GULF AIRLINES EYE FREE WiFi

ISTANBUL: Turkish and Gulf airlines are touting free WiFi and better in-flight connectivity for smart phones as they scramble to mitigate the impact of a ban on laptops in plane cabins bound for the United States. The restrictions could deal a blow to fast-growing Gulf airlines, which depend on business-class flyers shopping over in Dubai or Doha for far-flung destinations, and to Turkish Airlines with its high volume of transit passengers. A Turkish Airlines official said it was working on rolling out a system to allow passengers to use 3G data roaming on mobile phones to connect to the Internet in-flight, and planned to make WiFi freely available on some aircraft from next month. "We've sped up infrastructure work after the latest developments... If the work is complete, we're planning on switching to free WiFi services in our Boeing 777 and Airbus 330 aircraft in April," the official said.

Emirates said on Thursday it was introducing a "laptop and tablet handling service" for US-bound flights which would allow passengers to use their devices until just before they board. The devices would be "carefully packed into boxes" and returned on arrival in the United States, it said. Emirates passengers can access limited free WiFi or pay $1 for 500 MB. Fellow Gulf carrier Etihad encouraged passengers to pack their electronics in check-in luggage but said it would also allow devices to be handed over at boarding, a spokesman said. Turkish said it had introduced a similar measure.

BEIRUT: A Syrian woman travelling to the United States through Amman opens her laptop before checking in at Beirut international airport. — AFP

Qatar Airways did not respond to questions on how it planned to mitigate the impact of the new security measures, but in a Facebook posting this week it said its in-flight entertainment was "the only entertainment you'll need on board". Royal Jordanian also took a tongue-in-cheek approach, listing on Twitter "12 things to do on a 12-hour flight with no laptop or tablet", including reading, meditating, saying hello to your neighbor, or "reclaiming territory on your armrest." — Reuters

CAIRO: Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president overthrown in 2011 and the first leader to face trial after the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the region, was freed yesterday after six years in detention, his lawyer said. The 88-year-old was cleared of the final murder charges against him this month, after facing trial in a litany of cases ranging from corruption to the killing of protesters whose 18-day revolt stunned the world and ended his 30-year rule.

"Yes, he is now in his home in Helopoli," Mubarak's lawyer, Farid El Deeb said when asked if Mubarak had left Maadi Military hospital in southern Cairo where he had been detained. Helopoli is an upscale neighborhood where the main presidential palace from which Mubarak once governed is located.

Mubarak was initially arrested in April 2011, two months after leaving office, and has since been held in prison and in military hospitals under heavy guard.

Many Egyptians who lived through his presidency view it as a period of stagnation, autocracy and cronyc capitalism. Arabs watched enrapured when the first images of the former air force commander, Egypt's modern-day Pharaoh, were beamed live on television, showing him bed-bound in his courtroom cage. The overthrow of Mubarak, one of a series of former military men to rule Egypt since the 1952 abolition of the monarchy, embodied the hopes of the Arab Spring uprisings that shook autocrats from Tunisia to the Gulf and briefly raised hopes of a new era of democracy and social justice.

His release takes that journey full circle, marking what his critics say is the return of the old order to Egypt, where authorities have crushed Mubarak's enemies in the Muslim Brotherhood, killing hundreds and jailing thousands, while his allies regain influence. Another military man, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, stepped into Mubarak's shoes in 2013 when he overthrew Mohamed Morsi, the Brotherhood official who won Egypt's first free election after the uprising.

A year later, Sisi won a presidential election in which the Brotherhood, now banned, could not participate. The liberal and leftist opposition, at the forefront of the 2011 protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, is under pressure and in disarray. Years of political tumult and worsening security have hit the economy, just as Mubarak always warned. Egyptians complain of empty pockets and rumbling bellies as inflation exceeds 30 percent and the government tightens its belt in return for loans from the International Monetary Fund.

"The economic crisis we are living in and the high prices take priority over everything, as does the fear of terrorism. That is what preoccupies ordinary citizens, not Mubarak," said Khaled Dawoud, an opposition politician who opposed the Islamists but also condemned the bloody crackdown on them. "When you see the group of people who show up and cheer and support him, you are talking about 150, 200 people," he said, referring to occasional shows of support outside the Maadi hospital where Mubarak was there.

In the turmoil of the Arab uprisings, Tunisian President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi met an ignominious death at the hands of rebels and Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned. But early hopes of democratic change in the region have eroded. In Syria, Bashar Al-Assad still holds the presidency in a country ruined by a civil war that has drawn in global and region powers. Yemen's Saleh joined his erstwhile enemies in a new battle for power that has driven into famine a country on the fringes of the Gulf, one of the world's richest oil-producing regions. — Reuters
**Kuwait Host Meeting for Joint OPEC and Non-OPEC Committee**

**Kuwait Oil Price up 12 Cents to $47.45 PB**

**VIENNA:** Kuwait will be hosting, a meeting for the joint OPEC and non-OPEC members’ ministerial committee tasked with monitoring the decision in late 2016 to reduce oil production. The meeting today will be headed by Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Essam Al-Marzouq and will include the participation of ministers from OPEC members Kuwait, Algeria, and Venezuela in addition to non-OPEC countries Russia and Oman.

OPEC and other major producers pledged late last year to reduce output by 1.8 million barrels. Three months have passed since the decision took effect in mid-January. OPEC’s current production is at 32.5 million barrels per day (bpd). The decision was made to stable the global price. Speaking on the issue, Kuwait’s permanent delegate to the headquarters of international organizations in Vienna and its Ambassador to Austria Sadeq Marafi said that the one-day meeting will be crucial for OPEC and major states efforts to reduce the surplus in the global market.

Choosing Kuwait as the venue for the grand meeting was a reflextial of the global oil community’s trust and confidence in the Gulf state, said Marafi who revealed that his country played an integral role in formulating the decision to cut down production last year.

Meanwhile, an OPEC source, preferring anonymity, said that a report issued in January by the committee monitoring the output reduction-revealed that commitment within the organization was at 86 percent and there was still hope to bring the number to 100 percent.

On the upcoming meeting, the source affirmed that commitment reflected by the committee’s member states was a positive sign, hoping that the outcome of the event will further bolster aims for a stable price at the global market. According to energy experts, the committee’s meeting in Kuwait will look into whether the decision to reduce production was effective in stabilizing the prices. The committee has the authority to call for urgent meetings whenever possible if the agreement parties did not fulfill their output reduction quota. OPEC’s recent monthly report revealed that the organization’s basket price had recorded an increase by 2 percent, reaching $53.37 per barrel in February.

**Kuwait Oil price up**

Meanwhile, the price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 12 cents to $47.45 per barrel Thursday after being at 48.33 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, oil prices were down due to investors concerns regarding the OPEC-led bid to lower production due to minimize US crude oil reserves. The price of Brent crude was also up 8 cents to $50.56 per barrel, however the West Texas Intermediate was down 34 cents to $47.70 pb.

**Photo shows some of the houses in Turkish city.** Istanbul led Turkish cities in real-estates’ sales in February, with sold units amounting to 458. — KUNA

**Kuwait’s Oil Exports to China Jump 16.5%**

**TOKYO:** Kuwait’s crude oil exports to China in February grew 16.5 percent from a year earlier on daily basis to 1.07 million tons, equivalent to around 281,000 barrels per day (bpd), government data showed. In the first two months of this year, Kuwait exported 266,000 bpd to the world’s second-largest oil consumer, up 6.6 percent on the year, according to the General Administration of Customs. China’s overall imports of crude oil in February increased 3.5 percent year-on-year on daily basis to 6.32 million bpd, the second-highest level on record. Saudi Arabia remained country’s top supplier, though its shipments fell 9.8 percent to 1.25 million bpd, followed by Russia with 1.12 million bpd, up 8.2 percent.

Angola became third, with imports from the country plunging 29.5 percent to 853,000 bpd. Iraq ranked fourth and Oman fifth, respectively. China drastically increased the quota for non-State crude imports in 2016 as it seeks to attract more private capital in the largely monopolized sector. In 2015, the government gave private refiners, known as “teapot” refineries, the green light to directly import crude oil. These private refiners are with relatively small capacities, ranging from 20,000 bpd to 100,000 bpd.

**Property sales**

In another development, Kuwaitis came third after Iraqis and Saudis in property trades in Turkey last February, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. Kuwaiti nationals bought 115 realty plots in February - ranking third after the Iraqis who bought 282 units and the Saudis, 143. Overall, property sales in the country dropped by 17.6 percent compared to the same period last year, the institute said, noting that the total sales of plots amounted to 1,306. Istanbul led Turkish cities in real-estates’ sales in February, with sold units amounting to 458. Sales to foreigners rose 49 percent last year in contrast to 2013, where up to 18,189 plots were sold, in 2015, compared to 12,181 in 2013. However, the sales last February dropped by 0.2 percent compared to the same month last year, where up to 101,468 estates were sold all over the nation. — Agencies

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**In brief**

**CAIRO University honors Sheikha Hessa Al-Sabah**

CAIRO: Chairwoman of the Council of Arab Businesswomen Sheikha Hessa Al-Sabah was honored late Thursday by the esteemed Cairo University’s School of Medicine. On the sideline of the 190th anniversary of the school of medicine and 110th anniversary of the obstetrics and gynecology department, a service was held for Sheikha Hessa in honor of her “advance” work for women issues within the GCC and Arab scenarios. Speaking to KUNA, Sheikha Hessa, also President of the federation of Arab-African businesswomen, said that Arab women have an important role in the development and progress of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Sheikha Hessa thanked Cairo University for the honoring, saying that she dedicated it to the Kuwaiti leadership and people in addition to all the members of the Arab businesswomen council.

**Top Arab attorney calls for safeguarding Arab nations**

MANAMA: Chairman of the Arab Lawyers Union Sameh Ashour said yesterday that the Arab nation is in dire need for “real action” to safeguard security of the GCC states and the whole nation. Ashour, speaking at the opening of the union conference hosted in Manama under the theme, “the Gulf security is inseparable from the Arab nation’s security,” said that “the region is currently at a dangerous crossroad,” alluding to “conspiracies aimed at partitioning the Arab countries for service of the Zionist entity.” The Arab common security is unattainable without unified industries and remediing crucial issues namely the youth unemployment, he added. He critized reports by international human rights agencies saying that they “are selective and tuned to the mood of some politicians.” Huda Al-Mehze’, chairperson of the Bahrain Bar Society, said the conference “coincided with plots targeting the Arabian Gulf to undermine its security and stability and spread sectarian discords.”

**GCC top bankers endorse a firm for settling payments**

MANAMA: Governor of Bahrain Central Bank Rashid Al-Mearaj said that governors of GCC monetary institutions and central banks have adopted technical and executive details related to founding a company for settling financial payments among the council member states. He said in a statement at conclusion of the 67th relevant committee meeting that the company would be owned by the institutions and the central banks. The Riyadh-headquartered company will function based on a profit-commercial system, he said. However, he did not specify its capital. It will be tasked with speeding settlement of commercial trades among the GCC countries, limit costs and time.

Money transfer among the member states will be faster and easier, for they will be processed through a common and secured network. The committee meeting also endorsed a system for credit information swap. Central Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel represented Kuwait at the meeting.
KUWAIT, S KOREA AGREE TO ENHANCING COOPERATION

KUWAIT: Kuwait and South Korea yesterday discussed means of cementing their bilateral relations at the political, economic, and academic and health levels. The Kuwaiti embassy in Seoul said in a statement the Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Ali Suleiman Al-Saeed headed the Kuwaiti delegation that engaged in talks with Korean officials topped by the Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Lee Jeong-Kyu. The meeting was held in the South Korean capital. Ambassador Al-Saeed in remarks, expressed deep satisfaction at outcome of the discussions that dealt with cooperation and bilateral relations in the political, economic, and academic and health sectors. — KUNA

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AGREES DRAFT AGENDA FOR THE ARAB SUMMIT

DEAD SEA: The Arab Economic and Social Council concluded its senior-level meeting here on Thursday after working out draft resolutions for the 28th Arab Summit, due on Wednesday, March 29. The draft economic and social agenda of the summit will be submitted to the Council's minister-level meeting next Sunday for preliminary endorsement ahead of final approval by the summit, said the Arab League’s Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs Kamal Hussein.

“The top item of this agenda is the report of League’s Secretary General on socio-economic joint action and review of the implementation of the relevant resolutions adopted by the Nouakchott summit last July,” he told reporters this evening. The Secretary General’s report deals with joint mega projects in the areas of socio-economic development and economic integration, as well as the progress towards launching the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the Arab Customs Union,” Kamal revealed. Under a draft resolution, the report tasks the Council with reviewing the initiative of Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir for Arab investment in his country to enhance Arab food security and approved a draft resolution on setting up a mechanism to implement and finance this initiative. The Council also debated impacts of the large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Arab region on the economies of host countries and agreed to support the affected countries, he added.

Regarding the social dossier, the League’s Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs Badr-Eddin Al-Alali said the Council highlighted commitment to cooperation to combat poverty, women empowerment and youth, and enhance health and education. “A draft has been developed approving the outcomes of the ministerial meeting on ‘terrorism and social development - causes and remedies,’ hosted by Sharm El-Sheikh last February. ‘The draft approves the Arab declaration on terrorism and development,’ Al-Alali said. The Council also reviewed the Arab strategy for scientific and technological research, which was developed by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), and the women development agenda 2030, he added. — KUNA

KFAED, IVORY COAST SIGN KD 5 M LOAN AGREEMENT

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and Ivory Coast have signed a loan agreement worth KD five million ($17 million) to finance building a vocational school so as to improve education. The project aims to support social and economic development, as well as human resources in Ivory Coast through improving and expanding vocational education, the Fund said in a press statement late Thursday.

It will meet needs of national labor qualified for commercial and industrial markets, it added. The project also seeks to improve education and training voca- tionally and this will positively affect indicators of economic and social development across the country, it noted. It includes constructing new buildings, and providing furniture, equipment and tools for workshops and training staff of school.

The loan was inked in implementation of the initiative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah declared during the Arab-African Summit hosted by Kuwait in 2013, in which one billion dollars was allocated to fund projects in African countries within five years, the statement said. It is the fifth loan provided by KFAED to the Ivory Coast; the previous ones were estimated at KD 19 million ($64.9 million) for financing projects in different sectors. It also provided technical loans and grants worth KD 250,000 ($850,000). The loan was inked Minister of Finance Adama Kone of Ivory Coast and KFAED’s deputy director general Ghanem Al-Ghunaiman. — KUNA

AFC CANDIDATES CLEARED FOR FIFA COUNCIL ELECTIONS

MANAMA: Candidates vying for the four available Asian Football Confederation (AFC) seats on the FIFA council have been cleared to stand for election by the world governing body, the AFC said yesterday. The four successful candidates at May’s AFC congress in Bahrain will represent Asia on the body along with Bahraini vice president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al-Khalifa, also the head of the AFC, and members from Japan and Malaysia. The four spots include one reserved for women.

Australian Moya Dodd, formerly a co-opted member of the old FIFA Executive Committee, will take on Mahfuza Akhter Akhter of Bangladesh, Han Un-gyong of North Korea and Susan RA Shalabi of Palestine. Chinese Football Association general secretary Zhang Jian, South Korea’s Mong Gyu Chung, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah of Kuwait and Mariano V Araneta Jr of Philippines will contest for the other three spots.

Olympic Council of Asia President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Moula, who heads the Association of National Olympic committees and is an influential International Olympic Committee (IOC) member, has a FIFA Council seat currently, the term of which ends in May. The FIFA Council replaced the largely discredited Executive Committee as FIFA’s decision-making body under reforms instituted in the wake of the 2015 corruption scandal in soccer’s world governing body.

Last September, the AFC extraordinary congress, called to conduct elections for the FIFA council, was postponed over the disqualification of a Qatari candidate. — Reuters
Luxury vehicle stolen
A Kuwaiti reported that a female citizen stole his luxury vehicle. The female citizen made away with the vehicle after depositing KD 250 as a down payment but never returned the vehicle. The man told the police that he only knew the woman’s mobile phone number.

Kidnap attempt
A search is on for an unidentified person who had tried to kidnap a Filipina in Salmiya area, said security sources. The woman reported that while returning home from work, the suspect followed her and then stepped out of his vehicle — trying to kidnap her. She said the suspect ran away when she screamed. In another development, a 43-year-old female citizen reported that someone driving a 4X4 vehicle with a GCC license plate number tried to stop her along Fahaheel expressway and when he failed, he started insulting her. A case was filed.

Fire at a hospital
A limited fire recently broke out at Al-Salam International Hospital. Firemen rushed to the scene and stopped the fire from spreading to other parts of the hospital. No casualties were reported.

4 injured in accident
Four people were seriously injured yesterday in a road accident along Al-Salmi highway. Security sources said three vehicles collided together opposite Jahra cemetery. The sources added that one of the injured victim was trapped and special hydraulic equipments had to be used to release him. All the injured were rushed to Jahra hospital for treatment.

Serious skin burns
A female citizen was recently admitted to Mubarak hospital with very serious skin burns she sustained after using a so-called slimming ointment she purchased online. The girl said that the burns started within an hour after using the cream.

Fugitive nabbed
A 69-year-old citizen, who had been wanted for several cases in which he was sentenced to the total of 99 years in prison was recently arrested at his own house while trying to escape. Separately, a citizen with a criminal record was recently arrested with illicit drugs, said security sources. — Al-Anbaa/ Al-Qabas

Kuwait helps Iraqi widows open businesses

BAGHDAD: ‘Kuwait Beside You Campaign’, funded by the Kuwait Society for Relief, has distributed in-kind aid and equipment to displaced Iraqi widows to help them have their businesses. The aid was doled out in a ceremony held at Iraqi Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in the presence of Kuwait Ambassador in Baghdad Salem Al-Zamanan and Secretary General of the Iraqi Cabinet Mahdi Al-Alaq. Addressing the audience, Al-Zamanan pointed out that 2,500 women from the five Iraqi governorates of Baghdad, Anbar, Saladin, Diyala, and Nineveh benefited from the project. The goal is to economically empower the widows and help them have a permanent source of income for their families, Al-Zamanan said.

He unveiled that the beneficiaries would launch poultry breeding, beauty salons for women, dressmaking, and bakery businesses. The ambassador noted that the program to train the widows and provide them with the required equipment and kits for their enterprises have cost $1.045 million. For his part, the Secretary General of the Iraqi Cabinet Al-Alaq commended Kuwait’s aid to Iraqi widows. He stressed that this aid would empower the war-traumatized widows and relieve some of their suffering. He announced that the international community with the support of Kuwait would organize an international conference for rebuilding Iraq in the coming period.

Also, the ‘Kuwait beside you’ campaign yesterday delivered food supplies to displaced people in northern city of Mosul in Iraq. The United Iraqi Medical Society (UIMS), the local partner of the KRS, said teams delivered 2,600 food baskets to relocated people, currently settled at Haj Ali camp. Chairman of UIMS Dr Ahmad Al-Hayti said that the supplies were handed over under supervision of Nineveh Governor Nofal Hammadi and Iraqi parliament member Zahed Al-Khatoni. Kuwait has recently established a number of health centers and schools in Mosul for the displaced people there. — Agencies

‘A fireman At Every House’

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: KFSD PR Department recently concluded a one week training course themed ‘A fireman At Every House’. The conclusion ceremony was held in the presence of the Firemen Training Center Manager Lt Colonel Abdullah Al-Ansari. KFSD’s PR manager Colonel Khalil Al-Amir said that 60 civilians took part in the course. Graduating participants were honored.

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The photo contest begins on March 12, 2017 and ends on April 6, 2017. To ensure eligibility for the contest, please submit files in high resolution:

- **Photographic Camera:** Submit original files (entries should include metadata if possible) in jpg format on CD or flash memory with hard copy on photo paper (size 300 × 400 millimeters or 11.81 × 15.75 inches)
- **Mobile phone or tablet Camera:** Submit original files in jpg format on CD or flash memory with hard copy on photo paper (A4 size – 210 × 297 millimeters or 8.27 × 11.69 inches)
- **All photographs should accurately reflect the subject matter and the scene as it appears.** "High Dynamic Range" images are acceptable. Photos that have been digitally altered beyond standard optimization (removal of dust, cropping, reasonable adjustments to exposure, color, contrast, etc.) will be disqualified.

**Caption information should include:**
- Location – Detailed caption of subject matter
- If you choose to include people in your submission, you are responsible for obtaining the necessary permissions from the individuals depicted, and must be able to provide copies of these to Kuwait Times upon request.
- **Kuwait Times & Jazeera Airways** has all rights to use the photographs in internal and external communications materials, excluding but not limited to websites and web publications, fact sheets, fundraising publications, advertising, multimedia, presentation and membership services, annual reports, and Kuwait Times’ magazines, or by other individuals and organizations for Kuwait Times’ use in news stories, newsletters, reports, displays, web pages, videos, membership premiums and the like.
- Winners will be chosen by a panel of independent judges.
- Original coupon should be stuck on the back of each photo with complete information of the participant.

*For all Jazeera Airways tickets terms and conditions are applied*
KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to engage with all segments of the community and in particular - students, a team from the Corporate Communications Unit at Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently organized a visit to Al-Mulla Sualiman Al-Khenaini Primary School for Boys. Speaking on this occasion, Team Leader of Corporate Communications at KIB, Fahad Al-Sarhan, stated: “This visit presented us with the perfect opportunity to introduce students to the importance of savings and various savings methods. At KIB we believe that encouraging students to focus on their studies will help equip them with the necessary tools to build a bright future for Kuwait. We wish the students a successful academic semester and a bright and fruitful future.” Al-Sarhan also praised the efforts of the Public Relations team at KIB, who presented a lecture to the students on the values and fundamentals of savings. At the end of the visit, the team presented the students with a variety of gifts and mementos.

Through its leading social responsibility program, KIB devotes special attention to the education sector. The Bank is keen on supporting student initiatives and cultural activities that nourish the minds of students and further their knowledge, believing that they are the key to the development of the community.

KUWAIT: With the presence of the National Guards Chief of Staff and Operations Brigadier Bader Abdullah Hamad, the national Guards recently concluded its training course senior for officers and commanders. It was organized by the Moral Guidance Department with participation of officers from Kuwait and Bahrain.

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has announced its presence at the Marina Mall throughout the weekend. The aim is to enlighten the mall visitors about the privileges of the cards jointly issued by CBK and the British Airways including granting holders special awards - through collecting Avios points.
UK police arrest 10 in London attack probe

Attacker Masood known in a number of other names

LONDON: British police are combing through "massive amounts of computer data," have searched more than 20 sites and have contacted thousands of witnesses in a vast operation to trace how a British man became radicalized and launched a deadly attack on Parliament, a senior official said yesterday.

In a briefing outside Scotland Yard, London's top counterterror officer, Mark Rowley, said more "significant" arrests had been made, bringing to 10 the number of people in custody over Wednesday's attack, which killed four people and the assailant. Police said the attacker, Khalid Masood, was born Adrian Russell Ajaio in southern England in 1964. He was also known as Adrian Elms and "may also be known by a number of other names," police said.

The latest arrests were a man and a woman detained early yesterday in Manchester, northwest England. Police believe Masood acted alone but Rowley said police were trying to determine whether others "encouraged, supported or directed him."

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the attack on Westminster Bridge and at Parliament. Detectives have searched 21 properties in London, Brighton, Wales, Manchester and the central English city of Birmingham in one of Britain's biggest counterterrorism operations in years. Wednesday's attack was the deadliest in Britain since suicide bombers killed 52 commuters on London's transit system in July 2005.

"We've seized 2,700 items from these searches, including massive amounts of computer data for us to work through," Rowley said, adding that contact had been made with 3,500 witnesses. "We've received hundreds of uploads of video images to our online platform. Given this attack was in the heart of the capital we also, of course, are dealing with statements from a wide range of nationalities."

Masood drove his car into crowds on Westminster Bridge before fatally stabbing a police officer on Parliament grounds. He was shot dead by police.

An American man from Utah, a British retiree and British female school administrator were killed on the bridge, and police officer Keith Palmer was stabbed to death at Parliament, police said. The latest victim, a man who died in a hospital Thursday, was identified as 75-year-old Leslie Rhodes from south London.

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Poignant reminder

More than 50 people of a dozen nationalities were wounded in the attack, 31 of whom required hospital treatment. "Those affected include a real cross-section of ages from at least 12 nationalities," Rowley said. "It's a poignant reminder, I think, that the impact of this attack on the capital will reach around the world."

Rowley said two police officers targeted in the attack have significant injuries. Two other people also remain in critical condition, one with life-threatening injuries. The 52-year-old attacker was born in southeastern England and had most recently been living in Birmingham, where several properties have been searched by police.

Police say Masood has had a string of convictions between 1983 and 2003 for offenses including assault and possession of an offensive weapon. Prime Minister Theresa May said Thursday that Masood was "investigated in relation to concerns about violent extremism" some years ago. But she called him "a peripheral figure."

The manager of a hotel in the beachside city of Brighton in southern England, where Masood stayed the night before the attack, said he seemed unusual-ly outgoing and mentioned details about his family, including having a sick father.—AP

LONDON: Newly published video showing British Prime Minister Theresa May being rushed out of Parliament while an attack unfolded nearby seems to show some confusion and delays on the part of her security detail.

Yesterday, The Sun newspaper showcased the 73-second video, taken by a bystander in Parliament on Wednesday. May had been voting in Parliament when the attacker in a SUV ran over a number of pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and rushed onto Parliament’s grounds, where he was shot dead after fatally stabbing a policeman.

In the video, there are times when May is seen standing exposed to possible sniper fire. At one point, she wanders off for a few moments without a security escort before she is ushered into her Jaguar sedan.—AP
CAIRO: The “Islamic State soldier” who killed four people in an ambush on Saturday may have been aorno carry out the attack, but the militant group has given no evidence yet that he acted on specific instructions.

Islamic State frequently delays releasing video footage or other material showing the planning and implementation of operations.

But the nature of Wednesday’s killings, carried out by a single assailant armed only with a hire car and a knife, matched a pattern of recent attacks which require no training, military expertise or outside guidance. Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani called on sympathisers across the world to carry out exactly those kind of attacks in an appeal issued when the group was at the peak of its power in late 2014. “If you can kill a disbelieving American or European ... smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him,” said Adnani, who was killed in a US air strike in Syria last August.

British counter-terrorism police say they are still trying to establish whether Masood, a criminal with militant links, acted alone, with support or under instruction of others. — Reuters

LONG-TERM ATTACK BEARS ‘SIGNATURE’ BUT NO LINK

IS GUNMEN TARGET CIVILIANS FLEEING MOSUL BY NIGHT

Flow picks up as conditions grow more desperate

MOSUL: Islamic State gunmen are opening fire on men, women and children as they try to flee Mosul under cover of darkness, civilians who escaped the besieged Iraqi city said yesterday. Hungry and exhausted, thousands sloshed through the mud, past wrecked buildings and shattered pavements, to reach an army checkpoint. Some carried suitcases or bags, others had fled with just the clothes on their backs. They came by foot or piled into carts, and some pushed relatives in wheelchairs.

A black-uniformed intelligence officer said about 6,000 people had come through on Thursday, the most he had seen at this exit, and a similar flow had poured in yesterday since about 4 am. Relieved to reach the safety of the checkpoint, some of those escaping described running a gauntlet of fire.

“The snipers are professional, they do not care. Anybody that moves, they kill,” said Fares Khader, from Al-Abar district. The battle for Mosul, Islamic State’s last major urban stronghold in Iraq, has now lasted more than five months.

Government forces recaptured the east side in January and are besieging the militants on the western side of the Tigris river. At least 500,000 civilians are trapped inside, battered by government and US-led air strikes and artillery, caught in the crossfire of ground fighting, or targeted by IS gunmen. The militants sometimes use residents as human shields.

Khadir blamed the government and international coalition for some of the death and mayhem. An IS sniper had been firing from the roof of his home when an air strike hit, he said.

“There are many people dead under the rubble. Some in my family died. Nobody can take the bodies out. They were killed by an air strike.”

“No food, no water”

Omar, a car mechanic, described life under IS. “It’s very difficult. There’s no food, no water. They are killing a lot of people. They kill anyone who goes out, they kill them in the street.”

“We have no money. We have suffered for three years,” he said, clutching his young son to his shoulder. Salwan, 19, pushed his sister Noor, 21, who is suffering from MS, in her wheelchair. “We decided to risk escaping,” Bashar said. They were shot at during the trek, he said. Sweat poured from the face of Khalid Khalil as he trudged up the last stretch of the debris-strewn boulevard with his young son slung on his shoulder and his wife and three other children behind. He had no coat, no bag, and just a pair of plastic sandals on his mud-splattered feet. “I came like this. We had the chance so we fled,” said the 36-year-old. “We have been travelling since yesterday. We are very tired but now we are safe.”

“The snipers are professional, they do not care. Anybody that moves, they kill,” said Fares Khader, from Al-Abar district. The battle for Mosul, Islamic State’s last major urban stronghold in Iraq, has now lasted more than five months.

Government forces recaptured the east side in January and are besieging the militants on the western side of the Tigris river. At least 500,000 civilians are trapped inside, battered by government and US-led air strikes and artillery, caught in the crossfire of ground fighting, or targeted by IS gunmen. The militants sometimes use residents as human shields.

Khadir blamed the government and international coalition for some of the death and mayhem. An IS sniper had been firing from the roof of his home when an air strike hit, he said. “There are many people dead under the rubble. Some in my family died. Nobody can take the bodies out. They were killed by an air strike.”

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He was a carpenter but his shop had been destroyed.

Taking the risk

Then an army jeep drove up with a wounded man on a stretcher. He was laid on the ground by an abandoned building. Bashar Hazem, 43, and Ali, 29, had carried out their brother Maan, 32, overnight. He was shot in the right thigh 20 days ago. He was bandaged up in the Jamhouri hospital inside an IS-held area but left for home after three days because it was dangerous. He had no painkillers and grimaced as his brothers spoke. “We had no food. That’s why we decided to risk escaping,” Bashar said. They made a run with a big group in the early hours of yesterday. But IS gunmen starting shooting at them and the group was split up. They saw three women shot in the legs. “Even if you are injured, they shoot at you. Our family is still inside but they are coming soon, God willing,” Ali said.

At the checkpoint, soldiers separated the women and children from the men. They waited, tired but visibly relieved, for buses to take them to a United Nations reception camp at Hamman Al-Alil about 20 km (15 miles) away. The men were gathered in a park, sitting on the ground under guard by soldiers and awaiting questioning.

“We do a first check here. Anyone we suspect of working with Daesh (IS), we pull to one side,” the intelligence officer said. Some IS fighters had tried to leave disguised as women, their faces concealed by veils, he said, scrutinising arrivals. The men were then loaded onto trucks and taken to a centre for more thorough checks. An avuncular Sergeant Hussam Imam told jokes to a group of women and children waiting to be transported to the reception camp. They boarded the bus with smiles on their faces. — Reuters
Decline of ancient trade route deepens Yemeni food crisis

SHARJAH: Captains of small wooden dhows are carrying food and wares from the United Arab Emirates to war-torn Yemen. But supplies are falling even from this centuries-old Arabian sea route that is one of the last lifelines to a country on the brink of famine.

A two-year-old civil war has severely restricted the flow of food into the main Yemeni cargo ports of Hodeidah and Salif on the west coast. Port damage, funding shortages and military inspections have reduced the volume of food carried by this route.

The small wooden boats sailing from souks in the UAE are moving small but vital supplies by making for the smaller ports to the south coast that are of little use to larger vessels - and often sidestepping military inspections that choke traffic by dropping anchor at secluded coves nearby.

The deals originate in the sprawling Al Ras Market, a collection of dusty alleys near the Dubai Creek where an array of food and spices are on display including colourful sacks of Pakistani and Indian rice. The dhows - plying the ancient trade route that once carried the likes of pearls, frankincense and myrrh - supply 14,000 to 18,000 tons of food每月 to Yemen, according to traders. That represents a drop of about 30-40 percent over the past year because of problems with payment, as well as adverse sailing conditions.

"The Yemeni currency is destroyed, sometimes we can't get paid enough. We can only go once a month because the seas are too rough," said trader Mohammed Hassan, at a docking station at nearby Port Khasab in Sharjah. "Sometimes we have to wait up to 40 days."

The volumes of food carried on this route represent a small fraction of the supply to Yemen, which relies on imports for 90 percent of its food. But it has become increasingly important as fighting has raged, the economy has collapsed and Yemen has needed all the help it can get.

Port damage

Thousands of people have been killed in the civil war in the south, which includes the UAE - fighting to restore the government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. The conflict has choked imports. Sixty percent of Yemenis, or 17 million people, are in "crisis" or "emergency" food situations, according to the United Nations. While vessels seeking access to Houthi-held areas must face inspections for smuggled weapons, the government-controlled south has less restrictions. Food imports into Hodeidah have fallen relentlessly, with only a few ships arriving each week - compared with dozens before the war - and more shipping lines pulling out due to the growing risks, according to aid and shipping sources.

In recent weeks damage to infrastructure in the neighboring port of Salif has also cut food deliveries, aid officials said. "The country is living on its reserves," said Robert Mardini, International Committee of the Red Cross regional director for their area in Middle East and North Africa.

"There is a lack of liquidity, no payment of salaries, which means that the spending power has collapsed and that the price of food is soaring whenever it is available." — Reuters

Pay thugs

UAE-based dhow captains avoid these snarl-ups by steering clear of the big Red Sea ports and instead ply their trade to the south, often docking at informal inlets. The average journey takes about five to eight days, with the boats capable of taking up to 2,000 tons of goods, still small fry compared with cargo ships that could provide more relief to one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world. — Reuters

US-backed Syrian fighters reach IS-held dam in north

BEIRUT: US-backed Syrian fighters reached a major dam held by the Islamic State group in northern Syria yesterday as Syria’s UN ambassador said hundreds of American personnel are “invading my country,” insisting that any effort to liberate the city of Raqqah - the de facto capital of the Islamic State group - should be done in coordination with the Damascus government.

The push toward the Tishrin Dam came three days after US aircraft ferried Syrian Kurdish fighters and allies behind IS lines to spearhead a major ground assault on the IS-held town of Tabqa where the dam is located. Tabqa is west of the city of Raqqah. Cihan Sheikh Eumed, the spokesman for the Syrian Democratic Forces, said the fighting is ongoing at the entrance of the dam, adding that there have been casualties among IS fighters. She gave no further details.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said SDF fighters are marching slowly toward the buildings of the Tishrin Dam because of mines and explosives planted by IS. To the east of Raqqah, SDF fighters clashed with IS gunmen inside the village of Karama, according to the Observatory and Mohammed Kreidi of Sound and Picture Organization, which documents IS violations. Karama is about 15 kilometers (10 miles) east of Raqqah, making it a strategic village to capture.

The attacks on the Tabqa and Karama were ongoing under the cover of airstrikes by the US-led coalition, accord-

ing to the activists.

SDF fighters have been on the offensive since November under the cover of airstrikes by the US-led coalition with the aim of eventually surrounding Raqqah and storming it. In France, the country’s defense minister said the campaign by international forces to take back IS’ de facto capital will start in the coming days. Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Raqqah is a “major objective” for the US-led coalition trying to quash IS extremists in Syria and Iraq. Le Drian spoke on CNEWS television yesterday. He said: “Today we can say that Raqqah is encircled and that the battle will begin in the coming days. It will be a very hard battle but it will be an essential battle.” As the coalition advances in its battle to retake the IS stronghold of Mosul in Iraq, the US has been intensifying involvement in Syria’s conflict ahead of the battle for Raqqah.

In Geneva, where peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition resumed yesterday, Syria’s ambassador to the UN Bashar Al-Jaafari insisted that “American warplanes” had bombed a school in the village of Mansoura, west of Raqqah, a day earlier and were responsible for the deaths of 237 civilians among some 500 people fleeing Raqqah. He did not elaborate.

Al-Jaafari said any military presence in Syria without government approval was “illegitimate.” Using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group, he said: “Those who are truly fighting Daesh are the Syrian Army with the help of our allies from Russia and Iran.”

The US has deployed more than 700 advisers, marines and Rangers to Syria to support fighters battling Islamic State militants. — AFP

AUB in Beirut settles US lawsuit for $700,000

BEIRUT: American University of Beirut, a recipient of US government aid, has agreed to pay $700,000 to settle a civil lawsuit over accusations that it assisted three organizations linked to the militant group Hezbollah, federal prosecutors said. As part of its deal with the US Attorney’s Office in Manhattan, a party to the lawsuit, the university also agreed to revise its policies, prosecutors said in a statement on Thursday. The agreement resolved a case originally filed under seal by an unnamed complainant. American University of Beirut receives funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Acting Manhattan US Attorney Joon Kim said in the statement, “For years, the American University of Beirut accepted grant money from USAID, but failed to take reasonable steps to ensure against providing material support to entities on the Treasury Department’s prohibited list.” The US Attorney’s Office said the university in the Lebanese capital admitted to training rep-

resentatives of Al-Nour Radio and Al-Manar TV, media groups that the US Treasury Department has listed as branches of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. Between 2007 and 2009 the university provid-

ed the training in workshops to representatives from Al-Nour and Al-Manar, who were allowed to participate among a larger group of journalists, a statement from the US Attorney’s Office said.

For instance, one workshop was titled “Citizen/Online Journalism” and provided instruc-

tion on how to produce blogs, videos and pod-

casts, prosecutors said. Federal prosecutors said the university used its website to connect stu-

dents with Jihad Al-Binaa, another organization that the US Treasury Department has linked to Hezbollah. American University of Beirut (AUB) said in a statement on Friday that its con-

duct had been neither “knowing, intentional or reckless.” “AUB is pleased to have reached the settlement and looks forward to continuing to provide a world-class education to students of all backgrounds,” the statement said. The university, founded in 1866, centers its teaching on the American liberal arts tradition. “With today’s set-

tlement, the university is being made to pay a financial penalty for its conduct, and importantly, it has admitted to its conduct and agreed to put proper precautions in place to ensure that it does not happen again,” Kim said in a statement. The $700,000 penalty levied on the university will be paid to the US government. — Reuters
MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) shakes hands with French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, in the Kremlin in Moscow yesterday. — AP

RUSSIA’S PUTIN HOSTS FRENCH CONTENDER LE PEN IN KREMLIN

Le Pen says she, Putin and Trump represent a new world

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin granted an audience to French far-right party leader Marine Le Pen in the Kremlin yesterday, bestowing a level of international recognition that has so far eluded her in the countdown to France’s presidential election. Opinion polls eluded her in the run-up to France’s presidential election on May 7 but then losing to centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron. Le Pen backs the lifting of the European Union’s economic sanctions imposed on Russia over its role in the Ukraine conflict – a stance she reiterated yesterday.

‘Two days of beer’

“These individual reparations don’t have any symbolic value,” Vucic said. “Today 250 doesn’t mean anything in the DWC,” Salomon Kiseombo Byaruhanga, a local tribal chief, told AFP. “Those who will get it will most likely waste it all away on beer in two days,” he added, saying it would be far better to rebuild a village or construct a memorial. Perrin de Brichambaut said the court had assessed the total damage at $3,752,620, and said collective reparations should go towards projects to help the victims with housing, education and “income-generating activities.”

The court asked the Trust Fund for Victims, an independent body set up under the tribunal’s founding guidelines, to consider using its resources to pay for the reparations and to come up with a plan by late June. Court officials said the fund could release up to $1 million for reparations in the case. Legal representatives for the victims had assessed the damage at $16.4 million in a filing to the court last year. They calculated that 228 homes were destroyed, that the school was lost and that hundreds of cattle and other livestock had been killed.

In its ruling, it also watched via video-link by victims in Bunia, the provincial capital of Ituri Province, the court set the cost of each destroyed Bogoro home at $600, while the value of each harvest lost that year was $150. Victims who suffered psychological harm after the death of a loved one were entitled to $8,000 for a close family member, or $4,000 for a more distant relative.

“We’ve buried our dead”

“What will $250 change in our lives?” asked Jean Bosco Lalo, a coordinator for the Ituri Civil Society group of local associations. “A woman who has already turned the page. Everyone has rebuilt their homes. We’ve buried our dead.”

The Trust Fund for Victims has $5 million available, of which $1 million has been earmarked for the case of Thomas Lubanga, sentenced in 2012 to 14 years for crimes against humanity. The ICC has also approved a “symbolic reparation” of $250 each to Congo war crime victims.

ICC AWARDS ‘SYMBOLIC’ $250 EACH TO CONGO WAR CRIME VICTIMS

THE HAGUE: In its first such decision, the International Criminal Court yesterday awarded $250 dollars as “symbolic” damages to each of three Congolese war crimes victims. The court swiftly dismissed as meaningless by some who lost homes and loved ones in a militia attack on their village 14 years ago.

The reparations order was a landmark step for the tribunal, set up in 2002 to prosecute the world’s worst atrocities, marking the first time it has placed monetary values on the harm caused by such crimes. Presiding judge, Antonio Cassese, told the tribunal in The Hague the amount of $250 to each of the 297 victims of Germain Katanga “does not make up for the totality of the crimes,” estimating the total damage caused at $3.7 million.

But in unveiling the collective and individual reparations, he said he hoped it would bring some “measure of relief” and help victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo rebuild their lives.

The ICC sentenced Katanga to 12 years in jail in 2014 after convicting him of five charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity for the February 2003 ethnic attack on Bogoro, a village in troubled Ituri Province. He was accused of supplying weapons to his militia which went on a rampage, shooting and hacking to death with machetes some 200 people.

Katanga, who watched the proceedings by video-link from a jail in Kinshasa where he is on trial over separate charges, was also found liable for $1 million in compensation, though the court recognised that he was penniless, or “indigent”, and had no home or possessions.

It asked that he consider making a public apology or writing a letter to the victims, or even attending a public reconciliation ceremony.

Two days of beer

“These individual reparations don’t have any symbolic value,” Vucic said. “Today 250 doesn’t mean anything in the DWC,” Salomon Kiseombo Byaruhanga, a local tribal chief, told AFP. “Those who will get it will most likely waste it all away on beer in two days,” he added, saying it would be far better to rebuild a village or construct a memorial. Perrin de Brichambaut said the court had assessed the total damage at $3,752,620, and said collective reparations should go towards projects to help the victims with housing, education and “income-generating activities.”

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NEW ZEALAND SAS RAID IN AFGHANISTAN UNDER FIRE

WELLINGTON: Pressure mounted on the New Zealand government yesterday to call an inquiry into a botched special forces raid in Afghanistan that reportedly left six civilians dead, including a three-year-old child. A book published this week alleges the SAS staged the 2010 raid as a “revenge attack” after a New Zealand soldier was killed, but faulty intelligence meant that our forces had not behaved inappropriately, United Future leader Peter Dunne said. “The current saga of claim and counter-claim will not provide that, therefore some form of independent inquiry is appropriate. Amnesty International has also called for a probe while a team of New Zealand human rights lawyers announced Friday they were representing affected Afghan villagers and wanted an independent investigation. New Zealand sent a reconstruction team and a small special forces contingent to join the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan in 2003. In early August 2010, Lieutenant Tim O'Donnell became the first of New Zealand's 10 military deaths in Afghanistan when his patrol was hit by a roadside bomb. The SAS raid in the northern province of Baghlan, carried out with US helicopter support, took place about two weeks later on August 22. In the following days Mohammad Ismail, a district chief for Tala Wa Barfak, where the incident occurred, told AFP that eight people died in the raid. The New Zealand military initially kept silent about its involvement, then when it emerged seven insurgents were killed and no civilians harmed. But then-defence minister Wayne Mapp conceded for the first time this week that he knew as early as 2014 that civilians died.

“I'm sure everyone is remorseful about that,” he said. “At the time of the attack they (New Zealand forces) thought they were being attacked by insurgents.” The book, citing interviews with villagers and unnamed military sources, says six civilians died, including a three-year-old girl named Fatima. It also alleges soldiers failed to provide medical treatment to wounded civilians and further punished villagers by returning 10 days after the raid to blow up their rebuilding efforts. Hager, co-author of the book, has suggested that such conduct, if true, could constitute a war crime.

RUSSIA DENIES DENYING TALEBAN

In other related news, Thursday, Russia denied allegations by Kabul residents that officials and Russian soldiers looted a hospital last Monday. The residents claimed that buscars from the Russian military took 30 kilograms of gold. Bhesh Narayan Dahal, chief of Nepal’s archaeological department, said he is aware of concerns regarding the construction contract system. The restoration was largely communi-
ty-led and cost $2.1 million, including over 30 kilograms of gold. Bhesh Narayan Dahal, chief of Nepal’s archaeological department, said he is aware of concerns regarding the construction contract system.

LOWEST BIDDERS THREATENING NEPAL'S QUAKE-HIT HERITAGE

GoverNMEN}; DISMISSING COMMUNITY, SACRED RITUALS

KATHMANDU: In this picture taken on February 8, 2017, a worker renovates a heritage site at Durbar Square. — AFP

KATHMANDU: Caretaker Deepak Shrestha padlocked shut the quake-ravaged remains of the Trailokya Mohan Narayan temple in Nepal’s capital Kathmandu to keep out the contractors who are said to be rebuilding it. The 17th century monument’s three-tiered pagoda completely collapsed in a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit the Himalayan nation in April 2015, leaving the main statue standing exposed on a high plinth. Shrestha, whose family has looked after the Hindu temple for generations, is now on a mission to protect it from a govern-
ment system that grants contracts to rebuild the quake-damaged heritage sites to the lowest bidder. “We had doubts about the contractors but it was con-
formed when they were starting to dig the foundations haphazardly, disregarding the community’s involvement and our sacred rituals,” Shrestha, 56, told AFP. “We don’t believe the cheapest contractors will rebuild our temple sincerely. We demand that the government dismiss such a sys-
tem.” The temple was among more than 700 heritage sites damaged in the disaster which killed nearly 9,000 people and destroyed half a million homes. Nepal’s laws state that construction contracts val-
ed at more than 500,000 rupees ($4,670) must be granted through a tender process to the lowest bidder — and the same rules govern the restoration of ancient temples and buildings. The system has raised alarm over the quality and techniques being used to rebuild historical sites-with experts saying the Kathmandu valley’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage site could be under threat. “The lowest bidder is not necessarily the best,” Christian Manhart, head of UNESCO in Nepal, told AFP. “There are strong chances that it can be in the world heritage in danger,” he added. When the UNESCO World Heritage com-
mittee met in July last year, it narrowly avoided putting the Kathmandu Valley on its “List of World Heritage in Danger”, but warned it could be added in 2017 if progress is not made.

‘ATTACK ON OUR HERITAGE’

The government estimates that rebuilding the centuries-old temples and monuments damaged by the quake will cost over $300 million. Several countries who have pledged support to help Nepal rebuild its cultural heritage have also expressed concerns about the tender process and the slow pace of work. Nearly two years since the earthquake struck, only ten monuments have so far been rebuilt—some totally bypassing the government’s rules. In November last year, the Boudhanath stupa—the country’s largest and one of the holiest sites of pil-
gimage in Tibetan Buddhism—reopened having been restored with donations from international Buddhist groups. “The restoration was largely communi-
ty-led and cost $2.1 million, including over 30 kilograms of gold. Bhesh Narayan Dahal, chief of Nepal’s archaeological department, said he is aware of concerns regarding the construction contract system. The restoration was largely communi-
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pak police prevent clerics’ rally against blasphemy

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani police have blocked a rally by clerics in Islamabad seeking to press their calls for the death of social media activists accused of insulting Islam. Security forces sealed off and surrounded the Red Mosque, and the home of the leader, Maulana Abdul Aziz, preventing his followers from staging the gathering yesterday. Meanwhile, the Center for Inquiry, a US-based advocacy group, has appealed to Facebook not to consider demands by Pakistan to help identify Pakistanis sus-
ppected of blasphemy so that authorities can prosecute them or pursue their extradition. Pakistan has harsh blasphemy laws under which insulting Islam is an offence that carries the death penal-
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INTERNATIONAL

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

 KUWAIT TIMES

Lowest bidders threatening Nepal’s quake-hit heritage

Government dismissing community, sacred rituals

Pakistan police prevent clerics’ rally against blasphemy

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani police have blocked a rally by clerics in Islamabad seeking to press their calls for the death of social media activists accused of insulting Islam. Security forces sealed off and surrounded the Red Mosque and the home of the leader, Maulana Abdul Aziz, preventing his followers from staging the gathering yesterday. Meanwhile, the Center for Inquiry, a US-based advocacy group, has appealed to Facebook not to consider demands by Pakistan to help identify Pakistanis suspected of blasphemy so that authorities can prosecute them or pursue their extradition. Pakistan has harsh blasphemy laws under which insulting Islam is an offence that carries the death penalty. Pakistan’s media have been increasingly attacked by religious hard-liners. The government has asked Facebook and Twitter to censor religiously offensive material emanating from Pakistan.— AP
AUSTRALIA WON’T CHOOSE BETWEEN CHINA AND US

CANBERRA: Australia does not have to choose between the United States and China, the Australian prime minister said yesterday as he announced a new belt and road deal with the Chinese. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang oversaw signing of bilateral agreements that will expand their two-year-old free trade pact.

China also agreed to remove a cap that allows only 11 Australian beef exporters to sell 400 million Australian dollars ($500 million) in frozen meat to the burgeoning ranks of the Chinese middleclass. China will be open to all eligible Australian beef exporters. “Australia is the only country in the world with this market access,” Turnbull told reporters. “This new agreement will drive significant future growth.”

Turnbull later rejected arguments that Australia must choose between its most important security partner, the United States, and its most important trading partner, China, as tensions escalate between the world’s two largest economies. “We have a staunch, strong ally in Washington — a good friend in Washington — and we have a very good friend in Bejing,” Turnbull told reporters.

“The idea that Australia has to choose between China and the United States is not correct,” he said. Li, who on Wednesday warned Australia against “taking sides, as happened during the Cold War,” agreed with Turnbull. “We believe China-Australia cooperation will bring good to other countries and regions, and this cooperation will not be targeted at any third party,” he said through a translator, referring to the United States.

The United States has questioned aspects of the rapidly evolving commercial relationship between the Chinese and Australians, including Australia’s decision to allow a Chinese company, Landbridge, to secure a 99-year lease over the strategically important Port of Darwin. Darwin has become strategically important Port of Darwin. Darwin has become the two witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Australia State Construction Engineering Corp. and Chinese. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang yesterday as he announced a new beef export deal with the United States.

Premier Li Keqiang oversaw signing of bilateral agreements between China and US economies. “We have a staunch, strong ally in Bejing,” Turnbull told reporters. “This new agreement will drive significant future growth.”

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Sydney: Australia’s Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (R) and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang (L) attend the 6th Australia-China CEO roundtable meeting in Sydney. —AFP

TAIWAN NGO WORKER ‘MISSING IN CHINA’

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese NGO worker who pro-supported democracy in China has gone missing after entering the mainland earlier this month, according to a leader of the group. The 42-year-old worker, who lost her daughter on the Sewol ferry, was last seen on the mainland on May 1.

He said yesterday that Chinese authorities had not responded to their enquiries on Lee Ming-cheh’s whereabouts, as his wife pleaded for help to locate him. Ties between China and Taiwan have worsened since President Tsai Ing-wen took office in May and Beijing has cut off all official communication with Taipei. Taiwan has been self-ruling since 1949 following a civil war on the mainland, but it has never formally declared independence and Beijing still claims it as part of its territory.

Chinese authorities deeply mistrust Tsai’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is traditionally pro-independence. Lee, 42, works for a community college in Taipei and “lost contact” on March 19 after he entered the southeastern Chinese city of Zhuhai from Macau, said the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), Taiwan’s top China policy-making body. A former DPP employee, Lee had been sharing “Taiwan’s democratic experiences” with his Chinese friends online for many years and often mailed books to them, according to the Taiwan Association for Human Rights. “It’s unreasonable that a Taiwanese citizen has been unaccounted for in China for more than five days for no reason,” his wife Lee Ching-yu said in a statement.

“If Lee Ming-cheh has been arrested, please tell me on what charges … whether he is alive or dead, and where he is,” she said, adding that Lee has been following human rights issues in China. Lee has long supported civil society organizations and activists in China, according to Amnesty International, which added that he went there this time to arrange for his mother-in-law’s medical treatment.

His disappearance “raises serious questions about the safety of people working with civil society in China”, said Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International’s East Asia Director. Taiwan authorities say Zhuhai police have informed Lee’s family that there is no record of his arrest. However the Taiwan Association for Human Rights said the Chinese government should prove that Lee is not under arrest, citing the incident of five Hong Kong booksellers who went missing in 2015 and resurfaced in detention on the mainland. —AFP

SOUTH KOREA’S SUNKEN SEWOL FERRY STARTS FINAL JOURNEY

JINDO: South Korea’s sunken Sewol ferry was sailed away from its watery grave yesterday, beginning its final journey nearly three years after it went down with the loss of more than 300 lives.

A flotilla of powerful tugs towed the wreck, lying on its side on a platform between two giant salvage barges, towards a semi-submersible that will finally bring it into port.

The 145-metre ship was brought to the surface in a complex salvage operation believed to be among the largest recoveries ever of a wreck in one piece, a key demand of the families of the dead. “The Sewol began its move towards the semi-submersible at 16:55,” (0755 GMT) the maritime ministry said in a statement.

The rusted, silted hull stood high out of the water, with both its white superstructure and blue bulbous bow exposed as it was taken towards the Dockwise White Marlin, a huge vessel standing by in deeper waters to bring it to Mokpo on the mainland, for investigations and a search. Almost all the dead were schoolchildren and it is thought that nine bodies still unaccounted for may be trapped inside the sunken ship.

“Today is the last day of the neap tide and we must finish loading the Sewol to the submersible,” Lee Cheol-jo, a ministry official in charge of the operation told reporters earlier, referring to tides at their weakest. Around 450 workers were involved in the painstaking salvage. The Sewol has a displacement of 6,825 tons but is now estimated to weigh between 8,000-8,500 tons including the silt piled up inside.

It came as the third anniversary approached of one of the country’s worst-ever maritime disasters, which dealt a crushing blow to now-outsted president Park Geun-Hye. Several relatives watched the much-anticipated operation unfolding from a boat near the site. “I had seen footage of the vessel from time to time, but there are no words to describe what I’m feeling to see it above water,” said Jung Seong-Wook, a father who lost his son in the deadly accident. “I cried. I could only think about my son,” he told AFP after a boat trip to the wreck site. Jung is among a handful of bereaved family members who have kept watch at a camp on a hilltop on the nearest island Donggpyeongdo, just 1.5 kilometers away.

“My heart stops”

Other bereaved family members gathered at Paengmok harbor on the nearby larger island of Jindo, huddled in front of a small computer monitor for any updates to the salvage operation. “From time to time when the news mentions a possible obstacle, my heart stops,” said Youn Young-Hwa, who lost her daughter on the Sewol.

The vessel was lying more than 40 meters below the waves off southwestern South Korea and the operation, originally scheduled for last year, had been pushed back several times because of adverse weather. The disaster was a crippling blow to the now-outsted leader Park Geun-Hye, whose dismissal over a corruption scandal was confirmed by Seoul’s top court only two weeks ago. She stayed at her residence for the first few critical hours after the disaster while officials were frantically sending updates and asking for guidance.

She has never specified what she was doing for the seven hours, sparking wild rumours including a trip to cosmetic surgery. A permanent Sewol protest site target- ing her was subsequently set up in the cen- tre of Seoul. Investigations into the disaster, in which 304 people died, concluded it was largely man-made-the cumulative result of an illegal redesign, an overloaded cargo bay, inexperienced crew and a questionable relationship between the ship operators and state regulators.

Even though the vessel took around three hours to sink, many of those on board never heard any evacuation order, while the crew were among the first to escape to safety. Captain Lee Jun-Seok was sentenced to life in prison for “murder through willful negligence” and 14 other crew members were given terms ranging from two to 12 years. —AFP

INTERNATIONAL
Abe redoubles efforts on cash scandal

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday again rebuffed allegations that he made a donation to an educator at the centre of an intensifying political scandal that has gripped the country. Yasunori Kagoike, a controversial nationalist school operator, said under oath Thursday he had received a one million yen ($9,000) donation from Abe, handed to him, he claimed, by the premier’s wife in 2015. Kagoike’s nationally televised testimony came as his purchase of government land for the construction of a new school at a huge discount has dominated media coverage for weeks. Abe, whose high approval ratings have taken a hit, has repeatedly denied giving Kagoike money and on more than one occasion offered to resign if he was found to be involved in the land deal. Yesterday he issued a fresh denial, releasing emails between the first lady and Kagoike’s wife. “There is nothing at all like a one million yen transaction mentioned in the exchanges,” Abe told parliament, referring to the emails. “I disclosed all the emails to quash any misunderstandings,” Abe said, blaming Kagoike for disclosing “only part of the information” during his sworn testimony. Analysts say such a donation in itself is unlikely to be illegal, but if proven could damage the prime minister’s credibility given his steadfast denials. Abe also denied putting political pressure on bureaucrats to favor Kagoike when he purchased the state land for his now scuttled plan to construct a primary school. The scandal has drawn intense interest in Japan largely due to the character of Kagoike, whose views on education are widely out of step with mainstream society. He operates a kindergarten in the western city of Osaka that promotes hyper-nationalistic doctrine similar to that taught through the end of World War II. The prime minister also rejected calls by opposition parties that his wife be summoned for questioning.—AFP
NEW YORK: This file photo taken on January 11, 2017 shows US President-elect Donald Trump whispers to his daughter Ivanka during a press conference at Trump Tower. — AFP

**IVANKA TRUMP: A WHITE HOUSE FORCE, JUST NOT AN ‘EMPLOYEE’**

While the White House stands alone in its refusal to embrace Trump’s wiretap allegation, the president used the word wiretapping in quotes to mean broad surveillance, rather than referring to the actions of the Obama administration in investigating allegations of phone hacking.

Richard Painter, one of the letter’s signatories and President George W Bush’s chief ethics counselor, said he cannot recall a White House that had such high-powered “non-employees.” One of the most politically active close relatives of a sitting president was Hillary Clinton. And she successfully fought to be considered a federal employee because of the privacy benefits it involves. A June 1993 ruling by a federal appeals court enabled Clinton to keep secret the details of the health care reform panel that she led.

Ivanka Trump is choosing to be in a less formal role than her husband, Jared Kushner, who is a senior adviser to the president and, as an employee, must follow the rules. She has relinquished control of her brand but, like her father, continues to own and financially benefit from her businesses. She will “voluntarily comply with the rules that would apply if she were a government employee, even though she is not,” her attorney Jamie Gorelick said this week. Gorelick, who also helped Kushner through the White House appointment process, said McGahn’s office agreed with the decision. Ivanka Trump and Kushner have said they will not accept government pay.

Fred Wertheimer, one of the authors of the letter to McGahn and president of the Washington watchdog Democracy 21, said Ivanka Trump “should not be treated differently than any other government employee just because she is the president’s daughter.” This is untenable. She can make a decision at any time not to comply and there’s no penalty or sanction whatsoever,” he said. “We don’t normally have White House employees voluntarily complying with rules that were enacted to protect the American people.”

The senior White House official left open the possibility of altering the Ivanka Trump arrangement at some point - again stressing that this is new territory. Others in Trump’s White House have drawn outside scrutiny for government work without the usual set of rules that accompanies it. Billionaire Carl Icahn, a special adviser to the president, has been highly criticized for exercising his influence. “On the one hand, the White House rejects that notion. It is signed by two signatories and President George W Bush’s chief ethics counsel, said he cannot recall a White House that had such high-powered “non-employees.” One of the most politically active close relatives of a sitting president was Hillary Clinton. And she successfully fought to be considered a federal employee because of the privacy benefits it involves. A June 1993 ruling by a federal appeals court enabled Clinton to keep secret the details of the health care reform panel that she led.

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WASHINGTON: New orders for key US-made capital goods unexpectedly fell in February, but a surge in shipments amid demand for machinery and electrical equipment supported expectations for an acceleration in business investment in the first quarter.

The Commerce Department said yesterday that non-defense capital goods orders excluding aircraft, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, dipped 0.1 percent last month after rising 0.1 percent in January. Shipments of these so-called core capital goods jumped 1.0 percent after declining 0.3 percent in January. Core capital goods shipments are used to calculate equipment spending in the government’s gross domestic product measurement.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core capital goods orders rising 0.6 percent last month. Orders for machinery edged up 0.1 percent while shipments increased 0.9 percent. Orders for electrical equipment, appliances and components advanced 2.2 percent, the biggest increase in seven months, and shipments rose 1.5 percent. US financial markets were little moved by the data as investors awaited the outcome of a vote later on Friday on a Republican-sponsored bill to replace Democratic President Barack Obama’s 2010 Affordable Care Act. The vote is seen as the first significant policy test for President Donald Trump.

Manufacturing

A recovery in oil prices from multi-year lows is driving demand for equipment in the energy sector, helping to lift the manufacturing sector after a prolonged slump. Manufacturing, which accounts for about 12 percent of the US economy is also being underpinned by a burst of confidence amid promises by the Trump administration to slash taxes for businesses, boost infrastructure spending and repeal some regulations.

Details of the fiscal stimulus package, however, remain vague, resulting in only a modest increase in business spending on equipment outside the energy sector. The Federal Reserve last week described business investment as appearing to have “firmed somewhat.” Economists expect business spending on equipment to pick up in the first quarter after a 1.9 percent annualized growth pace in the fourth quarter.

Still, that will likely be insufficient to offset the drag on GDP from slower consumer spending and a wider trade deficit. The Atlanta Fed is forecasting the economy growing at a 0.9 percent rate in the first quarter after expanding at a 1.9 percent pace in the final three months of 2016. Last month, a 4.3 percent jump in demand for transportation equipment offset the dip in core capital goods bookings, and hoisted overall orders for durable goods, items ranging from toasters to aircraft that are meant to last three years or more, 1.7 percent. Durable goods orders had increased 2.3 percent in January. Civilian aircraft orders soared 47.6 percent in February. Boeing reported on its website that it had received orders for 43 aircraft last month, up from 26 in January. Orders for motor vehicles and parts fell 0.8 percent in February, while orders for defense aircraft declined 12.8 percent. There were increases in orders for primary metals, but orders for fabricated metal products fell as did those for computers and electronic products. Unfilled orders for core capital goods increased 0.2 percent last month after rising 0.5 percent in January. Inventories of overall durable goods rose 0.2 percent last month. — Reuters

US Core Capital Goods Orders Dip

Capital goods shipments edge higher marginally

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PITTSBURGH: Washers and dryers appear on display for sale at a JC Penney store in Pittsburgh. The Commerce Department released its February report on durable goods. — AP
MARKETS ON EDGE BEFORE KEY US HEALTHCARE VOTE

AXE ON CORPORATE TAX LOOMING

LONDON: World markets wobbled in unsteady trading as investors looked to a key vote on US healthcare reform whose passage is seen as crucial to the future of Donald Trump's growth agenda. The four-month rally in global stocks came to a juddering halt this week as the new president struggled to garner enough support from his own Republican party for a bill repealing ObamaCare.

There are fears the bill’s failure would throw a spanner in the works for his other big-ticket pledges on infrastructure spending, tax cuts and deregulation-key drivers of the markets’ surge. A vote on the reforms pencilled in for Thursday was put back a day, with the White House saying it would definitely pass. Nevertheless Trump turned up the pressure on lawmakers yesterday.

“After seven horrible years of ObamaCare (skyrocketing premiums & deductibles, bad healthcare), this is finally your chance for a great plan!” Trump tweeted. Wall Street equities opened to the upside, while London and Frankfurt treading water in afternoon trading.

“The threat of a rejection in Congress for Trump’s Obamacare replacement has brought about significant doubts over his ability to pass his corporate tax cut this week,” noted IG analyst Joshua Mahony.

Move on to tax

“However, Trump has indicated that should the healthcare reforms not pass, he would simply move on to his other plans, such as cutting corporate taxes.” The administration gave lawmakers an ultimatum Thursday, warning that if the bill failed then Republicans—which have vilified since its inception seven years ago—would stay in place and Trump would move on to the rest of his agenda.

Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at CFD and FX provider AXIGroup, warned: “If it fails then the whole house of cards that’s been built up since the election can come crashing down as traders and investors wonder what the heck will happen to tax and infrastructure plans.” Tokyo ended 0.9 percent higher, with exporters lifted by a weaker yen against the dollar, having advanced on the US unit all week. Hong Kong added 0.1 percent, Sydney was up 0.8 percent and Shanghai closed 0.6 percent higher. —AP

NEW YORK: Traders work on the Mizuho Americas trading floor in New York. Stock opened higher on Wall Street yesterday led by gains in technology companies and banks. —AP

ABK ANNOUNCES FINAL WINNER OF ITS ‘UPDATE YOUR CIVIL ID’ CAMPAIGN

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) successfully concluded its ‘Update your Civil ID’ February promotion, as it held its fourth and last draw earlier this month at the Bank’s Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

The lucky customer for the fourth ‘Update Your Civil ID’ draw was Meshal Abdulla Alrif, from Jahra 2 Branch, winning an Apple iPhone 7. ABK rolled out this campaign to encourage its customers to make the necessary updates to their Civil ID details, while rewarding them for doing so. It also aimed to raise awareness of the different services that can be completed through ABK’s ATM machines, which include withdrawing and depositing money, requesting account balances and mini-statements, changing a PIN number and transferring funds to other ABK accounts.

The Bank’s activities and initiatives ultimately stem from its ‘Simpler Banking’ strategy, which aims to offer customers a simpler banking model while ensuring speed, security and convenience. ABK will continue to capitalize on this strategy and ensure that customers are receiving superior services that cater to their different needs.

SHELL SELLS GABON ONSHORE ENERGY ASSETS

LONDON: Royal Dutch Shell has sold its onshore oil and gas interests in the central African nation of Gabon for $587 million to private equity firm Carlyle Group, it said yesterday.

The Anglo-Dutch energy giant announced in a statement that it has sold the assets to Carlyle for the equivalent of 544 million euros in a deal expected to complete in mid-2017. Carlyle will also take on debt of $285 million as part of the deal. It will make extra payments up to a maximum of $150 million depending on production performance and commodity prices.

Shell will however retain exploration licenses for two offshore blocks west of Gabon, a company spokesperson added. “Shell is very proud of the strong legacy we have built in Gabon over the past 55 years,” said Upstream Director Andy Brown in the statement. “The decision to divest was not taken lightly, but it is consistent with Shell’s strategy to concentrate our upstream footprint where we can be most competitive. Shell will continue to pursue opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Together with recent investments in the UK, Gulf of Mexico and Canada, this transaction shows the clear momentum behind Shell’s $30-billion divestment program, and it helps us to high-grade and simplify our upstream portfolio following the acquisition of BG.”

The downstream business includes refining, marketing and distribution, while upstream comprises exploration and production. Yesterday’s sale is part of a huge $30-billion divestment plan as Shell streamlines its portfolio and cuts debt following the vast takeaway of rival BG Group last year.

“I think it illustrates management’s ongoing success of pivoting the company toward a more sustainable future, and their commitment to normalizing debt levels,” Cantor analyst David Donnelly told AFP. “It’s notable that the disposals tend to be focused on mature, oil-based assets, thereby boosting the prominence of natural gas within Shell’s portfolio, particularly following the BG deal.” —AFP

TUNISIA PUSHING ‘ECONOMIC EMERGENCY’ BILL TO SPUR GROWTH

TUNIS: Tunisia is drafting an “economic emergency” bill that will allow the government to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and speed up large-scale projects as it seeks to boost growth and create jobs, a senior official said.

Administrative delays and bureaucracy are one of the biggest obstacles for local and foreign investors in Tunisia, which has struggled economically since its 2011 uprising. The move comes amid increasing pressure from international lenders to reform the state sector and cut a bloated public sector wage bill. “In two or three weeks the parliament will start debates on a new ‘economic emergency’ bill aimed at reducing the obstacles on major projects,” Ridha Saidi, an economic advisor to Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, told Reuters.

The bill will allow the government to take rapid decisions and short-circuit some bureaucratic procedures on big infrastructure projects and other new investment.

“The new law will give a strong message for all investors that Tunisia is committed to providing a better investment climate,” Saidi said. Opposition parties have raised concerns that by reducing bureaucratic checks, the proposed bill could increase corruption, already a major problem in Tunisia’s economy. Saidi said anti-corruption controls would not be weakened.

Chahed’s government has been pushing a raft of reforms aimed at ending years of stagnation and high unemployment. It expects the economy to grow between 2.5 percent and 3 percent this year.

Previous attempts at reform have been frustrated by political infighting and resistance from powerful trade unions and other interest groups. — Reuters
**NBK Launches Foreign Currency Prepaid Card**

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has recently launched NBK Foreign Currency Prepaid Card; as part of its ongoing efforts to facilitate customers’ banking transactions while travelling abroad, enabling cardholders to pay using the hosting country’s currency. This new innovative card is the safest and most convenient means of payment, as it delivers more secure and convenient experience for NBK customers during their travel, and gives them peace of mind knowing that they have prepaid their cards before leaving home, thus avoiding any exchange fluctuation.

NBK Foreign Currency Prepaid Card is available in seven currencies: US dollar, euro, pound sterling, UAE dirham, Egyptian pound, Indian rupee, and the Jordanian dinar. Customers can recharge their cards through NBK Online Banking, NBK’s IVR, NBK Call Center, or any of NBK ATMs.

Commenting on the newly launched card, NBK Assistant General Manager - Consumer Banking Group, Hanadi Khazal, said: “This card is an example of leveraging innovation to deliver on client needs, and builds on NBK’s ongoing efforts to provide frequent travellers with the flexibility and security while paying for their purchases in any of the currencies provided by the card, be it for online shopping, point-of-sale, or ATM withdrawals.

Moreover, NBK Foreign Currency Prepaid Card offers a range of benefits including: Travel insurance of up to $1,000,000, exclusive offers and rewards from Via, SMS Service, in addition to easy login to your account via NBK Online Banking, and other benefits that meet travellers’ lifestyle and needs. In addition, customers can apply for the card with ease and convenience through NBK Online Banking or NBK Call Center, and the bank will deliver the card to them free of charge anywhere in Kuwait. NBK Credit Cards are widely accepted worldwide and are the safest, most convenient and rewarding way to pay, offering value added features, numerous discounts, and excellent rewards.

**EIB Asks French Diesel Inquiry to Probe Renault’s Use of EU Loans**

**PARIS:** The European Investment Bank (EIB) has granted more than 8 billion euros in preferential loans to back development of vehicles with lower carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that carmakers including VW, exposed in 2015 for using software “defeat devices” to dupe US regulatory tests. Technologies funded by the EIB have included diesel engines, because they emit less CO2 than gasoline equivalents. More recently, however, diesel has been shown to produce many times the legal limit of toxic NOx in real driving.

“The EIB has granted Renault several loans to finance projects including research and development to reduce vehicle CO2 emissions (amounting to more than 800 million euros),” the bank’s chief fraud investigator told the French judges. The Jan. 30 letter also proposes a follow-up meeting “in order to establish whether our financing is implicated in your investigations and to offer you all possible assistance.” It adds: “The EIB enforces a zero-tolerance policy towards fraud and corruption and strives to ensure that no illegal activity tarnishes its business.” A spokesman for the Luxembourg-based bank declined to comment on the correspondence with French prosecutors. Two 400 million-euro loans granted to Renault in 2009 and 2013 have since been reimbursed, she said, and a third outstanding 180 million-euro facility did not cover any diesel development.

**Market Fallout**

Renault shares fell 7.8 percent in three days to end last week at 78.65 euros after excerpts of a November report by France’s DGCCRF consumer fraud watchdog appeared in newspapers, wiping 2 billion euros off the company’s value. The stock has since recovered some ground to 80.68 euros, as of 12:35 GMT. Based on the agency’s findings, the new card is an example of leveraging innovation to deliver on client needs, and builds on NBK’s ongoing efforts to provide frequent travellers with the flexibility and security while paying for their purchases in any of the currencies provided by the card, be it for online shopping, point-of-sale, or ATM withdrawals.

**SPLINTERING EUROZONE DEBT MARKET DOWN TO DRAGHI**

**LONDON:** Big bond funds are becoming increasingly reluctant to lend to the eurozone’s weakest members, looking instead to crowd in new lenders to a potential winding down of the European Central Bank’s ultra-loose monetary policy. In recent months, the funds have been hinging the premiums they demand to buy bonds from highly indebted southern European states such as Portugal and Italy.

Many analysts have put much of that to fears that the anti-establishment wave behind Brexit and Donald Trump’s US presidential election win could sweep anti-establishment parties to power in a series of European elections this year.

But the first of those votes in the Netherlands last week threw into sharp relief for investors there are more risks facing the bloc’s weakest debt markets than just politics. There was little change in relative borrowing costs after Prime Minister Mark Rutte fended off a challenge from the far-right populist Geert Wilders in the Dutch election.

Top of the risks list is whether the European Central Bank will soon withdraw the life support that has kept many of the weaker economies functioning and compressed government bond yields. “The better the political outcome in all of these European elections, the more flexibility the ECB has to one day withdraw the stimulus,” said Michael Krautzberger, the head of European fixed income at the world’s biggest asset manager, BlackRock.

“I would expect that we have much more country differentiation in a scenario where the ECB finally withdraws from the market because that uniform factor falls away,” At the start of April, the ECB will scale back the billions of euros it spends each month on a bond-buying scheme designed to prop up growth and inflation. That may be the start. At its March meeting, ECB President Mario Draghi said its sense of urgency was over. Investors have begun to anticipate interest rate rises by the end of this year.

‘Drugs don’t work’

Some analysts warn that if the ECB tries to wind down its program quickly, borrowing costs for so-called peripheral countries relative to Germany-known as the spread-could widen by as much as 1-2 percentage points. For the likes of Portugal that would put borrowing costs back towards levels seen as unsustainable for managing debts.

In a similar way that some emerging countries suffered in the backdraft of US hints it would scale back monetary easing in 2013, the bloc’s weakest links may be punished by markets.

“The drugs don’t work already and when you take steps towards pricing in less drugs - QE - then you price in spread widening,” said Richard McGuire, head of rates strategy at Rabobank. Spain and Italy have been among the poorest performers in the euro area.

“Election uncertainty in the eurozone has also been weighing down market inflation expectations in the bloc. Analysts say those expectations should snap back once the political hurdles are cleared, meaning the ECB’s near 2 percent target and supporting the case for tighter policy. For the currency market, some argue the prospect of tighter policy is set to prove as least as important as politics over the next six months. Bet against the euro hit their lowest in nearly a year after this month’s ECB’s meeting and major banks have abandoned predictions for a fall to parity with the dollar.” —Reuters

**BUSINESS**

**KUWAIT TIMES**

**Saturday, March 25, 2017**
LONDON: One afternoon in mid-January, Prime Minister Theresa May walked into a meeting room in the Swiss resort of Davos to face Wall Street’s most powerful bankers. May had delivered her vision two days earlier for pulling Britain out of the European Union’s single market. Now the Wall Street banks, fearing Britain was headed for trouble, wanted to hear more about her strategy.

At stake was London’s future as a global financial centre. Among those present were Lloyd Blankfein, chief executive of Goldman Sachs, Jamie Dimon, chief executive of JPMorgan Chase, and James Gorman, chief executive of Morgan Stanley. Blankfein, a former gold trader raking in $100m a year, who worked his way up to lead one of the world’s most powerful investment banks, was the most direct during the talks, according to two bankers and a government official with knowledge of the meeting.

“Lloyd asked where does the financial services industry stand in her list of priorities,” according to one senior banking executive briefed on the discussion by his boss. “We contribute a double-digit percentage to Britain’s GDP. We’re the biggest taxpayer in the country.”

Questioning
May gave a reply about the importance of financial services but declined to answer the question directly, the sources said. Some of the bankers left questioning her commitment.

May and the banks declined to comment on the meeting. Over the past two decades, Goldman, like many of the other 250 foreign-owned banks in Britain, has consolidated its European operations in London to take advantage of the EU’s $1.65m trillion-a-year single market. They are set to lose this wide-open access to a market of 500m people after May has delivered a prime minister determined not to be in thrall to bankers.

The result is that banks are preparing to move large numbers of staff from London, and Germany and France are trying to lure jobs to their financial capitals. Some bankers believe the biggest winner from Brexit will be New York because some business currently carried out in London would naturally revert to US headquarters.

Bankers say May’s ministers don’t understand the industry and what is at stake, and don’t want to hear negative news about Brexit. “We have entered a period of severe danger,” said a Wall Street executive who runs the European operations of a global investment bank. “Parts of the government are being too complacent.”

May’s office, in a statement responding to the findings of this article, said the government didn’t “recognize this version of events.” The government was engaging intensively with the financial services industry, the statement said.

Politicians say the bankers are exaggerating the threat. Some rebalancing of the economy away from financial services – which accounts for about 12 percent of Britain’s economic output – will be good in the long run, they say. “It is all just lobbying,” they make a brilhauda, said Peter Lilley, a pro-Brexit Conservative politician and former financer, who sits on the parliamentary committee examining Britain’s exit from the EU. “They always massively exaggerate.”

The rift is in marked contrast to what’s happening in the United States. There the populist backlash that made Donald Trump president has brought at least four former Goldman Sachs executives into senior positions in the new administration. But in Britain, the nationalista that produced Brexit delivered a prime minister determined not to be in thrall to bankers.

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“There is a widespread feeling that May is detached from the financial services industry, these bankers said.

To a withering in London’s role as a hub for financial services further raised concerns among some bankers. They doubted that Kirby, who founded a radio station and a chain of nightclubs before going into politics, was suitable to be the new government liaison to the industry, these bankers said.

In November, many of the most senior executives and chairmen of Britain’s financial services companies met him for the first time. Kirby failed to answer basic questions about the government’s policy towards financial services further raising concerns among some bankers. They doubted that Kirby, who founded a radio station and a chain of nightclubs before going into politics, was suitable to be the new government liaison to the industry, these bankers said.

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LONDON: A European and British Union flags hang outside Europe House, the European Parliament’s British offices in London. Britain’s government will begin the process of leaving the European Union on March 29, starting the clock on the two years in which to complete the most important negotiation for a generation.

London would naturally revert to US headquarters. HSBC, UBS and Morgan Stanley have already decided to move about 1,000 staff each from London in the next two years, according to sources familiar with their plans. This week Goldman Sachs said it would begin moving hundreds of people out of London as part of contingency plans for Britain leaving the EU.

Not crying wolf
Since Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s “Big Bang” financial deregulation triggered a massive expansion of the industry 31 years ago, bankers have relied on being a powerhouse of Britain’s economy to find a receptive ear in government. But in the aftermath of the vote to leave the EU, the sector is grappling with a new reality. Last year’s vote triggered a change in leadership and tone at the heart of Britain’s government. May pledged an industrially revitalised and to build an economy that works for everyone, not just the elite.

Reuters spoke to more than 40 senior bankers from big British and international banks, politicians, government officials and lobbyists to piece together how the relationship between these pillars of Britain’s establishment became strained. Those people say there are conflicting opinions about what the long-term results of Brexit will be for the world’s fifth largest economy and whether finance should remain the biggest driver of its wealth.

Negotiators
The government is making two calculations, these people say. The first is that bank executives are bluffing over moving jobs. The second is the EU’s view that the tier one IMF bodies must be in thrall to bankers.

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**RUSSIA CUTS KEY RATE IN BOOST TO ECONOMY**

MOSCOW: Russia’s central bank cut its key rate yesterday for the first time in six months and said more cuts were coming, offering a welcome boost to the country’s struggling economy. Falling inflation gave the central bank the leeway to shave a quarter-point off its headline rate and to promise more easing down the road. The central bank announced the cut to 9.75 percent from 10 percent after a regular monetary policy meeting. Russia’s economic activity is in sore need of a boost as it struggles to emerge from two years of recession caused by the slump in oil prices and Western sanctions imposed over Moscow’s actions in Ukraine.

The central bank last cut its interest rate in September, by half a percentage point to 10 percent. Yesterday’s move came as the “inflation slowdown overshoots the forecast, inflation expectations continue to decline and economic activity recovers,” the central bank said. It said inflation had dropped to 4.3 percent from 5 percent in January. “Inflation risks have slightly dropped but remain elevated. In these circumstances, given the moderately tight monetary policy, the 4 percent inflation target will be achieved by the end of 2017,” the central bank said. It said it was considering “the possibility of cutting the key rate gradually” in the second and third quarters.

More to come

Previous to yesterday’s move, many economists had expected the status quo to continue while others had predicted a softening of the very restrictive monetary policy followed by the central bank since the ruble collapsed at the end of 2014. William Jackson, Senior Emerging Markets Economist at Capital Economics, said falling inflation and a stronger ruble mean that Russia’s easing cycle “has much further to run”. Jackson himself had even predicted a 0.5 point reduction at yesterday’s central bank meeting. Inflation was set to fall further “and more quickly than the central bank anticipates,” Jackson said. “That should provide substantial room for further easing.” The ruble rose against the dollar after the rate move, trading at 57.10 against the greenback around 1200 GMT, compared to 57.40 just before the cut. A number of key indicators have improved recently, favoring easier credit, especially inflation, which is now approaching the central bank’s four-percent target for this year. — AFP

**PORTUGAL CUTS DEFICIT TO LOWEST RATIO SINCE DEMOCRACY**

LISBON: Portugal slashed its public sector deficit by more than half in a single year, when measured as a proportion of GDP, the national statistics bureau said yesterday, taking the shortfall comfortably below eurozone limits. The deficit dropped to 2.1 percent of gross domestic product in 2016, a staggering reduction from its 4.4 percent level a year earlier. This confirms Finance Minister Mario Centeno’s prediction last month that the deficit would be “not more than 2.1 percent,” its lowest share of GDP since the advent of democracy in 1974. Eurozone members are required to keep their public deficits to below three percent of GDP, but some are struggling to do so. Portugal’s public deficit shot up into the double digits during the global economic crisis, and despite an international bailout it had difficulty bringing it back down to 4.4 percent in 2015. Portugal’s economy expanded by 1.4 percent in 2016, the national statistics institute said in February, after growing by 1.6 percent the previous year on the back of stronger exports and private consumption. — AFP

**TRUMP GOVT APPROVES KEYSTONE XL PIPELINE**

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration issued a permit yesterday to build the Keystone XL pipeline, reversing the Obama administration and clearing the way for the $8 billion project to finally be completed.

The decision caps a years-long fight between environmental groups and energy industry advocates over the pipeline’s fate that became a proxy battle over global warming. It marks one of the biggest steps taken to date by the Trump administration to boost U.S. economic development over environmental concerns. The State Department, responsible for reviewing the project because it crosses an international border, determined that building it serves US national interests.

That conclusion followed a review of environmental, economic and diplomatic factors, the department said. It wasn’t immediately clear what, if anything, had changed since the State Department reached the opposite conclusion two years ago, other than the election of a new administration. President Donald Trump planned to address Keystone during an announcement yesterday morning, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said on Twitter.

Presidential permit

TransCanada, the Calgary-based company that first applied for a presidential permit in 2008, called the decision a “significant milestone.” “We greatly appreciate President Trump’s administration for reviewing and approving this important initiative,” said TransCanada CEO Russ Girling. “We look forward to working with them as we continue to invest in and strengthen North America’s energy infrastructure.” But Greenpeace, one of the pipeline’s most vocal opponents, said it sent a signal to the world that the US is “moving backwards” on climate and energy, and pledged to keep fighting it nonetheless. “Keystone was stopped once before, and it will be stopped again,” said Annie Leonard, the group’s US director. The 1,700-mile (2,735 kilometers) pipeline, as envisioned, would carry oil from tar sands in Alberta, Canada, to refineries along the Texas Gulf Coast, passing through Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. The pipeline would move roughly 800,000 barrels of oil per day, more than one-fifth of the oil Canada exports to the US.

Portions of Keystone have already been built. Completing it required a permit to cross from Canada into the US. Yet even with a presidential permit, the pipeline still faces obstacles - most notably the route, which is still being heavily litigated in the states. Native American tribes and landowners have joined environmental groups in opposing the pipeline.

TransCanada said yesterday it would continue engaging with “neighbors throughout Nebraska, Montana and South Dakota to obtain the necessary permits and approvals to advance this project to construction.” In an unusual twist, the presidential permit was signed by Tom Shannon, a career diplomat serving in a senior State Department role, rather than by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

The former CEO of oil company Exxon Mobil recalled himself after protests from environmental groups who said it would be a conflict of interest for Tillerson to decide the pipeline’s fate. Canadian Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr said the Canadian government is pleased with the decision. Ninety-seven percent of Canada’s oil exports go to the US.

“Nothing is more essential to the American economy than access to a secure and reliable source of energy. Canada is that source,” Carr said. Oil industry advocates say the pipeline will improve US energy security and create jobs, although how many is widely disputed. Calgary-based TransCanada has promised as many as 13,000 construction jobs - 6,500 a year over two years - although the State Department previously estimated a far smaller number. The pipeline’s opponents contend the jobs will be minimal and short-lived, and say the pipeline won’t help the US with energy needs because the oil is destined for export.

A Trump presidential directive also required new or expanded pipelines to be built with American steel “to the maximum extent possible.” However, TransCanada has said Keystone won’t be built with US steel.

The company has already acquired the steel, much of it from Canada and Mexico, and the White House has acknowledged it’s too difficult to impose conditions on a pipeline already under construction. Environmental groups also say the pipeline will encourage the use of carbon-heavy tar sands oil which contributes more to global warming than cleaner sources of energy. President Barack Obama reached the same conclusion in 2015 after a negative recommendation from then-Secretary of State John Kerry. — AP
EUROZONE ECONOMY SPARKLES, LIGHTS WAY FOR ECB PULL-BACK

FRANKFURT: For companies in the European Union, London is the chief gateway to finance. Recouring the financial lines that run through London will be complex, experts say.

London dominates wholesale banking in Europe, a $5.2 trillion euro ($6.2 trillion) industry that includes financing for companies from big multinationals to family-owned firms that are the backbone of Germany’s economy. London is also the first port of call for companies measuring stocks or raising debt. This is because many fund managers and asset managers have a base in Britain. The Bank of England estimates that half of the demand for funding issued by EU borrowers involves financial groups in Britain. This could be a London bank organising a sale of European company bonds, for example.

And London houses the bulk of Europe’s derivatives market, where car makers buy protection against swings in the US dollar or airlines guard themselves against a spike in the price of oil. More than 7 trillion euros of trading in such instruments is processed in London daily.

Experts expect EU firms and banks gradually to reduce their reliance on London. Governments in France and Germany want to establish alternatives to London in Paris and Frankfurt.

Over time, some of London’s wholesale funding will move to other centres in Europe. Thinktank Bruegel are studying whether banks and insurance companies can gradually move their euro-denominated assets to the continent, with London retaining its status as a global financial centre.

But growth has been slowing ever since, hitting 4.4 percent last year, according to central bank data. Foreign reserves fell to $5.6 billion at the end of February compared to $6.0 billion in December 2016. “The Monetary Board was of the view that further tightening of monetary policy is necessary as a precautionary measure, in order to contain the buildup of adverse inflation expectations,” it said.

A drought gripping parts of the island and unfavourable external conditions were hurting the economy, the bank said. Last June, the government received a $1.5 billion bailout from the IMF after facing a balance of payments crisis.

Earlier this month, the IMF said Sri Lanka’s current account remained stable, but the financial account weakened with the resumption of capital outflows. The IMF also warned that a prolonged drought in the island could raise food and oil imports with adverse impacts on economic growth, inflation, and the country’s balance of payments. — AFP

UK CONSUMERS SPEND MORE IN FEBRUARY

LONDON: Official figures show retail sales in Britain bounced back strongly in February but that the underlying picture remains gloomy as the country prepares to start two years of discussions to leave the European Union. The Office for National Statistics said Thursday that retail sales rose 1.4 percent in February from the previous month. An increase had been expected following three monthly declines. On a three-month basis, however, retail sales are still down by 1.4 percent. That’s the worst three-month performance since March 2010.

Analysts say the underlying picture suggests that households are reining in spending ahead of Prime Minister Theresa May’s upcoming triggering of the two-year Brexit process as well as rising inflation largely related to higher energy prices. — AP

EUROPE’S FINANCIAL LIFEWLINE FROM LONDON IN DOUBT

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SRI LANKA RAISES RATES AS GROWTH SLOWS, INFLATION SPIKES

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka raised its key interest rate by 25 basis points yesterday as inflation spiked and foreign reserves fell, compounding problems caused by slowing economic growth.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka said it raised the benchmark lending rate from 8.5 percent to 8.75 percent as year-on-year inflation increased to 8.2 percent last month, sharply up from 5.2 percent in January. Sri Lanka enjoyed blistering economic growth rates averaging more than 8.0 percent for two years after a prolonged civil war ended in 2009.

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PARIS: French Junior Minister for Budget Christian Eckert (right) listens to Finance minister Michel Sapin speaking during a press conference to present the latest figures on France’s public deficit yesterday at the Economy ministry in Paris. — AFP
Hello artists...

Welcome to the Student's Art Competition. I hope you are ready to paint a beautiful painting and win wonderful prizes. The theme for your painting must be related to planting and greening, basically anything pertaining to our environment. We are looking for a great painting. So, please pick up your color pencils, paint brushes, crayons or whatever you prefer and start drawing and painting.

Good luck to you, our young artists.

- Competition is open to ages from (6 - 8) (9 - 11) (12 - 14) (15 - 17) and Special needs.
- The competition is open for all schools in Kuwait (Government and Private)
- The competition will start on March 19th and will continue till April 20th 2017.
- 10 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools participating in the competition will receive an appreciation plaque.
- Any school or individual interested to participate in this competition is welcome to visit the office of Kuwait Times and collect the drawing sheets.
- Drawing sheets will be given to schools FREE of charge.
- Only drawing sheets provided by the Kuwait Times will be allowed.
- You can use any kind of color pencils, paint brushes or crayons.

* For all Jazeera Airways terms and conditions are applied

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JW MARRIOTT, KUWAIT CITY
A model presents a creation by Iraqi designer Zead Al-Atlary during a fashion show at Basra International Hotel in Basra, 340 miles southeast of Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, March 23, 2017. — AP
Kim and Kanye attend self-help seminar

Amy Schumer’s boyfriend is ‘very protective’

Corden ‘humbled’ by the success of his show
Netflix/Marvel’s ‘Iron Fist’ epic fail, say viewers, critics

Cultural problems

“Iron Fist” stars Finn Jones, who is best known for playing Loras Tyrell on “Game of Thrones.” But casting him as Danny was a missed opportunity, according to disgruntled fans who argue that an Asian-American actor should have been chosen. Maybe, maybe not. But that would seem to be the least of the ilgs plaguing “Iron Fist.” For instance, the Polygon website wielded iron fists at the show’s “problems with delaying exposition, crafting consistent characters, and even basic writing.”

“Yeah. And watch.”

“So we just wait?”

“Not too quick or too slow.”

Tiesto signs the arm of a Grammy-winning DJ-producer

Failing to make the lows in each performance, bringing audiences down a level so they can take a breather rather than keeping them constantly on overdrive? “You’ve got to feel it out. That’s an experience you learn with DJing over the years,” he said. Like sex, “it has to be the perfect timing for everything: you don’t want to make it too slick or too slow.” That’s my laugh and blamed a little bit. “It’s a very magical feeling,” he said.

Grammy-winning DJ-producer Tiesto speaks to the media, on March 22, 2017, at the opening of Tiesto Miami.

Tiesto(R) signs a scene from the Netflix original series, “Iron Fist.” — AP

Jay Z to make feature on Trayvon Martin

The rap mogul Jay Z is partnering with the Weinstein Company to produce a feature film and documentary series about the killing of Trayvon Martin, the teen whose death in 2012 set off nationwide protests. They will make the film and six-part docuseries after winning a bidding war for the rights to two books about the killing of the unarmed black teenager by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, the trade magazine Variety reported on Thursday.

The case ignited civil unrest across the country and a debate about racial profiling. It also gave birth to the Black Lives Matter movement. Zimmerman, who claimed he shot Martin in self-defense, was acquitted of a charge of second degree murder in 2013 by a jury in Florida. The film and series projects will be based on the books “Suspicion Nation: The Inside Story of the Trayvon Martin Justice and Why We Continue to Repeat It” and “Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin,” Variety said.

“Suspicion Nation” recounts the experience of a reporter who covered the trial for NBC. “Rest in Power” is by Martin’s parents. Another docuseries produced by Jay Z and Weinstein Television that touches on race relations “Time: The Kaled Browder Story” was aired last month. The six-part series follows the story of a teen arrested in 2010 while walking home for allegedly stealing a backpack. — AP
**War film shows Warsaw zoo couple who hid Jews**

The director of Warsaw zoo and his wife always carried cyanide during World War II. Danger was ever-present but they were both heartbroken by the secret to the Nazi guards. The couple hid nearly 300 Jews and resistance fighters on zoo grounds during most of the war, under the noses of the German Nazis occupying Poland.

It sounds like a Hollywood movie, and now it is. But “The Zookeeper’s Wife”, which opens in Polish cinemas this week before rolling out internationally, is based on actual events. Inside the zookeeper’s villa, whose windowless cellar had a secret tunnel and basement, the family paid off the guards and Tirosh and his sister were thrown over the wall in sacks while their parents climbed over. On arriving at the zoo, Antonina’s empathy and reassuring calm told them they were in good hands. She was extraordinary. I was a small boy who was very afraid of everything. But when I saw her face, I calmed right down. I still remember that feeling,” Tirosh said.

Helping animals and people

Before he became a child, Ryszard Zabinski tried to make them “look less Jewish” by bleaching their hair lighter. “She locked herself in the bathroom with us and dyed our hair. She rubbed and rubbed and when we came out of the bathroom, Ryssie (nickname for the Zabinski’s son) cried out, ‘Dad, what did you do? That’s a squirrel colour.’” Tirosh said, of the inadvertent reddish colour.

The family became known as The Squirrels. Others also had animal nicknames, including The Starling, The Hamsters and The Pheasants. “There was a house where both animals and people always found help,” said Teresa, who was born at the zoo and had a raccoon-like coati born at the zoo and had a raccoon-like coati. Aply, her mother’s memoirs to be republished this month-were entitled “People and Animals.” They describe how they pushed to raise funds to reopen the zoo after the war while Jan was in a Nazi German prisoner-of-war camp, having fought in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

American author Diane Ackerman relied heavily on the memoirs when writing her own 2007 nonfiction book “The Zookeeper’s Wife”, which inspired the movie. Directed by Niki Caro, it stars Golden Globe winner Jessica Chastain. The couple’s diary was published in the early 1970s. The villa is now a museum where visitors can make an appointment to see the life-saving secret tunnel and basement.

**Film Review**

‘Life’ is a mediocre science-fiction thriller

Ryan Reynolds appears in a scene from, “Life.”

Life is a box of chocolates, a highway and, alas, a mediocre science-fiction thriller. In Daniel Espinosa’s “Life,” an international space station orbiting the Earth intercepts an automated capsule returning from Mars with samples: rocks, dust and, as it turns out, a tiny, tony molecular organism that proves the existence of life on another planet. The thing, though, about those tony molecular organisms from Mars is that they grow up. When Dr Hugh Derry (Ariyon Bakare) injects the cell with glucose, it begins rapidly growing bigger, beyond its petri dish. (Yes, “Life” is, above all, a lesson in the dangers of too much sugar.) The crew-including Jake Gyllenhaal’s troubled veteran, Ryan Reynolds’ cocky engineer, Rebecca Ferguson’s microbiologist and Hirokazu Sanada’s new father - celebrate their remarkable discovery and observe its development. “You’re going to be a dad,” Reynolds’ astronaut tells the proud Derry.

Derry, the biological expert of the bunch, hopes the organism - dubbed “Calvin” - will teach the scientists about the origin, the nature “and maybe even the meaning of life.” Such glories, however, aren’t in store. The harsh revelation that Calvin brings is that life - violently striving for survival - finds a way. Unfortunately, “Life,” the movie, doesn’t.

Once the alien lifeform strengthens and gets loose, “Life” surrenders to a tiresome chase away from not just its ravenous creature but from the movies “Life” so obviously takes it cues from. “Life” certainly can’t come anywhere near the well-earned horrors of “Alien,” nor does it boast anything like the silky splendor of “Gravity.”

Espinosa’s “Safe House,” “Child 44”) clausrophobically encloses the drama in a fairly realistic space station that, lacking sufficiently cinematic production design, doesn’t allow for much movement. Unlike Hollywood’s recent, more ambitious sojourns into space, “Life” is a gittier, clunkier B-movie monster movie in zero gravity. An extraterrestrial Frankenstein is hunted with implausible dimwittedness by a bickering human crew.

Calvin (sadly there is no Hobbes in sight) grows in size and shape, but he mostly looks like a super-powerful, fearfully smart starfish. As he slithers this way and that, he almost resembles the alien cousin of Hank, the equally resourceful octopus of last year’s “Finding Dory,” Penned by Rheet Reese and Paul Wernick (“Deadpool,” “Zombieland”), “Life” doesn’t have much of the sarcastic wit the screenwriters have shown before. Instead, it’s merely a tense, prickly cheap-thill. Not until the film’s final moments - finally free of the space station - does the movie find its own bite. “Life,” a Columbia Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for language throughout, some sci-fi violence and terror. Running time: 102 minutes. Two stars out of four. — AP photos
“breathing” Fidel Castro is among several ex-communist leaders gathered in Hong Kong this week—one of the world’s centers of capitalism—as part of a cheeky exhibition at Art Basel. Lifelike replicas of Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Kim II-Sung, Ho Chi Minh and the former Cuban leader are lying in state in the city’s harbor front convention centre, drawing curious, smartphone-snapping art enthusiasts.

Made from acrylic and silica gel and dressed in their signature uniforms, all lie in glass coffins, except for Castro, who can be seen ‘breathing’ almost imperceptibly on his deathbed. The installation, called “Summit,” was created by Chinese artist Shen Shaomin who said the work was conceived as a response to the global financial crisis of 2008.

It was originally commissioned for the Sydney Biennale contemporary art festival in 2010—when Castro was still alive—as an imaginary meeting of former dictators to parody the now defunct G8 grouping of wealthy industrialized nations. “Many Western scholars have become suspicious about capitalism, and compared and discussed theories of communism, so I have created the ‘GS’,” Shen told AFP at the Hong Kong fair. “People from different countries, different cultural backgrounds, different experiences have their own ways to interpret it,” said Shen, who jokingly inserted his iPhone into Castro’s hand.

In this picture taken on March 22, 2017, visitors sit behind Chinese artist Shen Shaomin’s Fidel Castro, part of his ‘Summit’ project, at Art Basel in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

As US takes aim at immigration, musicians feel the pinch

Before he staged a professional comeback last week, the rapper Kayem had disappeared from public life for two years. An US citizen by birth who remembers his relatives suffering at the hands of Moamer Kadhafi’s regime in Libya, he was lying low on legal advice after the US authorities crippled his career by putting him on a no-fly list. He blames profiling for the scrutiny he receives at airports.

“I’ve been on lockdown,” the rapper-who used to go by Khaled M.-said at South by Southwest. “I can’t travel to the United States for South by Southwest. And among those artists who were able to play, worries are growing about how tougher immigration rules will affect their careers and the music world more broadly.

Inconsistencies on border

Despite the suspension of Trump’s travel bans, the president has vowed to ramp up enforcement of existing rules. “One of the major problems with the ban is that even if it’s stayed, it’s very difficult to consider working with artists from those countries,” said Matthew Covey, an immigration lawyer who produced a South by Southwest showcase, Contrabanned, featuring musicians with ties to countries on Trump’s list. “It isolates those nations,” he said. “So the question is, ‘How do we counteract the narrative that we are receiving about the Muslim-majority countries?”

Covey is executive director of Tamizdat, a non-profit cultural support organization that set up a free hotline in 2015 for artists encountering problems at the US border. He described an especially stubborn customs officer about whom Tamizdat documented six cases: “Five-foot-six (1.7 meters), moustache, bald, didn’t like DJs, didn’t think they were real artists.” Customs officers at New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport are more friendly to foreign artists, reflecting the kind of crossing-by-crossing, officer-by-officer unpredictability foreign artists can run into at the border, Covey said.

Handcuffed at airport

Another group on its way to South by Southwest, the Italian post-punk band Soviet, said its three members were handcuffed and detained overnight with common criminals after being refused entry at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. It’s not clear to what extent Trump has affected such decisions. The US-born Libyan-American rapper Khaled Ahmed, better known as Kayem, poses ahead of his live performance at the ContraBanned: MusicUnites South by Southwest (SXSW) music showcase at The Palm Door on Sixth on March 17, 2017 in Austin. — AFP

United States requires visas for performers on tour—even if they come from visa-exempt countries—but has traditionally made exceptions for appearances at showcases such as South by Southwest.

Cherine Amr, lead singer of the Egyptian-Canadian metal band Massive Scar Era, which was turned away at the border, said she had been doubtful whether the exhibit would be allowed into semi-autonomous Hong Kong, where concerns are growing that China is tightening its grip.

Mao remains a controversial figure on the mainland and there is general sensitivity about his image there. Despite that, Mao’s replica and the other bodies were made in Beijing, where Shen has a base. “(Art Basel) really fought hard to have this piece in,” Lin said. “I think Hong Kong is still free... we can still have the freedom to show this work and I’m happy about that.” Shen said the bodies took a team of seven to eight artists sans six months to create after intensively studying the leaders’ appearances, from their moles to their hair.

“It makes people want to learn more about them,” said Tiernan Breen, 18, a student from Fiji browsing Art Basel. “You ask yourself questions which you wouldn’t ask if you hadn’t actually seen them.”

Shen is not expecting a private collector to take home the bodies, but hopes the work finds a place in a museum. Since the Sydney Biennale, the installation has toured museums in Singapore and France. “It’s very unique, I love it... You get goosebumps, you know?” said Nesli Vetter, 54, visiting Art Basel from Germany. “All good old boys.” — AFP
Greyhounds compete on the track during an evening of greyhound racing at Wimbledon Stadium in south London. — AFP photos

**London greyhound racing goes to the dogs**

Once a hugely popular working man’s sport, Saturday marks the final demise of greyhound racing in London, closing a chapter of British social culture in the capital. More than 20 dog tracks have been dotted around London since modern greyhound racing was introduced to Britain in the 1920s, drawing in punters for a cheap evening’s entertainment.

Wimbledon Stadium is the last one standing, but it, too, now faces the bulldozers—a victim of cultural shifts and the city’s housing crisis. The timeworn ground, built in 1928, is set to be replaced by around 600 flats to service the soaring London property market, and a new 11,000-seater home for third-tier football team AFC Wimbledon. At the penultimate racing event, followers of the competitive sport lamented the closure.

Dressed in a flat cap, a beige overcoat, a blue spotted silk scarf and a yellow tie with greyhounds on, trackside bookmaker John Henwood, 68, has taken bets at almost every Wimbledon race meeting for 34 years. “It will be a really, really sad loss,” he told AFP. “In days of yore, it was perceived as a cloth-cap sport enjoyed by the working man,” he said. “But now we have a cosmopolitan clientele right across the age and social spectrum. And a big proportion of female attendees, which you didn’t get before.”

**Value of land**

Once the mechanised hare was introduced in Britain in the 1920s, greyhound racing went to the dogs. “It's the whole vibe. It's cheap, sweet and fun. You have your £2 bet and have a laugh and you're so close up,” said Theresa Ajid, who was trackside with her husband and young children. A fanfare announces each race and the six greyhounds are then paraded along the finishing straight. Punters size them up and rush to the bookmakers’ stands to place bets, pint of beer straight. Punters size them up and rush to the bookmakers’ stands to place bets, pint of beer flung in the air, before heading off into the night with their £850 winnings. “The excitement is unreal. I’m totally addicted,” said pensioner Fred, 78, with the Racing Post newspaper tucked under his arm.

“Chunk of history”

Most bets are small-scale but in the last race of the night, a stag party piles in all their remaining cash on 10/1 outsider Office Hazard, picked by the groom-to-be. As it triumphs, they erupt with joy, wildly bounce around cheering with beer flung in the air, before heading off into the night with their £850 winnings. “The excitement is unreal. I’m totally addicted,” said pensioner Fred, 78, with the Racing Post newspaper tucked under his arm.

Fred, who declined to give his surname, said: “It’s a crying shame. Eight million people and there’ll not be a dog track in London. That’s it; end of the line.” Darren, 40, said he had been coming to the stadium for 20 years. “We're losing a chunk of history here. Once it’s gone, you won’t get it back.”

**Online betting shift**

“This is an institution, not just a greyhound track,” said the stadium’s general manager Keith Hallinan. “Fewer people are coming to the tracks. People can watch on their phone and bet,” he said. “But people don’t realize if they don’t come to the tracks, there’s not going to be greyhound racing.”

“Internet betting has been a chunk of history here. Once it’s gone, you won’t get it back.”

**A race goer checks the odds at the greyhound racing track.**

**Race goers watch the track during an evening of greyhound racing at Wimbledon Stadium.**
He's been hailed a "fresh new voice" by Vogue, won admiration from Giorgio Armani and bagged an award: Mitsuru Nishizaki is hot fashion talent in Japan. But that doesn't guarantee international stardom. Loud applause and uncharacteristic cheers erupted from the usually restrained Japanese fashion crowd at the 38-year-old's packed autumn/winter 2017 collection for brand Ujoh at Tokyo Fashion Week.

The models strode out to upbeat techno tempo, tearing up a multi-lane catwalk in a high-energy show starring preppy-grunge, sporty-tailored chic that would not look out of place in New York. It was eminently wearable with bright high-necked ribbed sweaters slashed at the side, a deconstructed pale pink trench coat and crisp shirts that button front and back to be styled how the wearer desires. Shoes were trainer-meets-loafer-black with white soles and a yellow serrated grip, which he calls shark soles, worn with gypsy-style skirts, pin-stripped suits or slouchy velvet track bottoms. Nishizaki set up Ujoh in 2009 after seven years as a Yohji Yamamoto pattern cutter. Six years later he won a design award sponsored by DHL and then in 2016 staged a show in Milan. Armani provided his theatre for the venue, though Nishizaki didn't meet the veteran Italian designer in person. Vogue wrote afterwards: "this is how cool girls dress now" and predicted a bright future for him. But what does it take to make it outside Japan? To follow in the footsteps of Issey Miyake, Yamamoto-Nishizaki's former boss-and Rei Kawakubo, 20th century masters who have flown the nest to take their place among the greats in the fashion pantheon of Paris?

"Give me ideas"

In an interview at his showroom in Omotesando, a chic neighbourhood heaving with high-fashion boutiques, he was polite and earnest, but also shy and nervous behind the wide brim of a black floppy hat. Nishizaki appears reluctant to present a compelling personal narrative in the rags-to-riches or fashion-ruled-my-childhood style that has helped many celebrated US designers market pret-a-porter to a mass audience.

When it comes to his collections, he says he works in the style to which he became accustomed at Yamamoto: having an open mind and designing freely without pre-selecting a particular inspiration. "It is a difficult question to answer and I wish you could give me some ideas," Nishizaki ventured when asked if he thought it was harder to break through as a designer from Japan than from Europe or America.

But he does admit that the Japanese calendar is stacked against quick success on the international circuit. Tokyo's bi-annual style fest in March and October comes several weeks after the main fashion merry-go-round in New York, London, Milan and Paris comes to an end. By then most international editors and buyers are too exhausted and saturated to board a long-haul flight to Tokyo. "What I really should do now is rearrange my brand schedule for press and sales not only in Japan but overseas," Nishizaki said. Misha Janette, a Tokyo-based stylist, creative director and blogger who has lived in Japan since 2004, said a major challenge for many Japanese designers trying to cut it in the West are different tastes. She summed up the Japanese market as conservative and casual, rather than expensive and high fashion, warning that simple clothes were "not going to sell" in Paris. "I think the most important thing is to have a balance of show pieces, interesting things that show their viewpoint with simple of- the-rack to satisfy both. That's hard," she told AFP. "Most Japanese brands don't have the investment, it's just girls and boys doing it alone out of their garage," she said. "Instead of having this balance of show pieces and wearable pieces it becomes either or." — AFP
Models present the creations of Japanese designer Yuma Koshino during the 2017 Autumn/Winter Collection show of the Tokyo Fashion Week. — AFP photos
SAMSUNG SHAREHOLDERS HAIL STOCK PRICE GAINS
SOME LAMENT CORRUPTION SCANDALS

SEOUl: Shareholders of Samsung Electronics praised the company yesterday for big gains in its share price while lamenting its involvement in a massive corruption scandal that brought the arrest of the company’s de facto leader.

The company’s image has also taken a big hit from cases of overheating and sometimes exploding batteries of its flagship Galaxy Note 7 smart phones. Samsung ended up discontinuing the product just weeks after it was launched in August. Shin Jong-kyun, a Samsung president, promised shareholders the company would put “flawless” products through extensive safety checks. The precautions would be permanent, he said.

But infecting all phones somewhere in the manufacturing process would be extremely difficult, said Mogull, especially given multiple layers of inspection conducted by Apple and its contractors. At most, he said, the CIA might have shipped a rogue device with limited access to support our national interests,” said Rich Mogull, CEO of the security firm Securosis.

The leaks Thursday come about two weeks after WikiLeaks published thousands of alleged CIA documents describing hacking tools that the government employed to break into computers, mobile phones and even smart TVs from companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft and Samsung. The latest disclosures are much more focused and consist of just 12 documents, all involving Apple products. The documents describe techniques for rewriting devices’ firmware in ways that would maintain a hacker’s access even if a user resets a phone or computer to factory settings. Doing so wipes out all apps and the operating system and installs a clean version; it is an extreme measure sometimes used to deal with technical problems, but is also the sort of step that someone suspicious of surveillance might take when getting a brand new phone.

A December 2008 document describes “NightSkies,” a tool apparently designed to target the iPhone 3G, the document claims it can retrieve files such as contact lists and call logs and execute other commands. WikiLeaks suggested in a press release that “the CIA has been infecting the iPhone supply chain of its targets since at least 2008.”

However, the document describes only how to install the malware on a “factory fresh” version of the 3G specifically, the iPhone 3G running the 2.1 version of Apple’s operating system, both of which are now nine years old. But infecting all phones somewhere in the manufacturing process would be extremely difficult, said Mogull, especially given multiple layers of inspection conducted by Apple and its contractors. At most, he said, the CIA might have shipped a rogue device with limited access to support our national interests,” said Rich Mogull, CEO of the security firm Securosis.

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Dell EMC Launches Cloud Ecosystem Hub
Hub to Enable Cloud Transformation, Business Growth

**BRACKNELL, UK:** Dell EMC and Intel have announced a new web-based Cloud Ecosystem Hub, to provide EMIA Cloud Service Providers (SPs) and end users with an online one-stop site to unify and link up with all aspects of Dell EMC’s cloud proposition and resources. The hub will connect customers with SPs to help establish stronger marketing efforts, enabling digital transformation and significantly growing long-term Cloud business.

The hub demonstrates Dell EMC’s commitment to providing choice and unique solutions to every customer and removing obstacles to cloud adoption through hosting an online cloud portal for Dell EMC Technology, making it easier for customers to select the right SP to address their needs. For SPs, the hub will be a platform to launch key initiatives and drive new business with the marketplace. With sales revenues in the hardware market decreasing and much of the Cloud market set to transition over to hybrid cloud models, customers will expect to see a considerably larger market share over the next five years and Dell EMC and Intel will act as key business enablers to all parties.

“As a European leader in the secure management of online documents, Oodrive addresses the needs of the modern business by placing its expertise in security, ergonomics and innovation at the core of each of its solutions,” said Cedric Mermilliod, Co-founder and Managing Director, Oodrive. “We are looking for business partners with the ability to deliver significant business offer comprehensive services to the customer. With its state-of-the-art technologies, Dell EMC is certainly one of the key players and the Cloud Ecosystem Hub will allow us to facilitate new business more effectively whilst preserving the customer intimacy cherished by Oodrive.”

**New development**

“Historically, vendors have failed to support Service Providers in their campaigns and the Dell EMC Cloud Ecosystem represents a game-changing development for both Service Providers and customers alike,” said Eric Velfre, senior vice president, Compute and Networking Sales Dell EMC EMEA. “By extending access to the Dell EMC Cloud value proposition and offering content and support for co-marketing projects, we can generate awareness and enable new capabilities to achieve greater profitability for our partners. Through the Dell EMC Cloud Community we can also drive demand from the customer towards Service Providers and capture feedback to help develop future Dell EMC Cloud technologies.”

One Stop Shop for customers, the Cloud Ecosystem Hub promises to help them understand how to transform their businesses, with a dedicated repository of up-to-date resources and assets explaining the value proposition and benefits offered by Dell EMC technologies. Customers can now select SPs through browse searches to find the most relevant solutions for their businesses, with options to contact providers directly through the platform. The Cloud Ecosystem Hub will also allow customers to discover and register for broader industry events organized by SPs and Dell EMC.

**BEIJING:** In this file photo, customers try out Apple iPhone 6s models on display at an Apple Store in Beijing. New documents from Wikileaks, posted on Thursday point to an apparent CIA program to hack Apple’s iPhones and Mac computers such that the exploits persist even after the devices are reset to factory conditions. — AP

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“Twitter is considering offering a more advanced TweetDeck experience, with more powerful tools to help marketers, journalists, professionals, and others in our community find out what is happening in the world quicker, to gain more insights, and see the broadest range of what people are saying on Twitter,” survey participants were told. “This premium tool set will provide valuable viewing, posting, and signaling tools like alerts, trends and activity analysis, advanced analytics, and composing and posting tools all in one customizable dashboard.” — AP

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**COLUMBIA:** Federal officials took a step Thursday toward increasing safety in prisons by making it easier to find and seize cellphones obtained illegally by inmates. The Federal Communications Commission in Washington voted 3-0 to approve rules to streamline the process for using technology to detect and block contraband phones in prisons and jails across the US.

The vote doesn’t make it legal to jam cellphone signals in prison, which corrections directors across the country say is what they need to shut down inmate cellphone use. The FCC is willing to see prisons install jammers at a cost of $12 things to do on a 12-hour flight with no laptop or tablet.”

In another post, it took up rhyming, with a five-line poem that begins: “Every week a new ban. Travel to the US could get you a laptop on board? Jordanian carrier Royal Jordanian said hello to the person next to you. Reclaim territory on the armrest. Think of the reasons why you don’t have a laptop with you. This is some of the light-hearted advice dispensed by Royal Jordanian on social media Thursday, a day before the carrier is to enforce a new ban at the time. Since then, the carrier has been trying to get ahead of the curve because Washington hadn’t announced the ban at the time. Since then, Johnson has become an advocate on the issue, saying prisons allow users to get what they need to be able to jam cell signals, but that would require congressional changes to a decades-old communicationst law.

Previously, the FCC has said its hands are tied by a law that says the agency can grant permission to jam the public airwaves only to federal agencies, not state or local ones. South Carolina Corrections Commission Director Bryan Stirling accompanied Johnson to Thursday’s hearing, telling The Associated Press this week the pair would meet with members of Congress on ways they can address the issue.

The cellphone industry has been vocal in its opposition to the notion of jamming, arguing that legitimate cellphone users near prisons could be affected if jammers were in use. Officials with wireless less trade group CTIA did not immediately respond to email asking for reaction to Thursday’s ruling.

Pai came to South Carolina last year to see the issue up close, touring the prison where Johnson worked and holding a field hearing at which the former corrections officer who was nearly killed in a shooting that authorities said was the first in the country orchestrated by an inmate using an illegal cellphone inside prison. “I bled out three times,” Johnson recalled, telling commissioners how he was shot six times at his home early one morning in March 2010. “My doctor said I should be dead. ... Last Wednesday, I had surgery Number 24, my 24th surgery.”

At the time, Johnson was the lead officer tasked with keeping contraband items like tobacco, weapons, and cellphones out of Lee Correctional Institution, a prison 50 miles east of Columbia that houses some of the state’s most high-profile criminals. The inmates are smuggled inside, tossed over fences or even delivered by drone.

**Jamming signals**

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BURGAN BANK SPONSORS THE THIRD GULF STUDIES SYMPOSIUM AT AUK

Burgan Bank recently sponsored the 2017 Gulf Studies Symposium organized by the Center for Gulf Studies at the American University of Kuwait. Themed under ‘Mobilities and Materialities’ of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, the third edition bi-annual event was held from 17-19 March at the central garden campus. Renowned local, regional and international scholars gathered together under one roof to examine the long historical development of people in the Gulf through an analysis of historical and archaeological evidence that ties the patterns of migration and settlement in the region to wider patterns of integration, globalization, and trade.

The bank’s continued contribution to the annual symposium reflects the brand’s mission to improve every segment of the Kuwaiti community as part of its full-fledged CSR program entitled ‘ENGAGE’ - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank’s approach to ‘ENGAGE’ begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of its community.

INDONESIAN SOCCER LEAGUE 2017 CONCLUDES

The Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, Tatang Budie Utama Razak officially closed the “Indonesian Soccer League 2017” that was held from 22 January until March 18, 2017, the participants of the tournament are Indonesian expatriates working in various fields such as engineers, petroleum, aviation, IT and nurses. The football league was organized jointly by the Indonesian embassy in Kuwait with the Indonesian Communication Forum in Kuwait (FKMI). The Indonesian Nurse Association in Kuwait (INNA-K FC) became the champion after beating the Sundanese Community In Kuwait (Bobotoh PPK FC) 1-0 in the final.”
Global coatings supplier Hempel inaugurated a new factory in Mina Abdullah in Kuwait last week. The factory, which meets ISO 9000 quality management guidelines, will meet growing demand for Hempel coatings and consolidate its position as market leader in the region.

Hempel is the number one coatings supplier in Kuwait. Over the years, its coatings have been used to protect and decorate some of the country’s most iconic buildings, including the Kuwait Towers and the Kuwait Opera House, as well as numerous schools, mosques, hospitals, shopping malls and other important civil structures.

With a 40 percent higher capacity than Hempel’s existing production facility in Safat, Kuwait, the new EUR 13 million factory in Mina Abdullah will help the company meet growing demand for its coatings in Kuwait and other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The new factory will be fully up and running by September 2017, and Hempel’s existing factory in Safat will close later in the year.

Karsten Pedersen, Group Vice President of Hempel Middle East (West), comments: “The new factory is a state-of-the-art facility that will produce coatings that are trusted across the region to provide long-term protection to industrial assets, large buildings, homes and infrastructure. We are looking forward to continuing to be the market leader in the region, while increasing production and making our operations cleaner, faster and more energy efficient.”

Built to ISO 9000 quality management guidelines, Hempel’s Mina Abdullah factory is designed with sustainability in mind. It includes a solvent distillation unit that recycles solvents to reduce hazardous waste, as well as a water treatment plant that ensures much of the factory’s wastewater can be reused for vegetation and cleaning. The factory is also the first coatings production unit in Kuwait to include a regenerative thermal oxidiser unit, which removes volatile organic compounds during production to prevent atmospheric pollution.

The factory was opened at a ceremony attended by H.E. Ole Frijs-Madsen, the Danish Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, senior Hempel executives and employees, media representatives and other guests. At the ceremony, Khaled Al-Rashed, Board Member of DPME, Hempel’s partner in Kuwait, said:

“We are proud that Hempel has grown to become the number one paint company in terms of production and distribution in Kuwait. This is a clear sign of our customers’ trust in the quality of our products, which has now become a benchmark for companies worldwide. Today, as we inaugurate the opening of this state-of-the-art facility, we are also celebrating a story of enduring partnerships that have lasted over 51 years.”

Hempel’s new factory in Mina Abdullah, Kuwait is the latest edition to its comprehensive global supply chain. In 2016 alone, the company completed a capacity expansion project in Malaysia and opened new factories in Russia and Vietnam, adding more than 28 million litres to its annual production capacity.

**Hempel’s new Mina Abdullah factory at a glance:**
- Will produce marine, protective and decorative coatings for Kuwait and other GCC countries
- Built to ISO 9000 quality management guidelines
- Includes a solvent distillation unit, wastewater treatment plant, and regenerative thermal oxidiser unit to reduce waste and water use
- Capacity: Up to 25 million litres per year
- Cost: EUR 13 million
- Inaugurated: 22 March
- Full production: By September 2017
UNAVOIDABLE TYPOS IN DNA HELP FUEL CANCER

GENE MUTATIONS CAUSE CANCER BUT WHAT CAUSES MUTATIONS?

WASHINGTON: Cancer patients often wonder “why me?” Does their tumor run in the family? Did they try hard enough to avoid smoking? Did their parents cook with sun or a bad diet? Lifestyle and heredity get the most blame but new research suggests random chance plays a bigger role than people realize: Healthy cells naturally make mistakes when they multiply, unavoidable typos in DNA that can leave new cells carrying cancer-prone genetic mutations.

How big? About two-thirds of the mutations that occur in various types of cancer are due to those random copying errors, researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported Thursday in the journal Science. What that doesn’t mean most cases of cancer are due solely to “bad luck.” It takes multiple mutations to turn cells into tumors — and a lot of cancer is preventable, the Hopkins team stressed, if people take proven steps to avoid risks like smoking, too much sun or a bad diet.

Thursday’s report is an estimate, based on a math model, that is sure to be hotly debated by scientists who say those unavoidable mistakes of nature play a much smaller role. But whatever the ultimate number, the research offers a peek at how cancer may begin. And it should help with the “why me?” question from people who have done everything they know to do to prevent cancer.

“We need to understand that these cancers would have occurred no matter what they did,” Vogelstein said. “We all harbor those random copy errors in our genetic mutations who co-authored the study. “It’s not an essential element of urban life. But society needs to address a growing list of concerns, they suggest.

“Urban areas are not saying cities should go dark, or that lighting pollution is bad. But society needs to take action on climate change. But the moment of darkness will hold more meaning for humans and other animals. In 2012, the University of Washington show that as of last month ice volume levels were down 42 percent from 1979, said polar science center chief Axel Schweiger.

Several scientists called the sea ice loss disturbing. “It’s evidence that the climate at the top of the world continues to change faster than anywhere else on Earth with impacts to us that are still largely unknown,” Pennsylvania State University meteorology professor and retired admiral David W. Titley, said in an email. Scientists blame a combination of natural weather and man-made global warming for the burning of coal, oil and gas. The winter of 2016-2017 was unusually cold and the Arctic saw three “extreme heat waves,” Sereze said.

A new study earlier this month in the journal Nature Climate Change found that natural causes can explain between 30 and 50 percent of plunging September sea ice levels, while Sereze and others give climate change an even bigger role in sea ice loss. A relatively new idea — that natural weather and man-made global warming for the burning of coal, oil and gas — is a key part of the Earth’s climate system and we’re losing it,” he said. “We’re losing the ice in all seasons now.”

WASHINGTON: The frigid top of the Earth just set yet another record for low levels of sea ice in what scientists say is a signal of an overheating world. The extent of floating ice in the Arctic hit a new low for winter: 5.57 million square miles (14.42 million square kilometers). That’s about 35,000 square miles (97,000 square kilometers) — an area about the size of Maine below-2015’s record. Last year had a shade more than 2015, but nearly a tied record.

This undated fluorescence-colored microscope image made available by the National Institutes of Health in September 2016 shows a culture of human breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for breast cancer cells.
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How big? About two-thirds of the mutations that occur in various forms of cancer are due to those random copying errors, researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported Thursday in the journal Science. Whoa: That doesn’t mean most cases of cancer are due solely to “bad luck.” It takes multiple mutations to turn cells into tumors - and a lot of cancer is preventable, the Hopkins team stressed, if people take proven prevention advice.

Thursday’s report is an estimate, based on a math model, that is sure to stir up over time. That’s one reason the risk of cancer increases with age. — AP

What causes mutations?
You might inherit some mutations, like flaws in BRCA genes that are infamous for causing aggressive breast and ovarian cancers in certain families. More commonly, damage is caused by what scientists call environmental factors - the assault on DNA from the world around us and how we live our lives. There’s a long list of risks: Cigarette smoke, UV light from the sun, other forms of radiation, certain hormones or viruses, an unhealthy diet, smoking, and lack of exercise.

There are those random copy errors in cells - what Vogelstein calls our baseline rate of genetic mutations that will occur no matter how healthy we live. One way to think of it: If we all have some mutations lurking in our cells anyway, that’s yet another reason to avoid known risks that could push us over the edge.

How cells make typos
New cells are formed when an existing cell divides and copies its DNA. One cell turning into two. Every time DNA is copied, about three random mutations occur, Vogelstein said. We all harbor these kinds of mutations and most don’t hurt us because they’re in genes that have nothing to do with cancer or the body’s defense mechanisms spot and fix the damage, said Dr. Otis Brawley of the American Cancer Society, who wasn’t involved in the new study. Sometimes the errors hit the wrong spot and damage genes that can spur cancerous growth or genes that help the cell spot and fix problems. Then the damaged cells can survive to copy themselves, allowing important mutations to gradually build up over time. That’s one reason the risk of cancer increases with age. — AP

Not taken lightly
One of the biggest challenges in fighting light pollution is convincing people that “brightness” is not synonymous with “safety”, said Umpierre. “Sometimes it’s just the opposite,” she argued, citing studies showing that people drive more carefully and exercise more slowly on roads with less or no lighting at night.

This undated fluorescence-colored microscope image made available by the National Institutes of Health in September 2016 shows a culture of human breast cancer cells. Environmental risks and heredity get the most blame for cancer, but new research released suggests random chance can play a bigger role than people realize. — AP

PARIS: For the 11th year running, cities worldwide will turn their lights off Saturday to mark Earth Hour in a global call to action on climate change. But the moment of darkness should also serve as a reminder, activists say, of another problem that gets far less attention: light pollution. More than 80 percent of humanity lives under skies saturated with artificial light, scientists recently calculated. In the United States and western Europe, that figure goes up to 99 percent of the population, most of whom cannot discern the Milky Way in the night sky.

Artificial lighting has been shown to disturb the reproductive cycles of some animals and the migration of birds that navigate using the stars, and to disorient night-flying insects. For humans, circadian rhythms that regulate hormones and other bodily functions can also be thrown off by too much light at night. Even the most ardent critics of light pollution are not saying cities should go dark, or that lighting is not an essential element of urban life. But society needs to address a growing list of concerns, they suggest.

“In general, it’s getting worse,” Diana Umpierre, president of the International Dark-Sky Association, said of light pollution in her home state of Florida. And things are moving in the wrong direction, she said. “We are predicted to have 15 million more residents in the next 50 years” with all the extra lighting that entails. By contrast, in Chad, the Central African Republic and Madagascar - not coincidentally among the poorest countries in the world - people have a clear view of the heavens. Arguably, no-one suffers more from light pollution than astronomers whose telescopes are blinded by the glare of urban glow. In 1958 Flagstaff, Arizona - more than 2,100 metres (nearly 8,000 feet) above sea level - became the first city to curb nighttime lighting, mainly to shield a major observatory.

Photo shows how low sea ice levels were in the Arctic this winter, alarming climate scientists. During the winter, Arctic sea ice grew to 5.57 million square miles at its peak, but that’s the smallest amount of winter sea ice in 38 years of record keeping, beating the record set in 2015 and tied last year. — AP

ANOTHER REASON TO FLIP THE OFF SWITCH: LIGHT POLLUTION

WASHINGTON: The frigid top of the Earth just set yet another record for low levels of sea ice in what scientists say is a signal of an overheating world. The extent of floating ice in the Arctic hit a new low for winter: 5.57 million square miles (14.42 million square kilometers). That’s about 35,000 square miles (97,000 square kilometers) - an area about the size of Maine - below 2015’s record. Last year had a shade more than 2015, but nearly a tied record.

This puts the Arctic in a “deep hole” as the crucial spring and summer melt season starts and more regions will likely be ice-free, said Mark Serreze, director of the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Colorado, which released the findings Wednesday. “It’s a key part of the Earth’s climate system and we’re losing it,” he said. “We’re losing the ice in all seasons now.”

At the other end of the world, Antarctica, where sea ice reaches its lowest point of the year in March, also hit a record low mark. Antarctic sea ice varies widely unlike Arctic sea ice, which has steadily dropped since the start of satellite measurements. That gives researchers a window to project how wide sea ice extends based on satellite imagery. It’s harder to measure the thickness and overall volume, but data from the University of Washington showed that as of late last month ice volume levels were down 42 percent from 1979, said polar science center chief Axel Schweiger.

Several scientists called the sea ice loss disturbing. “It’s evident that the climate at the top of the world continues to change faster than anywhere else on Earth with impacts to us that are still frankly unknown,” Pennsylvania State University meteorology professor and retired admiral David W Titley, said in an email. Scientists blame a combination of natural random weather and man-made global warming from the burning of coal, oil and gas. The winter of 2016-2017 was unusually cold and the Arctic saw three “extreme heat waves,” Serreze said.

A new study earlier this month in the journal Nature Climate Change found that natural causes can explain between 30 and 50 percent of plunging September sea ice lows, while Serezee and others give climate change an even bigger role in sea ice loss. A relatively new idea - that still divides meteorologists - links the shrinking ice cap at the North Pole to a weaker polar vortex and weak and ambivalent jet stream, which can mean more extreme weather for a good part of the rest of the world. “Recent cold spells and big snowstorms that we have experienced over the past few winters have occurred when the polar vortex is weak,” top winter weather forecaster Judah Cohen, of the private Atmospheric Environmental Research in Lexington, Massachusetts, said in an email. It’s not just the weather. As more regions become free of ice, shipping lanes will open in the Arctic, there will be more drilling for oil and gas and more overall economic activity. And that may mean rising tensions between countries over newly available resources, Serreze said. — AP
PAINFUL CHOICES AWAITS IF OBAMACARE GOES

ROGERSVILLE: Maribeth Coote says she hates Obamacare, but it's the only health coverage option she can afford in this remote, hardscrabble corner of southwestern Pennsylvania. The government should "just back off and let me figure it out, and get out of the whole industry" of health care, the 52-year-old Chicago transplant to the tiny town of Rogersville said as she cleaned up her woodworkshed from recent flooding. Donna Himelrick is uninsured and priced out of the market, despite being the mayor of Hundred, a small town 20 miles south in neighboring West Virginia.

"I make too much for Medicaid and not enough that we can afford insurance. It's a difficult situation," Himelrick, 62, said at a clinic in nearby Burton, where she pays for medical treatment in cash, according to what she can afford. Like millions in Appalachia, both women voted for Donald Trump in last November's election seeking to upend the political system. The Affordable Care Act, they insist, is not the answer to their health woes. But both would face dramatic changes to their health care — probably for the worse, at least at first-if Obamacare is replaced by the plan being hashed out by Republican lawmakers in Washington, a cultural and political world away.

Local clinics are a lifeline for many in this economically stagnant, overwhelmingly white region. Ambulance coverage is spotty, and rough roads with rougher weather can leave rural communities even more isolated in emergencies. Now that Trump is president, the reforms installed by his predecessor Barack Obama are under threat, potentially whipsawing a Republican law appearing likely to hurt health centers' ability to care for the very people who voted the president into office. "I see reminders of better days. In Trump country, we're dealing with these health trenches, we're dealing with these health issues that are real," Cornerstone Care chief executive Richard Rinehart said. "We're in the trenches, we're dealing with these health issues that are real."

Cornerstone operates another clinic in the larger town of Waynesburg, where coal silos, conveyors and green buildings of the shuttered Emerald Mine stand as ghostly reminders of better days. In Trump country, many health workers are aware of the irony of a Republican law appearing likely to hurt health centers' ability to care for the very people who voted the president into office. "I see it very personally," Morris said. "Many of our staff people are Trump supporters." But health outcomes of Americans are "at risk" because of the Republican plan, he added. —AFP

Safety nets

The Cornerstone Care CHC in Rogersville, which treats Coote, and several other facilities serve an area where coal mines have recently closed, pushing up unemployment, and where health facilities can be 20 miles or more apart. "We are the safety net for this community," Janice Morris, chief executive of the Clay-Battelle CHC in Blacksville, West Virginia, said in an interview. Under Obamacare, several states have expanded Medicaid, the federal health program for the poor and disabled, to include residents whose income is at or below 138 percent of the poverty level. But with some 670,000 people in Pennsylvania and 175,000 in West Virginia eligible for Medicaid through the expansion, a rollback of the program as proposed in the Republican plan would "have a terrible impact there," Senator Bob Casey, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, told AFP back in Washington. At Clay-Battelle clinic, nearly half of the patients are either on Medicaid or Medicare, the coverage program for the elderly.

Many of the clinic's 300 to 400 weekly patients pay on a scale according to their financial ability—a system known as "the slide." The clinic covers the slack through Medicaid and commercial insurance reimbursements, federal and state funding, and grants. Obamacare has helped Clay-Battelle and Cornerstone lower the rate of uninsured who get treatment there. The result—increasing increase in reimbursements have translated into expanding staff and hours of operation. That could crumble if Obamacare disappears. "A lot of people don't recognize that the health coverage they have was made possible through the Affordable Care Act," Morris said.

Getting whipsawed

Don Humbertson, 64, says he owes his life to Clay-Battelle doctors who discovered he had lung cancer. The retired concrete worker is insured through his wife's bus-driver job, but he has grown to appreciate how Obamacare has given those in need a chance. "Obamacare when it first came out, I was totally against it," said Humbertson, who has had difficulty breathing and speaking since part of his right lung was removed. "But I've seen how it was helping some people." Instead of pulling it out by its roots, he said, Republicans and Democrats should come together and fix the current law. That is not what's happening. Republican leaders are keen to keep popular provisions that bar companies from refusing to insure people because of pre-existing conditions.

But in a bid to provide more free-market choice and competition, they want to slash the amount of subsidies that would be provided for Americans to buy health care, potentially putting insurance out of reach for millions. The bill is hanging by a thread, with the House of Representatives likely to vote on the measure. "We feel like we're just getting whipsawed around," Cornerstone Care chief executive Richard Rinehart said. "We're in the trenches, we're dealing with these health issues that are real."
### Arrivals

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**Total Flights:** 161

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**Total Flights:** 161
SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Shakespeare: Macbeth

Find and circle all of the words relating to Macbeth that are hidden in the grid.

Note: MACBETH and LADY MACBETH are hidden separately and do not interlock.

ACROSS
1. Any maneuver made as part of progress toward a goal.
2. The basic unit of money in Western Samoa.
3. A blind god.
4. A planet (usually Venus) seen at sunset in the western sky.
5. Any of various plants of the genus Althaea.
6. Filled with terms for a mother.
7. (physics and chemistry) A smallest component of an element having the chemical properties of the element.
8. Have confidence or faith in.
9. A step in walking or running.
10. Being one more than two.
11. An accessory or adjoining anatomical parts or appendages (especially of the embryo).
12. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
13. Kamarupan languages spoken in northeastern India and western Burma.
14. A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
15. An adherent of any branch of Taoism.
16. A Scotch added after or under your signature (originally to protect against forgery).
17. Any of several small ungulate mammals of Africa and Asia with rodent-like incisors and feet with clawless toes.
18. First in order of birth.
19. Made of earth (or baked clay).
20. A naturally occurring glyceride of oleic acid that is found in fats and oils.
21. An accessory or adjoining anatomical parts or appendages (especially of the embryo).
22. A flourish added after or under your signature (originally to protect against forgery).
23. Type genus of the family Myacidae.
24. Moth having nonfunctional mouthparts as adults.
25. Having the deep slightly brownish color of gold.
26. Being or occurring in fact or actuality.
28. The 11 southern states that seceded from the United States in 1861.
29. Large herbivorous tropical American arboreal lizards with a spiny crest along the back.
30. Being or occurring in fact or actuality.
31. A king of the Myrmidons and father of Achilles.
32. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
33. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
34. United States liquid unit equal to 4 quarts or 3.785 liters.
35. 80. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
36. Encircle or bind.
37. The dialect of Sotho spoken by the Tswana people in Botswana.
38. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
39. Affectedly dainty or refined.
40. A very large person.
41. A purgative made from the leaves of salsify.
42. A native of ancient Troy.
43. Marked by or showing unaffected simplicity and lack of guile or worldly experience.
44. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
45. A colorless odorless gaseous element that gives a red glow in a vacuum tube.
46. A language spoken by the Atakapa people of the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
47. A Native American who lived in what is now southern Colorado and Utah and experienced that is taken as true by many people.
48. A facial expression characterized by turning up the corners of the mouth.
49. A United States liquid unit equal to 8 fluid ounces.
50. A unit of heat equal to the amount of heat required to raise one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit at one atmosphere pressure.
51. German engineer and automobile manufacturer who produced the first high-speed internal combustion engine (1834-1900).
52. A radioactive transuranic element produced by bombarding plutonium with neutrons.
53. A woman's dress style that imitates the caftan cloaks worn by men in the Near East.
54. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
56. A piece of land cleared of trees and usually enclosed.
57. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
58. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
60. A nurse who has enough training to be licensed by a state to provide routine care for the sick.
61. A folded part (as a fold of skin or muscle).
63. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
64. A language spoken by the Atakapa people of the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
65. Bearing or marked with a label or tag.
66. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
67. A language spoken by the Atakapa people of the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
68. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
69. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
70. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience taken as true by many people.
71. Genus of widely distributed agarics that have white spores and are poisonous with few exceptions.
72. A jaunty rhythm in music.
73. Game in which matchsticks are arranged in rows and players alternately remove one or more of them.
74. Airy cherry-like sweetly scented white flowers with lilac-like leaves.
75. An adherent of any branch of Taoism.
76. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
77. Characteristic of a mob.
78. The basic unit of money in China.
79. Genus of beetles whose grubs feed mainly on roots of plants.
80. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.

DOWN
1. A hormone produced by the anterior pituitary gland.
2. The character flaw or error of a tragic hero that leads to his downfall.
3. (prefix) Opposite or opposing or neutralizing.
4. A planet (usually Venus) seen at sunset in the western sky.
5. Any of various plants of the genus Althaea.
6. Informal terms for a mother.
7. (physics and chemistry) The smallest component of an element having the chemical properties of the element.
8. Have confidence or faith in.
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18. First in order of birth.
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**SQUASH**

David eager to follow in Billie Jean’s footsteps

**SPORTS**

Top 14 aims to put sparkle back into French club rugby

**CRUSADERS BEAT FORCE 45-17 IN SUPER RUGBY**

Grenoble, who sit in 13th place three points ahead of rock-bottom Bayonne and 11 behind Stade Francais, responded to their off-field crises with an impressive last-gasp draw with Toulon last weekend. — AFP

**SQUEEZE**

**CRUSADERS BEAT FORCE 45-17 IN SUPER RUGBY**

**CHRISTCHURCH:** The Crusnick, New Zealand-based Crusaders maintained their unbeaten start to the Super Rugby season when they beat the Perth-based Western Force 45-17 yesterday to open the tournament’s fifth round. In contrast to their last three matches in which they came from behind to win — after trailing by 18, 21 and 19 points respectively — the Crusaders led throughout Friday’s match to win by seven tries to two.

But after leading 28-17 at halftime, the Crusaders struggled to drive home their advantage in the second half and their winning margin was only inflated by two tries in the last 10 minutes.

The Force, who have been competitive but have won only one of their first four matches, put pressure on the Crusaders, especially at scrums n the early part of the second half. But they were unable to capitalize on a period of intense pressure early in the second spell and the Crusaders were able to re-establish control and post a convincing victory.

Rain late in the match made ball-handling difficult and the game lost most of its structure after halftime.

“We can’t make the weather an excuse,” Crusaders captain Sam Whitelock said. “We’ve got to trust our ball skills and make better decisions. They came out and really tested us.”

The Crusaders took the lead in the match after only five minutes with a try to former Wallabies winger Digby Ioane, converted by flyhalf Mitchell Hunt. After a penalty by Jono Lance for a tackling error, the Force struggled to get back into the game and were outplayed by a dominant Crusaders side.

**DUBLIN:** This file photo taken on February 24 shows England’s forwards failing to claim the ball from a line-out during the 6 Nations Rugby union game between Ireland and England at Croke Park stadium, Dublin. — AFP

**PARIS:** A botched Parisian club merger, a strike, rape allegations against three Grenoble players and the federation at apparent war with Top 14 officials. It is fair to say that it has not been the best couple of weeks for French club rugby. Fans and players will attempt to put all that aside for the next round of matches this weekend with particular interest in key games for Racing 92 and Stade Francais. A mooted merger between the two clubs, winners of the last two Top 14 titles, was promptly booed into touch. Their owners were forced into a swift backtrack after a deluge of criticism from players, fans, rugby officials and even the Paris city administration.

The proposed merger saw the body running professional rugby in France, the LNR, postpone both Racing and Stade Francais’ matches last week, against Montpellier and Castres. It was a decision that will not do much to condemn a scheduling nightmare with just five weekends of the regular season remaining before play-offs start on May 20, and European action filling in the rest.

The French Rugby Federation (FFR), now headed by former France coach Bernard Laporte, waded into the row on Wednesday by symbolic cancellation of the LNR decision.

Despite the action highlighted wider rifts between the LNR and FFR over federal contracts — 11 of the Top 14 clubs have come out against Laporte’s proposal to have a 40-player core on central contracts to try to improve the French national team’s performance. As it is, Racing and Stade have two mouthwatering games awaiting them, against Clermont (in Lille) and Toulon respectively. “We’re not going to hide it, it’s been tough, complicated for everyone,” said Racing’s Argentine lock Manuel Cariza. “But we know how to separate the paddock from all the off-the-field stuff. Even last week we trained really well. That’s great because it shows that even if we haven’t had an outstanding season thus far, there remains a strong bond between the squad, like last season.”
HAMILTON FASTEST IN FIRST PRACTICE SESSIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN GP

AUSTIN: World number one Dustin Johnson continued his perfect record at the WGC-Mexico Championship, winning his opening match play round 10-9 on Thursday while number two Rory McIlroy was eliminated without even setting foot on the course.

Johnson stays perfect, McIlroy eliminated

AUSTIN: World number one Dustin Johnson continued his perfect record at the WGC-Mexico Championship, winning his opening match play round 10-9 on Thursday while number two Rory McIlroy was eliminated without even setting foot on the course.

Some view the Match Play as their chance to change the narrative and avoid results from prior major tournaments, but Johnson simply doesn’t see it that way.

“I think the AT&T is almost everything, that’s all there is,” Johnson told Golf Channel. “It’s not like you can take anything from the past and carry it forward. I come in here and it’s a new week, and I’m just trying to win.”

Johnson had eight birdies and no bogeys in his round, which knew he was going to be the standout of the day.

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SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

KIB CONCLUDES SPONSORSHIP OF 8TH KUWAIT OPEN TENNIS TOURNAMENT

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently concluded its sponsorship of the 8th Kuwait Open Tennis Tournament, which took place under the patronage of the President of the Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The tournament kicked off on March 2nd and took place at Al-Yarmouk Sports Club and the Kuwait Tennis Federation (KTF) courts, featuring around 500 participants of all ages.

The tournament was the largest organized by KTF throughout the entire season, as it included 302 matches overall. The closing game was attended by various sponsors, KTF members, parents of the players, as well as a huge audience of local sports fans. During the closing ceremony, over 50 players from all age groups and winners of the tournament were recognized for their sportsmanship and performance throughout the tournament.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Nawaf Naja, Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, stated: “The Bank pays special attention to promoting Kuwaiti excellence and success in all fields, and, for that reason, actively seeks to support community-based sports initiatives and activities. We are proud to sponsor this tournament, as it reflects our ongoing belief in the importance of sports and our role in encouraging regular exercise among people to achieve a healthy lifestyle, enhancing both physical and mental well-being.”

Naja also congratulated international tennis player, Mohammad Al-Ghareeb, who was honored during the closing ceremony for his outstanding athletic performance. He lauded Al-Ghareeb’s sportsmanship in boosting Kuwait’s standing internationally and successfully representing Kuwait in Davis Cup, The World Cup of Tennis, over the course of 20 years; his performance successfully placing Kuwait amongst international rankings.

KIB considers sports a cornerstone of its social responsibility program and so, the Bank is keen on providing its full support to athletes and local talents within various different sports. The Bank continues to be an adamant supporter of local athletes who have acted as a true inspiration to the community, as well as those who have played a role in strengthening Kuwait’s standing, within the region and internationally.

TENNIS

TOMIC PULLS OUT AT MIAMI WITH INJURY

MIAMI: Bernard Tomic’s woes continued Thursday as he pulled out of the Miami Open due to a back injury, the latest setback in a disappointing year for the Australian.

Ranked 17th in the world as recently as November, Tomic has tumbled down the rankings to 44th. Since a third-round Australian Open exit, the 24-year-old has lost four first-round matches to lowly ranked opponents. The most recent came at Indian Wells, where he was beaten by 112th-ranked Bjorn Fratangelo of the United States. At Acapulco in February, Tomic retired from his opening match citing “unbearable heat” and the fact that he withdrew from four ATP matches last year has led to some questioning of his attitude.

Tomic was due to face Kazakh qualifier Mikhail Kukushkin at Crandon Park on Thursday but pulled out shortly before the contest was due to begin. Lucky loser Mikhail Youzhny of Russia took Tomic’s place in the first-round contest, but was ousted 6-4, 6-1.

US teen Frances Tiafoe downed Russia’s Konstantin Kravchuk 7-5, 7-7, 6-1 to book a second-round match against 18-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer. It will be the 19-year-old American’s first match against a top-10 foe. “The guy has about a million Grand Slams and done everything. I can’t tell you how excited I am to play,” Tiafoe said. “Seeing the draw was partly probably why I put up a set and 4-1. I started rushing and thinking, ‘Oh my god, I’m going to play Roger.’” He’s my idol, everyone’s idol.” World number 41 Marcel Granollers of Spain fell 7-6 (8/6), 4-6, 6-3 to promising 62nd-ranked Croatian Borna Coric in a testing two hours, 51 minutes contest.

Coric tired towards the end and offered some openings to Granollers while missing three match points but was able to recover well to hold on and set up a meeting with sixth seed Dominic Thiem of Austria. Russian 19-year-old Andrey Rublev made short work of world number 46 Florian Mayer of Germany, winning 6-1, 6-1 in just 44 minutes. Rublev will now face a tough challenge against 2010 Miami finalist and 10th seed Tomas Berdych. — AFP
NEW YORK: The NHL may be nearing a dead-
line to decide whether to allow the world’s best
hockey players to participate in the Winter
Olympics next year in South Korea.

"I hope we can find a compromise in the
next two or three weeks," international ice
hockey Federation President Rene Fasel told
The Associated Press on Thursday in a tele-
phone interview from Russia. "We need to
know by the end of April if they're coming, or
not." Fasel said leaders of national teams,
including those in Canada and Russia, have
recently told him they need to know next
month if it is time for them to assemble their
Plan B rosters. The IIHF is the game’s interna-
tional governing body and runs hockey tour-
naments, including those at the Olympics.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman has
made it clear league owners don’t want to
stop their season for three weeks again and
put their stars at risk of injury without what
they consider a tangible return. The reлу-
cence has come up in the past and yet the
NHL has participated in every Winter
Olympics since 1998. Four years ago, the dis-
cussions weren’t settled until midsummer
2013 ahead of the Sochi Games.

This time, however, there seems to be
an impasse. After the International Olympic
Committee indicated it did not want to cover
costs for travel and insurance expenses to get
NHL players to South Korea as it did in the
past, including about $14 million for the 2014
Olympics, the IIHF came up with the $10 mil-
lion necessary to do it. That, however, does
not appear to be enough to appease the NHL.

"The league seems to want more, including
the rights to put Olympic highlights on its TV
network, website and social media platforms.

"In the absence of any material change to
the current status quo, NHL players will not
be participating in the 2018 Winter Olympics,"
NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly wrote in
an email to AP. Don Fehr, the head of the NHL
Players’ Association, said all players in the
league want to participate. He believes the
NHL should choose to take advantage of the
chance to market the game in Asia, which will
host the next two Winter Olympics.

"Playing in an Olympic games is funda-
mentally different than playing in other tour-
naments, other hockey events, because it’s an
opportunity to play for your country on a
global stage with fans watching who never
otherwise watch hockey games,” Fehr said.

"There’s a patriotic element, too, which play-
ers feel and feel very strongly and it’s some-
thing we should applaud and be proud of for
them. And to take that opportunity away
would be most, most unfortunate.” The NHL
has acknowledged it isn’t excited about the
prospects of marketing the sport in South
Korea, but it is very interested in being part of
the 2022 Olympics in China.

Fasel suggested that might not be an
option. "If they don’t go to Korea, it will be
very difficult to take advantage of the IOC’s
offer," Fasel said. "The IOC will be in a different position and it
would be a totally different deal on the table for the
NHL. They might be able to get something other than to
win if they don’t come to Pyeongchang. If they
don’t come, they will isolate themselves. The
fans will be left in the cold and it will not be
happy and then I would say, ‘Good luck with
negotiations to go to China.’" Even if
the NHL doesn’t set up next season’s schedule
with an Olympic break, Washington Capitals
and Russian superstar Alex Ovechkin has vowed to go to
the 2018 Olympics and he may not be the only one
to test the league’s stance. — AP

WASHINGTON: Lukas Sedlak #45 of the Columbus Blue Jackets checks Marcus Johannsson #90 of the Washington Capitals during the second period on Thursday in Washington, DC. — AFP

SENATORS 2, PENGUINS 1
Kyle Turris and Bobby Ryan scored in the
shootout to lift the Ottawa Senators over the
Pittsburgh Penguins. Mike Hoffman scored in
regulation for the Senators and Mike Condon
finished with 34 saves, including two incredi-
bly difficult stops in the third period to
keep the Penguins at bay for the second
time in their last eight games (3-0-5).

"You can’t be a little bit tired and have a
win in your last two or three games and you
come out like this," Hoffman said.

WASHINGTON: T.J. Oshie scored the
shootout winner as the Washington Capitals
overcame a stellar performance from
Braden Holtby to beat the Blue Jackets 2-1 in the NHL on
Thursday night. Despite 44 saves from
Bobrovsky, the Capitals reached 104 points and
extended their lead atop the Metropolitan Division and NHL standings.

Oshie and Evgeny Kuznetsov had goals for Washington, while
Braden Holtby made 29 saves and ended the Capitals’ four-game
goine. Nick Bonino had the goal in reg-
ulation for the Penguins and Matt Murray
stopped 29 shots. After being outplayed for
much of the first two periods, the Senators
were much better in the third and tied the
tied the score 1-1 on the power play at 9:43 as
Oshie beat Bobrovsky over the shoulder
14 seconds after Matt Cullen was penalized for
holding.

HURRICANES 4, CANADIENS 1
Lee Stempniak scored twice and the
Carolina Hurricanes defeated the Montreal
Canadiens to extend their point streak to nine
games and keep their playoff hopes alive. Elias Lindholm and Jeff Skinner also
scored for the Hurricanes, while Eddie Lack stopped 21
shots. Carolina, undefeated in regulation time
in nine straight games (6-0-3), is five points out
of the final wildcard spot in the Eastern
Conference with 10 regular-season games
left. Alex Galchenyuk scored the lone goal for
Montreal. Carey Price stopped 19 of 22
shots.

FLYERS 3, WILD 1
Matt Read scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period as Philadelphia stopped
24 shots as the Philadelphia Flyers beat
the Minnesota Wild. Sean Couturier and Jakub
Voracek also scored for the Flyers, who won
for the fourth time in their last eight games (3-
5-0). Zach Parise scored for Minnesota and
devout Dubnyk stopped 24 shots for the Wild,
who have lost six of their last seven.

BLACKHAWKS 3, STARS 2, SO
Patrick Kane scored the game-winning
goal in overtime as Chicago Blackhawk beat the
Dallas Stars to open an eight-point lead to
lead for first place in the Central Division. Artemi
Panarin also scored in the shootout as Chicago
rode a 4-2 save effort by Corey Crawford
through overtime to improve to 6-0-1 in
its last seven. It was also the Blackhawks’ 18th
win in their last 22 games. Marian Hossa
scored his 24th goal of the season midway
through the third period. Crawford was beat-
en only by Tyler Seguin in the shootout and
scored twice in regulation by Alex Hemsky as
he rebounded from giving up four goals on four
shots to Vancouver on Tuesday night.

OILERS 7, AVALANCHE 4
Drake Caggiula and Jordan Eberle scored
three times each as Edmonton beat Colorado
1-7-3. The third period was the third
period as the Edmonton Oilers rallied to beat the
Colorado Avalanche. Eberle scored twice in
Edmonton’s five-goal third period and also
added an assist. Zack Kassian and Leon
Draisaitl also scored in the rally that moved
Edmonton into a tie with Anaheim for second
in the Pacific Division with 89 points. Andrej
Sejka had a goal and two assists, Milan Lucic
also scored and Laurent Brossoit had five
saves in relief of Cam Talbot to lead Edmonton to the win. Mikko Rantanen
had two goals, J.T. Compher and Rene Bourque
had a goal each and Nathan MacKinnon
finished with two assists for Colorado.

KINGS 5, JETS 2
Drew Doughty, Marian Gaborik and Anze
Kopitar each scored a power-play goal as the
Los Angeles Kings beat Winnipeg past the
Flames and keep their playoff hopes alive with a win over the Winnipeg Jets.

Ben Bishop made 19 saves and Tanner
Pearson scored the winning goal in overtime
as the Los Angeles Kings fell to the Kings
who trail Nashville for the second wild
card in the Western Conference by eight
points with nine games to play. Gaborik put
the Kings ahead 2:01 into the third period
and Doughty doubled the lead 1:56 later as
Los Angeles emphatically broke out of a 1-for-
13 slump with the man advantage. —AP

NHL asked for decision on Olympics by end of April
India’s Kohli in doubt for Australia showdown

DHARMSALA: Injured Indian skipper Virat Kohli said yesterday he would play the fourth Test against Australia only if he was 100 percent fit, keeping up the suspense over his participation in the series decider.

Kohli, who injured his shoulder during the drawn third Test in Ranchi, said he would undergo fitness tests before taking a final call on whether to take the field in the fourth and final Test which begins Saturday.

“Obviously if I am 100 percent fit for the game (that) is the only condition on which I will take the field,” Kohli, 28, said at the pre-match press conference in Dharmsala.

“The physio can explain better (the risks of playing despite carrying an injury). I don’t know the magnitude of the risk but all I know is the fitness tests, if I go through them I will take the field.”

On Thursday the Indian team management rushed in uncapped batsman Shreyas Iyer as a cover for Kohli, who has led India to victory in nine of their last 12 Tests at home.

Kohli has had a disappointing series against Australia, managing just 46 runs in the first three Tests of a series between the world’s top two sides which is tantalisingly poised at 1-1 as it reaches its climax.

Kohli, who batted in the nets Friday, said the full extent of an injury could only be known in match conditions and that he would strictly follow the advice of the physiotherapist.

“As and probably we will take a call on it later tonight or tomorrow (Saturday) so I think we will have to give that much time more for me to make that call with the physiotherapist.”

RAHANE MORE CHILLED OUT

Rival captain Steve Smith said Kohli would still be in very good hands if Kohli was forced out of action, with Ajinkya Rahane having proved his credentials as a stand-in during the Ranchi Test.

Rahane was off the field during most of Australia’s first innings in Ranchi but he did come out to bat at his usual number four position and took the field during Australia’s second innings.

“He (Rahane) is probably a bit more chilled out on the field, probably not as emotional but I think he understands the game really well,” said Smith. “I have been fortunate enough to play a fair bit of cricket with Ajinkya and I think he reads and understands the game really well.”

Smith and Kohli have been at loggerheads since the Indian skipper accused his opposite number of systematically abusing the Decision Review System (DRS) during the second Test in Bangalore. Kohli, who has been compared in the Australian press to US President Donald Trump, has especially come under scrutiny both over his form and his conduct under pressure.

Smith however sought to put the controversies on the back burner, saying the team was focused on playing good cricket over the next five days.

“As I said, it’s an exciting time for this team. For me it’s not about worrying about the end or the result,” said Smith, as Australia chase their first Test series win in India in 13 years.

“It’s about focusing on our process and making sure we do those really well. If we can do again and do it for a little bit longer than we did in Ranchi or Bangalore, then hopefully the result will take care of itself.” — AFP

India’s Manohar to stay on as ICC chairman

DHARMSALA: India’s Shashank Manohar has deferred his resignation as the chairman of the International Cricket Council to see through a reformation of the ICC, the game’s world governing body said yesterday.

Manohar quit earlier this month in the middle of an overhaul of the ICC’s governance designed to reduce the power of cricket’s most powerful nations - India, Australia and England. He agreed to withdraw his resignation temporarily after the ICC board asked him to see through the restructuring.

“In a significant show of support for Manohar the board asked him to withdraw his resignation or at the very least defer it until the ongoing process relating to governance and financial restructuring are completed,” the ICC said in a statement. Manohar ended his two-year stint as ICC chairman just eight months into the job after the divisions between the powerful Indian board and most of the rest of the game erupted into the open.

India had last month voted against a proposed shake-up of the ICC, fearing a curb of its earnings and clout as a result of the changes to the organisation’s financial and governance structure.

Manohar, 59, had committed as early as two weeks ago, including a 186-run humiliation at Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

However, a cloud hangs-over the visitors in the aftermath of a corruption scandal that emerged during last month’s Pakistan Super League with five players, including regular internationals Shoaib Malik and Mohammad Hafeez, or newcomers like Shadab Khan and Fakhar Zaman to stake their claims to regular international duty.

Sunday’s match is the first of four-a rarity in bilateral T20 international series with the remaining three at the Queen’s Park Oval in Trinidad at the end of the week.

Yet for all the excitement and hype generated by cricket’s most abbreviated and lucrative format, it is fair to suggest that both teams will have a greater level of focus and intensity in the three-match One-Day International series that follows in Guyana, especially with the West Indies desperate to stay in the hunt for an automatic qualifying spot for the World Cup via the qualifying tournament in June’s Champions Trophy in England, and improve to advance automatically to the World Cup.

HUMILIATION

Trounced 3-0 in their own backyard by the English just two weeks ago, including a 186-run humiliation at Kensington Oval in the final match, the two-time former World Cup winners continue to languish in ninth spot in the rankings on 84 points, five behind the Pakistanis, who will want to ensure they maintain that eighth spot and even improve to advance automatically to the World Cup.

Pakistan have already pipped the West Indies for the last available spot at June’s Champions Trophy in England, and although the Caribbean side will still have the chance to get one of the available spot at June’s Champions Trophy in England, and improve to advance automatically to the World Cup.

Australia chase their first Test series win in India in 13 years. “It’s about focusing on our process and making sure we do those really well. If we can do again and do it for a little bit longer than we did in Ranchi or Bangalore, then hopefully the result will take care of itself.” — AFP

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“And probably we will take a call on it later tonight or tomorrow (Saturday) so I think we will have to give that much time more for me to make that call with the physiotherapist.”

West Indies look to revive fortunes against Pakistan

BRIDGETOWN: World champions West Indies will be seeking to erase the recent memory of a pitiful showing in the United Arab Emirates when they commence a T20 international series against Pakistan at Kensington Oval in Barbados tomorrow. With their strike-tom squad obliterated in all three matches at the start of the campaign in the UAE last September, Carlos Brathwaite’s team has the opportunity to make an immediate statement on home soil against a Pakistan side that has also been inactive as a national unit since those comprehensive triumphs in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

However, a cloud hangs over the visitors in the aftermath of a corruption scandal that emerged during last month’s Pakistan Super League with five players, including regular internationals Shoaib Malik and Mohammad Hafeez, or newcomers like Shadab Khan and Fakhar Zaman to stake their claims to regular international duty.

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BARNES’ LATE BASKET STEAL PUT MAVS PAST CLIPPERS

DALLAS: Mavericks forward Harrison Barnes buried the go-ahead jumper and made a big steal with 0.9 seconds to go, but guard J.J. Redick’s leaning three-point attempt just missed off the back iron.

RAPTORS 101, HEAT 84
DeMar DeRozan scored 40 points, and the Raptors rallied from an early 15-point deficit to defeat the Heat. DeRozan shot 14-of-25 from the field and made 12 of 13 free throws as Toronto won its fourth straight. In one first-quarter stretch, DeRozan scored 14 consecutive points for a Raptors lineup still without starting point guard Kyle Lowry, who remains sidelined because of an injury to his right wrist. Miami got 16 points and 14 rebounds from Hassan Whiteside.

TRAIL BLAZERS 110, KNICKS 95
DeMar DeRozan and CJ McCollum combined for 50 points as Portland swept past New York at Moda Center. Lillard scored 30 points and McCollum added 20 for the Trail Blazers, who won for the ninth time in 12 outings. Jusuf Nurkic contributed 16 points and 10 rebounds for Portland. Kristaps Porzingis scored 18 points and Courtney Lee chipped in 16 for the Knicks, who have lost seven of their last eight contests. — Reuters

STOCKHOLM: Sweden stalwart Sebastian Larsson may have missed the autumn internationals due to a knee operation but there is no end in sight for the 31-year-old who is back in the squad aiming to increase his haul of 87 caps. With his contract at English Premier League club Sunderland set to run out in June, and a top flight club having relocated to his Swedish home town of Eskilstuna, talk has been rife that Larsson was set to either move home or quit the game entirely. However, the midfielder has no plans to end his career and is set to continue playing for the foreseeable future.

"Honestly, I don’t see the end of my career any time soon and I hope to play on for another few years," he told Reuters following a training session in the Swedish capital ahead of the World Cup qualifier against Belarus today.

“I feel motivated and hungry, but where that will be I have to wait and see. I’m not too stressed about it.

“You’ve got to keep your options open. I’ve loved England throughout my career. The Premier League has been great for me. Obviously, I wouldn’t be here playing in England, but you have to keep your options open. “I’ll have a look in the summer, see what’s available and make a decision from there.”

Larsson was his usual industrious self at Euro 2016, appearing in all three group games, but could not prevent Sweden finishing bottom of the section with one point.

But unlike other senior squad members, such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Kim Kallstrom and Andreas Isaksson, he chose not to hang up his international boots after Sweden’s early exit.

With coach Erik Hamren having been replaced by Jan Andersson, Larsson is adapting to a new way of working but he won’t be quiting the national team any time soon.

“I haven’t been here long enough to notice any changes yet, as the days go by I’m sure there will be,” he said. “Club manager has his own way of doing things, so I’ll just have to try to pick it up as I go along.”

FATHER FIGURE
He returns to a team who are third in the league following a 2-1 win over Galatasaray on Tuesday, with coach Hamren having been replaced by Jan Andersson.

Larsson is the third-oldest player in the squad and smiles at the suggestion he is a father figure for the younger players. “I don’t see myself as the granddad just yet, so we’ll have to see how we go. Obviously, I’ve got a lot of experience and I have to use that to help the younger lads when that is needed.”

Having spent the best part of six years at Sunderland, who are again involved in a relegation battle, the international break provides Larsson with a chance to get away from the pressure of their struggle at the bottom of the table. — Reuters

SWEDEN VETERAN LARSSON HAS NO PLANS TO RETIRE
DOHA: An angry Carlos Queiroz accused Qatar’s coaching staff of verbally abusing his mother following an explosive end to Iran’s 1-0 World Cup qualifier win in Doha on Thursday. The Portuguese coach said members of the Qatar bench made rude remarks in Spanish about his mother and accused his opponents of “a lack of ethics” throughout the match. “Two staff insulted me in Spanish, I can’t understand it,” he said. Asked to clarify, he said they had made offensive remarks about his mother. “People don’t have the right to spend the game insulting and offending other people,” said Queiroz. “I have never seen this in my life before,” said the former Real Madrid coach. He added: “One thing I am sure, the coaching staff is not at the level of the Qatar national team. “The Qatar national team deserves much better.”

He said Qatar’s antics were “embarrassing”. Queiroz also accused the opposite bench of trying to influence the referee throughout the game, which saw Iran take a giant step towards qualification for the World Cup in Russia next year while Qatar’s hopes virtually vanished. The two benches clashed at the end of the match, each other and Queiroz was booted from the pitch by home fans. That bad-tempered ending came after tensions had simmered between the coaching staff prior to the crucial 90 minutes.

Before the match, Qatar’s coach Jorge Fossati said he was upset by remarks attributed to Queiroz about the number of foreign-born players in the squad. The remarks were allegedly made when the teams met in Tehran last September when Iran secured 2-0 victory with goals in the 94th and 96th minutes. That match too ended with angry clashes after which Fossati and Queiroz were sent off. Queiroz however denied making the remarks. In response to the accusations of abuse, Fossati said he did not believe Queiroz and accused the Portuguese coach of being a “Hollywood artist”.

Talking about the remarks over naturalised players, he said Queiroz had accused the media of being “a hooligan”. “If he doesn’t take responsibility for what he said (about naturalised players), how can we believe what he says?” “Mr Queiroz is a good artist,” Fossati told reporters. He added that Queiroz had not raised the issue when the pair had met before the final whistle. “He is not the kind of man that I like,” added Fossati. — AFP

BARRANQUILLA: Real Madrid star James Rodriguez bundled in the rebound from a late penalty as Colombia defeated Bolivia 1-0 on Thursday to boost their 2018 World Cup qualification campaign. Rodriguez rammed home his finish at the second attempt after Bolivia goalkeeper Carlos Lampe had saved the playmaker’s spot kick on 83 minutes.

The goal gave Colombia a precious three points and moved them up into fourth spot in the South American standings, ahead of other matches being played Thursday, with 11 points from 13 games. Until Rodriguez’s late winner, it looked as if Bolivia had done enough to earn a point, defending in depth and frustrating the hosts at every turn.

The Colombians almost opened the scoring after eight minutes when Pablo Armero’s cross into the area was met by Sampdoria striker Luis Muriel, who clipped his left-foot shot just wide of the bar. Mateus Uribe rattled Bolivian nerves further after 17 minutes, shooting low after a deft layoff from MacNelly Torres only to see his effort parried and gathered by Lampe.

Colombia were forced into a reshuffle just after the half-hour mark when Muriel limped off with what looked like an injury to his right hamstring. Rodriguez almost opened the scoring on 34 minutes but Cristian Coimbra did just enough with his covering tackle to throw the Real Madrid star off balance and his shot went wide. Rodriguez almost created an opening for Juan Cuadrado on the stroke of halftime but his chip into the box was directed just wide by the Juventus winger.

Colombia cramped up the pressure in the second half and carved out a series of good chances in quick succession which began when Carlos Bacca’s header was turned around the post by Lampe in the 63rd minute.

Bolivia were reduced to 10 men when Coimbra’s tackle on a thumping header off the underside of the bar from the ensuing corner and Torres then sent a low shot from just outside the area skidding wide of the post. Bolivia continued to ride their luck and Coimbra was fortunate not to concede a penalty for handball as the minutes wound down. But Bolivia’s luck ran out when Coimbra brought down Cuadrado, allowing Rodriguez to score from the spot at the second attempt. —AFP

GENEVA: Swiss head coach Vladimir Petkovic, speaks to his players during a training session of Switzerland’s squad at the stade de Geneve stadium, in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday. Switzerland will play Latvia today, for a 2018 World Cup group B qualification soccer match. — AP

AS WORLD CUP 2018 HOPE FADES, EURO TURN TO NATIONS LEAGUE

GENEVA: For European teams fading out of the 2018 World Cup picture, a new opportunity opens if they lose their qualifying match this weekend. Euro 2020 is the Nations League. The complex format created by UEFA to replace most unloved national team friendlies kicks off in 18 months’ time. By tomorrow night, for teams with slim-to-none World Cup hopes, their next meaningful match with qualification at stake might be their Nations League debut. It offers a second-chance path to major tournaments - the 2020 European Championship for those which have not been in it in a generation, or ever. For teams failing to finish in the top two of a traditional Euro 2020 qualifying group, a subsequent playoff round will determine who progresses. It will also see at least one of UEFA’s lowest-ranked teams to the 24-team tournament. For fans of Norway and Scotland, Armenia and Kazakhstan, it’s almost time to learn to love the Nations League.

WHAT IS THE NATIONS LEAGUE?

A new competition for all 55 UEFA members with three parts. A group stage from November 2018; Final Four mini-tournament in June 2019 for high-ranked teams; playoffs in March 2020 to fill the last four Euro 2020 qualifying places. The group stage is the most important in Euro 2020 qualifying. League A has the 12 top-ranked teams playing in three-team groups. Group winners advance to the Final Four at a venue to be decided. That will also determine the Nations League champion.

WHAT HAPPENS TO EURO 2020 QUALIFYING?

It starts late in March 2019 and group-stage games are completed that year. The draw - with five groups of five teams and five six-team groups - is influenced by Nations League results. Teams set to play in the Final Four are placed in a five-team Euro 2020 qualifying group. With fewer matches, their schedule is clear for the June 2019 mini-tournament.

The top two teams in each group will fill 20 places at Euro 2020, being played in 13 different countries with no automatic entries for hosts. —AP
SAO PAULO: Brazil was not intimidated by more than 60,000 raucous fans at the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo, beating second-place Uruguay 4-1 in South America’s World Cup qualifying group to retain the lead in the standings after 13 matches. Midfielder Paulinho scored a surprising hat trick, with Barcelona star Neymar adding another, to keep their team firmly on course for football’s main event in Russia next year.

Brazil is still to lose a point under coach Tite, who took over in September and secured on Thursday his seventh straight win in the South American qualifiers. Now the five-time World Cup champions total 30 points, seven more than Uruguay and 10 above the lowest place that could guarantee a berth in the next World Cup. With five games to play, Brazil could qualify next Tuesday with victory over Paraguay if Ecuador and Chile fail to win their games.

ARGENTINA

Messi’s goal at 16 minutes gave Argentina a valuable victory, putting Edgardo Bauza’s side once again in the qualification zone. The Chileans complained about the penalty decision, but failed to take advantage of an unimaginative Argentine team that managed to get few opportunities to score at the Monumental de Nunez in Buenos Aires.

The result takes pressure off Argentina, a team whose players have refused to talk to the media because of criticism they have endured over recent games. Bauza had to speak some words, but they were not too encouraging for the team’s future. “What matters is that we won,” the coach said.—AP