

Info minister launches two new broadcast vehicles



Thousands throng Tehran funeral of Rafsanjani



Detroit auto show kicks off with trade plea to Trump



Late TD lifts Clemson to coveted collegiate crown



OUTRAGE AS SPEAKER ENDS SESSION AFTER HEATED ROW

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MOROCCO BANS PRODUCTION AND SALE OF NIQABS

RABAT: Morocco has banned the production and sale of burqa full-face Muslim veils, apparently for security reasons, media reports said yesterday. While there was no official announcement by authorities in the North African nation, the reports said the interior ministry order would take effect this week. "We have taken the step of completely banning the import, manufacture and marketing of this garment in all the cities and towns of the kingdom," the Le360 news site quoted a high-ranking interior ministry official as saying. It said the measure appeared to be motivated by security concerns, "since bandits have repeatedly used this garment to perpetrate their crimes".

Most women in Morocco, whose King Mohammed VI favors a moderate version of Islam, prefer the hijab headscarf that does not cover the face. The niqab, which leaves the area around the eyes uncovered, is also worn in Salafist circles and in more conservative regions in the north, from where thousands of jihadists have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq.

In some commercial districts of Casablanca, the country's economic capital, interior ministry officials on Monday conducted "awareness-raising campaigns with traders to inform them of this new decision", the Media 24 website said.

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KUWAIT: MP Safaa Al-Hashem speaks during a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Zlazz

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday adjourned the Assembly session following a heated argument between pro-government MP Hamad Al-Harashani and opposition lawmaker Jamaan Al-Harbash that involved other MPs. The argument began after Harbash criticized the previous Assembly as a rubberstamp house that triggered a strong response from Harashani, a member in the previous house.

Ghanem immediately adjourned the session for the day, but a number of opposition MPs said what happened in the session was orchestrated by the government to prevent the Assembly from studying and approving a draft law that could have helped lift an international suspension on Kuwaiti sports. At least two lawmakers, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei and Abdulwahab Al-Babtain threatened they will file to grill Minister of Information and Youth Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah over the issue. Babtain said he is likely to file his grilling next week.

During the session, 10 opposition lawmakers filed a motion calling on the Assembly's sports and youth panel to study and approve a draft law on sports and bring it to the session to allow the Assembly to vote on it. But it could not do so because the session was adjourned due to the arguments. Kuwait national football team has until today to be included in the qualifying rounds for the Asia Cup 2019, provided the sports laws are amended to be compatible with international sports charters.

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News

in brief

Nine dead, UAE envoy hurt in Kandahar blast

KANDAHAR: At least nine people were killed in an explosion in the governor's compound in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province yesterday during a visit by the UAE ambassador, local media reported. The UAE foreign ministry said envoy Juma Mohammed Abdullah Al-Kaabi and other UAE diplomats were wounded in the "terrorist attack". Afghanistan's Tolo News said the blast left nine people dead and 16 others wounded.

Saudi Arabia unblocks military aid to Lebanon

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia and Lebanon have agreed to hold talks on restoring a \$3-billion military aid package that Riyadh froze last year, a Lebanese source said yesterday. "The blockage is lifted," said an official in the delegation of Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who held talks in the Saudi capital with King Salman. In February, the kingdom halted the military aid program to protest what it said was "the stranglehold" which the Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah had on the Lebanese state. The program, funded by Riyadh, would provide vehicles, helicopters, drones, cannons and other military equipment from France.

Iran says it finally receives hajj invite

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it had finally received an official invitation from Saudi Arabia for its pilgrims to attend this year's hajj, two weeks after Riyadh announced it. "The Iranian delegation will travel to Saudi Arabia on February 23... and we hope to get tangible results," hajj affairs representative Ali Ghazi Askar told the Mizan Online news website. "For the time being, nothing is certain and we will attend the hajj as long as the situation is prepared for us," he said. The tone of the invitation is "not that much different from past letters", Askar said earlier. "All matters regarding the hajj - including accommodation, food, medical affairs, transport, pilgrims' security, banking and consular issues - must immediately be studied and appropriate solutions put forward."

UAE to invest \$163bn to diversify energy

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates announced yesterday plans to invest 600 billion dirhams (\$163 billion) in projects to generate almost half the country's power needs from renewables. "Our aim is to balance our economic needs with our environmental goals," Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said on Twitter as the Gulf state unveiled its "Energy Strategy 2050". The country's energy mix by 2050 will comprise 44 percent from renewables, 38 percent from gas, 12 percent from clean fossils and six percent from nuclear energy, said Sheikh Mohammed.

FIFA APPROVES 48-TEAM WORLD CUP



ZURICH: FIFA President Gianni Infantino speaks during a press briefing after a meeting of the FIFA executive council yesterday at FIFA headquarters. — AFP

ZURICH: FIFA voted to expand the World Cup to 48 teams from 2026 in a victory yesterday for its president Gianni Infantino but derided by critics as driven by money and politics. In a deeply divisive move which will enrich scandal-tainted FIFA's coffers, its ruling council unanimously adopted an expanded format with 16 groups of three nations that will bring "benefits without negatives", said Infantino. "We have to shape the World Cup of the 21st Century... football is more than Europe and South America," the FIFA president said after the vote. "Many more countries will have the chance to dream."

It represents the first major change to the World Cup since the tournament was boosted from 24 to the current 32 teams for the 1998 tournament in France. But its many critics strongly oppose the latest move and it was branded a "money grab and power grab" by New FIFA Now, a group campaigning for reform of FIFA. Infantino took over the body 11 months ago with a vow to repair the damage done during Sepp Blatter's tenure by growing football across the globe.

Enlarging the World Cup was the centerpiece of that vision, but opponents say a bigger tournament will dilute the quality of play and overburden already exhausted players, particularly in Europe's money-rich leagues. Football's powerful European Club Association reiterated its strong opposition, describing the current World Cup model as "the perfect formula". "We understand that this decision has been taken based on political reasons rather than sporting ones and under considerable political pressure, something ECA believes is regrettable," the body which represents Europe's leading clubs said in a statement.

Javier Tebas, president of the Spanish La Liga, made no attempt to hide his disgust. "FIFA is doing politics. Gianni Infantino is doing politics," he thundered.

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TRUMP NAMES SON-IN-LAW AS SENIOR WHITE HOUSE ADVISOR

IVANKA TO QUIT BUSINESSES

NEW YORK: Donald Trump yesterday named son-in-law Jared Kushner as senior White House advisor, rewarding the man widely credited as the brains behind his election but courting serious legal and ethical concerns. The baby-faced real estate developer and magazine publisher, who turned 36 yesterday, will be the youngest top member of the administration, working closely with chief of staff Reince Priebus and chief strategist Steve Bannon. "Jared has been a tremendous asset and trusted advisor throughout the campaign and transition and I am proud to have him in a key leadership role in my administration," announced the Republican president-elect.

The appointment was announced two days before Trump is set to give his first news conference since the November election, in which he will detail plans for his own company and potential conflicts of interest while in the White House. Kushner, who is married to Trump's eldest daughter Ivanka, was credited with masterminding a data-driven campaign that focused on message tailoring and harnessing social media to an unprecedented extent.

The transition said that Kushner, whom Forbes estimates is worth \$1.8 billion with his parents and brother, will forego his salary while serving in the administration. The announcement made no direct reference to nepotism laws or other potential conflicts of interest for

which Kushner has hired a legal team. A federal law, passed after then-president John F Kennedy appointed his brother as attorney general, prohibits any president from hiring a relative.

Meanwhile, Ivanka will step down from the Trump Organization and her own label, US media reported yesterday. They suggest an effort by Ivanka Trump, vice president of development and acquisitions at the Trump Organization who set up her own company that sells clothes, shoes and jewelry, to comply with ethics laws. Ivanka came under fire shortly after the election, when her company used her appearance in a family television interview to market a \$10,000 gold bracelet that she wore during the segment.

Given Trump's reliance on Kushner, advisors have already spent weeks saying there could be more leeway for a White House rather than a cabinet job. But The New York Times at the weekend spotlighted what it called the "ethical thicket" that Kushner would have to navigate while advising his father-in-law on policy that could affect his business holdings. Under his leadership, real estate group Kushner Companies has completed more than \$14 billion in transactions and \$7 billion in acquisitions since 2007, according to its website. He and his brother co-founded an investment company.



Jared Kushner

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SWISS MUSLIM GIRLS MUST SWIM WITH BOYS: COURT

STRASBOURG, France: Muslim parents in Switzerland cannot refuse to send their daughters to school-run swimming lessons with boys, Europe's top rights court said yesterday, dismissing a challenge by a Turkish-Swiss couple claiming the rule violated their beliefs. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) accepted that the refusal by Swiss authorities to exempt the couple's two daughters from the compulsory lessons interfered with their freedom of religion. But the interference, it ruled, was justified by the need to protect the children from social exclusion.

School has become the focal point in several high-profile battles between Swiss authorities and Muslim families who say their religion prevents their children from participating in some mixed activities. Last year, a high-profile case involving Muslim pupils in the northern canton of Basel refusing to shake hands with their female teachers caused an uproar.

School plays "a special role in the process of social integration, particularly where children of foreign origin were concerned," the ECHR, which is based in the French city of Strasbourg, said. Swimming lessons are "not just to learn to swim, but above all to take part in that activity with all the other pupils", it added. Several parents in Switzerland have incurred fines in recent years for keeping their daughters home from obligatory swimming lessons.

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