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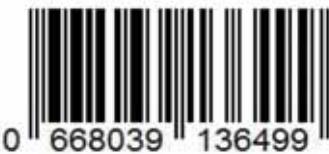
Vodafone Qatar set to deliver its growth plans faster: CEO

SPORT | Page 1

Rory roars to win after 18-month PGA drought



GULF TIMES



In brief

QATAR | Official

Emir congratulates Russian president

His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Emir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to Russian President Vladimir Putin on his victory in the presidential elections. **Page 19**

QATAR | Official

Emir gets message from Hungarian president

His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani received a written message from the President of Hungary, Janos Ader, pertaining to bilateral relations and ways to boost them. The message was received by HE the Foreign Minister's Secretary-General Dr Ahmed bin Hassan al-Hammadi during his meeting yesterday with the Hungarian ambassador to Qatar Fodor Barnabas.

BRITAIN | Politics

UK and EU agree Brexit transition deal

Britain and the European Union yesterday reached a landmark deal on a transition phase that will see London follow the bloc's rules for nearly two years after the Brexit divorce. Chief EU negotiator Michel Barnier and his British counterpart David Davis said the agreement, which European leaders will sign at a summit this week, was a "decisive step". The two sides also agreed on a "backstop" solution for the thorny issue of the future of the Irish border, just weeks after Prime Minister Theresa May said no British premier could ever accept such an idea. **Page 16**

ARAB WORLD | Conflict

Strike on Syria's Ghouta kills 15 children

An air strike on a school in Syria's Eastern Ghouta late yesterday killed 15 children and two women who were using its basement as a bomb shelter, a monitor said. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the bombing raid hit Arbin, a key town in a dwindling rebel-held pocket of Ghouta that has been under attack by government troops for over a month. **Page 12**

REGION | Diplomacy

Trump still wants summit of Gulf states

US President Donald Trump believes unity among Gulf states in the Middle East is critical and still wants to organise a meeting of Gulf leaders, a senior administration official said yesterday. Briefing reporters before Trump's meeting today with Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman, he said Trump had wanted Qatar and GCC members to settle their dispute on their own but is now more concerned about the long-term impact in the region.

AMERICA | Transport

Self-driving Uber car kills Arizona woman

An Uber self-driving car hit and killed a woman crossing the street in Arizona, police said yesterday, marking the first fatality caused by an autonomous vehicle and a potential blow to the technology expected to transform transportation. The ride services company said it was suspending North American tests of its self-driving vehicles. So-called robot cars, when fully developed by companies including Uber, Alphabet Inc and General Motors Co, are expected to drastically cut down on motor vehicle fatalities.



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), with the winners of Best Research and Best Innovation Awards. **PICTURE:** Aisha al-Musallam/HHOPL

Sheikha Moza honours QF ARC'18 award winners

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation attended the Qatar Foundation Annual Research Conference 2018 (ARC'18) and presented awards to the winners of 'Best Research Project' and 'Best Innovation Award' at Qatar National Convention Centre yesterday.

HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, Vice Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation; HE Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs; HE Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada, Minister of Energy and Industry, were among the distinguished guests present on the occasion.

Vivek Kundra, former chief information officer of the United States; Deborah Wince-Smith, president and CEO of the Council on Competitiveness; David Roberts, distinguished faculty, Singularity University and Prof Hasan Mandal, president, Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, were some of the international speakers at the event.

The conference is being held under the theme 'R&D: Focusing on Priorities, Delivering Impact'.

The ARC'18 'Best Research Project Award' went to Dr Talal Khader Talal of Hamad Medical Corporation and

Dr David Armstrong of the University of Southern California, in recognition of their collaborative project 'Tackling Diabetic Foot Ulcer'. The ARC'18 'Best Innovation Award' was won by Hamad bin Khalifa University's Qatar Computing Research Institute for their project 'The Advanced Transcription System (QATS); an Arabic language speech recognition technology.'

At the inaugural session, Sheikha Hind said: "The Annual Research Conference 2018 stems from Qatar Foundation's efforts to address major national challenges by contributing to the establishment of a diverse and sustainable economy, while providing effective and impactful solutions. We believe that research, technology, and development are among the most important elements of a competitive and diverse economy, and are therefore a key priority at Qatar Foundation, along with empowering and activating research innovations across Qatar."

Kundra, keynote speaker at the inaugural session of the conference, said: "Next-generation economies need to think internationally and systematically from day one, with a 20-year view, while attracting the best and brightest innovators and ensuring investments are focused. The wonderful thing is that, through technology, an idea can now reach global scale really quickly. Research and development succeeds where countries have been able to attract global talent not just

to build great research institutes, but to identify a path to commercialising their technology."

"There is no monopoly on thinking. You just have to be able to unleash your citizens' creative spirit, dreams, and aspirations to build your nation's next economy."

The two-day conference brings local and international perspectives to the pivotal issue of how Qatar's research and innovation efforts can address the nation's greatest challenges, and make a mark in the global marketplace. The opening day of ARC'18 was also attended by other dignitaries and 2,600 delegates from Qatar and around the world.

The seventh edition of ARC organised by Qatar Foundation Research and Development provides a platform for knowledge-sharing and multidisciplinary collaboration. The global gathering has introduced three new tracks, each centring on a pivotal element of Qatar's R&D ecosystem.

Day one of ARC'18 featured expert-led panel sessions and presentations of impactful research projects focused on the four thematic pillars defined in Qatar's National Research Strategy : Energy and Environment; Computing and Information Technology; Health and Biomedical; Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities.

ARC'18 concludes today with more panel discussions and paper presentations. **Pages 8, 9**

QP awards North Field expansion contract to Chiyoda

● The facilities will produce an additional 23mn tonnes per year of LNG, which will raise Qatar's production from 77mn tpy to 100mn tpy

strategic growth plan and objectives of becoming one of the best national oil and gas companies in the world.

We are continuing discussions with potential international joint venture partners for this strategic project to determine an optimised arrangement with the objective of delivering maximum value to the State of Qatar and contribute to the optimal utilisation of Qatar's natural resources."

The FEED scope of work will provide the basic design for the addition of three LNG mega trains, each one with 7.8mn tpy production capacity with associated pre-investment to add a 4th LNG train in future.

The onshore facilities will receive about 4.6bn standard cubic feet per day of feed gas from the southern sector of Qatar's North Field, which is the largest single non-associated gas field in the world.

The processing of the feed gas will also produce about 3,000 tonnes/day of ethane as feedstock to a petrochemical development in Qatar, 185,000 barrels/day of condensate, and 8,500 tonnes/day of LPG for sale into world markets, in addition to approximately 12 tonnes per day of pure helium.

Qatar has been entrusted with executing this mega-project on behalf of Qatar Petroleum.

Qatargas, which has a well-proven history in delivering such major projects, also has an established and long-term successful relationship with Chiyoda Corporation.

Robot adds to Hamad airport security



Brigadier Eissa Arrar al-Romaihi and Major Ali Rashid explaining the features of the new device.

operate on its own."

A camera attached near the side wheel scans every passenger, displaying the person's face, heartbeat, and identity on a screen fitted near its handle. It also includes telemetry to detect stress.

A small sensor near its foot stand scans for any abandoned luggage and alerts the officials. It also hosts a currency scanner and finger print machine, in case the official handling the device requires them.

Major Rashid pointed out that the device would recognise suspects by measuring their heart rate. **Page 10**

Hamad Port reaches 1mn TEU milestone in record time

By Peter Alagos
Business Reporter

Hamad Port has reached the 1mn TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) mark in only under 14 months, a significant milestone described as "one of the fastest in the region" achieved amidst an economic blockade imposed on Qatar in June 2017.

"In such a record short time, Hamad Port today marks the handling of 1mn TEUs coming from regional and global seaports via 22 direct navigation routes and around 120 navigation destinations," said HE the Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim Seif Ahmed al-Sulaiti in a ceremony held at Hamad Port yesterday.

Achieved well ahead of schedule, the rapid increase in the container handling business at Hamad Port "demonstrates its operational efficiency and relentless efforts toward holding a leading position among key regional and global ports, according to the plan overseen by the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC)."

Addressing the gathering, the minister said: "This achievement, un-



der the current exceptional circumstances, would not have been possible without His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's vision and HE the Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani's unlimited support."

"Hamad Port has proved highly capable of not only flexibly handling the logistics challenges that have emerged from the current circumstances, but also overcoming them efficiently, let alone its significant contribution to bolstering Qatar's marine trade and overall development strategies," he added.

Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani Qatar) CEO Captain Abdullah al-Khanji said: "The shipping routes that have been launched between Hamad Port and regional and international ports have provided additional reliable options and solutions for customers, playing a significant role in enhancing container handling operations and boosting trade via the port. **Page 10**



Speaker hails success of economic, trade policies in overcoming siege

The Advisory Council held its weekly session yesterday under the chairmanship of HE the Speaker Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Zaid al-Mahmoud.

The session was attended by HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani to discuss the economic and trade policies and assure citizens of the sustained economic stability and future prospects in light of the unjust siege imposed on the country and the post-siege era.

The Speaker praised the economic and commercial policies of the state, which His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani laid down. The policies enabled the country to overcome the effects of the siege since its inception, move towards a new stage of self-reliance and high levels of production and diversification of sources of income, and establish major projects of which some have been already implemented and others are being implemented, in an effective and professional manner.

The Speaker welcomed the Minister of Economy and Commerce, expressing his thanks for accepting the invitation and attending the session, which saw extensive discussions on the state's economic and trade policies and the current and future plans and programmes of the ministry.

The discussions included the state of the Qatari economy after more than nine months of the unjust siege imposed on the country; the economic policies adopted by the country and its success in facing the siege, containing and overcoming its negative effects, and economic plans and policies for the post-siege phase; the state strategy to diversify sources of income and develop the productivity of non-oil sectors; the state

policies towards supporting the private sector in implementation of His Highness the Emir's directives, and the foundations under which this support is granted and the extent of success achieved in this important area; Qatari exports, foreign trade, Qatar's new markets, Qatari national product competitiveness, and national product initiative; the flow of imports through state ports, the availability of basic consumer goods in the market, the efforts of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce to stabilise prices and make them affordable for all and eliminate the phenomenon of disparities in commodity prices; and opening of new channels with brotherly and friendly countries to accelerate the supply of goods and products to local market, while diversifying their geographic distribution and geopolitical extension.

They also included the size of the gross domestic product (GDP), the growth rate and surplus achieved by the country's trade balance; the volume of investments in various productive and service sectors and the extent of success in attracting foreign investments, and the effectiveness of the laws in force in encouraging and securing investment, providing environment and climate conducive to increase it and stimulate investors, and the expected positive effects of the draft non-Qatari capital investment law; and providing important investment opportunities not only in food security but also in the logistics, sports, tourism, health and other vital sectors, along with the state's efforts to increase foreign investment flows to the Qatari market; and launching a package of incentives for landholders in the logistics areas to reduce production costs and reduce rental prices.

The discussions highlighted that the contribution of non-oil



HE the Speaker Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Zaid al-Mahmoud presiding over an Advisory Council meeting, attended by HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani.

sectors to GDP has reached 52% in 2017; foreign trade increased by 16% in 2017; exports increased by 19% to \$68bn in 2017 compared to \$57bn in 2016; the country's trade balance achieved a surplus of 40% in 2017; GDP increased to \$220bn in 2017 compared with \$218bn in 2016, or 2% at constant prices; the World Bank expects our national economy to grow by 2.6% in 2018; and Qatar's occupied advanced international positions in the economic and commercial indicators.

After the discussions, the

Speaker thanked HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohammed al-Thani, on behalf of the Advisory Council members, for explaining, providing information and answering questions and inquiries regarding the unjust siege imposed on the country.

The Council also reviewed the agenda of a meeting held by the Speaker and a number of the Council members with a delegation from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) Parliamentary Assembly last Thursday. The delegation was com-

prised of a number of members of national parliaments of Nato countries which are interested in foreign policy, security, defence and foreign affairs.

The Speaker said the meeting discussed the relations between the Advisory Council and the Nato Assembly, and ways to boost and develop them. In addition, they reviewed a number of topics of common interest.

HE al-Mahmoud said the meeting touched on the economic and legislative renaissance witnessed in Qatar, the rights guaranteed by the Qatari

constitution to all citizens, where he highlighted the appointment of four women to the Advisory Council.

He added that he had spoken about the unjust siege imposed on Qatar, its violations with regard to global law, its disrespect to the principles of good neighbourliness and its fallout on the relations of the regional countries.

The Speaker also praised the agreement signed between Qatar and Nato in Brussels on March 7, regarding co-operating on military and security matters, which

was witnessed by His Highness the Emir.

The Speaker revealed that the delegation confirmed the Nato Parliamentary Assembly's support to all the diplomatic efforts exerted to resolve the Gulf crisis. The delegation also praised the development and progress in Qatar in different fields and welcomed the agreement signed between Qatar and Nato, which takes the relations between both parties to a new strategic co-operation, consolidating security and peace in the region, he added. (QNA)

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Traffic awareness activities at Darb Al Saai



The 34th Traffic Week celebration continued at Darb Al Saai yesterday, with the organisers lining up various activities and attractions aimed at raising awareness on various traffic-related issues. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam

Karwa takes part in 'Batabit Mile' event

Mowasalat's Karwa Driving School participated in Batabit - Qatar Centre for Motorcycles' 'Batabit Mile' event earlier this month.

The event, held at the training airport in Al Khor, offered various theoretical and practical safe driving presentations.

In a statement yesterday, Mowasalat said participation in 'Batabit Mile' came as part of its social responsibility.

Among the highlights of the participation was a seat belt convincer demonstration equipment, with advice on the importance of seat belts along with statistics on deaths and casualties for not using seat belts. The vital issue of accidents was also addressed, featuring statistics presented on the causes of mortality and how to avoid them, including the use of mobile phones and texting while driving, the importance of keeping

adequate distance between vehicles, overspeeding and its risks, driving under the influence of alcohol with goggles vision and driving in difficult weather conditions. Besides, other important tips and guidance were also provided to motorists.

During the exhibition, various tests and practical presentations were carried out using driving simulators and guidance from specialised trainers at Karwa Driving School. The audience mainly included participants from among bikers, their families, as well as Al Khor city residents, who interacted and experienced the demonstration through the equipment.

"We also displayed our latest school bus. The audience came to our stand to check the interior of the school bus and learn about the special safety characteristics and features on board Mowasalat Co school

buses, adopting international school bus safety standards," the statement noted. Mowasalat stressed that it is working with a mission "to provide transport solutions in a safe and environment-friendly, conscious way for the welfare of residents and visitors in Qatar, and was happy to participate in the 'Batabit Mile' event."

The company is framing its safety strategy with a focus on driving/traffic/road safety in its action plan to deliver the

national safety strategy objectives. Over the past years, the company has been participating in several stakeholder and customer initiatives through presentations and demonstrations pertaining to driving and road safety.



Mowasalat at the 'Batabit Mile' event.

Mahaseel to showcase high-quality food products at Doha expo

Mahaseel, a producer of high-quality Canadian food products, will showcase how it is meeting rising demand for food and its contribution to Qatar's goals for a dynamic, self-sufficient national economy during the inaugural Qatar Self-Sufficiency Exhibition (QSSE) 2018 slated to start from April 1 to 3 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre.

Mahaseel, which is among the 120 exhibitors participating in the QSSE, brings high-quality food products that are fully-certified by the Canada Halal Examination and Certification (CHEC) agency. Its products span the full spectrum of the food sector from fats and oils, pulses and grains, wheat and flour to meat, snacks and confectionery.

"With demand for food rising and consumer preferences constantly changing, the challenge for the food industry is how to deliver quality food in an efficient, fast and cost-effective way."

"We have the range of products to suit all needs at competitive prices and visitors to Qatar Self-Sufficiency Exhibition will get true feel for our offering. The exhibition provides us with the perfect stage to demonstrate how we can have a significant, positive impact on the future of Qatar," said Dr Faical Zellama, chief executive officer, Mahaseel Canada.

Self-sufficiency is a key pillar in Qatar National Vision 2030 plan implemented by the bold

and visionary leadership of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to move away from a reliance on fossil fuels, which has opened numerous new opportunities for established local businesses, entrepreneurs, and overseas companies seeking to set up operations in the country.

QSSE 2018 will provide a platform for industry leaders, production line manufacturers, and decision makers spanning the full range of sectors to showcase the latest solutions and services to support the country's progressive diversification strategy and improve production line efficiencies and operations to demonstrate how they are helping to shape the country's future.

QSSE exhibition manager Assem Abot Fakher said, "It is an honour to have a company such as Mahaseel, which has a rich history in manufacturing high-quality food products, as part of our exhibition."

Their commitment highlights the high-calibre of exhibitors confirmed. We are confident that the inaugural Qatar Self-Sufficiency Exhibition will be a huge success, a key indicator of the proactive approach of manufacturing and production lines to diversification."

QSSE 2018, a first for the region, will host 120 leading exhibitors from countries such as Kuwait, Lebanon, the UK, Turkey, Spain, the US, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Iran and China, among others.

QM holds workshop on museum education

Qatar Museums (QM) hosted the first of two one-day workshops, which aimed to provide school teachers in the country with informative and practical sessions on museum education.

The workshops – for independent, international and private school teachers – form part of QM's ongoing commitment to align its educational offerings and learning opportunities with teachers' interests and the school curricula in Qatar.

The initial two sessions are pilots, with QM exploring the idea of rolling out the programme in the months to come.

Participants in this week's workshop have been given the chance to familiarise themselves with the concept of museum education and explore

ways in which they can use these concepts and activities in their curriculum.

Teachers also enjoyed exploring students' books, lesson plans and online resources, and took part in group exercises related to creating museum educational activities.

In collaboration between QM and University College London Qatar (UCL Qatar) on museum education, QM said the programme seeks to significantly contribute to the educational landscape of Qatar.

QM wants to inspire the next generation of creative talent and thinkers by sharing knowledge about art, heritage and culture.

As a result of the workshop, teachers will develop new skills and acquire knowledge of object-based learning, en-

riching their teaching materials with content coming directly from QM's collections and exhibitions.

The next session, organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, will take place on April 18 for independent school teachers, and will be run by QM educators. Teachers must sign-up in order to secure a place.

"QM prides itself on being a provider of informal education and life-long learning opportunities through arts, culture and heritage," QM's education director Dr Jelena Trkulja said.

"We are particularly committed to supporting the national curriculum through our ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education," she noted.

"To that end, we are developing substantial educational resources in form of teacher guides, lesson plans and interactive activities that can be integrated into the national curriculum across all subjects," Dr Trkulja added.

UCL Qatar director Dr Sam Evans said their contribution to Qatar is grounded in the development of people, groundbreaking research, promoting heritage and setting up new research and education resource and infrastructure.

"We are proud to play an active role in engaging all elements of the community to build appreciation, awareness and understanding of Qatar's cultural heritage and traditions – and our museum education work is central to this," he added.



Teachers took part in group exercises related to creating museum educational activities.

HBKU to present colloquium on role of Qatar International Court

Hamad Bin Khalifa University's (HBKU) College of Law and Public Policy (CLPP), in collaboration with Qatar International Court and Dispute Resolution Centre, will present a colloquium titled the 'Role of Qatar International Court in the Qatari Legal Order' at Education City tomorrow.

The event is open to lawyers, students, academics as well as members of the public.

The purpose of the colloquium is to discuss the nature, applicable law and enforcement of judgments of the Qatar International Court (QIC) and more generally consider the role of the court in the Qatari legal order, HBKU has said in a statement.

The CLPP discussion



Faisal Rashid al-Sahouti and Professor Clinton Francis.

will be attended by several notable speakers, including the CEO of QIC, Faisal Rashid al-Sahouti; senior consultant at DLA Piper, Tariq al-Abdulla; founding and managing partner at Al Marri & El Hage Law Office, Claudia el Hage; registrar at QIC, Christopher Grout; and assistant professor at HBKU's CLPP, Dr Georgios Dimitropoulos.

Professor Clinton Francis, dean of CLPP, noted: "The QIC is a special institution comparable to only a handful of similar institutions around the world – all of which have been established very recently. This special colloquium and gathering of top-tier academics and legal experts is of special value to us at CLPP."

QIC, which deals with

domestic cases, comprises a Civil and Commercial Court and a specialist Regulatory Tribunal. It brings together some of the most revered legal and judicial figures from around the world, known for their independence, impartiality and professional expertise. The court was designed to have international standards in dispute resolution, and to be part of the strategy of the Qatar Financial Centre to attract international business and financial services into Qatar. Today, it constitutes a novel mechanism of dispute resolution, particularly of law pertaining to QFC.

As a notable provider of legal education, both on a national and regional scale, HBKU's CLPP offers training to students from a variety of disciplines.

QRCS celebrates 40 years of humanitarian service

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has said it is holding a grand celebration today at Katara – the Cultural Village to celebrate 40 years of humanitarian service.

Present on the occasion will be VIP guests, government officials, social figures, business leaders, senior volunteers and representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Established on March 20, 1978, QRCS "boasts of a track record of achievements, lessons learnt and milestones", it has said in a statement. "These successes have shaped the arena of charitable and social work in Qatar, and enriched the country's bright image as a major humanitarian



The QRCS building.

player around the world."

The event will be attended by senior QRCS officials, including Dr Mohammed bin Ghanem al-Ali al-Maadheed – president, Ali bin Hassan al-Hammadi – secretary-general, board members, directors of divisions, managers of medical facilities, staff and volunteers.

A special honouring ceremony will see the chief donors and contributors to the organisation recognised, including govern-

ment authorities, NGOs, corporations and the media.

On the sidelines of the 40th anniversary, a public exhibition will be held at the Katara Corniche to give a timeline narration of QRCS's history. It will open its doors to the public from this evening until March 24.

At the exhibition, there will be activities for kids, 'real' displays (shelter tents, field hospital, ambulances) and a presentation on diverse volunteering opportunities.

"Being Qatar's first humanitarian organisation, QRCS became a pioneer in its vision, principles and efforts. Now, it serves as an auxiliary to Qatar in its humanitarian policies both locally and internation-

ally. Also, it has become a role model for many NGOs and humanitarian service providers, which follow its strategies and operations," the statement adds.

In 1981, QRCS became a member of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In this capacity, QRCS has access to the zones affected by disasters, conflict or economic challenges.

Over four decades, QRCS has managed to establish its reputation in the fields of relief, development and humanitarian advocacy/diplomacy. In all of this, QRCS is inspired by its strategic slogan "Saving Lives and Preserving Dignity".

Ukrainian president arrives in Doha



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko arrived in Doha yesterday on an official visit to State of Qatar. Upon arrival at the Hamad International Airport, President Poroshenko and his accompanying delegation were welcomed by HE the Minister of Energy and Industry Dr Mohammed bin Saleh al-Sada, chargé d'affaires at Qatari embassy in Ukraine Aisha Mohammed Ishaq al-Ghaffari, Ukraine's ambassador to Qatar Yevhen Mykytenko.

Kahramaa launches 'best sustainable' local product contest

Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation (Kahramaa) has launched the 'best sustainable' local product competition, which is described as a first-of-its-kind initiative in Qatar. The competition is being launched with a plan to encourage the country's industrial and commercial sectors to produce more environment-friendly, sustainable products in Qatar, Kahramaa has said in a statement.

It is one of the initiatives of Kahramaa's National Programme for Conservation and Energy

Efficiency (Tarsheed) and entries will be received until April 1, according to the statement. The competition, Kahramaa stressed, aims to raise awareness about the concept of sustainability and its role in the progress of domestic products in Qatar. Through the contest, the corporation is urging the industrial and commercial sectors to adopt strategies to conserve the environment and achieve sustainability in their production processes. It is also asking local manufacturers to adopt

the practices of Tarsheed and energy efficiency in the domestic market and promote competitiveness between the industrial and commercial sectors and private sector development in Qatar. Those interested to enter the contest can visit the Kahramaa website and review the terms of the competition and technical criteria to evaluate and then fill the registration form. The winners of the best sustainable local product competition will be honoured at the sixth Tarsheed ceremony on April 22.

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Some of the QNB employees who participated in the Leadership and Management Development Programme seen with bank officials.

120 QNB staff take part in leadership programme

QNB recently held a graduation ceremony for more than 120 employees who participated in the 'Leadership and Management Development Programme' marking its sixth year.

The programme was organised by the bank in collaboration with the renowned Franklin Covey Middle East and International Group for Training.

The Leadership and Management Development Programme, which comprises supervisory, management and leadership

skill development over the span of three months, offers participants the opportunity to develop and enhance their managerial skills, and enable future leaders to achieve their ambitions and career goals.

The programme is also part of one of the bank's talent management endeavours, which provides QNB Group with leadership and management competencies capable of supporting its expansion and the rapid growth of its operations.

It aims to develop and raise

staff efficiency as part of an ongoing human capital strategy aiming to consolidate the status of the bank as the "employer of choice" in Qatar and across its international footprint.

QNB Group executive general manager and group chief operating officer Ali Rashid al-Mohannadi said: "This programme reflects the importance that QNB attaches to its manpower, through training and development programmes, in order to enhance their capabilities, improve their performance and

achieve the desired objectives and results."

"Investing in national human capital to build a knowledge-based economy is an important pillar of QNB's mission towards achieving Qatar National Vision 2030, which considers human capital development as a key asset," al-Mohannadi added.

The development of staff skills is one of the most important priorities of QNB Group, as it is constantly striving to develop the latest training programmes to enhance the efficiency of its em-

ployees, particularly their ability to assume duties in the banking environment and achieving excellence in their careers.

QNB Group's presence through its subsidiaries and associate companies extends to more than 31 countries across three continents providing a comprehensive range of advanced products and services.

The total number of employees is more than 28,800 operating through more than 1,230 locations, with an ATM network of more than 4,200 machines.

Director of AJCS, Mohamed Mukhtar al-Khalil, said the seminar is being held as the Gulf crisis remains unresolved.

"We at AJCS were of the opinion that it is necessary to reconsider the variable factors of the crisis and to explore the prospects of resolution. One of these prospects, if held, is the US-GCC Camp David summit in May," al-Khalil said.

"By putting the matter to extensive discussion and analyses by experts and professionals during the seminar, we hope new perspectives are laid out on how to tone down the negative impacts of the crisis on the peoples of the region. It is also an opportunity to put forward more viewpoints of any possible détente, even if not currently looming large," added al-Khalil.

Founded in 2005, GU-Q empowers students and shapes the human capacity that the Mena region needs for the 21st century. As part of this effort, GU-Q "continuously produces major studies of regional and international significance, including multi- and inter-disciplinary research initiatives that study strategic, political, economic and social realities in Qatar, as well as the geopolitical reconfigurations of the region and beyond," according to a press statement.

The university has organised several symposiums dedicated to understanding the geopolitics of the Gulf and the wider Middle East region.

GU-Q event to discuss future of Gulf crisis

Experts from Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), Al Jazeera and Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) will gather to discuss the Gulf crisis and potential future developments at an upcoming seminar at GU-Q.

Organised by Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (AJCS), the public event will be held on Georgetown's campus in Education City at 6pm today.

Convened under the title 'The Gulf Crisis, US Mediation, and Future Trends' the event will focus on the proposed visit by Gulf leaders to the US for talks to resolve the dispute. Speakers include Abdullah bin Hamad al-Athbah, editor-in-chief of Al Arab, journalist and political analyst Abdul Aziz al-Ishaq, GU-Q's Professor Rory Miller; and Professor Steven Wright, associate dean for academic affairs and research at HBKU.

It will be moderated by Al-Jazeera Mubasher's Salem Al-mahrouqui.

"In line with Georgetown's commitment to fostering open dialogue and informed debate, this event will bring broad perspectives on developments in the Gulf to the audiences from Qatar and the region," said GU-Q dean Ahmad Dallal. "We are happy to provide a platform to expand the public's understanding of these issues and possible solutions, as part of our ongoing contribution to the academic environment in Qatar."

QGBC opens registration for 'No Paper Day Qatar'



and individuals taking part in 'No Paper Day Qatar' are encouraged to start saving and collecting recyclable waste in the form of newspapers and magazines, office paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, plastic cups and jugs, and aluminium and steel cans.

All collected recyclable waste should be dropped off at the QGBC Villa on April 8, 9 & 10. Participating companies will be invited to attend an appreciation event to celebrate the success of the campaign and will also receive QGBC-led sustainability training sessions on their premises.

To learn more about 'No Paper Day 2018' and to sign up, one can visit qatgbc.org



The MG brand is back in Qatar after signing partnership with Auto Class Cars.

MG brand returns to Qatar

SAIC Motor and Auto Class Cars have announced the return of the MG brand to Qatar after signing a new partnership agreement.

According to the new partnership, Auto Class Cars, a subsidiary of Nasser Bin Khaled (NBK) Holding, will be the authorised distributor of MG, adding more brands from international car manufacturer SAIC Motor's portfolio.

The new partnership between SAIC Motor and Auto Class Cars confirms that MG is returning to Qatar with a refreshed new lineup of models aimed at meeting the demands of today's modern motorists, according to a press statement.

Auto Class Cars will introduce the new model lineup of sedans and SUVs that will go on sale in a "state-of-the-art" showroom strategically located on Salwa Road that will also provide an array of services for new and exist-

ing customers of the rejuvenated MG brand.

MG is a British-born car maker established in 1924 and renowned globally for its historic models, awards and achievements. The brand recently launched two new models in the Middle East, the MG RX5 and MG ZS, and is set to add further models to the lineup later this year. MG is benefiting from heavy investment from its parent company, SAIC Motor, which was listed in the 2017 Forbes Fortune 500 list for the 13th consecutive year, ranking No 41 overall and seventh among all global automakers - its highest ever ranking.

Sheikh Fahel bin Nawaf al-Thani, Automotive Operations director - NBK Holding, said: "We are proud to bring MG back to Qatar, which will add value to the Qatari automotive market. MG's long heritage perfectly fits NBK's long legacy."

Tom Lee, managing director for the Middle East, said: "NBK Holding and Auto Class are the natural choice for us as a retail partner in Qatar; the automotive knowledge they possess, and quality and efficiency of their service and they offer, is unrivalled. We are experiencing positive growth globally, and want to project that in the Middle East as it's a very important market for MG. Together with Auto Class, we are dedicated to delivering the highest levels of customer satisfaction through our innovative product range and customer experience."

Inhab El Feky, Automotive director - NBK Holding, added: "Auto Class will be the perfect partner of MG to take this brand into the next level. The Auto Class showroom on Salwa Road will be ready to welcome all customers and car enthusiasts by the end of April to offer them a wide range of cars that meet their needs and requirements."

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FROM INVESTORS AND OPERATORS FOR THE PROVISION AND OPERATION OF SHORT TERM VISITOR ACCOMMODATION



The Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) is seeking information from interested companies who can provide a solution for short term visitor accommodation in the State of Qatar for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar™ (the Tournament).

Request for Information (RFI)	Deadlines (All times GMT+3)
Provision and Operation of Short Term Visitor Accommodation	Expression of Interest Submission 31 Mar 2018, 3:30PM
	Request for Information (RFI) Submission 15 Apr 2018, 12:00PM

Qatar will welcome thousands of visitors in 2022 to enjoy the Tournament. As part of the preparation of accommodation for these visitors, the SC is seeking information from interested companies, to invest in and operate a range of short term visitor accommodation facilities such as camping facilities and residential real estate as short term serviced apartments in and around Doha City.

The visitor accommodation is expected to include provision of various appropriate hospitality style services to guests along with promotion of activities and events where appropriate. To assist those interested, the Technical Questionnaire to be issued will be divided into two parts:

- Those interested in camping type facilities to fund, design, build, manage, operate and deconstruct; and
- Those interested in leasing a portfolio of residential accommodation from existing landlords in the Qatari real estate market, to offer short term furnished and serviced accommodation as a private venture.

Who should respond to this RFI request?

- Local and international companies, joint ventures, consortia that are willing to deliver a solution to fund, design, build, manage and operate short term accommodation facilities for fans, visitors and workforce and who have delivered and/or operated similar large scale short term accommodation facilities for multi-day events, festivals and mega sporting events such as FIFA World Cup™ or Olympics, around the World.
- Organisations specialised in the selection and investment of a range of short term accommodation from existing in-country real estate, and providing management of operation of hospitality services to various guests including fans, visitors and workforce.

The RFI Process:

- Respondents should register their interest by submitting a letter by email to tva@sc.qa
- Upon receipt of an expression of interest, the respondent will be issued a Confidentiality Agreement (CA) and a copy of the Request for Information letter including a questionnaire that seeks information on the respondents experience and capabilities, which is a requirement of the SC, via email.
- The respondent shall provide the information requested in the Technical Questionnaire along with the completed Confidentiality Agreement by email to tva@sc.qa followed by a hard copy of the documentation delivered to the address below within two (2) business days from the submission of the electronic copy:

Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy
Capital Procurement - Technical Delivery Office
Al Bidda Tower, 34th Floor
PO Box 62022
Doha, State of Qatar

* Any queries in relation to this request for information should be addressed to tva@sc.qa.

AAB Treasure Hunt to be launched on Friday

The Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME), in co-operation with Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros Co (AAB), have announced that the AAB Treasure Hunt 2018 will be launched on March 23.

The treasure hunt is the first such activity of its type in the country, the MME has said in a statement.

The announcement was made at New Salata Park yesterday in the presence of Mohamed Ali al-Khoury, director of the MME's Public Parks Department, and R K Murugan, AAB's acting chief executive and chief operating officer (Automotive Division), in the presence of representatives from the ministry and the company.

AAB is the exclusive dealer of Toyota and Lexus in Qatar. The activity is part of efforts undertaken to enhance ties between the MME and the private sector and also serves as a corporate social responsibility initiative.

It also aims at raising awareness about the importance of following safety rules by road users.

The competition will take place at the Al Thumama, Al Dafna, Al Gharafa, Abu Samra, Khalifa, and Al Qutaifiya public parks.

The activity entails the participation of around 25-30 vehicles, with each having 2-4 participants.

The participants will be divided into teams at the various parks at the start of the treasure hunt.

They will be evaluated based on the time they spend in answering the questions and carrying out the activities at all the designated parks.

The winners will be announced at the same day of the competition and prizes will be given out accordingly.

Al-Khoury thanked all those involved in organising the activity for the second consecutive year.

The ministry official noted that the initiative is more than just a competition; he said it is also an introduction to

the importance of parks and embracing nature.

He said the recent launch of an environment-friendly electric vehicle is considered an important initiative to maintain a clean environment.



Al-Khoury and Murugan at the announcement yesterday.

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Khalid al-Ibrahim: We have very good reason to feel optimistic and encouraged by the path that this plan sets out.

Qatar Museums plays key role in forming National Development Plan

Qatar Museums (QM) has further cemented its leadership in the country's cultural and institutional development through its contribution to the publication of the Qatar National Development Plan 2018-2022.

Led by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS), the publication of the plan represents the culmination of many months of intensive work by a number of leading public bodies and institutions in the country, including QM.

In helping move the country forward towards realising the ambitions of the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), the plan covers a variety of programmes and projects designed to improve and support institutional development, service provision, financial management, sustainability of economic prosperity, strengthen human development, support social development and sustainable development that preserves the environment, as well as underpin strategic performance management across the country's leading organisations and institutions.

A team from QM has played a key role since 2017 in the formulation of the plan through active involvement on the Central Advisory Committee, which was charged with reviewing, evaluating and strengthening strategies and plans developed by various sub-committees to feed into the overarching plan and which cover all spheres of public life.

The Committee spent considerable time during these past few months scrutinising plans covering all aspects of the country's development, ranging from culture, safety and security, finances, immigration, employment, education, healthcare and more, QM said.

The Committee is made up of experts and leading figures representing a wide cross section of the public and private sectors.

In addition to making a vital contribution to the work of the Committee, as the leading arts and cultural authority in Qatar with responsibility for developing the arts and cultural sector, QM played a prominent and active role on the Cultural Sector Committee.

The publication of the plan marks a major milestone for Qatar in marking a clear path towards achieving the leadership's vision.

The Qatar National Development Plan 2018-2022 builds on the National Development Strategy 2011-2016, and will continue to pave the way for Qatar's economic, social, cultural, and environmental development, leading to an even more prosperous Qatar and setting the pace for future national strategies to come.

"Today marks an incredibly important moment in moving Qatar forward towards a bright and prosperous future," said QM chief strategic planning officer Khalid al-Ibrahim, who is member of the Central Advisory Committee and the Committee that prepared the strategy for the cultural and sport sector.

"The publication of this plan represents the culmination of the very best strategic thinking across all sectors of the economy. We have very good reason to feel optimistic and encouraged by the path that this plan sets out," he noted.

"It has been an honour and privilege to play an active role on both the Central Advisory Committee and the Cultural Sector Committee, helping to shape the plan. I'm excited to see where it leads," he added.



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Early intervention is 'key to helping kids with Down Syndrome thrive'

Hamad Medical Corp (HMC) has said it is improving the lives of children with Down Syndrome by providing access to specialist therapeutic and educational resources through its Early Intervention Programme at the Child Development Centre and Therapy Services, Rumailah Hospital.

Down Syndrome is a genetic condition caused by the presence of all, or a partial extra copy of, chromosome 21. The condition, which is the most common chromosome abnormality, is typically associated with characteristic physical features, some health and developmental challenges, and some level of intellectual disability.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the incidence of Down Syndrome is between 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 1,100 live births worldwide. Approximately, 3,000 to 5,000 children worldwide are born with Down Syndrome each year.

Child Development and Rehabilitation Service specialists at HMC's Child Development Centre and Therapy Services say early intervention and rehabilitation are key to helping children with the condition thrive.

Currently, there are 73 children with Down Syndrome under the age of three receiving care through the Early Intervention Programme. Each year, the programme receives between 40 and 50 new referrals.

While individuals with Down Syndrome are more likely to have certain medical conditions such as congenital heart defects, hearing and vision problems, and gastrointestinal issues, many of these conditions are now treatable.

Today, most individuals with Down Syndrome lead healthy lives, enjoying a higher life expectancy than ever before.

Speaking about the condition, Dr Sona Fayed Tahtamouni, paediatric consultant, Child De-

velopment Centre and Therapy Services, explained: "Children with Down Syndrome nearly always have physical and intellectual disabilities. Therefore, they generally reach developmental milestones at a later age. These children have an increased risk of certain health problems, including congenital heart defects, epilepsy, leukaemia, thyroid diseases, and hearing and vision disorders. They may also have a weak immune function. Regular screening for health problems common in people with Down Syndrome is recommended throughout the individual's life."

She maintained that the quality of life for individuals with Down Syndrome can be improved by meeting their healthcare needs and stressed the importance of early intervention programmes.

"Children with Down Syndrome can lead a normal life if their parents and caregivers ensure their healthcare needs are

met. For example, by having regular check-ups with health professionals to monitor their mental and physical health and providing timely intervention with physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, counselling or special education when required," she said.

Parents of two-year-old Layanne Fahmi, one of the children currently receiving care at HMC's Child Development Centre and Therapy Services, say they appreciate the benefits of early intervention programmes.

"We are glad that our daughter is being cared for by a team of experts who are not only caring but empathetic toward us. Layanne is presently undergoing rehabilitation services, including occupational, physical, and speech therapies, as well as special education services at the centre. Due to this intervention, we as her parents are empowered to tackle the daily challenge of caring for our daugh-



Dr Sona Fayed Tahtamouni

ter. This intervention programme has helped us as a family and fills us with hope for our daughter's future. We can see how much of an impact HMC's Early Intervention Programme has had on her."

To highlight World Down Syndrome Day, observed globally on March 21, HMC is organising a family day for patients and their

families at Bayt Al Dhiyafah in Hamad Bin Khalifa Medical City from 10am to 3pm.

Awareness events are also planned from 8am to 12pm across the main lobbies of Women's Hospital, Hamad General Hospital, Rumailah Hospital, Al Khor Hospital, Qatar Rehabilitation Institute, and the Women's Wellness and Research Centre. The Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics will also participate, providing gifts to children.

"Children and their families will be treated to a number of entertainment activities during the event while parents will also have the opportunity to meet and share their experiences. At the awareness booths, hospital visitors will learn about Down Syndrome and receive educational leaflets highlighting the condition," added Fatmeh Mustafa, assistant director, Paediatric Rehabilitation, Child Development Centre and Therapy Services.

Invitation to Tender

Qatar Navigation Q.P.S.C. (Milaha) is pleased to announce the following tender:

S/N	Tender No.	Subject	Tender Collection Fee	Bid Bond	Closing Date
1.	MPCS/2018/005/AS	Purchase of 4 Units of 15 Ton Forklift	QAR 1000/-	5% of bid amount valid for 4 months from closing date	29-Mar-2018

▪ Tender documents can be collected from:

Milaha - Qatar Navigation Q.P.S.C (Head Office)
Procurement & Contract Department
Ein Khaled, Zone B, First Floor

▪ Issuing of Tender Documents from 08.00 am to 02.00 pm. Starting from Monday, 19-Mar-2018 until Sunday, 25-Mar-2018 (Exclude Friday & Saturday).

▪ Authorization letter is required to collect the Tender Documents along with the copy of I.D. of the authorized person.

▪ Bidders should submit along with their proposal a Bid Bond of 5% of their proposal value issued by a local authorized bank in Doha valid for 120 days after the Tender Closing Date.

▪ Successful bidder should submit within 10 days from the date of award, a Performance Bond valued at 10% of the contract amount and valid for 30 days after the expiry of the contract.

▪ The Proposals should be valid for acceptance for 90 days from the Tender Closing Date.

▪ The Proposals should be delivered to the Procurement & Contract Department at our Head Office, Ein Khaled First Floor, Zone B as per the above closing date.

▪ The Bidder shall submit the proposal in 3 sealed envelopes labelled as Envelope A: Technical Offer, Envelope B: Commercial Offer and Envelope C: Bid Bond.

▪ Labels for the Envelopes A, B & C are included in the Tender Documents, which should be used for the submission of the proposal.

▪ Bidders not complying with the above terms will be disqualified.

Become a Registered Supplier

▪ As part of enhancing and updating our supplier database, Milaha is encouraging all suppliers to register online by visiting our website www.milaha.com

▪ After successful registration, Milaha will provide each supplier with an individual code to be utilized for all our future tenders.

▪ If you have any questions about the registration process, please e-mail to SupplierManagement@milaha.com

Qatar Navigation QPSC - P.O. Box 153 Doha, State of Qatar
Tel +974 4494 9666 Fax +974 4483 3244 www.milaha.com



QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LIMITED

Public Announcement

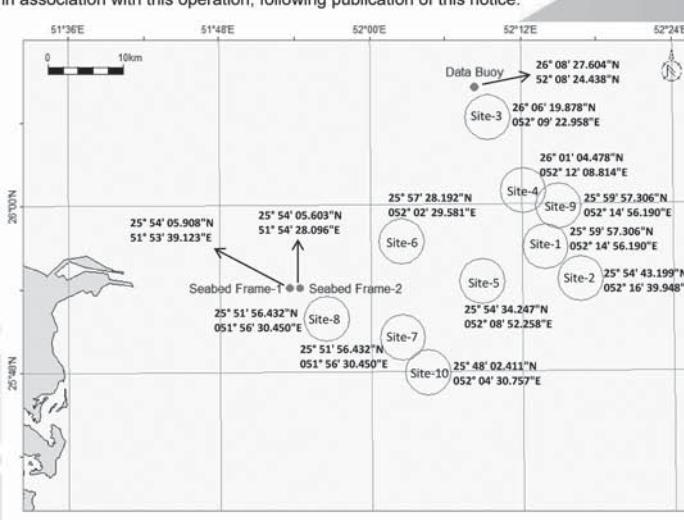
To all Ships, Fishermen and Mariners
"Acquisition of geophysical, environmental, and geotechnical surveys"
"SEAWATCH Midi 185 Buoy and Seabed Frames Deployment"

Warning of geophysical, environmental, geotechnical surveys, Buoy and Seabed Frames Deployment Offshore Qatar from 26th February- 31st May 2018

Pursuant to and under directives from the Department of Marine Regulations, Ministry of Transport and Communications, State of Qatar, this announcement is to inform all the Vessels, Mariners and Fishermen that QATARGAS Operating Company Limited intends to acquire geophysical, environmental, and geotechnical surveys and also to carry out Mooring Buoy and two Seabed Frames deployment in the locations bound by the coordinates shown in the diagram below.

Therefore, all Vessels, Fishermen and Mariners are expected to keep clear of the survey locations during the operations.

QATARGAS Operating Company Limited takes no responsibility for any loss or damage caused to outside parties in association with this operation, following publication of this notice.



DJWE 2018 partners feted

The Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA), along with partners Auditore, has held a special recognition ceremony to celebrate the achievements and success of the Doha Jewellery & Watches Exhibition (DJWE) 2018 with all related partners, including government entities, exhibitors and the Young Qatari Designers.

Held under the patronage of HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani, the 15th edition of DJWE noted a record number of visits (more than 23,000) from Qatar and abroad through its doors.

Bringing to life the theme, 'Celebrate luxury,' the exhibition enabled visitors to discover precious jewels and timepieces from over 490 brands, at more than 50 exhibitors from 10 countries.

During his remarks at the recognition ceremony, Ahmed al-Obaidi, director of Exhibitions at QTA, said: "The 15th edition of DJWE was exceptional on all levels; it was a true celebration of one of the oldest and most important exhibitions in Qatar, which has continued to achieve successes year after year. At QTA, we believe that at the heart of any success is our partnerships with the public and private sectors, a matter we take great pride in."

"DJWE has also been the recipient of our leadership's interest and support, and this progress would only



QTA, Auditore and partners officials at the felicitation ceremony.

have been possible with the kind patronage of HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani who has consistently supported the development of this exhibition."

Al-Obaidi, together with Mazen Abd Rabbo, VP Middle East for Auditore, delivered the recognition awards to the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the MoI Security Systems Department (SSD), MoI Civil Defence, General Customs Authority, Lekhwiya, the immigration authority, Traffic Department and Qatar standardisation.

Young Qatari Designers Nada al-Sulaiti (Haireaat), Nouf al-Meer (Nouf Jewellery), Ghada al-Bou-

nain (Ghada Al Bouanian), Jawaher and Hessa al-Mannai (Ghand Jewellery), Shikha Mohamed (Al Ghala Jewellery) and Leila Abu Issa (Leila Issam Fine Jewellery), who showcased their creativity at the centre of the exhibition, were also recognised for their talent.

Five special awards were also granted to exhibitors.

Acknowledged for its support in bringing innovative activities to DJWE and its sponsorship of the new DJWE Forum that took place on February 22, Fifty One East received the DJWE 2018 Innovation Award.

The Best Local Newspaper Campaign Award was given to Alfardan

Jewellery in recognition of their communications efforts to promote DJWE.

The Best Social Media Campaign Award went to Ali Bin Ali Watches and Jewellery in recognition of their dynamism on their social media channels.

The Best Cultural Heritage Activity Award went to Al Majed Jewellery in recognition of their showcase of traditional Qatari craftsmanship.

The Best Booth Alteration Award was presented to Amiri Gems in recognition of the upscale general appearance of their booth.

Finally, the Best Newcomer Award was given to the French exhibitor Djula, who brought a fresh new Parisian touch to the exhibition.

Commenting on Auditore's role at this year's show, Mazen Abd Rabbo said: "We are delighted to have brought enhanced visitor experiences to this year's show. It was a pleasure to introduce exhibitiongoers to the many activities and events DJWE has to offer. To see such high levels of participation from attendees, and positive feedback is a great reward to all those involved."

The six-day show unveiled a series of new visitor experiences, from the new DJWE Forum, to a charity auction in partnership with Qatar Auction House AlBahie, expert talks and hands-on watches and jewellery workshops.

In Line with HH The Emir Initiative and to support Qatari products

AlMana Precision Industries

has opened a new Factory

Subsidiary of Mohammed Hamad AlMana Group

The factory will Supply Fire resistance Doors with metal, stainless steel as well as glass

Providing Doors & Windows of Electrical substations meeting the standards of Kaharamaa

We are planning to produce Fire resistance glass with Swiss Technology according to the Civil defense requirements



Saad AlMana: A new line of productions of water tanks for Fire Systems will open soon.



Production will cover the local market

Yousef Al-Emadi: The new factory is a milestone in the development of national industries, meeting the requirements of local market

Mohamed Hady:

We are proud of the rapid progress of the national industry

In support of HH the Emir's Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani and Qatar's Vision, AlMana Precision Industries factory was opened in the new Industrial Area.

The launch ceremony was attended by Eng .Yousef Ahmed Al Emadi, Director of Industrial Zones Department, Ministry of Energy as well as engineering staff at the department. The ceremony was also attended by Captain Mohammed Hady Al Mirri from operations department, first lieutenant Al Hemdy Rashid from administrative department, first Lieutenant Saad Abdullah Al Kuwari from operations department and first lieutenant Khaled Saoudan Erhema Al Kuwari.

Eng. Yousef Al Emadi said: "We are proud of the new factory, as it is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and machines with the highest resistance to fire. The urban development Qatar is witnessing in all fields requires such types of doors. I think the factory will have an important role in national industry, meeting requirements of local market in the shade of siege."

Al-Emadi said that the establishment of the factory is a Qatari achievement in private industrial sector, which will contribute significantly to the growth and development of the national industry.

"We are proud of the rapid development witnessed by the national industry, said Capt. Mohamed Hadi Al-Shawawy Al-Mirri, head of the civil defense department in the Industrial Area. The proof of this is what we saw today at AlMana Precision Industries Factory specialized in the manufacture of fire-resistant doors, which are made using

the latest technology and global specifications.

The attendees toured the factory and saw the latest technology and machines which comply with the highest industry standards.

"The new factory will supply most of Qatari market's needs for fire-resistant doors" said Saad AlMana.

Mohammed Hamad AlMana Group is one of the reputed companies in Qatar and it offers numerous services and contributes to improving Qatar economic strength.

Talking about the importance of the new factory, Mr. Saad AlMana said that the new factory is in line with HH the Emir's call for self-reliance and is part of nation's plans to diversify its economy.

AlMana pointed out that the new factory will produce a wide range of products, including fire resistant doors, stainless steel as well as glass to meet the requirements of Qatar market.

"The Ministry of Economy and Commerce allocated the land on the directives of HH the Emir to promote the Qatari products," he added.

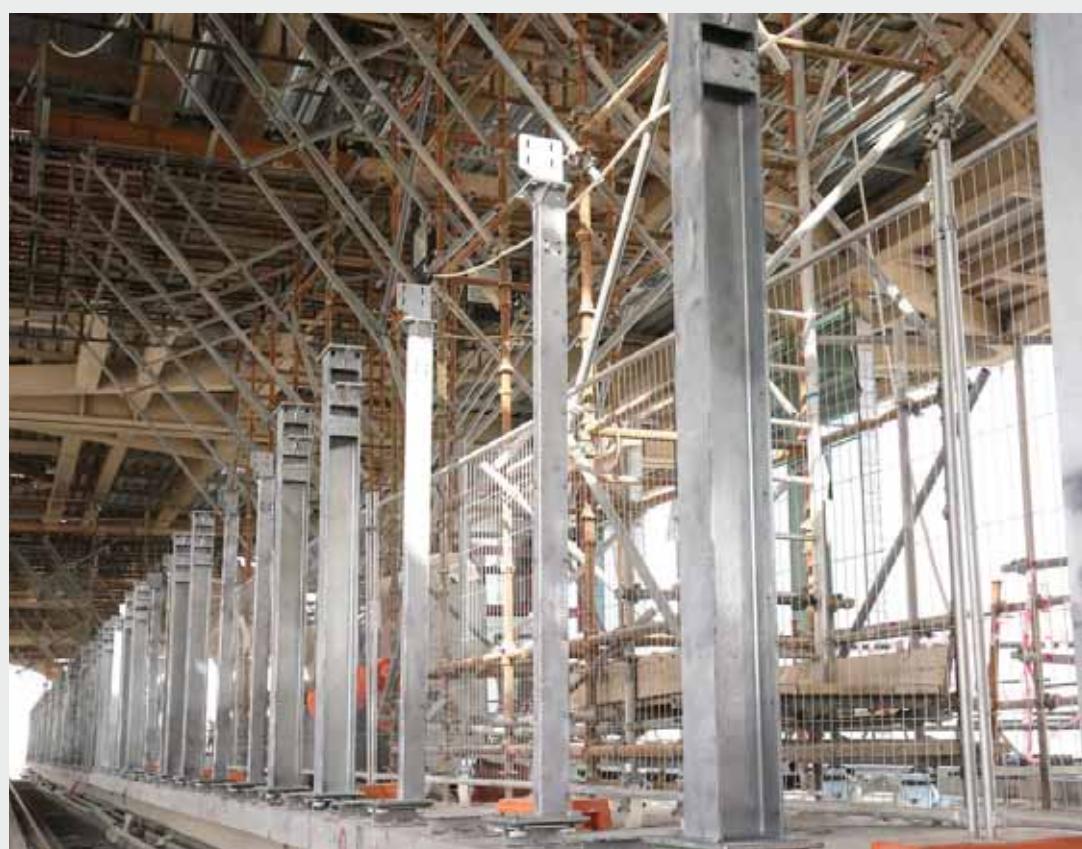
The 8000 square meters factory will ensure high volume of production. And we have signed a contract with a Swiss company to import fireproof glass to cover the needs of the local market. It will reduce fire-related hazards and accidents."

AlMana pointed out that the factory has employed highly qualified and experienced engineers, technicians and workers. "We are aware that the workers of the factory are the most important element. Therefore, we have established a good mechanism to take care of their needs."

AlMana noted that the success of the project is a positive indicator of the investment situation in the country and will strengthen economy further. The success of this project depends on the support of government agencies in terms of encouraging the Qatari products.

AlMana concluded saying that the new factory contains qualified and experienced team .



**On the fast track**

Structural frames for platform doors are now being erected at the Metro Green Line's Al Riffa station, Qatar Rail has said on its Twitter page.

Indian President's Certificate of Honour for scholars

The Indian embassy in Doha has announced details of the Presidential Award of Certificate of Honour to Sanskrit, classical Oriya, classical Kannada, classical Telugu and classical Malayalam scholars. Under the scheme, one International Award of Certificate of Honour is given to a non-resident Indian or person of non-Indian origin with outstanding contributions in the field of Sanskrit, along with two International Awards - one each for person of Indian and non-Indian origin - in each of the languages of classical Oriya, classical Kannada, classical Telugu and classical Malayalam, the embassy has said in a statement. The scheme also provides the Maharsi Badrayan Vyas Samman for young scholars in the age group

of 30-45 years in the field of Sanskrit, Pali/Prakrit, Arabic and Persian, with an award amount of Rs100,000 as onetime payment to each awardee along with a sanad and shawl presented by the Indian President. The statement explained that a Certificate of Honour is conferred by the President of India to distinguished scholars of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian languages since 1958, which was later extended to cover Pali/Prakrit, classical Oriya, classical Kannada, classical Telugu and classical Malayalam. Under the scheme, a Certificate of Honour, along with an onetime monetary grant of Rs500,000 each, is awarded to scholars of eminence over 60 years of age with outstanding contribution in the field of these languages.

From 2016, it was decided to give separate awards to scholars of Pali and Prakrit (one each) both under the category of Certificate of Honour and Maharsi Badrayan Vyas Samman. All those who have to their credit extraordinary works in the classical languages indicated should fill in their details in the proforma available on the embassy's website and submit the same to the mission along with a maximum of five published works. A detailed list of all published works is also to be provided. These awards are not given to scholars who have received this award earlier, not given posthumously, or not given to persons who have been convicted by a court in a criminal case or against whom any criminal case is pending in a court, the statement adds.

Chopard Happy Hearts Chopard's Big Heart

Chopard has made the Big Heart the emblem of the Maison, reinterpreting it in its collections as a recurrent reflection of its creativity and a distinctive token of its values. Chopard dedicates its Happy Hearts collection to every woman with a Big Heart, through creations worn like a visible talisman of happiness. Interpreted in a wide range of colours, Happy Hearts now welcome a new Tahitian mother-of-pearl version.

The heart, a Chopard signature

"If I were to associate Chopard with a motif, it would be a Big Heart because there is a family behind it". It is in these terms that Caroline Scheufele, Co-President of Chopard, explains the importance of the values that have forged the shining reputation of the Geneva-based Maison: altruism, generosity and benevolence are the essential qualities governing the

happiness, to be passed on from generation to generation as testimony to the happy moments when they were received as gifts. A cherished talisman for all women who share a sense of selflessness and generosity - all those with a Big Heart - each Happy Hearts model stems from Chopard's subtle ability to capture fleeting and precious moments of life within a timeless object.

Tahitian mother-of-pearl hearts

The heart of these Happy Heart models takes on a protective role, welcoming a broad palette of colourful stones to give free rein to women's imagination as they change jewellery in tune with their outfit, thereby perfectly matching the woman they wish to be each day. Thanks to the inventiveness of the Chopard workshops, a Tahitian mother-of-pearl interpretation now joins



vibrant creativity and the taste for aesthetic wonderment cultivated in the ateliers of this family-run Maison. Above and beyond its stature as the symbol of lovers, it evokes the heart as a giver of life.

Happy Hearts, a visible talisman of happiness

The Happy Hearts collection undoubtedly embodies all that Chopard represents, through a perfect alliance between its Heart emblem and the iconic moving diamonds concept that has shaped the renown of the Maison. The Happy Hearts collection provides anchor points for moments of happiness by connecting them with objects that evoke fond memories whenever they are seen. These creations are a visible token of

the existing versions in red, pink, blue, green and turquoise, along with the diamond, mother-of-pearl, onyx, malachite and tiger's eye variations.

Precious and rare, delicate and iridescent, Tahitian mother-of-pearl is a noble material sourced from the treasures of the sea. Harvested from the heart of shells, it is a symbol of tenderness and love. Tahitian mother-of-pearl, enhanced by glowing 18-carat rose gold, makes its grand entrance into the collection with earrings and a matching bangle whose two ends are respectively tipped with a large mother-of-pearl heart and another smaller one featuring a moving diamond dancing between two sapphire crystals.



HE Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada interacts with other panellists.

'Concerted efforts needed to meet cyber security challenges'

By Joseph Varghese

Staff Reporter

Cyber security is a hot issue and requires international collaboration to overcome the challenges presented by ever-evolving technological advances, said HE Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada, Minister of Energy and Industry yesterday.

Dr al-Sada was speaking at a panel discussion at the inaugural session of the Annual Research Conference 2018 being held at the Qatar National Convention Centre. The other panellists at the conference were Vivek Kundra, former chief information officer of the United States, David Roberts, distinguished faculty, Singularity University and Prof Hasan Mandal, president, Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey. It was moderated by Deborah Wince-Smith, president and CEO of the Council on Competitiveness.

"The issue of cyber security was at a different level in the earlier days. Now it has moved to a level of espionage and stealing information. It is now much more dangerous as it has come to the level of sabotage. Cyber-attacks are aimed at inflicting damage on governments, businesses or other entities. Qatar's experience today is that we do as much as possible to overcome the threat as we employee firewalls, upgrading our systems and procedures," said Dr al-Sada.

"However, most cyber-attacks are



David Roberts speaking at the event.



Vivek Kundra giving the keynote address.

coming from foreign countries. So, we need international collaboration, to ensure cyber security worldwide. We need closer international relations, conventions and agreements so that such saboteurs can be stopped and make sure those who commit these crimes do not get away easily. We need concerted international efforts to fight it," highlighted Dr al-Sada.

Roberts said that the world has to keep the Internet safe at any cost. "We created the Internet several decades ago. But it is not secure and we have to make it secure for future generations. We are taking on the grand challenge of creating a secure Internet. This is within our capacity and to do that we

need to collaborate across the world to create a secure Internet and ensure the safe future of the humanity," explained Roberts.

According to Kundra, it is an area that can be addressed very well if collaborative efforts are taken up. "This challenge can be turned into an huge opportunity. On the security perspective, it will be the area where the next generation of warfare will be waged. This can be battled in collaboration and we can achieve the desired result," said Kundra.

Prof Mandal also pointed to collaboration and international efforts at overcoming the challenges involved in cyber security.

QU-CED organises second lesson study project forum

The National Center for Educational Development (NCED) at Qatar University College of Education and Higher Education and Marubeni, as well as school teachers and CED faculty.

project manager Dr Akihiko Takahashi, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Marubeni, as well as school teachers and CED faculty.

The event's presentation focused on emphasising the process of the 'Lesson Study' project in the classroom.

Ruba al-Said, second grade teacher at Al Markhiya Primary School, and Hana al-Ashwal, CED professional development specialist, displayed a model lesson and practices involving classroom students. Following the lesson, Anbara al-Abdullah facilitated a panel discussion on the lesson progress and students involvement led by Dr Takahashi.

Attendees included QU chief strategy and development officer Dr Darwish al-Emadi, CED dean Dr Ahmed al-Emadi, ambassador of Japan Seiichi Otsuka, NCED director Dr Abdullah M Abu-Tineh, researcher at Tokyo Gakugei University and IMPULS

mitment to make a positive impact on the performance of educators in Qatar through various professional development opportunities and research projects designed to inspire teachers to reach their greatest potential as highly competent educators."

Otsuka extended his thanks and appreciation to all parties involved in implementing the project and the continuous support from QU, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, as well as Marubeni for their efforts. Otsuka referred in his speech to how difficult it is learning mathematics in the traditional ways, as he remembers, yet visiting several schools and watching the 'Lesson Study' project in practice, he was able to recognise the impact of the project on student involvement in the learning process.



Attendees of the forum.

Blockade has spurred innovation, development, says Sheikha Hind

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The blockade imposed on Qatar by some of its neighbouring countries has further enhanced Qatar's strong belief in the importance of innovation, research, and development, said HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, vice chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF).

Sheikha Hind was speaking at the inaugural session of the Annual Research Conference 2018 which was attended by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, HE Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs, HE Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada, Minister of Energy and Industry and a number of international experts in various research fields.

"The blockade represents a challenge for us to persevere and pursue innovation; we see it as an opportunity to continue co-operation and research partnerships, and to make further contribution to the development of Qatar," said Sheikha Hind.

"The blockade has motivated us to strive for economic independence and devote our efforts to make Qatar a regional and international centre for research and development, through co-operation with partners, governments, and research institutions, both locally and globally," the QF vice chairperson said.

"As the blockade continues,



Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), attended the QF Annual Research Conference 2018 yesterday at the Qatar National Convention Center. Her Highness honoured the winners of Best Research and Best Innovation Awards. The event was attended by HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, vice chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF), HE Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs, HE Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada, Minister of Energy and Industry and a number of international experts in various research fields. **PICTURE:** A R al-Baker-HHOPOL

Qatar has unveiled its second national development plan, focusing on building human and institutional capacities, developing a system that supports entrepreneurship and promotes research and development. The plan comes in the context of efforts aiming to achieve sustainable development and accelerate

progress and innovation," noted the QF CEO.

According to Sheikha Hind, the Annual Research Conference fulfils this role and it stems from

Qatar Foundation's efforts to address major national challenges, contribute to the establishment of a diverse and sustainable economy, and provide effective

and impactful solutions. She said that focusing on national priorities, the conference recognises solution-based research as the best means for

greater prosperity and regional security. "Based on our firm belief that research, technology, and development are among the most important elements of a competitive and diverse economy, our main areas of interest at Qatar Foundation remain research and development, along with empowering and activating research innovations across Qatar.

Research offers a significant contribution to promoting human capital development and supporting the growth of local institutions throughout the region, thus helping to provide security that can mitigate the current turmoil in the region," she said.

"The current circumstances require us to take effective and careful measures, and to exert more efforts to raise the banner of Qatar by investing in the brightest minds. I invite you all to co-operate together to achieve the desired positive impacts," Sheikha Hind said.

The QF CEO also highlighted that Qatar Foundation collaborates with stakeholders in the public and private sectors to shape the future of research and development, both inside and outside the country to provide innovative and research-based solutions.

"Through our concerted efforts, we can achieve our vision and goals in a manner that fortifies Qatar and all its residents. Our efforts will not stop at this point, but like our nation, we share the fruits of our work, our experiences, and our ideas for the benefit of all," added Sheikha Hind.

Qatar Foundation signs MoUs with leading research entities

HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani, vice chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF), signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to strengthen and promote the local research and development ecosystem on the sidelines of the Qatar Foundation Annual Research Conference 2018 (ARC'18) that got underway yesterday.

The agreements were signed with Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) and Iberdrola QSTP LLC, the European Federation of Corrosion (EFC), and the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT).

Sheikha Hind said, "At Qatar Foundation we collaborate with stakeholders in the public and private sectors to shape the future of research and development, both locally and globally, in order to create innovative solutions to today's most pressing challenges."

"We are delighted, therefore, to be joining hands with these leading entities today. These partnerships will allow us to work together to deliver impact across the nation and beyond, and to further contribute to the development of Qatar."

"This is particularly pertinent today, at the Qatar Foun-



HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani signs an MoU with Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) and Iberdrola QSTP LLC.

dation Annual Research Conference 2018."

The collaboration between Kahramaa and Iberdrola will help to facilitate key developments within the energy and environment sectors in Qatar.

The MoU with the EFC will also help to further address areas of national priority within the field of energy and environment. The agreement with MIGHT has been designed to pave the way for mutually-

beneficial research, innovation, and technology development collaborations between Qatar and Malaysia.

ARC'18 is taking place at the Qatar National Convention Centre and will conclude today.



HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani signs an MoU with the European Federation of Corrosion.



HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani signs an MoU with the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology.

ARC'18 showcases startups; rapid technological advances

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

The Innovation Track at the Annual Research Conference 2018 unveiled a new event for the Middle East, 'The Future Is Now,' presented by Qatar Science & Technology Park and Singularity University (SU) and highlighted how technologies transform the world at a rapid pace. It also showcased some of the highly successful global startups.

Giving an overview of the significant changes that have taken place in the world over the peri-

od, David Roberts, distinguished faculty, SU, noted that disruption of a major practice leads to bigger achievements.

Speaking on the topic 'Disruption and Global Impact,' Roberts highlighted: "Innovation is doing same things in a better way but disruption is doing new things that make the older things obsolete."

Rapidly-accelerating technologies are reshaping industries, societies, and lives."

Roberts pointed out how the spice trade, biggest trade in the ancient times was disrupted by the discovery of insulated warehouse. He also pointed out how

many of the modern technologies have made some of the highly successful business practices obsolete.

"We are now in the same stage of exponential growth that we witnessed in the 18th century, when electricity was invented. We live in an era where Artificial Intelligence will bring great added-value to simple things like cars and phones," noted Roberts.

Showcasing 16 global startups and their groundbreaking ideas and products, 'The Future Is Now' saw some of SU's top speakers provide their insights on the impact that exponential

technologies will have on economic prosperity, business, energy, manufacturing, and healthcare and medicine.

Under the ARC'18 Research Strategy Track, the role of R&D in building a strong, sustainable, and globally-competitive economy was at the centre of a special panel session involving six panellists from three nations. 'Research and Innovation for Qatar's Competitiveness' saw Prof Low Teck Seng, CEO, National Research Foundation, Singapore, state, "We have to ask ourselves where the next major company in our nation is coming from – it must be something that we have

invested in, and that dovetails with the needs of industry."

"We want to fund areas of science that are relevant to our countries, but that also have global impact, areas that link to an economic narrative but whose outcomes also help us to resolve issues. To be competitive, you need to be relevant," he added.

The conference's Researchers

Track presented 55 of Qatar's best research projects to a local and global audience through a series of sessions built around the four conference pillars, each focusing on a research area identified as a priority for the nation. Topics included energy and environment solutions for the oil and gas sector, energy efficiency and water security, diabetes, cybersecurity,

and data science, education, population and economic sustainability, and culture and communication.

Another 270 projects were showcased to delegates through the ARC'18 poster presentations display, with entities and companies involved in R&D in Qatar also exhibiting their ongoing research activities and projects.



David Roberts speaking at the event



Hamad Port anticipates another milestone in 2018

QTerminals CEO Neville Bissett has expressed optimism that Hamad Port would achieve another milestone by reaching the 2mn TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) throughput mark by the end of 2018.

"We're actually hoping and we're anticipating that 2mn would be achieved this year, so we'll be looking at doing an additional 1mn TEU in a much shorter period of time; perhaps towards September, October, November we'll be looking at the 2mn TEUs coming through Hamad Port," Bissett told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony held at Hamad Port yesterday.

QTerminals, which manages the Hamad Port, is a joint venture between Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani - 51%) and Qatar Navigation (Milaha - 49%).

According to Bissett, traffic through Hamad Port "increased substantially" since mid-2017.

During that period, he said container traffic increased by almost two and a half times and similarly, bulk and break bulk traffic, as well as other traffic increased.

"In terms of Hamad Port, from January to May 2017, the average throughput in the container terminal was just over 40,000 TEUs a month. After which, from October 2017 to March 2018, we're looking at over 100,000 TEUs a month, so it's almost two and a half times the volume on a monthly basis.

"We're doing that with the same amount of people, equipment, and space. We're working with the government agencies, the port authority, consumers, and other industry representative organisations to ensure that the blockade does not adversely impact business in Qatar," Bissett noted.



HE the Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim Seif Ahmed al-Sulaiti and other dignitaries during a ceremony celebrating Hamad Port's 1mn TEU mark milestone yesterday. **PICTURE:** Jayan Orma

Security robot launched at Hamad International Airport



The security robot launched at Hamad International Airport yesterday. Built in the form of a scooter, the robot can measure pulse rate remotely and also has a facial recognition feature. The robot carries cameras and sensors to detect suspicious and wanted persons, fake currencies, credit cards, abandoned objects and explosive of any kind.



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MINISTRY OF FINANCE

GOVERNMENT TENDERS

Tenders and Bids of Government Organizations subordinate to the Law of Organizing Tenders and Bids No.24 for the Year 2015

For More details please refer to the unified website of government procurement
<https://monaqasat.mof.gov.qa>

Logo	Organization	Tender Number	Description of the required goods, works or Services	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Submission System	Closing Date
	Qatar General Electricity & Water Corporation - Kahramaa	GTC/893/2017	GTC 893-2017 EMC converged systems and data protection solution with ACI www.kmqa IT Department	QAR 8,500	QAR 850,000	Two Envelopes	12/04/2018
	Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)	406 - 2018	MAINTENANCE OF LANDSCAPE AND OUTDOOR PLANTS FOR MEDICAL COMMISSION DEPARTMENT FOR ONE (1) YEAR - For more information : www.MOPH.gov.qa Announcement	QAR 500	QAR 10,000	Two Envelopes	Sunday, 08 th of April 2018 12:00 hrs
	Ministry of Transport and Communications	IDDCIE-2016-41	تطوير الخطة التبروبيجة والموقع الإلكتروني والحملات التوعوية لمراكز حاضنات الأعمال الرقمية DIC Communication Plan, Website & Awareness Campaign	QAR 700.00	QAR 70,000.00	Two Envelopes	10/04/2018
	Primary Health Care Corporation	PHCC/TAC/31/2018	Provision of Information Security Audit Consultancy Service.	QAR 500	QAR 7,000	Two Envelope (Technical + Commercial)	Sunday 22/4/2018
	Primary Health Care Corporation	PHCC/TAC/35/2018	Provision of Oracle EBS Consultants for a Period of 2 Years	QAR 2500	QAR 250,000	Two Envelope (Technical + Commercial)	Monday 23/4/2018
	Primary Health Care Corporation	PHCC/TAC/36/2018	Provision of Fixed Asset and Inventory Accounting Supporting Service for a Period of 2 years.	QAR 750	QAR 75,000	Two Envelope (Technical + Commercial)	Tuesday 24/4/2018
	Public Works Authority	PWA/STC/013/2018	Price Agreement for Photography Services PR/2018/S/001/S	QAR 500	QAR 6,200	Two Envelopes (Technical + Financial)	09/04/2018
	Public Works Authority	PWA/GTC/005/2018	Interim Road Improvement - Doha South Phase 1 IA/2018/C/024/G	QAR 91,000	QAR 9,100,000	Two Envelopes (Technical + Financial)	24/04/2018
	Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy	40001366	Expression of Interest (EOI) for DNS Security Solution and Component Renewal – PR 20006406 – 400/2018 Kindly submit your EOI by e-mail to s.basu@sc.qa with cc to b.elmerheby@sc.qa by 1 April 2018, 13:00 for more information please refer to http://www.sc.qa/en/opportunities/prourement	QAR 500	QAR 28,000.00	Two Envelopes	1 April 2018

Barwa Bank names Thara'a savings account draw winners

Barwa Bank has announced the names of the most recent round of draw winners for Thara'a, its Sharia-compliant savings account, in a ceremony held recently at the bank's headquarters.

Mohamed Omar Abdalkader and Khaldoun Nachawi each won a cash prize of QR10,000. The draw was conducted under the supervision of a representative of the qualitative licence and market control department at the Ministry of Economy and Commerce.

A cash prize worth QR5,000 was awarded to the following bank clients - Sara Jabor al-Kubaisi, Ziyad Mohamed Marouf, Abdulaziz Ibrahim al-Shaar, Nyla Abdul Rashid, Yousef Belal al-Abdulla, Saeed Mubarak al-Hajri, Almayasa Mohd al-Anqar, Mohd Shbhi al-Anqar,

Bashaer Ameer al-Mulla, Noora Saleh al-Shahwani, Maha Mohamed Alqatouni, Aysha Essa al-Sulaiti, Fatema Saad al-Mannai, Turki Mansour al-Qahtani, Abdulaziz Abdo al-Amari, Catherine Amante Tan, Mona Abdallaazak Mardoum, Alfajer Mohamed al-Sayed, Hanan Nagi Alyafei, Essa Mubarak al-Kuwari and Daleen Munther Alkhatib.

Thara'a offers account holders the chance to benefit from cash rewards up to QR1mn, a first for Islamic banks in Qatar. Based on several criteria, Thara'a account holders are eligible for a number of periodic draws for cash prizes.

Totaling QR3.3mn, Thara'a cash rewards are distributed on both a monthly and biannual basis to customers holding a minimum balance of QR10,000.

On a monthly basis, there are 21 winners per draw for the cash prize of QR5,000, as well as two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR10,000.

Additionally, twice a year, there are two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR25,000, two winners per draw for the cash prize of QR50,000, and one winner per draw for the grand prize of QR1mn, rewarding 194 winners in total with cash prizes up to QR3.3mn.

Coupled with cash prizes and a reward scheme, Thara'a is a product full of value-added benefits and services. Thara'a offers account holders access to Barwa Bank's innovative banking channels with benefits, including unlimited withdrawals and deposits, as well as free fund transfers across their accounts and through all Barwa Bank channels.



A pendant from the collection.

Malabar Gold launches Mother's Day pendants

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has announced the introduction of an exclusive collection of diamond and 18k gold jewellery pendants to celebrate Mother's Day.

The initiative comes as a "glittering tribute to the unspoken love of a mother", the leading jeweller has said in a statement.

Mother's Day is celebrated on March 21 every year to honour and commemorate the unconditional bond of motherhood.

One can celebrate the "true essence of motherhood" with pendants offered at prices starting from QR750 onwards. There



are 11 "beautifully crafted designs" in diamond and five "exquisite designs" in 18k gold jewellery. All diamond pendants will come with a 18k chain.

All these pendants are available across Malabar Gold & Diamonds

showrooms until stocks last. "This Mother's Day, make your mom feel unique by gifting her diamond and 18k gold jewellery pendants specially designed for the special occasion by Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Let your mom know how you feel and shower some love on her with the magnificent Mother's Day collection by Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Show her how much she is loved and appreciated by gifting an entwined pendant sparkling with brilliant diamonds, representing the unbreakable bond a mother and child share," the statement added.

selected by the company.



Participants pose for a group photo.

Chiyoda Almana staffers take part in beach clean-up

More than 150 of Chiyoda Almana's employees and their family members celebrated the 10th establishment anniversary of the company by conducting a beach clean-up activity.

For the eighth year, Chiyoda Almana, in collaboration with the Beaches and Islands Section

at the Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME), arranged an environmental activity to clean up an approximately 2.5km stretch of coastline in the vicinity of Al Jumail - the fishermen's village.

"Over the last 10 years of successful operation in Qatar, Chiyoda Almana has given the

highest priority to Qatar's environment and has executed many projects considering environmental protection and conservation," the company said in a statement.

Tanemura, deputy managing director of Chiyoda Almana who led the campaign, passed a message to all participants

about the importance of individuals' and companies' responsibility towards the environment in Qatar.

He also expressed the company's appreciation to representatives from the MME for their co-operation and support to Chiyoda Almana for the annual beach clean-up activities.

'LuLu Kochu Rocks' talent show on March 23

For the first time in Qatar, popular south Indian children's channel Kochu TV will conduct a kids' talent show at LuLu Hypermarket - Barwa City at 5pm on March 23, it has been announced.

To take part in the show, 'LuLu Kochu Rocks in Qatar 2018', interested children with special talents (aged five to 14 years) can WhatsApp a one-minute video clip to 33159433 before March 21.

Selected children will get a chance to showcase their talent during the show and receive gifts, while others can enjoy with Singoo.

The programme is sponsored by LuLu Hypermarket and the presenting sponsor is Al Anees Electronics.

Gifts are sponsored by LuLu Hypermarket and Al Anees Electronics, and the event is organised by Watermelon Advertising.



Award-winning filmmaker to lecture at NU-Q graduation

Renowned journalist, filmmaker and activist Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy will address Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q)'s graduating class in May, it has been announced.

Obaid-Chinoy's documentary films and projects, which focus on inequality among women, have received international recognition, earning her two Academy Awards, six Emmy Awards and a Lux Style Award.

"We are honoured that Sharmeen, a person of great distinction and achievement, will speak at the 2018 graduation," said Everett E Dennis, dean and CEO, NU-Q.

"Her accomplishments connect the values and interests of all students at NU-Q, and her life and work will be a source of courage and inspiration for all of us."

In 2012, *Time* magazine included Obaid-Chinoy on their annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world. In the same year, the Pakistani journalist received the Hilal-i-Imtiaz award, the second highest civilian honour awarded by Pakistan.

"Her accomplishments connect the values and interests of all students at NU-Q, and her life and work will be a source of courage and inspiration for all of us."



Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy

In 2013, Canada awarded her a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for her work in the field of documentary films and, in the same year, the World Economic Forum honoured her with a Crystal Award at its annual summit in Davos.

Obaid-Chinoy was selected to speak by a graduation speaker committee, composed of NU-Q faculty, students and

stories about injustice and inequality, especially among women, which is something very important to me given the region I live in and the issues surrounding it. I am very pleased and honoured that she is coming to speak at our graduation!

In the past 16 years, Obaid-Chinoy has made a dozen multi-award winning films in more than 10 countries around the world. Her films include *Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*, *Song of Lahore*, *Saving Face* and *Peace Keepers*, among others. Her work has aired on international channels, including HBO, CNN, PBS, Channel 4, CBC, Arte, SBS and Discovery Channel.

NU-Q's previous graduation speakers have included columnist and commentator Rami Khoury, author and filmmaker Sophia al-Marai, filmmaker and Oscar nominee Jehane Noujaim, social entrepreneur Shiza Shahid, award-winning BBC anchor and best-selling author and magazine journalist Derek Thompson.

Place, time of birth affect media preferences: NU-Q researcher

According to a new explorative study by Klaus Schoenbach, an internationally renowned researcher, when and where you are born could influence the type of media you consume.

Schoenbach, who served as NU-Q's senior associate dean for four years, concluded that service in December and continues to serve as a distinguished adjunct professor.

The study, published in the scholarly journal *Communications*, examines possible correlations between both the season and hemisphere in which one is born and media preferences later in life.

The work builds on previous studies conducted in Europe and Japan suggesting that those born during winter months - when less light and colder temperatures cause people to stay indoors - tend to be less cheerful, lively and self-assured, and therefore more likely drawn to entertaining content to manage their mood.

The NU-Q study focuses on the Mena region where summers are almost unbearably hot, forcing people to stay inside or to cover themselves up - that is, more like during northern winters.

"The more summer months people born in the Mena region experience in the first half year of their life, the more we would expect them to use and prefer entertaining media content," said Schoenbach, who is also a former senior associate dean at NU-Q. "This relationship is stronger in countries with higher average summer temperatures. The duration of summer correlates with more media use later in



Klaus Schoenbach says place and time of birth affect media preferences.

life to compensate for a lack of cheerfulness and liveliness."

Individuals with more - but also relatively hotter - summer months directly after birth more often prefer entertaining genres such as comedy and drama, both on TV and online.

Younger respondents also tend to watch films on DVD more frequently and do not call either religious and spiritual programmes their favourites.

The study does note that the impact of climate during a person's first six months in life should fade with age.

"This study provides new evidence of how temperaments come about that lead to specific media behaviours, thus helping to expand and refine mood-management theory," said Schoenbach.

With a host of new smartphone device launches planned for 2018, Ooredoo has reminded customers that Flexi-Pay is available on devices in Ooredoo shops.

To ensure that everyone can take advantage of the latest technology, Ooredoo launched a payment instalment

programme (Flexi-Pay) that enables customers to purchase the latest devices and spreads payments over a calendar year.

Customers who bank with QNB, Commercial Bank or Doha Bank can enjoy the spread-out payment options, and Flexi-Pay is available on all devices of a greater value than QR500, Ooredoo has said in a

statement. Devices available from Ooredoo include the latest smartphones, tablets, Ooredoo 4G+ My-Fi connections and 4G Smart Cradles. On top of the monthly instalments, customers will benefit from a 0% interest rate, so that they can manage their costs more effectively over the year, the statement noted.

Instalment options on Ooredoo devices over QR500



Damascus sees some Ghouta rebels accepting deals soon

Reuters

Damascus/Beirut

Some rebels in eastern Ghouta may soon agree to withdraw from the opposition enclave or accept rule by the Syrian state after big advances by the army into the area, a Syrian government minister said yesterday.

Syrian government forces have splintered eastern Ghouta into three separate zones in a month-long assault to crush the last major opposition stronghold near Damascus, confronting the rebels with their biggest defeat since 2016.

Damascus and its Russian allies are offering rebels in eastern Ghouta similar terms to those offered in other parts of the country that have been recaptured: safe passage out for those who agree to surrender territory, or a reconciliation agreement for those who wish to stay under government rule.

The government offensive has been one of the deadliest of the war, killing more than 1,400 people in eastern Ghouta since last month, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Tens of thousands of people have fled rebel-held areas into territory controlled by the government since Thursday.

Ali Haidar, the Syrian minister responsible for national reconciliation, told Reuters in an interview that rebels in an enclave centred around the town of Harasta — one of three rebel pockets in eastern Ghouta — may be ready to cut a deal.

He said the army had captured more than 80% of the area once held by rebels but the pace of advances may slow as the troops reach more densely populated areas and they try to avoid civilian casualties.

"There will be possibility for greater discussion in the matter of reconciliations in these areas to safeguard civilians and therefore the pace that we saw



Syrians are seen walking past the damage following government air strikes in the Eastern Ghouta rebel-held enclave of Douma, on the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

may slow a bit," Haidar said.

With the sound of warplanes in the background, Haidar said there were contacts with rebels and "to a certain extent there are acceptable results in part of the file". "There may be an accomplishment in Harasta in the coming period. I don't commit to specific timeframes because the matter is linked to the militants accepting departure or settling their situation (with the authorities) and the army entering the area," Haidar said.

Rebels in eastern Ghouta have publicly ruled out the kind of negotiated withdrawal that helped Assad recover Aleppo, Homs and other areas, though figures close to rebels have said indirect talks have been underway

to secure such an agreement.

The opposition accuses Assad of moving his opponents out of Syria's main towns and cities to the border with Turkey in what it calls a systematic policy of "demographic change". Before the exodus from Ghouta, the United Nations estimated that some 400,000 people were living in eastern Ghouta, an expanse of farmland and towns that rebels have used to shell the capital during the conflict now in its eighth year.

Assad visited soldiers fighting on the frontline on Sunday.

A video released overnight showed him in his car driving from central Damascus to eastern Ghouta, and discussing the war on his way, a sign of his con-

fident position in the war now entering its eighth year.

"The road is open... everything is running now in the city and in Syria," he said in the video, describing a road that had previously been cut by sniper fire and saying it was now easier to travel around the country.

Assad was shown in sunglasses at the wheel of his Honda car, speaking about the government's increasing strength as peaceful scenery behind him gave way to battle-scarred concrete.

State TV broadcast from the outskirts of the town of Hassa where it said militant positions were being targeted.

The sound of explosions could be heard. A big plume of

UN envoy sees partition 'catastrophe'

Syria is heading for a catastrophic partition and could see the return of Islamic State if there is no inclusive peace settlement, UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura said yesterday.

"The truth is that a soft, long-term partition of Syria, which is the one that we are witnessing at the moment, in different areas of control, will be a catastrophe, not only for Syria but for the whole region," he told an audience at Geneva's Graduate Institute.

"Without an inclusive political process, including those who are excluded, particularly the majority, Daesh will come back," he said, referring to Islamic State.

smoke was seen in a separate broadcast from the outskirts of Arbin.

The Russian defence ministry said more than 6,000 people had left eastern Ghouta since yesterday morning.

Haidar said the total was now over 50,000.

The people were in three shelters set up by the government and at other locations, he said.

Haidar said the people who left eastern Ghouta would return as soon as possible.

The United Nations estimated that as of Sunday around 25,000 people had left eastern Ghouta, and conditions for those still inside the besieged enclave remained "dire". Many people are sheltering government bombardment in basements.

The New York-based Human Rights Watch said on Sunday that with Russia's continued support, the Syrian government was using unlawful tactics in the eastern Ghouta assault, including what appears to be the use of internationally banned weapons.

US warns over civilians caught in assault

AFP

Washington

The United States warned its Nato ally Turkey yesterday it is "deeply concerned" after a Turkish-led assault on the Syrian city of Afrin triggered an exodus of Kurdish civilians.

"It appears the majority of the population of the city, which is predominantly Kurdish, evacuated under threat of attack from Turkish military forces and Turkish-backed opposition forces," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said.

"We are also concerned over reports of looting inside the city of Afrin. We have repeatedly expressed our serious concern to Turkish officials regarding the situation in Afrin," she said.

Over the previous 48 hours, Turkish forces and Turkish-backed Syrian Arab fighters have surged into the city in northwest Turkey, once defended by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia.

In the east of the country, the YPG forms the backbone of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the militia which ousted the Islamic State group from its main stronghold of Raqa.

But, while American special forces continue to support the SDF east of the Euphrates river, they have not come to take their aid in Afrin, a pocket of autonomous Kurdish-led rule west of the river.

There, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has unleashed his army and Syrian former rebel fighters to take Afrin from a group he sees as aligned with the Kurdish PPK group, fighting within Turkey.

The fight has embarrassed the United States, which is seeking to maintain ties with both its traditional Nato ally and a regional force that has proved its mettle against the

Islamic State group. Nauert said the offensive had worsened the "humanitarian situation in the area, with United Nations agencies reporting a displaced population in or from Afrin district in the hundreds of thousands."

But she made it clear that Washington is not taking sides west of the Euphrates, despite Erdogan having declared that his forces will now take the battle to more Kurdish-held districts. "The United States does not operate in the area of northwest Syria where Afrin is located," Nauert said.

"We remain committed to our Nato ally Turkey, to include their legitimate security concerns."

"We also remain committed to the defeat ISIS campaign and our Syrian Democratic Forces partners in eastern Syria," she said. But the US spokeswoman also warned that the fighting has distracted from the battle against the Islamic State group, which she said had begun "reconstituting in some areas."

British woman killed fighting alongside Kurds

A British woman fighting alongside Kurdish forces in the Syrian region of Afrin was killed in the Turkish-led offensive on the area, a spokeswoman for the forces said yesterday. Anna Campbell was killed last week in the Afrin enclave, said Nisrin Abdallah, a spokeswoman for the Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ). She died on March 15, 2018 in Turkish shelling on frontlines around Afrin city, Abdallah said, adding that Campbell was 27 at the time of her death.

"We learned of her death yesterday and communicated with her parents," she said, confirming that Campbell was from Lewes in East Sussex.

Court rejects bid to make Palestinian teen trial public

An Israeli military court has blocked a bid to make the high-profile trial of Palestinian teen Ahed Tamimi public, meaning it will continue behind closed doors, her lawyer said yesterday. "The Military Appeals Tribunal dismissed the defense's appeal against a closed trial," Gaby Lasky wrote on Twitter. "A public trial was the only defense and it's obvious that in its absence, Ahed Tamimi will not be entitled to a fair trial." Tamimi was arrested four months ago after the 17-year-old appeared in a viral video, along with her mother and cousin, slapping and shoving two Israeli soldier outside their family home in the village of Nabi Saleh in the occupied West Bank. The soldiers had taken up positions next to the house amid near daily protests in the village against US President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Tunisian chased by cops 'blows himself up'

AFP

Tunis

ATunisian man "blew himself up" as he was being chased yesterday by police in a border region near Libya and his companion was shot dead, the interior ministry said.

Spokesman Khalifa Chibani said the National Guard had received information concerning "two male suspects" in the southern Ben Guerdane region. They tracked them down in the Magroun area, a desert zone near a nature reserve, and tried to arrest them but "one of them blew himself up," he said.

Chibani said both suspects wore explosive vests, and had

currency from chaos-wracked Libya, grenades and ammunition.

One of the suspects, he said, was armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle and had opened fire on the police.

After an exchange of fire, security forces "shot dead the second terrorist", the interior ministry said later, adding that the National Guard and the army were searching the area.

The identity of the two suspects was not immediately clear. Chibani said an investigation had been opened and would determine if the first suspect who blew himself up had activated his explosives vest or if it blew up in the exchange of fire with the security forces.

Call for tough EU approach to save nuclear accord

Reuters

Brussels

US sanctions relief on Iran.

In response, the three European signatories — France, Britain and Germany — have proposed new EU sanctions targeting Iranians who support Syria's government in that country's civil war and Tehran's ballistic missile programme, as Paris tries to persuade Washington to preserve a 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

"We are determined to ensure that the Vienna accord is respected," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters on arrival for talks with his EU counterparts, referring to the city where the 2015 deal was signed.

"But we must not exclude

(from consideration) Iran's responsibility in the proliferation of ballistic missiles," he said. "That must also be discussed to reach a common position."

Britain, France and Germany raised the sanctions issue with fellow EU foreign ministers yesterday, who discussed what strategy to present to Trump.

But with time still to run until May, sanctions did not dominate the debate, diplomats said.

Iran's foreign ministry criticised Le Drian's comments, saying there could be no negotiation over what Iran says are purely defensive weapons.

"We were hopeful that after his recent visit to Tehran and

negotiations with Iranian officials, he would understand the realities of the Islamic Republic's defence policies," Fars news agency quoted Iranian spokesman Bahram Qasemi as saying.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Twitter accused the West of "sheer hypocrisy" in selling large quantities of weapons to countries in the region while "whining about Iran's defensive missiles".

The United States has unilateral sanctions on Iran over missile tests it says violate a UN resolution against developing weapons capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

French consulate worker charged with smuggling guns

AFP

Beersheba

AFrench consulate worker was charged in an Israeli court yesterday with arms smuggling following his arrest on accusations he used an official car to transport dozens of guns from the Gaza Strip to the occupied West Bank.

Israeli officials were quick to note that the worker from France's Jerusalem consulate acted on his own without his superiors' knowledge and that diplomatic relations between the two countries were not affected.

But the delicate case comes ahead of a planned visit next week to Israel and the Palestinian territories by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and French diplomats are sure to face questions over it.

The arrested French citizen

and several Palestinian suspects are accused of belonging to a gun-running network that eventually sold the weapons to arms dealers, Israel's Shin Bet domestic security agency said in a statement.

It alleged that Romain Franck had taken advantage of reduced security checks for consular vehicles to transport the weapons out of the Palestinian enclave.

The Shin Bet said he was motivated by money, with the indictment alleging he was paid a total of around \$5,500.

The consulate employee smuggled the arms on a number of occasions in recent months while using the French consulate's consular car, which underwent a more lax security inspection at the border crossing, as is the case with this type of car," the statement said.

The consulate employee transferred arms on five occa-



French national Romain Franck (right), 24, a worker at the French consulate, and Moufak al-Ajluni (left) and Mohamed Katout (centre) appear in court in the southern Israeli city of Beer Sheva, to face charges of smuggling guns from Gaza.

The statement said the French consulate employee received the guns from a Palestinian in Gaza who worked at the French cultural centre in the strip.

He then smuggled them into the West Bank to another person who eventually sold them on to arms dealers, it said.

Gaza, run by Hamas, has been under an Israeli blockade for over a decade but weapons have been smuggled in through tunnels from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

News of the arrest emerged on Sunday, but the details had still been unclear.

A spokesman for France's embassy in Israel said Sunday "we take this case very seriously and are in close contact with the Israeli authorities".

Franck "has benefited and continues to enjoy the consular protection" provided to French nationals, he said.

A French diplomatic source said yesterday that Franck had been screened by security before he was hired and no issues were detected.

According to the source, Franck "did not deny the facts" after his arrest.

A Facebook page in his name did not show any overt signs of political engagement and features pictures of his travels in the region.

The Shin Bet called the incident "very severe".

"The immunity and privileges

given to foreign representatives were cynically abused to smuggle dozens of weapons that could be used for terror attacks against Israeli civilians and security forces," it said.

The investigation was conducted in co-operation with the Israeli foreign ministry while constantly updating the French authorities.

An Israeli official said on condition of anonymity that while authorities were taking the case "very seriously", diplomatic relations were not affected.

"Relations with France are excellent and won't be affected by this affair," the official said.

"We thank the French authorities for their co-operation." Those entering and exiting the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing with Israel undergo strict security checks by Israeli authorities, but these measures are eased for diplomatic visitors.



REFORM

Chad ponders presidential terms, opposition sceptical

Chadian President Idriss Deby yesterday opened a forum on sweeping constitutional reforms including presidential term limits in a country he has ruled with an iron fist since a 1996 coup. Deby kicked off the so-called "national forum" comprising more than 700 pro-government figures but boycotted by the opposition with a grandiose declaration that it would lead "to the birth of the Fourth Republic." The current mandate is five years and there are no limits on re-election. Deby is currently serving his fifth term. The opposition said the exercise was mere window dressing. Saleh Kebzabo, who stood against Deby in the 2016 election, said it was a ploy by Deby "to prolong his regime."

SECURITY

Canada to deploy troops, choppers on Mali mission

Canada will deploy an infantry unit and military trainers along with attack and transport helicopters to Mali for 12 months in support of an ongoing UN peacekeeping mission, Ottawa announced yesterday. "The task force will include two Chinook helicopters to provide much-needed transport and logistics capability, as well as four armed Griffon helicopters for armed escort and protection," Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan told a press conference. A date for the deployment and the exact numbers to be sent have yet to be decided. The unit heading to Mali would include women soldiers to meet a demand for gender perspectives in securing peace and security in hotspots.

CRACKDOWN

Mnangagwa threatens to prosecute forex culprits

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa yesterday named hundreds of mines, Chinese businesses and individuals who had illegally transferred foreign currency abroad during Robert Mugabe's rule and warned they would be prosecuted. The announcement came after the expiry of a three month amnesty for the return of funds. Authorities say Zimbabwe lost at least \$1.4bn in revenue as a result. "Despite concerted efforts by authorities and banks to request these entities and individuals to account for the externalised funds, the entities or individuals failed, ignored or neglected to respond to the amnesty," he said in a statement.

COMPENSATION

\$15mn in damages for deaths of 144 patients

A judge has ordered a provincial government in South Africa to pay \$15mn in damages to families of at least 144 psychiatric patients who he said died of negligence after being moved to unregistered facilities in early 2016. About 1,300 psychiatric patients were shifted from a unit of the Life Healthcare Group to charities as part of cost-cutting measures by Gauteng's health department, sparking public outrage. Retired Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke ruled yesterday that the Gauteng provincial government had violated the constitutional rights of the patients who died under its custody.

CRITICISED

UN slams crackdown on DR Congo protests

The United Nations yesterday condemned Congolese security forces for killing at least 47 people, including women and children, in "unlawful and unjustified" crackdowns on protests. The Democratic Republic of Congo is facing growing public unrest since President Joseph Kabila refused to step down after his mandate expired in December 2016. A UN Human Rights Office report said that Congolese authorities used lethal force on protesters and attempted to cover up rights abuses by hiding dead bodies after protests. "Security services and defense forces carry out this violence with almost full impunity," the report said.

Pretoria food plant shut on listeria find

Reuters
Johannesburg

Tiger Brands yesterday closed its factory in Pretoria where listeria was detected as South Africa faces the worst outbreak of the disease, which has killed 180 people since January 2017.

The government, which has been criticised for taking too long to find the cause, linked the outbreak to a meat product known as "polony" made by Tiger's Enterprise Food in the northern city of Polokwane.

Health authorities are also examining a second Tiger Brands factory in the town of Germiston, near Johannesburg.

Officials this month ordered a recall of polony made by Tiger Brands plants in Polokwane and Germiston and also by RCL Foods which has a plant under investigation by authorities.

RCL Foods has said it had found no deadly strain at its plant.

Tiger Brands said yesterday it recalled products made at the Pretoria facility, but added that it was not clear if the bacteria detected there were the same as the strain that has infected about 950 people since January 2017.

"We will be sending samples for genome sequencing to establish the specific strain of listeria," the company said in a statement adding that the level detected was well within the range of government standards for the presence of listeria.

Doyle told the radio station the company had yet to calculate the total financial impact of the suits.

Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia have banned imports of South African processed meat, dairy products, vegetables and fruit.

Mozambique and Namibia halted imports of the processed meat items and Botswana said it was recalling them.

Malawi stepped up screening of South African food imports.

Mozambican health authorities said yesterday they had incinerated 55 tonnes of processed meat from South Africa produced by Tiger Brands and RCL Foods.

Guinean schools reopen after month-long teachers' strike

Classes resumed yesterday in Guinean schools after a month-long strike by teachers seeking the implementation of a 40% pay increase that was only partially fulfilled.

The strike, which began on February 12, had paralysed the education system and fractured relations between teachers, parents and the state, while President Alpha Conde faced criticism for allowing the industrial action to drag on.

"I am happy to see my friends and teachers again," said final-year student Idressa Camara, 16,

outside a school in the Conakry suburb of Kite.

"I failed the school leaving exam last year. This year is my final chance. These strikes haven't helped at all," he said.

The powerful teachers' union agreed to lift the strike last Wednesday after gaining a guarantee of the pay hike agreed in 2017 which was only partially implemented in February. The government and the union have also agreed to negotiations on May 2-25 for a base salary of 8mn Guinean francs (\$880) and to a promise that strikers would not be punished.

At least 12 people have died in the course of political and social protests in Guinea since the start of February.

Tropical storm hits Madagascar

Locals push a minibus on a flooded road near Manambonitra, Atsinanana region, Madagascar, yesterday after tropical storm Eliakim made landfall in this picture obtained from social media. Seventeen people are dead after a powerful tropical storm hit Madagascar over the weekend, officials said yesterday. "We are still calculating the damage, the death toll could increase," Charles Ramboliarson, executive secretary at the National Bureau of Risk Management and Disaster, told DPA. More than 1,000 homes were flooded, many of them destroyed completely, and several bridges were swept away by tropical storm Eliakim, the disaster agency said.

Cape Town counts cost of worst drought in 100 years

By Gregory Walton, AFP
Cape Town

South African winemaker Marlize Jacobs looks out across the parched brown earth that sustains her award-winning vines, surveying the effects of the water crisis ravaging Cape Town and surrounding areas.

"It's the strangest thing — I think vines like to suffer. When the berries are shrinking, there's more concentration of flavours," she told AFP, describing the impact on her crop of the worst drought in 100 years.

The Western Cape region has gone without significant rains for more than three years, forcing South Africa's second city to slash residential water consumption by more than 60%.

Wine flavours may benefit, but water-intensive businesses like Marlize's farm, 35km east of Cape Town, have borne the brunt of the water crisis.

"It's the fourth year in a row that we're having lower production and there is a shortage of wine," said Marlize, 48. "Water costs have increased by about 100%. We're absolutely only giving water to keep the vines alive — not any more than that."

So perilous is Cape Town's economic situation that credit rating agency Moody's warned in January that if the crisis worsens, it could lead to the city losing its investment-grade status.

Western Cape province said in its economic forecast for 2017 that the growth outlook was "soared... by the persisting drought which also threatens employment."

The city was granted a narrow escape earlier this month when the dreaded "Day Zero" — the date when taps will run dry — was finally pushed back until next year after months of growing public panic.

If Day Zero does arrive, individuals will be forced to queue at public standpipes to collect daily 25 litre rations.

The famed winelands, responsible for 11% of the region's economic output, also bring millions of visitors to the region annually and the Western Cape tourism sector alone sustains 300,000 jobs.

But tourists have been found to use up to eight times as much water as locals.

The construction industry — another major employer — has not been spared draconian consumption cuts.

Some building projects have had to rely on expensive imported water with others postponed indefinitely because of shortages — in a region where one in ten jobs are in construction.

The Rabie Group, a large construction company, uses treated effluent water to make concrete and wash equipment on its Cape Town sites. "Obviously these factors all have a price tag which will invariably push up construction prices," warned Rabie director Miguel Rodrigues.

In 2016, 94% of the region's companies

flagged water as a risk to their operations. Companies have not yet faced a blanket limit, but instead struck agreements with officials — often at huge costs.

"You want to avoid creating the crisis within the crisis... the construction industry is already very fragile, cutting off their water risks creating job losses," councillor J P Smith, who is responsible for safety in the city, told AFP. The city council is even working with behavioural scientists and the University of Cape Town to determine the best way to "nudge" businesses and residents to slash consumption.

Cape Town's success in cutting domestic consumption — by 60% in three years — is expected to be highlighted during World Water Day on Thursday.

Christopher Smith, a senior engineering assistant at the Koeberg nuclear power station outside Cape Town, said that the plant has developed its own desalination system in response to the drought. "I don't see any option, we just have to bite the bullet," said Smith, 60, as he stood in line for water at the Newland Spring collection point beside the SAB Miller brewery.

The beer giant, owned by AB InBev, declined to comment on the drought's effect on beer production, but others in the drinks industry told AFP that if "Day Zero" happened, it would be catastrophic. "If we run out of water, the whole industry will be mucked up," said Raphael Clistini, 28, a South African-born entrepreneur.

AU launches ambitious bid for world's largest free trade area

By Chris Stein, AFP
Addis Ababa

Africa's leaders will gather in Rwanda tomorrow to launch what they say will be the world's largest free trade area but Nigeria has already pulled out, highlighting the challenge in getting the continent to sign up.

Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) with 55 African Union (AU) members having a cumulative GDP of \$2.5tn is one of the bloc's flagship projects.

However Muhammad Buhari, president of one of Africa's largest markets Nigeria, cancelled

plans to attend the Kigali launch and called for more consultations after business leaders objected to joining the world's biggest free trade area in terms of countries.

"The signature of the CFTA is something that makes Africa look good on paper, but for implementation it's going to have a lot of hiccups," said Sola Afolabi, a Nigeria-based international trade consultant.

Some 27 heads of state are expected to attend the Kigali meeting, but it is unclear who will sign on to the CFTA right away.

AU trade and industry commissioner Albert M Muchanga said

Africa's fledgling industries and growing middle class would benefit from the CFTA's removal of tariffs.

Currently, African countries only do about 16% of their business with each other.

"If we remove customs and duties by 2022, the level of intra-African trade will increase by 60%, which is very, very significant," Muchanga told AFP.

"Eventually, we are hoping that all the African Union states will be parties to the Continental Free Trade Area," he added.

With underdeveloped service and industrial sectors across the continent, African countries have for decades seen their fortunes rise and fall with the prices of exported commodities such as oil, cocoa and gold.

In recent years, nations like Ethiopia and Ghana have tried to

wean themselves from this cycle by building factories and new infrastructure for local industries, spurring rapid growth.

Landry Signe, a development expert with Stanford University in the United States, said the agreement could help these industries, while giving African countries a unified platform to negotiate trade deals with wealthier nations.

"With the CFTA, the manufacturing sector would be much more diversified, as the market would not be a few million people, but potentially 1.2bn people," he said.

South Africa, a vocal backer of the trade deal, has argued that African economies are too small

to support economic diversification and industrialisation on their own.

Regional integration "is critical to reduce the vulnerability of African economies to global shocks, a vulnerability which results from their heavy reliance on commodities," South Africa's Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies wrote in an editorial last week.

However in Nigeria, the plans have not gone down well with unions and business leaders.

"We have no doubt this policy initiative will spell the death knell of the Nigerian economy," said the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

The CFTA is a key part of the

AU's long-term development plan Agenda 2063, which calls for easing trade and travel across the continent.

At its most recent summit in Ethiopia in January, AU member states agreed to a common air transport market that could drive down air fares, as well as plans for visa-free travel for Africans across the continent.

Which countries will adopt these agreements remains unclear, as do the prospects for the CFTA, which requires 22 ratifications at a national level after its signing to come into force.

Afolabi said countries with more developed industries would embrace the CFTA because it could open more markets, but nations whose ports served landlocked neighbours could opt out, fearing a loss of revenue.

He worked on setting up the Economic Community of West African States's (ECOWAS) common market, which he has subsequently criticised for failing to punish countries that violated its terms.

"The regional trade agreements are not working and those are supposed to be the legs for the continental version," Afolabi said.

"If there is no reward for compliance and there is no punishment for non-compliance, then it is going to be a very nice agreement without any teeth or any legs," he said.



MOURNED



Members of a US Air Force carry team move the flag-draped transfer case holding the remains of Air Force Master Sergeant Christopher J Raguso of Commack, New York, who was killed on an Iraq mission, to a transfer vehicle during a dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base in Dover, Delaware.

DISMISSED

Killer's death penalty challenge rebuffed

The US Supreme Court yesterday rebuffed a direct challenge to the constitutionality of the death penalty, refusing to hear an Arizona contract killer's argument that it amounts to impermissible cruel and unusual punishment and that American society has reached a consensus on the need to strike it down. The justices also rejected death row inmate Abel Daniel Hidalgo's bid to strike down Arizona's death penalty law, which he argued makes too many defendants in the state eligible for capital punishment. Hidalgo fatally shot two men at a Phoenix body shop in 2001 after being paid \$1,000 by a gang member, and pleaded guilty in 2015.

COMPENSATION

Flint water contamination lawsuits get green signal

The US Supreme Court yesterday gave the green light to two class-action lawsuits filed by residents of Flint, Michigan who are pursuing civil rights claims against local and state officials over lead contamination in the city's water supply. The justices left in place a July 2017 ruling by the Cincinnati, Ohio-based 6th US Circuit Court of Appeals that revived the litigation after the lawsuits were thrown out by a lower court. The high court rejected separate appeals filed by the city of Flint, Genesee County's drainage commissioner and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality officials. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality declined comment.

TRAGEDY

Boy, 9, shoots dead sister over video game controller

A nine-year-old boy shot dead his sister, 13, in the southern US state of Mississippi following an argument about a video game controller, local media reported yesterday. The tragedy took place Saturday when the girl refused to give up the controller, Monroe County Sheriff Cecil Cantrell said according to reports. The boy then opened fire, striking his sister in the back of the head. The bullet pierced through girl's brain, and she was taken to a hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, in critical condition. She died on Sunday. An investigation was opened to determine how the young boy had access to a firearm and to what extent he was aware of the danger.

JUSTICE

New immigration detention dispute in Supreme Court

The US Supreme Court yesterday took up a new dispute over the detention of immigrants in a case involving whether people who were convicted of criminal offences and were subject to deportation can go free in certain instances after serving their prison terms. The justices will hear an appeal by President Donald Trump's administration of a lower court ruling blocking the government from detaining immigrants convicted of crimes any time after they leave prison, sometimes years later. The San Francisco-based 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2016 that the government could detain such immigrants only immediately after they finish their prison term.

Austin 'serial bomber' showing 'higher level of skill': police

AFP

Austin

Texas police said yesterday that a bombing which left two people injured overnight in the state capital Austin was connected to three previous blasts in the city and the "serial bomber" used a tripwire in the latest attack, showing a "higher level of skill."

Police also said they have been unable to determine a motive for the string of bombings which have killed two people in Austin and put the city of nearly 900,000 on edge.

"As we said from the very beginning, we were not willing to classify this as terrorism, as hate, because we just don't know enough," police chief Brian Manley told reporters.

In the earlier bombings, two African-American men were killed by packages left on their doorsteps, raising the possibility of a hate crime.

A 75-year-old Hispanic woman was also injured in a blast.

But Manley said the latest bombing seriously wounded two white men in their 20s as they walked along a sidewalk in southwest Austin.

He said it appeared "random" and was triggered by a tripwire.

"We're clearly dealing with what we expect to be a serial bomber at this point based on the similarities between now what is the fourth device," the police chief said.

"(But) what we have seen now is a significant change from what appeared to be three very targeted attacks to what

was last night an attack that would have hit a random victim that happened to walk by," he said.

"So we've definitely seen a change in the method that this suspect or suspects are using," the police chief said.

Police believe they are "now dealing with someone who's using tripwires, shows a higher level of sophistication, a higher level of skill," he said.

Manley appealed to the bomber to contact the authorities and to the public to report anything suspicious.

"People need to be vigilant, pay attention," he said. "Pay attention to your surroundings."

Police said they were increasing the reward offered for information leading to an arrest, bringing the total city and state bounty money to \$115,000.

"We need every tip, every piece of information, however inconsequential you may think it is," Manley said.

Police cordoned off a half-mile (0.8km) radius of a residential neighbourhood of southwest Austin after the latest explosion.

Area residents were told to stay indoors until police determined it was safe.

An exploding package killed a 39-year-old African-American man on March 2.

A 17-year-old African-American man was killed on March 12 and the Hispanic woman was injured the same day.

All of the cardboard packages were hand-delivered, not sent through the mail, and the bombs were built with household items available at hardware stores.



Austin police chief Brian Manley speaks at a press conference in Austin yesterday.

A task force of hundreds of agents are working on the case, including criminal profilers and experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).

Austin Mayor Steve Adler said the

manhunt for the bomber was the "highest priority."

"We have some of the best law enforcement folks around dealing with this," Adler said on ABC's *Good Morning America*.

"There's an army of federal agents.

We have state resources. We're going to find out who is responsible for this and we're going to stop it," he said.

Since the bombings began city police have responded to some 700 suspicious package calls, the *Austin-American Statesman* newspaper said.

Kushner Companies 'falsified permits'

Reuters

New York

A New York tenants rights group and local politician said yesterday they would launch an investigation into the real estate company formerly headed by Jared Kushner, a top aide to President Donald Trump, over alleged falsification of building permits.

The group and the politician, a city councilman, said they had uncovered evidence that Kushner Companies, the developer headed by Kushner until early last year, had falsified more than 80 work permits involving 34 buildings in New York.

They made the allegations at a press conference in front of the 41-story tower on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan controlled by the Kushner Companies.

The tower has been at the center of potential conflicts of interest involving Kushner, who is also Trump's son-in-law.

Aaron Carr, executive director of Housing Rights Initiative, said the company failed to disclose the existence of rent-stabilized units in buildings.

The group's allegations were first



reported by the Associated Press on Sunday.

Christine Taylor, spokeswoman for Kushner Companies, said the company values its tenants, takes its legal and ethical responsibilities seriously, corrects mistakes, and would not intentionally falsify any filings in order to harass tenants.

"The investigation is trying to create an issue where none exists," she said.

Ritchie Torres, who chairs a city council committee on public housing, told the press conference that there was a direct link between the falsification of permits and the decline in affordable housing in New York.

Torres said the investigation would lead to the publication of a report, that he would work to pass legislation to bolster oversight of the permitting process and would make a criminal referral if there was evidence of criminal wrongdoing.

Torres said he was in confidential talks with prosecutors, but did not say which ones.

He said any criminal referral would be to either the district attorney or the state attorney general.

His tactics, employed by other landlords, have led to a significant drop in affordable housing in the city, he said.

"This is not a clerical error. This is a window into the Kushner Companies' business practices," Carr said.

"This is just the tip of a very dirty iceberg."

The group's allegations were first

Supreme Court rejects Arizona challenge to Dreamers programme

Reuters

Washington

The US Supreme Court yesterday required Arizona to continue to issue driver's licences to the so-called Dreamers immigrants and refused to hear the state's challenge to an Obama-era programme that protects hundreds of thousands of young adults brought into the country illegally as children.

The case centred on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme created in 2012 under Democratic former President Barack Obama that Republican President Donald Trump already has sought to rescind.

Those who signed up for DACA are shielded from deportation and given work permits.

The high court refused to hear Republican-governor Arizona's appeal of a lower court ruling that barred the state from denying driver's licences to people protected under DACA.

"Arizona's inexplicable attempt to deny driver's licences to Dreamers, pursued by two governors for years, has now failed at

every level of the federal judiciary," said Jennifer Chang Newell, an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, which represented the immigrants in the case.

The justices on February 26 required the Trump administration to keep DACA in place at least for now, turning away its appeal of a judge's nationwide injunction that halted the president's September order to begin winding down the program in March. A second federal judge has since issued a similar injunction.

After DACA was put in place under Obama, Arizona's governor at the time, Republican Jan Brewer, directed state officials to prevent the program's recipients from obtaining a driver's licence in the state.

Non-citizens must prove they are authorised to be in the United States to obtain an Arizona driver's licence, such as with a valid federal work permit.

The state decided not to accept permits obtained by DACA recipients.

The ACLU sued on behalf of a group of DACA recipients who were denied driver's licences.

Arizona was the only state to deny licences to DACA recipients, according to court papers.

Time's Up slams delay in Weinstein prosecution

AFP

New York

The Time's Up movement campaigning against sexual harassment yesterday demanded an investigation into a Manhattan prosecutor for failing to bring a criminal case against disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

The group called on New York's Democratic state governor, Andrew Cuomo, to open an investigation to determine why Cyrus Vance did not prosecute the 60-year-old Hollywood powerbroker in a 2015 case, arguing it could have saved other potential victims.

Italian model Ambra Battilana was one of the first women to come forward accusing Weinstein of sexual assault. But her case was dismissed and discredited.

Reports that Vance "could have been improperly influenced" by Weinstein and that senior officials in the Manhattan district attorney's office "may have sought to intimidate Battilana are particularly disturbing and merit investigation," the movement said.

An independent investigation into the full decision-making process in this case, including a full review of the correspondence within the office and with any representatives for Mr Weinstein, must be undertaken immediately," it added.

"Given the multitude of credible reports of Mr Weinstein's behaviours after the DA's decision not to prosecute in this case, arguably his continued victimisation of others could have been avoided."

There was no immediate comment from the prosecutor's office.

"It's very much under active investigation, I really can't say anything else," Vance told AFP last week when asked about the possibility of Weinstein being charged.

Weinstein hired Ben Brafman, one of America's most celebrated criminal defence lawyers to represent him in New York last November, just days after New York police confirmed they were gathering evidence for a possible arrest warrant in another rape allegation.

Brafman's past clients include former IMF boss Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who ultimately escaped criminal prosecution by Vance for alleged sexual assault in 2011.

Around 100 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct since a *New York Times* exposé was published last October, with allegations ranging from harassment to rape. Weinstein denies any non-consensual relations.

Trump's pick to lead UN agency says has trust of Muslim states

By Ben Simon, AFP
Geneva

Donald Trump's nominee to lead the UN migration agency said yesterday that he has convinced member states that he holds no anti-Muslim views, after a series of reports accused him of prejudice against Islam.

Ken Isaacs, who has a long record of humanitarian work with the Christian charity Samaritan's Purse and within George W Bush's presidential administration, has been nominated by Washington to head the

International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Isaacs is in Geneva trying to rally support for his candidacy ahead of a June vote in which IOM's 169-member states will choose their next director-general, a post traditionally held by an American.

But his candidacy has been complicated by reports detailing incidents where Isaacs apparently tweeted or retweeted material offensive to Muslims.

Speaking to journalists yesterday, Isaacs said he has met with envoys from dozens of IOM member-states, including majority Muslim nations, and con-

vinced them he was not a bigot.

"Yes, they feel satisfied," he said, adding that "after talking to me for a minute or two and hearing who I am, what I talk about, what my heart is," questions about prejudice vanish, he said.

"I have never shown discrimination against anybody for any-

thing, period," he said.

"If (people) need help, I have always helped them."

Questions about Isaacs' views on Islam emerged shortly after his February 1 nomination.

The Washington Post has re-

ported Isaacs' anti-Islam tweets between 2015 and 2017.

CNN reported four other in-

stances where Isaacs retweeted anti-Islam sentiments.

Isaacs' Twitter account has

been made private.

"I would point out the

bio at the top that

says retweets are not

endorsements...I have

retweeted many

things to stimulate

conversation"

He defended himself against the Post's charges in an email exchange with AFP last month and yesterday responded to the CNN report.

"First, I would point out the

bio at the top that says retweets are not endorsements...I have

retweeted many things to

stimulate conversation," he

said.

He added that accusing him of discriminating against Muslims stands in defiance of his four-decade career, highlighting his relief work in Darfur, Jordan, Iraq, Bangladesh and elsewhere, helping Muslims in

need.

Isaacs currently faces two rival

nominees from Costa Rica and

Portugal in the race to succeed



N Korea 'in talks to free US detainees'

AFP
Seoul

North Korea is in talks with the US and Sweden to release three jailed Americans, reports said, as diplomatic activities intensified ahead of Pyongyang's planned summits with Washington and Seoul.

The release of the three Korean-Americans is under discussion through multiple channels more than a week after President Donald Trump agreed to meet the North's Kim Jong-un, the reports said.

Pyongyang has yet to confirm it even made the US summit offer — relayed by Seoul envoys who had met Kim in Pyongyang — but South Korea said he had "given his word" about his commitment to denuclearisation.

Trump's stunning announcement has triggered a race to set a credible agenda for what would be historic talks between the two leaders.

Seoul-based MBC TV station reported on Sunday that Pyongyang and Washington had "practically reached" a final agreement on the release of US citizens Kim Hak-song, Kim Sang-duk and Kim Dong-chul.

"They are hammering out details over the timing of the release," it quoted a South Korean diplomatic source as saying.

The negotiation was held through the North's mission to the United Nations and the US State Department — an unofficial avenue of communication dubbed the "New York channel," the source said.

CNN said the prisoners' release was also discussed at three-day talks in Stockholm between the North's Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho and Swedish counterpart Margot Wallstrom that ended Saturday.

Sweden represents Washing-

ton's interests in the North.

It raised the issue of Americans detainees to "move things in the right direction," CNN quoted one source as saying.

Kim Dong-chul, a South Korea-born American pastor, has been detained by the North since 2015 when he was arrested for spying.

He was sentenced to 10 years' hard labour in 2016.

Kim Hak-song and Kim Sang-duk — or Tony Kim — were both working at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, founded by evangelical Christians from overseas, when they were detained last year on suspicion of "hostile acts."

"They are hammering out details over the timing of the release"

Reports of their possible release came amid a flurry of diplomatic activities involving Pyongyang and Washington along with Seoul and other US allies.

During a visit to Pyongyang by Seoul's envoys earlier this month, Kim reportedly offered to meet Trump, with the US president subsequently agreeing to talks by May.

No specific time or venue has been set.

Kim also agreed to hold a summit with South Korean President Moon Jae-in next month — the third ever between the two Koreas — according to the envoys.

And he reportedly offered to consider abandoning its nuclear weapons in exchange for US security guarantees.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said in an interview aired Sunday that Kim was "taking stock" after Trump's surprise decision to accept the invitation, but that a channel of communication had been established.

She said Kim had "given his word" on his commitment to denuclearisation.

"But the significance of his word is quite, quite weighty in the sense that this is the first time that the words came directly from the North Korean supreme leader himself, and that has never been done before," Kang told CBS's "Face the Nation." Nothing has been offered to the North Koreans to engage in negotiations, she said.

The Stockholm talks overlapped with another meeting between the national security advisers of the US, South Korea and Japan.

US National Security Adviser H R McMaster, the South's Chung Eui-yong and Japan's Shotaro Yachi met in San Francisco over the weekend and vowed "close policy co-ordination" for the weeks ahead, Seoul's presidential office said.

They agreed that peace on the Korean peninsula hinges on the success of the two planned summits, vowing "not to repeat the failure of the past," it said in an apparent reference to previous botched nuclear disarmament negotiations with the North.

Also on Sunday a senior North Korean diplomat arrived in Finland for talks on peninsula issues with former officials and academics from the US and South Korea.

The sudden rapprochement comes months after the North staged its most powerful nuclear test and test-fired missiles capable of reaching the US mainland.

Kim and Trump traded colourful threats of war and personal insults, which heightened global concerns of another conflict on the peninsula once reduced to ruin by the 1950-53 Korean War.



Activists march during the Commemorating Lee Ming-che's One Year Of Imprisonment Protest in Taipei yesterday.

Groups in Taiwan urge China to ensure rights of jailed activist

DPA
Taipei

Taiwan has to work with international organisations to push Beijing to ensure the rights of a Taiwan-based democracy advocate who has been detained in China for a year now, non-governmental organisations told Taipei yesterday. On the first anniversary of the arrest of rights activist Lee Ming-che, Taiwan-based groups urged President Tsai Ing-wen to better deal with China and help ensure Lee's

family's rights to visit him.

Lee, 43, went missing on March 19, 2017, after he entered China from Macau.

On September 11, Lee pleaded guilty to charges of "subversion of state power" in a court in the Chinese province of Hunan.

Since then, his family has been barred from entering China to visit him.

Lee had been promoting democracy through Chinese social media channels while still living and working in Taiwan.

Yesterday, dozens of Taiwanese rights activists gathered in front of the office of the presi-

dent, shouting slogans such as "Free Lee Immediately," "Lee is Innocent," and "Freedom of Speech."

"Lee's rights have been violated because clothes sent by his family to China were even rejected," Chiu E-ling, secretary-general of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, told a news conference.

Huang Yi-bee, head of the Taipei-based rights watchdog Covenants Watch, said Taiwanese non-governmental organisations on Friday had sent a letter to the United Nations'

Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, asking it to investigate the case of Lee in China.

Yesterday, Chen Ming-tong, the new minister of the Mainland Affairs Council, Taiwan's top government agency on policy dealing with Beijing, took office.

Chen said he looked forward to better interactions with China.

China cut off all official communication with Taiwan in late June 2016, one month after Tsai, of the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party, took office..

POLITICS
Seoul prosecutors seek arrest of ex-president Lee

Seoul prosecutors said yesterday they are seeking the arrest of former President Lee Myung-bak over corruption allegations, on the grounds he might destroy evidence if not detained. Lee, the latest of several ex-leaders to be embroiled in a criminal inquiry,

is being investigated for multiple cases of bribery amounting to millions of dollars. The 76-year-old, who served from 2008 to 2013, faced a marathon interrogation by prosecutors last week, during which he denied most of the accusations he faced.

RULING
Japan court rejects suit against N-plant construction

A court in northern Japan yesterday rejected a lawsuit to halt construction of a nuclear plant, said the company building the facility, Electric Power Development Co (J-Power). The ruling by the Hakodate District Court in Hokkaido prefecture on the Ohma plant will be welcomed by many utilities as they push for a return to nuclear power following the 2011 Fukushima disaster, despite strong opposition from chunks of the public. More than 1,100 residents in Hokkaido, among others, had filed the lawsuit in 2010 to prevent Ohma from starting.

MASCOT
Missing giant yellow duck found in Australia

A giant yellow inflatable duck named Daphne that made a break from its moorings in Australia has been located after a week on the lam, its swimming club owners said yesterday. Daphne — the oversized mascot of the Cockburn Masters Swimming Club in Perth — made a bid for freedom on March 11, drifting out into the Indian Ocean and sparking an appeal for help along Australia's west coast. Reports of sightings flooded in, including one from 440km away. But yesterday a local fisherman revealed that he had spotted the escaping bath toy on the day of its disappearance — just 30km off shore.

Suu Kyi, Turnbull talk about Rohingya crisis in Canberra

Sydney
Agencies

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has met with Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi in the Australian capital Canberra and offered support to end the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State.

Suu Kyi, a state counsellor, a position similar to prime minister, received a ceremonial wel-

come with a 19-gun salute at Parliament House yesterday.

She had attended the gathering of the Southeast Asian leaders in Sydney at the weekend.

In recent years, the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner has come under heavy international criticism for her handling of the Rohingya crisis.

Turnbull and Suu Kyi had a detailed discussion about the ongoing humanitarian crisis, Australian media reported.

The prime minister encouraged her to reach a resolution for the resettlement of displaced refugees.

Turnbull also said Australia would be willing to keep aid money flowing to both Myanmar and Bangladesh to help resolve the emergency.

Meanwhile, Suu Kyi had to cancel a speech and question-and-answer session scheduled for today in Sydney due to illness, the event's organisers said.

Defiant Japanese PM hits back over scandal as support plunges

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's embattled prime minister hit back at critics yesterday over a favouritism and cover-up scandal that has seen his popularity plunge and loosened his iron grip on power.

In a hotly awaited statement in parliament, Shinzo Abe denied he had ordered bureaucrats to alter documents relating to a controversial land sale as he comes under mounting pressure over the affair.

"I have never ordered changes," he said.

The scandal surrounds the 2016 sale of state-owned land to a nationalist operator of schools who claims ties to Abe and his wife Akie.

"Why was the land sold at a discount price? Without any political pressure, this could never happen, and voters are angry about it," said Yamaguchi.

The sale was clinched at a price well below market value amid allegations that the high-

level connections helped grease the deal.

The affair emerged early last year, but resurfaced after the revelation that finance ministry documents related to the sale had been changed.

Versions of the original and doctored documents made public by opposition lawmakers appeared to show passing references to Abe were deleted, along with several references to his wife Akie and Finance Minister Taro Aso.

Abe has blamed the alterations on "some staff members" at the ministry.

But Jiro Yamaguchi, a politics professor at Hosei University in Tokyo, said the public was "not at all convinced" by this explanation.

The scandal is harming Abe's hopes of winning re-election as head of his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in September, which would make him Japan's longest-serving prime minister.

Australia bushfires destroy homes, kill cattle



This handout photo taken on Sunday and received yesterday from David Porter shows smoke rising from fires in the village of Tathra on the south coast of New South Wales.

AFP
Sydney

High temperatures and strong winds have fuelled large grass and bushfires in Australia, officials said yesterday, reducing dozens of houses to ash and killing cattle.

Sixty-nine homes were destroyed in the picturesque seaside town of Tathra on the south coast of New South Wales when a fire tore through the area on Sunday.

Some 40,000 hectares (100,000 acres) were also scorched in southwestern regions of neighbouring Victoria as dozens of blazes swept through over the weekend, wiping out beef and dairy cattle.

Despite the damage, authorities said there were no reports of serious injuries or deaths.

Experts said the infernos showed the bushfire season — which usually occurs in the summer months of December-February — was lengthening as climate change disrupts weather patterns.

In Tathra, over 1,000 hectares were burnt and more than 60 firefighters were continuing to battle the flames yesterday, supported by three water-bombing aircraft, NSW Rural Fire Service spokesman Greg Allan told AFP.

In Victoria, Premier Daniel Andrews said the "unprecedented" force of the fires had claimed at least 18 homes.

"The size of this fire, its absolute intensity, how fast running it was and of course at night, we are all very fortunate that we are not talking about serious injury or loss of life," he told reporters.

Firefighters were hopeful they could contain three remaining blazes in the region as the weather became milder, Andrews added.

Johnson under pressure over scrapped garden bridge

Guardian News and Media
London

Labour has written to Boris Johnson asking him to account for his role in the scrapped £46mn London garden bridge project, after the foreign secretary had said he could not recall the reasons for key decisions he made.

The letter, from the shadow communities secretary, Andrew Gwynne, challenges Johnson over

his claim earlier this month that a prominent journalist who has criticised the project was motivated by a personal dislike of its designer.

Gwynne demanded Johnson provide evidence for his allegation against Will Hurst, the managing editor of Architects' Journal who has won several awards for his coverage of the garden bridge, or withdraw them and apologise.

The letter adds to the pressure on Johnson over his role in the troubled story of the planned pedestrian link across the river

Thames, which he commissioned and championed as mayor of London, a job he held until May 2016.

In total, £46.4mn of public money was spent on the project, but construction never began. The public liabilities, initially capped at £16mn, escalated in 2016 when funding for a construction contract was released even though it appeared the stipulated conditions were not in place for this to happen.

Appearing before the London assembly's oversight committee

earlier this month, Johnson insisted the funding conditions had been met by the charity behind the project, the Garden Bridge Trust, but he was questioned as to why he had made a mayoral direction in April 2016 that watered down some of these conditions.

Johnson said the explanation was "something which, I'm afraid, I simply don't have, at this distance in time".

At the same session, Johnson launched a vehement attack on Hurst, who won a British jour-

nalist award in December for a series of stories uncovering problems with the project.

The stories, Johnson said, were "motivated to the best of my knowledge by a dislike that the Architects' Journal journalist concerned had for Thomas Heatherwick, who is not conceived of as being a proper architect, and is therefore somehow worthy of abuse".

Hurst has vehemently denied this, pointing out that Architects' Journal gave Heatherwick

an award in 2015 for his contribution to the profession.

Gwynne's letter says Johnson should answer questions on "the role played by your office in the reckless decision to release public funds for the construction contract", including what role he played in releasing the construction funding.

It queries Johnson's claim before the London assembly that the garden bridge project had "secured every relevant planning permission", saying this was not the case.

The letter ends: "Do you have any evidence to support your public claim that articles published by Hurst are motivated by a dislike of Thomas Heatherwick, if not, do you want to withdraw this comment and apologise?"

Johnson has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing over the scheme, insisting it would have been a success had it not been cancelled by his successor, Sadiq Khan, who was concerned at rising costs and a lack of funds raised by the Garden Bridge Trust.

Tories 'spent £18.5mn on 2017 poll campaign'

Guardian News and Media
London

The Conservatives spent more than £18.5mn while losing their majority at last year's general election, against £11mn of spending by Labour and £6.8mn by the Liberal Democrats, newly released figures have shown.

The Electoral Commission data, which covers the 12 months prior to the election on June 8, also showed the increasing role of social media in campaigning, with the Conservatives spending about £2.1mn on Facebook advertising alone.

In contrast Labour - whose message is seen as being shared more widely and favourably on social media - spent slightly over £500,000 on Facebook advertising.

The biggest single element of the Conservative spend was £4mn, which went to Crosby Textor, the market research firm run by the Tories' regular election guru Sir Lynton Crosby, whose reputation took something of a battering after Theresa May lost her majority.

The Conservatives also spent more than £500,000 with the political consulting group set up by Jim Messina, Barack Obama's 2012 campaign manager, who also worked for the party under David Cameron at the 2015 election.

The biggest single Labour spend was £624,000 on direct mail leaflets. For the LibDems, the biggest one-off expense was £244,000 on Facebook advertising.

Among other parties, the SNP spent £1.6mn on the election, the Green party £299,000 and the Women's Equality party (WEP) £285,000.

The financial decline of Ukip was shown by the fact that it was outspent by the WEP, with a total 2017 election outlay of £273,000 - down from £2.8mn in 2015.

The new Electoral Commission figures include total spending by political parties and non-party campaigners who spent more than £250,000 at the election, with data for those spending less than this released late last year.

May visits charity



Prime Minister Theresa May visits the "Street League at People Plus" employment charity in Birmingham yesterday. The charity aims to get young people back into work through training, education and football and dance-based motivation.

Facebook claims troubling: premier

Reuters
London

The government is very concerned by allegations that the British data firm Cambridge Analytica exploited data on millions of Facebook users without their authorisation in election campaigns, a spokesman for Prime Minister Theresa May said yesterday.

The chairman of parliament's digital, culture, media and sport committee also alleged that Cambridge Analytica chief executive Alexander Nix had "deliberately misled" his committee during testimony about its use of Facebook data two weeks ago.

The New York Times and the Observer newspaper reported on Saturday that the political analytics firm had harvested private data on more than 50mn Facebook users to support Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign.

Facebook said in a statement on Friday that it had learned in 2015 that a Cambridge University psychology professor had lied to the company and violated its policies by passing data to Cambridge Analytica from a psychological testing app he had built.

Facebook said it suspended the firms and researchers involved.

"The allegations are clearly very concerning," May's spokesman told reporters yesterday. "It is essential that people can have confidence that their personal data will be protected and used in an appropriate way."

Parliamentary committee chairman and Conserva-

tive lawmaker Damian Collins said on Sunday that Facebook had avoided answering straight questions from the committee about what it knew about the abuse of its users' social media data by Cambridge Analytica. "Someone has to take responsibility for this."

It's time for Mark Zuckerberg to stop hiding behind his Facebook page," Collins said in a statement.

He also said he would be contacting Nix to answer further questions raised by the media reports.

Cambridge Analytica and its CEO were not immediately available to comment.

Nix testified before the parliamentary committee on February 27 that Cambridge Analytica carried out advertising campaigns and conducted opinion surveys on Facebook to collect data on users' political attitudes on behalf of its campaign clients.

"We do not work with Facebook data, and we do not have Facebook data. We do use Facebook as a platform to advertise, as do all brands and most agencies, or all agencies, I should say," Nix told the committee.

Facebook said it suspended the firms and researchers involved.

"The allegations are clearly very concerning," May's spokesman told reporters yesterday. "It is essential that people can have confidence that their personal data will be protected and used in an appropriate way."

Parliamentary committee chairman and Conserva-

Russia govt behind spy poisoning, insists PM

Reuters
London

Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday said Russia was to blame for the poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal, rejecting denials from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday it was nonsense to think that Moscow was behind the incident which has left Skripal and his daughter critically ill in a British hospital.

"I am clear that what we have seen shows that there is no other conclusion but the Russia state is culpable for what happened on the streets of Salisbury," May told Sky News when asked if Putin was lying.

Russia earlier demanded proof that Moscow was involved in the nerve agent attack, as international weapons experts were called in to take a sample of the chemical for testing.

Skripal's poisoning has plunged relations between London and Moscow into crisis. But as the European Union offered "unqualified solidarity" with Britain, the Kremlin insisted that Britain prove Russia was involved in the March 4 attack or apologize.

"Sooner or later these unsubstantiated allegations will have to be answered for; either backed up with the appropriate evidence or apologised for," said Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Reiterating her belief that Russia was responsible the prime minister said, "they have the capability. This nerve agent was one from group of Novichoks that were developed by the Soviets," she said.

The EU said it fully backed Britain.

"The European Union expresses its unqualified solidarity with the UK and its support, including for the UK's efforts to bring those responsible for this crime to justice," EU foreign ministers said in a joint statement.

No sign of forced entry into slain tycoon's home

Guardian News and Media
London

Police investigating the murder of the Russian businessman Nikolai Glushkov say they have found no evidence of forced entry into his home in New Malden, south-west London.

Officers yesterday launched fresh house-to-house inquiries in the neighbourhood.

The 68-year-old was found dead at the property on Clarence Avenue on March 12 and a post-mortem showed he had died from compression to the neck, suggesting he was strangled.

Detectives are focusing on what happened in the immediate area on March 11 and March 12, and are appealing for anyone who may have seen or heard anything suspicious at or near Glushkov's home to come forward.

"I would urge anybody who may have information to get in touch if they have not already

done so," said commander Clarke Jarrett, head of the Metropolitan police's counter-terrorism command, which is running the investigation because of the associations Glushkov is believed to have had.

"We will have officers in Glushkov's local neighbourhood, so please come and speak to us if you think you may have seen or heard anything suspicious last Sunday or Monday."

At the time of his death, Glushkov was about to defend a claim against him by the Russian airline Aeroflot at the commercial court in London, where he was accused of fraud.

In 2017, during a trial in absentia in Russia, he was sentenced to eight years in prison for stealing \$123mn (£87mn) from the airline, which then pursued the case in London. Glushkov failed to arrive at court in central London on March 12 and his body was discovered that evening.

There have been no arrests so far. The killing of Glushkov came a week after the attempted murders of Sergei Skripal, a former Russian intelligence officer living in Salisbury, Wiltshire, and his daughter Yulia Skripal, using the nerve agent novichok. The pair remain in a critical condition.

Sturgeon in Stirling



Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon meets pupils at Riverside Primary School in Stirling yesterday.

400 schools receive hoax bomb threats

Guardian News and Media
London

More than 400 schools across England have received hoax bomb threats believed to be coming from the US.

Humberside police said that schools and colleges across the country, including 19 in its region, had received e-mails "claiming a device has been planted and demanding cash".

Detective superintendent Tony Cockerill, of Humberside police, said: "We have been liaising with our counter-terrorism colleagues across the country and it is not believed that the threats are credible."

"We have spoken to all schools who have contacted us, reassured them that there is no need to evacuate and offered them security advice."

Northumbria police said more than 35 schools in its region had received e-mails threatening to detonate a bomb unless money was handed over.

A police spokeswoman said detectives had assessed there

was "no viable threat" and that no schools in the area had been evacuated.

The force said in a statement: "We have received reports from a large number of schools in our region that they have received threatening e-mails."

"The emails inform the school that a bomb has been placed on the grounds and will be detonated if they don't hand over cash."

"Detectives have looked into the e-mails - which appear to originate from the US - and can confirm that there is no visible threat."

Police officers visited the schools to reassure pupils and staff. "We take all incidents of this nature extremely seriously and an investigation into the emails in question is under way," the spokeswoman said.

In London, some schools were evacuated after receiving what the Metropolitan police described as "malicious communications".

Kantor King Solomon school in Barking, east London, said it briefly evacuated pupils but later established there was "no further threat".

**CONTROVERSY**
Shami blames third party for domestic row

India pacer Mohammed Shami is blaming "a third party" for the allegations of domestic violence and extramarital affairs hurled against him by his wife Hasain Jahan. He has denied the charges. Shami said it was not a work of Jahan and someone was involved, maybe due to greed of money. Jahan had posted screenshots of Shami's alleged WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger conversations with multiple women on her Facebook account. She also uploaded photos and phone numbers of the women. Jahan alleged that Shami, 27, and his family had tried to kill her. "I still say that this is not the deed of Hasain. This is certainly a plan of a third party, maybe the happiness of my family is intolerable, maybe because of the greed of money," Shami was quoted as saying by News18 India channel.

SC issues notice to Talwars on Aarushi murder

IANS
New Delhi

The Supreme Court yesterday issued a notice to Rajesh and Nupur Talwar on a plea challenging their acquittal in the Aarushi-Hemraj double murder case by the Allahabad High Court.

The plea was filed by Khumkala Banjade, the widow of Hemraj, who was the Talwars' domestic help.

The Central Bureau of Investigation told the court that the agency too has challenged the Allahabad High Court verdict and that its petition was pending.

On October 12 last year, the high court acquitted the couple giving them the benefit of doubt.

Aarushi, 14, and Hemraj were found murdered at the Talwars' Jalayu Vihar home in Noida on May 16, 2008.

The high court acquitted them after the Talwars challenged a Ghaziabad CBI court's November 26, 2013 verdict sentencing them to life imprisonment, bringing an end to the couple's nine-year ordeal.

After Aarushi was found dead in her bedroom, Hemraj was initially considered a suspect. However, his body too was found in a pool of blood a day later on the terrace of the house.

The high court, while convicting the Talwars, had made comments on the CBI trial court judge, saying he had adopted a "partial and parochial approach" in his 2013 judgment to convict the parents for the double murder.

It said the trial court's judgment was based on "creation of fanciful reasoning" and "presuming facts with indomitable obstinacy and taking things for granted, and thus basing the conclusion on unfounded evidence".

The Uttar Pradesh police had accused Rajesh Talwar on May 23, 2008 of killing his daughter in a fit of rage.

On May 31, 2008, the CBI took over the case and initially absolved the parents but later held them responsible for the two murders.



RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav is escorted by police as he leaves the CBI court in Ranchi after it convicted him in the fourth fodder scam case yesterday.

Church to launch campaign against Kerala liquor policy

By Ashraf Padanna
Thiruvananthapuram

In a huge embarrassment for the ruling Communists in Kerala, the influential church in the state has announced an anti-government campaign in the election-bound Chengannur constituency.

The Kerala Catholic Bishops Council's temperance commission yesterday said it would launch a campaign as soon as the authorities announce the date for the by-election.

A spokesman for the apex body of the churches said the campaign would begin with a convention in the constituency which the Communist Party of India (Marxist) won in 2016.

The winner, K K Ramachandran Nair, who died last month, defeated the Congress Party by a comfortable margin.

The CPM has this time nominated a Christian candidate, Saji Cherian, its district secretary,

with an eye on the influential minority votes in a three-cornered fight.

Both the opposition Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have fielded powerful Nair candidates - D Vijaya Kumar and P S Sreedharan Pillai, respectively.

The temperance commission said it would ask the electorate to vote against the proliferation of liquor outlets in the state.

"We are not going to make any call for voting for or against anybody. People are capable of choosing their representatives," Father Varghese Vallikkattu, secretary of Pastoral Orientation Centre of KCBC, said.

"The government propaganda is a lie. They are in a denial mode while continuing to allow new bars and open more outlets," opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala said.

"The government's policy is to cut on the supply of liquor. It's nothing but cheating people who reposed their trust in you."

The new policy coming into

force on April 1 allows villages of more than 10,000 population to have a bar serving both hard and light alcoholic beverages.

The population criterion does not apply to tourist destinations, but hotels below four stars have to keep 200m from schools, places of worship and Dalit colonies.

The government, however, said it was only following Supreme Court's verdicts and no "new bars" are going to open, an argument the opponents dismissed as an eyewash.

In the state assembly, the Congress-led opposition staged a walkout saying it was "drowning the state in liquor."

"The government's propaganda is a lie. They are in a denial mode while continuing to allow new bars and open more outlets," opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala said.

"They said in their manifesto that their policy was to cut on the supply of liquor. It's nothing but cheating people who reposed their trust in you."

The state government last week issued a notification liberalising liquor trade further.

The new policy coming into

TRAGEDY
17 dead in Theni forest fire, says Tamil Nadu CM

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami yesterday said 17 trekkers lost their lives in the Kurangani Hills forest fire in Theni district on March 11. Speaking in the assembly, Palaniswami said the trekking groups - one from Chennai and another from Erode and Tiruppur - had not taken official approval for trekking. He said a compensation of Rs400,000 will be paid to the families of the dead, Rs100,000 to those seriously injured and Rs50,000 to others injured in the blaze. Palaniswami said the fire spread fast because of lemon grass that has oil content. He said the 12-member team paid an entry fee of Rs200 each but took an unofficial route. The entry fee is valid for a day and since they had stayed in a tea estate guest house overnight, the fee validity expired.

JUDICIARY
SC stays trial in Junaid lynching case in Haryana

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed the trial in Junaid Khan lynching case as it sought response from the Central Bureau of Investigation and Haryana government on a plea seeking the transfer of investigation from the state police to the CBI. Khan, 16, was lynched by a mob on train in Haryana on June 22, 2017, following a row over seats. The murder triggered nationwide outrage. The court move was in response to a plea by Khan's father Jalaluddin who challenged the November 27, 2017 Punjab and Haryana High Court order rejecting his request for a CBI probe. Khan and his cousins Hasim Moin and Shakir Moin were on the train going from Ghaziabad to Mathura after Eid shopping on June 22 when the incident took place.

TECHNOLOGY
Samsung partners with BITS Pilani to train staff

To help its employees at its Noida R&D facility to upgrade skills in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud computing and Machine Learning (ML), Samsung India yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with India's premier engineering institute BITS Pilani. As part of the initiative, the employees of the R&D centre will be able to do M Tech in Software Systems to further upgrade their skills, Samsung India said in a statement. "As technology evolves, skill sets must evolve too, especially for a company like Samsung that is focused on the next level of innovations," the statement said. "This MoU is in line with our vision to develop futuristic skill sets aligned to the requirements of the fast evolving mobile and consumer electronics sectors," it said.

The Punjab government yesterday decided to impose a ban on hookah bars across the state instead of issuing temporary orders against their operation every two months. The decision is aimed at reducing the trend of hookah bars, besides the use of tobacco in various forms among the youths, a government spokesman said. He said the amendment would result in a complete ban on running of hookah bars. The proposal will be placed before the assembly which will be commencing for its budget session today and is likely to end on March 28, he said. After being passed by the assembly it will be sent for presidential assent, he added. Currently, Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code is promulgated against hookah bars in the states for two months, with an extension required at the end of the period.

PROPOSAL
Punjab govt to ban hookah bars in state

Fodder scam: Lalu Prasad convicted in fourth case

●RJD to challenge verdict; former CM Jagannath Mishra acquitted

IANS
Ranchi

A court yesterday convicted Rashtriya Janata Dal chief and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav in the fourth fodder scam case but acquitted another former chief minister Jagannath Mishra.

Judge Shivpal Singh delivered the judgment in the case relating to fraudulent withdrawal of Rs31.3mn from December 1995 to January 1996 from the Dumka treasury. The verdict was delivered four times.

The judge delivered the verdict alphabetically but Yadav, who was the chief minister of undivided Bihar when the multi-million rupee fodder scam surfaced in 1990s, reached the court after it was delivered. Mishra was, however, present in the court.

After the judgment, Yadav returned to the hospital.

This is second case in which Mishra has been acquitted. Both Yadav and Mishra are facing five cases each in the fodder scam in Ranchi.

There were 31 accused in this case, of which 19 were convicted and 12 acquitted.

According to Yadav's lawyer Prabhat Kumar, the Central Bureau of Investigation court will sentence the accused later this week.

When the case was first filed against Yadav in 1996, there were 49 accused, of which 14 died during trial.

Besides Mishra, those acquitted include politicians like Dhruva Bhagat, R K Rana and Jagdish Sharma.

Yadav's wife Rabri Devi, who too is a former Bihar chief minister, and her elder son Tej Pratap Yadav expressed disappointment over the conviction, saying they had thought he would be acquitted.

"I was expecting acquittal. It disappointed us. But we respect the verdict and have faith in judiciary," Rabri Devi told reporters in Patna.

Tej Pratap said he expected "relief" for his father. Nonetheless, "we respect the court verdict."

RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said: "There were four conspirators in the case and three including Mishra have been acquitted. This indicates that (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi is playing some game. We will appeal."

Party spokesman Shakti Yadav said the party would challenge the verdict in the high court.

Soon after the verdict, hundreds of RJD leaders and workers gathered outside 10, Circular Road, the official residence of Rabri Devi. Most said the RJD chief had been convicted due to political vendetta.

"How come Jagannath Mishra has been acquitted in a scam in which Lalu Prasad is convicted? Mishra was acquitted as he supported the BJP, which

has 'managed' the CBI, and Lalu Prasad was convicted for fighting against them," RJD worker Mukesh Singh said.

Yadav was convicted in the first fodder scam case in 2013 and sentenced to five years in jail.

He was convicted in the second case on December 23, 2017 and given three-and-a-half years imprisonment.

The RJD chief was convicted in the third case on January 24 and awarded a five-year jail term.

The bulk of the cases was transferred to Ranchi after Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar in 2000.

Yadav, who is currently in Ranchi jail, cannot contest elections or hold public offices due to his conviction in different cases relating to scam.

His youngest son Tejashwi Yadav, who is the leader of opposition in the Bihar assembly, is currently leading the RJD in the state. In the 2015 Bihar assembly polls, the RJD saw its political revival after bagging 80 seats as an ally of a grand alliance that included the Congress and the Janata Dal (United) of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. In July last year, Nitish Kumar left the alliance and joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance.

The over Rs9bn fodder scam cases relate to illegal withdrawal of money from government treasury in different districts in the Animal Husbandry department in undivided Bihar in the 1990s when the RJD was in power in the state.



Ola taxis are parked on a ground after drivers of the app-based operator went on a country-wide strike, in Hyderabad yesterday.

Ola, Uber strike hits Mumbai commuters

IANS
Mumbai

Hundreds of thousands of commuters were hit as more than 80,000 drivers of app-based ride hailing taxi operators Ola and Uber went on strike in Mumbai yesterday, an official said.

"The strike has been launched from midnight in support of various demands of the drivers who are being meted out injustice by the companies. If the government fails to intervene, they will go on an indefinite strike," Sanjay Naik, president of Maharashtra Navnirman Vahatuk Sena (MNVS), said.

The MNVS is affiliated to Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS).

He said that several thousands of drivers of Ola and Uber had also joined the protest in Aurangabad, Nashik, Pune and other cities in Maharashtra as part of an all-India strike.

The worst-hit were people going to the airport or railway sta-

tions, besides local commuters rushing for business meetings.

Naik claimed that both Ola and Uber had promised big returns of more than Rs125,000 per month to the drivers who invested between Rs500,000 and 700,000.

"Now the situation is that many drivers earn barely half the promised amount which is not even sufficient to cover their costs. The drivers are practically on the verge of starvation owing to the mismanagement by the two companies," Naik said.

Moreover, the companies give preference to their own vehicles rather than the driver-owned cars, which has led to a steep decline in the latter's business.

Owing to these, Naik said there has been a drop of more than 20% in Mumbai alone of the cabs running on this platform, hitting both the drivers and the commuters.

The MNVS has appealed to the Mumbai commuters to make alternative arrangements and "support the fight for justice" by the Ola and Uber drivers.

Telangana, West Bengal CMs pitch for federal front

IANS
Kolkata

Amid political churning ahead of Lok Sabha elections next year, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee met in Kolkata yesterday and pitched for a non-Congress, non-Bharatiya Janata Party federal front, saying there is a need for a national alternative.

Rao, whose idea of a third front last week was immediately welcomed by Banerjee, flew to Kolkata and drove to the Secretariat for a meeting with the Trinamool Congress chief. He was accompanied by his daughter and MP Kavita and TRS MP K Keshava Rao.

"We made a good beginning today and we will be able to carry forward from this," Rao, who is also the Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief, told reporters with Banerjee by his side.

He said it won't be a third front and their idea of a new front would be a collective leadership.

"There is definitely going to be a federal front by the people of India. It is not a mere aligning of political parties. It is about unifying the masses, the people of India. There is a need for a political change," Rao said.

"The Congress and BJP have not worked well for the country. There is a need for an alternative and an alternative agenda. We agreed on to bring a real federal front in the country with a group of like-minded leaders. The other leaders will sit together," the TRS chief said.

"You know what has happened in this country for the last 71 years. Do you want the same routine model to continue? Will it do any wonders if BJP goes out and Congress comes in? This country needs something wonderful," he said.

"The agenda we propose would be totally different from the present routine model. It would be people's agenda."

Terming his meeting with Banerjee as the first step towards the inception of the front, KCR, as the leader is popularly known, said the proposal can be discussed in detail once other like-minded political leaders come to a consensus.

As of last September, state banks held about 87% of the Indian banking system's Rs9.46tn (about \$147bn) of soured loans that are non-performing, restructured or rolled over.

In the December 2013 case, the CBI said charges were filed against five former Canara Bank officials including former chairman and managing director R K Dubey, two former executive directors of the bank and a current bank official.

A Delhi-based private company and its directors were also charged, the CBI said in a statement.

Canara Bank did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Dubey was not immediately available for a comment.

The CBI, which had first registered the case in 2016, said a Rs683.8mn loan to the Delhi-based jewellery company, Occasion Silver Pvt Ltd, turned bad

who had also filed a defamation case against the Aam Aadmi Party chief for accusing him of corruption during his tenure as the chairman of the Delhi cricket board.

The development came days after Kejriwal regretted having accused Akali Dal leader Bikram Majithia of drug trade without evidence.

In a March 16 letter to Gadkari, Kejriwal said he was feeling sorry for



Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury joins a protest by TDP MPs outside parliament yesterday.

Parliament adjourned amid chaotic scenes

No-confidence motion not taken up as opposition parties continue to stall proceedings

IANS
New Delhi

Parliament yesterday could not transact any business as opposition parties continued to stall proceedings over their demands, resulting in a washout of the second part of the budget session.

Answering a question on who would be the other stakeholders of the front, Banerjee said: "In politics, the situation sometimes allows everyone to come and work together. I have faith in democracy. It is best to work along with everyone in democracy. We have good relations with all political parties. We will maintain that."

Replying to a question about the BJP's claim that it can face the challenge of all parties, she said such an attitude by a party does not look nice in a democratic setup.

"Don't think one party can rule the country. No party should be so proud of its own identity. Everybody has their own regional and national strength. They should respect each other."

tion bills in the lower house.

The Lok Sabha was adjourned for an hour and when it met again at 12 noon, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan sought to put the notices of the motion for leave of the House so that a discussion could be initiated. At least 50 members should back the motion for it to be admitted.

But as has been happening for the last two weeks, members of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi raised slogans and walked to their podium, shouting slogans in support of their demands.

The TRS members were demanding an increase in the reservation quota for jobs in Telangana while the AIADMK wanted the setting up of a Cauvery Management Board.

Several opposition parties including the Congress, Trinamool

Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, Samajwadi Party, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen and Rashtriya Janata Dal have expressed their support for the notices.

The speaker called the members to stand up so that the numbers could be counted to see how many supported it.

But with members from the TRS and AIADMK holding placards and surrounding the speaker's dais, Mahajan said she could not count the members who were standing.

"Please go back to your seats. If the House is not in order, I will not bring the notices," she said, before adjourning for the day.

Minutes before Mahajan made her comments, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said the government was ready to face the motions.

"We are ready for any discuss-

sion... We are also ready for a discussion on the no-confidence motion. I appeal to all political parties to co-operate," he pleaded.

Earlier, the Lok Sabha started with disruptions and was adjourned till noon within a couple of minutes amid noisy protests by AIADMK and TRS members.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananth Kumar told reporters that the government had the numbers to defeat the motion.

"We are ready to face the no-confidence motion as we have support in the House. We are confident."

TDP MP R M Naidu said they were trying to gather as much support as possible from all the opposition parties in parliament although they knew the motion would fall because the government has enough numbers.

At present, the Lok Sabha has

CBI charges former bank chief in alleged fraud case

Reuters
New Delhi/ Mumbai

The Central Bureau of Investigation yesterday filed charges against a former chairman of state-run Canara Bank and others over allegations that the officials helped a company defraud the bank of about \$10.5mn taken in loans over four years ago.

The CBI also said it had arrested seven people – including two former managers of the country's top lender, State Bank of India, a former manager of Canara Bank and directors of a Kolkata-based private company – in a separate "bank fraud" case of about Rs150mn (\$2.3mn).

India has cracked down on shady loans in its mammoth state banking sector after a more than \$2bn fraud was uncovered at state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) earlier this year.

Kejriwal apologises to Gadkari and Sibal

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has apologised to Bharatiya Janata Party leader and federal minister Nitin Gadkari and Congress leader Kapil Sibal for making unverified allegations of corruption, a move his rivals reciprocated by withdrawing defamation cases yesterday.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia hinted that Kejriwal may also say sorry to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley,

within a year of the bank giving it the loan.

"The funds were siphoned off through a chain of alleged bogus transactions facilitated by fake sister concerns, family members and bank officials including the top executives," the CBI said.

"It was also revealed during investigation that there was an alleged nexus between the bank officials with the private persons which led to the perpetration of the fraud," the agency said.

Reuters could not immediately locate contact details of Occasion Silver Pvt Ltd.

In the alleged PNB fraud – the biggest in India's banking history – the bank has accused two jewellery groups, one controlled by diamond tycoon Nirav Modi and the other by his uncle, Mehul Choksi, of colluding with rogue bank employees to secure credit overseas.

The key accused in that case have denied any wrongdoing.

making "certain statements, without regard to its verifiability, which seem to have hurt you."

"I have nothing personal against you. I regret the same. Let us put the incident behind us and bring the court proceedings to a closure."

He also suggested to the Shipping and Transport minister that "we should put our energy to serve the people of this country in the spirit of mutual respect".

Kejriwal and Sisodia also wrote to Sibal and his son Amit, apologising for making "unfounded" allegation against them on May 15, 2013.

Asked whether they would apologise to Jaitley also, Sisodia said: "We do not want to fight any ego battles with anyone. If anything has happened to anyone due to what we had said, we will apologise and work for the people."

CONDOLENCES
The Management and Staff of KOMPASS INTERNATIONAL TRADING CO. WLL

deeply mourn the sad demise of



SALLY THOMAS (MARIAMMA) (70)

Who entered into eternal rest on 16-03-2018 in Doha

We express our heartfelt condolences to her husband Mr.K.V. Thomas (Moni), daughter Jula Thomas, son-in-law Mr. Joel Tom Mathews, grandson Daniel Joel Mathews and all the family members. Funeral will be held at St. Mulk Orthodox Church, Kavumbhagam, Thiruvalla (India) at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, 20th March 2018. May almighty God rest her soul in eternal peace, and give grace and fortitude to the bereaved family to bear this irreparable loss.



Committee formed to address students' heavy backpacks

Internews
Peshawar

With students literally crushed under the weight of their studies, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education Department has ordered a probe to examine the occupational load of schools bags complete with their particulars and the negative consequences they can have on the health of students.

In this regard, directions have been issued to form a committee in the northwestern province.

Heavy backpacks have raised concerns among parents over the impact that this may have on a child's spine and in turn their growth.

The committee will also propose measures on how the weight can be reduced.

According to a statement issued by the education department, the committee would comprise of the department special secretary, the Provincial Institute for Teacher Education director, and the director general of the health department.

The committee will examine and frame standards for the maximum weight of schoolbags considering the weight of students, international standards of bags at 10% of body weight, the fact that students in a similar class may even be of different statures, and other issues.

It will also propose how to reduce the weight of books carried at any given time through timetable adjustments, class-work and homework staggering, books and notebook weight reduction through different printing methods, and even the use of e-books.

The committee will also propose methodology for weighing bags at schools, communication of these health impacts on students to the public, teachers and students, including how to correctly bear the backpack.

It will also recommend design changes to the furniture of government schools to include tables with storage capacity and locker space for students to store books that are not required to be carried home for homework.

International maths event

The International Conference on Applied and Engineering Mathematics will be hosted by Hitec University in Taxila in northwest Pakistan, close to Islamabad on September 4 and 5. This intends to bring together mathematicians, system designers and engineers to gain cognisance of the researchers' findings covering a wide domain of applications. It is a forum dedicated to the presentation and discussion of newly emerging ideas and concepts in the field of Applied and Engineering Mathematics.

Government websites lost in (Urdu) translation

Internews
Islamabad

The Pakistan government has turned the national language into a laughing stock by literally translating the English version of its websites in a bid to fulfil the Supreme Court's directives to federal and provincial governments to adopt and promote Urdu as official language.

Over a dozen government websites, which include ministries of defence, education, information technology and even the official website of government – Pakistan.gov.pk – has been put on Google translate at the right corner of each page.

The government has literally made a mockery of itself by doing word-to-word translation of all the details it has put on the page.

Teams being formed to monitor national polls

Internews
Islamabad

As a part of its preparations for 2018 general elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has sought list of officers from its local chapters, to be trained for nation-wide first-ever monitoring of the electoral exercise.

The ECP plans to monitor the next general elections, covering all the directly-contested seats of the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies simultaneously.

Terms of reference of the pro-

posed monitoring teams will include monitoring of pre-polls, polling day, and post-polls activities.

The government was approached early last year for the creation of 141 new posts for the Monitoring Wing along with financial and logistic allocations.

The four provincial election commissioners, regional and district election commissioners have been asked to submit lists of officers of good repute from the government, semi-government departments for their role in the proposed monitoring teams.

They have been asked by the

ECP, through a letter on March 9, to furnish such lists by March 22.

The Elections Act 2017 says:

"The Commission shall constitute a monitoring team consisting of such number of persons as may be determined by it, to monitor election campaign of the candidates and political parties and report, on regular basis in the prescribed manner, to an officer nominated by the Commission in respect of each district for the purpose of deciding the complaints regarding any violation by a candidate or a political party of any provision of the Act, Rules or the Code of

Conduct issued by the Commission."

The Commission, it explains, shall constitute a monitoring team for a constituency or a group of constituencies and determine the terms of reference.

"If the officer, nominated under sub-section (1), receives a report of any violation of the Act or the Rules and, after holding a summary enquiry, finds that the reported violation has been committed and no other punishment is provided under the Act for such violation, he may impose a fine not exceeding Rs50,000."

However, the violation(s), if

persisted despite imposition of fine, the matter will be then, reported to the ECP and it can even bar a violator from taking part in the electoral exercise.

"Indeed, the exercise will be gigantic, as the number of voters has for the first time, crossed 100mn mark and naturally, there will be more candidates and tougher job to monitor them till the announcement of election results," a senior ECP official conceded.

He believed that around 3,000 personnel would be required for the proposed teams to be constituted for each NA and provincial assembly constituency.

It is pertinent to mention that a central monitoring cell has already been established at the ECP Secretariat here.

"Monitoring teams will greatly lessen pressure on district returning officers and returning officers to focus more on their job, including looking into nomination papers and scrutiny of the same," he maintained.

Although the Election Commission's initiative may face problems, ranging from logistics to co-ordination, the move is believed to contribute to an extent in ensuring adherence to the election rules and the code of conduct for elections.

Army rally



Top Senate post should be rotated: chairman

Internews
Quetta

New Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani has suggested giving the top office in the upper house of parliament to all federating units by rotation, saying that this will create harmony among them.

Speaking with journalists and tribal elders on his first visit to Quetta after assuming the office of the Senate chairman here, Sanjrani said that after developing a consensus on the matter, legislation would be introduced in parliament.

"The rotational election of Senate chairman from all four provinces and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) will

create harmony among the people of the country," he said.

Provincial ministers, advisers to the chief minister and a large number of tribal elders of Sanjrani and other tribes welcomed the Senate chairman at Quetta airport.

Sanjrani said that legislation would also be introduced for the solution of Baluchistan's problems so that the longstanding sense of deprivation among its people could be removed.

He said that the rights of Baluchistan's people would be protected and their share in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects would be ensured.

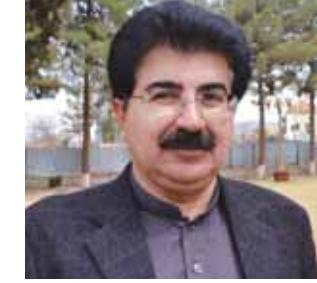
All efforts would be made to resolve the issues facing the province, he added.

In reply to a question, Sanjrani said that his election as Senate chairman was the result of "team work".

He said that Chief Minister Quddus Bizenjo had played an important role in persuading the leaderships of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) to support him, an independent candidate from Baluchistan, for the top office in the Senate.

Sanjrani said that the independent senators from Baluchistan had played a vital role in making the idea of a Senate chairman from the province a reality.

He also appreciated the support of PPP co-chairman Asif Zardari and PTI chairman Imran Khan for his election.



Answering a question, Sanjrani said that he had so far no plan to join any political party.

He added that his meeting with Zardari was just for exchanging views on the appointment of the opposition leader in the Senate.

However, Sindh has a few sections written in Urdu but the link in English.

Famous Urdu writer and humorist Anwar Masood laughed after listening to some of the translated words and said that they are not typographical errors or mistakes.

"Do not call them mistakes, these are jokes," he said.

Akhtar Raza, a novelist who has been working on matters related to Urdu language, said that it is a "sorry state of affairs" that the government had opted for such methods.

"All the words are ridiculously translated and have alternative words ... but those at the helm of affairs are not interested to implement it," he said and regretted that despite having all the facilities and personalities in the country for task, the government was utilising such absurd means.

Peshawar bus metro project taking toll on commercial activities

Internews
Peshawar

The multi-billion-rupee Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in Peshawar, the bustling capital of Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, has started taking its toll on commercial activities along its city route as businesses and shops run into losses amid uncertainty over timely completion of the project.

The University Road, an upscale neighbourhood of the city and a hub of business activities, is the worst-affected locality where businesses and various brands have either moved or shifted to other localities.

The University Road boasts high-rise shopping malls, multi-storey apartment houses, eateries, furniture and electronics markets, automobile showrooms and workshops, wedding halls and branches of commercial banks.

Market sources said that several workshops had left the area and relocated their businesses to the Ring Road and other localities.

"Before the project, we would receive 50 to 65 vehicles for maintenance and repair work on daily basis, but now hardly 15 to 20 customers visit our workshop in a day," said Gulistan Khan, an auto mechanic.

He said that customers faced great inconvenience due to the construction work and avoided visiting this area.

The retailers fear that the University Road would lose its charm and attraction for customers after the merging of service roads into the main road.

These service roads doubled as parking facilities for the customers and shopkeepers.

A major portion of the existing road has been allocated for BRT and its associated facilities.

Most of the shopping plazas and apartment buildings constructed along the main road do not have parking facilities.

"Our business is on the decline because of losing car parking space in front of the showroom," said Mohammad Aqeel, a manager of a major clothing brand company.

"We offered sale on discount a couple of times to dispose of the goods, so that we can relocate the business, but no customers come," he said.

Aqeel said that after the open space in front of showrooms of three major brands was marked for constructing BRT station, the companies had no other option but to close down their outlets.

The only beneficiaries of prevailing situation appear to be some small-time companies carrying out home delivery service by motorcycle in the city.

Imran Afridi, who runs a start-up company, said that demand in service had increased 50% since the launch of the BRT project.



Govt takes first step to legalising divorce

AFP
Manila

The mainly Catholic Philippines, the only country apart from the Vatican to ban divorce, took a first big step towards legalising it yesterday when the lower house of congress passed a bill.

The measure, which would allow a divorced partner to marry another person of the opposite sex, passed on third reading by 134-57 with two abstentions, the House of Representatives secretariat said.

The bill will become law if the Senate (upper house) also passes it and President Rodrigo Duterte fails to use his veto.

"In divorce and dissolution of marriage proceedings, there is no more marriage to protect or union to destroy because the marriage has long perished," said opposition leader Edcel Lagman, one of its sponsors.

"The institution of absolute divorce and dissolution of marriage does not negate the steadfast commitment of the state to protect and preserve marriage as a social institution and as the foundation of the family."

Duterte spokesman Harry Roque revealed yesterday that the president opposed divorce, but did not say whether he would veto the bill if it reached his desk.

"The president is against

divorce. He said the children will suffer," Roque told reporters, while adding he recognised the prevailing sentiment in the House.

At present the only way to exit a failed union is to bring an embarrassing, expensive and labyrinthine civil case of annulment in which a judge declares a marriage invalid — generally because the spouses have a "psychological incapacity".

Applicants must undergo a mental exam, testify in court and sometimes even claim they or their spouse entered the union while afflicted by a disorder such as narcissism.

The process can take anywhere from one to 10 years to wind through the creakingly slow and overburdened Philippine court system and cost at least \$4,800.

Duterte, 72, separated from his estranged wife in this manner long before he was elected president. The proposed divorce law would require a court ruling to dissolve "irremediably broken" marital unions.

It is expected to face a tougher passage in the Senate, with several senators allied to Duterte having publicly allied their opposition.

Since 1999 Philippine lawmakers have regularly filed a bill to legalise divorce, only to see it languish in committee limbo — until now.

Illegal fishing 'threatens food security'

A report released by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has revealed that unabated illegal and unregulated fishing continues to pose a threat to food security in the Philippines. *Manila Times* reported. Vince Cinches, Oceans Campaigner for Greenpeace Southeast Asia-Philippines, cited the BFAR-Fisheries Protection and Law Enforcement Group's recorded 649 apprehensions of illegal fishing practices in 2016 and 2017. According to

the BFAR, the highest recorded violations included unauthorised fishing, intrusion of commercial fishing vessels within municipal waters, dynamite fishing, use of illegal and active fishing gears in municipal waters such as "hulbot-hulbot" (Danish seine) and bottom trawling and employment of unlicensed fishers. The report was presented at the recently concluded Sustainable Seafood Week that Greenpeace organised together with civil society organisations.

Gray tops in beauty contest

By Arlo Custodio
Manila Times

The strongest and most popular candidate proved to be most worthy of the top title, indeed.

Catriona Gray, former Miss World-Philippines, was judged Miss Universe Philippines in Sunday's Binibining Pilipinas grand coronation night at the Smart Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, Quezon City.

Clearly a veteran among the 40 candidates, the 25-year-old beauty from Albay collected three awards early on in the pageant, based on her performance in the run-up of activities to coronation night. She received the Pitoy Moreno Best in National Costume award (renamed for the first time this year as a tribute to the late iconic fashion designer), and was named Miss Ever Bilena and Miss Jag Denim Queen.

Following the selection of the Top 25 contestants, Gray—who naturally took her experience as the country's representative to Miss World 2016 on the stage of Binibining Pilipinas—also won Best in Swimsuit and Best in Long Gown.

Slaying the question-and-answer portion when US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim asked what her message to the women of Marawi would be at this time of recovery following the war, she replied with intelligence and empathy, "Thank you for



Catriona Gray is crowned Miss Universe Philippines 2018 by Miss Universe Philippines 2017 Rachel Peters during the Binibining Pilipinas coronation night on Sunday.

that question. My answer and my message to the women are to be strong. As women, we're the head of the household and we have amazing influence not only on our own families as mothers, sisters, and friends, but also in our community. If we could get the women to stay strong and be that image of strength for the children and the people around them, then once the rebuilding is complete and is underway, the morale of the community will stay strong and high."

The Big Dome erupted in applause at Gray's seamless re-

sponse, all of them convinced at that point that she should represent the Philippines at the next Miss Universe pageant, and with great possibility a win for the country's fourth such crown.

Completing this year's winners are Binibining Pilipinas International Ma. Ahtisa Manalo of Quezon Province; Binibining Pilipinas Supranational Jehza Mae Huelar of Davao City; Binibining Pilipinas Grand International Eva Psychée Patalinjug of Cebu City; Binibining Pilipinas Intercontinental Karen Gallman

of Bohol; and Binibining Pilipinas Globe Michele Gumabao of Quezon City, a University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) volleyballer. Former Mutya ng Pilipinas titleholder and "Pinoy Big Brother" housemate Vickie Rushton of Talisay City was declared First Runner-Up and Samantha Bernardo of Puerto Princesa City, Palawan was Second Runner-Up.

The rest of the winners for the special awards are as follows: Michele Gumabao, Miss Creamsilk; Muriel Orais, Binibining Philippine Airlines (PAL); Shana Tormes, Miss Friendship and Best in Talent; Eva Psychée Patalinjug, Face of Binibini (Miss Photogenic); and Samantha Mae Bernardo, Manila Bulletin Readers' Choice.

Others in the top 15 were Anjane Magbitang, Muriel Orais, Wynonah Buot, Julianne Kapeundl, Sandra Lemonon, Maria Andrea Abesamis and Edelyn Joy Gamboa; while Patrizia Garcia, Kristie Rose Quenceña, Sigrid Grace Flores, Kayesha Chua, Ana Patricia Asturias, Ena Velasco, Trixie Marie Maraña, Agatha Romero, Mary Joy de Castro and Shane Tormes made it to the top 25.

Hosting the pageant were Miss Universe 2015 Pia Wurtzbach and Richard Gutierrez. Wurtzbach's leading man in her new movie, Gerald Anderson, was also part of the panel of judges.

Move to place Napoles under witness protection welcomed

By Jefferson Antiporda
Manila Times

How long? Can it be 10 years? One year?" Sandoval, a former Sandiganbayan presiding justice, said in an interview.

He asked: "Suppose later on, after about six months, it is denied, what will happen to the provisional admission?"

According to him, either one is admitted to the programme or not. He argued before the Sandiganbayan's First Division that if Napoles' motion was granted, "it will have far-reaching effect."

Defence lawyer Stephen David said in a separate interview the Napoles camp filed a motion seeking custody transfer "as a matter of courtesy to the" Sandiganbayan. According to Sandoval, Napoles' transfer is "the court's call."

David said he filed the motion seeking a Sandiganbayan order for Napoles' custody transfer after consulting with Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea and Justice Secretary Aguirre.

He said Medialdea's advice was "to file a motion. That is why I filed a motion."

The court gave the prosecution 10 days from March 19 to file its comment or opposition to the motion.

Napoles — who is detained at a BJMP facility in Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig — is one of the accused in the P224mn plunder case filed against former Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr, which is pending before the Sandiganbayan's First Division.

Death toll rises to five in hotel blaze

AFP
Manila

Five people have perished in a raging inferno that tore through a hotel and casino complex in Manila, authorities said yesterday, after firefighters battled more than 24 hours to douse the flames.

Rescuers said billowing smoke, sometimes so dense it obscured the 22-floor Waterfront Manila Pavilion, had hampered their efforts to contain the blaze which started Sunday morning.

The dead were all casino employees, and another of the workers was still in critical condition.

About 20 people were injured.

Some 300 guests and staff were evacuated safely, hotel and fire officials told a press conference.

"We are hoping no one was left behind in the rooms. Our firefighters have not yet gone up all parts of the building," Metro Manila Development Authority acting chief Jojo Garcia said.

Some firefighters were treated after inhaling the dense smoke, which shrouded the chaotic scene on Sunday.

"The smoke was so big, so you can just imagine, there was zero visibility and our firefighters had difficulty breathing."

Even outside the building there was zero visibility and



A man cycles past the Waterfront Manila Pavilion hotel, yesterday, a day after the hotel and casino complex was hit by fire.

it was much harder to operate inside," Manila district fire marshal Jonas Silvano told radio DZBB.

Deadly blazes break out reg-

ularly in the Philippines, particularly in slum areas where there are virtually no safety standards.

The deadliest in recent

years was in suburban Manila where 72 people died in 2015 at a factory which makes rubber sandals. But more modern buildings have also gone

up in huge, deadly blazes. In December, 38 people died in a fire at a four-storey shopping mall in the southern city of Davao.

Nod for impeachment articles against Sereno

DPA
Manila

A Philippine congressional committee yesterday approved six articles of impeachment against the country's Supreme Court chief justice, whose removal is being sought by the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte.

The House of Representatives' Committee on Justice said the six charges against Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno constituted betrayal of public trust, culpable violation of the constitution and corruption.

The charges included failure to disclose hundreds of thousands of dollars in lawyers' fees, misuse of public funds worth \$360,000, arrogating powers of the full Supreme Court unto herself and abusing her position as chief justice.

"These six articles are anchored on strong evidence, documentary

and testimonial that will stand trial," said Representative Reynaldo Umali, chairman of the committee.

Two-thirds of the more than 200 members of the House of Representatives have to approve the articles to impeach Sereno, the first woman to lead the Supreme Court.

Once the plenary vote is made, the charges will be transmitted to the Senate, which will constitute itself into an impeachment court.

No schedule has been set for the House plenary vote.

A spokeswoman for Sereno, who has denied the charges, called on the House to expedite the process amid concerns the lawmakers were stalling the vote to allow the Supreme Court to act on a petition to remove the chief justice.

The petition, which used the same charges as the impeachment complaint, was filed by Solicitor General Jose Calida, who insisted that Sereno should be removed by her colleagues at the Supreme Court for lack of integrity.



Maria Lourdes Sereno: facing scrutiny



Bangladesh Supreme Court cancels Zia bail



In this file picture, BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia arrives for a rally in Dhaka.

DPA
Dhaka

Former Bangladeshi prime minister Khaleda Zia will have to stay in prison until May, after the country's top court yesterday stayed a temporary bail order for her following a petition by government lawyers.

Zia was jailed last month in a graft case.

Yesterday's order means she will remain jailed until May 8, at least.

A two-judge High Court panel approved an order for four months of interim bail on March 12, after granting Zia the right to appeal a five-year prison term handed down by a lower court.

But yesterday, a four-member Supreme Court panel headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hosain overturned the bail, after hearing a petition by the state counsels, according to prosecution lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan.

Zia, who is also the chief of

the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was sent to Dhaka Central Jail on February 8, after a special court in Dhaka sentenced her to five years in jail for misappropriating funds meant for orphans.

Defence lawyers vented frustration yesterday about the latest court decision.

"It is unwarranted and we are frustrated with the court order," said Joynan Abedin, one of the lawyers handling Zia's defence.

The government's intentions were reflected in the court's orders, alleged Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, general secretary of the BNP, which earlier dismissed the conviction of the party chief as politically motivated.

The 72-year-old politician was convicted of transferring 21mn taka (\$252,203) to personal accounts from a charity named after her slain husband, Ziaur Rahman, during her 1991-96 tenure as prime minister.

The lower court also sen-

tenced Tarique Rahman, Zia's son, who lives in exile in London, and four others to 10 years in jail.

Zia's conviction in the graft case has made her chances of contesting the next general election against her arch political rival, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, exceedingly slim, as Bangladeshi law disqualifies anyone imprisoned for at least two years for moral turpitude from running for office.

A widow of army chief-turned president Ziaur Rahman, Zia was twice elected prime minister of Bangladesh, a country politically divided between her Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League party.

Zia's boycott allowed Hasina, a political heir of the country's founding president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to win the 2014 general election by a big margin.

Zia has been facing at least 30 other charges that include corruption, violence and sedition.



Nanda Bahadur Pun ... second innings

Pun re-elected vice-president of Nepal

IANS
Kathmandu

Nanda Bahadur Pun has been re-elected as the vice-president of Nepal for the second term unopposed, the election commission of Nepal said yesterday in a statement.

Pun has filed candidacy for the post of the vice-president on Saturday and his candidacy remained unopposed as no candidate came forward to contest with him for the post.

The election commission announced Pun as the vice-president of the country as no election was required for him to continue in the post.

"As per the election law for the election of president and the vice-president, 2074 clause 24 Nanda Bahadur Pun has been re-elected as vice-president," the election commission said.

"As per the final list of candidates published by the election commission in accordance to the election law for the president and the vice-president with the provision of announcing the sole candidate as the winner with no contestants standing against him/her will be awarded the post," the statement added.

Last year in October, Nepal endorsed new electoral law for the president and vice-president's election, which had barred anyone out of the parliament or any state assembly to stand in fray for the post and also has erased the provision of security deposit of Rs175,000 for the candidates of president and vice-president with filing of nomination free of cost, but making five supporters and proposers each mandatory to stand in the fray.

The newly endorsed bill also has the age limitation of not

less than 45 years and naturalised Nepalese citizenship to stand for the election. Also it has prohibited the people accused and jailed for more than 20 years in corruption, human trafficking, property purification, drug trafficking, foreclosure charges to stand for the post.

But the people indulged in organised crimes and other similar cases, can contest for the post after six years of their release if they have completed the prison sentence for less than 20 years. The blacklisted ones also can contest the election after getting their name removed from the list.

Also the law has made the separate allocation of elections for the president and vice-president as it is not possible as the bill has the compulsory provision of having the candidate of different sects and genders to contest for the post of president and vice-president. The bill does not allow the same gender or same ethnic community to stand for the post of state head.

Nepal last week re-elected Bidhya Devi Bhandari as president.

Bodies of plane crash victims flown home

IANS
Dhaka

The bodies of the 23 Bangladeshis killed in a plane crash in Nepal were flown home yesterday as mourners prepared a massive funeral.

A Bangladesh Air Force cargo plane, bearing the coffins, landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Ruling Bangladeshi Awami League general secretary Obaidul Quader, also the road transport minister, received the bodies at the airport, Xinhua news agency reported.

The bodies include those of pilot Abid Sultan, co-pilot Prithula Rashid and crew members, Khwaja Hossain Mohammad Shafay and Sharmin Nabila.

At least 51 people were killed as the aircraft of Bangladesh's private US-Bangla Airlines, with 71 people onboard, crashed and burst into flames while landing at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport on March 12.

Bangladesh and Nepal civil aviation authorities have launched a joint investigation, amid reports of confusion between the pilot and air traffic control over the runway approach.

Thousands of people including government high-ups and relatives and well-wishers of the victims gathered at an Army Stadium in the



Relatives and army personnel offer funeral prayer for the victims of the US-Bangla plane crash as the bodies were brought back to Dhaka yesterday, following the March 12 crash in Kathmandu.



Right: Relatives of a victim of the US-Bangla plane crash react in Dhaka yesterday.

capital for 'namaz-e-janaza' (funeral prayer).

The bodies were handed over to the relatives after the funeral service.

Of 71 people, four were cabin crew, 32 people were from Bangladesh, 33 from Nepal and one each from China and the Maldives.

Bodies of three more Bangladeshi crash victims will be flown back to Bangladesh after their identities are confirmed through DNA tests.

Close call for Yeti flight as plane's wheel gets locked

Agencies
Kathmandu

An aircraft belonging to Yeti Airlines of Nepal yesterday avoided an accident at Gautam Buddha Airport in Bhairahawa, 268km from the capital Kathmandu, local media reported.

The 9N AJC aircraft that flew from Kathmandu at 4:40pm narrowly escaped a crash while landing at Gautam Buddha airport as the plane got stuck in the middle of the runway when its front wheel got locked in the course of landing.

"Technicians failed to open the locked wheel. The airport will remain closed until the plane is removed from the runway with the help of technicians from Kathmandu," he added.

All flights of Buddha Air and Shree Airlines were cancelled after Yeti Airlines' aircraft got stuck in the runway.

A Buddha Air plane coming from Kathmandu was held for half-an-hour in the sky before

stuck in the middle of the runway.

The 9N AJC aircraft narrowly escaped a crash while landing at Gautam Buddha airport as the plane got stuck in the middle of the runway when its front wheel got locked in the course of landing

it was diverted to Bharatpur airport, said station manager Darshan Ghimire.

Rajbiraj Airport work on fast track: The black topping work at the Rajbiraj Airport, 294km east from the capital Kathmandu, has started to gain momentum after the government set a final deadline for completion of work.

As per the earlier schedule, black topping of the airport was to be completed by December 15, 2017.

Work on the airport started on November 23, 2016 but contractors had continuously failed to finish the work in time citing various reasons.

Now the government has set the last and final deadline, which has seen the contractors expediting the work to meet the deadline by April 13.

Besides black topping the runway, contractors have also been asked to construct the

fence around the airport.

Contractors blamed multiple strikes during the Madheshi movement for the delay.

"We could not transport the needed materials in time due to the strike which delayed black topping works. But now we are confident of finishing the work within 26 days," said a manager of a construction company.

The total contract cost of black topping at the airport is Rs30.3mn. The runway at the airport is 1,500m long, 30m wide while the apron has 90m length and 105m breadth.

The Rajbiraj Airport, located in Bishnumupur Rural Municipality near Rajbiraj, was inaugurated by the then Transport Minister Ganesh Man Singh in 2016. The airport was in operation for sometimes, however with frequent interruptions, but it has remained closed since 2008 due to improper infrastructure.

Lanka confident of high tourist arrivals despite travel advisories

IANS
Colombo

Sri Lankan Tourism Minister John Amarasinghe yesterday expressed confidence in the country attracting over 2.5mn tourists in 2018.

Amarasinghe said he had urged the embassies to lift travel restrictions issued against Sri Lanka and assured the island was now safe for tourists.

"My ministry will write to the embassies briefing them that the state of emergency has been lifted and the situation is now normal. Despite cancellations this month due to the violence, we are confident the numbers will pick up as Sri Lanka is a popular tourist destination," he told Xinhua.

Amarasinghe further said the country will host several international events this year including an international golf tournament and international stage shows with popular artistes.

He said several events were also planned to attract more Chinese tourists into the island country.

"China is one of our leading markets and we will take all steps to ensure we attract more Chinese tourists. We have several events planned including a mega digital advertising campaign in leading Chinese cities," the minister said.

Local media reports over the weekend said that tourism in the Central Hills had suffered a blow following communal violence which erupted in Kandy, earlier this month which left three dead,



Sri Lankan Tourism Minister John Amarasinghe
several injured and houses, shops, mosques and temples burnt and damaged.
Police said more than 300 people had been arrested to date over the violence and things had now returned to normal across the Kandy district.
The state of emergency imposed on March 6 was lifted by President Maithripala Sirisena on Sunday after assessing the public safety situation.

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GULF TIMES

FIFA's decision on Iraq couldn't have come at a better time

FIFA's decision to lift the ban on international matches in some cities in Iraq has come as a welcome relief to the football loving people of the country which has suffered far too much over the past four decades due to wars and internal conflicts.

Following the decision, a friendly tournament will kick off in Erbil tomorrow involving Qatar, Syria and Iraq, hopefully marking an encouraging development for the game in the country which has a great history in the region as well as Asia as far as football is concerned.

"We are allowing international matches to be staged in the cities of Erbil, Basra and Karbala," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said after a meeting of the FIFA Council in Bogota last week.

These three cities had been allowed to organise friendlies in the past year provided the security situation was "stable".

FIFA said it could not "yet" agree to a request from the Iraqi authorities to organise matches in the capital Baghdad, but Infantino promised that the city's application would continue to be studied. The three

cities selected are among the more secure in Iraq.

The Iran-Iraq war in the eighties and the first and second Gulf wars followed by the crisis involving ISIS had all contributed to large scale destruction and loss of lives.

Unsurprisingly sport

too was not spared, with football, which has mass following, becoming a major casualty.

During these testing times Iraqi football players lived a nomadic existence, playing their international matches on neutral venues, including Qatar, which has often been a base for them during important tournaments and played a key role in getting the ban lifted.

The Iraq Football Association (IFA) welcomed FIFA's decision but vowed to "spare no effort for games to be played in stadiums in other provinces, including Baghdad".

"This decision puts our sport back on the rails," it said.

IFA chief Abdul Khaleq Masoud also praised the efforts made by Qatar Football Association (QFA) under the leadership of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, to get the ban lifted.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who declared victory over ISIS in December, said the lifting of the FIFA ban was the "fruit of stability in terms of security and of the successes achieved by Iraq."

For years, Iraq has been busily building stadiums and lobbying stars and the sport's governing bodies for a return to the international fold.

The Asian football Confederation (AFC) has also welcomed the FIFA Council's decision to lift the ban.

"This is a significant moment in shaping the future of football in Iraq," the AFC said in a statement.

"The AFC, and the Asian football family as a whole, have supported this structured return of competitive football to Iraq."

Hopefully, the ban on other cities will be also lifted in due course of time, paving the way for a new era for Iraqi sport.

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HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohamed al-Thani addressing the Advisory Council's regular weekly session yesterday.

Qatar's economy has succeeded in overcoming siege: minister

QNA
Doha

HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohamed al-Thani has reiterated that the Qatari economy has proved its strength and robustness in facing the challenges of the unjust siege imposed on Qatar.

The economy also proved its capability to handle and overcome all the effects of the siege with the support of the systematic economic and commercial policies planned by the leadership, he added.

Speaking at the Advisory Council's regular weekly session, the minister said Qatar succeeded in overcoming the effects of the treacherous and arbitrary measures of the siege countries in full, within 36 hours, the first of its kind in the world.

The minister said the siege imposed since June 5, 2017 is a new phase in consolidating the strength of Qatar, and promoting its independence and economic security. Qatar has overcome various challenges of supply to the domestic market and the movement of ports and airports by strengthening existing business lines and developing new and direct lines with a number of strategic trading partners around the world, benefiting from the strategic facilities of the country such as Hamad Port and Hamad International Airport, he added.

• Strengthening logistics

The minister said, the Ministry of Economy and Commerce also sought to strengthen the logistics supply capacity in the country by reactivating the use of Al Ruwais Port to receive land supply operations through Turkey and Azerbaijan, through Iranian ports.

He added that, thanks to these major logistic capacities which were built around the clock, imports of foodstuffs and live animals increased by 29.8% in the fourth quarter of 2017,

in comparison to the same period in 2016, while food and beverages imports during the mentioned period increased by 28.7%.

The minister reminded the attendees of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani's affirmations that Qatar will not be the same after June 5, adding that Qatar's achievements during the period following the siege proved unequivocal evidence of the failure of the arbitrary measures of the siege countries, which only succeeded in strengthening Qatar's faith in its citizens' capabilities.

The minister said Qatar has consciously maintained its trade commitments with all countries, including the siege states themselves, to give a lesson in the professionalism and responsibility of institutional action in states. The minister highlighted that the impact of these responsible measures in establishing the reputation and status of Qatar, as a reliable and credible economic and trade partner of all parties in the international community, and also promoted Qatar as a safe investment destination compared to other siege countries.

The minister revealed a few statistics that proves the status and robustness of the Qatari economy on the world trade level including, the oil exports which rose by 25.2% in the fourth quarter of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016, whereas the contribution of the oil and gas sector to the gross domestic product (GDP) during the year 2017 was 48%, at constant prices.

He added: "Qatar implemented its economic diversification policies and built a leading economic model based on openness, diversity and productivity, based on the combined efforts of both the public and private sectors by relying on our capabilities, supporting its national products and opening new channels with its various trading partners around the world".

In addition, Qatar moved towards supporting the private sector through offering administrative and legislative

environment that encourages investment and business practices, he said noting in this regard the progress achieved in applying public-private partnership principle.

The minister highlighted several projects that have been launched in this sector and have gained great interest from businessmen and investors, such as the one offering investment opportunities for the development and operation of private schools and hospitals, economic and logistic zones, as well as a number of promising tourism projects, in addition to introducing aquacultural schemes, and projects for production of fodder for the local market.

• Initiatives to fortify economy

HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim bin Mohamed al-Thani spoke of several initiatives put forward by the ministry to fortify the national economy, including an increase of foreign capital liquidity at the stock exchange by increasing the proportion of foreign ownership, which has helped to increase market liquidity, in addition to launching a stimulus package for the land owners in logistics areas to reduce production costs and reduce rents, stressing that the Ministry of Economy and Commerce is, in parallel, making a periodic review of the legislation on business and investment to provide legislative frameworks that keep with international best practices in this regard.

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce is working on a number of legislative amendments, around 18 different legislative instruments, including new and specialised legislation such as the public-private partnership law, the strategic stock law, the national product protection law, and the unified economic registry law and brokerage law, in addition to key amendments to the law on non-Qatari capital investment in economic activity and the laws on business environment business enterprises, he said.

The draft laws will be referred to the Advisory Council in accordance with the legislative procedures in this regard, he said.

To further complement those measures, the state is working to enhance the contribution of non-oil sectors to GDP, which reached about 52% last year, the minister added.

With regard to foreign trade, he said the indicators showed that the country's foreign trade increased by 16% last year to reach US\$103bn compared with US\$ 89bn in 2016.

The minister also noted that country exports saw a remarkable rise of 19%, registering US\$4.68bn last year compared with \$57bn in 2016.

The state's trade balance had a 40% surplus in 2017, rising from US\$ 235bn in 2016 to US\$ 356bn last year, he said.

At the macro-economic level, the country's gross domestic product (GDP) increased last year to US\$ 220bn, compared with US\$ 218bn in 2016, about 2% in constant prices, he said, pointing out that this was a evidence that the unjust siege has not affected our national economy, but has increased our resolve and determination to achieve economic growth and stability.

The minister stated that these indicators reflected positively on the position of Qatar in many global reports, referring in this context to the World Bank's expectation that our national economy would grow 2.6% this year.

He added that the announced increase in the production capacity of liquefied gas, which represents a positive motive for our national economy is expected to raise the economic growth to about 8.2% in 2024.

Qatar's political and economic fundamentals and choices have played an important role in enhancing the confidence of the business community in the national economy, the Minister of Economy and Commerce said, adding that Qatar is today one of the most important countries in the region to invest in, and it offers huge investment opportunities not only in food security but also in the logistics, sports, tourism, health and other vital sectors. **To Page 27**





Activation of contingency plan

From Page 20

He added that Qatar took advanced international positions in the Global Competitiveness Index, as the country ranked first for its safe business environment, second for the impact of tax on business, third for government procurement of advanced technology, fifth for venture capital availability and fifth in terms of availability of quality labour.

•**Steps to boost local market**

The minister touched on the actions taken during the first hours of the siege, including the activation of the contingency plan set in advance to deal with everything that would affect the food security of the country and the country's economic capabilities (including the siege) by diversifying sources of supply and opening markets, and taking necessary steps to strengthen, fortify and boost the national economy and the local market and ensuring the continued flow and provision of goods, services, food products and supplies, medicine, building materials and other materials and commodities to all citizens and residents without interruption.

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce, he said, is keen to activate the institutional work and develop mechanisms of joint co-ordination with all parties concerned in order to unite efforts to work on a number of key areas at the internal and external levels, including the diversification of external sources of product and food supply and activating the strategic partnerships initiated by the policies of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

"The ministry and all partners have been able to meet all the needs of the local market since the first day of the siege, and the abundance of products in the markets was not affected and we have completely succeeded in



HE the Minister of Economy and Commerce Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Mohamed al-Thani.

overcoming the effects of treacherous and arbitrary measures of the siege countries," he added.

He pointed to the provision of logistical support services for the supply operations both in the

exporting countries or in transport, loading, unloading, warehousing and distribution operations at all

commercial outlets of the State, including small grocery stores and strengthening field control of markets around the clock to prevent any monopolistic practices and supervise the quality and prices of goods offered.

The minister pointed out that community awareness and communication were at the heart of the work of the ministry as it prepared a series of positive messages in order to reassure all members of the society about the availability of goods in the markets, as well as intensified awareness campaigns on the importance of reading food data on imported products, in addition to the provision of the translation of product's language.

•**National product initiative**

On the national product initiative, he stressed that the ministry has been keen to establish the executive frameworks of the initiative, which is a product of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce to support the marketing of national companies' products and one of the most important initiatives to deter the economic effects of the unjust siege on the local market.

He pointed out that the ministry has launched a huge campaign to support national products and urged consumers to make them their first choice.

He also noted that the Ministry of Economy and Commerce has taken measures to ensure that all necessary production inputs are provided to the national food industries to continue supplying the local market with the national product.

The minister pointed out that the ministry, in co-operation with the private sector represented in national suppliers and producers, launched a project to build and control the targeted strategic stock of commodities and food products, whose preliminary

results indicate that global rates have been achieved in this regard compared to the beginning of the siege, which is another indicator of the failure of this unjust siege.

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce continued to work on opening new channels with brotherly and friendly countries in order to accelerate the supply of goods and products to the local market while diversifying its geographic distribution and geopolitical expansion to reduce the risk rates. The most important of these countries are Turkey, Oman, Kuwait, Azerbaijan, India, Pakistan, Morocco, and Algeria.

He added that the ministry signed bilateral economic and trade partnership agreements with Turkey as well as multilateral agreements such as the agreement to facilitate transport and transit of goods between Qatar, Iran and Turkey, and is working to open new markets such as Iraq, some African and Asian countries and the Americas.

At the international level, the Minister of Economy and Commerce said that the ministry had explained to various parties of the international community Qatar's views on the arbitrary measures of the siege states and had taken the necessary legal action against them at the relevant international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation.

He stressed that these efforts have played an important role in breaking the unjust siege which the siege countries thought will affect the independence and sovereignty of Qatar.

He also praised the pioneering role of the Qatari citizens, who were aware of the conspiracy and who supported their country and their leadership against this brutal siege, while lauding the efforts of residents in the country as well.

Developing a culture of accountability

By S Zuhair Naqvi
Doha

It's common to throw around the right words in business without necessarily considering their meaning. I was asked about one of them in particular by a client recently that gave me pause for thought.

We were discussing the importance of accountability and, after mentioning the word several times, she looked at me with a slight tilt in her head before asking, "How do you define accountability?" My explanation, that at its most basic level it's about doing what's expected of you and what you've committed to, received a scoffed response, "Wishful thinking. Wouldn't that make work a lot easier?"

Like many things related to people, it sounds easy. Unfortunately, most workplaces suffer from a consistent lack of accountability and the reason is two-fold; employees are not doing what is expected and leaders are failing to create a culture of accountability.

It leaves a simple question.

What should businesses do create that culture of accountability?

1. Own your mistakes – individuals

don't want to take accountability because they don't want to be in the firing line. Lead by example, if you make a mistake hold your hands up and share how you intend to fix it. Show them it's safe to fail and how to turn failure into an opportunity to learn.

2. Make goal setting collaborative – Ensure people are motivated to achieve specific goals by getting early commitment and buy-in from them and getting them to design and detail their own goals.

3. Make transparency your default setting – Set clear standards and expectations. Ensure every employee should be clear on their role and contribution to the company and provide SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused and time-bound) goals.

4. Provide regular feedback – Don't wait for things to get off track, plan for regular checkpoints through any project.

5. Hire well – If you want to create real change it needs to start at the beginning, hire accountable people. Every interview by structured to identify accountability.

6. Make accountability habitual –



Emphasise accountability at every opportunity so employees prepare and expect it. For example, set clear agendas in meetings, use accountable language such as directly responsible individual (DRI).

Accountability builds trust and high performing teams. Developing a culture of accountability will happen

when leaders consistently practice these principles and lead by example – that's a journey that can begin at any level.

•**S Zuhair Naqvi is the Managing Director of DicoTech Qatar WLL, and an EMBA alumnus of HEC Paris, Class of 2016.**

Live issues

Exercise stress test to diagnose heart issues

Tribune News Service
Washington, DC

Dear Mayo Clinic: I have a treadmill stress test scheduled to look for heart disease. I know this involves exercising, and I'm worried that I'm not physically up to it. Is there another way to gather this information?

Answer: Yes. There's another way to conduct a heart stress test that doesn't involve exercise. Several drugs can be safely used to mimic the effects of exercise or stress on the heart. This is known as a pharmacological stress imaging study. However, pharmacological stress testing usually is used only when an exercise stress test can't be performed due to exercise-limiting problems, such as musculoskeletal problems or poor lung function, and in instances when the resting electrocardiogram (ECG) has certain baseline abnormalities or is considered to be non-diagnostic.

A treadmill stress test provides information about your heart function during exercise. Because exercise makes your heart pump harder and faster and more vigorously than it does during most daily activities, the



test may be able to reveal problems within your heart that might not be noticeable otherwise.

If you can walk for more than five minutes on flat ground or up one to two flights of stairs without needing to stop, you can most likely exercise enough to participate in a treadmill stress test.

An exercise stress test is preferable to one using drugs. Compared with a pharmacological stress imaging study, an exercise ECG stress test:

Provides different information with which to assess the condition of your heart and cardiovascular system.

In addition, it provides healthcare providers with information on your

exercise heart rate, rhythm or any abnormalities – as measured by an ECG. It also enables healthcare providers to see if exercise reproduces any heart or lung symptoms, and how exercise affects other aspects of your cardiovascular system, such as blood pressure and blood flow.

Measures your ability to exercise at varying levels.

It's predictive of cardiac outcomes, and exercise duration is strongly associated with the risk of coronary events and death.

Often doesn't require any imaging, such as a cardiac nuclear scan or ECG to be done in conjunction with the test, since the ECG tracings are often sufficiently informative.

Still, imaging studies are frequently performed with an exercise stress test, when needed.

Is less expensive and takes less time. In addition, the drugs given to mimic exercise or stress can have side effects of their own.

If the treadmill is a barrier – perhaps because of balance issues or knee arthritis – then other forms of exercise often can be substituted. Exercise bikes are often available as alternatives to the treadmill. – Mayo Clinic News Network

WEATHER REPORT

Three-day forecast

TODAY
Maximum Temperature : 29°C
Minimum Temperature : 20°C

WEDNESDAY
Maximum Temperature : 30°C
Minimum Temperature : 21°C

THURSDAY
Maximum Temperature : 32°C
Minimum Temperature : 21°C

Fisherman's forecast

WARNING
Inshore : Nil
Offshore : Nil

WEATHER
Inshore : Moderate temperature daytime

WIND
Inshore : Northwesterly-Northeasterly 05-12 KT
Offshore : Northwest-Northwesterly 03-12 KT
Visibility : 5-9 KM

SEA STATE
Offshore : 1-3

Around the region			
	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow
Baghdad	Sunny	31/16	Sunny
Kuwait City	Sunny	28/17	Sunny
Manama	Sunny	27/20	Sunny
Muscat	Sunny	26/21	Sunny
Tehran	M Sunny	23/12	M Sunny



	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Athens	P Cloudy	19/11	M Cloudy	18/12
Beirut	Sunny	21/17	Sunny	22/17
Bangkok	P Cloudy	33/26	S Showers	34/26
Berlin	Snow	04/6	P Cloudy	07/1
Cairo	Sunny	30/17	Sunny	30/19
Cape Town	M Sunny	20/15	Cloudy	19/14
Colombo	P Cloudy	31/26	M Sunny	31/26
Dhaka	Sunny	36/21	Sunny	36/22
Hong Kong	Sunny	23/15	Sunny	21/18
Istanbul	Cloudy	16/11	P Cloudy	17/09
Jakarta	S T Storms	33/25	T Storms	32/24
Karachi	P Cloudy	31/18	Sunny	32/19
London	Showers	08/00	P Cloudy	09/04
Manila	M Sunny	34/24	P Cloudy	34/25
Moscow	M Sunny	2/-9	Cloudy	2/-9
New Delhi	M Sunny	34/19	S T Storms	32/17
New York	Cloudy	04/01	Snow	02/1
Paris	P Cloudy	08/3	M Sunny	08/01
Sao Paulo	T Storms	28/22	T Storms	28/20
Seoul	M Cloudy	09/01	Cloudy	07/01
Singapore	S T Storms	32/25	S T Storms	32/25
Sydney	S Showers	26/19	Rain	21/19
Tokyo	Rain	07/07	Rain	04/02





QIFF a platform for local entrepreneurs

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Local entrepreneurs, especially those producing unique and one-of-a-kind products, highly benefit from the Qatar International Food Festival (QIFF) 2018, it is learnt.

Two of these entrepreneurs, Faisal Abdulaziz Ali and Bayan Shokri, are showcasing and promoting their coffee products for the first time at the 11-day culinary event, taking place at the Hotel Park until March 25.

"The festival has helped us show our merchandise to a large number of people, especially those who love to drink coffee," said Shokri, who manages Tamr café.

The company, which started operating 11 months ago, uses machines to convert date seeds into caffeine-free coffee granules.

She noted that such a product is new in Qatar.

The product has many health benefits compared to other coffee beans due to the properties of date seeds, which have an array of medicinal properties.

In the past four days at QIFF's Coffee Zone, Shokri revealed that they received many customers who enjoyed the coffee's flavour. She plans to open stalls in different locations, including public



Faisal Abdulaziz Ali at his stall in QIFF's Coffee Zone. **PICTURES:** Joey Aguilar

parks, in Doha in the next few months.

Currently, she prefers participating in events and festivals such as QIFF to raise public awareness on the benefits of drinking healthy coffee like Tamr. The Coffee Zone is a new offering at the festival, aimed at celebrating coffee's aroma and providing another unique experience for visitors.

Assaden Food Trading Co CEO and partner Ali echoed Shokri's statement, saying that the Qatar Tourism Authority-organised festival is a good platform to promote and market his product. He produces Turkish coffee from high-quality Brazilian coffee beans.

"This is our first product in Doha, we roast it by wood fire and it is specially made for Qatar, you

will only find it here in Doha," he said. "We do it medium roast so it is not too strong nor mild. And the good thing about the Brazilian coffee bean is it's not sour like other beans. The taste is great," Ali stressed.

He finds the location of his stall at the annual festival conspicuous as many people pass by the area.

Ali said events such as QIFF

are also an opportunity to get the response of the public on their products. "What I observed is that a lot of people like its (Turkish coffee) taste while some may not like it, but that is normal," he noted.

Like Tamr, Ali's product is now available in some major outlets such as Al Meera, and residents may soon find them in LuLu and Carrefour.



Bayan Shokri showcases her products at the festival.



Alejandro Resta is among the labels to be featured in the festival.

Colourful fashion fest at Mall of Qatar

Mal of Qatar has announced that it is adding a new type of entertainment with its first ever Spring/Summer Fashion Festival, beginning on Thursday, March 22.

The mall will host three fashion shows per day dedicated to women's, men's and children's collections along with a variety of interactive and fashion-focused activities, all concluding on Saturday, March 31, it has said in a press statement.

The fashion shows will encompass "some of the visitors' favourite brands at Mall of Qatar and exquisite Spring/Summer

collections from international designers", namely Qlabel of Qatar; Ali Al Khechen and Nizar Roumani, both of Lebanon; Alejandro Resta of Spain; and Daniel Oporto of Los Angeles, US.

Additional activities taking place during the week in different rotundas will include a kids' mini catwalk, a make-up tutorial booth and womenswear, menswear and children's clothing displays throughout the mall.

"At Mall of Qatar, we are always searching for new ways to entertain our guests through unique and captivating entertainment and activities," said Stuart Elder, Mall of Qatar CEO.

"Given that we are a regional shopping destination for some of the most well-known labels in the Middle East and around the world, it seems only fitting that we would start the new season with our Spring/Summer Fashion Festival.

"We look forward to seeing what our featured designers will be showcasing, and encourage our fashion-loving guests to come join the fun."

Mall of Qatar has welcomed its visitors to "enjoy and get inspired by the exquisite styles of designers from far and wide during its Spring/Summer Fashion Festival".

Apart from sharing his passion to young audiences, Youssef also composes, directs and performs with numerous artists from all walks of life.

From Barbara Hendricks to Youssou N'Dour or Sister Marie Keyrouz, stars of the opera world and the flamboyant diva Simone Kermes, he performs in different countries around the world.

The musician recently directed the Chamber Orchestra of Paris at the Philharmonie



Jasser Haj Youssef plays with his musical instrument at the French Institute in Qatar yesterday. **PICTURE:** Joey Aguilar

of Paris, in France. Graduated with a degree in Music, Musicology and Education, the Tunisian prodigy records his first album *Sira* with his jazz quartet, classic and baroque musicians.

Youssef pointed out that he normally does not have any particular musical piece to play for a certain country where he performs. "It is important for other people to discover other things they don't know," he said. "I think people are intel-

ligent to feel (what's in) the music."

Organisers said *Sira* music is inspired by the Arabic maqam and jazz, and through the musician's latest album *Resonance*, "Youssef has opened a new way for the viola d'amore (a huge baroque violin with seven melodic strings and a variable number of nice strings), offering all modern oriental music liberties."

"Played by him, the viola d'amore becomes the most ec-

static and confidential instrument in the history of music. Youssef surprises, upsets and transforms...poetic with a plural creation, which opens the horizon and liberates music," organisers added.

Prior to the concert, students of the poetry workshop of the French Institute in Qatar will open the evening by introducing the audience to French poems on the theme of music, accompanied by the bewitching sound of the flute ney.

Second Aspire Lake Festival returns to take spectators through its 'Magical Journey'

The second Aspire Lake Festival will take spectators through a half-hour 'magical journey' featuring more than 40 artists and experts for a showcase of theatrical performances and fireworks displays between March 23-24 at Aspire Park.

The festival, organised in partnership with Ooredoo, Qatar Airways, the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy and Katara, forms part of Aspire Zone Foundation's commitment to support Qatar's tourism and entertainment sectors. The festival returns this year after the huge success of the first edition, which was

held as a trial-run to gauge people's interest last November. AZF noted that the entire show will be directed by French fireworks art wizard and director Christophe Berthonneau.

Some of Berthonneau's earlier work was displayed at the closing ceremony of the 1998 FIFA World Cup France, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens 2004, Turin 2006 Winter Olympics, Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the 2011 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar.

He also played a part in the inauguration of the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha in 2008. "Qa-

tar's first-ever Aspire Lake Festival, which was held in November 2017, attracted more than 75,000 local and expatriate community members over three days. The event's success has prompted AZF to turn the festival into an annual event on Qatar's tourism and cultural agenda," Festival organising committee chairperson Khoudoud al-Hail said.

"As such, we decided to introduce another unique Lake Show this year. In 2018's edition of the Festival, the artists will perform a magical story told through the art of fireworks," she noted. "This event is testament to Aspire's lo-

gistical capability to organising world-class sporting, entertainment and cultural events."

She added that the first edition of the festival was a great learning experience, building on the feedback of the visitors, performers and organisers to ensure AZF hosts an even bigger and better event this time. "This year's event will be an entirely new and unique experience for visitors. We extend our thanks to this year's partners for their support in making this another memorable event for us and the people in Qatar," al-Hail said.

AZF will set up food and bev-



erage stalls for visitors attending the Aspire Park during the two days. The festival will run throughout the weekend starting at 8pm.



A snapshot from the first Aspire Lake Festival.