



**3** Amir launches conference on Palestinian children's plight



**11** Hariri says he's free in Saudi and will return home 'soon'



**11** Isolated Qatar campaigns to protect 2022 World Cup



**16** Golden State hit stride; Wizards stop Hawks; Ball makes history



# People rush out on streets after tremor jolts Kuwait

## Strong earthquake hits Iraq-Iran border, several killed



KUWAIT: People stand in the street after a tremor hit Kuwait yesterday.

By Shakir Reshamwala and Agencies

KUWAIT: People rushed out of their homes in panic yesterday night as a tremor shook Kuwait, after an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.3 struck neighboring Iraq. An Iraqi meteorology official said the earthquake hit large parts of Iraq, including the capital Baghdad. The US Geological Survey placed its epicenter at around 32 km outside the Iraqi city of Halabja along the Iraq-Iran border, issuing an "orange" alert for "shaking-related fatalities and economic losses".

Iran's state TV said at least six people were killed and many injured in the Western Iranian town of Qasr-e Shirin. Eight villages were damaged, while electricity and water was cut in some villages. Rescue teams have been dispatched to those areas, it added. The semi-official Iranian ILNA news agency reported that at least 14 provinces had been

impacted by the earthquake. Iraqi health and local officials said at least one person was killed and 50 wounded in Darbandikhan, 75 km east of the major city of Sulaimaniyah in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

All across Kuwait, buildings were swiftly evacuated as people rushed out onto the streets, with images and videos of jittery residents immediately circulating on social media. Unconfirmed reports warned aftershocks were expected, causing further anxiety. The Kuwait National Seismic Network confirmed that a tremor with a magnitude between 4 and 5 degrees was felt in Kuwait. The fire department said in a statement the quake did not cause any harm, adding it received more than 40 calls from people saying they felt the tremor. Interior ministry officials also assured residents that the tremor did not cause any damage or traffic incidents.

## Omantel announces trust in Bader Al-Kharafi on top of Zain pyramid for years to come

### Strategic acquisition creates synergies between Zain and Omantel

KUWAIT: Oman Telecommunications (Omantel) will pay \$1.35 billion to buy a further 12.1 percent stake in Kuwaiti telecoms company Zain in a deal that will expand its reach to nine Middle Eastern and North African countries. Omantel CEO Talal Al-Mamari announced Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi will continue leading the Kuwait-based telecom, trusting his vision for the firm's future expansion plans.

"We trust Bader Al-Kharafi and we rely on his leadership at Zain Group for several years to come, and we do not have plans to make any changes in the executive administration," Mamari told CNBC Arabia. Mamari was speaking at the Kuwait Bourse after the auction of the Zain treasury shares, adding that Omantel will have five seats on the board of directors. "We are keen on strengthening the group's operations, as we expect the deal to achieve integration opportunities of a value of \$400 million over the next five years," Mamari said.

Omantel paid 0.781 Kuwaiti dinars (\$2.58) per share, around 74 percent above the current listed price, for the stake, which will take its total shareholding in Zain to 21.9 percent.



Zain Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi

That will make it the second largest shareholder after Kuwait's sovereign wealth fund, the Kuwait Investment Authority. "The multiples paid by Omantel are equivalent or less than those paid for a similar transaction in the region," Mamari was quoted by Reuters as saying. "This transaction will bring in scale.

Prior to this transaction, Omantel was operating in a single market, namely Oman, and Zain Group operates in nine markets."

Omantel purchased the stake from investment vehicles linked to Kuwait's Al-Kharafi merchant family, following its acquisition of a 9.8 percent stake in Zain in August. The purchase is aimed at creating value for Omantel's shareholders, diversifying its revenue sources and raising its regional scale. Omantel said in the bourse statement. The company has no immediate plans to raise its stake further and its priority is to accelerate the leveraging of the company's debt, Mamari said.

Omantel financed the deal with a combination of long-term and bridge loan facilities, led by Citigroup and Credit Suisse, with HSBC, Standard Chartered, Bank Muscat and Arab Banking Corporation also participating. The syndication for the bridge loan was expected to be completed by the end of the year, said Mamari. That will be followed by a roadshow early next quarter to convert around \$1.4 billion of the debt into a bond or sukuk, or a mix of both, with maturities of five and 10 years. The capital market instrument should be completed by the end of the first quarter next year, he said. —Agencies

## Trump offers to mediate in South China Sea row

MANILA: US President Donald Trump offered yesterday to mediate in a territorial dispute over the resource-rich South China Sea, after years of Chinese island-building in the contested waters. Trump's surprise proposal to insert himself into the decades-long row risked a backlash from China, which has repeatedly said the United States has no role to play in what it insists is a series of bilateral issues. "If I can help mediate or arbitrate, please let me know... I am a very good mediator," Trump told Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang in Hanoi during an official state visit.

Hours later, the Communist leaders of China and Vietnam said they had reached a "consensus" on handling the disputed waters during a state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Hanoi, according to the official Chinese news agency Xinhua. The countries "reached an important consensus in accordance with leaders of the



MANILA: US President Donald Trump shakes hands with Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte during a gala dinner marking ASEAN's 50th anniversary yesterday. — AP

two parties and countries, to appropriately manage maritime issues, steadily advance all forms of maritime

Continued on Page 11

## Panel to resolve labor problems; work to begin on expat hospital

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh yesterday formed a supreme consultative committee to look into and resolve problems of manpower in the country, with the main aim of fighting visa trading. Health Minister Jamal Al-Harbi meanwhile will lay on Wednesday the foundation stone of the first hospital run by a private company to provide medical care to expatriates.

The supreme labor committee consists of representatives of the government and also employers and workers as well, in addition to manpower experts. The committee will be entrusted to study all problems relating to man-

power in the country and make proposals to resolve key labor problems, especially visa trading and the recruitment of unskilled expatriate workers.

The committee will also study issues notified by the minister. Board members of the committee will include the head of the manpower department, three of his assistants, representatives of the ministries of interior and commerce and the municipality, in addition to two members each from the chamber of commerce and trade unions, and two experts in the field.

Meanwhile, the new hospital for expatriates only will be constructed south of Sabahiya by the Health Assurance Hospitals Co (Daman), a public private partnership (PPP) company. The company aims to privatize health services provided to expatriates through the payment of health insurance. The first hospital is expected to become operational by 2020.

The company plans to build several other hospitals in other governorates with the ultimate objective of relieving public hospitals to provide medical care to citizens only. The new medical system for expatriates was approved by the National Assembly amid increasing calls to allocate public hospitals for the treatment of Kuwaitis only. The new system requires expatriates to pay health premiums to benefit from the Daman hospitals.

## Qatar investigates alleged currency manipulation plot

DOHA: Qatar is investigating an alleged attempt to manipulate its currency during the early weeks of a Gulf political crisis, now in its sixth month, a government spokesman said yesterday. The director of Qatar's government communications office said an unnamed global financial institution - partly owned by United Arab Emirates investors - had been instructed to stop trading Qatari riyals across Europe and Asia.

Sheikh Saif Al-Thani's claim is the latest development in an increasingly complex and bitter crisis. Since June 5, Qatar has been diplomatically, politically and economically boycotted by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt over charges Doha supports terrorism. Doha denies the accusations.

Continued on Page 11

## Dubai Air Show opens with Emirates' \$15.1bn Boeing buy

DUBAI: Long-haul carrier Emirates purchased 40 American-made Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners yesterday at the start of the biennial Dubai Air Show, a \$15.1 billion deal certain to please US President Donald Trump who has touted the plane's sales as a job creator in America. The deal appeared to surprise Boeing's archrival Airbus, whose staff had attended a long-delayed news conference and left the room just moments before the announcement.

Airbus has pinned hopes of continuing production of its double-decker jumbo jet on Emirates, the world's largest operator of the aircraft which took delivery of its 100th A380 earlier this month. Reports circulated before the air show that a major A380 sale would be coming.

But instead, Emirates CEO and Chairman Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum explained how the airline considered the Airbus A350 and decided to pick the Boeing 787-10.

"We were comparing the two apples," he said, but found that the Boeing 787 is "the best option" for Emirates "given its maintenance and so on". It's the second time Airbus has lost out on selling the A350 to Emirates. In June 2014, the state-owned Emirates cancelled an order for 70 A350s after a "fleet requirement" review. The Boeing 787-10 typically lists for \$312.8 million. Delivery will begin in 2022. Chicago-based Boeing Co already has 171 787-10s on order. Among those waiting for the aircraft are Abu Dhabi-based Etihad.



DUBAI: Participants walk past drones displayed during the Dubai Air Show yesterday. — AFP

The twin-engine 787-10, however, has been a focus of Trump since he came into office. In February, he visited the Boeing plant in North Charleston, South

Carolina, which manufactures the carbon-fiber, 330-seat plane Trump described as "an amazing piece of art".

Continued on Page 11