassis-, Mixer-, Tipper- and all-wheel-drive variants - from 4x2 to 8x8 configurations with Gross Combination Weights (GCW) of up to 250 tons.

As a highlight, the new Actros and Arocs set a new benchmark when it comes to safety and assistance systems, supporting the driver and saving lives. The most impressive safety feature is the optional available Active Brake Assist 4: this radar-based emergency braking system initiates maximum full-stop braking ahead of moving and stationary obstacles if necessary and can therefore save lives. It also warns the driver of any potential collision with pedestrians, triggering partial braking at the same time.

Al-Mulla Automobiles Company aims to provide a wide network of facilities and a variety of new services to its customers in the near future, while ensuring the best service and commitment to international quality standards.



A group photo

KIC to distribute dividends of 10% for 2018

By Nawara Fattahwa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Investment Company (KIC) announced distributing dividends of 10 percent of the share value - equal to 10 fils per share for 2018 - during the general assembly held yesterday. Chairman of KIC Dr Yousef Al-Ali said the five-year strategy from 2014 to 2018 achieved its goals, which allowed distributing dividends to shareholders to the value of approximately half of the company's capital during the last five years.

After years of fluctuation in results after the financial crisis, KIC succeeded to achieve best revenues for its shareholders. "The strong performance of KIC during last year preserved its credit rating that remained at Ba2 with a stable future view according to Moody's latest update in November 2018 for the fourth consecutive year," noted Ali during a press conference yesterday.

Financial results till Dec 31, 2018 were positive. "Till the end of last year, KIC achieved net profit of KD 10 million, although it's less compared to 2017, when it reached KD 16.4 million. "Total assets reached KD 253 million, and property rights of shareholders reached

KD 117 million, which equals 212 percent of the capital, which is KD 55.125 million. The consolidated revenues reached KD 28.219 million, in addition to preserving a good ratio of income to costs. Earnings per share reached 18 fils for 2018, which is a good performance with the market situation last year," he pointed out.

According to him, the stock exchange is more optimistic after Bursa Kuwait was upgraded to emerging markets status last year. "This upgrade brings more opportunities for KIC to play a bigger role, with more foreign investments coming and placing Kuwait Boursa on the international map. I expect that its performance will improve in 2019, especially if it upgrades on the MSCI index," stressed Ali.

CEO of KIC Bader Al-Sabei noted that KIC is reviewing its strategy to face future challenges to apply modern technology such as artificial intelligence, robots, electronic vehicles or digital currency markets, which all are new sectors. "Some of them may be just trends, while others can't be ignored. And of course, we will continue investing in traditional sectors including real estate and shares," he said.

"We put our efforts and experiences to execute our strategy that we improved to be in line with international changes after the financial crisis. It was a difficult challenge for our administration. We had to reform our assets, redistribute risks through diversifying our investment geographically in regional and international markets, and investing in European markets. And we achieved successful results and met the goals of our strategy. This was translated into our profits and dividends," added Sabei.



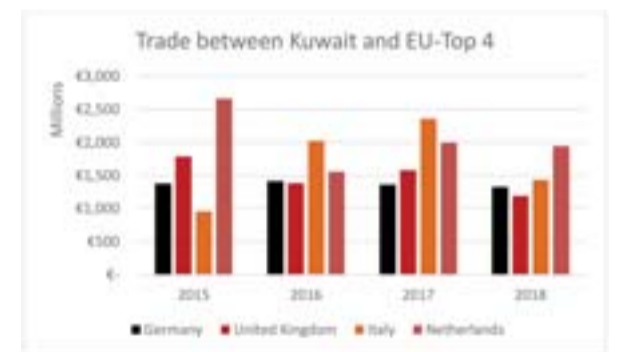
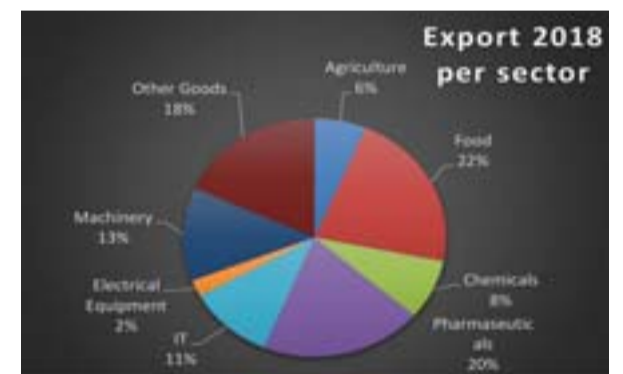
KUWAIT: KIC Chairman Dr Yousef Al-Ali addresses the general assembly meeting. — asser Al-Zayyat

Netherlands once again Kuwait's biggest EU trading partner

KUWAIT: According to the newly-published statistical data by Eurostat, the Netherlands was Kuwait's main trading partner among the 28 countries of the EU in 2018. The decisive bulk of trade contains the increased Kuwaiti export of crude oil to the refineries of the Dutch port of Rotterdam. However, also the Dutch exports to Kuwait grew substantially: agricultural products, foods and pharmaceuticals.

The Netherlands has retaken its place as Kuwait's biggest EU trading partner, after losing the position in 2016 and 2017 to Italy. In 2018, Kuwait and the Netherlands traded for more than 1.9 billion euros (KD 665 million). The most traded products between Kuwait and the Netherlands are crude oil, pharmaceuticals, food and machinery. Crude oil is of special importance, as it is responsible for 68 percent of all trade between Kuwait and the Netherlands. The overall trade with the Netherlands decreased with 60 million euros in comparison to 2017, a result of lower crude oil imports. Export from the Netherlands to Kuwait increased with more than 35 million euros. Holland was the only country of the big EU trading partners that increased its export to Kuwait. Especially trade in food, pharmaceuticals and IT increased in 2018.

Compared to the other big EU trading partners, the decrease in trade between Kuwait and the Netherlands was relatively small. Italy, the biggest trading partner of



Kuwait in 2016 and 2017 lost more than 940 million euros in trade as a result of lower crude oil imports and decreased export numbers. The United Kingdom lost over 340 million euros in trade, mostly as a result of lower refined petroleum imports from Kuwait. Germany, compared to the other EU trading partners, did very well in 2018. Europe's biggest economy traded 24 million euros less than the previous year, mainly as a result of lower exports of motor vehicles to Kuwait. -Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Founder of India's beleaguered Jet Airways quits

MUMBAI: India's troubled Jet Airways said yesterday that founder Naresh Goyal has stepped down as chairman and left the company board as part of a rescue plan.

Jet, which has debts of more than \$1 billion, said in a statement that its creditors would inject up to \$218 million of "immediate funding support" into the airline.

Its shares soared 13 percent in Mumbai. Indian media reports said that Goyal's stake in Jet will fall to half the current 51 percent. The statement said it would also issue 11.4 million new shares.

The Mumbai-based carrier, which until turbulence recently was India's second biggest airline, has been forced to ground three-quarters of its 119-aircraft fleet.

This is because it was unable to pay aircraft lessors. Its pilots have also complained of delays in receiving their salaries, while the firm also defaulted on loan payments. Thousands of customers have been stranded in recent weeks after hundreds of flights were cancelled, in some cases with little or no notice.

Jet, founded by Goyal in 1993, employs more than 20,000 people. A collapse would deal a blow to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pragmatic pro-business reputation ahead of elections starting on April 11.

India's air passenger numbers have rocketed six-fold over the past decade with its middle class taking advantage of better connectivity and cheaper flights. The country's aviation sector is projected to become the world's third-largest by 2025. — AFP

Business

NBK to sponsor 'The Dynamics of Disruption' discussion forum

Forum to be held on April 9th by IBS

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced that it is sponsoring "The Dynamics of Disruption" discussion forum on April 9, 2019 led by IMD Professor of Innovation and Strategy, Michael Wade. NBK's sponsorship of this event is part of its efforts to effectively contribute to increasing awareness and knowledge to all segments of the society.

The discussion forum, organized by the Institute of Banking Studies, will be held at Symphony Style Hotel. Several key topics will be discussed, including the strategic advantage through business agility and linking strategy to execution.

The session aims at providing participants with a deeper insight into digital business transformation as well as exploring how to drive business value, like revenue, cost savings, profit, market share, and customer satisfaction from digital tools and technologies.

The session will also include how to push your business 'outside your comfort zone', to see what is happening away from your local and regional markets, and to recognize the opportunities and threats of digital disruption.

Michael Wade is the Director of the Global Center for Digital Business Transformation at IMD. He has published nine books, more than one hundred articles, presentations, and case studies, writes a regular column for Fortune on digital dis-



Michael Wade

ruption, and appears frequently in the mainstream media. His latest book is Orchestrating Transformation: How to Deliver Winning Performance with a Connected Approach to Change, published in early 2019.

Michael has been named one of the top ten digital thought leaders in Switzerland from 2016 to 2018. He has been nominated for teaching awards in the MBA, International MBA, and Executive MBA programs. Michael sits on three company boards as a digitally-focused advisor. Prior to joining IMD, he was the Academic Director of the Kellogg-Schulich Executive MBA Program in Canada.

NBK is always proud to support community endeavors like this event as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives aimed towards community learning and development across various areas, including social and educational fields.

Ooredoo Kuwait participates in IDC Security Roadshow

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait participated as a Platinum Partner in the IDC Security Roadshow 2019, which took place at the JW Marriot Hotel Kuwait City last week. The roadshow was hosted by global technology research and consulting firm International Data Corporation (IDC). The event showcased insights from a number of industry-leading entities. Ooredoo's participation reiterates its commitment to enriching the Kuwaiti business community with digital transformation. Chief Business Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait Abdulaziz Al-Babtain and Senior Director Corporate Security at Ooredoo Kuwait, Amadou Ndiaye represented Ooredoo at the event.

Various topics were discussed during the roadshow such as the challenges facing Ooredoo Kuwait in its security strategy and reduction of business risks in parallel with Ooredoo's digital transformation strategy and the utilization of AI, automation, and orchestration and how to effectively combat cyber threats, in addition to showcasing its success and best practices. Discussions included providing essential guidance for the security leaders on the front line and driving their organization's security strategy and working to reduce business risks.

Commenting on the company's participation, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain said: "We're proud to participate in this event, which provides a good opportunity to interact with industry leaders in this field, and provides a constructive platform for exchanging expertise. Security strategy and



reducing business risks is without a doubt one of the main and most important goals, which plays a vital role in the security of organizations. We believe that the Kuwaiti market deserves to have the latest and most advanced and innovative modalities to keep up with international trends of security." Amadou Ndiaye added, "The field of digital transformation and security is evolving significantly and provides basic guidelines for security leaders to reduce risk and push the security strategy to reduce cyber risks. It is with no doubt that digital transformation and security is one of the company's main objectives, which is of great interest because of the vital role played by digital technology in the development of many vital sectors including transportation, health, education, trade and others".

Agility and MIT Media Lab host 'Data Agility' Hackathon

KUWAIT: Agility, a leading global logistics provider, is collaborating with the MIT Media Lab to host a four-day competition that opened Sunday and challenges teams of Kuwaiti tech students, coders and entrepreneurs to solve real-world societal and business problems.

The Data Agility Hackathon will be co-hosted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab, one of the world's pioneering interdisciplinary research laboratories. Experts from the MIT Media Lab are coaching 50 Hackathon participants working in teams of 10 to find ways to crack issues faced by consumers, businesses and the government.

Hackathon competitors will use high-powered tools to analyze data provided by Agility and Kuwait's Public Authority for Civil Information. Among the questions they will examine:

- Can satellite imagery unspool Kuwait's epic morning traffic so we can get to work, school and the airport faster?
- Can predictive analytics ensure that your favorite cosmetics and fashion items are in store when you go shopping?
- How can data science speed online purchases right to your door, faster and more reliably than ever?

Thinkers and representatives from Kuwaiti ministries, universities, businesses, banks, technology innovators, start-up accelerators and foundations also are taking part. The data used by the teams includes satellite imaging, Kuwait traffic information, location-based data, and warehousing and freight data.

Tarek Sultan, Agility CEO & Vice Chairman, said: "The Data Agility Hackathon brings a new generation of Kuwaiti problem-solvers together to learn, grow, and use their skills to improve life. We are trying to foster a collaborative, creative mentality and develop the skills critical to the future of Kuwait and its citizens."

Ryan McCarthy, Director of Member Relations at the MIT Media Lab, said: "Hackathons bring together intellect, creativity and the latest technology tools to address unique regional challenges. We're enthusiastic about bringing our interdisciplinary approach to design, prototyping and problem-solving to this event."

Sunday's opening ceremony featured remarks from U.S. Ambassador Lawrence Silverman; Dr. Youssef Al-Ibrahim, Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of Kuwait Achievers for Future Opportunities (KAFO) Project; and Abdulrahman Al-Otaibi, a Kuwaiti doctoral candidate at the MIT Media Lab. The opening was followed by a panel discussion on the trends and implications of data science,

automation and data privacy. Dr. Al-Ibrahim said: "Following the vision and direction of His Highness the Amir to continue to empower the youth of Kuwait, we initiated KAFO following the national youth project. It is our mission at KAFO to identify young talent and connect them to others so that they can learn and collaborate as part of our role in contributing to the knowledge economy.

We are proud to be part of this advanced program which promotes problem solving through innovation to enable youth in building the future."

Agility has been a member of the MIT Media Lab since 2017. The Data Agility Hackathon is supported by the Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences and KAFO.



Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 24th March 2019 announcing the names of its winners for the week from the 17th March till the 21st March 2019, in which five winners will receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners this week are:

- Reem Haji Ghuloum Hasan
- Noha Al-Sayed Mohamed Hasan
- Sayer Atshaan Ajeel
- Mohammad Sami Saleh Zaabalawi
- Ali Zaid Mustafa Sayed Abbas

The first Gulf Bank Al-Danah's quarterly draw 2019 for the prize of KD 150,000 will be held tomorrow, 27 March 2019, the second quarterly draw 2019 will be held on 26 June 2019, for the prize of KD 250,000, and the third quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 on 25 September 2019. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1,000,000, will be held on 16 January 2020, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced at a live event.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

Burgan Bank appoints Fadel Abdullah as Chief Corporate Banking Officer

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has appointed Fadel Abdullah as Chief Corporate Banking Officer after obtaining the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait as of March 5, 2019. Fadel provides strategic direction and leadership to the corporate banking group including corporate operations, cash management, financial analysis, and projects engineering. Fadel Abdullah will ensure short- and long-term revenue growth and profitability.

Raed Al-Haqhaq, Chief Executive Officer of Burgan Bank -Kuwait said: "I would like to congratulate Mr. Fadel Abdullah on his role as the Chief Corporate Banking Officer. He has served with us for more than two decades and has proven to be an extremely capable leader, and a highly respected figure in our industry. Given his long record of exemplary experience in corporate banking, we are confident he will steer the bank to greater achievements, in line with our strategic vision. I look forward to working with him in this capacity and wish him every success."

"Leveraging my robust expertise and long experience in the corporate banking division, I will strive to maintain the bank's position as one of the leading financial groups in the region," says Fadel Abdullah. "As a progressive financial institution that thrives on new banking solutions, innovation, and specialized banking services to deliver excellence for our customers, I look forward to raising the bar with the duties entrusted to me." Fadel has extensive experience spanning over 25 years in the banking industry. He joined Burgan Bank in 1998 and has held different leadership positions since. He holds a Bachelor of Science majoring in Mathematics from Kuwait University.



Fadel Abdullah

Eskom price hike to cost South Africa 90,000 mining jobs

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's gold and platinum mines will shed around 90,000 jobs in the next three years as above-inflation electricity price increases by power utility Eskom add to already soaring operating costs, an industry body said yesterday.

"In total, as many as 90,222 jobs would be at risk solely as a result of the MYPD4 tariff increases granted by Eskom," the Minerals Council of South Africa said in a presentation.

Job cuts are politically sensitive in Africa's most industrialized economy where a quarter of the labour force is unemployed, while power outages and steep price increases by Eskom are set to hurt an already fragile growth outlook.

In February, miner Sibanye-Stillwater said it planned to cut nearly 6,000 jobs in a restructuring of its gold mining operations, while Gold Fields said last year it could slash 1,100 jobs, and Impala Platinum plans to cut its workforce by a third. Labour unions have threatened strikes over the job cuts at mining firms as well planned reductions at a numerous state-owned companies. — Reuters

What's On

LOYAC volunteers celebrate Mother's Day, distribute roses

Under auspices of the Ahliya Insurance Company, LOYAC recently celebrated Mother's Day by visiting the geriatric care center where LOYAC volunteers distributed roses to mothers and other gifts for senior citizens and staff. In addition, LOYAC volunteers took part in a workshop on designing post cards celebrating the occasion to distribute them to mothers amongst the company staff.

In this regard, LOYAC's social services department manager, Yusra Al-Essa stressed that LOYAC is always keen on commemorating such occasions adding that in addition to distributing gifts to senior women at the geriatric house and female staff members at Al-Ahliya company, LOYAC volunteers also distributed roses and flowers to mothers at the Mubarakiya market.



Symphony Style Kuwait Spa records another intriguing win

Symphony Style Kuwait, A Radisson Collection Hotel collected the "City Hotel Spa of The Year 2019" Award in recognition of its enlivening Six Senses Spa at the second professional beauty GCC awards, which took place at the Intercontinental, Festival City, Dubai. The Exceptional received recognition for its elegant efforts in making a difference within the beauty, spa, hair and nail markets through its remarkably savvy Six Senses Spa.

The contemporary spa has a touch of Kuwait's cultural authenticity, providing a relaxing sense of intimacy in its atmospheric environment, which blends seamlessly with the hotel's thriving flair.

When it comes to wellness, beauty and lifestyle, Symphony Style Kuwait, A Radisson Collection's Six Senses Spa is a hotspot for an outstandingly refreshing experience, in which you will receive an alluring sense of rejuvenation.

The Professional Beauty GCC magazine is the leading business magazine for the beauty, spa and hair industries in the GCC, and its recognition of the Six Senses Spa further cements Symphony Style Kuwait, A Radisson Collection Hotel as an iconic hotspot for a vibrant hospitality experience.



NOTICE

Kuwait Malankara Rite Movement (KMIRM) is a leading association in Kuwait, which will be celebrating Rajathotsav 2019 (Silver Jubilee Harvest Festival and Mega Carnival), a social - cultural extravaganza on April 26, 2019 at Al-Jawahara Tent, Ardiya, Kuwait. The carnival will have many cultural programs, various food courts, games, fun shows and much more. Competitions such as Drawing, Chess, Pet Show, Salad making, payasam preparation, hair styling, short film, pair of India etc. will be open to the public for participation.



American Folk Band to Perform at Abdulhusein Abdulredha Theater

The Public Affairs Section at the US Embassy in Kuwait, in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), is pleased to invite you to attend the performance of Kyle Dillingham and Horseshoe Road on March 28, 2019 at the Abdulhusein Abdulredha Theater from 7 pm to 8 pm. Admission is free. Voted "Best Americana/Folk Band" in the 2016 Oklahoma Gazette Music Awards, Kyle Dillingham and Horseshoe Road's eclectic style rooted in Bluegrass and Western Swing is sure to inspire. Till date, the band has represented America internationally across 37 countries, energizing audiences worldwide.

Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa opens Dar Messilah Sheesha Lounge

Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa invites guests to spend their evenings at the newly opened Dar Messilah Sheesha Lounge. Located by the Arabian Sea, the new sheesha lounge offers a perfect setting for guests to relax and indulge in a laid-back atmosphere while enjoying authentic Arabic music and a variety of flavor some sheesha with family and friends.

Unwind and enjoy a breath-taking evening at Dar Messilah Lounge lined by the sparkling Arabian Gulf in the

distance, while listening to the soothing melody of the dancing waves. Along with their unique flavored sheesha varieties, guests can indulge in delectable bites including mezzeh, shawarmas and delicious zaatar wraps with fabulous drinks and unobstructed views of the Arabian Sea.

Director of Sales and Marketing, Georges Akar said: "With the launch of Dar Messilah Sheesha Lounge, we want to provide our valued guests a perfect Arabian ambience experience with authentic Arabic music, delicious arrays of sheesha flavors to explore, as well as the cozy bonfire setting by the Arabian Gulf to spend their evenings in a relaxed environment with family and friends. We are always looking at ways to elevate our entertainment offerings to cater to our guests' needs. We are confident that this new outlet will exceed our guests' expectations by offering a unique experience to explore on the beach." Dar Messilah is now open from 4PM to midnight every day for everyone to enjoy in the lovely outdoors weather.



CBK celebrates Mother's Day

Within its social activities and role in enhancing team work spirit amongst its staff members, The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently celebrated Mother's Day with its female

employees who were all given roses and special gifts on the occasion. In this regard, CBK's deputy director for corporate communication, Amani Al-Wer'a said that the celebration came to reflect the one family spirit and to emphasize CBK's appreciation to the efforts exerted by female employees who, at the same time, manage to take very good care of their children and families.



Agua Park and Flow House reopens

The Aqua Park is scheduled to reopen for visitors next Thursday following new renovations and adding branches of international restaurants to it. In this regard, the park's manager and member of board of directors, Mohammed Khorsheed said that the company would provide unique offers for the first time to compete with international rivals through developing its facilities and the services it offers to visitors. Khorsheed added that various surprises and competitions will be offered for visitors.

Meanwhile, Flow House CEO, Hamad Al-Khenaini announced that Flow House would also open for visitors and surfing lovers on the same day after developing

the city facilities and hiring new local and international trainers.

Al-Khenaini added that the opening day would include various entertaining games for all ages in the presence of iconic sportsmen, social media icons and artists.

Notably, Flow House is a separate city with a special gate besides the Aqua Park.



KIB celebrates Mother's Day

As part of its ongoing commitment to participate in social occasions and events in the local community, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently celebrated Mother's Day with visitors amidst a fun-filled atmosphere of joy and happiness, in cooperation with Murouj Complex.

The Mother's Day celebration featured a number of fun and entertaining activities organized by a team of KIB employees in cooperation with Murouj Complex. The team also distributed flowers amongst children, who were encouraged to gift them to their mothers as a small token of their love and appreciation for their hard work and limitless love. Additionally, children at the Complex participated in various games and fun activities.

On this special occasion, Nawaf Najia, Senior Manager of the Corporate

Communications Unit at KIB, said: "As part of our strong commitment to participating in community-based events, we always strive to organize initiatives and activities that reflect our key role in the local community. These occasions present us with the perfect opportunity to show our support for diverse segments of the community."

Najia added that, through this event, KIB aims at showcasing its thanks and appreciation to every woman and mother, as they nurture youth to become the nation's future leaders; thereby reaffirming their pivotal role in everyone's life and the community as a whole.

It is worth noting that, as part of its leading social responsibility program, KIB always strives to participate in and organize initiatives and events which aim at supporting various segments of the local community. As a core component of its internal culture, the Bank is strongly committed to its social duty, not only as a national financial institution, but also as an integral member of the community it operates in.



Indian embassy in Kuwait organizes Best of Indian Healthcare Expo 2019

KUWAIT: A two-day exhibition, 'Best of Indian Healthcare Expo 2019' was organized by the Embassy of India in Kuwait, in association with the Indian Doctors' Forum (IDF), Kuwait Medical Association (KMA), Indian Business and Professional Council (IBPC) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), on 17-18 March, at Hotel Radisson Blu, Kuwait. The exhibition witnessed participation of over 20 exhibitors, including leading Indian hospitals and healthcare centers, alternative healthcare providers, wellness centers and prominent medical travel planners from various parts of India, showcasing India's finest healthcare advancements.

The exhibition was officially inaugurated by Dr Mustafa Mohammad Ridha, Undersecretary, Ministry of Health, and Dr Ahmad Thuwaini AlEnizi, President, Kuwait Medical Association. During an impressive inaugural ceremony, Ambassador of India to Kuwait K Jeeva Sagar welcomed the distinguished guests comprising officials from various ministries and departments of the Government of Kuwait, Kuwaiti medical and business fraternities, diplomats and several representatives of the Indian Community in Kuwait.

During the inauguration, Dr Ridha, accompanied by the Ambassador of India and other dignitaries, interacted with the exhibitors at the event. The ambassador said that he was motivated by the human dimension of the health services, which have the potential to deepen

and strengthen further the goodwill between the people of the two countries, for organizing this event.

Speaking at the event, Dr Ridha congratulated the Embassy of India for taking this important initiative of hosting the 'Best of Indian Healthcare Expo' that offered a very good opportunity for the Kuwaiti medical fraternity for networking, exchanging ideas and familiarizing themselves with the impressive advances made in healthcare domain by India. Extolling the excellent skills and expertise of Indian doctors and the world class standards achieved by the Indian healthcare services providers, Dr Ridha added that the people of Kuwait, through this event, were able to get a direct glimpse of a wide range of finest solutions available in India to meet their medical issues.

In his address on the occasion, Dr Al-Enizi, reflected on his own encounters with the extensive knowledge and experience of Indian doctors working in Kuwait, and expressed the hope that the Expo would open another bridge of cooperation between the two friendly countries.

The keynote address of the evening was delivered by Prof Srinath Reddy, an eminent cardiologist of global repute and President of Public Health Foundation of India, who spoke about the advancements in Indian healthcare and its extensive comparative advantages, including high accuracy diagnosis, modern technology-based pathology lab facilities,



robotic interventions, absence of health insurance impediments etc.

The exhibition, which was open to the public on March 17 and 18, 2019 from 10 am to 9 pm, generated a tremendous response, with hundreds of people from different walks of life attending the exhibition and utilizing the unique opportunity to witness first-hand the

quality of Indian healthcare that was on display, and also to personally interact with some of India's top doctors and healthcare providers. The visitors engaged in productive one-on-one discussions with the Indian healthcare professionals and many of them expressed keen desire to benefit from the advanced healthcare services on offer in India.

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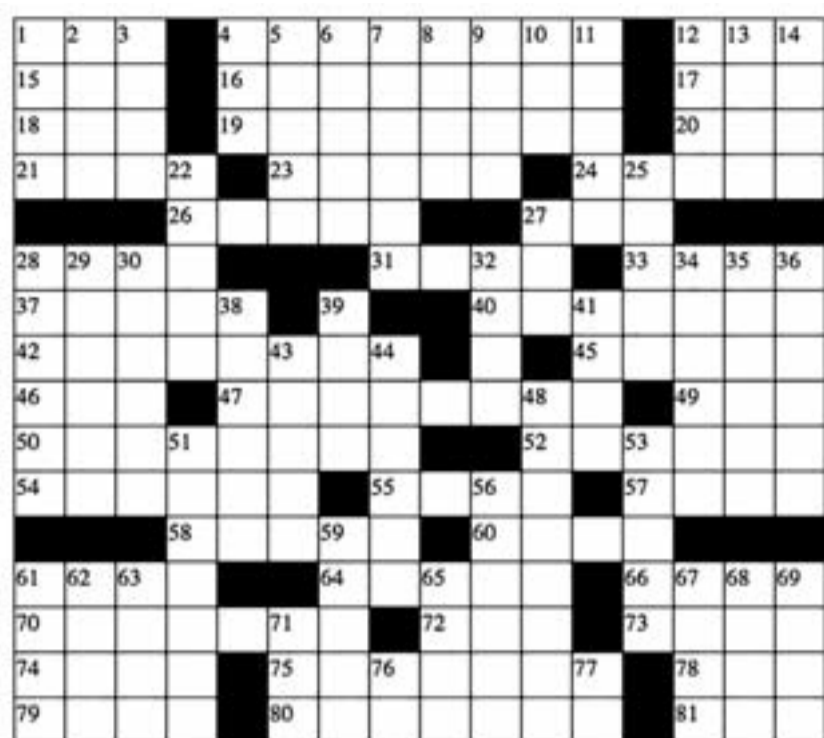
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- ACROSS**
- Annual grass of Europe and North Africa.
 - Political propaganda (especially Communist propaganda) communicated via art and literature and cinema.
 - (computer science) A computer that is running software that allows users to leave messages and access information of general interest.
 - 100 pyas equal 1 kyat.
 - An imaginary line or standard by which things are measured or compared.
 - Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to the but larger than a mouse.
 - The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
 - Someone who pays for goods or services.
 - A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 - A wad of something chewable as tobacco.
 - An important god.
 - A roll of tobacco for smoking.
 - A minor Hebrew prophet (8th century BC).
 - An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
 - A slender double-reed instrument.
 - A short piece remaining on a trunk or stem where a branch is lost.
 - Sour or bitter in taste.
 - Extremely large tree-like cactus of desert regions of southwestern United States having a thick columnar sparsely branched trunk bearing white flowers and edible red pulpy fruit.
 - Pounded or hit repeatedly by storms or adversities.
 - Turned or twisted toward one side.
 - Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
 - The central body of an airplane that is designed to accommodate the crew and passengers (or cargo).
 - Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment.
 - A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Lodine).
 - On the contrary.
 - English composer (1862-1934).
 - Capital and largest city and economic center of Peru.
 - Characterized by lightness and insubstantiality.
 - Wild or domesticated South American cud-chewing animal related to camels but smaller and lacking a hump.
 - Again but in a new or different way.
 - (Akkadian) Father of the gods and consort of Tiamat.
 - A grant made by a law court.
 - A branch of the Tai languages.
 - Of or relating to a creed.
 - An informal term for a father.
 - Tropical starchy tuberous root.
 - A mountain lake (especially one formed by glaciers).
 - A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
 - Gone by.
 - A flat tortilla with various fillings piled on it.
 - The habitation of wild animals.
- DOWN**
- An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
 - An Indian nursemaid who looks after children.
 - A village in eastern Ireland (northwest of Dublin).
 - The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
 - A unit of magnetic flux density equal to 1 maxwell per square centimeter.
 - An important question that is in dispute and must be settled.
 - Type genus of the Tetraonidae.
 - An opening remark intended to secure an advantage for the speaker.
 - A narrow elongated opening or fissure between two symmetrical parts.
 - Used of a single unit or thing.
 - Type genus of the Percidae.
 - (informal) Exceptionally good.
 - A small cake leavened with yeast.
 - Indicating the most important performer or role.
 - A platform built out from the shore into the water and supported by piles.
 - A battle between the successors of Alexander the Great (301 BC).
 - A unit of length of thread or yarn.
 - Ending in a sharp point.
 - Make a fool or dupe of.
 - A law passed by US Congress to prevent employees from being injured or contracting diseases in the course of their employment.
 - Flightless New Zealand birds similar to gallinules.
 - Either of a pair of thick-walled tubes that carry urine from the kidney to the urinary bladder.
 - Like a bower.
 - Spot, stain, or pollute.
 - Flat tableland with steep edges.
 - (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
 - A major city of northeastern Oklahoma on the Arkansas river.
 - Remove the claws from (a cat).
 - The father of your father or mother.
 - A diluting agent.
 - (Scot) A leather strap for punishing children.
 - A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
 - Celebes megapode that lays eggs in holes in sandy beaches.
 - The fleshy part of the human body that you sit on.
 - (used especially of vegetation) Having lost all moisture.
 - A nearly horizontal passage from the surface into a mine.
 - (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
 - At or constituting a border or edge.
 - An unstable meson produced as the result of a high-energy particle collision.
 - (usually followed by 'to') Naturally disposed toward.
 - An honorary degree in science.
 - A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

On your birthday today you may feel as if you're flying by the seat of your britches. What you've loved and thought of as the way to do something before takes a drastic change and is put into process by you. Someone who generally agrees with you doesn't which hurts your feelings. An argument could happen if you don't keep emotions under control. Remember that people standing on the sidelines don't really know who the stupid one is when two people argue. Though your temper can show, keep it under wraps. Have your family, friends and other loved ones close because you need them now for emotional support. Try to enjoy times with those who give you that added oomph when you're in your happy part of life.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Unexpectedly your emotions take an emotional turn. You're bombarded with wanting to be independent and doing whatever in a different manner. People aren't used to change ordinarily especially at work. They like the tried and true. You get your feelings hurt when you're not thought of as the great guru right away and arguments may ensue. Workmates and loved ones know you normally make sound decisions. Give them a minute to sort it out. They usually come around to your point of view. Moreover, today you need your loved ones to express their love for you often.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

People with whom you speak today should be taken with a grain of salt. You find yourself getting upset from some supposed inuendo given by someone for whom you care. That can start the day off badly to begin with but allowing it to fester can have worse implications than confronting the situation a little more gently than you really want to do. You woke up feeling that anything is possible today and you're right. Allow that feeling to stay with you and build upon it at work and at home. Otherwise there is much ado about nothing and you've taken valuable time away from achieving your goal.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

The sky's not the limit either is your philosophy now. You seek out others to discuss the possibilities for earning what you so passionately seek, material success. You want to share with others and learn too. That is the forum you're creating at work and more now. Others want to share your enthusiasm too and of course reap the rewards as well. This is a feel-good time that makes you proud to be alive and able to accomplish your desires. People are at the root of all you do. You're smart enough to know that you can make the life you desire only with the help of others.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

The weekend revived you. You feel as if you're ready to tackle the world. You're optimistic about work and more. You feel good and have the energy to march forward in life. You're restless where your love life is concerned. You want to get on with it. Never mind the waiting, you know what you want and you want it now. You feel as if you're in control of all that happens to you and you can manage incidents that may not be ideal later when they raise their ugly little heads. Generally, that isn't a good idea. Let your practical mind lead you should be what you're thinking of but it's not.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You're full of optimism and faith that anything you do now will work to make your current situation and your future better. You know anything is possible. That's a good place to be. Just be careful you're not rushing into events that you may wish you'd not endeavored tomorrow. Give it a chance to sit and reflect before putting actions into conception. Try to be thoughtful in your love life especially since that's been a source of unhappiness for the last few days. Take actions of another with a grain of salt here if at all possible.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Emotional support comes from those you love. You feel an urge to try anything new and unusual just for the heck of it. You want new emotional experiences as well. That sets up a whole new set of dominoes for you. Anything pretty to the eye is what you crave now, not just for being told you have a beautiful home but because you feel you need to surround yourself with things that make you happy. It's good to be a little selfish now. If you don't spend all you make, which you generally don't do, then you may find yourself creating ways to make and invest more money. This is really a good time for you.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You're optimistic and take chances now on a deeply emotional state. You want to believe that people you love are truthful and have your best interest at heart. Generally, they do. You're optimistic and faithful in your beliefs and look to the core of your being for answers. Things in the mundane world are back at work for you just as they were last week. Opportunities abound and give you the chance of doing better where material gain is concerned, even though you might feel just a tad frustrated. Work helps you feel better and more in control of your life. It's a time to think and act slowly.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You've had your rest yesterday and you're back at work with a vengeance. Moreover, your business associates are right there with you ready to go. That's because you're making their work exciting too. Today you may try something you're generally resistant to doing and that's using material you think is unconventional. From the success you've been having you won't have to work hard to convince those working with you. Your confidence makes you assertive and you have people on board almost before you've laid out your plans.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You're at war with your own self. Your feelings have you running from "I can do this to no, I can't." The "I can," will win out though because you want a change of pace in your life. You can't stay dormant for very long. Either you want to change jobs or home. Perhaps travel is better because you get to keep both your necessities intact and pay for your seeing bigger and better things. That's a good part of life to have. Get off the stump and make your decision. You'll feel better for having done it.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Friends and family feel the need to be near you now. Be grateful and enjoy your time with them though you're in the middle of thinking about yourself. Really taking care of yourself has been playing at the corners of your mind for some time and has finally made you think that you need to do some work on you such as diet and exercise. Decide how you want to do this in a logical and practical manner. After all, if you don't think the work is done correctly you won't work at it. Do you want to lose weight or are you concerned about how you eat? Today's the day to make that decision and proceed.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Don't take chances at work right now. Use the tried and true method. Try to be patient and let this day pass without incident. You're not in the mood to give in easily to anyone today after yesterday's debacle. But that was then, this is now. Let bygones be just that. You allow others to control your life when you give into emotional garbage. Remember not everyone agrees with all you do. Furthermore, you feel the same way about others. Try to relax and enjoy the rest of this day. It's spring.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Air Flight - Word Search

B G O L R F T B L S L O R T N O C
 B N S D N L L I S Q P F I X M I Z
 Y I T E E I F Y F U S E L A G E X
 V D R D F E N L I T V U J P C A S
 N N I U Q S P S S N T S T N I G K
 W A M T W R N S T P G I E R N Y P
 A L T I M E T E R R A L P I I R B
 I R A T L L P F U I U L W K O B C
 L U B L P I F L K B A M F P C T U
 E D S A L O U I R N O N E L W O Q
 R D S O E P B U E Z L L U N I N C
 O E T K H S T J X K L U M R T A W
 N R A A S S L A D E P K A P I S T
 S T R U T S W F R E R U S S E R P

- AILERONS** **INSTRUMENTS** **TAIL FLAPS**
AIRPLANE **LANDING** **TAKEOFF**
AIRSPEED **PEDALS** **TRIM TABS**
ALTIMETER **PILOT** **TURBULENCE**
ALTITUDE **PRESSURE** **WINGS**
COCKPIT **PROPELLER**
CONTROLS **RUDDER**
FLYING **SPOILERS**

Yesterday's Solution

Adverbs 2 - Solution

Q W N H L S U S O N N L R H D D P
 L U N I L L E W Y A M O E G N R H
 I H W E A E A M D Y J U W I I J U
 I I O Y A G V R I L E D O H H F X
 M F N M Y R A H Y T L L R S E I Y
 C Z T Y E W L L K F E Y Z S B R O
 A P J V R Q W Y N O D M L I U S E
 A D E O S O C A Y S O Z O E H T F
 K N E H L V L K E E W Y H S R B X
 Q X O S F R O F T E N X P D W A L
 P R E S E N T L Y G W N W I D Y R
 T I P A E V N O Z U A E Q J O Y M
 T N D F Q U I T E R R K H T H B C
 R Y L T N E G Y B X D U N G Q W O

- AGAIN** **LOUDLY** **SLOWLY**
ALREADY **NEARLY** **SOFTLY**
BEHIND **NEVER** **SOMETIMES**
DOWNWARD **NOWHERE** **WEEKLY**
FIRST **OFTEN** **WELL**
FORWARD **PRESENTLY**
GENTLY **QUITE**
HIGH **RARELY**

Yesterday's Solution

A N A D A M N A B L E C O P
 C E R I B S E N I A N A P E
 T W I G G Y W I N C E C A B
 S T A R R G E L D A K H A
 O A S I S I M A G E
 O C C U P A N T N A B A L U S
 R H A P H E A G L E T N E
 A I R K Y A T S T E L L A
 C L I M B E P H A A I N
 L O B A R A R A V A S I K A
 E E N O A H R E H E A T E D
 I D U N R A L L Y
 S C R A G G Y R B O A A D
 I A A H O O K U P D I R C A
 A F T A L D E H Y D E A I D
 L E E M A H A R A J A F D A

Daily Sudoku

	7		3	5				
					1			
2			1	5				9
5			2	8				1
	8				2			
1		9	7					3
7			1	5				6
	2							
		4	2					8

Yesterday's Solution

4	7	8	1	2	5	6	3	9
6	3	1	9	8	7	2	4	5
5	2	9	4	3	6	8	1	7
8	5	2	3	4	9	1	7	6
9	6	7	5	1	8	3	2	4
3	1	4	7	6	2	5	9	8
2	9	5	6	7	1	4	8	3
1	4	6	8	9	3	7	5	2
7	8	3	2	5	4	9	6	1

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2019



A waiter is pictured as he works in a restaurant in Tokyo's Yurakucho district yesterday. — AFP

Desert truffles are Libya's 'manna from heaven'

Braving the cold and hostile Libyan desert, Milad Mohammed scratches the ground to extract what he calls "manna from heaven" — white truffles coveted as a delicacy at home and abroad. The fungus known locally as "Terfas" is the only thing, besides some wild grass, that grows under the desert sands nurtured by the combined effect of rain and cold temperatures at night.

They have been consumed since Roman times for their delicate taste as well as their nutritious and medical properties, and are sold to Gulf countries as a luxury food item. Mohammed harvests the white truffle as a hobby and each year before springtime he treks through the desert region of Al-Hamada Al-Hamra, southwest of Tripoli, to look for them.

"I don't earn my living from this. It's a passion," says Mohammed, in his 60s, a retired civil servant from the

western city of Zintan. "It's like a therapy, a way to purify myself from the chaos of the city," he adds as he takes a drag from a cigarette outside a tent he pitched in the desert after a day's work. "It's a beautiful place, and rough, and you feel so isolated here," says Mohammed. For hours he wanders across the desert by foot or in his pickup truck, covering dozens of kilometers and stopping at several spots to scratch the sand with his hands or a cane in search of white truffles. Usually they are buried deep underground.

Digging with bare hands

"There is nothing more satisfying than to use your bare hands to dig into the sand and extract these delicious truffles," says Mohammed. "They're manna from heaven." But searching for this white gold in the oil-rich North African country that descended into chaos after the fall of veteran



dictator Moamer Kadhafi in the 2011 NATO-backed uprising is no easy task.

Libya has been gripped by unrest since the revolt, with various groups vying for control of its oil wealth and cities, while the desert has become a hornet's nest for jihadists and criminal gangs. Unlike hunters of black truffles, who use dogs or hogs to search for the prized mushroom, Mohammed only trusts his eyes to spot the place where they grow. According to him, white truffles — scientifically known to provide a rich source of protein — have health benefits and their juice is used to treat eye diseases. But truffles are also in great demand in Gulf markets.

Buyers and sellers

Over the past few years the price per kilo of white truffles tripled to 130 dinars (\$33), a merchant said, as harvesting the fungus became more difficult due to Libya's unrest and unfavorable weather conditions. This year the harvest was good thanks to abundant rain but that meant that the cost per kilo dropped to 80 dinars.

Wholesale transactions often take place at a tent erected on a road near Zintan that leads to Al-Hamada Al-

Hamra. It is there that pickers like Mohammed and Khaled Abdelwahed go to sell the truffles they found in the desert. "We endured very cold weather but the merchant is offering us a fraction of the price," says Abdelwahed, as he tried to negotiate a good deal for the eight kilos of truffles he collected after four nights spent in the desert. "The merchant's making a better profit than us, and all that time he keeps warm in his tent" while truffle pickers do all the hard work, he says.

The buyer Khalifa Al-Sahraoui, a merchant from neighboring Algeria who travels to Libya each year for truffle season between November and March, disagrees. "We buy the truffles and sell them to other merchants," he says. Abdallah Miloud, another truffle merchant, says the harvest is sold to middlemen who in turn "sell them to clients abroad". The Libyan white truffle is "of excellent quality" and "prized in Gulf countries", he adds. There are no official figures for the export of Libyan truffles but according to Miloud, revenues from sales have "rescued several families" from financial hardship. — AFP



Milad Mohammed, a Truffle hunter, holds up a white truffle.



Milad Mohammed, a Truffle hunter, searches for white truffles, known locally as "Terfas", in Al-Hamada Al-Hamra desert, in Libya's western Nalut province. — AFP photos





China
Fashion Week



Models display the creations from the "Sheguang Hu" collection by Hu Sheguang during the China Fashion Week in Beijing yesterday. — AFP photos



'Game of Thrones' season 8 to premiere exclusively on OSN

Winter has officially come to the Middle East as the most anticipated TV season of all time - the eighth and final season of Game of Thrones - premieres exclusively on OSN, the region's leading entertainment network. The wait for the

final season may feel longer than a winter in Westeros, but the end is in sight and Season 8 promises to be an epic and thrilling conclusion to the most successful global television fantasy series in history.

The new season of HBO's epic series will

air weekly on OSN Series First HD at 10pm (KSA), starting Monday 15 April with English and Arabic subtitles. GoT's most dedicated fans can avoid the spoilers and watch the latest episodes at the same minute as the US, anywhere and on any device through OSN Play and On Demand from 4am (KSA), Monday 15 April.

For newcomers who don't know a Targaryen from a Tully, or the die-hard Thrones fan wanting to relive the drama ahead of the new season, every battle, betrayal and brutality in Westeros from seasons one to seven are available for catch up with OSN Play and On Demand, or on the brand new OSN Binge Channel from 1 April.

OSN is also marking the arrival of season 8 with an exciting social media competition calling on the region's fandom to unleash their creativity. From fashion or design to baking, braiding or painting, use your talents to show your love for the Throne. Simply share an image or a video of your GoT inspired creations with #OSNGoTTheThrone on Twitter



until April 15. Entries will be shared on www.osn.com/en-ae/game-of-thrones/competition, where the post with the most votes will win a GoT trip of a lifetime.

Preceded only by live cricket, GoT is the most viewed show of all time on OSN Play. It is also the most highly consumed TV series on OSN on Demand. This April, exclusively on

OSN, find out who will take their seat on the Iron Throne, and revel in the war, intrigue, love and dragons as the battle between the living and the dead finally begins.

Lifestyle | Features



X-cite launches Blueair's state-of-the-art intelligent range of in-car air purifiers

Never ceasing to amaze its customers with the best in class electronics and latest technologies, X-cite by Alghanim Electronics, Kuwait's largest electronic retailer, announced the launch of state-of-the-art in-car air purifiers from Blueair, which were developed after research has shown that in-car air quality contains up to 100% more PM2.5, ultrafine particles harmful to human health, than the roadside air.

At a press event held outside the Al Rai showroom on March 20th, 2019, senior representatives from X-cite and Blueair introduced the revolutionary Blueair Cabin Air purifier for the first time in Kuwait. The newly launched in-car air purifier guarantees everyone in the vehicle is breathing air free from city smog and harmful substances. The Blueair team demonstrated the effectiveness and advantages of using the new cabin air purifier, which cleaned the air inside the displayed Honda cars in less than just six minutes.

"We are thrilled to launch Blueair's innovative in-car air purifiers in our showrooms and online shopping platform, which comes as a sheer reflection of X-cite's commitment to meeting customers' needs for clean air in cars and providing them with products that will undoubtedly add value to their lives", said Bassil Kaddoura, Senior Marketing Manager at X-Cite by Alghanim Electronics.

According to an article published in Kuwait Times on Feb 2, 2019, Kuwait recorded the highest air pollution score of 301 on the air quality index AQI, which measures



the level of air pollution. Inefficient and polluting forms of energy and transport systems contribute to air pollution, which remains one of the biggest public health concerns in Kuwait and internationally.

"Air quality inside cars can be much worse than on the street, thanks to a combination of exhaust emissions from one's own vehicle as well as from other vehicles, as well as particles from tires and road wear products that enter through ventilation and air-conditioning systems," said TR Ganesh, General Manager, Blueair Middle East. "With its high-performance technology, Cabin car air purifier will offer Kuwait's residents peace of mind that 99.97% of these impurities are being filtered out."

Given the long hours spent driving, a staggering 72% of consumers are worried about the impact the air circulating inside their cars may have on themselves and their families. The same number, 72% of people asked, also said that they are aware of the negative health effects of breathing polluted air, reveals a survey carried out for Blueair by independent UK research firm Bonamy Finch.

Last year, US scientists found that levels of soot and chemicals inside cars were twice as high as those measured by roadside detectors. A few months ago, scientists at London Metropolitan University revealed that car air-conditioning systems can function as breeding grounds for bacteria. Additionally, the seats, fabric, carpet and other crevices can become home over time to pollutants and allergens, all of which might result in significant allergic reactions and health discomfort. The United Nations warned earlier this year that more than 80 per cent of people living in urban areas are exposed to air quality levels that exceed World Health Organization guidelines and are at risk respiratory diseases and other long-term health problems.

Blueair intelligent appliance with integrated sensors, Bluetooth and Blueair Friend compatible, can be easily installed and is equipped with Blueair's pioneering HEPA Silent(tm) technology, which filters out at least 99.97% of airborne pollutants such as PM2.5, car exhausts, road wear, smoke, dust, soot, sand, pollen, bacteria and viruses as small as 0.1 micron in size. Sustainably designed for

highest road safety, the Cabin P1/i is available for cars, trucks and other road vehicles. With its sustainable Swedish design and whisper-silent technology, the new range upgrades consumers' lives in more ways than one.

Through its customer-centric concept, X-cite offers customers competitive quality and prices to serve every segment, providing them with the highest level of service, engaging with them, and earning their trust through supporting services and offerings. X-cite also enable customers to shop from the comfort of their homes through its free mobile app and shopping website at www.xcite.com

X-cite has established itself as a leading brand in providing the latest products to customers as it continues to build strong relations with international brands in the electronics sector. Continuously seeking to satisfy the needs of its customers, X-cite provides them with diverse services that enable customers to experience products and interact with them, and the service of buy online and pick the product in store, whether in their 27 showrooms or through the website, designed to make online shopping a fast and easy experience. X-cite also offers premium maintenance and purchase services at most of its major showrooms throughout Kuwait and other services such as free delivery and X-care packages.

No quiet rules at Indonesia's flyover library

Singing and laughter briefly drown out the roar of cars under a Jakarta flyover, where an unlikely library for kids is thriving despite choking fumes — and opposition from menacing gangsters. There's no quiet rule at this open-air reading park wedged between two lanes of traffic just outside Indonesia's capital, a city of some 30 million that is notorious for having some of the world's worst traffic jams.

panied by choking exhaust fumes. Several years ago, the flyover in suburb Ciputat, part of Jakarta's greater metropolitan area, was strewn with rubbish and roamed by intimidating street thugs, Febrianti said. But armed with books and paint, local organisations set about transforming its down-and-out reputation.

Artists painted murals on the walls, installed planter boxes and a futsal pitch, and a library with several dozen

ers," she added, referring to cheap and ubiquitous minivans that provide public transport. Winning over parents afraid that their children would be kidnapped or hit by a car was no mean feat, either.

'Smell, rubbish, loud noises'

But eventually, parents — and even the street gangs — warmed to the idea. Today, it's not uncommon to see up to 70 kids attending after-school sessions, where they read stories with teachers, get help with homework, or sing and dance on concrete covered with green Astroturf. Bookshelves are stuffed with hand-me-down kids books and some other less likely titles such as "Accounting" and "Glossary of Marketing Terms".

Emilia Clara, an 11-year-old student, said she liked reading stories, especially fairytales, with friends. "It makes me happy and it's exciting," she told AFP in a brief interview, before rushing back to join the other kids. And it has won over parents like Salmih Usia, a 41-year-old mother of two. "This is a great place for learning, creating and playing," she said. Free reading gardens, known as Taman Bacaan, have existed in various forms across Indonesia for several decades. They're often run by NGOs or volunteer associations funded by public and private sector contributions.

Some 80 reading parks have been established this part of the sprawling capital, although there is only one located right below a flyover, Febrianti said. In Hong Kong, a small outdoor library that doubled as a children's playground was set up under a flyover in the bustling city as part of research into how to better use community spaces, according to a report in the South China Morning Post last year.

Back in Indonesia, library volunteers admit the street-side location poses some potential health problems because of the fumes from traffic and the subsequent impact on air quality. "But so far there haven't been any complaints about the smell, rubbish or loud noises," Febrianti said, adding: "We use a sound system, which is quite helpful for us to overcome the (noise) problem." — AFP



Screen grab from Jordan Peele's latest film 'Us'.

Jordan Peele scares, and scores, again with new film 'Us'

With his new film "Us" blasting to an estimated \$70.3 million opening in North American theaters in one of the best launches ever for a horror film, director Jordan Peele has done it again. Website BoxOfficeMojo called the film's three-day ticket sales "mind-blowing." The Universal production, which stars Lupita Nyong'o, Winston Duke and Elisabeth Moss in the story of a family that encounters horrifying versions of themselves, had the second-best launch of the year, trailing only blockbuster "Captain Marvel," according to industry watcher Exhibitor Relations.

Peele had impressed Hollywood with his first production, "Get Out," another horror film with heavy social commentary that won an Oscar as Best Original Screenplay and was the 10th most profitable film of 2017. The new film has a 94 percent rating on Rotten Tomatoes, rare praise for a horror flick. "Us" pushed Disney's "Captain Marvel" down to second place, at \$35 million for the weekend, but that female-led blockbuster had little to complain about. With Brie Larson starring as a former fighter pilot with superpowers, the film has taken in a combined \$910 million at home and abroad.

In third spot was Paramount's animation "Wonder Park," at \$9 million. The film, about an amusement park based on a young girl's imaginings, is voiced by Brianna Denski, Jennifer Garner, Matthew Broderick and John Oliver. Fourth spot went to CBS/Lionsgate's teen drama "Five Feet Apart," at \$8.8 million. It stars Haley Lu Richardson and Cole Sprouse as teens who fall in love but must keep their distance while being treated for cystic fibrosis. And in fifth was "How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World," at \$6.5 million. It tells the story of young Hiccup and his dragon Toothless on a quest for a dragon utopia. Jay Baruchel, America Ferrera and Cate Blanchett provide the voices.

Rounding out the weekend's top 10 were:
 "A Madea Family Funeral" (\$4.5 million)
 "Gloria Bell" (\$1.8 million)
 "No Manches Frida 2" (\$1.8 million)
 "The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part" (\$1.1 million)
 "Alita: Battle Angel" (\$1 million) — AFP



This photo taken in Tangerang, Banten province on February 10, 2019 shows Indonesian children attending a program at the under bridge library called "TBM Kolong". — AFP photos

Despite its unlikely location, the Taman Baca Masyarakat Kolong has been a hit. A shortage of public libraries means it's one of the few places where kids from this area can read books outside school. "We wanted to bring books closer to the community," Devina Febrianti, a library coordinator, told AFP as car horns blared accom-

panied by choking exhaust fumes. Several years ago, the flyover in suburb Ciputat, part of Jakarta's greater metropolitan area, was strewn with rubbish and roamed by intimidating street thugs, Febrianti said. But armed with books and paint, local organisations set about transforming its down-and-out reputation. Artists painted murals on the walls, installed planter boxes and a futsal pitch, and a library with several dozen



Indonesian children attending a program at the under bridge library called "TBM Kolong".

Lifestyle | Gossip



Ben Affleck has Dunkin' Donuts 'every day'

The 'Triple Frontier' star - who is often spotted carrying a cup of his favorite beverage from the popular US fast food chain - feels like a promoter for the brand as he goes there all the time in Los Angeles. He told Collider: "It's amazing! I have Dunkin Donuts everyday. "It's very weird. I have it every day and people are always like, 'Where is that? Is that near here?' So, I feel like I'm spreading the word." Meanwhile, Ben - who has children Violet, 13, Seraphina, 10, and Samuel, seven, with ex-wife Jennifer Garner - recently admitted alcoholism is a "part

of [his] life" so he is happy to talk about his addiction. The 46-year-old actor says it "doesn't really bother" him to speak about his struggles with alcohol and current sobriety and he feels proud that he has been to rehab and tackled his problem. He said: "It doesn't really bother me to talk about alcoholism and being an alcoholic. "It's part of my life, it's something that I deal with. "It doesn't have to subsume my whole identity and be everything but it is something that you have to work at. "I had a problem and I really want to address it and I take some pride in that. "It's about yourself, your life,

your family... we encounter these kinds of hurdles and we have to deal with them." And he praised his "wonderful" ex-wife Jennifer for being such a "great mom" and support to their three children. He said: "She's wonderful. When somebody's the mother of your kids, they're going to be the most important central person in your life and that's good. Dads are so important to kids, and it's our responsibility to be there for them — to be present, to be mindful, to be attentive, to be part of their lives, to be as in it as moms."

Nikki Bella feels like a 'free spirit' since moving to LA



The 35-year-old professional wrestler recently bought a house in Los Angeles, California, where she has been enjoying several dates with the likes of Artem Chigvinsteve - whom she was paired with on 'Dancing with the Stars' in 2017 - and 'The Bachelorette' star Peter Kraus. And since the move, Nikki - who was formerly engaged to fellow wrestler John Cena before they broke things off just weeks prior to their planned wedding date - has said she has a "new level of excitement" to her life. Speaking in Sunday's season finale of 'Total Bellas', the reality star said: "I just feel like this free spirit. Truly like a butterfly out of her cage. I don't know, I have this new level of excitement. I'm ready to really explore new things and people and just really see what certain chemistries are all about." Meanwhile, in a promotional clip for the episode, Nikki had admitted that despite her efforts to move on from the split with John, she would be devastated to see the WWE star romancing someone else. She confessed to her twin sister Brie Bella: "No matter what, the next time I see him with someone it's going to kill me. I still have a long way to go, but honestly I'm ready for a new me." And the beauty also said she'd relearned the "highs and low of dating" following her new life as a single lady, especially dating in the public eye. She added: "I definitely learned the highs and lows of dating again, oh my goodness - and I did it in front of the world. And I stayed fearless no matter what. That word 'fearless', I keep close to my heart."

Kerry Katona has battled suicidal thoughts



The 38-year-old singer and media personality has said there's been times in her life where "ending it all" seemed like "the easier option", but insisted there's "always another way" to keep on living. Speaking in response to the tragic death of former 'Love Island' star Mike Thalassitis, who took his own life earlier this month, Kerry said: "There have been times in my life where ending it all seemed like the easier option, but there's always another way. It's so hard when young people who have just got into this industry can't handle social media and people's opinions." And Kerry - who has Molly, 17, and Lily-Sue, 16, with ex-husband Brian McFadden, Heidi, 12, and Maxwell, 10, with former spouse Mark Croft, and four-year-old Dylan-Jorge with estranged husband George Kay - says she's now learned how to "love" herself and "accept" her flaws, as she's now "proud" of the way she looks. She added: "You've got to learn to love yourself and accept your flaws. I'm covered in stretch marks, but that's my kid's signatures! I'm proud of them and I'd never change them." Despite her own mental health struggles when it comes to life in the spotlight, Kerry insists she'd "love" to have her own reality show with her children, as she wants to be the next Kris Jenner - who's known for being the matriarch and momager of the Kardashian Jenner family.

Jameela Jamil claims she was once 'punched in the face'



The 33-year-old actress has taken to Twitter to recall a horrific encounter with a stranger, who viciously attacked her when she was 19-years-old after she snubbed his romantic interest, and after living through that experience she now always tells suitors she's not interested in that she has a boyfriend. She wrote: "I once said no thank you to man when I was 19 and didn't have an excuse ... and he punched me in the face. After that whether or not I have a boyfriend, I say I do. Being a woman is truly, constantly scary. It's like existing on thin ice. (sic)" 'The Good Place' star also recalled another guy who became aggressive when she refused to accept his phone number and made threats against her. She added: "Was out at the shops with my

friend. Man ogles me. Man then approaches me to give me his number. I explain I have a boyfriend but thank him for the offer. Man then threatens my career, saying I better remember that I rejected him. And then Shouts at me that I'm low class... (sic)" Jameela told her 735,000 followers that it is her belief that children need to be taught about how to deal with "rejection" so women aren't "dis-respected". She continued: "We need to teach children about rejection, so that we can change the way we see rejection as a society. We need to de-stigmatize it, so that it doesn't feel like the ground is swallowing you up when someone says no, however nicely. This would lessen their need to lash out."

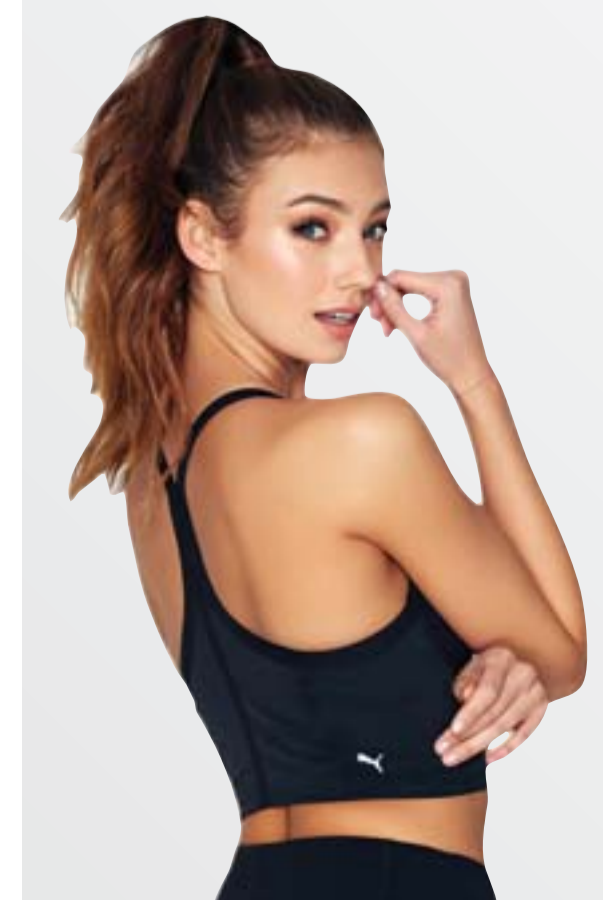
Lorena Rae says Victoria's Secret is an "empowering" brand

The 24-year-old German model - who made her prestigious Victoria's Secret Fashion Show debut last year - loves working with the lingerie giant because they represent a strong "woman". She admitted: "I've always seen VS as a very empowering brand for women, which was a reason I've always dreamed of being a part of it." Lorena also explained that although she loves her modeling career, it can be challenging being away from her family "all of the time". Speaking to Grazia Australia, she said: "The most challenging thing about modeling is definitely being away from your family all the time. Living out of a suitcase mostly makes you feel restless. But on the flip side, I love it. It helps me grow and appreciate the time I actually get to see my family and friends." The blonde beauty - who previously dated Leonardo DiCaprio - stays positive despite a lot of "negative comments" on social media by surrounding herself with friends and family who support her "mentally". She added: "Luckily, I haven't experienced too much attention just yet. Since I share quite a lot of my personal life on social media, there isn't a lot of room for rumors. "But I think it's important to have a lot of people behind you who support you mentally and help you to laugh about these kinds of things because these days it happens easily to each and every single one of us. We take negative comments to heart and we start to be too hard on ourselves."



Ed Sheeran was bullied 'every day' at school

The 28-year-old musician is now a chart-topping superstar, but he has revealed his "quirky" looks as a child made growing up difficult, as he was "instantly ripped into" by his classmates and "cried every day" throughout his school life. He said: "I hated primary school with a passion: I cried every day. I'm ginger so I was instantly ripped into from the day I started school - ginger, had a stutter, and wore huge glasses ...?just a bit odd." The 'Castle on the Hill' hitmaker - who is now married to Cherry Seaborn - beat the bullies by making music, and now doesn't mind the way he looks. He added: "But then as I got older I kind of loved it, I've always kind of looked a bit quirky. I never had much luck with girls and stuff like that, it was always I kind of looked a bit weird." On top of being bullied for his looks, Ed says he wasn't "cool" in school because he "couldn't play sport", and didn't realize his musical talent until he was older. Speaking in an interview with DJ Nihal and rapper Dave for anti-racism campaign group Love Music Hate Racism, he said: "I got to high school, started playing guitar and joined a band. Music is one of those things that can give you confidence, "You're suddenly like 'wow, I can actually do something well'. Before I picked up a guitar I did nothing. "I went to a primary school that was quite sporty and I couldn't play sport. That was how you were cool - if you were good at football you were cool and I wasn't good at football. "But then when I joined high school it was such a melting pot of all different things and I started playing the guitar and suddenly started fitting in." — Bangshowbiz



Rochelle Humes daughters are 'two opposite babies'

The 30-year-old singer and television presenter has daughters Alaia-Mae, five, and Valentina, two, with her husband Marvin Humes, and has said that whilst her eldest child is "so sociable", her youngest needed the help of their new puppy Ginger to bring out her "confident side". She said: "Alaia's very outgoing and so sociable. I've got two opposite babies. The puppy's brought a really confident side out in Valle, though, because she's normally so reserved." And the Saturday's singer wants her daughters to take after her own mother, who worked three jobs to provide for her children and taught her what it meant to be a "really strong woman". Speaking to OK! Magazine, she added: "I've grown up watching my mum raise us on her own, working three jobs, she's a really strong woman. She didn't know any different and those were the cards she had been dealt so she just got on with it. If you want

something, you work for it. That's what I want my kids to know and they definitely do." Meanwhile, Rochelle previously admitted she wants to have a third child and she thinks it would be great to have a son to complete her and Marvin's family. She said: "There was a time when I definitely thought I would only have two children, but now I don't know. I can't imagine not having a tiny baby again. I think I'm always really broody but you've got to stop somewhere. I actually thought I was having a boy when I had Valentina. But I really wanted Alaia to have a sister, so I thought: if we only had two I'd want another little girl. I'd be the type who'd end up with eight girls trying for a boy."

Bodies of Indians and Pakistani killed in N Zealand return home



(Left) The mother Razia and brother Asif Ali of Ansi Alibava, who was killed during the New Zealand mosque attacks, mourn over her body in Kodungallur in Trissur district in the Indian state of Kerala yesterday. (Right) Mourners carry the coffin of Syed Areeb Ahmed, a Pakistani victim of the Al Noor Mosque attack in New Zealand, during his funeral in Karachi yesterday. — AFP



KOCHI/KARACHI: The body of an Indian student killed in the Christchurch mosque attacks was returned yesterday to her grieving family in Kochi, where relatives remembered a bright young woman dedicated to her studies. Masters student Ansi Alibava, 25, was among at least five Indians shot dead by a white supremacist in New Zealand on March 15 and her body was the first of two to be repatriated. Her body arrived at an airport in Kochi in the southern Indian state of Kerala early yesterday where it was received by relatives and government officials.

It was then taken to her nearby hometown of Kodungallur and put on display - her mother Razia and brother Asif Ali weeping over the coffin - before a funeral. "She hails from a poor family and her whole family counted on her. She was a girl who took up the challenge to succeed in life in all adverse circumstances," said K I Noushad, Alibava's uncle. She was praying at the Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch with her husband, Abdul Nazer, when the Australian gunman opened fire on worshippers, killing 43. Another seven were murdered at a separate mosque when the shooter

later turned his weapon on Muslims there in the worst violence of its kind ever seen in New Zealand.

Some families have opted for burials in Christchurch itself, where a national remembrance service for the victims will be held on Friday, two weeks after the tragedy that shocked the world. Alibava started supporting her family after her father died five years ago in Saudi Arabia where he had been working. She took out thousands of dollars in loans to fund her studies in business agriculture at Christchurch's Lincoln University. Alibava's cousin, P H Niyas, told AFP the dedicated student was soon to finish her studies. "She had gone there last year, the course was due to finish by April. There was to be a six-month training (course) after which she was to return home by December," said Niyas.

Alibava also worked part-time at a supermarket with Nazer, who she married two years ago. On March 15, they went to the Al Noor Mosque and sat separately in the men and women's sections. When gunfire broke out, Nazer managed to flee through an emergency exit but his wife did not make it. When he returned to look for her, Nazer found his young wife motionless and face

down, according to Indian media reports. He was officially informed of her death 24 hours after the massacre.

Another Indian family who lost relatives in the attack opted for burial in Christchurch. Father and son Asif Vora and Rameez Vora hailed from Gujarat, in western India, and were visiting family in New Zealand when they were killed. The body of another victim also from Gujarat, Maheboob Khokhar, was expected to arrive late yesterday at Ahmedabad airport. The body was due to be taken to a mosque for prayers and then to a burial ground.

Meanwhile, hundreds gathered to pay their final respects in Karachi yesterday as the remains of one of the Pakistani victims of the Christchurch mosque attacks were laid to rest back home. Syed Areeb Ahmad was one of nine Pakistani nationals murdered in the attack. Ahmad's body was flown into the southern port city of Karachi and transported to a relative's house where family and friends gathered before heading to the cemetery for the burial. "It was very painful for the parents and all of us to wait. His funeral is taking place now that is a bit of relief for us," said Ahmad's uncle Aleemullah

Khan. "But his father is in so much agony as Areeb was his only son and the provider for the family," he added.

The other eight Pakistani victims were buried in New Zealand, according to the Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman. Islamic custom dictates that the dead should be buried within 24 hours, but strained authorities were forced to move carefully with their investigation, delaying funerals by several days in some cases. Ahmad's burial comes days after Pakistani officials posthumously awarded Naeem Rashid - who tried to tackle the gunman before being shot dead - with the order of bravery during Pakistan Day celebrations over the weekend.

During a visit to Islamabad Monday, the EU's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini offered her condolences to the victim's families, while warning against the growing threat of Islamophobia. "It's a threat not only for Muslims but also for our societies because the strength of our societies lies in their diversity and who-ever attacks the diversity of our societies, attacks the entire society, not just one segment of it," Mogherini told a press conference. — AFP

Erdogan moots renaming Hagia Sophia a mosque

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday mooted the possibility of renaming Istanbul's Hagia Sofia museum as a mosque, in comments during a television interview. Asked whether the entrance fee to the city landmark might be waived, he said: "It's not impossible... but we would not do it under the name 'museum' but 'Hagia Sophia mosque'." He added: "Tourists come and go at the Blue Mosque. Do they pay anything? ... Well, we will do the same with the Hagia Sofia."

Erdogan, who is a former mayor of Istanbul, is campaigning for votes for his Justice and Development Party (AKP) ahead of municipal elections on March 31. The former church and mosque, now a museum, often sparks tensions between Christians and Muslims over Islamic activities held there including the reading of verses from the Koran or collective prayers. Its secular status allows believers of all faiths to meditate, reflect or simply enjoy its astonishing architecture.

But calls for it to serve again as a mosque have caused anger among Christians and raised tensions between historic foes Turkey and Greece, both NATO members. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras visited the Hagia Sophia in February. "You can feel the burden of history here," he told AFP. Greece has repeatedly expressed concern over efforts to change the museum's status. But Erdogan raised the issue again after the March 15 shootings in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that killed 50 people.

In speeches he has denounced a passage in the gunman's "manifesto" in which he said the Hagia Sophia would be "liberated" of its minarets. The Hagia Sophia was first built as a church in the sixth century under the Christian Byzantine Empire as the centerpiece of its capital Constantinople, today's Istanbul. Almost immediately after the conquest of Constantinople by the Muslim Ottomans in 1453, it was converted into a mosque before becoming a secular museum in a key reform of the new post-Ottoman Turkish authorities under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in the 1930s. Ataturk was the founder of the Turkish republic.

Since Erdogan's AKP came to power, critics and advocates of secularism fear the government harbours a hidden agenda to reconvert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. But Turkey's top court in September last year rejected an association's demand that the Hagia Sophia be opened for Muslim prayers. — AFP

Trump jubilant after Mueller...

Continued from Page 1

Adding to suggestions that the White House would like to retaliate now that the damaging investigation is over, Trump said "there are people out there who have done very bad things, I would say treasonous things against our country." "We've gone through a period of really bad things happening - those people will certainly be looked at," he said.

"It was a complete and total exoneration," Trump said Sunday in brief comments from Florida, where he'd spent the weekend at his golf resort. "It's a shame that the country had to go through this." That note of anger boosted expectations that Trump and his allies may be seeking retaliation. "Hopefully somebody's going to be looking at the other side," Trump said, referring to investigating the origins of the probe against him.

Conway went further, calling on Democratic congressman Adam Schiff, head of the House Intelligence Committee and one of Trump's most dogged opponents, to resign. And Trump's son Eric echoed a growing outcry on the right of the Republican party by taking aim at the media, demanding a "simple apology" from seven major news organizations, including The New York Times and CNN. On Thursday, Trump will be back on the campaign trail, addressing a rally of his most faithful fans in Michigan - and energy levels will likely go through the roof. "Expect him to come 'off the chain,'" Trump's controversial former strategist Steve

Bannon wrote to The Washington Post.

Despite the relief at the White House, the Mueller probe painted a deeply unflattering picture of the divisive and populist real-estate-tycoon turned politician. The probe established that Russians did try to influence the 2016 election by hacking Democratic party computers and flooding social media with disinformation to harm Trump's rival Hillary Clinton. It also brought new focus on Trump's hidden business dealings with Russians, including a long-running push to build a Trump tower in Moscow, with negotiations continuing right into his election year - despite claims that he had no such links.

And although no collusion was proven, the probe uncovered other crimes, leaving a heavy taint on Trump's inner circle. Mueller issued criminal charges ranging from conspiracy to lying to investigators against 34 individuals. Six of those were former insiders in Trump's circle, and five have been convicted, including Trump's former personal attorney Michael Cohen, his national security advisor Michael Flynn and his campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

Cohen was sentenced to three years in prison for crimes including, at Trump's alleged instruction, using campaign funds for hush payments to an adult film star who allegedly had an affair with Trump. And Manafort was imprisoned for 7.5 years, though mostly for crimes unrelated to the campaign. With only a short summary made public by Barr, pressure is growing from Democrats for the entire probe to be released. However, Barr may declare parts of the report off limits for legal reasons. Senator Lindsey Graham, the Republican head of the judiciary committee, said he would be talking to Barr and "I hope soon to have as much of the report released as possible." — Agencies

Trump signs US recognition of...

Continued from Page 1

He harked back to two previous Middle Eastern wars as the reason why Israel needs to hang on to the Golan. "Just as Israel stood tall in 1967, just as it stood tall in 1973, Israel stands tall today. We hold the high ground and we should never give it up," he said.

The rocket attack near Tel Aviv in central Israel, blamed on Hamas, came as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a pro-Israel group, held its annual meeting in Washington with speaker after speaker expressing US support for strong ties with the country. "We stand with Israel because her cause is our cause, her values are our values, and her fight is our fight," Vice President Mike Pence said. Pence also talked tough against Iran, saying that under Trump, "America will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon."

Netanyahu's strongest election challenger, Benny Gantz, appeared before the gathering yesterday, and vowed to protect his country against threats from Iran and Syria. He called for unity in Israel. "We must remember if that we want hope, we must have unity," he said. With election day approaching, opinion polls put Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's centrist Blue and White party neck and neck.

A security source in Gaza said there had so far been at least six strikes, including five in and around Gaza City and one in southern Gaza between Rafah and Khan Younis. There were so far no reports of any casualties in Gaza. Earlier yesterday, a rocket from Gaza hit a house in Israel in a rare long-distance strike. Israel's army said

the rocket was fired by Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip, from the Rafah area.

A Hamas official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, denied the group was behind the rocket, evoking the possibility it was caused by "bad weather". The official said the same message had been passed to Egypt, which has acted as mediator between Israel and Hamas. But Israel warned of a firm response and announced it was sending two additional brigades to reinforce the Gaza area and carrying out a limited call up of reservists.

Israeli roads near the Gaza Strip were closed and farming activities in the area were halted. Israel also closed its people and goods crossings with the blockaded Gaza Strip and reduced the zone in the Mediterranean it allows for Palestinian fishermen off the enclave, a statement said. The house hit was located in the community of Mishmeret, around 20 km north of Tel Aviv, police said. The rocket would have had to travel some 120 km from Rafah to reach the area. Rocket fire from Gaza at that distance is rare.

The hospital treating the wounded said seven Israelis were injured lightly by burns and shrapnel, including three children. One of the wounded was a six-month-old child and six of them were members of the same British-Israeli family. The house was destroyed in the wake of the rocket and subsequent fire, with burnt wood, a children's toy and other debris piled at the site.

Police spokesman Ami Ben David said air raid sirens wailed at around 5:15 am and the home's residents made their way to a safe room, possibly saving their lives. The rocket crashed through the roof and then exploded when it hit the floor, he said. "I woke up hearing the sound of the explosion," said neighbor Yuval Katz Lass, 18. "People were shocked and panicked." Both Hamas and its ally in Gaza, Islamic Jihad, threatened to respond to Israeli "aggression". — Agencies

Qatar's desert rose museum...

Continued from Page 1

carpet embroidered with 1.5 million Gulf pearls and the oldest Quran yet discovered in Qatar, also dating back to the 1800s. "This is a museum that narrates the story of the people of Qatar," Sheikha Amna bint Abdulaziz bin Jassim Al-Thani, the museum's director, has stated.

The National Museum of Qatar also stands on the site of the former palace of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al-Thani - son of the founder of modern Qatar. The palace has been restored as part of the massive project. The museum, which officials say celebrates Qatar's bedouin past and energy-rich present, also reflects the country's massive wealth and ambition.

And as well as an architectural and cultural statement, the new museum is also a political one by the Qataris. It is among a growing list of spectacular buildings in Qatar, including the recently opened national library and Museum of Islamic Art further along the corniche. The national museum is also the latest in the cultural "arms race" and soft power course among Gulf

nations, which includes Nouvel's Louvre in Abu Dhabi opened to huge fanfare in 2017, designed to show-off the progressive aspects of the various competing emirate states.

And for Qatar, the museum's delayed opening - originally scheduled for 2016 - has given it a chance to reinforce its national identity from other Gulf states, say experts. Since June 2017, Qatar has been diplomatically and economically blockaded by neighboring former allies, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, accused among other things of supporting terrorism. Qatar rejects all charges and says the blockade is an attack on its sovereignty.

The bitter dispute has fractured long-standing Gulf alliances and the new museum will allow Qatar to reinforce its separatism from its rivals, says Sigurd Neubauer, a Middle East analyst based in Washington. "On the basic level the museum represents Qatari identity which has really accelerated in the post-blockade environment," he said. At the same time as the reputation of Doha's rivals appear "inward-looking and regressive", because of incidents like the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Qatar's standing is the "opposite", adds Neubauer. "It's really not about the building, Qatar is trying to create an environment and national identity that provides a space towards independent thinking. "It is doubling down on its own progressive reforms." — AFP

Sports

Sunwolves cull a blow to Asian rugby before WCup

Empty seats in Singapore underline the scale of challenge in expanding rugby in football-mad Asia

TOKYO: The decision by Super Rugby organisers to give Japan's Sunwolves the boot six months before the country hosts the World Cup has sparked concerns about the sport's growth prospects in Asia.

The axe will fall on the Tokyo-based franchise after next season following a chastening first three years in the southern hemisphere's elite competition.

Last week's announcement by Super Rugby organisers SANZAAR comes as a humiliating blow to Asian rugby as Japan gears up to host the continent's first World Cup later this year.

"It is clear that this is going to cause quite a lot of damage," admitted Sunwolves CEO Yuji Watase after a 37-24 defeat by South Africa's Lions at the weekend.

"It's obvious we had a responsibility to expand rugby in Asia. We have tried to do that and to an extent I believe we achieved that aim-but in pure economic terms, the reality is not that simple."

The Sunwolves were brought into Super Rugby in 2016 to tap into new Asian markets but SANZAAR said it wasn't prepared to bankroll the perennial whipping boys after Japan's rugby board withdrew financial support. Another reason for establishing the Sunwolves was to create a de facto Japanese national team-after Japan stunned two-time champions South Africa at the 2015 World Cup.

In reality, many Japan players stayed with their Top League teams, while others such as World Cup hero Ayumu Gohmaru and Japan captain Michael Leitch initially opted to play for other Super Rugby sides.

While Top League teams, backed by the corporate

might of companies such as Kobe Steel and Panasonic, can attract rugby greats like Dan Carter and Sonny Bill Williams, the Sunwolves were trawling for Super Rugby rejects in the run-up to their inaugural season.

EMPTY SEATS

Critics subsequently called for the team to be kicked out, pointing to their woeful record and the fact they rely so heavily on imports-with players from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Fiji, Tonga, Georgia and South Korea having pulled on the red shirt.

That volume of foreigners, dissenters argue, defeats a key objective for including the Sunwolves in the first place-to help grow rugby in Asia.

The Sunwolves divide their home fixtures between Tokyo-where they largely sell out-and fly-away games in Singapore, where they don't come close.

The swathes of empty seats in Singapore underline the scale of the challenge in expanding rugby in football-mad Asia. Japan Rugby Football Union chairman Noriyuki Sakamoto called on Sunwolves fans to follow Top League teams or the Japan national side, who have maintained the feel-good factor since the 2015 World Cup. Organisers for this year's tournament are confident the impressive form the "Brave Blossoms" have shown under Jamie Joseph will boost ticket sales, and expect a large turnout for Asia's debut World Cup.

"We feel like this will be the most impactful Rugby World Cup we've ever had," tournament director Alan Gilpin told AFP in a recent interview.

"We will have taken the sport forward more than we



SINGAPORE: File photo shows Sunwolves' Ryohei Yamanaka (centre L) is tackled by Lions' players during the Super Rugby match between Japan's Sunwolves and South Africa's Lions in Singapore on March 23, 2019. — AFP

would have done in England or New Zealand or France," he added, pointing to 4.5 million ticket applications, 70 percent of those from Japan.

"There are a couple of hundred thousand kids play-

ing rugby now in Japan that weren't there a year ago, let alone five years ago. We are somewhere new, the opportunity is to leave a bigger legacy in this World Cup than we've ever done before." — AFP

Sindhu, Srikanth eye consistency ahead of 2020 Olympics

NEW DELHI: India's badminton stars PV Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth said yesterday they are looking for a consistent run leading up to the 2020 Olympics, starting with the India Open tournament this week.

Olympic silver medallist Sindhu suffered a first-round exit in the women's singles of the All England Open early this month. Former world number one Srikanth lost in the men's quarter-finals in Birmingham.

But 23-year-old Sindhu, who claimed the World Tour Finals in December last year, said she has put the All England loss behind her to focus on qualifying for the Olympics.

Qualification for next year's Tokyo Games will depend on badminton world rankings between April 29, 2019 and April 26, 2020.

Two players each from men's and women's category will be allotted an Olympic berth if they are ranked in the top 16.

"2019, it wasn't a really good start. I have been losing and winning," world number six and top seed Sindhu told reporters ahead of the India Open starting today.

"It is these three tournaments (India, Malaysia and Singapore) and then the Olympic qualifications will also start. I have to be mentally and physically fit to give my best.

"I felt bad for a few days (after the All England loss) but then I thought it's not over with this and there is a lot more to come. Every time you can come back much more stronger and learn from your mis-



PV Sindhu

takes," said the lanky star.

Sindhu will open against compatriot Mugdha Agrey and is expected to face a sterner test later in the week with Thailand's Ratchanok Intanon and Chinese third seed He Bingjiao also in contention.

Denmark's Viktor Axelsen-top seed and world number four-leads the men's field in the \$350,000 tournament that will see many Indian players in action.

Srikanth, who has endured a title drought for the last 17 months, remains a firm favourite on home turf.

Last year's champion, Shi Yuqi of China, withdrew just ahead of the tournament.

"The results haven't really come my way but happy with the way I have been playing. (I am) working on to be more consistent and looking to do well at the Olympics," said world number seven Srikanth. — AFP

Suspicion surrounds boxing decisions at 2016 Rio Olympics

PARIS: An internal investigation by amateur boxing's world body AIBA has raised serious questions about the judging at the 2016 Rio Olympics, with particular suspicion falling on a French official, French newspaper Le Monde reported yesterday.

France basked in the glow of six boxing medals in Rio, including golds for super heavy-weight Tony Yoka and his now wife Estelle Mossely. But three days before the end of the Olympic tournament, boxing federation AIBA removed its then executive director Karim Bouzidi from his role because he was accused of favouring fighters from certain countries, according to Le Monde's report.

Le Monde, which carried out the investigation with Bulgarian newspaper Bulgaria Today, said it had seen the internal AIBA report and emails that showed the body was concerned Bouzidi had influenced the decisions of so-called five-star judges in Olympic bouts.

An email from AIBA's then-president Wu Ching-Ko dated November 18, 2016 said the body suspected Bouzidi of acting with another senior official to influence the judges, in particular those featuring boxers from France and Uzbekistan.

Bouzidi did not reply to AFP's request for a comment yesterday. Andre Martin, the head of the French boxing federation, told Le Monde: "The results in Rio were not 'stolen', they are honest. It's true that we knew Bouzidi but we never blackmailed him."

AIBA's internal investigation found that Bouzidi had the power to appoint the referees and officials for competitions, but added there was no direct proof that these changes influenced the results of fights.

Bouzidi's arrival in the senior AIBA ranks coincided with a campaign by France to try to improve its Olympic boxing results after disappointing performances at the 2008 Beijing and 2012 London Games.

One part of the strategy involved setting up a franchise to take part in World Series Boxing, an international competition aimed at swelling AIBA's coffers. Kevin Rabaud, the former coach of the French team in the WSB series, said they had done nothing wrong.

"We always played by the rules... We organised events in France so that the athletes could become better known. If the fight was close, it might play in the boxer's favour if they were better known.

"In Rio, we got results thanks to our reputation and our previous results."

Boxing is already facing the threat of expulsion from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Its inclusion depends on the outcome of an investigation into AIBA by the International Olympic Committee, which has presented the body with a list of 41 questions via audit firm Deloitte, who will then report back to the Olympic body.

Controversial Uzbek businessman Gafur Rakhimov, who the US Treasury Department has linked to "transnational criminal organisations", stepped down as AIBA president on Friday.

Relations between the IOC and AIBA were hit hard at the 2016 Rio Olympics when 36 officials and referees were suspended amid allegations of bout fixing. Rakhimov insists the allegations against him are "politically motivated lies".

His emergence as amateur boxing's head in 2018 was only made possible by a series of scandals and accidents of circumstance. — AFP

Record scorer Folau wants more high kicks

SYDNEY: Soaring record try scorer Israel Folau wants his NSW Waratahs teammates to kick him more high bombs after the fullback's aerial power set up a shock 20-12 win over champions Canterbury Crusaders.

Folau twice rose above the Crusaders defence to gather high kicks, one setting up a try for Cameron Clark and the second enabling the fullback to score a 59th Super Rugby try to match Doug Howlett's record set during stints at the Otago Highlanders, Wellington Hurricanes and Auckland Blues.

The display at the weekend by the spring-heeled former Australian Rules footballer prompted Crusaders coach Scott Robertson to remark: "He should be working for NASA".

And Wallaby Folau reckons he could be even more prolific if the Waratahs used the aerial tactic more often.

"I still think it is (underused)," he said on the Rugby Australia website of attacking kicks. "Of the 59 tries, you'd be probably lucky to get maybe 10 of them from kicks.

"So it is something I would like to see a lot more, because I am obviously confident in my ability to try and get up and contest for the ball," added the former rugby league international.

"I will continue to work on those combinations with Bernard (Foley) and Kurtley (Beale), whoever is in the playmaker role, and continue to execute," he added.

Folau's 59 tries came 10 games quicker than former All Black Howlett and he is set to run away with the record after last month signing a new four-year deal with the Waratahs until the end of 2022.

He has the chance to make the record his own on Friday when the Waratahs face Japan's Sunwolves in Sydney.

The 29-year-old said he had never met Howlett, but used to watch him growing up. "I have never come across him but I remember as a young kid watching clips of him with the All Blacks and obviously he was a great finisher, and someone who obviously scored a lot of tries," Folau said. "I wasn't coming into the game thinking about tries or anything like that. But it's always a bonus to cross and get a meat pie (try)." — AFP

Casey holds on late to repeat as PGA Valspar champion

MIAMI: Britain's Paul Casey won his second consecutive Valspar Championship on Sunday, holding off South Africa's Louis Oosthuizen and American Jason Kokrak for a one-stroke US PGA Tour victory.

The 41-year-old Englishman stumbled with a bogey at the par-3 17th hole but two-putted from 22 feet at 18 to become the first back-to-back winner of the event at Innsbrook Resort's Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida.

Casey had never before defended a professional title and he won for only the second time in six tries with a 54-hole US PGA lead by firing a final round one-over par 72 to finish 72 holes on eight-under 276.

"Today wasn't easy but it felt very different since winning last year," Casey said. "That felt like my first victory. Since then, new confidence. I've felt like a totally different player."

Casey edged Tiger Woods and Patrick Reed by a stroke for last year's Valspar crown.

Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open champion, and Kokrak, who failed to win his first PGA crown after 198 starts over eight seasons, shared second on 277 with two-time Masters winner Bubba Watson and South Korean Im Sung-jae another stroke adrift. Casey, who has never broken 70 when leading a US PGA event after 54 holes, won his only prior title when leading entering the last round at the 2009 Houston Open.

This marks the first time in seven years that European players have won three consecutive US PGA events, with Northern Ireland's Rory

Mellroy having taken The Players Championship last week and Italy's Francesco Molinari taking the Arnold Palmer Invitational two weeks ago.

WOES FOR NO. 1 JOHNSON

Top-ranked Dustin Johnson, one adrift at the start, failed to make a birdie and shot 74 to share sixth with Spain's Jon Rahm and American Ryan Armour on 279. The poor round snapped Johnson's run of 14 consecutive rounds in the 60s, the longest such streak of his career or by any tour player this season.

Casey opened with a birdie but stumbled early. He found a bunker and took bogey at three, then followed a birdie at the par-5 fifth with bogeys at six after finding deep rough off the tee and seven on three putts from 26 feet.

Oosthuizen began with an eagle, holing at 82-foot bunker shot at the par-5 opening hole. He made bogey at the par-5 fifth but birdied the sixth and dropped his approach to three feet to birdie the par-5 11th and share the lead at eight-under. Casey blasted out of a bunker to two feet and birdied the par-5 11th to seize a one-shot lead over Oosthuizen and Kokrak, who birdied the par-5 11th and par-3 13th to join the hunt.

Casey couldn't save par from 14 feet after finding a bunker at the par-3 13th, but restored his edge on a birdie at the par-5 14th after dropping his approach two feet from the cup.

Oosthuizen fell back with a bogey at 16 but Casey, after saving par from deep greenside rough at 16, missed a tense five-footer and made bogey at the par-3 17th, falling back into a share of the lead with Kokrak.

Kokrak then missed a nervy eight-foot par putt at 18 and slid back level with Oosthuizen, leaving Casey needing a par at 18 to win.

Casey's final tee shot found a bunker right of the fairway, but he dropped his approach 22 feet from the cup then rolled his birdie try inches past the hole before tapping in for the victory. — AFP

Sports

India a class act with soft underbelly: Sanjay Manjrekar

Vijay Shankar likely to fill the number four spot

MUMBAI: India are a class outfit but they will go into this year's World Cup with a soft underbelly having failed to settle on a number four, former batsman Sanjay Manjrekar told Reuters in an interview. With the experienced partnership of Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan locked in as openers and captain Virat Kohli coming in at first drop, the twice champions have a top order the rival of any in the game.

Selectors continue to fret over who bats after the second wicket falls, however, with a series of candidates having fluffed their auditions.

Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey, Lokesh Rahul and Dinesh Karthik have all been trialled for the number four spot and been found wanting.

Ambati Rayudu emerged as the most likely choice to fill the berth but scores of 13, 18 and two in the first three matches of the recent home series against world champions Australia damaged his cause.

The hosts ended up losing the series 3-2 and Manjrekar felt India were back to square one with no more ODIs scheduled before the May 30-July 14 World Cup in England and Wales, where India will be looking to add to their 1983 and 2011 triumphs.

"There was only one little gap that needed to be filled which is number four and getting some exciting options at four, five, six," Manjrekar said.

"They tried quite a few people and I don't begrudge them that. I don't think that was wrong. It's just disappointing that the players have not used the opportunity to cement their places.

"Like, Ambati Rayudu had a great opportunity. He got a 90 in New Zealand and I thought that's done. But then he fails in the next few innings and then a good ball will suddenly get him out and you sort of lose faith in him as the number four."

Vijay Shankar's rise as a handy, nerveless all-rounder was one definite gain from the Australia series.

With India's first choice pace-bowling all-rounder Hardik Pandya injured, Shankar proved he could float in the batting order and hold his nerve in the death overs with ball in hand.

Manjrekar, who played 37 Tests and 74 ODIs for India before turning his hand to media punditry, said that Shankar was his pick to fill the number four spot.

"Your number four has got to have a little bit of class because in England it's perfectly possible that you are 20-2 so you got to have somebody who will just weather the storm and then take India close to 300 runs," he said.

"That perfect number four India still haven't found and I don't think they will find it now.

"So when India goes into the World Cup, it's a class team with genuine class in bowling and batting but with a soft underbelly which will be their middle order.

"Vijay Shankar is my current number four-not the ideal number four but from the candidates that we have, he is my number four."

AUSTRALIA REVIVAL

Manjrekar, speaking on the sidelines of the launch of ESPNcricinfo's Superstats which uses data science to analyse cricket, said he expected the usual suspects to be challenging for the World Cup.

Five-times world champions Australia arrived in India as clear underdogs for the recent short format tour, having endured a wretched couple of years in ODIs during which they lost six series in a row.

That form slump was exacerbated by the ball-tampering scandal that robbed them of Steve Smith and David Warner for 12 months.



Sourav Ganguly (left) and Sanjay Manjrekar.

Without their two best batsmen as well as frontline pace duo Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, they still managed to win a five-match series from 2-0 down for the first time.

"I am delighted that Australia is coming into their own," Manjrekar said.

"Because you don't want a World Cup where there are one or two teams clear leaders and others are really struggling.

"And don't forget they know what it takes to be

champions. So if they have one or two good games, they will be thinking about only the title, nothing else."

Manjrekar did not have the same optimism about the chances of hosts England, who top the ODI world rankings but have yet to win the World Cup.

"I want to see England on a global sort of platform, when the entire world is watching," he added.

"I want to see how they cope with the pressure that comes with it. I have a big question mark over their temperament as a team." — Reuters

Fantastic Finch punishes Pakistan in Australia's win

SHARJAH: Aaron Finch struck his second century in as many games to lead Australia to another thumping eight-wicket victory over a hapless Pakistan in the second one-day international in Sharjah on Sunday.

The Australia captain smashed a 143-ball 153 not out for his 13th ODI hundred-also his highest score in ODIs-to anchor Australia's comfortable chase of a 285-run target in 47.5 overs.

Finch, who scored 116 in Australia's eight-wicket win in the first game at the same venue on Friday, put on a solid 209-run opening wicket stand with Usman Khawaja who made a 109-ball 88 to give Australia a 2-0 lead in the five-match series. Finch struck six sixes and 11 boundaries in a dominating innings, improving on his previous highest one-day score of 148 against Scotland at Edinburgh in 2013.

The victory came in the 100th one-day international match between the two countries. Finch admitted the start was tough.

"On a wicket like that, you can't afford to take it too deep with new batters," he said. "When you come in, it's tough to quickly at first. I just wanted to get through Imad (Wasim).

"It's hard to take a risk off him. I just hung in there as long as I could. Usman has been in good form, and he's getting big runs at an important time. Things are going quite well at the moment, but there are always things to improve."

Pakistan had replaced fast bowler Mohammad Amir with Mohammad Hasnain for rookie 18-year-old's first one-day and that made for an inexperienced lineup, having already rested six main players for the series.

Finch and Khawaja thrived against the novice attack, with Finch striking two sixes in the final overs while Khawaja's knock had eight boundaries. Finch completed his hundred with a couple off Hasnain on his 97th ball, making successive hundreds for a second time in his career. He scored consecutive hundreds against England in Australia last year.

Khawaja fell to leg-spinner Yasir Shah with 76 needed while Glenn Maxwell cracked two sixes in his 19 before he was run out. Pakistan's stand-in captain Shoaib Malik rued the lack of early wickets. "To be honest, I think early strikes in our bowling is what we are lacking," said Malik. "Overall, there are positives as we fought until the last ball. We are testing our bench strength."

Pakistan owed their total of 280-7, after winning the toss, to Mohammad Rizwan's maiden century. Rizwan, only playing because regular keeper and skipper Sarfraz Ahmed has been rested for the series, added 52 for the third wicket with Haris Sohail (34) and an invaluable 127 for the fifth wicket with Shoaib Malik.

Pakistan lost opener Imam-ul-Haq without scoring off the fifth ball of the innings from fast bowler Jhye Richardson. Shan Masood (19) and Sohail—who scored his maiden hundred in the first game on Friday—took the total to 35 when Richardson struck again, getting Masood caught at short mid-wicket.

But Richardson took 2-16 in his five overs and fell awkwardly in the outfield and left the field in the 11th over. Initial reports suggests he dislocated his shoulder and is doubtful for the remaining three matches. Rizwan, though, lifted Pakistan after Umar Akram fell for 16. — AFP

Patriots' tight end Gronkowski announces NFL retirement

LOS ANGELES: New England Patriots star tight end Rob Gronkowski, a three-time Super Bowl champion, announced his retirement from the National Football League in an Instagram post on Sunday.

Gronkowski brings down the curtain on a nine-year career after helping the Patriots to a third title in five seasons in a 13-3 victory over the Los Angeles Rams last month.

"I will be retiring from the game of football today," Gronkowski said in a post that called the decision "the biggest of my life so far". He thanked Patriots owner Robert Kraft and coach Bill Belichick for the opportunity they gave him "when drafting my silliness in 2010".

His effervescence and irreverence endeared "Gronk" to fans, but the towering tight end was a formidable offensive weapon on the field and a favorite target of superstar quarterback Tom Brady.

Gronkowski, who has suffered a laundry list of injuries in his career and was shaken by a concussion in a playoff win in January of 2018, said after the Patriots' loss to Philadelphia in February of 2018 that he would consider his future.

But he returned for a ninth NFL campaign that yielded another championship ring. "Thank you for everyone accepting who I am and the dedication I have put into my work to be the best player I could be," he wrote. "But now it's time to move forward."

"Cheers to all who have been part of this journey, cheers to the past for the incredible memories, and a HUGE cheers to the uncertain of what's next."

With the catching skills of a wide receiver and the physical size and power of an offensive lineman, Gronkowski was difficult to handle in either role the tight end spot required, befuddling rival defenders and putting him among the greatest to ever play the position.

Gronkowski, who turns 30 in May, is also a four-time First Team All-Pro and five-time Pro Bowl selection



LOS ANGELES: File photo shows Rob Gronkowski, the NFL tight end who helped the New England Patriots win three Super Bowl titles and is a near certain Hall of Fame pick, announced his retirement from football on Sunday. —AFP

who caught 521 passes for 7,861 yards and 79 touchdowns in 115 regular-season games from 2010-18.

He had 81 catches for 1,163 yards and 12 touchdowns in 16 post-season games. But Gronkowski became beloved as a character as much as for his skills, saying that partying helped him relax and thus inspire harder work in training.

His touchdown celebration spiking of the football became classics, many featuring a brief dance. When the Patriots played in London and he scored at Wembley Stadium, Gronkowski imitated a Queen's Guard—what he called a "little nutcracker dude"—in his touchdown celebration.

"Gronk is a one of a kind person," Brady said. "He's one of the most positive people I've ever been around and he loves to have fun." That's how he wound up on the cover of ESPN magazine's 2012 body issue wearing almost nothing and again posing for the magazine in 2014 with kittens.

And it's what had him on the ice before an NHL Boston Bruins game spiking a hockey puck a few days

after the Patriots won the 2015 Super Bowl.

Three months later, Gronkowski celebrated his 25th birthday with a party at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Weeks later, he was *Twerking* on the *Celebrity Family Feud* television show.

"Gronk" removed his shirt and flexed his muscles during the Patriots' 2017 Super Bowl celebration parade in Boston and two months later he bodyslammed a pro wrestler during a *Wrestlemania* match in Florida. Not even the White House was safe from being Gronked, the NFL star interrupting a news briefing during his April 2017 White House tour.

Sponsors delighted in his lively manner, making him a popular pitchman for doughnuts, cell phones, cereal, credit cards and video games. Gronkowski, the great-grandson of a 1924 US Olympic cyclist who held five world records, was nagged by injury throughout his career. Torn right knee ligaments ended his 2013 campaign after seven games. In 2016, he suffered hamstring injuries, a bruised lung and a herniated disc that required surgery. — AFP

W Indies cricket chief Cameron ousted in vote

LONDON: Controversial Cricket West Indies president Dave Cameron has lost a vote to remain in the post, the governing body announced Sunday.

Cameron was defeated eight votes to four by Ricky Skerritt, a former West Indies team manager in a ballot conducted in Kingston, Jamaica. Skerritt's running mate Dr Kishore Shallow, who challenged Emmanuel Nanthan for the vice-presidency, won by the same margin.

"I am humbled and deeply honoured to be elected as president," said Skerritt in a CWI statement. "We pledge to work for improvement on and off the field for West Indies cricket."

Cameron's six years as president were marked by a series of high-profile rows with several senior players, including Chris Gayle and Darren Sammy. The 47-year-old Jamaican administrator also

came under fire for his role in the sacking of Phil Simmons as head coach of the West Indies men's team in 2016.

Simmons, a former West Indies batsman who is now the coach of Afghanistan, has since launched legal action against CWI for constructive dismissal. In the run-up to Sunday's elections, CWI issued a statement detailing Cameron's expense arrangements following Skerritt's claim his time in charge had caused "significant damage" to the board in both financial and reputational terms.

Four years ago, the West Indies abandoned a tour of India following a pay dispute and in 2016 Sammy, the then captain of the side, publicly questioned CWI policy following the team's victory in the 2016 World Twenty20 in India.

But Cameron and Nanthan defended their record in a joint statement. "We were glad to be able to serve and proud of our achievements," they said. "We are happy that we left 123 players under contract. West Indies Cricket now has a home owned by the board at Coolidge Cricket Grounds (in Antigua).

"The world championships and bringing back the Wisden Trophy (which the men's team regained by beating England in a recent home Test series) are also other achievements that we are proud of." — AFP

Australia name Troy Cooley as bowling coach for Ashes tour

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday appointed ex-England bowling coach Troy Cooley for their upcoming Ashes series as they bid to win the urn on away soil for the first time in 18 years. Meanwhile Adam Griffith, a former head coach of Tasmania and assistant to national coach Justin Langer at the Western Warriors, takes charge of the bowlers for the team's World Cup campaign in England.

Their appointments follow the departure of another former England bowling coach, David Saker, who quit in February. Tasmanian Cooley is credited as being a key figure in helping England break their Ashes drought on home soil in 2005.

He recently coached Australia's

one-day bowlers for an away series win against India and is currently with the squad in the United Arab Emirates for their limited-overs clashes against Pakistan.

Cricket Australia's team performance manager Belinda Clark said Cooley and Griffith brought a wealth of knowledge and experience. "We reached out to the coaches working in Australian cricket and received expressions of interest from a strong field of candidates and through the process Adam and Troy emerged as the clear standouts for these secondments," she said.

"Adam and Troy have extensive coaching experience, which we believe will help support our players to best prepare and perform in the upcoming campaigns."

Former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting was last month appointed as batting coach for the World Cup. Ex-England player Graeme Hick is Australia's Test batting coach. The World Cup kicks off on May 30 and ends on July 14, while the five-test Ashes series is in August and September. — AFP

Sports

New-look Germany edge Dutch in Euro thriller as Croatia stumble

Hazard celebrate 100th cap by scoring opener in 2-0 win over Cyprus

PARIS: Germany's Nico Schulz sealed a thrilling 3-2 win over the Netherlands in a see-saw Euro 2020 qualifier as Joachim Loew's new-look line-up survived a severe test on Sunday. Elsewhere, World Cup finalists Croatia stumbled to a 2-1 defeat in Hungary, and Eden Hazard celebrated a century of caps with the opening goal in Belgium's 2-0 win over Cyprus.

A revamped Germany raced into a 2-0 lead in Amsterdam with thrilling strikes from Leroy Sane and Serge Gnabry but the hosts struck back with a second half header from Matthijs De Ligt before Memphis Depay pounced for an equaliser on 63 minutes.

The four-time world champions were put under immense pressure from a Netherlands side seeking a winner but the visitors, who were booed by their own fans in a 1-1 friendly draw against Serbia last Wednesday, snatched victory in the 90th minute through 25-year-old Schulz. The Hoffenheim midfielder, who made his international in August, tapped home a loose ball after a tireless Sane had taken the defence with him on a run into the box.

The win comes after Loew took an axe to Germany's squad ahead of the qualifying campaign in the aftermath of last year's calamitous World Cup elimination, when he told Bayern Munich trio Thomas Mueller, Jerome Boateng and Mats Hummels they had no future in the national side.

Bayern stopper Manuel Neuer may also come under pressure for his place after De Ligt beat him with a flying header just after the restart. Neuer, 32, was also slow to react as Depay pounced for the equaliser.

Dutch 'keeper Jasper Cillessen was left with little chance after Gnabry ended his mazy run by outwitting Virgil Van Dijk before sending a rasping long-range effort into the bottom corner in the early action.

Chelsea star Hazard celebrated his 100th cap by scoring the opener in their 2-0 win over Cyprus in Group I with Michy Batshuayi grabbing the second as Real Madrid's Thibaut Courtois went largely untested in the Belgian goal.

Ballon d'Or winner Luka Modric was powerless to stop beaten World Cup finalists Croatia from slipping to a 2-1 defeat to Hungary in Group E on Sunday as Mate Patkai notched a 76th minute winner in Budapest.

Croatia had struggled against Azerbaijan in their opening qualifier last Thursday before escaping with a 2-1 win, but they made the perfect start in the Hungarian capital when Ante Rebic put them ahead on 13 minutes. But Hungary pulled level through Adam Szalai's fifth goal in as many games and with a quarter of an hour left, 31-year-old Patkai scored his first international goal to pull off a famous victory.

Scotland got back to winning ways with an uninspiring 2-0 win at perennial makeweights San Marino, following an embarrassing defeat at Kazakhstan in their opening qualifier.

"It was a wee bit nervy, it's been a tough few days for everyone," admitted Scotland coach Alex McLeish.

Minnows Israel made it four points from their opening two qualifiers as they swept past Austria 4-2 thanks to a Eran Zahavi hat-trick, setting them up nicely for a tilt at qualification. —AFP



AMSTERDAM: Netherlands' midfielder Marten De Roon (L) vies with Germany's defender Jonathan Tah during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group C qualification football match between The Netherlands and Germany at the Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam on Sunday. — AFP

Pedersen seals win for Juve women in front of record crowd

TURIN: Danish international Sofie Pedersen sealed a home win for Juventus women who marked the team's first game at the Allianz Stadium in Turin by playing on front of a record crowd for a top-flight women's game in Italy, three months before the start of the World Cup in France. The championship-leading Juve women's team, who usually play their home games at Vinovo in the suburbs of the city, played rivals Fiorentina with

39,027 watching at the Allianz.

Juventus decided against charging fans an entry fee for the game at the 41,500-capacity arena, with the turnout beating the previous record for a women's football match in Italy of 14,000 spectators.

Pedersen nodded in the winner seven minutes from time, as Juventus moved four points ahead of Fiorentina in the top-of-the-table clash with three matches to go in the 12-team women's league. "Today will be an important day for the whole movement of women's football," tweeted Juventus men's captain Giorgio Chiellini. "Girls enjoy the Stadium!!!" he wrote, adding the club's slogan "Fino Alla Fine (until the end) Juventus!!!" Italian international defender Cecilia Salvai was stretched off in the second half, but was carried back onto the pitch to celebrate with her teammates after the win. Salvai's knee injury could be a worry for

Italy ahead of the World Cup in June. Juventus women's team are on course for a second consecutive Scudetto having won the trophy in their first season in 2017-2018. The interest in the women's game has been building ahead of this summer's World Cup in France with a world record crowd of 60,739 watching a women's match between Barcelona and Atletico Madrid at the Wanda Metropolitano last Sunday.

That attendance was the largest ever for a top-flight club match in European women's football while Atletico claimed the number also set a new world record. The top-of-the-table clash was played in Atletico men's team's arena instead of the women's much smaller home stadium which has a capacity of 3,500.

The previous European record was 48,121 who watched Athletic Bilbao's women's team play Atletico in a Copa del Rey match in Bilbao in January. —AFP

Caps sweep Flyers, keep division lead

WASHINGTON: Tom Wilson, Travis Boyd and Jakub Vrana each scored a goal as the Washington Capitals defeated the visiting Philadelphia Flyers 3-1 in a Sunday matinee. The Capitals maintain a narrow lead in the Metropolitan Division, leading the New York Islanders by one point and the Pittsburgh Penguins by three. Each team has six games remaining, with Washington hosting the Islanders in the regular-season finale on April 6. The Capitals snapped a two-game losing streak and completed a sweep of their four-game season series with the Flyers, whose fading playoff chances took a hit. Braden Holtby played another strong game for Washington with 35 saves. Alex Ovechkin did not score a goal for the eighth time in his last nine games, but tallied one assist.

HURRICANES 2, CANADIENS 1 (OT)

Andrei Svechnikov scored 3:15 into overtime as Carolina defeated visiting Montreal at Raleigh, N.C. Svechnikov scored his 20th goal of the season, this one set up on an assist from Jordan Staal. It was Carolina's only shot in overtime. Trevor van Riemsdyk scored the tying goal in the third period for Carolina, which won four of five games during a homestand. Hurricanes goalie Curtis McElhinney stopped 28 shots, and Montreal goalie Carey Price made 38 saves.

BLUE JACKETS 5, CANUCKS 0

Sergei Bobrovsky made 21 saves for his seventh shutout of the NHL season, and Josh Anderson posted two goals and an assist as visiting Columbus blanked Vancouver. Bobrovsky returned after being sidelined Thursday in Edmonton due to an undisclosed upper-body injury. He recorded his second shutout in three games. Columbus (41-30-4) ended its losing streak at three games. The Blue Jackets moved within two points of Montreal for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

ISLANDERS 2, COYOTES 0

Jordan Eberle scored early in the first period and Robin Lehner recorded his fifth shutout of the season with 31 saves as New York further damaged the playoff hopes of visiting Arizona with a win in Uniondale, N.Y. Brock Nelson scored on a wraparound with 3:14 left in the third for the Islanders (44-25-7, 95 points), who won for the second time in as many days to remain in second place in the Metropolitan Division. Goalie Darcy Kuemper, who made his 17th straight start, made 24 saves for the Coyotes (36-33-7, 79 points), who lost their fifth straight (0-3-2) and missed another chance to move into the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

BLACKHAWKS 2, AVALANCHE 1 (OT)

Duncan Keith scored the game-winning goal 1:23 into overtime to carry host Chicago to a win over Colorado to keep his team's slim playoff hopes alive. The 35-year-old Keith denied Nathan MacKinnon on a one-on-one battle, then raced the length of the ice and slid in the game-winner for his sixth goal of the season.



UNIONDALE: Lawson Crouse #67 of the Arizona Coyotes skates against the New York Islanders at the NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum on Sunday in Uniondale, New York. The Islanders shut-out the Coyotes 2-0. — AFP

Both goaltenders—Chicago's Corey Crawford and Colorado's Philipp Grubauer—played back-to-back games for just the second time this season. Crawford made 19 saves, Grubauer 40.

The win pushed Chicago to 76 points in the standings—five behind Colorado, which holds the Western Conference's second wild card, and three behind the Minnesota Wild and Arizona Coyotes. — Reuters

Solo break earns De Gendt Tour of Catalonia win

CALELLA: Belgian Lotto-Soudal rider Thomas de Gendt completed a long range solo break through the mountains to win the Tour of Catalonia's opening stage yesterday ahead of an all star cast of contenders.

In glorious spring sunshine De Gendt finished a 164km route in 4hrs 14mins and 32sec as the only survivor of an early six man breakaway that began after 12km in a race that started and ended in the seaside town of Calella.

The 32-year-old from Flanders leads the overall classification, the points, the mountain and the special breakaway category too. Germany's Maximilian Schachmann of Bora-Hansgrohe broke from the peloton with 5km or so remaining to finish second a couple of seconds ahead of the onrushing peloton as Grega Bole of Bahrain Merida came third.

With three category one climbs across the forested peaks behind Spain's Costa Brava an elite group had been expected to drop a major part of the peloton, which it did as Spanish outfit Movistar led by world champion Alejandro Valverde and Colombian climber Nairo Quintana set a high tempo late on.

"I was surprised the gap didn't come down," the win-

ner said after the race. "I was at the limit of my endurance but when I was getting closer I just had to carry on." "This is the best race I've had here and it's a joy to race in these circumstances."

It was a quiet day for four time Tour de France champion Chris Froome and his compatriots Simon and Adam Yates, while Australian contender Richie Porte and his Colombian teammate Estaban Chaves all finished in the main group.

Tuesday's second stage is a relatively flat 166km-long race which heads north along the coast from Mataro to Sant Feliu de Guixols and is expected to finish in a bunch sprint.

Overall standings:

1. Thomas De Gendt (BEL/Lotto) 4hrs 14min 16sec, 2. Maximilian Schachmann (GER/BOR) at 2min 48sec, 3. Grega Bole (SLO/BAH) 2:54, 4. Alejandro Valverde (ESP/MOV) 2:56, 5. Egan Bernal (COL/SKY) 2:57, 6. Michael Matthews (AUS/SUN) 2:58, 7. Mikel Bizkarra (ESP/EUS) same time, 8. Andre Greipel (GER/FST) s.t., 9. Daryl Impey (RSA/MIT) s.t., 10. Jay McCarthy (AUS/BOR) s.t.

Stage 1:

1. Thomas De Gendt (BEL/LOT) 164km in 4hrs 14mins 32sec, 2. Maximilian Schachmann (GER/BOR) at 2min 38sec, 3. Grega Bole (SLO/BAH) 2:41, 4. Michael Matthews (AUS/SUN) s.t., 5. Mikel Aristi (ESP/EUS) s.t., 6. Andre Greipel (GER/FST) s.t., 7. Egan Bernal (COL/SKY) s.t., 8. Daryl Impey (RSA/MIT) s.t., 9. Nick van der Lijke (NED/ROP) s.t., 10. Patrick Bevin (NZL/CCC) s.t. — AFP

Cardiff to claim Sala transfer 'null and void': Report

LONDON: Cardiff are set to tell FIFA that the £15 million (\$19.8m, 23m euros) deal they agreed to pay Nantes for Emiliano Sala became "null and void" after he died in a plane crash, a report said yesterday.

The 28-year-old Argentine forward was killed when the small plane carrying him came down in the Channel on January 21, two days after he completed his transfer from the French Ligue 1 side.

The Daily Telegraph said Sala signed a contract with Cardiff that was rejected by the Premier League and died before a revised one could be signed, adding that there is a dispute about whether he had agreed to sign a new deal.

According to the report, a source close to Cardiff said the agreement stipulated that Welsh and French football authorities had to confirm to both clubs that Sala "has been registered as a Cardiff City FC player and that the player's International Transfer Certificate has been released".

The source said this had not happened before Sala died. "The transfer agreement between Cardiff and Nantes was subject to several conditions," the source told the paper.

"If any were not satisfied, the contract would be deemed null and void, with no payment due. Nantes proposed that clause. They asked for the strict notification requirements." Nantes reportedly plan to dispute Cardiff's case, saying the club completed the required paperwork. The club last month referred their dispute with Cardiff over the transfer to FIFA, football's governing body.

Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AIB) previously said the plane carrying Sala, piloted by David Ibbotson, did not have a commercial licence. But it said the journey would have been allowed as a "private" flight in which costs are shared between pilot and passenger.

It added that on which Sala was a passenger had not been established. The investigators also said since the pilot's logbook and licence were not recovered, it was unclear whether Ibbotson was authorised to fly at night. Sala's body was recovered from the wreckage early last month but Ibbotson's body has not been found. — AFP

Stuani strikes again as ruthless Uruguay win China Cup

SHANGHAI: Stand-in forward Cristhian Stuani scored his third goal in two games as Uruguay taught Thailand a footballing lesson to win the China Cup with a 4-0 victory yesterday. The 2018 World Cup quarter-finalists hardly missed the injured star striking duo of Luis Suarez and Edinson Cavani as they made it seven goals in two games.

Uruguay, comfortable 3-0 victors over Uzbekistan on Friday in the four-team tournament, profited from some poor Thailand defending in the Chinese city of Nanning. Unmarked Inter Milan midfielder Matias Vecino headed home after just six minutes—Thai goalkeeper Siwarak Tedsungnoen should have done better—and it was 2-0 on 38 minutes when Gaston Pereiro prodded in after the Thai defence went AWOL. Stuani, starting because of the absence of PSG's Cavani and Barcelona's Suarez, made it 3-0 just before the hour with a close-range bullet header from a corner. The Girona striker, who scored a brace against the Uzbeks, had hit the post just minutes earlier. Substitute Maxi Gomez made it 4-0 two minutes from the end of normal time with goalkeeper Siwarak stranded out of position. Earlier in the day, Uzbekistan defeated Fabio Cannavaro's China 1-0 to leave the hosts last of the four teams involved. — AFP

25 Sindhu, Srikanth eye consistency ahead of 2020 Olympics



26 Patriots' tight end Gronkowski announces NFL retirement



27 New-look Germany edge Dutch in Euro thriller as Croatia stumble



Djokovic downs Delbonis in Miami Open

Halep battles into 4th round, Sloane Stephens's title defense ends



MIAMI GARDENS: Simona Halep of Romania returns a shot to Polona Hercog of Slovenia during Day 7 of the Miami Open presented by Itaú at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. — AFP

MIAMI: Novak Djokovic remains on course for a record seventh Miami Open title, but the world number one admitted to a loss of focus in a 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 victory over spirited Federico Delbonis which booked his place in the last 16.

Djokovic is hoping to eclipse Andre Agassi's six ATP crowns in South Florida over the next week and although the 31-year-old endured some shaky moments at Hard Rock Stadium, he still possessed enough quality during the key moments to see off the battling Delbonis.

The Serbian, though, wasn't happy with letting a 5-2 advantage slip in the first set and became furious with himself as the second squirmed from his grasp.

He will need to tighten up his game if he is to reach next Sunday's final with Roberto Bautista Agut waiting in the

fourth round after the Spaniard defeated Italian Fabio Fognini 6-4, 6-4.

"To be honest, I lost my focus," said Djokovic who smashed 36 winners compared to 24 from Delbonis. "I should have done better I think mentally than I have done at the end of the first two sets.

"I managed to really play well last couple games of first set, go up a break, put myself in front, then I played a couple of really bad service games. Credit to Federico, he stepped in." Djokovic had looked impressive in the second round win over Bernard Tomic and the Serbian continued his decent form by immediately imposing himself onto the Argentine.

Djokovic moved 5-2 ahead but after he missed a set point opportunity on the Delbonis serve, his game deserted him and suddenly, the South American had a spring

in his step.

Delbonis had opportunities to steal ahead, yet calling on all his experience and mental resolve, the Serbian was able to hold firm and take the opener.

The world number one was getting incredibly frustrated, he received a warning for racket abuse and was furious for allowing a 3-1 lead to slip in the second, yet credit to Delbonis who stayed calm and served out confidently to force a decider, something which looked beyond him midway through the opening set.

He couldn't keep the pressure on, however, and when Djokovic managed to get 3-1 ahead, this time there was no way back for the 28-year-old from Azul who rightly received an ovation from the center court crowd for his monumental efforts.

"I think last four games were terrific, so

I ended up in a positive way," Djokovic added. Defending champion John Isner blew Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas off court with serves touching 139 mph as the American sealed an ultimately comprehensive 7-5, 7-6 (8-6) win to set up an intriguing match with Kyle Edmund in the last 16 after the British number one impressively saw off Canadian Milos Raonic 6-4 6-4.

In the women's draw, Simona Halep kept alive hopes of regaining the world number one ranking Sunday, beating Polona Hercog 5-7, 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 to reach the last 16 where she will play Venus Williams.

Halep, 27, lost her place at the top of the rankings following Naomi Osaka's triumph at the Australian Open earlier this year.

But with the Japanese faltering here on

Saturday, Halep can return to the position she last held at the end of 2018 if she lands the Miami Open for the first time.

"It's always tough against Venus," said the current world number three, who has beaten the American in their previous three encounters. "I'm not going to say that it's going to be easier because I won the last matches against her. It's a big challenge for me." Seven-time Grand Slam champion Williams, meanwhile, swept past Russian Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 6-1. "Simona always plays flawless tennis against me, so I have to be ready for that," Williams said.

Elsewhere in women's action, American Sloane Stephens's title defense ended in a 6-3, 6-2 loss to Germany's Tatjana Maria. It was another disappointing ending for Stephens, who fell in the third round at Indian Wells. —AFP

Rockets clinch playoff spot, Warriors wins

LOS ANGELES: James Harden delivered 28 points as the Houston Rockets punched their ticket to the NBA postseason with a 113-90 win over the New Orleans Pelicans on Sunday. Harden, who scored a combined 118 points in his previous two games, didn't need to maintain his torrid pace against the Pelicans.

The Rockets led by 19 at the half and Harden's supporting cast did their job by shutting down the Pelicans in the second and not allowing them to get back into the contest. "We were professional tonight

from the beginning of the game," Harden said. "We've had previous games where teams weren't as good, or whatever you want to call it, and we kind of let up and we let one slip. So that was a good job from top to bottom."

NBA scoring leader Harden exploded for a career-high-tying 61 points in a win over San Antonio on Friday after netting 57 points in a loss to Memphis on Wednesday. Harden, who is averaging 36.4 points per game, hit 10 of 19 shots from the floor and made six threes for the Rockets, who remained in third place in the Western Conference. Rockets guards Eric Gordon scored 18 points and Chris Paul had 10 points and 13 assists against their former Pelican team.

Elsewhere, Giannis Antetokounmpo tallied 26 points and 10 rebounds as the NBA-leading Milwaukee Bucks avenged a loss to Cleveland earlier in the week by beating the

Cavaliers 127-105.

Antetokounmpo missed two of the three previous games with an ankle injury and did not play four days ago when the Cavaliers beat the Bucks 107-102.

He had a big impact on Sunday, adding seven assists, blocking four shots and shooting 11-of-16 from the field in 32 minutes of playing time.

Milwaukee improved to a league-leading 55-19 record, ahead of the Toronto Raptors, who are 51-23. George Hill, who was traded to the Bucks by the Cavaliers in December, and Khris Middleton scored 17 points each, and Brook Lopez scored all 14 of his points in the first half for Milwaukee.

Kevin Love finished with 20 points, 19 rebounds and four three pointers in the loss. In Oakland, Stephen Curry returned from a rest game to score 26 points, Klay Thompson finished with 24 and the Golden State Warriors rebounded from an embar-

assing blowout loss with a 121-114 win over the Detroit Pistons.

The Warriors decided to rest Curry on Saturday and it cost them as they were clobbered 126-91 by the Dallas Mavericks. He came back strong against the Pistons as Kevin Durant also finished with 14 points and 11 assists.

The Warriors improved to 50-23 on the season and moved back into the first seed in the Western Conference by a half-game over Denver. This is the sixth consecutive season Golden State has reached 50 wins.

"It's kind of surreal, to be honest," Warriors guard Curry said after the game. "You talk about the history of the organization, how hard it is to win NBA games, win championships and string together (wins) year after year after year."

Also, Lou Williams scored 15 of his game-high 29 points in the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Clippers won their fifth

consecutive game with a 124-113 victory over the hapless New York Knicks.

Danilo Gallinari drained a clutch three pointer in the fourth en route to a 26-point performance for the Clippers, who vaulted into sole possession of fifth place in the Western Conference.

The Clippers are trying to win as many games as possible late in the season to improve their playoff position and avoid having to play a top-ranked team like Golden State. "We're ready to play whoever we end up playing," coach Doc Rivers said. "In the meantime, let's just keep winning games and everything will take care of itself." The struggling Knicks have now reached 60 losses on the season. They have lost four straight and 12 of their last 13. New York must win at least three of their eight remaining games to avoid tying or exceeding the worst record (17-65) in team history. —AFP