



**4** Sheikh Nasser eyes \$450-650bn in investments in northern area



**16** Body bags, rats, waste: Disaster response turns to VR for training



**24** Desperate and hiding, collapsed Saudi Oger workers left in limbo



**28** Bautista Agut stuns Djokovic, Barty topples Kvitova in Miami



# Minister says 35-day annual leave ‘harmful’ to economy

Govt sources defend ‘anti-expat’ laws • Driving license process to go online

## Amir attends national operetta



KUWAIT: Performers are seen in front of images of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during a national operetta at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said yesterday that amendments to the labor law in the private sector raising annual leave to 35 days are harmful to the national economy and Kuwaiti businessmen. After the National Assembly passed the amendments in the first reading more than three weeks ago, mainly to increase annual leave from 30 to 35 days, the government, which voted in favor of the amendments, backtracked and decided to reject the changes.

The rejection came at a meeting of the Assembly's health and labor committee attended by the minister, during which she explained the “great damage” the amendments would inflict on the national economy and on the interests of Kuwaiti businessmen, especially small businesses. The minister explained that the workforce that will benefit from the amendments “include a small number of Kuwaitis and a large section of others”, a clear reference to the fact that expatriate employees in the private sector greatly outnumber Kuwaitis.

MPs who filed the amendments and

backed them said they wanted to encourage more nationals to join the private sector by increasing labor benefits in the sector to ultimately reduce pressure on public sector employment. Representatives of the chamber of commerce and industry and the banking association attended the meeting and totally backed the minister's remarks.

Well-informed government sources expressed amazement over opposition to new anti-expat legislations and stressed that Kuwait can never do without expats, who are still greatly needed. “This is nothing more than reorganizing their numbers in view of the growing number of Kuwaiti graduates awaiting employment and replacing expats where possible,” the sources explained, noting that legislations by the government and the parliament will never be against expats' rights or living standards. “If such talk refers to imposing new fees, citizens also pay some of these fees,” the sources stressed.

“Health fees are collected worldwide and those paid in Kuwait are the least,” added the sources, noting that imposing health insurance on visitors is done around the world.

Continued on Page 24

## Zain KSA inks \$672m tower deal with IHS

RIYADH/KUWAIT: Zain Group announced that the board of directors of Zain Saudi Arabia (Zain KSA) has signed an agreement to sell and lease back the passive physical infrastructure of its mobile tower portfolio to IHS Holding Limited (IHS) for SAR 2.52 billion (\$672 million). This signing came after Zain KSA announced on Nov 27, 2018 that the board of directors of the company had approved the offer from IHS Holding Limited to sell and lease back its passive towers. It should be noted that the original transaction valuation of SAR 2.43 billion has been revised to SAR 2.52 billion (\$672 million).

The agreement was signed by Sultan bin AbdulAziz AlDeghathier, CEO of Zain KSA, and William Saad, COO of IHS Holding Limited, at the headquarters of Zain KSA in Riyadh. Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO; & Zain KSA Vice-Chairman said: “Zain KSA is transforming financially, operationally, and strategically,



Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO; & Zain KSA Vice-Chairman

and this evolution is aimed at the operator emerging as a more successful digital lifestyle services provider and delivering additional shareholder value.” (See Page 11)

## Roudhan survives no-confidence; MPs against embassies in residential areas

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan comfortably defeated a no-confidence vote in the Assembly during a special session yesterday. Only 11 MPs voted for the motion, while 37 MPs voted against it, renewing their confidence in Roudhan. Only the 49 elected members are allowed to vote on no-confidence motions, as Cabinet ministers are barred from doing so. One MP was absent.

Roudhan was grilled last week by MPs Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei and Mubarak Al-Hajraf over allegations of financial and administrative violations and failure to prevent a



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan gestures during a National Assembly session yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

major real estate scam which affected hundreds of Kuwaitis, among others. The minister categorically denied the allegations and said the scam had begun before he became minister and that he initiated legal action after he assumed office. The two lawmakers insisted during the grilling and yesterday that the minister did not refute the allegations, while the minister's supporters said he had started key reforms and should be encouraged.

Continued on Page 24

## Modi declares India ‘space superpower’ as satellite downed

NEW DELHI: India said yesterday it destroyed a low-orbiting satellite in a missile test that proved the nation was among the world's most advanced space powers. In a rare address to the nation just weeks out from a national election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India had joined the United States, Russia and China in accomplishing the feat. A missile fired from a testing facility in Odisha, eastern India, downed the satellite at around 300 km in “a difficult operation” that lasted around three minutes, Modi said.

“This is a proud moment for India,” the prime minister added, in his first televised national address since late 2016. “India has registered its name in the list of space superpowers. Until now, only three countries had achieved this feat.” It comes a month after Indian and Pakistani fighter jets engaged in a dogfight over the disputed border in Kashmir - a serious military escalation between the nuclear-armed rivals. An Indian jet was shot down and a pilot captured by Pakistan, which had launched retaliatory air raids after

Continued on Page 24



NEW DELHI: A man watches Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation on a local news channel yesterday. — AFP

## Amir says Qatar ‘stronger’ as he opens museum

DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani said yesterday his country had become “stronger” since the start of a Gulf diplomatic crisis almost two years ago, as he formally opened the country's national museum. He made the comment during a speech at a glittering ceremony in Doha to open the estimated \$434 million building, with guests includ-

ing Kuwaiti and British royals, film star Johnny Depp, former French president Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife Carla Bruni, Jose Mourinho and Victoria Beckham.

“Qatar has become much stronger since June 2017,” said the amir. “The citizens have defended the dignity and the truth, with the consequences of strengthening the country.” Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut ties with Qatar in June 2017 over accusations it supports terrorism and is seeking closer ties with Saudi Arabia's regional rival, Iran. Qatar rejects all the charges and says the dispute is an attack on its sovereignty.

Continued on Page 24



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani poses for a group picture with children during the official opening ceremony of the National Museum of Qatar yesterday. — AFP

## US Golan move stymies Arabs, may boost Iran

CAIRO: The US move on the Golan has left fractious Arab nations scrambling for a united response to a decision taken by a key ally, which may only end up benefiting Iran, analysts said. Angry reactions have poured in from Arab capitals after US President Donald Trump on Monday formally announced US recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. But the seemingly united front is only a veneer masking the deep dilemma for Arab governments left trying to deal with Washington's “fait accompli”, analysts said.

Those Arab states who are “allies of the United States are the most embarrassed because they have gone to great lengths to get closer to Donald Trump,” said Karim Bitar, senior fellow at the Paris-based Institute for International and Strategic Affairs. Some Arab countries, including regional powerhouse and Iran foe Saudi Arabia, have been cozying up to Washington, hoping to influence a long-awaited Middle East peace plan due to be presented in the coming months.

But with the Trump administration shredding long-accepted regional conventions, Arab allies are left in an increasingly humiliating position. “It is rather Iran and its allies who feel comfortable in the idea that nothing can be expected from this American administration,” added Bitar. Indeed Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Tuesday denounced Trump's move as tantamount to “colonialism”, something that is “unprecedented in the present century”.

With Arab states long fractured, Tehran has increasingly sought to spread its influence in the region. While most Arab governments have shunned Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad over the country's devastating civil

Continued on Page 24

## Local

# Amir hosts Kuwaiti officials, Italian Defense Minister at Bayan Palace

Amir lauded Kuwaitis' devotion to philanthropy since old times



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Italian Minister of Defense Elisabetta Trenta. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also hosted National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He also hosted the visiting Italian Minister of Defense Elisabetta Trenta along with the accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammed Khaled Al-Khedhr.

His Highness the Amir also hosted, with attendance

of His Highness the Crown Prince, judges Khaled Abulaziz Al-Khaled and Sharifa Abdulaziz Al-Khaled, who presented to His Highness a historic document about 'Al-Haddamah Year,' when the natives jointly faced the hardships of that year. They also handed His Highness a documentary about history of education in the country. His Highness the Amir lauded the Kuwaitis' devotion to philanthropy since old times. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.



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 meet with judges Khaled Abulaziz Al-Khaled and Sharifa Abdulaziz Al-Khaled.

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent Tuesday a cable to Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri to congratulate him on successful catheterization procedure. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to congratulate Hariri on the successful catheterization procedure. In the meantime, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of congratulations to Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq for his re-appointment as UN chief's advisor. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed his sincere sentiments and showed his trust in Maatouq to continue to work diligently to serve humanity. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar

cables to Dr Maatouq.

Also, His Highness the Amir has addressed a cable to Sheikha Dr Suad Mohammad Al-Sabah, expressing congratulations on her designation as among global personalities of most effective influence in cultural and creative works for 2018. The honoring was presented by the Euro-Arab Organization for Cultural Exchange (OEAECE) during, as part of the International Forum of the Culture and Peace, recently held in Brussels (as well as in the city of Liege). His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister addressed cables of identical content to Dr Suad. The international forum was held in Liege and Brussels between March 12 and 25. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti, Italian Defense Ministers discuss ties

KUWAIT: Issues of common interest were the theme of the meeting between First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the visiting Italian Minister of Defense Elisabetta Trenta at Bayan Palace yesterday. Military cooperation and means of enhancing it was the focus of the meeting, as Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah lauded deep-seated relations with Italy, said a defense ministry statement. The meeting was attended by Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khedhr, Air Force Commander Marshal Adnan Al-Fadhli, Deputy Chief of Naval Forces General Idrees Abdulatif, Italy's Ambassador to Kuwait Giuseppe Scognamiglio and Military Attache to Kuwait Colonel Vito Cracas, along with the guest's accompanying delegation. — KUNA



First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Italian Minister of Defense Elisabetta Trenta.



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh inaugurates the Kuwait Yacht Show. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



Minister Anas Al-Saleh tours the exhibition.

## Kuwait Yacht Show underway

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The biggest Kuwait Yacht Show (KYS) kicked off on Tuesday at the Marina Crescent in Salmiya under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. On behalf of the premier, Anas Al-Saleh, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, said: "We can notice how this yacht show is growing significantly through interna-

tional participation. We see a remarkable development in the show year after year," adding that the maritime sector is active and important in Kuwait.

Zeina Al-Moqaddam, General Manager of PH7, noted that the seventh edition of the Kuwait Yacht Show is the largest. "As we at PH7 are optimistic with the number 7, we see the 7th edition is very promising, where we have more than 70 companies participating in the show," she said, adding that more than 15,000 attendees visit the show annually.

KYS makes sure to upgrade its dealerships and outgrow its previous records of brand collaborations with each successive show, meeting clients' requests for larger showcasing spaces. Today, with an ever-growing need for bigger yachts, the show hosts a wide vari-

ety of 70- to 90-foot yachts.

New activities featured for the first time will range from daily marine-themed talks, debates, a live simulation by an expert kayaker and many fish-casting competitions. Additionally, attendees will have the chance to savor the sailing experience on two sailboats offered by a special collaboration with the Kuwait Sailing Association. KYS will also give the stage to a special appearance of a spokesperson from the Environment Public Authority, a sign of the value Kuwait places on the marine economy. A highlight for the visiting public is the exclusive KYS 2019 raffle draw, where one lucky registered visitor will win a Kuwait-made fishing boat from Gulf Master, fully accessorized. The show is open daily till Saturday, March 30 from 4:00 pm to 9:30 pm.

## Zain takes part in inauguration of Kuwait Yacht Show

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in the inauguration of the seventh edition of the Kuwait Yacht Show (KYS 2019) as part of its platinum partnership to the event, which came under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the attendance of his representative Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

Zain's support to this event came in line with its keenness on being an active participant in the various local and regional projects that contribute to shouldering and advancing national economy, being a leading national company in the Kuwaiti private sector. The event also aimed at supporting the local small and medium-sized enterprises segment (SMEs) operating within the marine and boating sectors.

Zain participated in the Kuwait Yacht Show 2019 through its own dedicated booth to showcase the latest innovative solutions offered through the Zain LIFE smart home portfolio, which included a number of the latest and most advanced smart home and security devices that can be used to protect personal properties such as boats, yachts, and more.

The Kuwait Yacht Show (KYS 2019) is considered Kuwait's most awaited

nautical event specializing in marine and boating services. The event gathered the world's top brands as well as the best local and international specialists that offer world-class services to visitors as per the highest international standards.

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

Zain's platinum partnership of KYS 2019 came in line with its keenness to dedicate more efforts into supporting and empowering Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, as well as taking part in such initiatives that contribute to infusing creativity within the entrepreneurial community through partnering with entities that aim at its development.

Zain's showcasing of Zain LIFE's portfolio of innovative solutions at KYS 2019 is in line with the company's strategy to continue its transformation into an integrated digital lifestyle provider, which is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology solutions to enable an easier and more flexible life.

## Gulf Bank presents donation to Kuwait Red Crescent Society

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank was proud to present a donation of KD 10,000 to the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. The donation comes as part of the Bank's commitment to Kuwait and the community, bringing medical aid to those who are unable to afford medical treatment. The donation will go towards the provision of medical devices such as, pacemakers, cochlear devices, hearing aids, electric wheelchairs and stents. Commenting on the

donation, Ahmed Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communication, Gulf Bank, said: "Gulf Bank is committed to supporting the local community, and through our donation to Kuwait Red Crescent Society, the bank is honored to be supporting a local campaign. The private sector has an important role to play in raising awareness of notable causes, and we look forward to continue our support of such causes as that

of Kuwait Red Crescent Society."

Anwar Al-Hasawi, Vice President of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, added: "We are thrilled with Gulf Bank's donation to our cause, assisting us in our goal of providing medical aid to those who need it the most. We would like to thank Gulf Bank for their contribution, which will aid in provision of medical devices such as, pacemakers, cochlear devices, hearing aids, electric wheelchairs and stents."



# Amir attends, patronizes Kuwait's National Operetta at Bayan Palace

Kuwaiti minister grateful for Amir's patronage



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top officials attend the National Operetta at Bayan Palace yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended and patronized the National Operetta at Bayan Palace yesterday. The event was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and senior state officials. The

operetta kicked off with tunes of the National Anthem echoing across the hall. Then, students from various schools proceeded to unveil assorted pictures, depicting national themes. His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince were presented with souvenirs.

### Tremendous honor

His Highness the Amir's sponsorship of the national

operetta is a tremendous honor, Kuwait's Information Minister Mohammad Al-Jabri said. Through His Highness the Amir's support for the event, Kuwait has been thrust into the cultural spotlight, Jabri, who also serves as Minister of State for Youth Affairs, told the press. He said such national activities typify the patriotic ardor that Kuwaitis exude, pointing out that the operetta was the by-product of diligent efforts on the

part of the information and education ministries. Kuwait's Information Ministry will continue to pursue similar endeavors that help bring the country's 2035 vision of sustained development closer to fruition, the minister emphasized. He went on to thank all State bodies involved for organizing the artistic spectacle, wishing the country continued development and prosperity. — KUNA



Children greet His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Children greet His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets those in attendance.



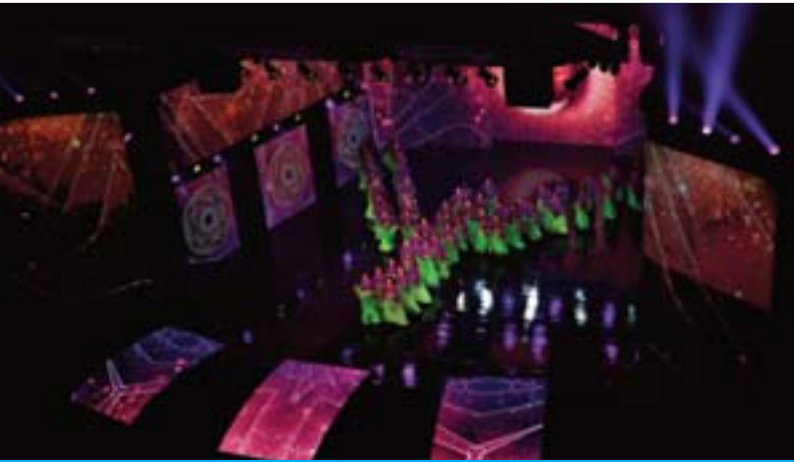
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top officials watch the performance.



Children rush off stage to greet His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Scenes from the national operetta.



## Local

# Kuwait northern area contains \$450-650 billion worth of investment: Sheikh Nasser

## Good education is the biggest thing you offer to preserve human dignity: Minister

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait northern area can contain \$450-650 billion worth of investment but conditional to laws that attract foreign capitals like tax reduction and elimination of "painful bureaucracy," a senior government official said Tuesday. First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said the northern area would house the Silk City project and other ventures which "will enable us to reach out to far places like the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, Turkey and East Europe."

Sheikh Nasser, in an interview with Kuwait TV, said Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port "will link us with those places." The selection of the northern area aims at transforming Kuwait into an international hub for huge foreign investments ... and these investments will be protected by everybody which will reduce the arms purchase made by the state, because of existence of a human and economic regime that is connected with the world," he said.

Sheikh Nasser said New Kuwait 2035 Vision has been inspired by the aspiration of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah "who lived when the human being, not oil, was the most important element in the State." His Highness the Amir has been keen on transforming Kuwait into an international financial and commercial hub, said Sheikh Nasser, and the human being is at its core, nothing else. Sheikh Nasser said the world recognized the Kuwaiti people, as human beings, due to their accomplishment. He added that the late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was

bestowed with the 'Sir' title for his role in helping allies against the Nazis. The allies also honored the Master shipbuilder with 'Sir' title.

### Geographical location

The strength of the Kuwait 2035 vision, said Sheikh Nasser, is in its geographical location. The



## Silk City draft law to be finalized soon

country is located between ancient civilizations: the Civilization of Elam (now modern-day Iran) and the Mesopotamian civilizations. "This has granted Kuwait a point of strength upon which it can proceed with its vision and future," he said.

Sheikh Nasser said Kuwait selected China because of its capabilities in equipping Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port. China, he added, also rented Pakistan's Gwadar Port in the Arabian Sea for 40 years because of its proximity to

Chinese cities. He said goods shipped towards the north of the Arabian Gulf sea can either go through Kuwait or Iraq, a complementary to the commercial and financial hub. Sheikh Nasser said the parliament and government should join hands to address any shortcomings facing the execution of the vision. He thanked Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem for proposing workshops between executive and legislative authorities to overcome obstacles and speed up implementation of the vision.

His Highness the Amir instructed allocation of a budget aimed at improving state management system, he said, and the government was keen on keeping citizens informed about different aspects of vision, its importance and phases of implementation.

### Education a top priority

Sheikh Nasser was asked about education and said this issue was a top priority at the Supreme Council of Planning and Development. "Good education is the biggest thing you offer to preserve dignity of humans, and it requires huge investment in students and teachers as well as a great interest by society and parents," he said. Education "is one of the important components of 2035 vision," added the senior official.

A huge and successful investment, he said, would reduce the burden on the state regarding the creation of jobs for citizens. This will be applicable when investment laws are activated and level of education improves thus nationals would be able to find appropriate jobs, he said.

## Officials warn of 'negative impact' of pressure to replace expats with Kuwaitis

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** High-ranking oil sources called for avoiding 'compulsory employment' in the oil sector, warning that pressure in this direction and politics or pressure-driven replacement of expats with citizens would have a negative impact on budgets, revenues and even projects. The sources added that one of the impacts of such pressure is talking about fake certificates and accrediting them, which nobody knows how far it might develop because it is too complicated.

"The oil sector only approves degrees endorsed by accreditation bodies," the sources stressed, noting that 5,332 citizens had been appointed in the oil sector since 2014 and that 'Kuwaitization' had reached 89.5 percent, the highest nationalization percentage in GCC states. The sources said the oil sector had been employing more Kuwaitis than its budgets and potentials allow. "The sector has a limited capacity according to vacancies and plans. The more projects we have, the more jobs there will be," they stressed, noting that some technical jobs require hiring people with plenty of experience to protect billions of Kuwaiti dinars.

### Excellent performance bonuses

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) agreed to pay excellent performance bonuses to 300 municipality employees working in various departments on monthly payment conditions, provided the needed sums are available in the municipality's budget, said informed sources. Meanwhile, an administrative decision was issued on transferring 291 municipality food inspectors to the food and nutrition authority effective Monday, April 1, the sources added, noting that another decision on transferring 300 others will be issued later.

In a similar development, informed sources said in accordance with CSC regulations and conditions, the Ministry of Health (MoH) had allocated KD 8 million for excellent performance bonuses for its employees, expecting the bonuses to be paid by May or June. The sources explained that bonuses for doctors, consultants and department managers will be KD 1,500, those for pharmacists and technicians will be KD 1,300, KD 1,000 for heads of sections and nursing staff, KD 800 for employees and administrative staff and KD 400 for assistant staff.

Further, the sources explained that conditions to get the bonus include having at least one year of service by the end of 2018, having an excellent assessment report for the previous year, not receiving any disciplinary penal measures in the same year, and not to have exceeded the maximum of 15 days - excluding hospitalization - of sick leaves during the same year. The sources added that those working shifts should have worked at least 70 percent of the shifts and 180 days of actual workdays.

### Uber shares

Well informed official sources at Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) said the authority indirectly owns shares in Uber, which is about to be listed on the New York bourse to increase its market value to \$120 billion, adding that the shares had been bought through international funds and portfolios. The sources added that KIA can earn good revenues from those shares if the funds and portfolios decide to exit.

Notably, as part of its expansion plans, Uber reached an agreement to acquire its Middle East rival Careem, and the deal is expected to be closed during the first quarter of 2020. Uber will pay \$1.4 billion in cash and \$1.7 billion in convertible notes at a price equal to \$55 per share in a deal that gives it full ownership of Careem, while keeping Careem's co-founders and CEO Mudathar Sheikha in office.

## Competition authority explains role in labor market

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Under the patronage of the Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Khalid Al-Roudhan, the Competition Protection Authority (CPA) organized a discussion session yesterday titled "Competition Protection: Defining the laws in order to achieve fair competition in the Kuwaiti market".

During his speech, Chairman of the Board of Directors Dr Rashed Al-Ajmi said the authority has begun to play its role in the labor market. He expected that the work of the authority during the next two years will be more technical than administrative, especially in light of its cooperation with Kuwait International Bank to educate the authority's staff about competition economics in Kuwait.

He added that the new competition law has been prepared in line with best international practices, which is being worked out with specialized bodies and is expected to be approved soon by the National Assembly after approval by the Council of Ministers. "The authority has worked to finalize the set of technical procedures necessary for the implementation of the law, in consultation with international experts specialized in the field, and is also working on the review and approval procedures from the executive management to be submitted to the governing council of the authority for adoption," Ajmi explained.

He stressed that competition is a vital element in stimulating effective and strong economies and encouraging economic growth, and seeks to increase productivity by pushing inefficient companies out of the market and allowing active companies to enter or gain market share. So competition drives all companies to become more efficient through innovation for their survival in the market.

Chief Executive Officer Abdulla Al-Owaisi said based on the freedom of competition guaranteed by the Kuwaiti constitution, freedom of economic activity is guaranteed to all in a way that does not restrict or prevent free competition without prejudice to the provisions of international

## Kuwait rejects consolidating Israel authority over Golan

**NEW YORK:** Kuwait has rejected resolutions that would consolidate the authority of Israel's occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan or any occupied Arab land as the current situation on the ground comes after Israel's decision to change the legal, natural and demographic situation of the Golan. This came in a speech delivered by Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, at a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian issue.

"These attempts are illegal, null and void and constitute a breach of international agreements, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular resolutions 242, 338 and 497, in which the Council affirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force," he said. "We are all following the international reactions condemning any step aimed at annexing the territories by force and rejecting any illegal measures aimed at increasing tension in the region. We regret the United States' decision to annex the Golan under Israel's sovereignty and here we reaffirm Syria's right to restore the entire Syrian Arab Golan according to international legitimacy resolutions," the Kuwaiti diplomat stressed.

Otaibi renewed the call on the international community to fulfill its



**NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks at a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East. — KUNA**

commitments and take the necessary steps to revive the peace process in order to reach a two-state solution, end the Israeli occupation imposed since 1967 and achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on the relevant UN resolutions, land for peace, the Arab peace initiative and the road map.

Otaibi pointed to Israel's plans to build more than 6,000 housing units in Area C and in East Jerusalem, stressing the need for the international community to implement resolution 2334, which stressed that Israeli settlement is a flagrant violation of international law and an obstacle to peace. The resolution calls on Israel to immediately and completely halt all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as the implementation of other relevant international resolutions condemning the illegality of Israeli settlement, including Security Council resolutions 465 and

497. "For almost a month, we have been forced to request a session after another to examine the unilateral decisions taken by the Israeli government illegally," he said.

Otaibi added that the first session came after Israel's refusal to renew mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron or (TIPI), and another when "we asked to hold a joint meeting with Indonesia on March 8 to discuss the economic repercussions of Israel's unilateral decision to freeze part of the Palestinian tax revenues which we fear will trigger another crisis." He noted that this decision may carry serious repercussions in the coming weeks that could drag the region to undesirable consequences due to violating the agreements signed between the two parties, namely the Paris Protocol, which violates international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. — KUNA

The government, said Sheikh Nasser, wanted to make services as good as those offered by the private sector. "The state wants to reduce its direct involvement in services but elevate their level. It will have a monitoring role and will leave the society the freedom to choose the type of services they want," he said.

Sheikh Nasser said "the more attractive the Silk City law is for investment ... the more it falls in the interest of the state." The draft law will be finalized soon and referred to the parliament, he added. The city, he said, would encompass medical, educational and sport zones. The zones will be placed for international bids in order to have security and economic outcome. The Silk City has a board of trustees consisting of renowned international figures, he said, "which will encourage capitals to come (to Kuwait) and trigger a great international confidence."

Sheikh Nasser said his recent tour to the Arabian Gulf countries aimed at working out a comprehensive development plan for the entire region, which would support local plans. He meanwhile said the vision paid a great attention to protection of environment, hand-in-hand with water desalination stations.

The Silk City does not violate the constitution, bans monopoly and encourages wide-scale competition, he said. Sheikh Nasser said skilled manpower would be the basis of the Silk City, and women would play a great role in the development of the nation, while the state was determined to secure equal opportunities and fair distribution of wealth. — KUNA

## Maid mixed baby formula with urine

**KUWAIT:** A Filipina domestic helper mixed baby formula with urine. When the child's father discovered what happened, he reported the matter to police. The Filipina confessed to committing the act but did not give any justification for it. She was detained and charged with the special misdemeanor of "bodily harm of a child".

### 'Suicide' in Hawally

An Ethiopian woman threw herself from a Hawally building, according to preliminary investigations. Police and paramedics rushed to the area and found she had died. The body was recovered by the coroner. A case was filed for further investigations.

### Botched robbery

Criminal detectives solved the mystery of attempted theft at a bank, and found out that a Kuwaiti and bedoon were involved. Both used a hammer to smash the glass and drove a car without plates belonging to the citizen's brother. Detectives found two persons were involved - one a Kuwaiti with a criminal record who was released from prison a year earlier, and the other a bedoon, also with a criminal record. The citizen said he along with his partner planned the theft after watching a movie. He said when the alarms sounded, they escaped.

### 15 bombs found

Kuwait army engineers collected 15 bombs found near Mutlaa. A citizen called police and told them he found a bomb near Ministry of Electricity and Water reservoirs, so they went to the area and checked it. They then called army engineers, who found 15 bombs and took them to a safe area. They combed the area, but nothing else was found. - Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

## Police raid unlicensed auto repair shops

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Jahra police carried out a crackdown yesterday at a large space in Amghara where unlicensed auto repairmen offered their services to reckless sports cars' drivers. The location also lacked necessary safety conditions. During the raid, police found six vehicles, some of which carrying Gulf license plates and forged plates, while others carried no plates, in addition to an unlicensed store for spare parts. The vehicles were impounded, while investigations are ongoing to identify their owners.





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Seven Thai parties form coalition to thwart junta

## Anti-satellite weapons: Rare, high-tech, and risky to test



RABAT: Roman Catholic Archbishop Cristobal Lopez Romero waves to worshippers as he walks during mass on the first Sunday of Lent at St Peter's Roman Catholic Cathedral in the Moroccan capital Rabat. — AFP

# Morocco counts its Christian community

## Several thousand Moroccans have converted

**RABAT:** Islam is the state religion in Morocco, but the country has a small Christian community dating back to Roman times, and kept alive mainly by devotees arriving from sub-Saharan Africa. The Roman Catholic Church in the country, governed under a decree adopted in 1984 before the ground-breaking visit of then pope John Paul II in August 1985, has about 30,000 to 35,000 members. There are about 3,000 Protestants, while several thousand believers follow other Christian movements, according to one expert.

### Europeans, sub-Saharan

More than 90 percent of the Christians hail from sub-Saharan Africa, and many of them are students drawn by grants for Morocco's universities. There are also growing numbers of immigrants, who come to Morocco hoping to make their way to Europe across the Mediterranean. The number of European Christians, either expatriates or descendants of French colonial families, has been falling since 1956. Back then Morocco counted more than 200 Catholic churches, with about 300,000 practicing faith-

ful. But former holy places have gradually been turned into mosques or cultural centers, while some have just been abandoned and fallen into ruins. Today about 44 churches remain, with some 57 priests of about 15 nationalities, led by two bishops in Rabat and Tangiers.

### Converted Christians

Most of the Christians in Morocco are foreigners, but there are also several thousand Moroccans who have converted, mostly to the Protestant church. The Paris-based Observatory for Religious Freedom put the number at 8,000. Morocco touts its policy of religious tolerance. And indeed its constitution states that "Islam is the state religion which guarantees to all the freedom to practice their faith".



## Islam is the state religion in Morocco

The king as "the commander of the faithful, guards over respect for Islam". And King Mohammed VI has vaunted himself as the defender of a "moderate Islam" and the protector of religious minorities. Christian foreigners linked to the "official" church enjoy the protection of the authorities, but unlike Jews, they do not have a legal status in the state's eyes. Moroccans who have converted must practice their faith discreetly and risk being accused of proselytizing if they engage in public expressions of any religion other than Islam.

It is a criminal offence under Moroccan law to try to proselytize or "rock the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion" punishable by six months to three years in prison. Two associations which are not rec-

ognized by the state-The Moroccan Christians' Coordination and the Moroccan Association for the Rights of Religious Minorities-have been campaigning for new legal clauses recognizing religious freedoms and condemning discrimination against Muslims who have converted.

### Muslim majority

Religious minorities-Christians, Jews, Baha'is and Shiites-represent less than one percent of the population of the kingdom, which is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. The Jewish community has fallen from about 300,000 to less than 3,000 since the creation of Israel in 1948 and Morocco's independence eight years later, according to some estimates. The number of atheists is unknown, as such a stand is usually rejected by Moroccan society. And there are very few people who dare to publicly break with the daytime fast observed during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan-something which is punishable by up to six months in prison.— AFP

## Morocco's diverse Catholic community awaits Pope

**RABAT:** Ahead of Pope Francis arriving in Morocco, the country's small and diverse Catholic community gathered excitedly at Rabat's cathedral to get their hands on tickets to see the pontiff. "We're lucky! The pope is coming to Africa, it will bring together communities from all walks of life in a Muslim country. It's extraordinary," said Ernoult Kumba, 27, originally from Congo-Brazzaville. On the first Sunday of Lent, a tight crowd gathered around the cathedral nave including tourists, foreign retirees, and a majority of parishioners from sub-Saharan Africa.

The pope's arrival on Saturday has been hailed as a "unique opportunity" by Rabat's archbishop, Cristobal Lopez Romero, who said it demonstrates that "we value more that which unites us than that which divides us". "You come from all peoples and all countries," the Spanish archbishop told churchgoers, rolling off a list of those who were due to be baptized. Reflecting the diversity of the parish, there was a reading in Portuguese before the Lord's Prayer in Arabic.

Around 30,000 to 35,000 Catholics live in Morocco, a tenth of the number before the North African country gained independence in 1956. Back then there were more than 200 Catholic churches, while now just 44 remain, which are supported by Morocco's migrant communities. The first wave of arrivals from sub-Saharan Africa came in the 1990s, with students on university grants, followed by those over the past decade who are seeking to reach



RABAT: Moroccan students attend class at the 'The Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams Morchidines and Morchidates' in the Moroccan capital Rabat. Pope Francis is due to visit the North African country on March 30-31 at the invitation of King Mohammed VI. — AFP

Europe. "They breathe new life, I've never seen a church so young, with an average age of 30 to 35", said Father Daniel Nourissat, who leads the Rabat parish. Lizzie, a 20-year-old Ivorian, said she wasn't previously a strong believer but "everything" changed when she came to study in Morocco. "It's not easy, here, and faith is a great support," she said. The sentiment was echoed by Jean-Baptiste, a fellow Ivorian, who said many parishioners attend church to "create a fraternity".

### A 'degree of freedom'

The pope's two-day visit follows an invitation by King Mohammed VI, as part of the "development of inter-religious dialogue" according to Moroccan authorities. The king describes himself as the "commander of the faithful" and Islam is the state religion, although the constitution guarantees "to all the freedom to practice their faith". It is, however, a criminal offence to try to prose-

lytise or "rock the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion", punishable with from six months to three years in prison. "It's true that compared to other Arab countries we have a degree of freedom," said Mohamed, a Moroccan who converted to Catholicism in 2016.

The 70-year-old said he was "convinced by the preachings of Father Rachid," a Christian convert and presenter on Egyptian satellite channel Al Hayat TV. "It's not always easy, but I don't hide" visits to the cathedral, Mohamed said proudly. With Christianity a sensitive subject, the Rabat parish avoids putting its flock in the spotlight.

"Some Muslims pretend that we don't have the same God and that we will end up in hell," said Cyrvine, a 24-year-old Congolese student who sings in the choir. "But the pope's visit will be an opportunity to unite communities and religions," she added, impatient for the pontiff's arrival.— AFP

## New blackout grips Venezuela as Maduro blames 'terrorists'

**CARACAS:** President Nicolas Maduro blamed "terrorists" for a new, near-nationwide blackout that gripped Venezuela Tuesday, two weeks after a similar outage caused deaths and chaos. In a statement on Twitter, Maduro said a deliberately set "large-scale fire" on Monday hit facilities around the Guri hydro-electric plant in the south of the country that supplies power to 80 percent of Venezuela's 30 million inhabitants.

"Criminal hands" then knocked out transformers as repairs were going on, he said, alleging the "sly terrorist attacks" had the goal of "destabilizing" the country. His communication minister, Jorge Rodriguez, tweeted images of electrical installations consumed by flames. Vice President Delcy Rodriguez tweeted that a 24-hour closure of schools and workplaces to take a load off the grid would be extended another 24 hours, "based on the scale of the damage."

The first blackout, between March 7 and 14, resulted in more than a dozen hospital patients, including those needing dialysis or intensive care, dying, and desperate citizens turning to sewer outfalls to get water. On Tuesday, Caracas and other cities were paralyzed once more. Public transport and water supplies were disrupted. Buildings without generators - including many hospitals - were plunged into gloom.

Junior Veliz, an unemployed man standing outside a Caracas hospital, told AFP that his newborn daughter "died because (the hospital) didn't have heating at the time the power went out-she died of respiratory arrest when the power went out." Nearby, a patient with renal failure, Beatriz Reyes, said "we're waiting for the electricity to come back so

they can give us dialysis." Streets in the capital were largely empty. Shops were shuttered. "It's a real catastrophe, a humanitarian crisis," said Noe de Souza, the 36-year-old owner of one of the rare bakeries still open. NetBlocks, an organization that monitors the internet, said it had detected a "severe impact" to the telecoms network across 18 of Venezuela's 23 states.

In the last blackout, Maduro also had said the Guri plant was targeted. Then, he accused the United States of launching a "cybernetic" attack against it, and the opposition of being behind acts of "sabotage." He promised to protect infrastructure with a specially created military unit. Analysts said that while a US attack was possible it was unlikely, adding that years of underinvestment, poor management and corruption was the more likely culprits. This time, Maduro's government again pointed the finger at the opposition. But opposition leader Juan Guaido - recognized as Venezuela's interim president by the US and its allies - rejected that as unbelievable.

"They are not giving any sensible, credible explanation," he said. "When it's not a 'cyberattack' or an 'electromagnetic pulse' it's 'sabotage,' despite them militarizing more and more the electricity stations." He said he had information from workers in the state electricity company Corpoelec that some transformers had overloaded. In the streets, Venezuelans appeared midway between rage and resignation. "This is too much," said Leo, a 19-year-old employee in a Caracas restaurant that was forced to close as its fridges warmed up. "The meat and chicken - all the food is rotting. It's a total loss."—AFP

International

# Calm returns to Gaza after rockets trigger retaliatory exchange of fire

## Netanyahu set for military action as election nears

**JERUSALEM:** Palestinian militants fired three rockets at Israel overnight prompting retaliatory fire from Israel, with the exchanges threatening a Hamas-declared truce. Calm returned later yesterday, though there were concerns the first anniversary of mass protests along the Gaza-Israel border on Saturday would lead to further tensions. A big turnout is expected for the anniversary of the marches, which have been calling for Palestinian refugees to be allowed to return to their former homes now inside Israel.

Israel says such calls amount to a campaign for its destruction and accuses Hamas of orchestrating violence along the border. The protests have drawn a deadly response from the Israel army, which says its actions are necessary to defend the border. More than 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire and one Israeli soldier has been killed by a Palestinian sniper. Palestinians and human rights groups say protesters have been shot while posing little threat.

The exchange of fire overnight came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was prepared for further military action in Gaza, at a highly sensitive time ahead of an April 9 Israeli general election. The latest severe flare-up began early Monday when a rare long-distance rocket fired from the Gaza Strip hit a house north of Tel Aviv, wounding seven Israelis. The Israeli military hit back with air strikes across the enclave and Palestinian militants launched a further barrage of rock-

ets. No casualties have been reported.

### 'Do what is necessary'

Calm prevailed throughout yesterday, with Hamas claiming Egypt had brokered a ceasefire, but as night fell Israel said a rocket was fired from Gaza. In response, a military statement said "fighter jets struck several terror targets in the southern Gaza Strip, including a Hamas military compound and a weapons manufacturing warehouse in Khan Yunis." A Palestinian security source said an air strike hit a Hamas military base in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza.

Shortly before midnight, the army reported a second rocket attack, this time on an industrial zone on the edge of the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon. Hamas, its main Gaza ally Islamic Jihad and smaller groups took pains to disassociate themselves from the incident. "The rocket that hit near Ashkelon was the work of an individual and the factions are committed to calm" as long as Israel is, they said in a joint statement. Early yesterday, Israel struck back.

"Fighter jets and aircraft struck several terror targets in the southern Gaza Strip in a Hamas military compound in Rafah," an army statement said. Before dawn, another rocket was fired at Ashkelon but was brought down by Israeli air defenses, the army said. Netanyahu, who cut short a high-profile visit to the United States to take charge of Israel's response, said

**A rare rocket fire sparks the latest flare-up**



**RAFAH:** A ball of fire and smoke billows above buildings in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli strikes yesterday. — AFP

Tuesday: "We are prepared to do a lot more. "We will do what is necessary to defend our people and to defend our state," he told the annual conference of US pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC by satellite link.

The army said that after a meeting with Netanyahu — who is also defense minister - chief of staff Lieutenant General Aviv Kohavi ordered more forces

sent to the southern border region. Yesterday, a Hamas spokesman said: "The Gaza Strip has lived under Israeli aggression for two days. The Hamas movement has exercised its right to defend its Palestinian people." "The situation has calmed down after the intervention of the brothers in Egypt and the entry into force of the ceasefire," said Hazem Qassem. — AFP

## Death toll from attack on Mali's herders hits 157

**BAMAKO:** The death toll from Saturday's attack by gunmen on villagers in central Mali has risen to 157, a government spokesman said, confirming it as one of the worst recent atrocities in a country beset by ethnic violence. The attack, in which women and children were burned in their homes, marked an escalation in violence between Dogon hunters and Fulani herders that killed hundreds of civilians last year and is spreading across Africa's Sahel, the region between the Sahara to the north and the continent's savannas to the south.

"The official death toll is 157," government spokesman Amadou Kotia said late on Tuesday. Officials on Saturday said that about 134 had been killed, though they expected that number to rise. The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, said this week that the crimes may fall under the court's jurisdiction and that a delegation will be sent to Mali. A UN Security Council mission was already visiting the former French colony to seek solutions to the violence when the attack took place.

An official from a nearby town said on Saturday that armed men, dressed as traditional Dogon hunters, attacked villages populated by Fulani herders. The Dogon suspect the Fulani of harboring Islamist extremists, charges the Fulani deny. The attack came less than a week after an assault by jihadists on an army post killed at least 23 soldiers, also in Mali's central region. That attack was



**MOPTI, Mali:** Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (center) looks at destroyed houses following an attack on the village of Ogossagou, near Mopti, where over 130 Fulani villagers, including women and children, were killed. — AFP

claimed by an Al-Qaeda affiliate. Tacit outsourcing of the fight against jihadists to vigilante groups with scores to settle has unleashed ethnic violence across the Sahel.

In neighboring Burkina Faso at the end of December, an ethnic Mossi militia group killed dozens of Fulani in revenge for the killing of a village chief by jihadists. Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita responded to the attack by replacing two generals and disbanding an anti-jihadist vigilante group called Dan Na Amassagou, whose Dogon fighters were suspected of being behind the massacre. The group has denied its members were

involved and rejected the government's dissolution.

"We will continue to exert our activities as per usual, ensuring the protection of populations until the state decides to live up to its security role," Dan Na Amassagou spokesman Marcelin Guinguere said. He said the attack was carried out by Fulani-led jihadists disguised as Dogon. Jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State have exploited ethnic rivalries in Mali and its neighbors Burkina Faso and Niger in recent years to boost recruitment. Some 4,500 French troops are based in the Sahel, most of them in Mali. The United States also has hundreds of troops in the region. — Reuters

## Indonesia buries unidentified Papua flood victims in a mass grave

**SENTANI:** Unidentified victims of deadly flash floods and landslides in Indonesia were buried in a mass grave yesterday, with dozens still missing nearly two weeks after the disaster. The official death toll stands at 112, but over 90 more people are unaccounted for after torrential rains pounded Indonesia's Papua region, triggering landslides and flash floods. Some 20 victims who have yet to be identified were placed in numbered coffins and then buried near the hard-hit town of Sentani. Their DNA samples have been sent to the national police headquarters, authorities said.

"If later on there's a family member who comes to report a missing relative, we will take their DNA and if it matches, the body (will) be exhumed and given to the relatives," Ramon Amiman, head of the medical unit at the Papua police said. The March 16 disaster left nearly 1,000 injured while more than 11,000 people were evacuated to temporary shelters, with thousands still living in makeshift tents. The government earlier announced a two-week state of emergency after the disaster destroyed homes and other buildings and blocked roads.

In one residential complex alone, some 60 homes were swept away. "The destruction is enormous," said Giri Wijayantoro, vice regent of Papua's capital Jayapura. "We're still in the state of emergency so we're focusing on searching for the missing victims." Flooding is common in Indonesia, especially during the rainy season which runs from October to April. In January, floods and landslides killed at least 70 people on Sulawesi island, while earlier this month hundreds in West Java province were forced to evacuate when torrential rains triggered severe flooding. — AFP

## 7 Thai parties form coalition to thwart junta

**BANGKOK:** Seven political parties formed a coalition in Thailand yesterday, vowing to thwart a military-backed proxy in a bid to end years of junta rule following the country's first election since a 2014 coup. A junta-aligned party and its main rival have both claimed the right to govern the country after Sunday's vote, prompting a political standoff. Questions over irregularities are swirling following invalidated ballots and accusations of skewed numbers.

Pheu Thai, affiliated with self-exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, joined forces with six other parties in a bid to halt military-backed factions from leading the country. "We want to stop the regime from hanging onto power," Pheu Thai's prime ministerial candidate Sudarat Keyuraphan told reporters. "Pro-democracy parties received the most trust and consensus by the people," she added, conceding that final results have not yet been released.

Thailand has been ruled by a junta since a 2014 putsch led by General Prayut Chan-O-Cha, the prime ministerial candidate for the Phalang Pracharat Party. But Phalang Pracharat stunned the pro-democracy camp by winning the popular vote on Sunday with 7.6 million ballots, according to preliminary results. Its main rival Pheu Thai got 400,000 fewer votes, but is now aiming to take the majority of seats in the lower house with its newly-formed coalition.

The seven-party bloc claimed it would take 255 out of the 500 lower house seats that are up for grabs, but with all official results yet to be confirmed the numbers are not ironclad. A clearer picture of the lower house could emerge as early as Friday when more comprehensive figures are expected to be released. But the party still cannot elect a prime minister without commanding more than half - or 376 - of all 750 seats in the com-



**BANGKOK:** Leaders of different Thai political parties show signed documents during a press conference in Bangkok yesterday. — AFP

bined lower and upper houses. The balance of power is stacked in the junta's favor thanks to a charter it drafted creating 250 military-appointed upper house seats. That means non-military parties like Pheu Thai need an avalanche of votes in order to elect a prime minister. The coalition formed yesterday does not include two other high-profile parties - Bhumjaithai and the Democrat Party - which together have around 70 seats so far and whose allegiances are still up for grabs. Phalang Pracharat is expected to seek its own allied bloc.

### 'People's mandate'

Sunday's election had been repeatedly delayed and was seen as a test for Thailand's tattered democracy, which has seen at least 12 coups since 1932.

Phalang Pracharat did better than expected by clinching the most popular votes, and the junta-backed party dismissed the coalition's claim to be the democratic choice. "Please stop using 'democratic front' because in this election, no matter how many votes each party receives, everyone enters the election democratically," the party's secretary general Sontirat Sontijirawong told reporters.

Its leader said the party was confident but was waiting to see how many seats it would get. A small protest was held outside its party headquarters yesterday, led by activist Ekachai Hongkangwan who cautioned potential allies from joining forces with Phalang Pracharat. "I don't want any snakes to enter the party," he said, throwing reptile repellent on the ground for effect. — AFP

## Brunei to impose death by stoning for gay sex and adultery

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Adultery and gay sex in Brunei will be subject to death by stoning from next week, authorities said, under a strict Sharia law that has been on hold for four years amid heavy criticism. Rights groups reacted in horror yesterday to the latest headline move from the resource-rich nation on Borneo, which practices a stricter brand of Islam than its neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia.

The tiny sultanate will implement the harsh new penal code—which also prescribes amputation of a hand and foot for theft—next Wednesday. Homosexuality is already illegal in Brunei but it will now become a capital offence. The law only applies to Muslims. The new penalty for theft is amputation of the right hand for a first offence, and the left foot for a second offence. Amnesty International yesterday urged Brunei to "immediately halt" implementing the new penalties.

"To legalize such cruel and inhuman penalties is appalling of itself," Brunei researcher Rachel Chhoa-Howard said in a statement. "Some of the potential 'offences' should not even be deemed crimes at all, including consensual sex between adults of the same gender." A notice on Brunei's Attorney General's Chambers dated December 29 last year said the provisions will take effect on April 3. Brunei first announced the measures in 2013 but implementation has been delayed as officials worked out the practical details and in the teeth of opposition by rights groups.

Under a shift towards hardline Islamic law, Brunei in 2015 banned excessive Christmas celebrations for fear that Muslims could be led astray. Brunei's Sultan is no stranger to controversy at home—the monarchy was deeply embarrassed by a family feud with his brother Jefri over the latter's alleged embezzlement of \$15 billion during his tenure as finance minister in the 1990s. Court battles and investigations revealed salacious details of Jefri's un-Islamic jetset lifestyle, including claims of a high-priced harem of foreign women and a luxury yacht he owned called "Tits". —AFP

## International

# Tall hurdles as Europe leaders seek to close ranks on Beijing

## China's push deep into Europe triggers alarm bells

**PARIS:** Europe's top leaders tried to project a united front when they met China's Xi Jinping, but their desire to push back against Beijing could prove difficult to put into practice, analysts say. Tuesday's joint meeting in Paris between Xi and Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker was an innovation of sorts. Xi usually prefers bilateral talks, but host Macron, a fervent pro-European, was intent on sending a message: that EU leaders were stronger together.

With Xi sat next to him at a press conference, the 41-year-old French leader pointedly reminded his Chinese visitor that "we expect our major partners to respect the unity of the European Union." Steven Blockmans, a foreign policy expert at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels, told AFP that the meeting should be seen as part of EU efforts to be more assertive. "There is a feeling that member states need to come together in unison to be able to stand up to China," he said.

The change has been sparked in large part by concerns about China's "Belt and Road" infrastructure venture, also known as the "New Silk Road", which has seen Beijing disperse billions of dollars on investments abroad. The idea is to improve infrastructure to link Chinese manufacturers in the east to European consumers in the west along a route of around 60 countries. But China's push deep into Europe, where it has snapped up strategic assets such as ports and promised lucrative contracts for some of the bloc's cash-strapped economies, has sounded alarm bells.

Days before Xi's visit, the European Commission released a sharply worded plan for balancing ties with China, warning that Beijing was a "systemic rival" as well as the bloc's biggest trading partner. The list of European grievances is long. The Commission raised the long-standing problem of forced technology transfers, in which European companies must transfer technology to China to win contracts. It also outlined issues such as Chinese subsidies for its industrial companies, which distort global competition, as well as the closed public procurement market in China. European offi-

cials have long chafed at the bloc's huge trade deficit with Beijing—it imported 375 billion euros of goods in 2017 while exporting just 198 billion euros. There is also mounting anxiety about cybersecurity, particularly over new 5G mobile phone technology from China's Huawei that the US has warned could be used for spying. "In my opinion, this is the beginning of a long-term adjustment of EU-China relations," said Alice Ekman, head of China studies at the French Institute of International Relations.

### 'Being realistic'

Both Macron and Merkel insisted Tuesday on the need for "reciprocity" in relations with China and a level playing field regarding trade and business ventures. Last month, EU lawmakers voted in new methods for screening foreign investments in Europe which will limit China's ability to buy firms in the strategic technology and infrastructure sectors.

And last week, European leaders devoted time during a meeting in Brussels to discuss their policies towards China—a rare step that many observers saw as a belated awakening to the risks. "I really think that Europe is getting its act together," said Philippe Le Corre, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This will be put to the test next month when Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang touches down in Brussels for another summit with EU leaders.

### 'Carrot and stick'

But the problem for leaders such as Macron who want to see a more coordinated EU strategy is individual members states pursuing narrower national interests. "Overall there is a very fractured, fragmented approach by EU member states vis-a-vis China, at a bilateral and regional level," Blockmans said.

He says members states have "old habits of trying to strike the best deal they can with this rising superpower." One flagrant example was Italy's decision to sign up to Beijing's "New Silk Road" infrastructure initiative last week—despite scowls of disapproval from its EU partners. And



**PARIS:** Chinese President Xi Jinping (left) meets French senators as he is received by President of the French Senate Gerard Larcher at the French Senate in Paris, as part of his three-day state visit to France. — AFP

while Xi praised multilateralism and EU cooperation during his five-day visit to Italy, Monaco and France, few expect China to change course in how it deals with the EU.

"They like talking to countries individually—it's not so different from (US President) Donald Trump—and they've been shaping EU-China relations in that way," said Le Corre. Just

days after the EU-China summit on April 9, Croatia will hold this year's meeting of the so-called "I6+1" forum of Central and European countries, which was formed by China. Many European officials believe it is designed to split the EU. Of the 16 countries which have partnered with Beijing in the forum, 11 are EU members. — AFP

## China expels former Interpol chief from Communist Party

**BEIJING:** China has expelled former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei from the Communist Party and dismissed him from his official positions, the country's graft watchdog announced yesterday. Meng, who served as the vice minister of public security, vanished in September last year during a visit to China from France, and was later accused of accepting bribes.

"Meng Hongwei has no party principles ... does not report personal matters in accordance with regulations ... and refuses to implement the decision of the Party Central Committee," the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) said in a statement. Meng had used state assets to support his family's lavish lifestyle while abusing his position to get his wife employment, the watchdog said, adding that he "illegally accepted huge amounts of property from others".

"Meng Hongwei seriously violated the party's political discipline and political rules ... seriously tarnished the party's image, seriously damaged national interest ... and should be seriously dealt with," the CCDI said. The case has been handed over to the state prosecutor's office, and his "illegal income" has been confiscated, it added.

### Long career

Meng, the first Chinese head of Interpol, had risen through the ranks of the country's feared security apparatus. He had a 14-year career overseeing various top public security bureaux in China, including the country's armed police force. As vice security minister, Meng has been entrusted with a number of sensitive portfolios, including the country's counter-terrorism division, and was in charge of the response to violence in China's fractious northwestern region of Xinjiang. Upon his 2016 election to the Interpol presidency, there were concerns by rights groups that Beijing could use the organization to round up Chinese dissidents overseas.

But day-to-day operations are overseen by the Interpol secretary general, though Meng presided over the organization's General Assembly and Executive Committee meetings, where key discussions around Interpol's general policies and international cooperation take place. Shortly after his disappearance last year, Beijing informed the international police organization that Meng had resigned as president, and that he had been charged with accepting bribes.

### Anti-graft drive

News of Meng's sacking comes just a day after the country's former head of internet censorship, Lu Wei, was sentenced to 14 years in prison for bribery. Meng and Lu are part of a growing group of Communist Party cadres caught in President Xi Jinping's anti-graft campaign, which critics say has served as a way to remove the leader's political enemies.

In October, the country's public security bureau linked Meng's detention to a broader initiative to "completely remove the pernicious influence" of Zhou Yongkang, a former security tsar who was sentenced to life in prison in 2015 for bribery, abuse of power and leaking state secrets. Meng was appointed vice security minister by Zhou in 2004. More than one million officials have been punished so far during Xi's six-year tenure.

Meng's wife Grace last week urged French President Emmanuel Macron to discuss her husband's case with Xi during the Chinese president's official visit to Paris. In her written appeal, Meng demanded that her husband be allowed to receive visits from his lawyers. Since her husband's arrest, she has remained in Lyon—where Interpol's headquarters is based—under French police protection. She has also applied for asylum in France and said she fears for her life and that of her twin sons. — AFP

## Brexit votes: The options

**LONDON:** British MPs are set to hold a series of votes yesterday on different Brexit options in a bid to break paralysis in parliament on the issue. Three years after Britain decided to leave the European Union, lawmakers have become deadlocked on how—or even whether—the country should proceed with its departure from the bloc.

More than a dozen amendments covering an array of scenarios have been put forward, with parliamentary speaker John Bercow first set to choose which will be voted on. Some build on Prime Minister Theresa May's twice-rejected divorce deal while others offer stark alternatives—including leaving without a deal and stopping Brexit altogether. Here are the main options being considered:

### Customs union

Several of the proposals advocate Britain remaining in the EU customs union—likely after adopting May's withdrawal plan and its implementation period to the end of 2020. Committing fully to the customs union would end the dispute over her deal's provisions for the Irish border, ensuring it remains open after Brexit. This option is favored by the main opposition Labor Party—alongside close alignment to the EU single market—as well as cross-party groups of MPs. But opponents argue it would hinder Britain's ability to strike trade deals with countries around the world, and

the Conservative Party manifesto vowed Britain would leave the customs union.

### Norwegian model

Although outside the EU, energy-rich Norway is in the European Economic Area (EEA) — alongside Iceland and Liechtenstein—meaning they benefit from membership of the single market but do not have a say in the making of its rules. They must also allow the free movement of goods, capital, services and people—the EU's four freedoms—with member states. However, they are not in the customs union. Some British lawmakers pushing this approach have also proposed that London adds comprehensive customs arrangements with the EU, in a plan dubbed "Common Market 2.0". Its advantages are Britain's large services sector—including the financial hub in the capital—would be undisturbed, while goods trade, including across the contentious Irish border, could continue unimpeded. But critics say it would leave Britain hostage to EU rules, and also fall foul of the promise of the Brexit campaign to limit immigration.

### Second Brexit referendum

Many Remain-backing MPs see a second referendum as the most viable path towards preventing Brexit, while others believe it could simply break the stalemate. However, there has never been clarity over what the referendum would ask, other than the cross-party People's Vote campaign insisting that staying in the EU must be one of the choices. A compromise put forward by some Labor MPs calls only for "a confirmatory public vote" on any government



**LONDON:** Union flags flutter on a souvenir stand near the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, central London yesterday. — AFP

deal reached with the EU—including the prime minister's current plan. That could garner more support than a vote earlier this month when a majority of MPs rejected postponing the Brexit date in order to hold another referendum.

### Cancel Brexit

The most dramatic option would be to cancel Brexit altogether by revoking Article 50, the departure mechanism that set a two-year clock ticking down to March 29, Britain's original exit day. With two of the amendments urging this measure to avoid a

no-deal departure, Bercow may give MPs the chance to vote on the option.

### No-deal

If no alternative course can be agreed, Britain will default to "third country" status with the EU as early as April 12, with trade relations run on World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. This involves tariffs and increased barriers that could disrupt the seamless supply chains that connect Britain and the EU. Lawmakers have already voted overwhelmingly to reject this option, meaning the speaker is doubtful to pick a new amendment again calling for it.— AFP

## Trump's administration puts Obamacare in crosshairs

**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump's administration vowed Tuesday to see Obamacare—a massive, but controversial reform intended to bring health care to more Americans—struck down. Top Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway said the policy, which became law after a fierce legislative battle under then president Barack Obama, had failed. "It wasn't the magical elixir for Americans," she told reporters.

Conway was speaking after Trump's Justice Department announced an abrupt escalation in the administration's push against Obamacare by siding with a Texas federal court ruling that declared the health care law unconstitutional. The department had previously said it backed parts of the law. But in its new position, it said that it sided fully with the December ruling made by Judge Reed O'Connor following a lawsuit brought by conservative states.

That ruling is currently being appealed and the resulting impasse looks increasingly likely to end up in the Supreme Court—putting a politically radioactive issue center stage as the country moves towards the 2020 presidential election. Obamacare, formally called the Affordable Care Act, was one of the most consequential healthcare measures in US history. At the heart of the law was a mandate that Americans buy health insurance, while also forcing insurance companies to accept all applicants, even if they have pre-existing health conditions.

Democrats saw the law as a historic step to getting tens of millions of Americans who had no health coverage to participate in what is a highly uneven and often inaccessible system. Republicans, on the other hand, attacked the law from the start—especially the mandate on buying insurance—as government overreach. A penalty that the law originally imposed on anyone failing to get insurance has already been repealed by Congress.



**WASHINGTON:** US President Donald Trump speaks to reporters before a meeting with Senate Republicans on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

### Pre-existing conditions protection?

Conway stressed that again Tuesday, saying the mandate is "not America." Health care "is one of the most intimate aspects of your life," she said. But she denied warnings from Democrats that scrapping Obamacare will once more allow insurance companies to reject applicants depending on their state of health—a practice that pushes huge numbers of people to get by with no medical coverage at all.

"We have to make sure that pre-existing conditions are protected," she said. And Trump, speaking to reporters before a meeting with congressional Republicans, insisted that he wanted alternatives to Obamacare, rather than merely scrapping the law. "The Republican Party will soon be known as the party of health care. You watch," he said. Democrats reacted with anger to the administration's latest move. "Tonight in federal court, the Trump Administration decided not only to try to destroy protections for Americans living with pre-existing conditions, but to declare all-out war on the health care of the American people," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Monday. "Democrats will continue to fight relentlessly to protect people with pre-existing conditions and to deliver lower health costs and prescription drug prices for every American," she added. In 2012, five of the nine Supreme Court justices upheld the law. All five remain on the court. — AFP

## Forest fire sweeps northwest Spain

**MADRID:** Firefighting crews aided by lighter winds made progress yesterday in their battle against a wildfire which broke out in northwestern Spain amid unusually warm weather, officials said. Hundreds of firefighters and soldiers backed by seven helicopters and five water-dropping planes were fighting the blaze which broke out on Monday near the village of San Xoan de Laino in the northwestern region of Galicia, the regional government said in a statement.

Officials evacuated two schools in the area on Tuesday because of the advancing flames but the blaze was no longer threatening built-up areas, it added. A spark from a high-voltage power line is the "most probable" cause of the wildfire, which was then fuelled by strong winds, the vice president of the regional government of Galicia, Alfonso Rueda, told local television. Authorities in Galicia estimate the blaze has so far ravaged around 850 acres (2,100 acres) of land, making it the worst wildfires since deadly blazes hit the region in October 2017.

Firefighters said lighter winds had helped them get the upper hand against the blaze although they cautioned temperatures remained high. Temperatures are forecast to hit 29 degrees (84 Fahrenheit) yesterday in some parts of Galicia, which is heavily wooded in native oaks and pines and has large areas of imported eucalyptus plantations. Another three smaller fires were active in other parts of Galicia which had so far destroyed a total of around 140 hectares, including one which affects a national park.

Last month was the second driest February this century in Spain, according to national weather office Aemet. Across the border in Portugal firefighters late on Tuesday brought under control a blaze near the central village of Oliveira de Azemeis which threatened several homes. Some 400 firefighters battled the fire at one point. Portuguese authorities warned that all of mainland Portugal faced a "high" risk of wildfires due to dry winds and drought conditions. — AFP

## International

# North Korea embassy raid thrusts shadowy group into the spotlight

## ‘A target on the back’: Spanish court names suspects in embassy break in

**SEOUL:** A shadowy group seeking to overthrow North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been thrust into the international spotlight after a Spanish court investigating a break-in at the North Korean embassy in Madrid named apparent members as suspects. Cheollima Civil Defense, also known as Free Joseon, first went public in 2017, when it said it was protecting the family of Kim Jong Un's half brother Kim Jong Nam, who was murdered in a Malaysian airport.

Spanish authorities unsealed court documents on Tuesday accusing at least 10 individuals of storming into the embassy, restraining and beating some staff members and holding them hostage for hours before fleeing with stolen computers and hard drives. Such an action would be one of the most militant operations ever carried out by activists opposed to North Korea's government.

"Parties seeking to 'out' those in Madrid have painted a target on the backs of those seeking only to protect others," Cheollima Civil Defense said in a website post, apparently acknowledging for the first time its involvement in the raid. "They have chosen to side with Pyongyang's criminal, totalitarian rulers over their victims." It disputed police allegations that weapons or violence were used in the break-in.

Of the 10 suspects, the documents listed the names and birth dates of seven, including citizens of Mexico, the United States, and South Korea. All but one are under 30

years old. The identification of at least some of the individuals in the group may have undermined their cause and perhaps endangered their lives, analysts and activists said. "It was too risky," said one South Korean human rights activist who previously worked with one of the



**‘Outing’ members put lives at risk**

suspects. "Now that their identities are known, they won't be able to carry out activities as before."

### North Korea activist

The Mexican national named by Spanish authorities as one of the embassy raid's leaders, Adrian Hong, is a longtime activist who helped found the refugee aid organization Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), and later

led an organization preparing for an "imminent, dramatic change" in North Korea, analysts said. Spanish court documents said Hong played a leading role in the break-in, and that after fleeing to the United States he contacted the FBI to offer information that had been stolen. Hong could not be reached for immediate comment. Hong was among several LiNK activists who were arrested and deported from China in late 2006 as they were trying to help a party of North Korean refugees escape.

In a statement on Tuesday, LiNK said Hong had not been involved in any way with the group for more than 10 years and LiNK had no information on his current activities. Hong told a newspaper in the United Arab Emirates in 2011 that the Arab Spring uprisings then unfolding were "a dress rehearsal for North Korea". Kang Cheol-hwan, a defector and founder of the North Korea Strategy Centre in Seoul, said Hong went so far as to travel to Libya to research the aftermath of Muammar Gaddafi's ouster.

### Free Joseon

Cheollima Civil Defense takes its name from a winged horse commonly featured in East Asian mythology. Free Joseon, meanwhile, references the last Korean dynasty, and a name that North Korea still often uses to refer to itself. On its website, the group used soaring language to

declare itself the "a provisional government" of Free Joseon as "the sole legitimate representative of the Korean people of the north". The website also began to sell "post-liberation blockchain visas" that can be bought with cryptocurrency, and on March 11 it claimed responsibility for defacing the North Korean embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

North Korea has not publicly commented on the Madrid break-in, nor filed a complaint with Spanish police. The group's brazen actions led some to speculate that there could be serious dissent against Kim Jong Un taking shape. But other analysts were more sceptical, and say there are lingering questions over possible ties to foreign intelligence agencies. "I'm still inclined to believe there was some professional involvement, because taking over a foreign mission is not an easy operation," said Korea Risk Group director Andrei Lankov.

"They took computers and hard disks, but if you don't have highly specialized capabilities for breaking the codes it's probably not going to be useful to anyone but major intelligence agencies," Cheollima Civil Defense said on Tuesday that no governments were involved or were aware of the embassy operation before hand. It said it had shared "certain information of enormous potential value" with the FBI at the agency's request, but that agreements of confidentiality "appear to have been broken". The US State department said on Tuesday the US government was not involved in the raid. — Reuters

## Anti-satellite weapons: Rare, high-tech, and risky to test

**NEW DELHI:** India tested an anti-satellite weapon yesterday, saying the indigenously produced interceptor was used to destroy an object in orbit. Such a weapon allows for attacks on enemy satellites - blinding them or disrupting communications - as well as providing a technology base for intercepting ballistic missiles. India, whose space program has developed launchers, satellites and probes to the moon and Mars, created the interceptor used in yesterday's test domestically, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a broadcast on television.

### Previous tests

The United States performed the first anti-satellite tests in 1959, when satellites themselves were rare and new. Bold Orion, designed as a nuclear-tipped ballistic missile re-purposed to attack satellites, was launched from a bomber and passed close enough to the Explorer 6 satellite for it to have been destroyed if the missile had been armed.

The Soviet Union performed similar tests around the same time. In the 1960s and early 1970s, it tested a weapon that could be launched in orbit, approach enemy satellites and destroy them with an explosive charge, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit research and advocacy organization. In 1985, the United States tested the ASM-135, launched from an F-15 fighter jet, destroying an American satellite called Solwind P78-1.

There were no tests for more than 20 years. Then in 2007, China entered the anti-satellite arena by destroying an old weather satellite in a high, polar orbit. The test created the largest orbital debris cloud in history, with more than 3,000 objects, according to the Secure World Foundation, a group that advocates sustainable and peaceful uses of outer space. The next year, the United States carried out Operation Burnt Frost, using a ship-launched SM-3 missile to destroy a defunct spy satellite.

### Debris

Debris from anti-satellite tests can create problems for



**AHMEDABAD:** Indian students celebrate after India shot down a low-orbiting satellite as part of a successful test of a new missile technology by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), in Ahmedabad yesterday. — AFP

other satellites and spacecraft in orbit, as tiny bits of junk whiz through space many times faster than a rifle bullet. The International Space Station, for example, regularly tweaks its orbit to avoid debris of all kinds. China's 2007 test is considered the most destructive. Because the impact took place at an altitude of more than 800 km (500 miles), many of the resulting scraps stayed in orbit.

The US test in 2008 did not create as much orbital debris, and because it was at a lower altitude, atmospheric drag caused much of it to fall toward Earth and burn up. India's foreign ministry said in a statement that its test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure there was no debris in space and that whatever was left would "decay and fall back onto the earth within weeks". The US Strategic Command, which tracks objects in orbit for the US military, had no immediate comment on yesterday's test.

### Military use

Destroying an enemy's satellites, which can provide crucial intelligence and communications in war, is considered an advanced capability. With the successful test yesterday, India theoretically holds other countries' satellites at risk. Neighboring Pakistan, with which India traded airstrikes last month, has several satellites in orbit, launched using Chinese and Russian rockets. But China, which put dozens of satellites in orbit in 2018 alone, according to state media, could see India's fledgling capability as more of a threat. India needed to build anti-satellite weapons "because adversary China has already done it in 2007," said Ajay Lele, senior fellow at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses. "More than anything I would say through this India is sending a message to the subcontinent," he added. "India is saying that we have mechanisms for space warfare." — Reuters

## Bangladesh mother has twins one month after the first birth

**DHAKA:** A Bangladeshi mother has stunned doctors by giving birth to healthy twins 26 days after a first child was born prematurely. Arifa Sultana, 20, gave birth to a baby boy last month through normal delivery, but doctors missed the presence of a second uterus. "She didn't realise she was still pregnant with the twins. Her waters broke again 26 days after the first baby was born and she rushed to us," Sheila Podder, a gynaecologist who treated the woman said.

Podder carried out an emergency caesarean section to deliver the twins—one boy and one girl—last Friday. The young woman from Jessore district in southwest Bangladesh was allowed to go home with her three healthy babies on Tuesday. Podder said there were no complications. "I haven't seen any case like this in my 30-year plus medical career," Dilip Roy, chief government doctor in Jessore, told AFP.

Roy questioned the actions of Khulna Medical College Hospital doctors for not detecting the second pregnancy. Hailing from a poor family, Sultana said she was happy with the three children but felt concerned how she would bring them up.

She told AFP her husband earns barely 6,000 taka (\$70) a month as a laborer. "I don't know how we will manage such a huge responsibility with this little amount," Her husband Sumon Biswas put on a brave face. "It was a miracle from Allah that all of my children are healthy. I will try my best to keep them happy," he said. — AFP

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THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2019

12 EU-GCC Business Forum discusses ways to boost bilateral trade, investments



13 VIVA reports net profit of KD 50.4m for 2018, total revenues reached KD 288m



14 Huawei rewrites rules of photography with groundbreaking Huawei P30 series



# Zain KSA inks \$672m tower deal with IHS

**RIYADH, KUWAIT:** Zain Group announces that the board of directors of Zain Saudi Arabia (Zain KSA) has signed an agreement to sell and lease back the passive physical infrastructure of its mobile tower portfolio to IHS Holding Limited (IHS) for SAR 2.52 billion (USD 672 million).

This signing came after Zain KSA announced on 27 November 2018 that the Board of Directors of the company had approved the offer from IHS Holding Limited to sell and lease back its passive towers. It should be noted that the original transaction valuation of SAR 2.43 billion has been revised to SAR 2.52 billion (US\$672 million).

The agreement was signed by Eng. Sultan bin AbdulAziz AlDeghaither, CEO of Zain KSA, and Mr. William Saad, COO of IHS Holding Limited, at the headquarters of Zain KSA in Riyadh.

Zain KSA has more than 8,100 mobile telecommunication towers located in prime and strategic locations across the Kingdom. IHS is the largest independent tower operator in Europe, Middle East and Africa by tower count and the third largest independent multinational tower company globally.

Under the terms of the agreement, Zain KSA is selling only its passive, physical infrastructure to IHS and will retain its intelligent software, technology and intellectual property with respect to managing its network.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group

CEO; & Zain KSA Vice-Chairman said, "Zain KSA is transforming financially, operationally, and strategically, and this evolution is aimed at the operator emerging as a more successful digital lifestyle services provider and delivering additional shareholder value. Our agreement with IHS is pioneering in many respects, not least in the way it allows us to reduce debt and free up capital to invest in other areas of the business focused on customer satisfaction and service delivery. We see this milestone agreement as extremely beneficial to all stakeholders, and we are pleased to have been among the first in the region to embrace it."

The agreement, once approved, will see the sale of the infrastructure of 8,100 towers with a lease back period of 15 years, with a 5-year renewal option. Furthermore, it includes the building of an additional 1,500 new towers over the next 6 years.

Sales proceeds will be used to reduce Murabaha financing, thus reducing funding burdens, and allowing the Zain KSA team to invest and focus on the delivery of more data monetization initiatives and customer enhancing services to offer them the best data experience in the Kingdom.

The final agreement between Zain KSA and IHS Holdings is subject to the approval of the Kingdom's Communications and Information Technology Commission and financing authorities. Any related developments will be announced immediately.



Bader Al Kharafi, Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO; & Zain KSA Vice-Chairman

## Burgan Bank approves distribution of 12 fils cash dividend, 5% bonus shares

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank held its ordinary annual general assembly meeting and Al-Shafafiyah Investors' forum yesterday at the KIPCO Tower. The Board of Directors presented the bank's full year 2018 financial results to its shareholders, highlighting the solid performance delivered by the bank. The shareholders approved the payment of recommended cash dividend of 12 fils per share and the distribution of 5 percent bonus shares.

**During the general assembly, Burgan's board members for the next three years were elected, who are as follows:**

1. Majed E. Al-Ajeel
2. Masaud M. J. Hayat
3. Faisal M. Al Radwan
4. Samer Khanachet
5. Sadoun Abdulla Ali
6. Pinak Pani Maitra
7. Abdulsalam M. Al Bahar
8. Abdel Kareem A. Al-Kabariti
9. Fouad Husni Douglas

**After the general Assembly, the newly elected board held its first meeting to:**

- Elect Majed E. Al-Ajeel as Chairman of the Board
- Elect Masaud M. J. Hayat as Vice-

Chairman of the Board

Afterwards, the bank held its Annual Shafafiyah Forum to present the full year 2018 performance highlights to its shareholders. The presentation was led by Raed Al-Haqhaq (Chief Executive Officer-Kuwait and Acting Group CEO, Burgan Bank).

Al-Haqhaq credited the record full year 2018 results to the bank's focus on generating high quality revenues, improving operating efficiencies, maintaining prudent risk approach, and delivering superior shareholders' returns.

This allowed the bank to achieve strong set of results, where revenue grew by 10.8 percent Y-o-Y to reach KD 265.3 million, operating profit before provisions grew by 17.9 percent Y-o-Y to reach KD 153.5 million and net income grew by 26.6 percent to reach KD 82.6 million.

Al-Haqhaq stated that the strong FY'18 performance is also reflected in the continued improvement of its core business metrics; where Net Interest Margin (NIM) increased from 16.2 percent (FY'17) to 17.4 percent (FY'18), Cost-to-Income Ratio (CIR) improved from 45.6 percent (FY'17) to 42.1 percent (FY'18), and improved Capital levels were Capital Ratios (CAR)



KUWAIT: Majed E Al-Ajeel (second left) addresses the annual general assembly meeting of the Burgan Bank yesterday. Raed Al-Haqhaq (left) and Khalid Al-Zouman (third from right) look on. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

increased from 16.2 percent (FY'17) to 17.4 percent (FY'18).

As a result, the bank was able to generate favorable outcome for its shareholders as Return on Equity (RoE) improved from

8.3 percent (FY'17) to 10.7 percent (FY'18), Earnings per Share (EPS) grew from 24.2 fils (FY'17) to 31 fils (FY'18), and Cash Dividend per Share increased from 7 fils (FY'17) to 12 fils (FY'18).

Al-Haqhaq concluded that the bank is on the right trajectory and will continue to pursue its successful strategy of cautious growth and strong risk management in 2019.



KUWAIT: Majed E Al-Ajeel (center) addresses the annual general assembly meeting of the Burgan Bank yesterday.



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank holds its ordinary annual general assembly meeting and Al-Shafafiyah Investors' forum yesterday at the KIPCO Tower.

Business

# EU-GCC Business Forum discusses ways to boost bilateral trade, investments

## Third forum held in Kuwait jointly by KDIPA, KCCI and KSCPD



Dr Khalid Mehdi leads a panel discussion



Ali Al-Ghanim



Michele Cervone D'urso

**KUWAIT:** The 3rd EU-GCC Business Forum convened yesterday in Kuwait City in cooperation with Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and the Kuwait Supreme Council for Planning and Development. The two-day Forum titled “An Oasis of Opportunities” tackled subjects such as innovation and entrepreneurship and investment opportunities in the healthcare sector, digitalization and doing business in GCC.

Attended by over 450 delegates from both the EU and GCC regions, expert speakers presented details on the ongoing initiatives and discussed planned investments in their respective countries.

Ali Mohammad Al-Ghanim, Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry commented about the EU-GCC Economic Cooperation.

“The economic cooperation between both sides has been three-pronged till the wake of the 21st century namely energy, trade and investment. We hope that this relationship continues to blossom and move forward as the GCC continues to search for way to diversify its economy.”

Sheikh Dr Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Director General of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority said: “The 3rd EU-GCC Business Forum is an expression of the strength of ongoing bilateral relations and increasing ties between the EU and GCC. During this dynamic period of GCC development when economic diversification requires the free movement of investments and trade, this forum is an important platform for leading government officials and senior executives from the private sector to openly discuss key topics aimed at strengthening linkages and enhancing collaboration to foster a thriving, inclusive and sustainable future for all.”

Dr Khaled Mehdi, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development commented during the event “we are very pleased with the outcomes of this joint partnership in organizing an EU-GCC platform that enables the community, stakeholders and partners - private and public sector at large to interact with one another. The EU is an important and strategic partner to Kuwait and the greater GCC. This forum allowed a closer interaction between private sector companies, businessmen from Europe and government entities to grasp a better understanding of each other’s needs and expertise. I believe in

the near future we will see more partnerships forming and higher inflow of foreign direct investment coming from Europe and vice versa.”

“The forum offered an immense opportunity for cross-cutting networking and identification of trade and investment opportunities between EU and the GCC countries”, said Stefan Kraxner, leader of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project Team adding “that the business linkages established will contribute to supporting the ongoing diversification strategies in key economic sectors”.

The official opening of the forum on the 19th of March, was attended by the Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Ali Al-Ghanim, the Secretary General of the Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Michele Cervone D’urso, the EU Ambassador to the Delegation of European Union to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia and Mariam Al-Aqeel, Minister of State for Economic Affairs in the State of Kuwait. The Kuwait Direct Investment and Promotion Authority (KDIPA) was represented by the Director General, Sheikh Dr Meshaal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

and the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development was represented by the Secretary-General Dr Khaled Mehdi with other representatives from both the UAE and GCC Federations of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The forum continued on its 2nd day with a series of panel discussions covering topics such as current EU-GCC Trade relations, GCC Business Opportunities, Digitalization, Investments in Healthcare, Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

Daniel Tanase, Ambassador from Romania, commented at the conclusion of the event that “the EU-GCC Business Forum, is an excellent example of the strategic partnership between the GCC and the EU in operation. As we move into the fully digital age, all countries are facing similar challenges and opportunities. The priorities of the current Romanian Presidency of the EU are similar in many respects to the Vision statements of GCC member states in terms of their aspirations to build knowledge-based economies and societies for the benefit of their citizens. The Business Forum is not an end in itself. It has set the foundation for future important and multi-faceted cooperation between us. We look forward to deepening our relationship with the GCC in the coming years.”

## Nissan urged to shake up governance after Ghosn arrest

**YOKOHAMA:** An advisory committee established by Japanese car giant Nissan to improve governance after the stunning arrest of former boss Carlos Ghosn on corruption allegations unveiled recommendations yesterday to prevent further scandals.

The seven-person body suggested abolishing the position of chairman vacated by Ghosn, with an external administrator running meetings of the board, where independent members would hold the majority. “I think it’s a bold proposal to remove the chairman’s position” which exists in many Japanese companies, Sadayuki Sakakibara, co-chairman of the advisory committee, told reporters yesterday.

The other co-chairman, Seiichiro Nishioka, said the main cause of the misconduct was “the concentration of the authority in Ghosn”. “He created a situation in which it would be difficult to detect his pursuit of personal gain,” Nishioka added.

Nissan was rocked when Japanese prosecutors said Ghosn had deferred his salary by nine billion yen (\$81 million) over a period of eight years. They also charged him with attempting to shift personal losses onto the company books. In an emotional news conference on the dramatic night of Ghosn’s arrest on November 19, chief executive Hiroto Saikawa said his former mentor

had held too much power alone. Ghosn was swiftly removed as chairman and the advisory body set up to improve Nissan governance amid questions over how this could have happened at such a major company.

### ‘Very bad track record’

According to the Nikkei business daily, Sakakibara may be named as the external administrator tasked with running board meetings. The 76-year-old is a former head of the powerful Keidanren business lobby and textiles firm Toray.

But Zuhair Khan, an analyst at investment bank Jefferies, said Sakakibara had a “very bad track record” and was “certainly not a role model for good governance”. “He talks a lot about governance. But when he had the ability to really implement what he talks about, absolutely the opposite was done, there is a huge discrepancy,” Khan told AFP.

“This is really just the old Japan Inc trying to protect Nissan and its Japanese management,” added the analyst, a long-time critic of the firm’s governance.

The report stopped short of proposing the removal of Saikawa, even though questions continue to be raised about his role in the scandal. Saikawa has said he only became aware of Ghosn’s alleged misconduct in late 2018 but sources close to the case say he knew long before that. He is thought to have signed an agreement in 2012 mentioning a transfer of \$40 million to Ghosn after his retirement. The same document also put lodgings in Beirut, Rio de Janeiro and Paris at Ghosn’s disposal. Nissan did not comment on this alleged document. The future of the three-way alliance between Nissan, fellow Japanese carmaker Mitsubishi Motors and French manufacturer Renault was the subject of further media speculation yesterday. — AFP

## ABK holds retail banking engagement day with staff

**KUWAIT:** To ensure constant engagement with its employees, Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently hosted its Retail Banking World Class Day for staff. Held at the Salwa Al-Sabah Ballroom, the event brought ABK’s retail banking staff together under one roof and provided an insight into the differing areas of retail banking.

This event allowed employees to exchange their opinions freely and learn about different areas within retail, through

fun activities. Designed as an exhibition representing the various areas of retail, ABK employees had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the objectives and practices of each unit. In addition, senior employees from other business areas were present and shared their professional experiences with attendees.

Commenting on the activity, Stewart Lockie, GM Retail Banking at ABK said: “Employee engagement is essential to ensure staff are given the platform to provide feedback. We chose to create a less formal and relaxed environment to allow them to be more forth coming. We did not want to make it seem like a normal business meeting, hence we chose the exhibition format. We are proud of our employee’s level of engagement, dedication and enthusiasm. It is always a pleasure to see employees strive to give the job all that they have”.



## Scandal-hit Korean Air chief forced off board by shareholders

**SEOUL:** The head of South Korea’s flag carrier Korean Air-whose family have been embroiled in multiple scandals including one involving a “nut rage” tantrum-lost his board seat after shareholders voted against extending his term as director, the airline said yesterday.

Cho Yang-ho, who is currently on trial for corruption, failed to secure a required two-thirds majority, becoming the first controlling shareholder of a South Korean conglomerate to be forced off the board.

The super-wealthy owners of chaebols-the sprawling conglomerates that dominate the world’s 11th-largest economy-are no strangers to controversy, but a string of high-profile scandals have vaulted the Cho family to notoriety in South Korea, even sparking protests by their employees.

The 70-year-old tycoon is the chairman of the Hanjin Group, which used to own the now-bankrupt Hanjin Shipping line. Cho controls around 30 percent of Korean Air through its parent company Hanjin Kal. But the National Pension Service, the airline’s second-biggest shareholder, had said Tuesday it will oppose Cho’s reelection, citing his records of “undermining corporate value and infringing upon shareholder rights”.

“It is correct that he has lost his seat as the director of the board,” a Korean Air spokeswoman told AFP. The vote had put “slight brakes” on Cho’s management of the airliner, she said, but stressed that he still had control over the company. “He maintains his post as the chairman and is the biggest shareholder of Korean Air so he will continue participating in the management,” she added. But analysts say that without a seat on the board, Cho will not be able to wield power over key management issues such as appointing directors and CEOs. — AFP

## EXCHANGE RATES

### AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

#### EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.200
Euro	347.090
Sterling Pound	403.070
Canadian dollar	227.870
Turkish lira	55.010
Swiss Franc	308.050
US Dollar Buying	303.000

#### ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.766
Indian Rupees	4.420
Pakistani Rupees	2.208
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.703
Nepali Rupees	2.748
Singapore Dollar	226.000
Hongkong Dollar	38.764
Bangladesh Taka	3.595
Philippine Peso	5.804
Thai Baht	9.667
Malaysian ringgit	77.801

#### GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.174
Qatari Riyal	83.606
Omani Riyal	790.903
Bahraini Dinar	808.290
UAE Dirham	82.877

#### ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.500
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.556

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.222
Tunisian Dinar	104.900
Jordanian Dinar	429.660
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.030
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.327

### DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.840
Canadian Dollar	227.560
Sterling Pound	403.080
Euro	346.230
Swiss Frank	304.470
Bahrain Dinar	808.025
UAE Dirhams	83.125
Qatari Riyals	84.365
Saudi Riyals	81.920
Jordanian Dinar	429.830
Egyptian Pound	17.590
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.706
Indian Rupees	4.415
Pakistani Rupees	2.164
Bangladesh Taka	3.611
Philippines Peso	5.798
Cyprus pound	18.080
Japanese Yen	3.760
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.760
Malaysian Ringgit	75.555
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.725

Thai Bhat	10.590
Turkish Lira	54.880
Singapore dollars	224.770

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.393786	0.407686
Czech Korune	0.005324	0.014624
Danish Krone	0.041990	0.046990
Euro	0.336319	0.350019
Georgian Lari	0.112616	0.112616
Hungarian 0.000996	0.001186	
Norwegian Krone	0.031579	0.036779
Romanian Leu	0.055329	0.072179
Russian ruble	0.004739	0.004739
Slovakia	0.009090	0.019090
Swedish Krona	0.028842	0.033842
Swiss Franc	0.299670	0.310670
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.221813	0.220183
New Zealand Dollar	0.203673	0.213173
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.221594	0.230594
US Dollars	0.300100	0.305400
US Dollars Mint	0.300600	0.305400
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003050	0.003851

Chinese Yuan	0.043799	0.047299
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036669	0.039419
Indian Rupee	0.003809	0.004581
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002677	0.002857
Korean Won	0.000258	0.000273
Malaysian Ringgit	0.071031	0.077031
Nepalese Rupee	0.002608	0.002948
Pakistan Rupee	0.001566	0.002366
Philippine Peso	0.005794	0.006094
Singapore Dollar	0.219815	0.229815
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001362	0.001942
Taiwan	0.009739	0.009919
Thai Baht	0.009289	0.009839
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.792326	0.803826
Egyptian Pound	0.017636	0.020236
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000209	0.000269
Jordanian Dinar	0.424149	0.433149
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022101	0.046101
Omani Riyal	0.783812	0.789492
Qatar Riyal	0.079266	0.084206
audi Riyal	0.080033	0.081333
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.096760	0.104760
Turkish Lira	0.048484	0.059984
UAE Dirhams	0.081398	0.083098
Yemeni Riyal	0.000989	0.001069

## Business

# VIVA's net profit increased 18% to reach KD 50.4 million in 2018

## VIVA holds AGM • Total revenues for 2018 reached KD 288 million

**KUWAIT:** VIVA held its annual general meeting (AGM) at the Four Seasons Hotel on 27 March 2019, and the attendance represented 66.208 percent from the total shareholders.

The AGM approved the board of directors' report, the auditors' report and the sharia committee's report for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2018. Also, the AGM approved the corporate governance report, the Audit Committee report and the report of remuneration and benefits for the board of directors and executive management for the year ended on 31 December 2018. In addition, the AGM approved financial statements and board of directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 40 fils among the shareholders representing 40 percent of the capital for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2018 for the shareholders registered in the company's records on the Record Date on Sunday, 14 April, 2019 and the cash dividends will be distributed for the eligible shareholders on the Payment Date on Sunday, 21 April, 2019.

The Chairman of VIVA, Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, commented that "Despite the high competition witnessed in Kuwait Telecommunication Market, VIVA was able to achieve good levels of revenues and growth in profitability to sustain the operational efficiency and to ensure generating positive return to our shareholders. Despite the fierce competition in the market VIVA has achieved growth in both revenue and profitability, and has further enhanced operational efficiency to create value and deliver reliable returns to its shareholder. VIVA has worked to consolidate its position as a leader in the telecom

Industry and developing services and creative offers to meet our customers' needs.

He added: "VIVA, grew its net profit by 18 percent to reach KD 50.4 million (earnings per share of 101 fils) compared to KD 42.8 million (earnings per share of 86 fils) in the previous year."

On his part, Mohammed Bin AbdulMohsen Al-Assaf, VIVA's Acting CEO and CFO, said: "VIVA achieved its financial goals in 2018 despite the high competition, where increased competition among mobile service providers led to lower prices, while the increased use of voice over IP (VoIP) affected the erosion margins, especially on traditional voice packages. The Data dominance and the need to invest, are becoming more important than ever. In 2019, we are looking to meet these challenges by improving our cost and achieving our competitive strategy. Our vision of growth was not limited to the first decade of the VIVA, but exceeded to investing in our future business through our strategy to develop infrastructure and investment in the modern and digital technology sector. We became the first telecom company to experience live on the fifth generation network 5G pre-launch in the near future."

He added: "Despite the difficult market conditions squeezing financial margins, we were able to both protect and improve our profits in 2018 VIVA reported excellent financial results generating revenues of KD 288 million, an increase of 0.1 percent compared to 2017, whereas EBITDA grew by 9.5 percent compared to last year to reach KD 77.8 million. Our focus on driving business efficiency was clearly reflected by our strong EBITDA margin reached 27 percent with histor-



**KUWAIT:** VIVA Chairman Dr Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman addresses the annual general assembly meeting yesterday.

ical net income reached KD 50.4 million. Our investment for expanding and upgrading our network led to CAPEX spend of KD 31.1 million over the year, reflecting to 11 percent of revenue, this will be critical in order for us to maintain our competitive advantage in future. Our commitment to delivering value to our shareholders, is reflected in the increase of equity by 22 percent to KD 192 million.

Our ability to navigate an increasingly challenging operating environment is evidence of the capability of the business to leverage new opportunities. We aim to deliver on our strategy to create an agile and leading organization, benefitting from new growth opportuni-

ties, monetizing our assets and continuing to increase efficiency.

He added: "In the coming year, we will seek to enhance our core business to augment the value we offer and to grow our profitable market share. We will also place a clear focus on value-creating digital opportunities for our business, to protect VIVA from any potential decline in the market. Our goal will be on creating telecom investment opportunities and working with IoT businesses to capitalize on the wider potential the local market can offer. We aim to further strength our operations through digitization, providing best-in-class services to our customers.

## Gulf Cable to distribute 27% cash dividends

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** The Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Co K.S.C.P held its 42nd ordinary general assembly yesterday with an attendance of 70.4 percent of shareholders. During the assembly, the agenda was approved including paying cash dividends of 27 percent of par value (27 fils per share).

Chairman of Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Co. K.S.C.P Bader Al-Kharafi noted that the company is facing fierce competition from foreign companies in the market. "Local products must get priority in projects in view of the high costs of manufacturing, labor and operations," he stated after the general assembly.

"The GCC countries support its local products by including their products in the public projects. The products of Gulf Cable are of high quality and have gained the trust of the regional markets," added Al-Kharafi.

Regarding the expansion in the market, he explained that the company is willing to enter into new projects. "Our vision is to participate in different future projects in Iraq, Syria and Jordan when the reconstruction starts," concluded Al-Kharafi.

## Cathay Pacific to buy budget airline HK Express for \$628m

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong flag carrier Cathay Pacific said yesterday it will buy budget airline HK Express for more than \$600 million as it moves to counter competition from the increasing number of low-cost carriers in the region. The move is its first foray into the budget sector and will leave Cathay controlling three of the four airlines at one of Asia's busiest airports at a time of huge growth in the region's air industry.

It comes weeks after the carrier said it had swung back into the black in 2018 following two years of losses and will help ease concerns after an embarrassing data breach that dented the firm's reputation and could prove costly.

"HK Express captures a unique market segment," Cathay said in a statement. "This represents an attractive and practical way for the Cathay Group to support the long-term development and growth of our aviation business and to enhance the competitiveness of the Hong Kong hub during a time of intense regional competition."

Cathay will stump up HK\$4.93 billion (\$628.15 million) for the airline in a deal that is expected to be completed by



**HONG KONG:** In this file photo, the Cathay Pacific logo is seen on the tail of a passenger plane as it prepares to take off from Hong Kong's international airport. Hong Kong flag carrier Cathay Pacific announced yesterday it will buy budget airline HK Express for \$628.15 million. —AFP

December, according to a filing announcement.

The firm said it will continue to operate HK Express as a "standalone airline using the low-cost carrier business model". "The transaction is expected to generate synergies as the businesses and business models of Cathay Pacific and HKE are largely complementary," it added.

Cathay shares rose almost three percent after the announcement but later retreated to end the day almost 2.5 percent lower at HK\$13.34.

HK Express is the city's sole budget carrier—a sector that premium-focused

Cathay has struggled to compete against despite rivals such as Singapore Airlines making inroads years ago.

### 'Goodbye to its worst time'

But analyst Dickie Wong of Kingston Securities said it is now rectifying its "shortcoming".

"I think Cathay has said goodbye to its worst time when it lost money from fuel-hedging contracts, faced an unclear business outlook and competition with budget airlines," he added.

Wong said the falling share price was "just a normal pullback after a recent gain". — AFP

## Russia-Germany pipeline on track despite US pressure

**LUBMIN:** US President Donald Trump may loathe it, but the Russia-Germany gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 that runs under the Baltic Sea is set to be completed by the end of the year, its operators predict. This week the consortium led by Russian energy giant Gazprom took international media to the Baltic coast town of Lubmin where the existing Nord Stream 1 and its new parallel pipeline terminate.

"The main installations have been completed, the shut-off valves have been installed, so we can assume that the project will be completed by the end of 2019," said project spokesman Jens Mueller.

The 11 billion euro (\$12.4 billion) project is set to double Russian gas shipments to the EU's biggest economy. This has sparked concerns about Western Europe's increasing dependence on Russian gas, as well as Moscow being able to increase pressure on Ukraine as it is no longer as reliant on the country for transit of supplies. Washington has bitterly opposed the project, with Trump charging in angry tweets last year that it made Germany a "captive" of President Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government, anxious to placate Trump, has meanwhile agreed steps to boost German purchases of US liquefied natural gas.

Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, Merkel's close confidant, yesterday said Germany would pave the way for the construction of new LNG port terminals to "boost competition between different gas imports".

### Pharaonic project

Meanwhile, on the edge of a pine forest at Lubmin, Mecklenburg-Pommern state, hundreds of workers with heavy construction equipment have been laboring at the pipeline's sandy landing site.

Other crews are busy offshore on a fleet of 20 ships to lay the 1,230 kilometre (764 mile) steel-and-concrete pipeline through the maritime territories of Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany.

The pharaonic project still faces an obstacle as Denmark has so far failed to give approval to the controversial and geopolitically sensitive pipeline. "We have good reason to think" that the green light will be given "in the near future," said Mueller.

Since its inception, Nord Stream 2 has caused controversy.

Proponents say it will help secure Europe's gas supply at lower prices by sending an additional 55 billion cubic metres per year. Several Eastern European countries have opposed the project which effectively bypasses them and deprives them of lucrative transit fees.

They charge that Moscow in particular aims to isolate Ukraine. The country has long key for the transit of Russian supplies to Western Europe, but price disputes between Moscow and Kiev have led to several disruptions of supplies to other European countries.

Ties between Kiev and its Soviet-era master Moscow were then shredded after a popular uprising in Ukraine ousted a Kremlin-backed regime in 2014. Russia retaliated by annexing Crimea and supporting a separatist uprising in the east of the country. Combined with the planned TurkStream pipeline across the Black Sea, Nord Stream 2 would theoretically allow Russia to bypass Ukraine in providing gas to Europe. — AFP

## China's industrial profits shrink most since 2011 as economy cools

**BEIJING:** China's industrial firms posted their worst slump in profits since late 2011 in the first two months of this year, data showed yesterday, as increasing strains on the economy in the face of slowing demand at home and abroad took a toll on businesses. The sharp decline in profits suggests further troubles for the world's second largest economy, which expanded at its slowest pace in almost three decades last year. The government has already lowered the economic growth target this year to 6.0-6.5 percent, from the actual rate of 6.6 percent in 2018.

Profits notched up by China's industrial firms in January-February slumped 14.0 percent year-on-year to 708.01 billion yuan (\$105.50 billion), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on its website on Wednesday. It marked the biggest contraction since Reuters began keeping records in October 2011.

The data combines figures for January and February to smooth out distortions caused by the week-long China's Lunar New Year. The drag was mainly due to price contractions in key industrial sectors such as auto, oil processing, steel and chemical industries, Zhu Hong of the statistics bureau said in a statement accompanying the data, adding that production and sales are slowing as well. Profits in the auto sector were down 37.1 billion yuan from a year earlier, while those in the oil processing industry fell 31.7 billion yuan, according to official data.

Zhu said the timing of Lunar New Year holidays that fell in early February also had a bigger negative impact on business operations this year than in 2018. The trade



**BEIJING:** A worker builds a wall with bricks in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

war with the United States has put a dent on factory activity, corporate earnings, business sentiment and overall consumption in a blow to the economic outlook.

Growth in China's manufacturing output slumped to a 17-year low in January-February, while factory-gate inflation remained subdued in the same period in a reflection of the deepening strains across the economy. "Although it's possible US and China could come to a trade deal in the near future, it still remains a question that it will help reverse the decline in China's exports," said Betty Wang, senior China economist at ANZ, adding that waning global demand remains a concern as well.

Policymakers have acknowledged the country's economy is facing increasing downward pressure, hurt by multi-year campaigns to curb debt risks and pollution, while the trade war with the United States took a toll on export orders and employment.

Beijing is beefing up measures to support the manufacturing industry by cutting the value-added tax, increasing infrastructure spending and reducing direct government intervention.

### Tax cuts to the rescue?

The profit margin in the manufacturing sector is less than 5 percent and many companies are suffering losses, Li Dongsheng, CEO of TCL Corp told a Guangdong delegation meeting on the sidelines of an annual parliament meeting in March. "I advise the government to further lower value-added tax, and if implemented, it will effectively boost the profit-making ability of the manufacturing industry," said Li. Lots of other firms are already facing margin pressure. Jiangsu Shagang, China's biggest private-owned steel mill, expects its first quarter net profit to decline as much as 68.6 percent year-on-year.

Industry data out on Monday also showed China's automobile sector in reverse gear, with sales down 13.8 percent in February year-on-year, marking the eighth consecutive month of decline in the world's largest auto market. Earlier this month, Beijing announced hundreds of billions of dollars in additional tax cuts, which included a 3 percentage point reduction in value-added tax for the manufacturing industry that has been grappling with rising costs and lower profit margins in the face of the economic slowdown. — Reuters

## Business

# Huawei rewrites rules of photography with groundbreaking Huawei P30 series

## Huawei debuts super camera phones Huawei P30 and Huawei P30 Pro

**KUWAIT:** During an exclusive launch event yesterday at the Paris Convention Center, Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) unveiled the Huawei P30 and Huawei P30 Pro. The Huawei P30 Series builds on the Huawei P Series DNA in design and photography and is the company's most advanced series of smartphone cameras. These devices feature the innovative Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor, an optical SuperZoom Lens, a new Huawei Time of Flight (ToF) Camera, and enhanced optical and AI image stabilization technology. With these revolutionary technologies, the Huawei P30 and Huawei P30 Pro capture incredible photos and videos in every scenario.

Richard Yu, CEO of Huawei Consumer BG, said, "the Huawei P30 Series is a fundamental breakthrough after decades of digital camera technology development; it will rewrite the rules and reshape everyone's perception of mobile photography. Innovations such as the Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor and SuperZoom Lens allow us to push the envelope of both photography and videography—a frontier long overdue for disruption. The Huawei P30 Series will set the pace for the next generation of smartphones by empowering people to capture the true beauty of the world around them through a device that fits in the palm of their hands."

The Huawei P30 Series will change users' expectations of smartphone photography. Achieving a record-high overall DxOMark score of 112, the Huawei P30 Pro is equipped with a new Leica Quad Camera System, including a 40MP main camera with the Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor, a 20MP ultra-wide angle camera, an 8MP telephoto camera, the Huawei ToF Camera and a 32MP front camera that takes selfies to a new level.

The 1/1.7-inch Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor looks at light in a fundamentally new way. The RYB Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor deviates from the traditional RGB Bayer filter by replacing green pixels with yellow pixels, yielding a high maximum ISO rating of 409,600 on the Huawei P30 Pro and 204,800 on the Huawei P30. This



Richard Yu

fundamental shift in sensor technology, combined with Huawei AIS, OIS and the Huawei P30 Pro's f/1.6 wide aperture, delivers extraordinary photography and videography experiences across a wide range of scenarios and lighting conditions—including extreme low light—producing images with enhanced detail, color and clarity.

The new SuperZoom Lens unlocks a superior level of zoom photography in a slim-line device design. Through a new periscope design, the SuperZoom Lens supports high fidelity magnification of 5 times optical zoom, 10 times hybrid zoom and 50 times digital zoom. A prism element in the telephoto camera bends light at a 90-degree angle to maximize focal length while minimizing camera height, without disrupting device design.

The Huawei ToF Camera unleashes the imagination. Unique to the Huawei P30 Pro is a Huawei ToF Camera that captures depth-of-field information to deliver accurate image segmentation. Precise distance measurement



allows for the simulation of multiple levels of bokeh. The Super Portrait feature captures even the smallest details, such as individual strands of hair. It combines depth information and proprietary algorithms to produce outstanding images with defocused backgrounds and highlights the subject of the image in any scenario.

### Smartphone videography

The Huawei P30 Series is a smartphone camera with cinematic capabilities. The Huawei P30 Series ushers in a new era of studio-grade videography. The Huawei SuperSpectrum Sensor enables spectacular low-light video capture so night scenes appear bright and highly

detailed. Huawei AIS and OIS support stabilization for all video capture settings, resulting in a perfect, steady shot. Additionally, the SuperZoom Lens allows for crisp close-ups, while the AI Video Editor enables users to add background music and special effects to their videos, turning the Huawei P30 Series into a mobile production studio.

Two views are better than one. Huawei Dual-View Video can capture two perspectives of the same scene at the same time by using multiple cameras simultaneously. The Huawei P30 Series provides a full view of a scene while also capturing a close-up of a subject, unleashing new and exciting possibilities for video.

## AUB named Best Bank in Bahrain, 2019 by Global Finance

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank has been named 'Best Bank in Bahrain, 2019' by Global Finance, the reputed magazine of international finance, in recognition of the Bank's strong financial performance and its track record in delivering superior banking services and solutions to customers in Bahrain. This is the 14th consecutive year AUB has won this award from this New York-based publication.

In selecting the winning banks for 2019, the editors of Global Finance, in consultations with international banking executives, consultants and analysts, considered a number of criteria including: growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products. Factors for selection also included the opinions of equity analysts, credit rating analysts, banking consultants and others involved in the industry.

"What it takes to rank among the world's best banks is increasingly difficult to deliver. Customer expectations of financial services providers has never been higher-tailored products delivered in real time with complete security," said Joseph D Giarraputo, publisher and editorial director of Global Finance.

"To be recognized as Bahrain's top bank for the 14th year running is a distinct honor and accomplishment," said Meshal Alothman, Chairman of Ahli United Bank. "It is a tribute to the sustained efforts, dedication and focus of all colleagues who bring together the best of AUB to meet the needs of our customers and shareholders".

"This award once again attests to the success of our well-managed business model based on business and regional diversification as well as to the efficacy of our operational model centered on delivering quality, dependable services and solutions to our valued clients, day in and day out," added Alothman.

This latest award by Global Finance adds to a string of recent awards won by AUB, including: 'Best Local Bank in Bahrain 2019' by EMEA Finance and 'Bank of the Year 2018' by the FT's The Banker.



Meshal Alothman

## NBK announces winner of KD 250,000 in Al-Jawhara's quarterly draw

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait announced the lucky winner of KD 250,000 during Al-Jawhara Account's quarterly draw held in an event at 360 Mall and attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as representatives from NBK.

The draw was broadcasted live on FM 88.8 Kuwait Pulse and through a large screen that enabled customers and visitors to enjoy the live draw which announced Minor Layan Basem Alghadban as the winner of the grand prize of KD 250,000 in the quarterly draw.

After announcing the winner a myriad of balloons were flown in the area of the event with some including cash prizes. Customers of Al-Jawhara Account enter automatically in the weekly, monthly and quarterly draws, giving them the chance to win KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly and the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly for every KD 50 deposited in their Al-Jawhara Account.

To enter the Al-Jawhara valuable draws, customers must deposit the minimum opening amount of KD 400 while the maximum amount that can be held is KD 500,000. Customers' chances of entering the draws double for every KD 50 when the amounts are not used for a given period of time. Commenting on the event, Suresh Varadarajan, Head of Liabilities & Insurance, Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait, said, "We wanted to make the announcement of the winner of KD

## Al-Raya team to receive visitors at Gate Mall

**KUWAIT:** Al-Raya United Company (Raya) builds its development strategy on enhancing its relations with various clients in Kuwait based on principles of transparency and keeping them posted with the latest creative services and products. Accordingly, a highly skilled team of the company will be present at the Gate Mall for a week effective March 25 (March 25-31) to receive visitors inquiring about the company activities and products in KSA, Egypt, Turkey and Europe.

In this regard, Al-Raya CEO, Adnan Al-Salem said that the company is always keen on direct contact with clients from



250,000 a unique moment through this event and we are very pleased of the great response we've received from visitors who also left with cash prizes. We congratulate the winner of the quarterly draw and look forward to rewarding more customers of Al-Jawhara Account."

Varadarajan added, "Al-Jawhara Account is a great way to save and win, and offers great benefits such as a free NBK Visa Debit card, access to the NBK Mobile Banking App and NBK Online Banking to easily manage their Account and many other features." NBK also recently announced the winners in Al-Jawhara's weekly draw for the month of March, which were: Eman Ibrahim Yousef Alabdulrazzaq, Fadi Saleh Moubarak Alobaid Alshammari and Soheer Alaa Aldeen Tawfeeq Jumaa.



Adnan Raya

time to time to enhance bonds with them as well as keep them posted on the company's latest products and services in view of its expansion plans.

Al-Salem added that the company team would answer all clients' questions and inquiries and provide them with all needed consultancy. Further, Al-Salem noted that Al-Raya was rapidly growing especially in view of founding Al-Raya Holding

Company which managed to get an investment share in Medaf Holding, Egypt, which already has many subsidiary companies in the fields of investment, finance and other sectors including Al-Salam Food Stuff company, which distributes products of trusted world famous brands. "This enhances the company's plans to diversify sources of income and reduces risks and ensures operating according to absolute transparent policies", he underlined.



MEGANE, one is at the heart of the action. Renault Al-Babtain encourages its customers to visit its showroom located in Al-Rai and avail of the benefits that accompany the new model through the limited time offer.

## KAICO, Al-Shaya & Al-Sagar, participate in 2019 motor show

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Automotive Imports Company (KAICO), the exclusive distributors of Peugeot cars in Kuwait participated in the auto finance motor show held at Marina Crescent, one of the busiest and most popular shopping malls in Kuwait that provides a significant flow of visitors.

The aim of this year's show was to provide customers with the opportunity to own the Peugeot car they always wanted with easy payments at premium rates. Customers could also enjoy the benefits of participating dealers in the exhibition and benefit from the exclusive offers and financial solutions offered by the bank.

Kaico showcased the latest models of 2019, Peugeot 3008 from the SUV range with a 1.6L turbo engine. The 3008 SUV features leather seats with massage control, panoramic sunroof, satellite navigation system with 3D mapping and many safety systems such as autonomous emergency braking and a lane departure warning system beside active safety brake system.

The motor show was held from March 7 to March 9, and KAICO provided the visitors with detailed explanation of their cars collection as well as offering financing programs and exclusive offers that can be valued in 2019.

The annual event featured a special media coverage that highlighted the importance of this event and its activities to meet the requirements of customers and determine their choices of Peugeot cars to suit their daily lifestyle. "We at KAICO provide mobility solutions in Kuwait for over five decades as partners of Peugeot and aim to ensure a unique experience for customers by providing an environment that encourages shopping and test driving the newest Peugeot cars during the auto shows," said Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO.

Nader Salameh, senior divisional manager, stated: "We are delighted that KAICO was able to offer the best services and exclusive packages to its customers just to satisfy their demands and budgets at premium prices and easy payments.

KAICO's participation in this exhibition is a reflection of the strong confidence in the quality and durability of its vehicles and it has proved to be one of the most developed companies in the Kuwaiti market as well as being one of most improved distributor of Peugeot in the Middle East.

This is in addition to the special benefits that KAICO offers to its customers at every purchase, including 3rd party insurance and free registration, and the highest trade-in value in the market beside maintenance packages and competitive guarantee as requested by the customers.



## Renault Al-Babtain: Renault Megane has European features with the best value

**KUWAIT:** Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co, the authorized agent of Renault in the State of Kuwait invites its customers to experience the best of European performance in the 2019 model of Renault Megane. The Renault Megane 2019 is equipped with generous space for its occupants i.e. dimensions of 4.63m long and 1.81m wide, and a record wheelbase in its class of 2.71m. Owing to its dynamic styling and advanced features, the new Megane represents the next level 10 yw in the compact saloon category. It comes with a 1.6-litre engine, 115hp designed to enhance driving enjoyment and reduce fuel consumption.

Externally, its muscular bonnet, broad shoulders, tight

curves and sculpted slides emphasize its modern, sophisticated character. At the rear, the new lighting signature traces an intense, dark-red horizontal line. Proudly supporting its chrome diamond, MEGANE affirms its ambition and dominates the road.

With comfort at its core, its sculpted, wraparound seats, worthy of the finest design workshops, the Renault MEGANE welcomes you in the greatest of style. It comes in 3 immaculately finished upholsterys, including one in perforated leather. From the speedometer and its center console to the vents, it is jam-packed with real satin-finish chrome details. Enriched with driving technologies, the R-LINK 2 system and its large touchscreen makes total control of the vehicle only a touch away. Passengers can choose the MULTI-SENSE driving mode according to the mood while staying connected with R-LINK 2 for more comfort: with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay and get easy access to the smartphone's driving-compatible apps using the large onboard R-LINK 2 screen. Backed by a digital speedometer, Bluetooth radio with voice recognition, USB & Jack sockets, 4.2" display, 4 speakers, ergonomic centre console, large 8.7-inch, intuitive, vertical touchscreen, etc. on board All-New Renault

## What's On



# NBK organizes annual carnival, movie nights at Specialty Hospital

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a carnival at its Children's Hospital in Al Sabah Medical Area. NBK- Group CEO Isam Al Sager and NBK- Kuwait Deputy CEO and NBK General Manager, Treasury Group, Sulaiman Barrak al Marzouq attended the ceremony, along with President of Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) Dr Hilal Al Sayer, The Founder and Director of KACCH, Margaret Al Sayer, Children from Beit Abdullah and NBK family who shared happy moments with children and their families. The carnival included several activities that attracted more than 300 children and their parents from NBK Hospital and Bayt Abdullah. The festival comprised a range of shows all of which contribute to raise the spirit of positivity, fun and encouragement among patients and families.

"We take great pride today in celebrating with our children at NBK Hospital," said Manal Al Mattar, Assistant General Manager, NBK Public relations. "NBK has always considered supporting the children

an essential part of its social and philanthropic outreach. The Carnival stands as one of many NBK initiatives for children. It comes as part of a fun activity program designed for the Hospital's patients and extends all year long, aiming at supporting children while they get their treatment," she added. "It is obvious that such efforts and initiatives are making significant impact on patients, families and NBK Hospital staff," she added.

NBK also organized story telling sessions and movie nights for children at the Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit during the month of March, as part of a fun-activity program that was launched to support children while they get their treatment and extends all the year round. NBK's commitment to shoulder its corporate social responsibility was the basic motive that led NBK to develop the hospital's project and build the Stem Cell Therapy Unit at Sabah Medical district. NBK Children's Hospital stands as a landmark for the bank's social initiatives towards children.



## CBK organizes flower arrangement workshop

Within the activities the Commercial bank of Kuwait (CBK) organizes for all account holders, and in celebration of the Mother's Day, CBK recently held a flower arrangement workshop for its female clients in collaboration with FLOWERED. In this regard, CBK's executive individual banking services manager, Noura Kayed stressed that registration in the three-day workshop attracted many CBK female account holders who were trained on how to select flowers and prepare them to last longer on various happy occasions.



## Maki Restaurant introduces new desserts

Kone-afa, Pistachio Mochi, Nutella Mochi, and Vanilla-Raspberry Mochi are the new 'stars' on Maki Restaurant's already exciting pastry menu. Maki has been the 'hallmark' of innovation when it comes to contemporary cuisine. With inventive dishes such as Maki Maki, Fusion Temaki, Oliva O-toro Maki, and tartufo Yaki Udon, Maki has been transforming and inspiring both the Japanese and the contemporary cuisine domains.

Bringing to the forefront both Mediterranean and global ingredients otherwise unknown to Japanese cuisine, Maki has perfectly incorporated components such as extra virgin olive oil, Moroccan truffles, balsamic vinegar, wild thyme, olives, plums, and many others into its wonderful menu. The result 'crystallized' in the form of many amazing guest favorites.

"When it comes to innovation, we are constantly tasting and testing new ingredients with our chefs, operations, and marketing teams, and desserts are no exception", commented Chef Louis Kenji Huang,



group executive chef. "We know what our guests like, and our mission is to always come up with dishes which will please their palates. That's what we are here for", commented Toufic Salloum, group operations manager.

On March 25th, 2019, Maki restaurant at Burj Jasim was the scene of a successful launch of Maki's new dessert items. A host of VIP's and media personalities enjoyed the delectable, new sweets. The Kone-afa was one of these delicious desserts. Shaped like a traditional ice-cream cone, this tasty treat is anything but traditional. Combining filo pastry, which is marinated in yuzu blossom syrup, along with a choice house-made vanilla bean, or green tea ice-cream, the

finishing touch comes in the form of a luscious chocolate coating which is topped with crushed fresh pistachios.

The Nutella Mochi takes the traditional mochi dessert to a whole new 'stratosphere' by introducing a house-made Nutella filling, which is covered with a chocolate shell, that is laid on top of crunchy cocoa nibs and drizzled with a fresh, house-made raspberry sauce. The Pistachio mochi boasts a rich house-made ice-cream which is placed over a layer of fresh filo pastry that is marinated in yuzu blossom syrup. Maki's existing scrumptious desserts will surely face competition from this new line of pastries which come at a perfect time when summer is right around the bend.



## ACK, ABB sign agreement for joint research



ABB Engineering Technologies Co (KSCC) (ABB) and the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on March 12, 2019 to collaborate and cooperate on science and technology research, leveraging expertise from automation major ABB and nurturing talent from privately-owned ACK.

As part of the MOU, which will be applied in accordance with the laws and regulations of the State of Kuwait, ABB and ACK will jointly develop projects and trainings aimed at providing advanced technical support and services to industries in Kuwait and throughout the Middle East region. The non-legally-binding agreement will promote the mutual exchange of personnel, facilities and equipment, and relevant information.

ABB Kuwait has been integral to the development of infrastructure in the state of Kuwait since 1956, today we are proud to support the continued generation and transmission of electricity, assist in providing abundant drinking water, power the new hospitals, bridges and airports and provide the technology to ensure Kuwait remains one of the leading producers of oil and gas in the world with the adoption of digital.

Through internships at ABB or its subsidiaries, ACK students will have the opportunity to get field experience. Dean of the School of Engineering at the Australian College of Kuwait, Dr Mohammad Abdul Niby expressed his appreciation for this move and said that this MOU defines the guidelines for a strong cooperation with ABB which will come with benefits for both parties in several aspects such as research, exchange of expertise, consultations, etc. He added that several collaboration plans are already in mind and the near future will witness the effectiveness of this relation.

College faculty will also participate in ABB projects and in technical support studies for the industry. Tareq Khalil- Country Sales Directory for Automation- expressed his belief that this partnership will be beneficial, both to the local ABB organization and the university especially in the avenue of knowledge exchange especially as we are in the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The MOU was signed by the President of ACK, Prof Isam Zabalawi and Paul Dennis Country CEO and will remain in effect until further notice.

ABB (ABB: SIX Swiss Ex) is a pioneering technology leader in power grids, electrification products, industrial automation and robotics and motion, serving customers in utilities, industry and transport & infrastructure globally. Continuing a history of innovation spanning more than 130 years, ABB today is writing the future of industrial digitalization with two clear value propositions: bringing electricity from any power plant to any plug and automating industries from natural resources to finished products. As title partner in ABB Formula E, the fully electric international FIA motorsport class, ABB is pushing the boundaries of e-mobility to contribute to a sustainable future. ABB operates in more than 100 countries with about 147,000 employees.

Established in 2004, ACK is one of the first private universities in Kuwait. The College offers world-class higher education on home ground through international learning partnerships. Courses of study are available at diploma and bachelor degree levels and in specializations within Engineering, Business, Aviation and Maritime studies.

ACK offers a personalized approach to learning where each student has an academic advisor who is available for scholastic and career guidance. At the same time, ACK places importance on the overall College experience and accordingly a wide range of sporting and club activities are available so that students can pursue their hobbies and interests with others and establish life-long friendships.

## ICSK Junior celebrates blessing ceremony

ICSK Junior celebrated the blessing ceremony 'Anugrah' on March 14, 2019, for the outgoing students of classes V and VI - 2018-19, who are being relocated to ICSK Senior School. The occasion was made grander by the presence of the mothers. To symbolize the occasion, a lamp lighting ceremony was held to start off on an auspicious note. The students presented a school band which made the audience mesmerized.

A vibrant and colorful invocation dance performed by the students of class V. The

celebration commenced with a Welcome Speech by the Principal pursued by an address by the chief guest Dr Susovana Sujit Nair, an oncologist, working in KCC. Principal Sherly Dennis in her address asked the children to obey their elders, especially their parents. She advised parents to be good listeners to their children so that they can be more open and free to discuss anything with their parents.

A melodious song and a wonderful dance were performed by the mothers. The most cherished moment of the whole program was the awesome dance performed by the teachers, as a farewell treat, for the students. The President of the School Senate Miss Aiyana Martin Rao and Master Niranjana Garish, on behalf of their fellow students extended their gratitude to the teachers and the school. As a token of love and appreciation, every child was given a card made by their teachers and a cup, with an inspiring message.



## Notice

The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kuwait notifies all Germans about the election of Members of the European Parliament from the Federal Republic of Germany that will take place on May 26, 2019. Germans who reside outside the Federal Republic of Germany and no longer have a domicile within the federal territory may be eligible to vote in the election.

In addition to fulfilling the electoral requirements applicable to all voters, they must:

1.1 On election day have been domiciled in one of the other member states of the European Union for the past three months or more, or have had their habitual residence there for that period (residence in the Federal Republic of Germany immediately prior to residence in such country counts towards this three-month requirement), or,

1.2 Either, within the last 25 years and after attaining the age of 14, have been domiciled without interruption in the Federal Republic of Germany for at least three months or otherwise have had their habitual residence there, or for other reasons have acquired a personal and direct familiarity with the political conditions in the Federal Republic of Germany and be affected by them;

2. Be registered on a voters' register in the Federal Republic of Germany. Registration is only possible upon application. The application must be made on an official form and should be submitted soon after publication of this notice.

Applications not received by the competent municipal authority before May 6, 2019 cannot be accepted (Section 17 (1) of the European Election Regulations). Application forms and information sheets are available online from the Federal Returning Officer (www.bundeswahlleiter.de). They are also available at: The diplomatic missions and career consular posts of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Federal Returning Officer at the following address: Bundeswahlleiter, Statistisches Bundesamt, Zweigstelle Bonn, Postfach 17 03 77, 53029 Bonn, Germany district and municipal returning officers in the Federal Republic of Germany.

## Health &amp; Science

# Disaster response turns to VR for grim training

**CHON BURI, Thailand:** A Thai policewoman trudges through waste and ruined buildings looking for bodies—but she needs only a joystick and a virtual reality headset for the grim task, as technology comes to the aid of disaster management training. As around 40 police officers watch her progress on a large screen, officer Chanika Sookreang's digital double goes from body to body in the ruined city, photographing tattoos, faces—anything that can later be used to establish who the victim was.

"VR is good as it allows us to be trained before we go to the actual scene," says Chanika, who has firsthand experience in relief work from the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) developed the new "game" and is testing it out for the first time on teams in Thailand's Chonburi province in a bid to recreate the daunting challenge of identifying bodies, which can help in repatriating them to families.

Dozens of forensic experts from the Red Cross are stationed around the world to help countries respond to tsunamis, earthquakes and other disasters. Training for refugee camps and high-risk disaster hotspots like Indonesia have long relied on heavy mannequin models. But a former Swiss army officer turned video gaming enthusiast has recruited graphic designers from the gaming industry to help create the ICRC's first Virtual Reality unit in Bangkok, which will allow teams to reach a wider audience.

"If you do training in a classroom, like how to put a body into a bodybag, it is excellent because you can have the weight," says Christian Rouffier, head of the VR team. By contrast, the new simulation is "weightless, but what you will have is all the risk factors" complicating search-and-rescue missions such as the presence of animals and

dangling electrical cables, he tells AFP. In one sequence a rat scurries across the ground as the rescuer tries to retrieve the corpse of a woman, whose arm comes detached when the body is flipped over.

## Lost Forever

To make the training more realistic, the ICRC team worked with forensics specialist Ivett Kovari. She explains that she came up with the idea for the rat "because that's what happens in reality". In the field, responders have to search for remains, take notes and photographs, and transport bodies. A diligent inventory of the victim's belongings from phones and jewelry to family photos and ID cards is also crucial, Kovari tells participants in Thailand, warning that otherwise "this information is going to be lost forever".

Virtual reality is increasingly sought after for skills training, from hospitals to industry. Disaster zone rescue is the latest in a series of VR simulations from the Red Cross. Trainees can already visit overcrowded prison cells to check on conditions—one of the group's global mandates—or plunge into the chaotic world of a refugee camp to assess needs of those displaced by conflict. Some are even intended for mainstream use, such as an immersive first aid game created at the request of the British Red Cross. Another game looking at earthquake response is currently in production.

A decade ago the ICRC produced research on gamers committing war crimes in the virtual world, which sparked ridicule. But the uproar led to the agency working with the creators of war video game "Arma 3" to create a new iteration that included a more humanitarian perspective, from the workers on the ground to the complex rules of



**CHON BURI:** A Thai forensic police officer wearing a virtual reality headset before searching for victims in a simulated city in ruins at the police headquarters in Chonburi province, Thailand. — AFP

engagement in conflict. Countries like Thailand, which lack big budgets for quick relief response, are keen to take advantage of VR's cost-saving measures.

The head of Thailand's disaster victim identification department Nithi Bundhuwong attended the training in Chonburi and was enthusiastic about a virtual crime scene

immersion program he showed off on his smartphone. "In the past, training was based on repeating (the same exercise) again and again, and it was a waste of time and money," he tells AFP. "Thanks to virtual reality, we can simulate different scenarios" from crime scenes to the chaos of a natural disaster, he added.—AFP

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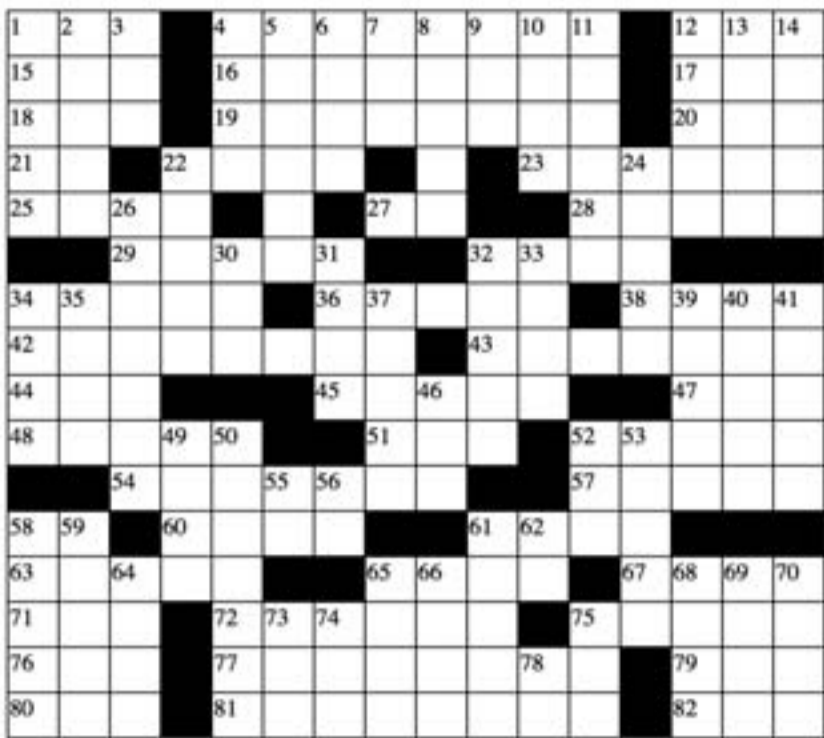
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ACROSS

- 1. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
- 4. Relating to or bordering the Atlantic Ocean.
- 12. A metric unit of length equal to ten meters.
- 15. An inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others.
- 16. Italian painter and sculptor and engineer and scientist and architect.
- 17. Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
- 18. Someone who is morally reprehensible.
- 19. 100 groschen equal 1 schilling.
- 20. Used in combination to denote the middle.
- 21. Before noon.
- 23. Keenly excited (especially sexually) or indicating excitement.
- 25. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- 27. A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
- 28. The large trunk artery that carries blood from the left ventricle of the heart to branch arteries.
- 29. Combined or joined to increase in size or quantity or scope.
- 34. Fed beyond capacity or desire.
- 36. Having the leading position or higher score in a contest.
- 38. A large number or amount.
- 42. Type genus of Crassulaceae.
- 43. An athlete who plays for pay on a part-time basis.
- 44. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
- 45. Suggestive of an elf in strangeness and otherworldliness.
- 47. A close friend who accompanies his buddies in their activities.
- 48. Found along western Atlantic coast.
- 51. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
- 54. Dyed with henna.
- 57. A mountain peak in the Andes in Argentina (21,654 feet high).
- 58. After noon.
- 60. Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- 63. United States tennis player (born in Czechoslovakia) who won several singles championships.
- 67. An officer who acts as military assistant to a more senior officer.
- 71. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- 72. In a state of sleep.
- 76. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
- 77. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- 79. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
- 80. (Babylonian) The sky god.
- 81. Low stinging nettle of Central and South America having velvety brownish-green toothed leaves and clusters of small green flowers.
- 82. A metric unit of length equal to 10,000 meters.

DOWN

- 1. A summary that repeats the substance of a longer discussion.
- 2. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
- 3. The federal department responsible for safeguarding national security.
- 4. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- 5. (botany) Especially of plant parts.
- 6. A textile machine for weaving yarn into a textile v 1.
- 7. The part of the nervous system of vertebrates that controls involuntary actions of the smooth muscles and heart and glands.
- 8. The iridescent internal layer of a mollusk shell.
- 9. Hormone released by the hypothalamus that controls the release of thyroid-stimulating hormone from the anterior pituitary.
- 10. The content of cognition.
- 11. An informal conversation.
- 12. Any of various hard resins from trees of the family Dipterocarpaceae and of the genus Agathis.
- 13. Austrian painter influenced by art nouveau (1862-1918).
- 14. (Greek mythology) A princess of Colchis who aided Jason in taking the Golden Fleece from her father.
- 22. (Greek mythology) The god of the underworld in ancient mythology.
- 24. United States pharmacologist (born in Germany) who was the first to show that acetylcholine is produced at the junction between a parasympathetic nerve and a muscle (1873-1961).
- 26. Inflammation of the nose and throat with increased production of mucus.
- 30. A doctor's degree in dental surgery.
- 31. (British) An open river valley (in a hilly area).
- 32. Pertaining to or constituting a base or basis.
- 33. Chief port of Yemen.
- 35. An elaborate song for solo voice.
- 37. A city in the Saxony region of Germany on the Saale River.
- 39. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
- 40. Any of numerous low-growing cushion-forming plants of the genus Draba having rosette-forming leaves and terminal racemes of small flowers with scapose or leafy stems.
- 41. Very large white gannet with black wing tips.
- 46. An interest followed with exaggerated zeal.
- 49. A small ball with a hole through the middle.
- 50. Release from a clasp.
- 52. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- 53. A family of Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in southeastern Asia.
- 55. A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
- 56. A public promotion of some product or service.
- 59. A city in Indonesia.
- 61. An island (part of Campania) in the Bay of Naples in southern Italy.
- 62. A unit of power equal to 746 watts.
- 64. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
- 65. A Chadic language spoken in Chad.
- 66. Large semi-evergreen tree of East India.
- 68. Severe diabetes mellitus with an early onset.
- 69. Declare untrue.
- 70. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls.
- 73. A health resort near a spring or at the seaside.
- 74. A local computer network for communicating with computers.
- 75. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- 78. Being nine more than ninety.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Nothing is going to be to certain today, so it's not the best time to make firm social plans. You might end up having to reschedule at the last minute—or, even worse, you might end up being stood up! There will be plenty of opportunities to prevent bad decisions today, as many folks will be asking for your advice. Reassure people that their instincts are right, and be as positive and as encouraging as you can. Considering the giving mood you're in, this won't be difficult.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your bold new plans are the hot topic among your friends—although not everyone agrees on whether or not they will work. Go to the folks who you think are the most pessimistic and find out what they have to say. Encourage them to tell you the truth—after all, you can handle it. Accept what they have to say, but do not let their opinions make you think that you have to alter your ideas. You have a clear plan, and this time you need to carry it out.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

he good news is that your confidence is expanding—the bad news is that some people might think that it is expanding too much! Today you need to decide for yourself whether you want to live your life your own way, or change according to what other people may think. Your reputation is important, but is it worth compromising yourself? This is a very hard concept to deal with, and one that will take time to sort through. Consider talking to an older relative to get some insight.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Have you ever tried herding cats? Okay, probably not—but you're certainly familiar with the frustrating act of trying to make things happen and getting absolutely no cooperation! People have their own priorities, and like those cats, they may not understand why they should pay attention to you. Luckily, today you will find someone who is willing to listen. Try not to pounce on her or him too eagerly—be cool and calm, and this person will come to you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

If powerful or charismatic people are being critical of you right now, simply shrug it off. Move on—and as far away from these folks as possible. They're on a power trip, eagerly pointing the finger at other people instead of looking at themselves for an explanation. Do not let yourself get conned into taking someone else's responsibility. Keep yourself focused on what you know is the right way to be and live your life accordingly.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Let your curiosity drive you today—investigate things that you find strange or unfamiliar, and you will find great satisfaction in your day. Amusing people will egg you on, offering some ideas that may seem awfully far-fetched to you, so poke around one or two of them and see what you can uncover. It will be worth your time. Curiosity will also come in handy in the romantic realm of your life. Ask the questions you have been dying to ask—take a risk!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Finishing up all your errands isn't that important today—starting new projects is. So put off picking up your dry cleaning, getting more kitty litter or stopping to get your oil changed. These things can wait. But when an opportunity or invitation lands right in your lap, you have to take it! Don't let your day-to-day routine make you forget that life is an adventure. Go down an unexplored path today. You can check off all the items on your to-do list some other day.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

The feeling that you are stuck in a rut will come over you today, and it could feel as though there's no point in even trying to get out of it. But before inertia takes over, check in with friends for a little pep talk. If you need any inspiration, you know that one of them (if not all of them) will provide you with the spark you need to add some interest to your day. Even if they just recommend a new song they think you would like, give it a listen and see what happens.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

There will be a tough decision for you to make today—are you going to do what you know you should do, or are you going to do what you want to do? Take a step back and look at potential problems that could develop if you take the easy route. The longer you delay doing the necessary work, the bigger these challenges will grow. The best attitude for you today is to focus on getting things over with. Tomorrow you'll have more flexibility to do what you want.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Divide and conquer—that's not only an effective strategy for battle. It can help you conquer many different conflicts in your life, too. Separating the good parts of people's personalities from the bad parts will help you argue your case without getting too personal. Focus on what you like about the people around you, and if you can't come up with anything, then ask yourself why you're so personally invested in this disagreement.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Things that used to be difficult for you are getting a lot easier—like letting go of people who are not good for you. Today you will be able to effortlessly turn away from some insincere and disreputable people in your life, and never look back again, no matter what the consequences are. If you are negotiating among friends, don't try to anticipate how other people will react. Just focus on you and that other person. What other people think is not important at all.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are a very generous person—to a fault sometimes. There are some people new to your life right now who could be angling to take advantage of the fact that you tend to think of the needs of others before you consider your own needs. Today you need to protect yourself. Switch those around on your priority list and focus more on giving yourself what you need and keeping it. Conservation is a big long word for maintaining what you've worked so hard to achieve.

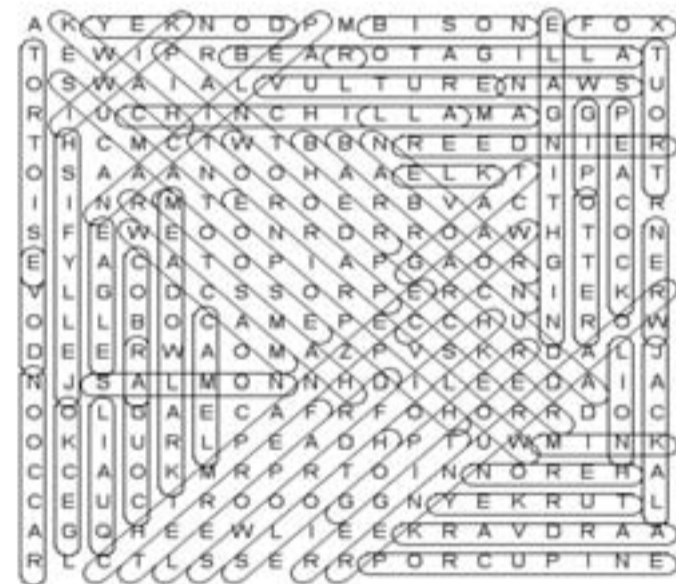
Wordsearch Puzzle

Animals 2

Find and circle all of the animals that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional animal.

Wordsearch puzzle grid for Animals 2. The grid contains hidden animal names. Below the grid is a list of animals to find: ANTELOPE, BAT, BEAVER, BOBCAT, BUFFALO, CHEETAH, CHICKEN, COYOTE, CRANE, DEER, DOLPHIN, DUCK, ELEPHANT, EMU, FLAMINGO, FROG, GAZELLE, GIRAFFE, GOOSE, GORILLA, HEDGEHOG, HORSE, HUMMINGBIRD, IMPALA, JAGUAR, KANGAROO, KOALA, LAHPREY, LEMMING, LYNX, MARLIN, MOCKINGBIRD, MONKEY, MOUSE, OCTOPUS, ORANGUTAN, ORCA, PANTHER, PARAKEET, PARTRIDGE, PENGUIN, PORPOISE, PUMA, RABBIT, RATTLESNAKE, RHINOCEROS, ROBIN, SHEEP, SHREW, STORK, TURTLE, WALLABY, WALRUS, WEASEL, WHALE, YAK, ZEBRA.

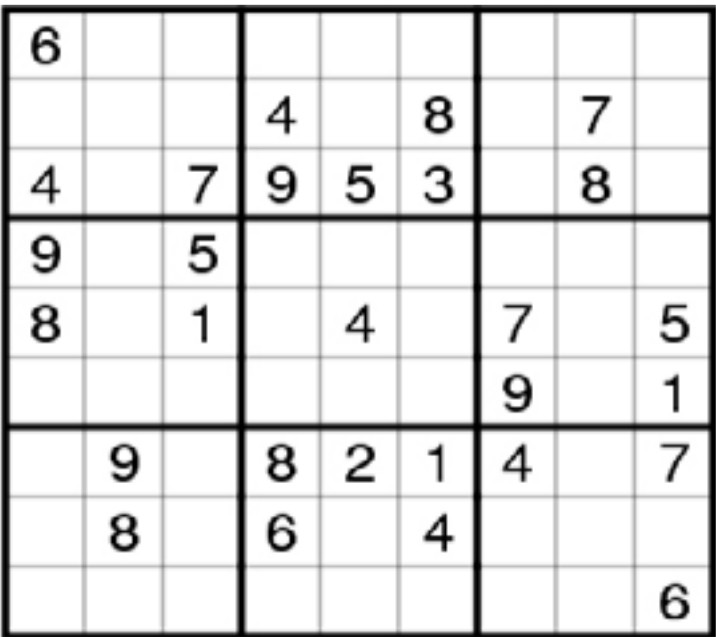
Animals 1



Wordsearch puzzle grid for Animals 1. The grid contains hidden animal names. Below the grid is a list of animals to find: AARDVARK, ALLIGATOR, BABOON, BARRACUOA, BEAR, BISON, CAMEL, CHIMPANZEE, CHINCHILLA, COBRA, COUGAR, CROW, DONKEY, DOVE, EAGLE, FERRET, FOX, GECKO, GOAT, GOPHER, HAMSTER, MINK, MOOSE, NIGHTINGALE, HIPPOPOTAMUS, JACKAL, JELLYFISH, KIWI, LEOPARD, LION, LLAMA, MACAW, MEADOWLARK, MINK, MOOSE, NIGHTINGALE, OTTER, PANTHER, PARROT, PEACOCK, PELICAN, PIG, PORCUPINE, QUAIL, RACCOON, RAVEN, REINDEER, ROADRUNNER, SALMON, SLOTH, SWAN, SWORDFISH, TIGER, TORTOISE, TROUT, TURKEY, VULTURE, WOLVERINE, WOODPECKER, WREN.

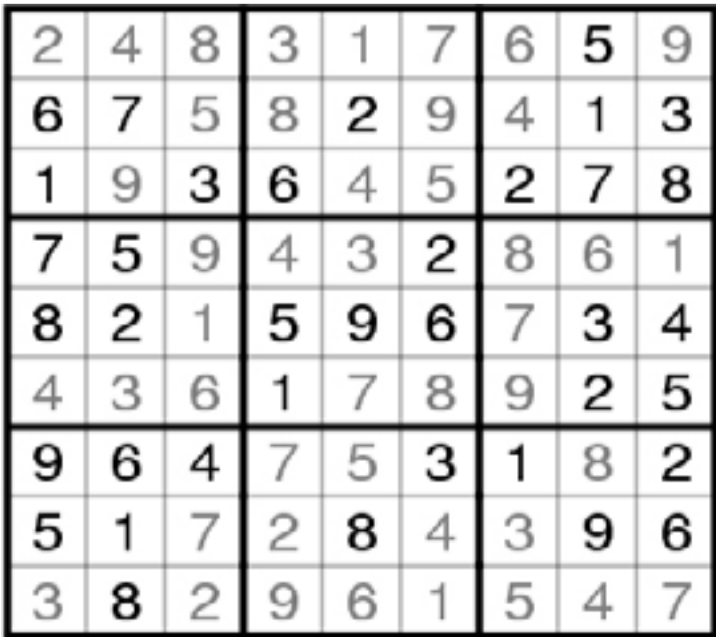
The hidden animal is: AMERICAN CROCODILE

Daily SuDoku



hard

Yesterday's Solution



easy

# Lifestyle

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2019



Cyclists ride past a field of blossomed daffodils in Lisse, on March 26, 2019. — AFP

## Ugly prosthetics get French design treatment



Evelynne Briand poses with her customized prosthesis at ALGO, a firm specialized in prosthesis in Brest, western France. — AFP photos



Bruno Paul poses with his customized prosthesis at ALGO.



Customized prosthesis displayed at ALGO.

French manufacturers of prosthetics are breaking from tradition to develop fashionable artificial limbs with patterns and color so that wearers don't mind showing off some leg. Two companies, Algo Orthopedie and U-Exist, have taken the lead in France and are trying to redefine the image of replacement limbs, which are manufactured from plastic resin and are usually skin-colored.

"A prosthetic worn with your granny's stocking is just ugly," said Alain Le Guen, an orthopedic surgeon and manager of Algo Orthopedie, which was created in 2004 in Brittany in northwestern France. "It has to be a bit of a work of art," he added, so that "people aren't shy about showing their leg." Le Guen believes that colorful prosthetics can help users accept their disability. His company has seen rapid growth in the past few years, with production increasing from just a dozen designer limbs in 2016 to around 50 now.



A technician uses a dryer to finalize a coated tibia prosthesis in a workshop at ALGO.

Each limb costs between 25-26,000 euros (28,000 dollars) and is normally covered by the French public health system. Users of Algo's prosthetic limbs seem to take pride in them. Bruno Paul, 55, sports an artificial left leg with a yellow-and-orange diamond motif. Former metal-worker Paul lost his leg in 2016, nearly 20 years after an accident in a foundry which led to around 20 operations to try to prevent an amputation.

"I don't have my leg anymore, so why pretend to still have one," Paul said. "I might as well accept my disability along with some color." Evelynne Briand, a 56-year-old who had her leg amputated in 2007, chose a striped blue-and-white design. "The way people look at you changes when you have a colored prosthetic," she said. "I've got another one in leather to go with my black dress." She had her leg amputated in 2007 after rupturing crucial ligaments in her knee during a tennis



A technician cuts up a tight prosthesis.

match at the age of 25, which led to more than 40 failed operations.

### Appreciating its worth

Another company, U-Exist, joined the competition in 2014 and trains prosthetic designers — between 150 and 200 annually — as well as manufacturing its own line of stylish limbs. "A prosthetic created to mimic the human body is frankly deceptive for the mind, not to mention that the appearance of a false limb can be troubling to other people," said Simon Colin, founder and director of U-Exist, to AFP.

Colin, whose interest in designs for prosthetics dates back to research as a student on the impact of personalized prosthetics, is a fervent believer in what he considers a form of art therapy. Around 250,000 people use a prosthetic limb in France and around 160,000 of them are built each year, according to Colin. — AFP

## 'Florida Man' challenge keeps US laughing

It's known for its theme parks and hot climate, but the southeastern US state of Florida also has a reputation for producing strange tales of misadventure-from driving into someone's living room to trying to buy drinks while carrying an alligator.

The inevitable headlines that follow usually make reference to "Florida Man"-a meme in his own right. And now, the "Florida Man" challenge has taken social media by storm: search the term and your birthday to uncover weird goings-on that took place while you were celebrating. You may find gems such as "Man with groping history opens fire on Florida yoga class, killing two," or "Police say Florida man climbs atop playground equipment at Clearwater park, tells kids where babies come from." And lest we forget the classic: "Naked man on bicycle stuns Miami commuters in I-95 traffic."

While there may not be a jaw-dropping "Florida Man" event every single day, they do add up. Just yesterday, a Florida man was followed and then attacked by an angry squirrel. Last year, a Florida man was fired-but not without cause. It was after he spent more than six months documenting his flatulence online. He made another Florida man arrested for lashing out at swans with his karate moves seem rational. As for the bored Florida man with a pilot license who drew a p\*\*\*s with his aircraft's exhaust tail-he was busted by radar. Florida, with a population of over 21 million, has a relatively low cost of living, and many people settle there from other US states and abroad. —AFP

# Case dropped against Smollett accused of hate attack hoax

Chicago authorities on Tuesday dropped the charges against a US television actor accused of fabricating a hate crime, in a shock move that enraged the city's police and mayor, who dismissed it as a "white-wash." Prosecutors said they had shelved all 16 felony charges against "Empire" star Jussie Smollett in exchange for an agreement that he carry out community service and forfeit a \$10,000 bond payment. But Smollett's lawyers claimed there was no such agreement, and that the actor was the victim of a rush to judgment.

"There is no deal. The state dismissed the charges," attorney Patricia Holmes said as the actor celebrated with family, whose claim that Smollett had been vindicated was flatly rejected by the police. The 36-year-old, one of the main cast members on Fox musical drama "Empire" alongside Taraji P Henson, was accused of masterminding a hoax attack in downtown Chicago to gain publicity and secure a bigger paycheck.

He reported to police that he was attacked in the middle of the night in January by two masked men while walking near his home. Smollett maintained his innocence in the face of a damning public account from authorities' of their case against him. They accused him of sending himself a threatening letter and hiring two acquaintances to stage the attack, complete with homophobic and racial slurs, while invoking Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

"I have been truthful and consistent on every single level since day one," Smollett, who is black and gay, said at a brief news conference. "This has been an incredibly difficult time," he added, "Honestly, one of the worst in my entire life." Chicago's police chief and mayor, both visibly

angry, denounced the decision to drop the case and countered Smollett's insistence of his innocence. "This is a whitewash of justice," Mayor Rahm Emanuel, a former congressman and White House chief-of-staff, told a hastily-arranged news conference. "Mr Smollett is still saying that he is innocent, still running down the Chicago Police Department. How dare (he)?" the mayor added.

**'We did not exonerate'**

The prosecutor's office offered little explanation at first for suddenly reversing course before finally characterized its decision as a routine one carried out in thousands of cases. "This is not a new or unusual practice. An alternative disposition does not mean that there were any problems or infirmities with the case or the evidence," the Cook County State Attorney's office said in a statement.

"We stand behind the Chicago Police Department's investigation and our decision to approve charges in this case. We did not exonerate Mr Smollett." Authorities have said there is enough evidence to back up their case, including surveillance camera footage, text messages, phone records, and a cashed check Smollett wrote to brothers Ola and Abel Osundairo, both of whom worked on "Empire," to carry out the alleged plan.

"I think this city is still owed an apology," Chicago police chief Eddie Johnson said Tuesday. "They chose to hide behind secrecy and broker a deal to circumvent the judicial system," he said. "I stand behind the detective's investigation." Holmes, Smollett's lawyer, acknowledged that the brothers had admitted carrying out the attack, but accused police of using "the press to convict people before they're tried in a court of law."



Actor Jussie Smollett speaks with members of the media after his court appearance at Leighton Courthouse on March 26, 2019 in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP photos

"We believe that it was the correct result in this case. We are very happy with this result," she said. The initial news of the attack had prompted widespread sympathy for Smollett and outrage over the nature of the alleged crime. But the star was written out of the last two episodes of the most recent season of "Empire" — which is set in New York but filmed in Chicago — amid uproar over the accusations against him.

Smollett said he wanted "nothing more than to just get back to work and move on with my life." His family described him as "an innocent man whose name and character has been unjustly smeared" in a statement published by the ABC News. Fox producers said Tuesday they were "gratified that all charges against him have been dismissed" but would not comment on whether he would return to the show. —AFP



Cloth bags with the bats inside hang in a fridge prior to their awakening after winter hibernating at a bat rescue centre in Minsk. — AFP photos



Alexei Shpak, the head of a bat rescue centre, weighs a bat as it wakes up after spending the winter months hibernating inside a fridge.

## After spending winter in a fridge, Minsk bats return to the wild

After spending the winter months hibernating inside a fridge at a rescue centre in Belarus, a group of bats awaken and are released into the wild. To ensure a good winter's sleep, each bat was tucked up inside a cloth bag by volunteers at the centre, then hung up inside an ordinary domestic fridge — giving them just the right amount of moisture and cold. The Kozhanopolis centre, which is located in Minsk, takes in bats that are found by members of the public after struggling to find a safe place to hibernate.

"In winter, bats fall into a very deep sleep and for hibernation, they need fairly cold and moist environments," says the centre's head, Alexei Shpak. "They fly into people's balconies, into apartment block entrances, ventilation shafts, cellars and so on. Sometimes people just find them on the ground in the snow." The right conditions for a bat to hibernate are temperatures between zero and five degrees Celsius (32 to 42 Fahrenheit) and moisture levels of more than 50 percent, and the bat shelter has found an easy way of providing these. "That's exactly what a fridge does. Just the most ordinary fridge," says Shpak.

The centre only has one fridge but it has enough space for the 32 bats that spent the winter hung up in bags. Some of the bats at the centre are "old-timers" who have been sleeping in the fridge since mid-December, he says. The bats are two different types found across Europe: parti-colored bats and serotine bats.

**Hand-fed with grubs**

The centre has no state funding but has premises provided by a state educational facility and equipment paid for by crowd-funding. With the arrival of spring and as outside temperatures rise above 10 degrees Celsius (10 degrees Fahrenheit), Shpak and the three other volunteers at the centre carefully remove the bats from their cloth bags so that they wake up naturally. "When they sense a higher temperature, their body temperature starts going up a little bit and they wake up," Shpak says. The black bats stretch their wings as they get a weigh-in to check they are healthy. They are hand-fed with grubs and given a drink of water through pipettes to bring up their strength.

In the evening, a procession of interested locals follow Shpak and the volunteers to a city park where they gently coax the bats onto trees, from where they will return to their previous haunts. Those watching talk about their prejudices about bats and how seeing them released back into the wild has changed their feelings. Anna, a school teacher who came with her small daughter, smiles as she talks about



A bat is released into the wild after spending the winter months hibernating.



A volunteer gives a bat a drink.

getting close to the bats. "They're so ugly, really, but when you pick them up, they're very pleasant to touch, so small and furry. And you realize this is a kind of miracle." —AFP

## China release of Bohemian Rhapsody disappoints gay community

The Chinese release of Bohemian Rhapsody, a biopic on British rock band Queen, has left many in China's gay community disheartened, as censors scrubbed a key part of the protagonist's story — his sexuality. Multiple gay scenes in the film about iconic musician Freddie Mercury were dropped, including a pivotal moment when he comes out to his wife. Romantic scenes between two men, such as a kiss shared by Mercury and his personal assistant, were also erased.

"The Chinese release is no different from a fabricated story," said Hua Zile, founder of Voice of China LGBT, a media and advocacy platform for China's gay community with over a million followers on Twitter-like Weibo. The censored film "disrespects the real experience of the character", he told AFP. "For gay people in the country, this is a huge regret."

In China, it is common for films to undergo a strict approval process and see scenes cut before receiving a greenlight for release. Gay-themed films often struggle to make it into movie theatres, while same-sex relationships are banned from television screens and gay content is forbidden on online streaming platforms. China only decriminalized homosexuality in 1997, and withdrew it from its list of mental illnesses in 2001. Same-sex marriage remains illegal. But restrictions on LGBT-themed films and online content have increased over the past few years, say LGBT advocacy groups.

"For the LGBT community, this is a setback," said Duan, media manager at the Beijing LGBT Center, who gave his surname only, citing the sensitivity of the matter. "There is no way to freely spread or share (LGBT) related content," he told AFP, adding that the organization has struggled to upload advocacy videos on streaming sites. Other LGBT-themed films have faced similar restrictions as Bohemian Rhapsody, though it can be difficult to "know where the line is," added Hua.

Last year, Oscar-winning "Call Me by Your Name", a story of a summer romance between two young men in Italy, was pulled from the Beijing International Film Festival. In May, online video service MangoTV cut out a gay-themed dance from its broadcast of the Eurovision contest. The video platform also censored the Chinese subtitles of Rami Malek's speech when he won the best actor Oscar for his performance as Freddie Mercury.

In a recently uploaded video of the award speech, the Chinese subtitles simply ignore Malek's line on creating a film about "a gay man". Still, despite the censorship, Chinese moviegoers have embraced Bohemian Rhapsody, which is ranked in the top five after its release last week. According to the China Movie Data Information Network, an official site that tracks ticket sales, the Queen biopic has netted around 53.7 million yuan (\$8 million) so far.

For some viewers, especially those who were not familiar with Queen and Mercury's story, the censorship was not apparent enough to take away from the experience. "I didn't realize it was censored," said Dian Dian, a moviegoer in Beijing who saw the film on Wednesday. "I just thought they had shot it in a very subtle way." —AFP



A woman rides an escalator past a poster for the film Bohemian Rhapsody at a movie theater in Beijing. — AFP

## Long-lost treasure of Russian aristocrats displayed for first time

Thousands of pieces of antique silver that a Russian aristocratic family hid from the Bolsheviks have gone on public display for the first time in the former imperial capital of Saint Petersburg after being found by builders. More than 2,000 silver items made by Russia's finest jewelers and valued at more than \$2 million (about 1.8 million euros) are being shown at the Tsarskoye Selo palace, one of the former residences of the tsars that is now a museum.

The trove of silver — including a tea set, ornamental figures, trays and cutlery — once belonged to the aristocratic Narshykin family, one of the country's richest, who were forced to flee abroad after the 1917 Revolution. For more than a century, the silver lay hidden in a mansion in Saint Petersburg that had once belonged to the family. "A discovery of this sort is extremely rare: a treasure trove that is complete, that all belonged to the same family and is very well pre-

served. It's unique," said Olga Taratynova, the head of the Tsarskoye Selo palace museum.

The hidden collection was discovered by accident in 2012 during repair work on the city centre mansion. Builders broke through a brick wall and found a secret room containing packing cases full of treasure. Local media reported that the builders tried to steal the silver but were caught red-handed. Last year, the Russian state handed the whole trove to the Tsarskoye Selo museum. The collection was in near-perfect condition because it was stored carefully wrapped in newspaper and tissue paper soaked in acetic acid. "At the time, all these were objects of everyday use for one of the richest families of Russia," said Taratynova, describing the silver as of "enormous artistic value," particularly the tea set, which was made by the jewelers of the royal court. — AFP



A view of pieces of the treasure once belonged to the Narshykin aristocratic family, which was discovered in 2012 during a restoration of an 18th century mansion in Saint Petersburg, during a media event at the Tsarskoye Selo palace museum in Pushkin. — AFP photos



Models display the creations from the “Eji’s pastoral song” collection during the China Fashion Week in Beijing. — AFP photos



Models display the creations from the “Vspatio” collection by Hao Liwei.



Models display the creations from the “HELONGFENG” collection by Zhu Zheling.



## Smith has a ‘brand new’ relationship with eldest son

The ‘Wild Wild West’ star had Trey, now 26, with his first wife Sheree Zampino and he admitted the impact of his second marriage to Jada Pinkett Smith and the birth of their two children, Jaden, 20, and 18-year-old Willow, had an “impact” on his first born that has taken until the last two years to “address”. On the latest episode of Will’s ‘Bucket List’ Facebook Watch show, the actor and Trey visit Abu Dhabi for a Formula 1-style race and the 50-year-old star said: “This relationship with Trey is brand new. “When you get divorced and then start another family, that had effects on Trey that we’re still healing and overcoming. Really in the last two years has there been enough wisdom and emotional development to be able to lovingly address the issues. We’re diving into creating a divine, loving friendship.” The ‘Men In Black’ star admitted he “failed” at spending quality time with Trey when he was younger but he’s determined to make up for his mistakes with his son in the future. He is quoted by USA Today newspaper as saying: “You cannot get around spending time if you want to build love. “It’s something I failed at for most of Trey’s life, but I’m going to dedicated the rest of my life to making up for it.” Will previously admitted Trey had felt “betrayed and abandoned” after his divorce from Sheree.

## Natalia Dyer likes to play different ‘characters’



The 22-year-old actress is known for her seemingly effortless and laid back style, and the star has insisted that she loves to “play around” with fashion because it gives her the “opportunity” to change her “confidence” and “mood”. She said: “Fashion is another opportunity for me to play a character. Clothes can really change how you see yourself: your mood, your confidence. I like to play around a lot.” Natalia plays Nancy Wheeler in the science-fiction horror Netflix series Stranger Things, which follows a group of teenagers in the fictional town of Hawkins during the 1980’s, and Nancy explained that her life completely “changed overnight” when the series premiered. Speaking to InStyle, she said: “When ‘Stranger Things’ premiered, given the nature of how Netflix operates, things started to change literally overnight. It’s still an adjustment. I’m an introverted person naturally. I like to keep to myself.” The brunette beauty - who is dating her ‘Stranger Things’ co-star Charlie Heaton - also said that she likes to keep her private life out of the spotlight and off social media because she likes to give “100 per cent” to her relationships. She said: “It’s [social media] a great platform, but it scares me. I’m fearful of general accessibility. I got rid of my Facebook; I don’t do Twitter. I prefer to keep my personal life separate. My Instagram is a lot more work-based than life-based. “It’s important to have a life outside of work. You want to give it 100 percent when you’re there, but it’s easy to get wrapped up in things. Relationships require time and work too.”

## Julia Louis-Dreyfus cried when ‘Veep’ wrapped

The 58-year-old actress was “hysterical” on the last day of shooting the seventh and final season of the HBO political satire, in which she portrays President Selina Meyer. She said: “I wept like a baby. The whole deal. I was hysterical.” The award-winning actress - who has scooped six Emmys for the show - will miss her castmates now the show is over - and she’s also going to have a hard time saying goodbye to her alter ego. She told People magazine: “What I’m gonna miss most is being with all these wonderful people, whom I adore more than I can possibly articulate. “But I am going to miss playing a hyper-dysfunctional, narcissistic, undeveloped, ruthless human being.” And after seven years on the show, Julia thinks she’s taken on some of her character’s more positive traits. She said: “I think I have asserted myself in a way, in my career, that is important. But I understand Selina’s frustration and that certainly helped fuel the character.” Julia has previously admitted she felt a mixture of “joy and grief” over the ending of the show. She said: “I was so overcome with a joy and grief mashup, as this show ended, it really was surprising to me. “I’m an emotional person anyway, but it really caught me by surprise. I think that’s because this show has been my baby for now eight years that I’ve felt fiercely protective and proud of. “We were on location for four years, this team of actors and writers, then we moved to Los Angeles, and it worked, and you never know, it’s such a risk.” Production of the final season of the show was delayed when the actress was diagnosed with breast cancer, which she revealed in September 2017. She underwent her final round of chemotherapy in January 2018 and had surgery a month later, before getting back to work on ‘Veep’ that August.



## Sophie Turner thinks therapy changed her life



The ‘Game of Thrones’ actress has suffered from depression and anxiety and while she is still taking medication to combat her problems, seeking counseling has been the most beneficial way of getting them under control. She said: “I’m just a nervous wreck at the moment... “Depression for sure, anxiety, all of those things. I still experience it, but I had therapy, I’m on medication, and I feel so much better. The fact that I spoke to someone changed my life.” The 23-year-old star - who is engaged to Joe Jonas - wasn’t impressed by reports suggesting celebrities being open about such struggles was just them following a trend. She added to Rolling Stone magazine: “It’s definitely a generational thing. My mom still asks me, ‘Why do you need a therapist?’” Sophie is a “very emotional person” and admitted she used to lie in bed at night and “cry for my character” because of the hardships her alter ego, Sansa Stark, had been through. She said: “The things that girl has gone through are just unbelievable and awful.” The HBO fantasy drama series was criticised after Sansa was raped by her brutal husband Ramsay Bolton (Iwan Rheon) but Sophie thinks the scene was necessary. She said: “I think the backlash was wrong because those things did happen. We can’t dismiss that and not put it in a TV show where it’s all about power — and that is a very impactful way to show that you have power over somebody.”

## Sarah Silverman criticizes Hulu for sending her a \$1,500 bill



The 48-year-old comic received Emmy nominations for both seasons of ‘America, I Love You’ and was unimpressed that the network refused to pick up her basic expenses for attending the glamorous event, especially because they had so few shows shortlisted for honors. Debating whether or not to tell the story on podcast ‘The Last Laugh’, she told host Matt Wilstein: “I probably shouldn’t... Eh, f\*\*k it. Guess I’ll just burn this one down. I think it’s a funny story, or maybe it sounds obnoxious and it’s too showbiz-y. I’m really debating right now. “You know, it’s one of their only shows nominated for Emmys besides ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’.. “Even Comedy Central, like 15 years ago, paid for that s\*\*t when I was nominated. I was just flummoxed. Wouldn’t it be worth them paying \$1,500 to not have me on Matt Wilstein’s podcast saying Hulu wouldn’t pay \$1,500 for an Emmy for their network?” Sarah admitted she was upset when the streaming service cancelled ‘America, I Love You’, especially because she knew the network “loved” the show but felt it was ultimately too expensive for them. She said: “I know that they did love the show, but I think what it cost compared to its popularity or the eyes that they had on it didn’t — you know, the people that make the decisions there don’t have any connection to the show. So it’s easier for them. It’s probably smart. They make very hard decisions.”



## Issa Rae wants people to like her for her ‘mind’

The ‘Insecure’ star - who recently sparked rumors she is engaged to boyfriend Louis Diame - has always focused on “being smart, being accomplished and being respected” as she figured out at school that she isn’t the “type” that the guys she was attracted to wanted to date. She said: “As corny as it sounds, I want you to just like my mind. “I think a part of it just came from figuring out that the guys I like, I’m not their type. Learning that early on made me realize there’s no point in valuing the physical, because it wasn’t going to get me anywhere. So what can I control, and what can I bring to the table? How can I be valued in this way?” The 34-year-old actress is glad things never “worked out” with the “cool guys” she was attracted to when she was younger. She told Essence magazine: “I’m glad a lot of it didn’t work out. I was really into cool guys. I was into very high school muscular, college muscular dudes. I was just like, If I’m attracted to you, then what’s the problem?” Though Issa initially felt rejected, she quickly “stopped caring” and insisted relationships have never been a major focus for her. She said: “I guess, after a certain point. After I learned they weren’t checking for me like that, I just kind of stopped caring in that way. That’s not my primary focus. I’ve always been kind of flippant about relationships and men in general.” The actress’ family travelled a lot when she was younger and while her parents tried to instill a sense of confidence in her, she eventually fumed that her mom ad “lied” to her when she was mocked by classmates. She said: “My parents helped me and they hurt me. My mom was extremely pro-Black, and I believed her. My dad is Senegalese, and I grew up around my dark-skinned cousins and just thought that they were the most beautiful women in the world. I was surrounded by beautiful dark people.”

## Woman arrested after barging into Justin Bieber’s room

The ‘Love Yourself’ hitmaker - who is married to model Hailey Bieber - was staying in an unspecified upmarket establishment in Laguna Beach, California, on Tuesday afternoon when the mystery female suddenly burst in. Sources told TMZ the woman had been partying and had earlier been escorted out of the hotel after she was found roaming the hallways but had returned for an unknown reason and walked straight into Justin’s room by mistake. The 25-year-old singer is said to have remained calm and told the woman to leave before his security guards stepped in and held her until police arrived. The mystery female, who is in her late 30s, appeared to be drunk and was booked for trespassing. Sources told the website that the unnamed woman had been visiting guests at the hotel the night before and had been staying in a room close to the one where the ‘Sorry’ hitmaker was staying. Justin recently announced he is taking a break from his career to focus on his health and family. He wrote on Instagram: “So I read a lot of messages saying you want an album .. I’ve toured my whole teenage life, and early 20s, I realised and as you guys probably saw I was unhappy last tour and I don’t deserve that and you don’t deserve that, you pay money to come and have a lively energetic fun light concert and I was unable emotionally to give you that near the end of the tour. “I have been looking, seeking, trial and error as most of us do, I am now very focused on repairing some of the deep rooted issues that I have as most of us have, so that I don’t fall apart, so that I can sustain my marriage and be the father I want to be. Music is very important to me but Nothing comes before my family and my health.” — Bangshowbiz



# Classifieds

Thursday, March 28, 2019

STATE OF KUWAIT  
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION  
METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 6819 - 6817  
Fax: (+965) 24348714  
www.met.gov.kw



## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 6 - 26 km/h .

**BY NIGHT:** Cool with light to moderate south easterly wind to variable wind, with speed of 08 - 28 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 27/03/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	16 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	26 °C	12 °C		
ABDALY	27 °C	12 °C		
BUBYAN	-- °C	-- °C		
JAHRA	27 °C	14 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	24 °C	15 °C		
SALMIYAH	25 °C	18 °C		
AHMADI	25 °C	17 °C		
NUWAISIB	27 °C	13 °C		
WAFRA	27 °C	11 °C		
SALMY	26 °C	10 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	03/28	Warm	27 °C	14 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 38 km/h
Friday	03/29	Warm and Partly cloudy	26 °C	14 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h
Saturday	03/30	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thunders later on	27 °C	15 °C	SE	15 - 55 km/h
Sunday	03/31	Unstable with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thunders at times	26 °C	16 °C	SE	25 - 55 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:24
Sunrise	05:43
Zuhr	11:54
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:03
Isha	19:21

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	25 °C
MIN. Temp.	16 °C
MAX. RH	100 %
MIN. RH	22 %
MAX. Wind	SW 68 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

## DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 28/3/2019				Departure Flights on Thursday 28/3/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	ABY	122	Sharjah	13:35
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10
THY	766	ISL	00:30	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
KAC	504	Beirut	00:45	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KNE	532	Jeddah	14:20
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	JZR	103	Bahrain	14:40
SAI	441	Lahore	00:50	IAW	158A	Al Najaf	14:55
KAC	102	London	00:50	IAW	158B	Al Najaf	14:55
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	15:00
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	KNE	382	Taif	15:00
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	IRA	666	Esfahan	15:10
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	JZR	125	Dubai	15:15
PGT	860	Istanbul	02:05	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	FDB	8066	Dubai	15:40
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	ISL	673	Dubai	15:40
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	563	Amman	16:10
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
MSR	606	Luxor	03:10	OMA	646	Jeddah	16:35
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	785	Muscat	16:40
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:45
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	SAW	706	Damascus	17:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	KAC	675	Dubai	17:05
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	KAC	619	Doha	17:15
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	KAC	691	Muscat	17:15
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	KAC	503	Beirut	17:15
UAE	873	Dubai	04:55	FDB	052	Dubai	17:40
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	KAC	283	Dhaka	17:45
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	405	Kochi	17:45
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	QTR	1073	Doha	17:50
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	FEG	242	Alexandria	17:55
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:10	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
KAC	362	Colombo	06:10	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:10	JZR	253	Amman	18:40
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	KAC	381	Delhi	18:55
BAW	157	London	07:05	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	JZR	721	Alexandria	19:20
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:35	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	RJA	641	Amman	20:00
IGO	1755	CNN	08:00	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
QTR	8511	Doha	08:00	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	304	Mumbai	08:20	NIA	162	Cairo	20:30
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	301	Mumbai	20:35
MSC	411	Asyut	09:00	FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	KNE	232	Riyadh	20:50
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	JZR	703	Asyut	20:50
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	357	Kochi	21:00
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
IAW	157	Al Najaf	09:55	DLH	624	Dammam	21:30
SYR	341	Damascus	10:00	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	QTR	1089	Doha	22:00
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
SAW	703	Damascus	10:30	KAC	1543	Cairo	22:15
IRA	675	Lar	10:50	KAC	203	Lahore	22:15
JZR	116	Doha	11:10	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
JZR	122	Dubai	11:10	RBG	552	Alexandria	22:20
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	KAC	303	Mumbai	22:30
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	KAC	383	Delhi	22:30
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
JZR	252	Amman	12:30	KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	KAC	783	Jeddah	22:55
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	UAE	860	Dubai	23:00
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	MSC	406	Sohag	23:00
ABY	121	Sharjah	12:55	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	RBG	214	Sohag	23:10
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	QTR	1083	Doha	23:25

# Desperate and hiding, collapsed Saudi Oger workers left in limbo

**RIYADH:** Nearly two years after the collapse of the construction giant Saudi Oger rendered thousands jobless, Lebanese worker Mohammed remains stranded in limbo in Riyadh - and desperate to avoid arrest. The demise in 2017 of the once-mighty company owned by the family of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri forced thousands of its expatriate workers to exit the kingdom without months of unpaid wages and end-of-service benefits.

But many like 60-year-old Mohammed, who worked for the company for 35 years, are still stuck in Saudi Arabia. The expiration of Mohammed's residence permit makes his presence in Saudi Arabia illegal, but he is also legally barred from leaving due to an outstanding bank loan taken while he was employed. So Mohammed is left in a bewildering limbo, barely scraping by on the kindness of strangers and cut off from his family in Lebanon.

"I am a prisoner," he told AFP at the Riyadh apartment of another former Saudi Oger employee from Lebanon in a similar predicament. "When I want to go outside, I choose a time when there are no (police) roadblocks so that I am not detained," he added. Saudi Arabia, home to some 10 million expats, is in the midst of an intensifying crackdown on illegal workers that has seen hundreds of thousands expelled over the past two years.

There appears to be no recourse for the two stranded workers, who requested that their real names be withheld. Without a valid residency, the two men are not allowed to legally find work and repay their debt. And until the debts are repaid, they cannot get an exit visa, a mandatory authorization to leave the kingdom. According to court documents seen by AFP, Saudi Oger

still owes Mohammed more than \$100,000 in unpaid wages - more than double his outstanding bank loan used partly to pay for his children's education.

The impasse spotlights Saudi Arabia's long-criticized sponsorship system, which binds workers to their Saudi employers. It is unclear exactly how many of the company's nearly 40,000 former workers remain in the kingdom. Company officials and the Saudi labor ministry have not responded to repeated requests for comment. "Employees took car loans, housing loans - they are not allowed to leave until they repay, in line with the kingdom's regulation," said Wissam Saab, a 48-year-old former employee, who left the kingdom after being bailed out by relatives. "No one is helping," he told AFP from Beirut.

The testimonies encapsulate the human cost of the labor-intensive construction sector's slowdown amid low oil prices, causing turmoil in the lives of millions of workers and leading to the demise of what was once one of the kingdom's biggest builders. Former Saudi Oger workers - from France to Lebanon, India and the Philippines - are still awaiting salary arrears despite repeated management assurances.

Many distressed employees regularly post screenshots of owed invoices on social media, pleading with their governments to intervene. "Where is Saudi Arabia? Where is justice? Where is humanity?" workers chanted at a protest in front of the Saudi embassy in Beirut. "We are asking for our rights, not charity." Multiple workers said some colleagues have died of life-threatening illnesses as their health insurance - once covered by the company - expired. "They were deported as dead bodies from the kingdom," Chahnaz

Ghayad, who offers legal counsel to Oger workers in Beirut, told AFP.

A job at Saudi Oger, which reaped billions for Hariri and helped establish his family as a dominant force in Lebanese politics, was once billed as a ticket to a secure future. The mega-contractor, which shut up shop in July 2017 after nearly four decades in operation, built grandiose complexes including Riyadh's palatial Ritz-Carlton hotel and the all-women Princess Noura University.

But trouble for the company - heavily reliant on the Saudi state for contracts - started much earlier as the world's top energy exporter tightened spending following a collapse in oil prices in mid-2014. The company's former employees, however, pin much of the blame on Hariri's personal and political ties with the kingdom's leadership, apparently helping him to escape stringent penalties over non-payment of wages.

Last year, the kingdom established a committee to handle the restructuring of the undisclosed debt owed by Saudi Oger, but its current status remains unclear. The company reportedly owed at least \$3.5 billion. "The fact that this firm, and the Hariri family, have a political relationship with the government clearly complicates matters," Karen Young, from the American Enterprise Institute, told AFP. "The fact that Saudi Oger has been in a restructuring process by a government committee, even as it was due outstanding payments by the government, is also distinct from how other failing firms have been treated by the state." Its former workers, meanwhile, are girding for an indefinite wait. "Fighting hopelessness all alone," reads graffiti outside the abandoned residential quarters for its workers in Riyadh. — AFP



**RIYADH:** A former employee stands in front of the closed entrance to Oger's headquarter in the Saudi capital on Nov 9, 2018. —AFP

## Egypt union expels actors over Sisi criticism

**CAIRO:** Egypt's actors union said yesterday it was expelling two prominent performers after they criticised constitutional amendments seeking to extend President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's rule. Amr Waked and Khaled Abol Naga joined a congressional briefing on Monday in Washington about the human rights situation in Egypt as well as the possible extension of Sisi's tenure. In a statement, the union accused Waked and Abol Naga of "betraying the nation" and pushing "the agenda of conspirators against Egypt's security and stability".

"Both actors will no longer be allowed to act in Egypt," the union's head, Ashraf Zaki, told AFP. "The decision prohibits anyone from assigning them to any acting jobs." Both men accused the union of playing a "political" role on their official Twitter accounts. The award-winning actors live abroad and have featured in a wide range of Egyptian as well as international movies and TV series. Earlier this month, Waked said he faced difficulties renewing his passport at the Egyptian consulate in Madrid.

Egypt's parliament, which is dominated by Sisi supporters, gave the preliminary go-ahead last month to constitutional amendments that would allow the president to stay in power after his second term ends in 2022. Speaker Ali Abdel-Aal said this week that a draft is expected to be ready by mid-April after which it will be put to a public referendum, according to local media. A coalition of opposition groups yesterday reiterated its rejection of the planned amendments which it criticized as "unconstitutional".

Sisi, a former army chief, led the military's overthrow of



**ALEXANDRIA:** Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi welcomes Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, at Ras El-Tin Palace yesterday. — AFP

Mohamed Morsi in 2013 following mass protests against the Islamist leader's rule. He won his first term as president the following year and was re-elected in March 2018 with over 97 percent of the vote. His government has been criticized for quashing serious opposition and curtailing freedoms gained following a 2011 uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

The authorities have in recent years launched a broad crackdown on dissent targeting Islamists as well as liberal and secular activists. Novelists, singers, actors and popular social media bloggers have also been swept up in the crackdown. Last week, Egypt's musicians union said it suspended singer Sherine Abdel-Wahab pending an investigation into her joke about a lack of free speech in the country. Prominent novelist Alaa Al-Aswany also said he was accused of insulting Sisi, the armed forces and judicial institutions. — AFP

achievement." Sheikha Mayassa, sister of the ruling amir, is considered one of the world's most important art buyers after making a string of high-price acquisitions in the years before Qatar was hit by an energy price slump in 2014.

The museum is the latest move in Doha's campaign for regional dominance in arts and culture that has seen big-ticket acquisitions, new galleries, film festivals and international exhibitions by artists like Damien Hirst and Richard Serra. The museum includes winding floor space, an artificial lagoon, and the restored palace of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al-Thani, who ruled until 1949.

Set along the Doha seaside and over a decade in the making, the museum's exterior is a tangle of massive interlocking discs that evoke the shape of a desert rose, a design Nouvel said was a big technical challenge. "It creates a variation of space and unexpected spaces and unexpected proportions. I think the visitor will be surprised," Nouvel said yesterday. The interior features walls splashed with looping videos on Qatar's desert life and pearl diving in past eras, plus digital archives about life under Ottoman and British rule. — Agencies

Meanwhile, the interior ministry announced that the first batch of half a million new e-driving licenses will arrive next week pending commencing the electronic issuance of driving licenses in May, said informed sources. The sources added that the project will initially start with citizens in May, while those for expatriates will start by the end of the year at most. The sources explained that applicants will have to log in to the MoI website to submit their information, and on receiving an automated text message, they can receive their licenses from automated machines in various governorates.

The sources also explained that applications of expats applying online to renew their licenses will be blocked if they have unpaid fines, have changed their profession, left the country or completed their studies (for students), and will be asked to check in with relevant traffic departments to rectify their status if they are entitled to get driving licenses with the new data. Moreover, the sources said the project will reduce the number of expat licenses by over 25,000 due to cancelling those of expats who permanently left Kuwait, changed their profession, exceeded the age of 65 or completed their studies in Kuwait.

## Modi declares India 'space superpower'...

Continued from Page 1

Indian planes bombed Pakistani territory for the first time in decades.

Modi said the anti-satellite missile test was peaceful, and not designed to create "an atmosphere of war". "I want to assure the world community that the new capability is not against anyone. This is to secure and defend... fast-growing India." But analysts said the test would not go unnoticed in China and Pakistan, India's chief rivals in the nuclear-armed region, and could be interpreted as a show of New Delhi's advancing military capabilities.

"This is less about shooting down satellites and more about proving high-altitude 'hit-to-kill' proficiency, which is the core competency required to get good at a range of things - including defense against nuclear-capable ballistic missiles," Ankit Panda, of the Federation of American Scientists, told AFP. "This is how the message is going to be perceived in Islamabad." A spokesman for Pakistan's foreign ministry said countries that had "strongly condemned" the demonstration of similar technologies in the past should work towards preventing the militarization of space. "Boasting of such capabilities is reminiscent of Don Quixote's tilting against windmills," the spokesman said.

The United States and the former Soviet Union carried out their first successful anti-satellite missile tests in 1985, and China in 2007. All are now said to be working on so-called Star Wars laser weapons to destroy satellites. With satellites increasingly important because of their intelligence gathering role - and major

nations seeking to gain a foothold in space - the United States in 2014 rejected a Russian-Chinese proposal for a treaty to ban weapons in space, saying it was "fundamentally flawed" because of the lack of weapons verification measures.

India's foreign ministry said the country "has no intention of entering into an arms race in outer space". "We have always maintained that space must be used only for peaceful purposes," the ministry said. "At the same time, the government is committed to ensuring the country's national security interests and is alert to threats from emerging technologies."

Modi said the test did not violate any international treaties and was for the betterment and safety of India's 1.3 billion people. The announcement comes ahead of a national election in which Modi - whose Hindu nationalist party stormed to power in 2014 - is seeking a second term in office. Voting starts April 11 and will last nearly six weeks, with close to 900 million Indians eligible to vote in the world's largest election. Under election laws in force, the government is forbidden from announcing new policies or other major developments that could benefit the ruling party.

"The timing and the manner of the announcement, with elections around the corner, will certainly lead to speculation," Dhruva Jaishankar, Delhi-based fellow in foreign policy with Brookings India, told AFP. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi congratulated India's scientists on the feat but also wished Modi "a very happy World Theatre Day" - referring to celebrations also marked around the globe on March 27. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley defended the announcement, saying for "a deterrent of this kind there is no better than the prime minister to inform the world". India has made giant strides in its space journey in recent years. It launched a record 104 satellites in a single mission in 2017, and has also built a reputation for low-cost space exploration and science missions. - AFP

## Amir says Qatar 'stronger' as he...

Continued from Page 1

The enormous 52,000-sq-m National Museum of Qatar is located on Doha's waterfront corniche. It tells the story of Qatar's bedouin past and colonial times to its energy-rich present, reflecting on the country's wealth and ambitions. French architect Jean Nouvel, who designed the museum in the shape of a desert rose, said it would become "an icon".

Sheikha Al-Mayassa Al-Thani, chair of Qatar Museums and a member of the royal family, said the blockade had not delayed the museum's opening date. "The blockade hasn't affected us one bit," she told AFP during a preview tour of the museum. "We are very proud and happy and, in fact, all the people are welcome to this museum and we remain open to the rest of the world," she said. "We are more than proud of this

## Minister says 35-day annual leave...

Continued from Page 1

"It is absurd to describe it as means to drive expats away from Kuwait," the sources exclaimed, pointing out that only small numbers of expats had left compared to their total numbers in Kuwait, and that they had left for personal reasons and not because of the fees or being replaced by citizens, who are still a minority in the private sector.

The sources admitted that the government does have plans to cut the numbers of some communities in a bid to adjust Kuwait's demographics, but remarked that such plans will never affect qualified and skilled labor. "They only target marginal workers who overburden public services and pose security threats without actually doing any good to Kuwait," explained the sources, noting that such laborers will not be given work permits in the future.

## US Golan move stymies Arabs...

Continued from Page 1

war, Tehran has been a steadfast ally helping the regime now gain the upper hand as the conflict enters its ninth year. And in Yemen it is supporting Houthis rebels fighting a Saudi-led military coalition which is backing the country's beleaguered government.

Trump's decision could be seen as a "godsend" for Iran which will "try to capitalize on the US-Israeli move to try to fill the void of official Arab leadership" in the region, said Fawaz Gerges, an international relations expert at the London School of Economics. Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and annexed it in 1981, in a move that was never recognized by the international community. It has always been assumed that the fate of the strategic plateau would be negotiated as part of a wider peace deal between Israel and Syria.

The Arab League, due to hold its annual summit in Tunis on Sunday, slammed Trump's announcement as "null and void in substance and form". Arab governments including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon have all condemned the US move. But while they have been left fuming by Trump's casual short-circuiting of the accepted precepts of a future Middle East peace, they are powerless to take any meaningful action. "Official Arab condemnation does not carry much weight. The Arab state system is dysfunctional

## Roudhan survives no-confidence; MPs...

Continued from Page 1

In another development, head of the Assembly's foreign relations committee MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said the committee has summoned Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah to question him over a Syrian businessman who was briefly detained two

weeks ago over alleged money laundering accusations. The government had made no statement over the detention of Mazen Al-Tarazi, reportedly close to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, but Jarallah said late on Tuesday that Kuwait received some communications from the Syrian government and decided to free Tarazi.

Also, a group of lawmakers handed the foreign minister a letter objecting to allowing embassies and consulates to have premises in residential areas. The move came amid reports that the government will next week decide to provide land plots to embassies with large communities in the country.

## Sports

# Semenya says ‘no threat’ to women’s sport, Coe comments open old wounds

## Court’s decision has been postponed until late April

**CAPE TOWN:** Double Olympic 800-metres champion Caster Semenya says she is “no threat” to women’s sport and that recent comments from International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) President Sebastian Coe have reopened old wounds.

Semenya is awaiting a Court of Arbitration for Sport verdict on her appeal against an IAAF regulation that says female athletes classed as having differences in sexual development (DSDs) gain an unfair advantage due to their higher testosterone levels, though only in races between 400 and 1,000m.

Under the new rules, athletes classed as having DSDs must reduce their blood testosterone level to below five (5) nmol/L for a continuous period of six months before they can compete. They must then maintain it below that level continuously.

The Court had been due to announce its decision on Tuesday but has postponed it until late April.

Coe told Australia’s Daily Telegraph at the weekend: “The reason we have gender classification is because if you didn’t then no woman would ever win another title or another medal or break another record in our sport.”

In response Semenya, in a statement through her lawyers, said: “The scars Ms Semenya has developed over the past decade run deep.

“Reading the comments of Mr Coe this weekend opened those old wounds and the reference by the Daily Telegraph (Australia) to ‘the muscle-packed Semenya’ is just the latest illustration of how the issues

have been distorted by innuendo.”

The statement continued: “Mr Coe is wrong to think Ms Semenya is a threat to women’s sport,” calling her a “heroine” and “inspirational role model” to young girls.

Semenya also sought to differentiate her case from those of transgender athletes who were formerly male but have now entered the female sporting arena.

“Ms Semenya is a woman. There is no debate or question about this and the IAAF does not dispute this,” the statement continued.

“She was born a woman, raised a woman, socialised as a woman and has competed as a woman her entire life. “Mr Coe may have views about transgender women in sport, but that is a different issue.

“Ms Semenya does not wish to undergo medical intervention to change who she is and how she was born. She wants to compete naturally.”

The IAAF said Coe’s comments are consistent with his, and the organisation’s, stance on DSD athletes from the beginning. “If you are going to have a protected category as we do for female sport then you need to find a way for DSD athletes to compete in a way that is fair for all female athletes,” the world governing body said in an emailed statement to Reuters. “The IAAF has endeavoured to do this with its Female Classification eligibility regulations and Lord Coe’s comments in the Australian Daily Telegraph are entirely consistent with both his and the IAAF’s comments on this issue since the regulations were introduced.” — Reuters



Caster Semenya

## Ooredoo’s female race event at Kuwait Motor Town tomorrow

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Kuwait announced yesterday its sponsorship of the ninth edition of the RoadRush Racing Competition for Women which will take place at Kuwait Motor Town tomorrow (March 29) for the first time ever. This sponsorship comes from the alignment with the company’s core values of caring, connecting, and challenging. It further underscores the company’s commitment to empowering women and giving them the opportunity to live their passions. The RoadRush Racing Competition will include a number of exciting activities

such as RoadRush Market, RoadRush Kid’s Wonderland, a live performance by Miami band, as well as other fun activities. Al Babbain Turnkey Solutions will also be participating at the event with Ooredoo by giving away prizes.

Kuwait Motor Town is a 2.6 million-meter square motor town and is the meeting place for the world’s most important car races, such as the FIA and FI, and our sponsorship of RoadRush is a clear translation of our commitment to bridging the gap between the private sector and public sector, especially when

it comes to such important events that cater to the Kuwaiti society.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director of Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait said, “We are very proud to participate in such an event which is aimed at promoting motor sports to women, which are dominated by men. This event will allow women to experience the thrills of racing and provide them with the chance to pursue their passion”. Alayoub further added that Ooredoo will look forward to participating in similar events in the future.



Mijbil Alayoub

## Jones succession plan on hold until after World Cup

**LONDON:** England are in danger of missing out on a chance to hire Warren Gatland after the Rugby Football Union admitted Eddie Jones’ successor would not be hired until after the World Cup.

Jones is under contract with England until 2021 but has hinted he may leave after the World Cup in Japan later this year. There is a reported break clause enabling Jones and the RFU to part ways if England fail to reach the World Cup semi-finals.

But, according to acting RFU chief executive Nigel Melville, next year’s tour to Japan is the organisation’s preferred for the incoming coach, with Jones taking charge of the 2020 Six Nations before departing.

While the RFU ponder their options, France and the British and Irish Lions are chasing Gatland, who recently clinched a third Grand Slam as Wales boss as he led them to the Six Nations title.

Gatland is due to leave Wales after the World Cup, but Melville insists the New Zealander’s availability is not on the RFU’s radar. “The Warren thing – is Warren going to do the Lions? Is Warren going to France? Is Warren coming to England? Is Warren doing all sorts?” Melville said.

“At this point that is not a concern to me. The concern to me is what we are doing going forward. There’s more than one coach out there who we are looking at. “I took Warren to Wasps, so I’m quite well aware of his talent. I do speak to Warren. I absolutely understand that he’s a very talented guy and has a fantastic resume.

“We will decide what is happening with Eddie post-World Cup. We have got a list of people who we think could take over. It’s a small list because there aren’t lots of coaches out there who are capable of coaching England.”

Reports claim the RFU are drawing up two lists of potential candidates to either replace Jones at the end of the year or be appointed in the summer of 2020 and work under him for a year. But the RFU, soon to be led by incoming chief executive Bill Sweeney, will not be making any announcements about a coaching change before the World Cup, according to Melville.

“We have pushed it back because we don’t want distractions pre-World Cup,” he said. “It’s to let Eddie get on with it and to stop people speculating on who is in and who is out and all the rest of it. “We don’t need that, I don’t think anybody needs that and the incoming coaches don’t need that.” —AFP



Kieran Read

## All Blacks captain Read back for Crusaders’ clash

**WELLINGTON:** All Blacks captain Kieran Read will make his long-awaited return to the field tomorrow as the Canterbury Crusaders face the Wellington Hurricanes in a Super Rugby clash that could go a long way in deciding the New Zealand conference title.

The 33-year-old Read has not played since the All Blacks’ end-of-season tour last year and was one of the senior international players given an extended break in the off-season with an eye on the Rugby World Cup in Japan later this year.

“Can’t wait,” Read told reporters in Christchurch. “I feel like I’m in as good nick as I’ve been in my career. “It was the aim this year, it’s what the off-season was about. I’m very thankful to have had the time. Right now, it’s time to get out there and do it on the field.”

The Crusaders head the Super Rugby standings on 19 points despite suffering their first loss in more than a year last week in Sydney, when they were beaten 20-12 by the New South Wales Waratahs.

The loss was particularly tough for Scott Robertson’s

side, coming just eight days after the March 15 shooting at two mosques in their home town of Christchurch killed 50 people. “We were desperate last week but we were pretty inaccurate a lot of times at key moments,” Robertson told reporters on Wednesday. “That’s our focus, we made sure we were really clear on what we needed to get better at.”

Read’s fellow All Blacks Richie Mo’unga and Scott Barrett have also returned to the Crusaders side after they missed the loss in Sydney as part of the national team’s player management protocols.

“It means a lot,” Robertson said of Read’s return. “Obviously his experience, his ability to play well in big games. His calm head, and ability to help out as a captain and leader.”

The loss last week allowed the Hurricanes to join the Crusaders on 19 points although John Plumtree’s side are second in the New Zealand conference on points differential. The Hurricanes’ only loss this season was to the Crusaders in Christchurch on Feb. 23, when they were totally blown away by the rampant nine-times champions, who raced out to a 31-0 lead shortly after halftime before winning 38-22.

“There’s always the anticipation around it from the players and the public,” Robertson said of the Hurricanes v Crusaders matches. “They’re always pretty brutal and results have gone both ways over the years.

“It’s a great date on the calendar and something to look forward to.” — Reuters

## Weightlifting happy as IOC softens stance on Paris Games

**LAUSANNE:** The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) yesterday welcomed to a decision by the International Olympic Committee to provisionally lift the sport’s conditional status for the Paris 2024 Games.

The IOC Executive Board had on Tuesday softened its position on the drug-plagued sport which threatens its exclusion from the Olympics. The board, on the first day of its three-day meeting in Lausanne, said that because of the work the IWF had done it would “lift the status of conditional inclusion”.

But, the IOC added, that was conditional on the finalisation of an agreement between the sport and the International Testing Agency and “confirmation of a successful transition of key areas of the IWF’s anti-doping programme”.

The IOC said it anticipated a signature of an accord between the IWF and ITA “in the coming days”. “Failing which, the conditional inclusion of weightlifting... will be maintained and reconsidered” in June, said the IOC.

Five weightlifters were banned in December after retests of samples from 2012, taking the sport’s total for the London Games to 24. In January, the IWF announced that eight Thai weightlifters had failed tests or retests on samples taken at the World Championships in November, including two Rio 2016 gold medalists—Sopita Tanasan and Sukanya Srisurat.

The IOC acknowledged the spate of recent positive tests might “negatively impact the perception that weightlifting has become cleaner” but added that many of these failed tests were the result of reforms by the IWF.

IWF rules say that a nation with three or more positives in a calendar year faces a ban of up to four years, but Thailand voluntarily banned itself from the 2019 world championships, which it is hosting, and from the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. That also drew praise from the IOC.

The IWF responded yesterday that it “welcomes the support of the IOC”. “The IWF’s commitment to clean competition has transformed our sport,” said its president, Tamas Ajan, in a press release yesterday. —AFP

## Romo seeking \$10m a year from CBS

**NEW YORK:** Tony Romo could become the first football analyst to earn \$10 million per year. Sources told the Sporting News that Romo’s team is seeking a contract of “eight figures” to stay as the No. 1 football analyst as CBS. He is under contract to the network through the 2019 season at \$4 million annually.

Romo, the former Dallas Cowboys quarterback, retired after the 2016 season and joined Jim Nantz in the booth at CBS in 2017, replacing Phil Simms.

In the 2018 postseason, the 38-year-old Romo became a star for his ability to assess the game situation and predict the plays coaches would call right before they did.

The day after the AFC championship game in January, when Romo seemed to be reading the minds of coaches Bill Belichick and Andy Reid, the New York Post reported that CBS likely would give Romo a “substantial” raise

The Post said John Madden, who bounced around the networks, earned \$8 million. Troy Aikman is under contract to Fox for \$7.5 million, and Jon Gruden made \$6.5 million at ESPN for his appearance on “Monday Night Football” and other platforms before leaving to coach the Raiders, the Sporting News said. — Reuters

Sports

# Nugent-Hopkins, Draisaitl hat tricks lead Oilers past Los Angeles Kings

## Capitals knock off Hurricanes, expand Metro lead

**EDMONTON:** Ryan Nugent-Hopkins posted a first-period hat trick, and Leon Draisaitl collected three goals in a four-point night as the host Edmonton Oilers scored five times in the opening frame en route to an 8-4 victory over the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday. Mikko Koskinen made 34 saves for Edmonton, which is five points behind the Colorado Avalanche for the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference with six games remaining. The Arizona Coyotes have the same point total as the Avalanche but have played one more game than Colorado. It's the first time two Oilers collected hat tricks in a game since Dec. 20, 1985, when Jari Kurri and Paul Coffey accomplished that feat. Edmonton's Connor McDavid finished with four points, which has him at a new personal standard of 112.

**COYOTES 1, BLACKHAWKS 0**  
Nick Cousins scored the game's lone goal 5:40 into the third period, and Darcy Kuemper stopped 31 shots for his fourth shutout of the season as Arizona blanked visiting Chicago. The Coyotes snapped a five-game winless streak (0-3-2). Corey Crawford stopped 28 of 29 shots for the Blackhawks, who trail Colorado and Arizona by five points. Chicago, which had gained points in seven of its previous nine outings (6-2-1), has six games remaining.

**CAPITALS 4, HURRICANES 1**  
Alex Ovechkin scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, and Washington went on to defeat visiting Carolina in the first end of a home-and-home. First-place Washington expanded its lead in the Metropolitan Division to three points. The New York Islanders remain on 95 points after losing to the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-0 on Tuesday, and the Pittsburgh Penguins, who were idle, also have 95 points.

Ovechkin (one goal, one assist) now has an NHL-best 49 goals. His goal started a three-goal third period that gave the Capitals control. Evgeny Kuznetsov had three assists.

**BLUE JACKETS 4, ISLANDERS 0**  
Sergei Bobrovsky made 26 saves in his second consecutive shutout for host Columbus, which made its lone victory this season over New York a timely one. Ryan Dzingel scored in the first period for the Blue Jackets, who received third-period goals from Artemi Panarin, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Cam Atkinson to blow open a close game. Columbus will have a chance to move into the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot Thursday when it plays host to the Montreal Canadiens. The shutout was the third in four games and the career-high eighth of the season for Bobrovsky. New York was blanked for the third time in five games.

**CANADIENS 6, PANTHERS 1**  
Tomas Tatar had a three-point night as Montreal routed visiting Florida. The win moves the Canadiens one point behind the Carolina Hurricanes for the top wild-card slot in the Eastern Conference. Montreal retains its two-point lead over the Blue Jackets. The loss officially eliminated the Panthers from playoff contention. Florida has allowed 20 goals in its past three games, all defeats.

**DUCKS 5, CANUCKS 4**  
Rookie Sam Steel scored three goals, including one on a penalty shot, as visiting Anaheim held off Vancouver. Steel, 21, now has four goals in 18 career NHL games. Another Ducks rookie, Kiefer Sherwood, also had a good night, posting the winning goal and adding an assist. Despite getting the win, Anaheim was eliminated from



playoff contention when Arizona beat Chicago.

**SENATORS 4, SABRES 0**  
Craig Anderson made 35 saves for his second shutout of the season as Ottawa handed reeling Buffalo a 13th straight road loss. Brian Gibbons had a goal with an assist, and Thomas Chabot recorded two assists for

the Senators, who have won four of six and matched a season high with their third consecutive home victory. Buffalo, meanwhile, continues to limp toward the finish line, a loser in four straight overall and amid a 3-15-2 stretch. The Sabres, blanked four times in the past nine games, are 0-11-2 on the road since winning at Columbus on Jan. 29. —Reuters

## Former Australian cricketer Yardley dies at 71

**ADELAIDE:** Former Australian bowler and influential coach Bruce Yardley died yesterday at the age of 71 after a battle with cancer. Playing at a time when the test landscape was dominated by fast-bowlers, Yardley started out as a medium-pacer himself before switching to off-spin midway through his career and earned his Test debut for Australia at the age of 30.

Using a distinctive long run-up better associated with pace bowling and employing his middle finger rather than his index finger to get the ball to turn, Yardley went on to take 126 wickets for Australia in 33 test matches.

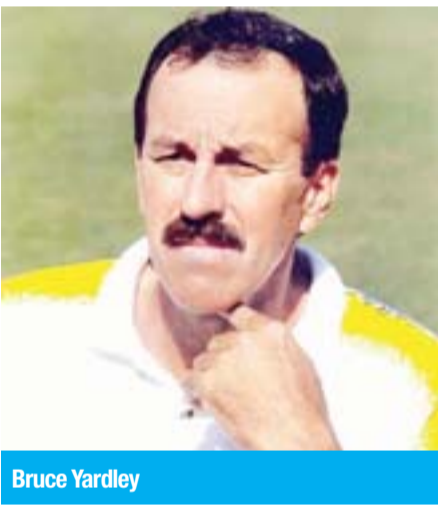
He also picked up 344 wickets in a first class career that spanned 24 years. "Bruce was a significant figure in Australian cricket, contributing in many ways on and off the field," Cricket Australia CEO Kevin Roberts said in a statement.

"As a player, it took him more than 10 years of persistence playing first class and Premier cricket to find the art of off-spin, earning him a test debut at the age of 30. "Off the field, Bruce had

an infectious personality and was regarded as one of the best spin-bowling coaches in the world, coaching Sri Lanka and mentoring the greatest test wicket-taker of all time, Muttiah Muralitharan."

Yardley coached the Sri Lankan team in the late 1990s and defended Muralitharan when the Sri Lankan, who has a record 800 test wickets, was investigated for having an illegal action in 2004.

"Very sad to hear about the passing of Bruce Yardley," former Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara said on Twitter. "He was a good man to get to know and a great friend of Sri Lankan cricket. May he rest in peace." — Reuters



## Vettel seeks Ferrari boost in Bahrain

**MANAMA:** Sebastian Vettel will be aiming for his third successive Bahrain Grand Prix win on Sunday as Ferrari seek to show their lack of pace in Formula One's Australian season opener was a one-off.

Tipped as pre-season favourites, the German and new team mate Charles Leclerc finished fourth and fifth in Melbourne, nearly a minute behind the dominant race-winning Mercedes of Valtteri Bottas.

Albert Park can be seen as something of an outlier but Ferrari hope the more traditional layout of Bahrain's 5.4-km Sakhir desert track will allow them to unlock the full potential of the SF90 car.

The most successful team in Bahrain, with six wins overall, can draw encouragement from last year when Mercedes were faster in Australia only for Ferrari to turn the tables with a front-row lockout and victory for Vettel. That also started a streak of three straight pole positions for the German. "In Bahrain, we expect to see the effect of the corrections we have made ...." said principal Mattia Binotto, who replaced Maurizio Arrivabene at the helm before the start of the season.

"We are well aware that our competitors will once again be very strong. With that in mind, we are keen to get back on track and face up to them." Bottas, having driven what he described as the race of his life in Australia to finish more than 20 seconds ahead of team mate Lewis Hamilton in second place, will be keen to serve up a thriller under the floodlights.

Having come within a second of snatching victory from Vettel last year, Bottas has some unfinished business on Sunday while Hamilton, who has taken two of Mercedes' three wins in Bahrain, will be keen to reassert his supremacy. Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said nothing was won or lost at Albert Park. "Whatever the Melbourne result says, our mindset hasn't changed since then," he said. "We've seen the potential of Ferrari's package in Barcelona (testing), so we expect them to come back strong in Bahrain, with Red Bull in the mix as well."

Max Verstappen finished third for Red Bull in Australia, the Milton Keynes-based team's first race with new engine partners Honda. Frenchman Pierre Gasly, now driving alongside Verstappen, finished fourth for Honda-powered Toro Rosso in Bahrain last year and will be hoping to do even better on Sunday.

McLaren, which counts Bahrain's Mumtalakat Holding Company among its major shareholders, will be looking for their first points after Lando Norris finished 12th and Carlos Sainz retired in Australia.

Bahrain will also mark the start of the Formula Two Championship with Mick Schumacher, son of seven-times Formula One champion Michael and nephew of Ralf, making his debut in the support category.

Schumacher, a part of Ferrari's young driver academy, is also scheduled to take part in a post-race test with Ferrari and Alfa Romeo. — Reuters



## McIlroy counts on little things with No 1 on horizon

**LOS ANGELES:** Northern Ireland star Rory McIlroy says he can't afford to focus on a possible return to world number one as he prepares for this week's WGC-Dell Match Play.

McIlroy said he won't even allow himself to ponder the possibility of a last-16 clash with Tiger Woods, preferring to concentrate on the pool matches he must get through to set up a possible meeting with the 14-time major champion.

"There's a long way to go," McIlroy told reporters in Austin, Texas, where the event teed off yesterday. McIlroy will open against big-hitting American Luke List, in a group that also includes England's Matthew Fitzpatrick and South African Justin Harding.

McIlroy said that he'd texted Fitzpatrick with a simple aim when he saw they were in the same group: "let's make sure we both have something to play for when we play each other in the last pool game on Friday," McIlroy told him. "That's honestly as far as I've thought ahead." McIlroy, a four-time major champion coming off a victory at the Players Championship two weeks ago, could jump from fourth back to number one in the

world with a victory-if current No. 1 Dustin Johnson fails to reach the semi-finals and Justin Rose doesn't make it to the semis.

McIlroy won all three of his round-robin pool matches on the way to the 2015 title, but bowed out in pool play the last two years and said he therefore wouldn't look further ahead.

"That's the first step in the process and if I win seven matches this week, then awesome. But, again, winning tournaments, getting number one, all those accolades, it's a by-product of doing all the little things right," he said. "Step by step they will add up to all that stuff that other people find important." Woods is a three-time winner of the WGC Match Play, but hasn't played it since 2013 when all rounds were knockout rounds.

"This'll be a little different," he said of the round-robin format, which will send the winner from each of 16 four-man groups through to the knockout stage. "I guess you can halve a match and still move on. I don't really know the intricacies of it," Woods said, but added: "It's not real complicated, play well and take care of the guy in front of me."

Woods, who arrived Monday and played nine holes at Austin Country Club, opens the Dell Technologies Match Play against Aaron Wise, an NCAA champion from Oregon and the PGA Tour rookie of the year.

Wise will be the 21st player who had never played with Woods since he returned from back surgeries that kept him out of golf for most of two years. Woods will play Wise, with matches against fellow Americans Brandt Snedeker and Patrick Cantlay to follow. —AFP

## Australia to confront past as ball-tampering bans expire

**MELBOURNE:** Steve Smith and David Warner may wake with some relief today as they greet the final day of their ball-tampering bans but the anniversary of their humiliation will otherwise be a sombre milestone for Australia's cricket fans.

Much has changed since Cricket Australia slapped former captain Smith and his deputy Warner with 12-month suspensions for the Cape Town scandal, while giving Cameron Bancroft a lighter nine-month sentence as the rookie opener caught up in a plot driven by others.

Captains, coaches and a string of senior cricket executives have left or been sent packing, their replacements pledging to win back fans with fair play as much as series wins and silverware.

Bancroft, the man who hastily trousered a piece of sandpaper in the Newlands field to try to hide his team's shame, has been named captain of English county side Durham, three months after fingering Warner as the ball-tampering mastermind in a TV interview in December.

The more circumspect Warner has largely kept his counsel while returning to one of cricket's biggest stages at the Indian Premier League, smashing 85 in a 53-ball blitz in his first outing for Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

Smith also returned to the IPL spotlight in defeat for the Rajasthan Royals, joining Warner on a mission to reclaim a spot in the one-day international team he once captained in the leadup to the showpiece World Cup in England.

Efforts to smooth the pair's rehabilitation have been in train for months, and culminated in a reunion with Aaron Finch's squad in the United Arab Emirates a week-and-a-half ago. "There were a lot of big hugs and cuddles," Warner said in a curated video published by Cricket Australia. "It's like we didn't really leave, the boys were very accepting of us coming in and with open arms."

Pundits have questioned whether all is really forgiven in a playing group who were left to rebuild Australia's shattered brand and absorb a series of humbling defeats without two of their best batsmen.

Yet none of the players have expressed reservations and many have argued Smith and Warner have "done their time". "It'd be silly not to use them," Finch said of the pair who boast over 200 matches and 22 centuries between them in one-day internationals.

Smith and Warner's former team mates may have already moved on but fans the world over have not forgotten Cape Town. Sections of the Jaipur crowd jeered Smith when he played for Rajasthan on Monday, and he and Warner can expect heat from English crowds should they play at the World Cup.

The hyper-aggressive teams they once led now have a very different timbre. The ugly verbal attacks and off-field confrontation that blighted the South Africa test series have disappeared, with Paine-led Australia hosting test series against India and Sri Lanka in good spirit over the home summer.

Governing body Cricket Australia (CA) was also shaken by Cape Town, with a slew of executives leaving or shown the door after a scathing cultural review. New CA boss Kevin Roberts has treaded carefully since taking over from long-serving CEO James Sutherland in October, while trying to shift Australia's focus forward rather than backward. —Reuters

## Sports

# Alvaro Morata double gives Spain victory over Malta

## Ireland ignore tennis ball protest to sink Georgia

**TA' QALI:** Alvaro Morata's remarkable revival continued on Tuesday as he scored twice for Spain in a 2-0 victory over Malta. After edging past Norway 2-1 on Saturday, Morata's double at the Ta'Qali stadium gives Spain two wins from two in Euro 2020 qualifying and the perfect start in Group F.

Luis Enrique's side again showed the inability to convert possession into chances that clouded their early exit from last year's World Cup. But Morata's brace offers room for encouragement, the striker extending his return to form since he joined Atletico Madrid on loan from Chelsea in January.

He has five goals in six games, his best return since September 2017, and has strengthened his case for a position that has proved so troublesome for Spain in recent years. "The boss knows how happy I am to be here and I am grateful to him," Morata said. "We want to qualify as soon as possible for the Euros so it was important to win today."

Malta lie 182nd in FIFA's world rankings, between Liechtenstein and Macau. Their win over the Faroe Islands last weekend was their first in 17 matches and only their second in almost four years. Luis Enrique was absent for "personal reasons", leaving his assistant Robert Moreno in charge on the touchline.

There were unfamiliar faces on the pitch too as only three players - Sergio Ramos, Morata and Marco Asensio - retained their places in a much-changed line-up from the team that beat Norway. Six of Spain's starting 11 owned five caps or fewer, including Real Betis' attacking midfielder Sergio Canales and Mario Hermoso, the 23-year-old Espanyol defender linked with a summer move to Real Madrid.

Morata's first, shortly after the half-hour, owed much to Malta's goalkeeper Henry Bonello, who failed to stop the forward's scuffed finish after Hermoso's clipped pass over the top. Sergi Roberto's cross almost gave Morata his second, only for the glancing header to flash wide, but he did not have long to wait. Jesus Navas delivered another ball to the back post in the 73rd minute and this time Morata made no mistake.

Meanwhile, Republic of Ireland ignored a bizarre tennis ball protest from angry fans as Conor Hourihane's first international goal sealed a 1-0 win

over Georgia in Tuesday's Euro 2020 qualifier.

Hourihane's excellent first-half free-kick settled the opening home game of Mick McCarthy's second spell as Ireland manager. But the clash in Dublin was overshadowed by irate Ireland supporters, who threw tennis balls on to the Lansdowne Road pitch in the first half in protest at controversial Football Association of Ireland chief executive John Delaney.

Delaney, due to take up the newly-created role of FAI executive vice-president, has come under pressure after it was revealed he provided a 100,000 euro (£85,000) cheque in April 2017 to the FAI, which did not appear in its audited accounts.

Delaney said he had loaned his employers the money "to aid a very short-term cash flow issue". The protest was expected in advance and, speaking on Monday, McCarthy had quipped: "I can't do anything about it. I'm not going to take a tennis racket with me."

Fortunately for McCarthy, the volley of tennis balls ended up more of a distraction for Georgia, who fell behind in the first action after a three-minute delay to clear the pitch.

Hourihane's goal was enough to make it two wins from two Group D matches as McCarthy bids to take Ireland to next year's European Championships.

"It didn't affect us. When things like that happen you have to really concentrate," McCarthy said of the protest. "I was conscious we didn't want to take the free-kick and get done on the break. It didn't happen. Nothing was stopping that free-kick."

McCarthy, who led Ireland to the 2002 World Cup, admitted he hated every minute of Saturday's 1-0 victory at minnows Gibraltar in his first game.

But the former Wolves and Sunderland manager's first home match as Ireland boss in 17 years wasn't much easier. "The lads worked an unbelievable shift and played really good football," McCarthy insisted.

"We created opportunities and unfortunately didn't take them, but we didn't let them in so one goal takes it." Hourihane should have put Ireland ahead early on after Jeff Hendrick stole possession near the Georgia penalty area.

Aston Villa midfielder Hourihane was clean through on goal and also had Robbie Brady free to his right, but



**TA' QALI:** Spain's forward Marco Asensio (L) and Malta's defender Joseph Zerafa go for the ball during the Euro 2020 Group F qualifying football match Malta vs Spain at the Ta' Qali Stadium in Malta. — AFP

he squandered the chance, shooting too close to Georgia keeper Giorgi Loria.

When Brady won a free-kick in the 33rd minute, the tennis balls rained down from the stands.

There was a delay while Ireland defender Richard Keogh joined stewards clearing the make-shift missiles from the pitch. Once play resumed, Hourihane got the Ireland fans' focus back on the match as he curled his 20-yard free-kick around the Georgia wall and past the slow-to-react Loria in the 36th minute.

But Ireland's first goal in four home matches should

have been followed by a Georgia equaliser in first half stoppage-time. Valeriane Gvilia slammed his shot goalwards from close-range, but Darren Randolph rescued Ireland with a fine save.

Jeff Hendrick, who scored the winner against Gibraltar, thought he'd netted again when he slotted home from two yards out, only to see an offside flag rule out his second half effort. Ireland's failure to finish off Georgia nearly came back to haunt them in the 85th minute when Jaba Kankava's long-range strike grazed the woodwork. —AFP



## Al Khaleej Takaful crowned champions at Ooredoo Temba championship

**DOHA:** During the final matches of the 'Ooredoo Temba' championship, which was organised by Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) in partnership with Ooredoo, Al Khaleej Takaful were crowned champions in the corporate category and Salt 2 took the trophy in the football enthusiast competition.

With more than 120 players taking part in this year's tournament, Al Khaleej Takaful managed to beat Ooredoo 7-4 in the corporate category final. Bravo Design came third after winning 9-5 against Qatar Insurance Company.

As for the football enthusiasts' category, Salt 2 beat Samla with a winning result of 13-7. Leaving the third position to Salt 1 who defeated Al Zaeem 11-7.

The winning teams found their way to the podium as awards were announced, the winners took home 12,500QAR, second place winners received 7,500QAR and the third position took 5,000QAR.

The awards were presented by Mohammed Khalifa Al Suwaidi, CEO of AZF, Yousuf Abdulla Al Kubaisi, Chief Operating Officer of Ooredoo Qatar, Abdullah Aman Al Khater, Director of Events and Venues at AZF.

The second and third position awards were presented by Nasser Abdullah Al Hajri, Director of Public Relations and Communications at AZF, Nawaf Al- Awjan, Deputy Director Venues & Events at AZF, Abdullah Al-Mohannadi, Director of Events at Ooredoo, Mohammed Al Ansari, Director of Events and Conferences at Ooredoo, Nasser Abdullah Al Hajri, Director of Public Relations and Communications at AZF, said: "Since the tournament's inception with Ooredoo Qatar in 2017 to organise this prestigious tournament, our goal was to encourage football fans in Qatar to enjoy a series of competitive matches in a thrilling environment. Our constant pursuit of new activities and programmes revolves around promoting a healthy and active lifestyle amongst the communities in Qatar."

"Today, we witnessed a huge turnout from football enthusiasts and corporate employees. By adding the corporate category, we increased the allocated spaces to



strengthen social ties in a fun and a competitive way. I congratulate the top three teams and honour the high spirits they have shown throughout the tournament." Nasser Al Hajri, concluded.

Yousuf Abdulla Al Kubaisi, Chief Operating Officer at Ooredoo Qatar, said: "We value our partnership with AZF and it's been a pleasure organising this tournament together for the third consecutive year. It's a central pillar of our social corporate responsibility programme. It was a great opportunity for firms to compete with one another away from the working environment. I am also delighted to witness that Ooredoo won second place in the corporate category and I would like to congratulate the team on reaching this stage."

The tournament reflects the keenness of institutes across Qatar in building an active and sportive society by nurturing a passion for football in the country. The last two editions were huge successes, with more than 160 football enthusiasts in Qatar taking part. The world-class football pitches at AZF are designed to meet international and European criteria and incorporate advanced solar technologies. In the upcoming few days, AZF will announce the details of the third edition of the Embassies Futsal tournament which is sought to see the participation of diplomatic representatives and head of missions from the embassies in the State of Qatar.

## Quagliarella becomes oldest Italy scorer in 6-0 Liechtenstein rout

**PARMA:** Fabio Quagliarella became the oldest ever player to score for Italy as the 36-year-old converted two penalties in a crushing 6-0 Euro 2020 qualifying win by the Azzurri over Liechtenstein on Tuesday.

Italy top Group J with six points after also beating Finland 2-0 in Udine on Saturday with goals from youngsters Nicolo Barella, 22, and 19-year-old Moise Kean. Bosnia threw away a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Greece and both are behind Italy on four points followed by Finland on three. Serie A top scorer Quagliarella has earned his recall to Roberto Mancini's new-look Italy thanks to his 21 goals in 28 league games, two more than Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo has managed for Juventus.

And he marked his return for the Azzurri after nearly nine years by converting a penalty on 35 minutes, adding a second, also from the spot, just before the break. The Sampdoria player becomes the oldest player ever to score for Italy aged 36 years and 54 days, overtaking Christian Panucci, who scored aged 35 years in 2008.

"It's a wonderful evening," said Quagliarella. "I want to thank my teammates. After the two goals they encouraged me to get a third one too, but it didn't happen. "I thank Jorginho and (Leonardo) Bonucci because they're the penalty takers and they told me to kick. "They said: 'The evening is yours, you kick it.'" Stefano Sensi had headed Italy in front after 17 minutes with Marco Verratti adding a second after 32 minutes. Kean, 19, nodded in his second Italy goal on 69 minutes with substitute Leonardo Pavoletti, 30, who got his first Italy start in the second half to replace Quagliarella, adding a sixth minutes afterwards.

Mancini made seven changes to the side that beat Finland with defender Cristiano Piccini and forward Stephan El Shaarawy injured. Sensi and Quagliarella stepped in for Barella and Ciro Immobile, alongside Kean who was given his second Italy start.

The veteran striker was denied early before Leonardo Spinazzola set up Senzi to head in for his first senior Italy goal after 17 minutes. Verratti broke through to curl in the second after 32 minutes for his second goal in the Azzurri jersey.

Italy were awarded a penalty for a Nicolas Hasler handball and Quagliarella made no mistake. A searing Kean effort clipped the bar before Liechtenstein's Daniel Kaufmann was sent off for handling a Verratti clearance with Quagliarella taking the second penalty on 43 minutes.

Pavoletti got his senior Azzurri debut and Quagliarella received a standing ovation as he left the Stadio Tardini pitch.

"This standing ovation is a memory I will always cherish," said Quagliarella. I also thank Mancini who gave me this opportunity." Four minutes later the Cagliari forward completed the rout off a rebound as Italy-European champions in 1968 and runners-up in 2000 and 2012 — kept their unbeaten run in qualifiers going back nearly 13 years. "Mission accomplished," said Mancini. "The result was obvious, but it was important that we score goals." — AFP

## Nissan Al Babtain supports 'Ultimate Soccer Academy'

**KUWAIT:** Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in the State of Kuwait, is delighted to announce its sponsorship of Ultimate Soccer Academy's participation in the Manchester City Abu Dhabi Cup 2019, taking place on March 29th and 30th. The third edition of the widely acclaimed event will include players from five different age categories belonging to global and local academies - The age group representing Kuwait this year are the Under 12 year's team. Entering its fourth consecutive year sponsorship of one of the leading sports academies in Kuwait, Nissan Al Babtain continues to drive awareness on the importance of advancing local talent and ensuring ways to hone young athletic skills.

Ultimate Soccer Academy provides football coaching to kids between 5-18 years of age and hosts activities all year around, including local and international field trips, as well as world-class soccer training programs under the supervision of highly skilled coaches.

Taking place at Abu Dhabi's iconic landmark and the largest sports and entertainment venue

in the region - Zayed City Sports Stadium, 2019's participating teams hail from Australia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, UK and many of the neighboring GCC countries. Kuwait's U12 team will be playing on popular grounds that have previously hosted the FIFA Club World Cup, AFC Asian World Cup Qualifiers.

The winning team will receive a lifetime opportunity and the ultimate treat that aspiring soccer-players have been waiting for - an all-expenses paid trip to the Etihad Campus in Manchester to train like their world famous football stars have. The champions will train at the City Football Academy alongside first team players such as Vincent Kompany, Sergio Aguero and Kevin de Bruyne. The champions will also be presented with the official Manchester city club training apparel and cultural experiences. This sponsorship reflects Nissan Al Babtain's corporate social responsibility mission to develop the local sports arena and provide a positive and healthy avenue for the youth to prosper through teamwork and determination, Nissan Al Babtain wishes Kuwait's U12 team the very best of luck.



**25** Semenya says 'no threat' to women's sport, Coe comments open old wounds



**26** Nugent-Hopkins, Draisaitl hat tricks lead Oilers past Los Angeles Kings



**27** Alvaro Morata double gives Spain victory over Malta



## Bautista Agut stuns Djokovic

Australia's Ashleigh Barty topples Kvitova in Miami



MIAMI GARDENS: Ashleigh Barty of Australia plays a backhand in her match against Petra Kvitova of Czech Republic during the Miami Open tennis in Miami Gardens, Florida. —AFP

**MIAMI:** Novak Djokovic's pursuit of a record seventh Miami Open ATP title ended in dramatic fashion on Tuesday as Roberto Bautista Agut superbly recovered from a first set destruction to win 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 and book a place in the quarter-finals.

And the top seeds kept falling as women's world number two Petra Kvitova slumped to a surprise 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-2 defeat to Australian Ashleigh Barty.

Bautista Agut, 30, may have beaten Djokovic on the way to winning the title in Doha earlier this year but 15-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic started like a train in this last 16 encounter before being amazingly reined back in. After just 25 minutes, Djokovic was 5-0 ahead and on cruise control, Bautista Agut severely struggling to keep the Serbian at bay. A short rain delay late in the second set allowed Bautista Agut to regroup, however.

He returned a completely different player and at the end of an absorbing two hours and 29 minutes, it was the number 22 seed who will now meet defending champion John Isner for a place in the semi-finals.

"I played more aggressive," said Bautista Agut who began to noticeably step inside and force Djokovic onto the back foot. "I tried to miss less balls, to really concentrate on the beginning of the point with my serve, with my return." With Roger Federer's match with Daniil Medvedev postponed until Wednesday after a spell of heavy rain forced tournament officials into a reshuffle, all the focus remained on Djokovic's shock exit.

The reigning Wimbledon, US Open and Australian Open champion left court and headed straight to a press conference to try and explain this most remarkable of turnarounds at Hard Rock Stadium.

"He is a solid player but I shouldn't have lost this match. I had way too many wasted opportunities," said the world number one, who also failed to make the latter stages of Indian Wells this month.

"I thought I played well today and during this tournament but two or three sluggish games and that's what happens." Djokovic, who also hinted his vociferous involvement in ATP tennis politics which saw President Chris

Kermode ousted this month may have affected his focus, was initially consistent with his serve during the opening set. He mixed up his shots superbly, blending power and subtlety to keep his opponent guessing. However, a drop in Djokovic's level coupled with a rise in Bautista Agut's aggression saw a complete reversal in fortunes after a 30 minute weather delay. The Spaniard grabbed two set points, the second of which was taken when the Serbian netted a forehand. Bautista Agut broke again for 3-1 in the third following an uncharacteristic double fault and although Djokovic hit back in the very next game, the Spaniard again took advantage of his opponent's faltering serve to move within two games of victory.

### AUGER-ALIASSE ADVANCES

Serving for the match, he brought up two match points, another forehand winner sealing one of the best comebacks of his career and his third win over the world number one from their last five matches.

Big-serving Isner moved into the last eight with a 7-6

(7/5), 7-6 (7/3) triumph over Great Britain's world number 22 Kyle Edmund.

Elsewhere there was a brilliant win for 18 year-old Felix Auger-Aliassime, the Canadian who came through qualifying, who beat Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili 7-6 (7-4), 6-4. Auger-Aliassime, who is set to become the first player born in the 2000s to break into the top 50 when the rankings are updated next week, plays Borna Coric after the Croatian beat Nick Kyrgios 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. The controversial Australian was furious after being heckled by a fan during the third set and was docked a point after responding with an expletive. Something similar happened Sunday night. "I'm not going to take it," said Kyrgios, who admitted he became "a little bored" during the second set.

In the women's draw, Barty, who beat Kvitova for the first time having gone into the clash 0-4, will play Anett Kontaveit for a place in Saturday's final after the Estonian brought an end to Hsieh Su-Wei's impressive run with a 3-6, 6-2, 7-5 victory to reach the last four in South Florida for the first time. —AFP

## Bledsoe, Bucks blitz Rockets

**MILWAUKEE:** Eric Bledsoe stole the spotlight from the MVP front-runners, and the Milwaukee Bucks coasted to a 108-94 victory over the visiting Houston Rockets on Tuesday. Bledsoe paired 23 points with seven assists and was the catalyst during a third-quarter run that enabled the Bucks to seize control. He scored 16 consecutive points for Milwaukee during one stretch, sinking four 3-pointers, as the Bucks extended a five-point lead into a 79-65 advantage. Rockets guard James Harden and Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo were relatively quiet. Harden posted 23 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists but shot 1 of 9 from 3-point range. Antetokounmpo tallied 19 points and 14 rebounds with five turnovers. Harden, Eric Gordon and P.J. Tucker shot a combined 2 of 22 from beyond the 3-point arc for Houston.

### CELTICS 116, CAVALIERS 106

Al Horford broke a fourth-quarter tie with a layup and capped a 14-4 run with an alley-oop slam, helping visiting Boston brush aside Cleveland. The win, paired with a later

loss by the Detroit Pistons, allowed the Celtics to clinch a playoff berth for the fifth year in a row. Horford finished with 19 points and a team-high eight rebounds for Boston, which snapped a four-game losing streak. With the Celtics giving Kyrie Irving a night off, Jayson Tatum and Marcus Smart shared team-high scoring honors with 21 points apiece. Collin Sexton had a game-high 24 points for the Cavaliers.

### CLIPPERS 122, TIMBERWOLVES 111

Danilo Gallinari scored 25 points, and Lou Williams added 20 as visiting Los Angeles officially clinched a playoff spot and increased its winning streak to six games by topping Minnesota in Minneapolis. Montrezl Harrell scored 18 points for the Clippers. The lone downside for Los Angeles was that by clinching a postseason berth, the Clippers must give their 2019 first-round draft pick to the Boston Celtics to complete the Jeff Green trade of February 2016. Karl-Anthony Towns scored 24 points with 13 rebounds as the Timberwolves lost for the sixth time in their past seven games.

### HORNETS 125, SPURS 116 (OT)

Kemba Walker had 38 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds and was brilliant in overtime, and Charlotte remained red hot with a victory over visiting San Antonio. Walker scored 11 of his points in overtime, including the Hornets' first seven of the extra session, as Charlotte outscored the Spurs 19-10. The Hornets, who also got a

career-high 24 points from Dwayne Bacon, claimed their fourth consecutive win, which is a first this season. DeMar DeRozan led the Spurs with 30 points and grabbed eight rebounds. LaMarcus Aldridge had 20 points and 15 rebounds, and Marco Belinelli scored 17 and pulled down 10 boards.

### MAGIC 104, HEAT 99

Nikola Vucevic scored 18 of his team-high 24 points in the second half as Orlando defeated host Miami in a key contest. Both teams are battling for the eighth and final playoff berth in the Eastern Conference, and the Magic vaulted over the Heat by a half-game in the standings. Vucevic also added a game-high 16 rebounds and five assists, leading Orlando to its sixth straight win. Miami, 10-5 in its past 15 games, was led by Dion Waiters, who scored a game-high 26 points. Reserve Dwyane Wade scored 22 points, including 18 in the second half.

### NUGGETS 95, PISTONS 92

Jamal Murray scored 33 points, and host Denver built a 27-point halftime lead, then withstood a furious Detroit rally to claim a victory. Nikola Jokic had 23 points and 15 rebounds for the Nuggets, who were outscored 53-29 in the second half. The Pistons' Blake Griffin had 29 points, 15 rebounds and five assists but missed a potential tying 3-pointer in the closing seconds. Reggie Jackson added 17

points, and Andre Drummond contributed 13 points and 17 rebounds.

### RAPTORS 112, BULLS 103

Norman Powell had 20 points off the bench, and Serge Ibaka added 16 points and eight rebounds to help Toronto defeat visiting Chicago. The victory salvaged the final game of a three-game homestand after the Raptors had lost the first two. Kawhi Leonard and Kyle Lowry each added 14 points for the Raptors while Pascal Siakam had 13. OG Anunoby had 10 points for Toronto before he groggily left the court with assistance with 4:10 to play in the game after a collision. Wayne Selden scored 20 points for the Bulls, and Shaquille Harrison added 15. Chicago has lost two in a row after winning the previous two games.

### HAWKS 130, PELICANS 120

Rookie Trae Young had 33 points and 12 assists as visiting Atlanta defeated New Orleans. The Hawks earned their third consecutive victory to tie their longest winning streak of the season. DeAndre' Bembry and Dewayne Dedmon added 18 points each for Atlanta. Julius Randle scored 24 to lead the Pelicans, who lost for the ninth time in 10 games. Christian Wood, playing in his second game since being claimed off waivers, had a career-high 23 points. New Orleans' Frank Jackson scored 20 before leaving the game after sustaining a concussion. —Reuters