



A schoolboy kicks a ball during a sports lesson at a school in Mogadishu yesterday. — AFP

OPPOSITION AGAIN FAILS TO AGREE ON SPEAKER

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Meanwhile, a number of newly-elected MPs yesterday visited the National Assembly for the first time and were introduced to the various departments of the Assembly. MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain said he has gathered signatures of several MPs of demands he will submit to the government to carry out in a bid to lift Kuwait's suspension by international sports organization imposed over a year ago.

A number of MPs however said they support calls to allocate part of the inaugural session on Sunday to debate the sports suspension and to see what measures should be followed by Kuwait to end the freeze. The International Olympic Committee, the world's football body FIFA and other sports federations suspended Kuwait from international sports in October last year for allegedly issuing legislations that violate the international sports charter.

The world sports bodies insist they will end the suspension only when the Kuwaiti government ends its alleged interference in sports. But instead of complying with world sports bodies' requirements, the previous Assembly approved in June a government-sponsored law that boosts government interference, which prompted IOC and FIFA to warn of further action. Several lawmakers urged the government to do what is needed to end the suspension.

Also, opposition lawmakers continue to warn HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah not to include certain ministers in the Cabinet which is being formed. MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei said that failing to read the outcome of the election and including controversial figures in the Cabinet will be a clear signal that he is seeking to have explosive relations with the Assembly.

AMIR CALLS FOR CONCERTED RESPONSE...

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Defense ties are also expected to be high on the agenda as Britain builds a new naval base in Bahrain. May's two-day visit comes as her government faces mounting domestic criticism that it has not done enough to avoid post-Brexit disruption to British trade, which is currently carried out under EU agreements.

"I will have the opportunity to talk to all six leaders about how we can develop our trade relationship, as well as cooperation on security and defense," May said before arriving in Manama late on Monday. Her office said May will discuss possibilities for post-Brexit free trade arrangements with the GCC states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "As the UK

leaves the EU, we should seize the opportunity to forge a new trade arrangement between the UK and the Gulf," the British premier said.

Ahead of the summit, May yesterday met King Salman, Bahrain's King Hamad, HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. In October last year, Britain began building a naval base at Mina Salman, outside Manama, its first new permanent base in the Middle East in four decades. May told 300 Royal Navy officers aboard HMS Ocean that she wanted to "step up our defense and security cooperation to keep British citizens safe at home and abroad". Britain's force already stationed in Bahrain was "a clear demonstration of the UK's enduring security commitment to the Gulf", she said. — Agencies

TRUMP ON BOEING'S AIR FORCE ONE CONTRACT: 'CANCEL ORDER!'

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump urged the government yesterday to cancel an order with Boeing Co to develop a revamped Air Force One - one of the most prominent symbols of the US presidency - saying costs were out of control. His bombshell was the latest example of how Trump is using his podium, often via brief Twitter messages, to rattle companies and foreign countries as he seeks to shake up business as usual in Washington. Trump, who takes office on Jan 20, took aim at what he called cost overruns even though the plane is only in development stages.

"Boeing is building a brand new 747 Air Force One for future presidents, but costs are out of control, more than \$4 billion. Cancel order!" Trump said on Twitter. It was not immediately clear what prompted the timing of his complaint. Trump, who stressed during his election campaign that he would use his skills as a businessman to make good deals that benefit American taxpayers, then made a surprise appearance in the lobby of Trump Tower in New York, where he amplified his comments.

"The plane is totally out of control. I think it's ridiculous. I think Boeing is doing a little bit of a number. We want Boeing to make a lot of money but not that much money," he told reporters. Boeing has not yet begun building the two replacements for the current Air Force One planes, which are scheduled to be in service by the 2024 fiscal year, and it was not clear what Trump's source of information was for the cost.

The budgeted costs for the Air Force One replacement program are \$2.87 billion for the fiscal years 2015 through 2021, according to budget documents. A March 2016 report from the Government Accountability Office, a watchdog agency, estimated the total cost of the two 747s, which have to be extensively modified so they can function as an airborne White House, was estimated at \$3.2 billion. Boeing has not yet been awarded the money to build the proposed replacements, and is currently working on engineering and designing the aircraft.

"We are currently under contract for \$170 million to help determine the capabilities of these complex military aircraft that serve the unique requirements of the President of the United States," the company said in a statement. "We look forward to working with the US Air Force on subsequent phases of the program allowing us to deliver the best planes for the president at the best value for the American taxpayer."

Some of the statistics cited by Trump about the plane did not appear to reflect arrangements between Boeing and the Department of Defense, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. Speaking to reporters, he added that Americans would expect that future presidents should benefit from upgrades to Air Force One. Boeing shares dipped after Trump's tweet and were down around 0.4 percent in the early afternoon. Shares of several other major defense contractors were also lower. Trump, who sold his Boeing shares in June according to a

spokesman, named former long-time Boeing CEO Jim McNerney to a high-profile business advisory council last week. McNerney could not be immediately reached for comment yesterday.

Latest broadside

A New York real estate developer, Trump took aim at big corporations during his campaign, saying that they often harm ordinary Americans by sending jobs abroad. Since winning the Nov 8 election he has taken credit for pushing United Technologies Corp and Ford Motor Co to backtrack on outsourcing plans. Last week, after discussions with Trump, United Technologies Chief Executive Greg Hayes Carrier, agreed to keep 800 of 2,100 jobs at Indiana operations of the company's Carrier unit, instead of moving all the jobs to Mexico as originally planned. The company agreed to keep another 300 jobs at a headquarters operation in the state.

Ford, meanwhile, in November allowed Trump to claim credit for a decision not to move production of a Lincoln sport utility vehicle to Mexico that the automaker had already made. Both Ford and United Technologies said they support Trump's efforts to cut corporate tax rates and overhaul regulations, which could save the companies billions in the long run. But in the short term, his comments on Boeing put defense contractors on notice.

"The chilling effect on industry is huge, if you are a contractor," said Franklin Turner, a partner specializing in government contracts at law firm McCarter & English. "To think that in 140 characters (the length of a Twitter message) the president can cancel a program is ridiculous. There would be a detailed review by legal professionals on the merits of the termination." A Trump spokesman said that his comments about the plane reflected the president-elect's desire to keep down costs across the board, and so save taxpayers' money.

Not a 'vanilla' jumbo jet

The US Air Force, which operates the presidential planes, first announced in Jan 2015 that Boeing's 747-8 would be used to replace the two current planes that transport the US president. Boeing officials were caught off guard by Trump's comments since the company is simply meeting requirements mapped out by the Air Force in consultation with the White House, said defense consultant Loren Thompson, who has close ties to Boeing and other companies.

The cost of the planes is high because of the unique security requirements and communications equipment, Thompson said. "Air Force One has unique mission requirements, including possibly having to operate in a nuclear war," Thompson said. "Of course it's not like buying a vanilla Boeing jumbo jet." US presidents have used Boeing planes since 1943, according to the company's website. — Reuters



People walk along the Neva River at sunset in St Petersburg, Russia, yesterday. The temperature in St Petersburg is -9 C. — AP

SAUDIS CONDEMN 15 TO DEATH FOR SPYING FOR IRAN

RIYADH: A Saudi court yesterday sentenced 15 people to death for spying for the kingdom's rival Iran, local media and a source close to the case said, in a move likely to heighten regional tensions. Their trial opened in February, a month after Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran over the burning of the Saudi embassy and a consulate by Iranian demonstrators protesting the kingdom's execution of cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. The most serious charge leveled against them was high treason.

Prosecutors also alleged the accused had divulged defense secrets, tried to commit sabotage, to recruit moles in government departments, to send coded information, and supported "riots" in the eastern district of Qatif, Saudi media reported. The 15 were among a group of 32 people tried over the espionage allegations, Alriyadh newspaper said. Some of the defendants were accused of meeting Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The death sentences will be appealed, said the source close to the case, who cannot be identified due to its sensitivity. Two of the group were acquitted while the rest received jail sentences of between six months

and 25 years. Apart from one Iranian and an Afghan, all of the defendants were Saudis. The source said that one of the two acquitted was a foreigner.

All but one of the accused had been detained since 2013. The region's leading powers are at odds over a range of issues including the wars in Syria and Yemen. Saudi Arabia has also expressed concern over an international agreement that lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for guarantees it would not pursue a nuclear weapons capability. Riyadh fears the pact will lead to more Iranian "interference" in the region.

With relations at a low, Iranian pilgrims in September - for the first time in nearly three decades - did not attend the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia after the two countries failed to agree on security and logistics. Nimr, the executed cleric whose case sent tensions soaring, was a driving force behind protests that began in 2011 among the Shiite minority, most of whom live in the kingdom's east, which faces Iran across the Gulf. Nimr was convicted of terrorism and executed in January alongside 46 other people - mostly Sunnis - found guilty of the same crime. — AFP