

Kuwait International Quran contest 2017 begins



Putin slams Trump ties as top diplomats spar on Syria



Work starts on Qatar World Cup final stadium



Ronaldo hits 100 as Real Madrid beat Bayern Munich



150 FILS
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THREE OPPOSITION LAWMAKERS FILE TO GRILL PRIME MINISTER

ASSEMBLY PASSES AMENDMENTS TO CORPORATE LAW

Min 25°
Max 44°
High Tide 01:23 & 13:10
Low Tide 07:29 & 19:57

AI WEIWEI URGES GULF TO DO MORE TO HELP REFUGEES

DOHA: Chinese artist Ai Weiwei called on wealthy Gulf Arab states to take in more Syrians displaced by six years of civil war, saying the surge of refugees fleeing conflict in the Middle East was a "test for humanity". Ai, often described as China's most high-profile artist and dissident, has won acclaim for artwork highlighting the plight of Middle East refugees fleeing in boats to Europe. Last year Ai wrapped the giant columns of the Berlin Konzerthaus with 14,000 life jackets brought from the Greek island of Lesbos on whose beaches over a million migrants have entered the European Union. He has visited camps in Greece, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to film a documentary about the refugee crisis.

Speaking after a talk in Doha on Tuesday night at Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), Ai said a Gulf Arab policy of not granting Syrians and Iraqis refugee status was short-sighted. "Many Gulf states refuse refugees. I don't think that's an intelligent act because many refugees even have the same religious background to them and talk the same language," Ai said speaking in the zigurat-style museum's vast marble lobby. "I think this only shows very short-sighted politics ... like you're refusing to help out your brothers or your relatives," he said.

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AMIR OPENS SHAHEED PARK ANNEX



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah opens the second phase of Al-Shaheed Park in Sharq yesterday, accompanied by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, Mohammad Al-Mutair and Marzouq Al-Khalifa yesterday filed a request to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah over a host of allegations including illegally revoking the citizenships of opposition figures for political reasons, squandering public funds, claims of corruption and raising utility charges. This is the first request to grill the prime minister in the current Assembly elected last November, in which the opposition controls about half of the 50 seats.

The grilling came just a day after the government and its supporters in the Assembly rejected a law to allow Kuwaitis who get their citizenships revoked by the government to seek recourse in courts. At present, Kuwaiti courts are not allowed to look into citizenship matters because they are sovereign issues.

The first issue in the grilling centers around the government's action almost three years ago to revoke the citizenship of a number of opposition figures and dozens of their family members using different pretexts. The grilling accuses the govern-

ment headed by the prime minister of violating the law and misusing its authority by revoking the citizenships of several opposition figures as a means of punishment and for politically-motivated reasons.

The grilling also holds the prime minister responsible for the government's violation of international civil rights covenants and misusing its authority to issue punitive and politically-motivated legislation against its opponents. It also accuses the prime minister of being responsible for the widespread corruption in the country, claiming that Kuwait dropped 20 places in the past year in the Corruption Perception Index. The grilling claims that the prime minister insisted on appointing senior officials who failed in their previous posts in new positions, as a reflection of rife corruption in the country.

The fourth issue in the grilling focuses on failure to implement the government's development program and squandering strategic assets owned by the state. The fifth and last issue in the grilling claims that the government has increased burdens on Kuwaiti citizens but still failed to check squandering of public funds and corruption.

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TEHRAN: Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (right) and his close ally Hamid Baghaei flash the victory sign yesterday as they arrive at the Interior Ministry to register their candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections. — AP

AHMADINEJAD TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT IN SHOCK MOVE

TEHRAN: Iran's former hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took the shock move yesterday of registering for next month's presidential election, going against the advice of the supreme leader. Ahmadinejad had previously insisted he would not stand after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said last year that his candidacy would have a "polarizing" effect on the nation, and instead backed his ex-deputy Hamid Baghaei.

But the former president - whose tenure between 2005 and 2013 saw mass protests at home, plummeting relations with the West and a shattered economy - surprised everyone when he registered along with Baghaei yesterday. He told reporters at the interior ministry, where registration was taking place, that he remained committed to his "moral promise" to Khamenei of not running for the May 19 election. But he

said Khamenei's "advice was not a ban". "I repeat that I am committed to my moral promise and my presence and registration is only to support Mr Baghaei," he added without explanation.

Only last week, flanked by his former deputy at his first press conference in four years, Ahmadinejad said he had "no plans to present myself. I support Mr Baghaei as the best candidate". The formal registration period for presidential hopefuls began on Tuesday and will continue until Saturday evening, after which candidates are vetted by the conservative-dominated Guardian Council, with a final list to be announced on April 27. So far, 197 people have registered to run in the May 19 vote, eight of them women. No woman has ever been allowed to stand for the presidency in the Islamic republic.

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ZAIN SAUDI ARABIA RECORDS FIRST-EVER QUARTERLY PROFIT

REVENUES UP 9% FOR Q1 2017

News

in brief

Manila says Riyadh still needs its workers

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will still need even more Filipino workers despite its "Saudization" policy, Manila's labor secretary said yesterday following a meeting between Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Saudi King Salman. To show Filipinos that they are still welcome, the Saudis are even willing to allow more than 100 "run-away" Filipino workers to return home, Secretary Silvestre Bello told reporters in Riyadh. He said Saudi officials told him they still need Filipinos who work in the Gulf kingdom in fields ranging from construction, domestic work, healthcare, retail, engineering, telecommunications, transportation and the oil industry. Asked how this would affect the policy of "Saudization," or giving jobs to Saudis, Bello said: "Saudization is sort of just a concept now."

Bangladesh hangs three for British envoy attack

KASHIMPUR, Bangladesh: Bangladesh hanged three extremists including the leader of a banned militant outfit yesterday, after they were sentenced to death over a 2004 grenade attack on the British ambassador. The authorities hanged Mufti Abdul Hannan, the leader of Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (HuJI), and one of his associates at Kashimpur prison just outside Dhaka and another associate in a jail in the northeastern city of Sylhet, home minister Asaduzzaman Khan said. The three were sentenced to death in 2008 for the grenade attack four years earlier at a 14th-century Sufi shrine in Sylhet, which killed three people and injured the British high commissioner at the time.

Woman seeking asylum returned to Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: A Saudi woman claiming she sought asylum in Australia was stopped on a layover in the Philippines and returned to Riyadh yesterday. Dina Ali Lasloom said in self-recorded videos the Philippine authorities had held her at the Manila airport and confiscated her passport. The videos circulated widely on social media over the last two days. "My name is Dina Ali and I'm a Saudi woman who fled Saudi Arabia to Australia to seek asylum," she said in one video, adding she feared violence from any relatives who came to bring her back home. The Saudi embassy in Manila issued a statement calling the case a "family matter" and added she had "returned with her relatives to the homeland". Meagan Khan, a Canadian tourist, told The Australian newspaper after landing in Bali that she had allowed Ali to use her phone to post the videos on Twitter.

RIYADH: Zain Saudi Arabia reported its first ever quarterly net profit for the three months ending March 31, 2017 driven by revenue growth and optimization of its operational cost structure. Key performance indicators for the first quarter Q1, 2017: Compared to Q1, 2016, Zain Saudi Arabia reported: First ever quarterly net profit amounting to SAR 45 million; Revenues of SAR 1,919 million, up 9 percent, Gross profit of SAR 1,291 million, up 19 percent; EBITDA of SAR 665 million, up 49 percent; Operational income of SAR 273 million.

Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Zain Group Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer and Vice-Chairman of Zain Saudi Arabia commented, "This strong performance of Zain's operation in Saudi Arabia comes at a time when the Saudi telecom market is witnessing exponential growth in demand for digital services which we are exploiting, reflecting the success of our turnaround and cost optimization program, and justifying our heavy investment in expanding and upgrading the state-of-the-art 4.5G network."

Kharafi continued, "Despite the intense competitive challenges of the Saudi telecom market, Zain Saudi Arabia is now on a forward growth trajectory and the management team remain cautiously optimistic and clearly focused on strategic priorities, continually striving to improve all aspects of this key operation for Zain Group."

Furthermore, Kharafi said, "The decision to extend the operating license for an additional 15 years, combined with a unified telecom license and other favorable gestures by the Saudi authorities, will give Zain Saudi Arabia a significant stimulus towards achieving its business objectives and at the same time positively impacting its financial performance."

Revenues grew by 9 percent in Q1, 2017 reaching SAR 1,919 million compared with SAR 1,765 million in Q1, 2016. This also represented a 7 percent increase in revenues from SAR 1,801 million generated for the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2016. The company recorded a significant 49 percent increase in EBITDA to reach SAR 665 million in Q1, 2017, up from SAR 445 million in Q1, 2016, and a 36 percent increase from SAR 490 million in Q4, 2016. EBITDA



Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Zain Group Vice-Chairman and Chief Executive Officer and Vice-Chairman of Zain Saudi Arabia

margin rose to 35 percent for Q1, 2017 up from 25 percent in Q1, 2016, and 27 percent in Q4, 2016.

Zain Saudi Arabia also reported a 19 percent increase in gross profit to reach SAR 1,291 million for Q1, 2017, reflecting a gross margin of 67 percent, up from SAR 1,086 million and 62 percent gross margin in Q1, 2016. Gross profit also increased by 13 percent, up from SAR 1,142 million and 63 percent gross margin in Q4, 2016.

The company recorded operational income of SAR 273 million in Q1, 2017, compared to operational loss of SAR 32 million in the same quarter of 2016. operational income increased by 214 percent compared to SAR 87 million in Q4, 2016.

Significantly, Zain Saudi Arabia announced its first quarterly net profit ever in Q1, 2017, amounting to SAR 45 million, compared to net losses of SAR 250 million in Q1, 2016 and SAR 135 million losses in Q4 2016. Kharafi concluded, "I would like to recognize the dedication of the entire Zain team in Saudi Arabia, and the continued support of the Board of Directors of both Zain Group and Zain Saudi Arabia, our shareholders and the Zain Group management team in the turnaround of this promising telecom entity."

INDIAN FISHERMEN RECALL GULF ORDEAL

CHENNAI: For six months, Indian fisherman S George lived in fear on a boat, thinking he would never see his wife and children again. George was one of 15 fishermen from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu detained in October last year on charges of straying into Iranian waters while fishing in the region, officials said. Reaching their homes last week, after months with no contact with their families, the fishermen said nothing had prepared them for the ordeal they went through when they left their homes in 2014 to work on

fishing boats off the coast of Bahrain. "Once we were trapped, there were days of confusion," George told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It was not clear to us that we had crossed international waters into Iran while fishing and were being detained. What followed we never imagined could happen." There are an estimated six million Indian migrants in the six Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman, many of them trafficked and exploited, campaigners say.

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