

Lifestyle | Features

Russian Embassy hosts Russian Culture event



By Nawara Fattahova

The Russian Embassy in Kuwait is holding the Days of Russian Culture and Cuisine Festival at the Crown Plaza Hotel. It was launched yesterday with a Musical evening 'the Echo of Love' performed by famous Russian opera singer Albert Zhalilov and Elmira Kalimullina who present marvelous Russian culture accompanied by talented Russian musicians. It also included a presentation for the Russian touristic opportunities organized by 'Visit Russia Kuwait', providing information about culture, nature, infrastructure, historical sights of different Russian regions, as

well as the FIFA World Cup 2018. Russian Ambassador to Kuwait Alexey V Solomatn said that this event is very important. "Through this event we show Kuwaitis the traditions the Russian nation, arts, food, and others. This is not the last event that we will hold, and we will soon hold an opera performance. We are also planning to organize a week of Russian movies next spring. Furthermore we are planning to hold a musical event with a popular Russian ballet band which has over 100 members," he told the Kuwait Times.

"For many years we have organized different cultural events every year. Such events bring nations together, particularly between Kuwait and Russia. We already held musi-



cal events earlier this year with singers and dancers, in addition to Russian artists and painters," added Solomatn. "The Commercial exchange between Kuwait and Russia is growing. Four years back when I first came the exchange was USD 39 million, and it grew today up to over USD 500 million. Also tourism exchange is growing every year, for instance during the first months of this year the figures were higher by 50 percent comparing to the same period of last year," he concluded. Tomorrow at 7:00pm a lecture will be held on one of the most significant historical events of the 20th century '100th anniversary of the 1917 Russian revolution' presented by Professor Andrey Zavalny.



Shanghai schools fly the flag for next generation

They sing the Chinese national anthem with gusto, hundreds of little arms bent in salute and faces transfixed on the country's red flag as it is hoisted high above Wuning Road school in Shanghai. Here and at other primary schools across the country the next generation of Chinese is taught everything from mathematics and English to tea-making, football, ethics and even hip-hop dancing.

Western interest in China's school system, and Shanghai in particular, has intensified after the city's pupils aced worldwide standardized tests in recent years. Teachers from England have been visiting to learn from Shanghai's success and the World Bank last year published a report titled, "How Shanghai does it: Insights and lessons from the highest-ranking education system in the world".

As teacher Zhang Jing watched, boys and girls wearing the school uniform of trainers, blue tracksuit bottoms, white T-shirts, and red or green scarves, work silently on math exercises. What does Zhang do if they talk? "I look at them," she replies in perfect English. That's all that is needed by way of a reprimand.

Chinese education has long had a reputation for strong discipline and conformity, but teachers at Wuning Road, whose students are aged 8-12, and at another high-performing Shanghai school say success today requires a slightly different approach. Teachers want pupils to like, not fear them, and say they encourage expression and creativity. "I'm dealing with young children and what they need from the teacher is a kind of gentleness," said Shen Yi, a maths teacher with 26 years' experience.

'Stay in line'

Shen sets her class of 34 boys and girls a statistics task and walks among their desks as they beaver away, occasionally touching them tenderly on the back of the head, addressing them as "little sister" or offering words of encouragement like, "Your graph is so pretty". Pupils sit ramrod-straight, arms folded one on top of the other, and speak only when addressed. "We basically don't have punishments,



Students run in the playground during a physical training session. — AFP photos

only encouragement," said Shen. "It makes them feel the relationship between them and their teacher is really close, like a mother or a friend, and that makes them think, 'The teacher loves me so I want to go to class.'" Melodic music played on the school P.A. system signals class is over and the students stand in unison and belt out: "Goodbye teacher!" It's now time for the school's 1,300 children to pay their daily respects to China's flag.

They file into the playground and stand to attention for the raising of the banner before enthusiastically singing the national anthem. Next, as military-style marching-band music plays, the children perform physical exercises by heart. Barely an arm or leg is out of sync. "Stay in line, left, right, left, right," barks a woman with a microphone. "Eyes forward and swing your arms."

World leader

A staff member at another top-performing local school said discipline is

instilled foremost by parents, and China's Confucian traditions mean rules are obeyed and teachers are highly respected authority figures. The World Bank's report said Shanghai's academic success is due largely to high-quality teaching. It credited rigorous pre-service training and continuous professional development of teachers once they start.

"One of the most impressive aspects of Shanghai's education system is the way it grooms, supports and manages teachers, who are central to any effort to raise the education quality in schools," it said. It also lauded Shanghai for making schools accountable for their students' performance, and for a system under which high-performing schools provide management and professional support to lower-performing ones. Shen and others say their mission is not just about academics, but also about producing "upstanding" members of Chinese society. Teachers say lessons are designed to be relevant to every-

day life, so Shen uses examples of trees and flowers instead of pure numbers in her class. Like other Chinese schools, Wuning Road teaches "ethics" and "morals". But teachers are vague on specifics and on how much time is dedicated to studying Communist Party doctrine and "Xi Jinping Thought", the president's eponymous philosophy now pushed as the national credo. The scarves around pupils' necks indicate they are on the path to perhaps one day joining the party.

The school hand-picks one boy and one girl, both aged 10 and top pupils, to answer pre-prepared questions put forward by AFP. July breathlessly rattles off well-rehearsed replies in English. She does two hours' homework straight after school and three more after dinner. There is no time for television, though she admits enjoying Disney films when homework allows. What's the worst thing about school? "There is no worst thing about my school. Everything is good." — AFP



Students sing the national anthem in the playground during the flag-hoisting ceremony at their school in Shanghai.



Students play Chinese musical instruments during a Chinese music session.



Students paint during an activity session.

INDIAN COURT REJECTS BID TO STOP WORLD RELEASE OF 'PADMAVATI'



This file photo taken on November 01, 2017 shows Indian Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone posing for a photograph during a promotional event for the forthcoming Hindi film 'Padmavati' in Mumbai. — AFP

India's top court yesterday rejected a legal attempt to block the global release of a Bollywood film that has sparked violent protests, warning against prejudging the controversial historical epic. Caste-based groups have been staging violent demonstrations against "Padmavati" amid rumors that it will depict a romance between a Hindu queen and a Muslim ruler.

The epic was scheduled for release in India on December 1 but delayed indefinitely after the censor board refused to certify it. The Supreme Court yesterday dismissed a legal petition to delay its release abroad, saying nobody should pre-judge the censors before the film is classified. "Responsible people in power and public office say certain things, and make comments on certain aspects, that violate the rule of law," declared the bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra. "We are sure they will be guided by the basic premise under the rule of law and not venture outside."

A number of officials, including state leaders from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party, had vowed to ban screenings of the film in their jurisdictions unless controversial sections were removed. The leader of a caste-related group also offered 50 million rupees (\$769,000) to anyone who "beheaded" lead actress Deepika Padukone or director Sanjay Leela Bhansali. In January protesters belonging to the Rajput Karni Sena caste-based group attacked Bhansali and vandalised the set during filming in Jaipur in Rajasthan.

Speculation that the film will include a romantic liaison between Rajput queen Padmavati, also known as Rani Padmini, and the 13th and 14th century Muslim ruler Alauddin Khilji, had enraged activists from the historically Hindu warrior caste. Rajput Karni Sena accuse the film's makers of distorting historical facts. But some historians say the queen is a mythical character and there is no clear evidence that she even existed. Protesters attacked another set near Mumbai in March, burning costumes and other props. Lawyer ML Sharma, who brought the petition before the Supreme Court, had previously failed to prevent the film's release in India. Harish Salve, representing the film's director and producer, said there was no intention of releasing the film abroad until it had received classification at home. — AFP