



2 Kuwait inaugurates mosque, Islamic center in Canberra



7 Rebel professor among 10 killed in Kashmir



17 Sale of debt-laden Air India fails to take off



16 Barca draw 2-2 with Real to stay unbeaten in Liga



Top court delays ruling in Assembly storming case

Tabtabaei warns PM over oil violations • Ashour ready to quit if allegations proven

Lebanese vote in first election in nine years



BEIRUT: A Lebanese woman casts her ballot as she votes at a polling station in the capital yesterday. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanon held a much-delayed general election yesterday, with a new civil society list hoping for a breakthrough but traditional parties expected to renew their fragile power-sharing bargain. Polling stations closed after 12 hours of voting that were marred only by minor incidents and were marked by what provisional estimates suggested was a low turnout. Lawmakers extended their own mandate three times since 2009, ostensibly over security concerns linked to neighboring Syria's war and political divisions that led to long and crippling institutional crises.

"This means that I voted, and I'm happy that I voted and took part in change," said Guy Farah, a 36-year-old salesman showing the ink stain on his thumb as he walked out of a Beirut polling station. One of the main

changes in this election is a complex voting system that introduces a degree of proportional representation which has allowed smaller parties to contend. The traditional big players of Lebanon's sect-driven political life were under no immediate threat of having to loosen their decades-old stranglehold on parliament however.

Analysts predict that influential Shiite movement Hezbollah, backed by Iran and wielding a formidable arsenal it refused to give up after the civil war, would retain or slightly increase its clout in the legislature. Prime Minister Saad Hariri's Sunni-dominated movement, which seems to have lost the lavish support it once enjoyed from Saudi Arabia, may shed a few seats but the 48-year-old is tipped to save his job.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The court of cassation yesterday decided to delay until July 8 rulings against around 70 opposition activists and MPs who are accused of storming the National Assembly. The court, whose rulings are final, was scheduled to issue its verdicts in the highly sensitive case yesterday, but the judge decided to delay the proceedings for two more months.

The activists have been charged with storming the Assembly following a demonstration outside the building in Nov 2011. They were also charged with using violence against police. The criminal court in Dec 2013 acquitted all the defendants, saying that they had no criminal intent and that they were expressing their anger over reports of corruption.

But the appeals court in November last year condemned all the defendants - except one who had died - and sentenced them to harsh jail terms of between one and nine

years. The terms of two defendants were suspended. The defendants include three current lawmakers - Jamaan Al-Harbash, Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Mohammad Al-Mutair - and as many as eight former MPs, including opposition leader Musallam Al-Barrak and Faisal Al-Mislem. The rest are opposition activists.

Meanwhile, MP Omar Al-Tabtabaei yesterday warned the prime minister that MPs will take measures against him if he does not take the necessary actions regarding the violations mentioned in the grilling against Oil Minister Bakheet Al-Rasheed. Tabtabaei, who along with MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain grilled the oil minister over alleged violations in the oil sector, warned the prime minister that "you are under the microscope and if you do not take any step, we will take steps against you". He wondered how "oil executives with all their shortcomings have been given the responsibility of the fate of Kuwait".

The grilling against the oil minister ended with 10 lawmakers signing a no-confidence

motion, and voting on it will take place on Thursday. Tabtabaei said he is waiting to see the outcome of the voting and what action the government takes in connection with the grilling. The lawmaker also criticized a number of MPs, whom he accused of striking deals with the government.

MP Saleh Ashour, who had grilled Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh, said yesterday that he will step down if the minister can prove her allegations in the grilling that the Al-Thaqalain Society - which he heads - had taken a KD 100,000 loan. Ashour distributed a copy of the resignation he said he intends to submit immediately if the minister proves that the loan was taken and that he had benefited from it. The minister had dissolved the society over financial violations that breached the charity law in the country. At the end of Ashour's grilling, 10 lawmakers filed a no-confidence motion against the minister. Voting on it is also scheduled to take place on Thursday.

Tunisia votes in first free municipal polls

TUNIS: Tunisia held its first free municipal elections yesterday as voters expressed frustration at the slow pace of change since the 2011 revolution in the cradle of the Arab Spring. The election has been touted as another milestone on the road to democracy in the North African country, which has been praised for its transition from decades of dictatorship. But Tunisia has struggled with persistent political, security and economic problems as well as corruption since the revolution, and observers expected a low turnout for yesterday's poll.

At a polling station in the capital, 58-year-old Ridha Kouki acknowledged that voting is "a right and a duty" but said Tunisians "have little hope" of any change. Chokri Halaoui, 45,



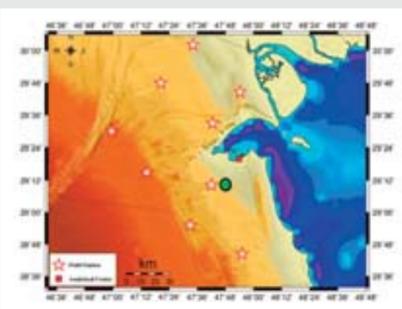
KASSERINE: A Tunisian man casts his vote at a polling station during local elections yesterday. — AFP

said he wanted to send a "message to politicians to tell them 'we have voted now show us what you can do'." Turnout, two hours after polling began, was at around 4.5 percent, the

election commission said. Tunisians have already voted in parliamentary and presidential elections since the 2011 fall of dictator

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News in brief



Earthquake jolts Kabd

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Seismic Network (KNSN) of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) recorded yesterday an earthquake measuring 3.0 on the Richter scale in eastern Kabd and southern Jahra. KISR mentioned in a press release the quake struck at 1:50 am local time at a depth of 3.7 km below the earth's surface. Many people in Kuwait felt the jolt. Another tremor with a magnitude of 3.2 on the Richter scale was also recorded in the same areas at 12:17 local time and at a depth of 4.7 km. — KUNA

Pak interior minister shot

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's interior minister Ahsan Iqbal has been shot in the arm in a suspected assassination attempt ahead of nationwide elections due this year, but will survive, his aide and officials said yesterday. The suspect, who police said was named "Abid" and is believed to be in his early 20s, shot Iqbal at close range with a 30-bore pistol, hitting him in his right arm as he was preparing to leave a public meeting in Punjab province. — AFP

Iran: US will regret quitting nuclear deal

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that if the United States quits the nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers then Washington would regret it "like never before". US President Donald Trump has threatened to withdraw from the agreement when it comes up for renewal on May 12, demanding his country's European allies "fix the terrible flaws" or he will re-impose sanctions.

"If the United States leaves the nuclear agreement, you will soon see that they will regret it like never before in history," reformist Rouhani said in a televised speech in northwestern Iran.

Stormy Daniels taunts fake Trump as lawyer presses media blitz

WASHINGTON: Porn actress Stormy Daniels took aim at Donald Trump on Saturday Night Live with comedy as her lawyer pressed forward yesterday with a straight-faced media offensive against the president. Daniels and her lawyer Michael Avenatti appear emboldened by the revelation that Trump reimbursed his attorney for a payment to the porn star, undercut-

"Trump must know that our people are united, the Zionist regime (Israel) must know that our people are united," Rouhani said. "Today all (Iran's) political factions, whether they be from the right, the left, the conservatives, reformers and moderates are united," he added.

The nuclear deal was struck in 2015 between Iran and Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, then led by Barack Obama. Under the pact, sanctions were eased in return for a commitment not to pursue a nuclear bomb, but Iran says it is not reaping the rewards despite complying with the deal. Trump has consistently complained about the agreement, citing perceived flaws including "sunset" provisions lifting some nuclear restrictions from 2025.

In an attempt to salvage the deal, French President Emmanuel Macron has recently pushed to extend its scope to address this issue, as well as the absence

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ting the president's assertion that he did not know about it.

On SNL, Daniels took a call from the president's personal lawyer Michael Cohen - played by comedian Ben Stiller - at the request of Trump, represented by Alec Baldwin. Trump said he would just listen in as they spoke, and Cohen asked Daniels if she was alone. "What are you wearing?" the fake Trump blurted out, to laughter, before cutting the faux Cohen out of the call. Trump has denied allegations from Daniels, a porn star whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, that they had an affair in 2006. In a skit that got playfully raunchy at times, Trump is asked by Daniels what it would take to make the whole thing go away. "A resignation," she said with a smile.

While Daniels made the comment on a comedy show, Avenatti echoed it to The Guardian. "Ultimately,

(Trump) is going to be forced to resign," he told the newspaper. "I firmly believe there is going to be too much evidence of wrongdoing by him and those around him for him to be able to survive the balance of his term," Avenatti said.

Cohen has admitted he paid Daniels \$130,000 just days before the 2016 election as part of a nondisclosure agreement he insists she has since repeatedly violated. Trump had denied knowing anything about the payment until his new lawyer Rudy Giuliani acknowledged that the president had in fact reimbursed Cohen for the payoff, which arguably may have violated federal campaign finance laws. "We have evidence that the president knew in the months at least following the campaign of this payment, certainly knew it long before his statement on Air Force One in April of this year

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SABZEVAR, Iran: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani addresses crowds during a rally in this northwestern city yesterday. — AFP