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Zain finalizes telecoms tower deal, first of its kind in region

Zain agrees to sell and lease back mobile towers for \$165m

KUWAIT: Mobile Telecommunications Company KSCP (Zain), Kuwait's leading mobile operator, yesterday announced that it has entered into definite agreements to sell and lease back the passive physical infrastructure of its mobile tower portfolio in Kuwait for \$165 million to IHS Holding Limited (IHS), in partnership with Towershare Management Limited. The transaction will result in the formation of a new entity that will acquire and manage Zain's tower assets in Kuwait, with Zain assuming a minority shareholding in this newly formed entity.

The transaction has been approved by Kuwait's Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), and is still subject to other regulatory and statutory approvals, and is expected to close in the first quarter of 2018.

IHS is the largest independent tower operator in Europe, Middle East and Africa by tower count and the third largest independent multinational tower company globally. Zain has more than 1,600 mobile telecommunication towers located in prime and strategic locations across Kuwait and this transaction will enable Zain to focus on its core business and customers while accelerating Zain's investments in cutting-edge telecom technologies to help meet growing mobile data demand.

Under the terms of the transaction, Zain is selling only its passive, physical infrastructure to the new company and will retain its intelligent software, technology and intellectual property with respect to managing its network.

Upon completion, the transaction will be the first sale and leaseback of telecom towers in the Middle East region by a licensed mobile operator, and creates the first independent tower operator of scale in the region. This transaction is part of IHS' broader strategy to apply its operational expertise from its international



Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of Zain Bader Al-Kharafi is seen with Zain, IHS and Towershare Management officials.



Bader Al-Kharafi signs the telecom tower sell and leaseback agreement.

portfolio further throughout emerging markets. The newly formed entity will be responsible for maintaining and expanding Zain's tower footprint across Kuwait.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Vice-Chairman and Group CEO of Zain said, "This transaction is set to support Zain's transformational strategy in becoming a digital lifestyle provider as it will optimize operational efficiencies, enhance customer experience, and deliver greater value for its shareholders. This deal will unlock value that can be more efficiently deployed in new technologies and higher



Bader Al-Kharafi: Our dedication to explore all opportunities and become first movers is the key to our innovation

yielding investments for Zain, and at the same time pave the way for further network expansion and tower infrastructure sharing in Kuwait."

Kharafi added, "I'm very proud of Zain team for its professionalism in completing the first agreement of its kind in the MENA region. We are confident we have chosen the right partner in IHS, a company that possesses high caliber expertise with sound operational experience in diverse markets."

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Harbash, Adasani trade barbs; Hayef warns government

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A tit-for-tat war of words between opposition MPs Jamaan Al-Harbash and Riyadh Al-Adasani intensified yesterday, with the two lawmakers hurling new accusations against each other. The confrontation began when Harbash, a leading Islamist MP from the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), criticized Adasani for rushing a grilling request against the state minister for Cabinet affairs. Adasani responded by lashing out at Harbash and his group, and charged that they were collaborating with the prime minister to protect him from political questioning.

Harbash replied yesterday by calling on Adasani to review his position and accused him of deliberately misleading people. He also charged that Adasani was part of a concerted attack against the ICM and Islamists. Harbash also said that he did not oppose the grilling against the minister, but Adasani "normally changes facts against his rivals".

The lawmaker also denied that he nor his group made any secret deals with the prime minister and the government, adding the understanding over the revoked citizenships was public and known to all. Harbash also warned the government against backing down in the citizenship agreement, saying that MPs will resort to "other methods". He called on MPs to coordinate their political agenda. But Adasani did not like Harbash's comments, and warned that his response will come soon in a "grilling of the prime minister".

Islamist opposition MP Mohammad Hayef called yesterday for unity and cooperation between the government and the National Assembly in the wake of highly tense situation in the region. He said that a lack of cooperation between the two authorities will strain political relations and create tensions. Hayef said talks will be held with the prime minister about the need to resolve the issue of revoked citizenships before the start of the next Assembly term on Oct 24. The government had pledged to return citizenships that were withdrawn more than three years ago from opposition figures.

Hayef said that lawmakers do not aim at straining relations with the government and that the political detente lawmakers pledged before the Amir is still standing and had continued for a long period, which is sufficient to resolve the issue of the citizenships. The lawmaker however warned the government against not fulfilling its pledges, adding that failure to resolve the citizenship issue means that the government is not cooperating, and in this case, MPs have pledged to hold the government to account.



Riyadh Al-Adasani



Jamaan Al-Harbash

Catalan leader steps back from declaring outright independence

BARCELONA: Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont said yesterday he had accepted the "mandate of the people" for his region's independence from Spain but suspended the declaration to allow more time for talks with Madrid. In a speech to regional lawmakers in Barcelona, Puigdemont stopped short of declaring an outright split but left the door to secession open, leaving some political rivals scratching their heads. "I assume the mandate of the people for Catalonia to become an independent republic," he said.

But the 54-year-old asked the Catalan parliament to "suspend the effects of the independence declaration to initiate dialogue in the coming weeks". The central government fired back, with a spokesman rejecting what Madrid termed Catalonia's "tacit" independence declaration. Political leaders in Catalonia, Spain and Europe have come out against an independence declaration, concerned over the country's biggest upheaval since its transition to democracy in the 1970s.

EU nations are watching developments closely amid concern that Catalan independence could put further pressure on the bloc still dealing with the fallout from Britain's shock decision to leave. Police deployed en masse around the regional parliament, blocking public access to a park that houses the building as crowds watched the session on giant screens, waving Catalan flags and some brandishing signs reading "democracy".

Reaction among those who had hoped to witness a historic moment for a region deeply-divided over independence was mixed. "In essence we're happy but I



BARCELONA: Catalan regional government president Carles Puigdemont (right) acknowledges applause at the Catalan regional parliament yesterday. — AFP

was expecting more," said 66-year-old Pere Valldeu. Merce Hernandez, a 35-year-old architect, said: "I am very emotional, this is a historic day. I'm satisfied." Madrid has repeatedly said it would not negotiate on Catalonia's independence. "We call on Puigdemont not to do anything irreversible, not to pursue a path of no return and not to make any unilateral independence declaration," government spokesman Inigo Mendez de Vigo told reporters earlier yesterday.

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Marginal workers face axe; degree needed for iqama

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Development Hind Al-Sabeeh told Al-Anbaa daily that expat university degree holders will have to provide their attested original certificates to renew their residency visas. Sabeeh added more categories could be later included in this condition once a related study is completed.

Responding to a question whether the residencies of some expats will no longer be renewed, Sabeeh said this was being considered, as expat

marginal laborers overburden the local market by seeking job opportunities all the time.

Sabeeh stressed that these decisions were meant to protect expat workers from being exploited. She noted that the new measures will also target Kuwaiti owners of companies using illegal methods and human trafficking to recruit expats and bring them to Kuwait. "These companies will be suspended, fined and referred for investigations," Sabeeh vowed.



Hind Al-Sabeeh

Indian child brides sold in 'package deals' to Gulf men

HYDERABAD, India: For years, Haji Khan - a lanky man in his thirties - moved inconspicuously in the bylanes of Hyderabad's Old City, scouring the streets for child brides for older men visiting from Gulf states, pocketing about 10,000 rupees (\$150) for each girl. Khan struck two kinds of deals: 'Pucca' meant long-term marriages where the girl would fly back with her husband to his home country, and 'time pass' marriages that lasted for the duration of the man's stay in India.

"We lined up 20 to 30 girls for each Arab in a hotel and he would select one. They (the men) gave the rejected girls 200

rupees (\$3) to go back home," said Khan, now a police informer. "The men came with old, used bridal clothes, soaps and nightgowns for the girl they would marry. Most marriages were 'time pass'," Khan told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Police in the southern Indian city, a hub for tech companies, last month busted a racket involving wealthy men from Gulf states such as Oman and UAE "marrying" teenage Muslim girls in Hyderabad for the duration of their stay in India. At the time of the marriage, the men signed postdated divorce documents, to be delivered to the brides after their new husbands had left the country.

The marriages were performed by a Muslim officiant, or qazi, who forged the bride's age to show her as an adult. The main qazi who performed these marriages in Hyderabad was arrested last month. "Most of the girls do not know that they will be abandoned within 15 or 20 days of the marriage. The men would come on tourist visas, perform a contract marriage and leave after a month," said V Satyanarayana, a deputy

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