Gillan plays with perceptions in thriller *Oculus*

Whether it is 11 players on a pitch or four football-playing robots, Germans often win — but it is Iran who triumph at a weekend RoboCup matchup in Tehran.

**SANCTIONS-HIT IRAN TRIUMPHS ROBOCUP**
Iran may be lumbered with economic sanctions but that did not stop a local team of robotics experts from sweeping aside German and Dutch rivals in football’s RoboCup.

In an event that could be considered just a fun distraction if it weren’t for all the hard work involved, the annual tournament drew an international field of competitors last weekend.

On a green felt carpet, five teams — three German, one Dutch and the other Iranian — contested RoboCup’s 9th edition in Tehran, with the robots trying to prod a red ball into the back of their opponent’s net over two 10-minute halves.

Standing just 60cm (24 inches) tall, the key factor in the match — unlike in everyday electronic games — the robots are pre-programmed by their human masters ahead of kick-off.

“The robots are completely autonomous — we don’t have any control on the game and they make their own decisions,” said Novin Sharhoudi, 20, a student of software and computer engineering at Qasvin Azad University, northwest of Tehran.

And unlike professional sport in which money can buy the best players, the RoboCup teams used identical machines designed by Aldebaran Robotics, a French company that also provided raw technical data for the programmers.

“We process the data to improve locomotion, perception of the infrastructure and behaviour,” said Sharhoudi, referring to how and when the robots move, kick the ball and interact with teammates across a playing surface six metres (yards) long and three metres wide.

Without upgrades, components

Each robot is equipped with two cameras — one on its head and the other on its chin — to see the ball and communicate with team mates via wireless networking.
Local MRL (Mechatronics Research Laboratories) team came out on top, even though all aspects of life in Iran are clouded by international sanctions imposed as punishment for its disputed nuclear programme.

“We don’t get all the upgrades, we can’t buy robots or some components and the company was not in Tehran during the event so we can’t repair the robots,” said Sharhoudi.

And just as in the beautiful game itself, no plan survives the opening whistle.

Jonas Mende of team HTWK from Leipzig, Germany saw his robots bump into each other and their opponents, fall over and require “time out” on the sidelines before returning to action.

Mende was impressed by the improvements achieved by the MRL team.

“Iranians have made good progress since last year. We are now on the same level and they are our main opponents,” he said.

The MRL team’s victory came after a third place finish behind world champions Bremen and Leipzig at a recent tournament in Germany.

But for professionals taking part in RoboCup, the aim is to advance their research and to improve design and movement in new software programmes.

“They develop lots of skills that can be used in other areas,” said Patrick de Kok of the NAO Dutch team who took part in Tehran.

“Finding a ball is not only for soccer but can help find a specific target during rescue operations,” he added, referring to searches in contaminated and dangerous places.
High school students hone research skills at Planet Georgetown week

Twenty-six Qatar-based high school students recently completed the Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) Planet Georgetown weekend-long after-school research programme.

The young researchers were all Year 10 students and represented 14 schools, both independent and private, from throughout Qatar. The highly-selective programme put the students through their paces as their research tasks aligned with this year’s Planet Georgetown theme: Mapping the Modern World.

Latifa Al Shamali, a student from the American School of Doha, said: “Planet Georgetown impacted me positively in an educational way. My research skills improved and I also gained more knowledge about other countries.”

“It has changed my way of looking at the world in general and looking at politics in particular,” added Al Dana Hamad Al Marri, while Albandari AlManaa exclaimed, “Engaging, enriching, and engaging—Planet Georgetown is a thrilling experience!” both are students at Al Maha Academy For Girls.

Abdulkareem Anisetta from Ahmed bin Hanbal Independent Secondary School For Boys said: “Planet Georgetown is more than just a programme about the planet — it was a planet itself with people from all over the world.”

This year’s Planet Georgetown immersed the students in map orientation, research skills, flag symbolism, professional citation proficiency, a study of the Ukraine conflict, and a sample University-level Map of the Modern World. In addition, to their own individual research projects.

The students’ individual projects required that they personally select a country for the purposes of researching the history of the ‘map’ of that country: How did the country’s map develop over time? What internal and external conflicts does the country currently face? When did the country come to be known by its current name? How were the country’s borders determined and have there been border disputes?

These are just some of the many questions the students examined and developed into individual finished research projects. This culminated with each student presenting their findings at the end of the week during the Planet Georgetown Closing Ceremony. By presentation time, the students were well-prepared to speak knowledgeably about their research results and answer questions from the audience.

“The Planet Georgetown participants were a group of motivated, dedicated, and talented young people who truly explored the world of today to shape the world of tomorrow through gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them,” explained Saaila Khan, GU-Q student development officer and member of the SFS-Q Enrichment Team.

“We are glad to be able to facilitate this journey that builds responsible global citizens and look forward to further engaging bright minds and young leaders in our local and global community.”

Organised by the GU-Q Office of Educational Enrichment Initiatives, the Planet Georgetown programme was launched in 2008 in order to expand the range and scope of engagement with the local community.

Domasco hosts Honda Pilot desert drive

Honda Pilot owners were invited to join Domasco for the last off-road adventure of the season in the dunes of Qatar last weekend.

A convoy of 15 care took to the sand dunes and enjoyed the off-road competence of their Pilot vehicles, led by Mohammed Abdullah Zareei, a professional off-road driver.

Greig Roffey, Head of Sales and Marketing, Domasco Honda welcomed everyone and provided tips on desert driving. Members of the Domasco Honda team accompanied the group, to give the owners the benefit of their personal experience and confidence in the capabilities of their vehicles.

“The Pilot’s smooth city driving capabilities underlie the power that it can harness when driving on rough, unpredictable and inhospitable conditions such as the desert,” said Greig.

“Honda Pilot owners experienced the Pilot’s enviable performance on the sands while relishing the spacious luxurious interior of this Grand Comfort Cruiser,” he added.

For many in the group, this was their first off-road experience. They smoothly conquered sand dunes of all sizes with ease with their Honda Pilot, a very thrilling experience, especially for the first timers. “It was a real pleasure driving the Pilot onto one dune after another and the vehicle never showed signs of tiredness,” explained a customer who joined the group with his family.

The dune drive was followed by a convivial barbeque on the beach, where the group enjoyed spending time relaxing with the Domasco team, enjoying a day of great food, conversation and adventure.

“Organising the Honda Pilot Desert Drive for our Honda customers to enjoy the off-road competence of their Pilot vehicles and the beauty of the desert was truly a delight for us. Besides, Honda lovers will be more delighted to know that they can now enjoy a huge cash back offer on all 2014 Honda models” said Greig.
The resident representatives of the seven ASEAN embassies in Doha - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines - held their monthly meeting hosted by Mövenpick Hotel Doha recently. The group enjoyed an Asian inspired sweet treatable in the renovated boardroom, followed by a lunch prepared by Chef Ery Imansjah with delicious dishes from the ASEAN countries. From left: Nurwenda Sucipto, Second Secretary of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Syed Noureddin, Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister-Counsellor of the Embassy of the Republic of Singapore, Crescente R Relacion, Ambassador of the Republic of Philippines, HE Dato’ Ahmad Jazri bin Mohd Johar, Ambassador of Malaysia, Nordin Ahmad, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam and Chairman of the ASEAN Committee in Doha (ACD), Le Hong Phan, Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Piroon Laismit, Ambassador of Thailand and Fabian Chensnais, General Manager of Mövenpick Hotel Doha.

Punjabi music album released

Dalerian, a music album of selected songs by Doha-based Punjabi singer Mohinder Jalandhary, was released at a ceremony held at Grand Qatar Palace Hotel yesterday. The album was jointly released by Indian Cultural Centre advisory board chairman KM Varghese, ICBF president Kareem Abdulla and IBPN president Aniz Abbas.

Jalandhary is a Punjabi singer working in Doha and he has been dabbling with music for last 19 years. So he has released two Punjabi albums prior to this. His first album 302, the case was released in Dubai, second album Tor Mastani was released in Doha in 2013. Dalerian (courage), his third, consists of eight Punjabi songs. The songs depict the folk and cultural scenario of Punjab with their rhythmic dance beats. The lyrics are written by Jalandhary along with Jagjit Malishan and Arun Kumar Mahi and music is composed by Raj Srivastava and Amandeep Lohat. The CD is presented by Sanjeev Sharma and Surinder S Saini. Album is produced by Raman Bharadwaj.

Renaissance Doha City Center plans Multiple events for Easter

Renaissance Doha City Center Hotel is hosting Easter special brunches at Crossroads Kitchen and Ipanema. The culinary team at the multi-cuisine restaurant - Crossroads Kitchen, will be displaying an array of Easter specialties from all around the world on April 18 from 12.30pm–3.30pm. Crossroads will also be offering a special buffet for kids along with a play zone as well as plenty of surprises from Easter Bunny.

Ipanema will be hosting a Brazilian Easter Brunch on April 18 from 12.30pm–3.30pm. Ipanema’s live band, Brazuqa will be showcasing their own samba flair, bringing a swinging pace to their Brazilian outfits.

There will be a Easter Egg Workshop for kids on April 19 from 3pm–6pm at Quick Bites. Tasty chocolate eggs will be provided by Executive Pastry Chef Auriel Constantin Hadzhi for the children who will be able to decorate and customize their eggs with marshmallows, caramel popcorn and much more.

The workshop will be followed by an Easter egg treasure hunt. The Peninsula

SDC to organise ‘Swathi Fest-2014’

Skills Development Centre (SDC) is set to organise ‘Swathi Fest-2014’, a cultural tribute to the late Indian Music legend Sri Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma – a connoisseur of Carnatic Music Tradition of India.

Dinesh Udenia, First Secretary to the Embassy of India, and VL Balasubramanyam, Principal of Bhavans Public School, would attend the ceremony. The event is organized to celebrate Swathi Thirunal’s 202nd Birth Anniversary on Friday April 18, at Maestro Community Hall located at New Salata from 7pm onwards.

Swathi Thirunal was a patron of music and is credited with composing over 400 compositions in classical music. On the occasion students and teachers of SDC would present a variety of dance and music performances based on his creations. The event is open to public.
By Nicole Anzia

The winter is over, and it’s finally time to put away the sweaters, down jackets, wool mittens and flannel sheets. Although it’s tempting to toss everything into a bin and deal with it in nine months, try to resist the quick fix and take some time to put the gear away properly. You’ll be glad you did in December.

Even though the winter is not severe in Qatar, many might have travelled to snow-covered countries, so these tips will help.

**Coats and jackets**

Before storing winter coats and jackets, empty the pockets. Wool coats should be dry-cleaned. Snow pants, down and synthetic jackets, as well as fleece, can be washed and dried at home. Store all outdoor gear in one place if possible — either a spare closet or the basement, if moisture isn’t an issue.

**Gloves, hats and scarves**

Make sure mittens and gloves are matched with their partners. If you didn’t wear one of your hats or scarves this winter, chances are you never will, so give it away. And even if you washed your favourite hat before the last snowfall, wash it again, along with all your other winter accessories, before you put them away for the season. Check that everything is completely dry before you put it in a large, labelled breathable bag. Store all outdoor gear in one place if possible — either a spare closet or the basement, if moisture isn’t an issue.

**Boots**

Snow boots should be wiped clean and stored, but those that are heavily worn should be assessed for damage first, to determine whether repairs are needed. Leather boots should be cleaned with leather cleaner and suede boots should be professionally cleaned before you put them away for the season. To help the boots retain their shape, fill them with scrunch-up plastic bags or tissue paper or use boot shapers. Store the boots in their original boxes or in a plastic boot bin.

**Sweaters**

Sweaters don’t last forever. Even though it can be difficult to say goodbye to your favourite sweater, don’t go to the trouble to clean and store sweaters that are worn thin or pilled. Likewise, if you didn’t wear one of your sweaters this winter, you probably don’t need it. As with other items, make sure your sweaters are properly cleaned and then store in them in breathable bags with either cedar blocks or a moth deterrent. If you’re tight on space, consider using a storage ottoman or bench or under-the-bed bins.

**Bedding**

Finding a space to store bulky winter bedding is a challenge. Down comforters should be professionally laundered and stored in a large, breathable cotton bag, unless you have space to cover and hang them. Compressing the down in a storage bag is fine, but hanging it helps to maintain its loft. Clean flannel sheets and blankets should be put in bins labelled with their size. And while you’re at it, this is a good time to wash pillows, pillow protectors and mattress pads.

Clearing out your closets to make room for warm weather clothes and gear is worth the little effort it requires. The next step: locate the swimsuits and shorts you packed away last September.

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*By Nicole Anzia*
FOOD

By Joe Yonan

Years ago, I read a technique for cooking sunny-side-up eggs in a way that resulted in tender whites without any of those crispy edges the writer found so troublesome.

I had one reaction: Why on Earth would you want to do that? Those edges are my favorite part of a fried egg, and I’ve always loved how they combine with a runny yolk to create such a satisfying combination of textures. When I was growing up in West Texas, my mother would fry eggs in beef bacon grease scooped out of a little can she kept on her stove, and to this day the smell of those ingredients together will take me back to my childhood like nothing else.

The first time I went to Spain, I realised there was an even better way: to fry eggs in even more fat — this time, olive oil. They puff up and get lacy and browned in seconds, leaving the yolk still runny (if you pull them out quickly enough, that is) but creating even more of those caramelised edges.

They’re a natural match for one of my favourite spring recipes: quickly broiled asparagus spears with what I have dubbed “romesco blanco.” It’s an ivory-coloured version of the classic Spanish romesco sauce, made with almonds and bread and olive oil and vinegar — plus salsa verde instead of the standard tomatoes or red peppers, along with a kick of mint.

Once the egg is broken and the yolk runs, though, another colour gets added to the mix: amarillo, through and through.

Maximising the texture of a fried egg

Asparagus with Romesco Blanco and Fried Eggs

4 servings

The Spanish approach to frying creates wonderfully crisp and browned edges on the egg, but you could substitute your favourite egg-cooking technique instead.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons sliced or slivered almonds, toasted (see NOTE)
- 3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup store-bought salsa verde
- 1 small slice of bread, preferably stale, torn into small pieces
- 2 tablespoons lightly packed fresh mint leaves, plus a few for optional garnish (stacked, rolled and cut crosswise into thin ribbons)
- 1 tablespoon apple vinegar
- 1 tablespoon water, plus more as needed
- Fine sea salt
- 1 pound asparagus, preferably with thick stalks
- 4 large eggs

Method:

Position a rack 5 or 6 inches from the broiler element; preheat the broiler.

Combine the almonds and 1 tablespoon of the oil in a food processor along with the salsa verde, bread, mint, vinegar and water; blend to form a smooth, thick sauce. Taste, and add salt if needed. Add water if the sauce seems too firm; it should not be pourable.

Snap the woody ends off the asparagus spears and discard them (or save them to make vegetable broth). Toss the asparagus with 1 tablespoon of the oil on a rimmed baking sheet, and sprinkle lightly with salt. Broil until the asparagus browns in spots and the spears just barely bend when you lift them, 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the freshness and thickness of the asparagus.

Break one egg into a small cup, making sure to keep the yolk intact. Line a plate with paper towels.

Pour the remaining 3/4 cup of oil into a small saucepan set over medium-high heat. Once the oil starts to shimmer, carefully slip in the egg, being careful to avoid any splattering. Run a spatula under the egg to keep it from sticking to the saucepan. Tilt the pan if needed so the egg is submerged, using a spoon to scoop oil from the pan on top of the egg if it is exposed. Cook for just a minute or two, until the edges have puffed up and browned but the yolk still seems liquid (beneath a white film). Use a spatula to transfer to the paper-towel-lined plate and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Cover loosely with aluminum foil to keep warm. Repeat with the remaining eggs, one at a time.

Divide the asparagus among individual plates, arranging them nicely. Top each portion with a fried egg, and dollop one-quarter of the sauce alongside. Garnish with mint chiffonade, if using. Serve right away.

Note: Toast the almonds in a small, dry skillet over medium-low heat for several minutes, until lightly browned and fragrant, shaking the pan to avoid scorching. Cool completely before using.

Nutrition Per serving: 220 calories, 9 g protein, 8 g carbohydrates, 17 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 185 mg cholesterol, 240 mg sodium, 3 g dietary fiber, 3 g sugar
Sharon to act with Kristen Stewart?

A

Alia Bhatt and Farhan Akhtar are reportedly in talks for a project, reports the Hindustan Times.

Alia Bhatt is likely to play Victoria Larson, a government agent who is in a love triangle with Depp. They will be joined by British actress Rebecca Hall as Caster’s wife Evelyn. They will be joined by British actress Rebecca Hall as Caster’s wife Evelyn. They will also carry out with a strict guide for wedding guests on appropriate service staff. Kim and Kanye want their day to be as regal as possible and are putting a British touch alongside a shot at working with him.

Freeman excited to work with Depp

A

Alia Bhatt

Alia Bhatt, who was last seen in R Balki’s &#39;On the Rocks’ last year, has now bagged a lead role in the Hollywood film ‘Transcendence’.

Kim-Kanye want regal wedding

A

Kim-Kanye want regal wedding

Kim Kardashian and her fiance Kanye West have hired a royal wedding coach to learn “contemporary etiquette and manners”. The coach will apparently spend a week with Kim-Kanye, and the rest of the wedding will be conducted by the modern royal family, as well as putting a British touch alongside a shot at working with him.

The 76-year-old told The Social Network newspaper: “There were three or four marriages before my own, long, drawn-out process. Always wanted to have the wedding coaching experience,” she said.

By Piya Sinha-Roy

The Smashing Pumpkins frontman and actor Billy Corgan will reportedly play a scientist and co-mentor in the film ‘Doctor Who To Nebula’, which has helped him achieve his lifelong ambition, reports Variety.

By Piya Sinha-Roy

The film flits between past and present, and what is real is constantly trying to right a heinous wrong. In one parable, Dr Caster is forced back into an apple, only to find it’s a light bulb. It’s all about perception because reality with ghostly scares.

By Piya Sinha-Roy

The film flits between past and present, and what is real is constantly trying to right a heinous wrong. In one parable, Dr Caster is forced back into an apple, only to find it’s a light bulb. It’s all about perception because reality is a strange territory, and I just thought there is always an element of horror in the universe. In addition to shaving her head, Gillan added that the role of Nebula was the most interesting role she has ever played.

By Piya Sinha-Roy

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By Piya Sinha-Roy
West eyes more Russia sanctions over Ukraine

The United States and European Union say they will impose further sanctions on Russia over its alleged interference in Ukraine, amid continuing unrest in the east of the country.

### Sanctions Imposed on Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asset freezes and travel bans</strong></td>
<td>Total of 38 Russian and Ukrainian officials targeted by U.S., including some close to President Vladimir Putin. EU has blacklisted 51 individuals, with more names being added to list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defence</strong></td>
<td>NATO suspending all military and civilian cooperation with Russia. U.S., UK and Germany halting arms export licenses to Moscow. France could cancel $1.7 billion deal to sell Russia two Mistral warships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade</strong></td>
<td>Negotiations frozen between EU and Russia on economic pact and visa-free agreement to ease travel to 28-member bloc. EU moving ahead with trade deal to bring Ukraine closer to Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finance</strong></td>
<td>U.S. firms and individuals prohibited from doing business with St. Petersburg-based Rossiya Bank – regarded by Washington as personal bank for several senior figures in Russian government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Energy</strong></td>
<td>Crimea-based Chernomorneftegaz gas firm sanctioned by U.S. Treasury for alleged misappropriation of Ukrainian state assets. EU seeking ways to reduce its dependence on Russian gas supplies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International organizations</strong></td>
<td>Russia frozen out of G8 group of industrialized nations. G7 to meet in Brussels in June instead of Sochi. Talks halted on Russia’s entry to OECD and International Energy Agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NASA</strong></td>
<td>NASA severing all ties with Russia apart from International Space Station. U.S. energy department halting collaboration with Moscow on peaceful nuclear projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science and Technology</strong></td>
<td>E.U. ready to impose sanctions against key sectors of Russian economy – such as energy, banking and mining. EU discussing range of options, including restrictions on finance and trade with Russia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Russian Counter-Measures

- Several Western officials hit with travel bans and asset freezes. Assets of U.S. and European companies in Russia could be seized in retaliation for economic sanctions.

- More drastic steps could see Russia cutting gas supplies to Europe, barring foreign firms from contracts, or refusing to cooperate with West on global issues.
After 24, cognitive motor skills begin to fall

T

Even though smoking appears far less frequently in US television shows than it used to, its portrayal may still be triggering the urge in adult smokers, according to a new study. Researchers reviewed patterns in TV smoking over more than 50 years and found that they tracked with changes in adult tobacco use, suggesting that even established smokers are influenced to light up by seeing it done on the small screen.

"Movie tobacco cues promoting smoking initiation in teens have been extensively covered in the literature, but this paper emphasizes that TV programming-promoted tobacco has been understudied and may be important as well," said lead study author Patrick E Jamieson of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

An effective cue "should promote smoking initiation, reinforce a current smoking habit and make it harder for smokers to quit," he said, and smoking on television appears to fit that bill.

For the new study, Jamieson and a colleague noted instances of tobacco use in prime-time TV dramas between 1955 and 2010. They compared these numbers to US adult smoking rates over the same period.

Over the 55 years studied, smoking in real life and on TV both declined. Between 1955 and 1964 there was an average of almost three tobacco appearances per hour in the primetime dramas, which declined to less than one every three hours between 2001 and 2010.

For every additional tobacco appearance per hour of TV, the researchers found, each US adult smoker consumed about two more packs of cigarettes per year.

"There is a concern that seeing tobacco on TV could trigger cravings in adult smokers," said Kristin Carson, senior medical research scientist at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Adelaide, South Australia.

Tobacco on TV tied to adult smoking rates

By Kathryn Doyle

E

Experts suggested that TV could be an important trigger, of which both smokers and former smokers should be aware.

"There is a concern that seeing smoking on TV may cause adults to both re-start smoking after they have quit and keep them from quitting," said Kristin Carson.

Tobacco counselling to his patients regularly.

"We advise people not to go to places where people smoke, to avoid the stimulus," he said. "We know there are very strong triggers."

Dr Roger Thomas of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, agreed.

"This is a very strong study methodologically," he said. "Quitting is often a long process with many relapses, since cravings can be triggered by stress, said Thomas, who was not involved in the study but administers tobacco counselling to his patients regularly.

Forget moms, young dads face depression too

A

Parental depression has a detrimental effect on kids, especially during those first key years of parent-child attachment.

"We need to do a better job of helping young dads transition through that time period," he advised.

Previous research has shown depressed dads will use more corporal punishment, read less and interact less with their children, and are more likely to be stressed and neglect their children.

"We knew paternal depression existed and the detrimental effects it has on children, but we did not know where to focus our energy and our attention until this study," Garfield noted.

Agencies

**Agencies**

- **The Peninsula Plus**
- **Reuters**

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**Sources:**
- https://www.tobaccocontrol.com/online-article/35894
- https://peninsulaplus.com/2014/04/17/tobacco-on-tv-tied-to-adult-smoking-rates/

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**Image:**

- "Tobacco on TV tied to adult smoking rates" by Kathryn Doyle for The Peninsula Plus.
Siri-like Cortana fills Windows phone gap

By Anick Jesdanun

"Y" ah, it’s Nick! How can I help?" Thanks for asking, Cortana. And thanks for making the Windows phone software better, Microsoft.

With the new Cortana virtual assistant, Windows catches up with Apple’s iOS and Google’s Android in a major way. Microsoft takes some of the best parts of Apple’s and Google’s virtual assistants and adds a few useful tools of its own. The result is Cortana, named after an artificial-intelligence character in Microsoft’s “Halo” video games.

The update, including Cortana, will come with new phones starting next month, while existing phones will be able to download it for free in the coming months. Microsoft is making a preview version available to software developers. I was able to test that version over the past week.

Apple’s Siri virtual assistant on iPhones and iPads has a feisty personality. She has good comebacks for such questions as, “What is the meaning of life?” She’s also helpful with directions, restaurant recommendations and appointment reminders. Google Now on Android phones is boring by comparison, but it’s better at anticipating your needs and giving you information before you even ask.

Cortana combines Siri’s personality with Google Now’s knack for anticipation. Cortana also incorporates a feature for blocking calls, texts and notifications during times of your choosing, while letting you set exceptions for specific people or emergencies (defined as someone trying to call again within three minutes). That feature is separate on iPhones and Samsung’s Android phones. Cortana will also identify the name of songs heard in a retail store or cafe, while you need separate apps such as SoundHound or Shazam on other phones.

Other differences include:

**Cortana asks rather than assumes.**

When you first use Cortana, she guides you through a brief questionnaire to gauge your interests. You can tap an icon on the top right to pull down a notebook and change your preferences.

Cortana also offers to scan your email for flights and other events to remind you about. Unlike Google Now, Cortana asks whether you’d like that flight and other events to remind you about. Unlike Google notebook and change your preferences.

You can tap an icon on the top right to pull down a notebook and change your preferences.

**Cortana lets you ask follow-up questions.**

After asking Cortana for Mexican restaurants, I asked for ones that are open and got my list narrowed. I then asked for the ones that are good. Cortana responded with the Mexican restaurants that are both open and have at least four stars on Yelp.

Siri and Google Now tend to treat each request as new, though both will let you make reservations through OpenTable. Cortana tells you only that a place takes reservations.

**Cortana offers more ways to set reminders.**

Like Siri and Google Now, Cortana lets you set reminders based on the time. Like Google Now, Cortana also lets you set reminders based on location. When you arrive at work, for instance, she can remind you to mail a package.

Both Siri and Google Now also let you set people-based reminders. Let’s say your friend Mary just had a baby. You can ask Cortana to remind you to mention that the next time you call, text or email Mary.

Some of the interactions got frustrating until I manually added my work and home addresses to Cortana’s notebook.

Me: “Remind me to turn off the stove when I get home.”
Cortana: “All right, where should I remind you?”
Me: “Home.”
Cortana: “OK, what should I remind you about?”
Me: “Turn off the stove.”
Cortana: “When would you like to be reminded?”
Me: “When I get home.”
Cortana: “Sure, remind you when you get to home. Is that the one you want?”

The suggestion wasn’t for my home but “Home Restaurant.”

“Microsoft says Cortana will figure out where you work and live over time.

Cortana is still in a “beta” test mode, so these kinks are to be expected.

Cortana is fine for basic queries, though sometimes you have to ask a few times. In requesting directions, I sometimes get a simple Web search for my destination address. But repeating the address then gets me actual step-by-step directions.

I asked all three virtual assistants on Friday whether I needed an umbrella. Siri and Google Now both told me I didn’t, based on the fact that it wasn’t raining. Cortana answered, “I’m not entirely certain.”

All three then presented a forecast.

By Sunday, Cortana seemed to have figured out I didn’t need an umbrella. But I asked the same question 10 minutes later and got Web results for “Do I need an umbrella?”

Both Siri and Google gave me movie times when I asked, “When is ‘Frozen’ showing?” Clicking on a time took me to a ticketing service. Cortana simply conducted a Web search.

Cortana warns me of conflicts when adding a calendar event, but the warning comes after the fact as a “by the way.” Siri warns me ahead of time, while Google Now offers no warning at all.

Ask Cortana to “tell me a joke,” and she tries to text “a joke” to my cellphone, or “Me” in the address book. Cortana also won’t compose emails. Siri and Google Now do both email and texts.

These are all small points that I’m sure Microsoft will address over time. The company plans to keep Cortana in beta and limited to the US until the second half of the year, when the assistant will also debut in the UK and China.

Perhaps by then, Microsoft will offer a male voice, the way Apple now does with Siri.

In the meantime, enjoy interacting with Cortana. You can ask her to sing a song.

Cortana’s improvements over Siri and Google Now aren’t enough to compel a switch from an iPhone or Android phone, but Cortana does address an omission in Windows Phone for those already thinking of getting one.
Hoy en la Historia

1960: U.S. rock star Eddie Cochran, aged 21, was killed in a car crash while on tour in the United Kingdom.

1986: UK journalist John McCarthy was kidnapped in Beirut. He was released by Islamic Jihad in 1991.

1993: The discovery of a 75 million-year-old fossil provided a link between dinosaurs and birds.

2009: Botswana halved its output of diamonds as a result of the global economic crisis.

Thousands of Chinese students marched into Tiananmen Square in Beijing, calling for democracy following the death of purged liberal reformer Hu Yaobang.

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Picture: Getty Images © GRAPHIC NEWS

ALL IN THE MIND

Can you find the hidden words? They may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal, forwards or backwards.

BANDANA, BRANDING, BRIDLE, BRONCO, BUCKAROO, BULLDOGGIN, BUNKHOUSE, CAMPFIRE, CATTLE, CHAPS, CHUCK-WARE, CORRAL, COWBOY, COWBOY BOOTS, COWBOY HAT, COWHAND, COWPUNCHER, GAUCHO, HARNESS, HORSE, LARIAT, LASSO, LINE RIDER, LONGHORNS, MUSTANG, REINS, RODEO, ROPER, ROUNDUP, RUSTLER, SADDLE, SPURS, STAMPEDE, STEER, STIRRUPS, STRAYS, TRAIL BOSS, VAQUERO, WRangler.

LEARN ARABIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dizziness</td>
<td>Dawbha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High temperature</td>
<td>Harara mourtafiça</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea</td>
<td>Ishal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common cold</td>
<td>Raš</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Ta-beeb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Moustafa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Momarrida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonsil infection</td>
<td>Ilthal allawzatayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My temperature high</td>
<td>Hararee mourtafiça</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel cold</td>
<td>Ašqour bibourooda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweat</td>
<td>Cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days will I stay in the hospital?</td>
<td>Kam yawman sa’abga fee almoustafa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colic</td>
<td>Mqis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Soudaq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General weakness</td>
<td>Douři  ča-mm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: چ = ‘a’ in ‘agh’ when surprised.
**CROSSWORD**

ACROSS

1 Verminous African snake  
6 Basics  
10 Former Swedish subsidiary of General Motors  
14 A fee sign  
15 Floored it  
16 Knobknight of toondom  
17 Deep-six  
18 Norwegian royal name  
19 Polite request  
20 “Really?!?”  
23 Chess great Mikhail  
24 “My man”  
25 Macs run it  
26 Zion’s site  
29 Far from industrious  
32 Old TV problem  
34 ___ beef  
35 A dedicator of New York’s Strawberry Fields  
36 A fire sign  
37 “Really!”  
43 Batteries for remotes, perhaps

DOWN

1 Boom support  
2 Shoe support  
3 Sorvino of “Mighty Aphrodite”  
4 Escape conviction  
5 Humane org.  
6 Lots and lots  
7 Leave in a hurry  
8 Like a grouch  
9 Cut, as ties  
10 Round for the final four  
11 Slowly, on a score  
12 In whatever way  
13 Sets, as a trap  
19 Round for the final four  
20 “Law & Order” spinoff, for short  
21 Tolerates  
22 Derby blooms  
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**HYPER SUDOKU**

How to play Hyper Sudoku:
A Hyper Sudoku Puzzle is solved by filling the numbers from 1 to 9 into the blank cells. A Hyper Sudoku has unlike Sudoku 13 regions (four regions overlap with the nine standard regions). In all regions the numbers from 1 to 9 can appear only once. Otherwise, a Hyper Sudoku is solved like a normal Sudoku.

**KAKURO**

How to play Kakuro:
The kakuro grid, unlike in sudoku, can be of any size. It has rows and columns, and dark cells like in a crossword. And, just like in a crossword, some of the dark cells will contain numbers. Some cells will contain two numbers. However, in a crossword the numbers reference clues. In a kakuro, the numbers are all you get! They denote the total of the digits in the row or column referenced by the number. Within each collection of cells - called a run - any of the numbers 1 to 9 may be used but, like suduko, each number may only be used once.

**EASY SUDOKU**

Easy Sudoku Puzzles:
Place a digit from 1 to 9 in each empty cell so every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains all the digits 1 to 9.

**YESTERDAY’S ANSWER**

14

**CROSSWORD**

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**YESTERDAY’S ANSWER**

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Some people have lauded the idea of opening a 24-hour call centre for answering people’s queries about health services in different hospitals.

There are complaints about delays in granting housing loans to a number of Qatari women, who say they applied three years ago and got approval for their loan, despite which the authority concerned has not taken practical action. This delay will affect those who applied later as they will need to wait for a similar period.

Some Qatari University students are demanding that the University administration stop discriminating between Qatari students by giving some of them allowances of up to QR7,000 per month while others are denied any money. They say all should be treated equally as the allowances are for the benefit of the students.

It has been suggested that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in collaboration with other ministries and state institutions, publish booklets to raise awareness among expatriate workers about laws related to their entry, exit, residence and sponsorship, and other relevant rules.

There is talk about the second phase of the health insurance scheme, which will include all Qataris and start by the end of April 2014, as announced by the National Company for Health and Social Insurance.

There is talk about the decision by the Independent schools bureau at the Supreme Education Council to resume the morning flag ceremony in schools, which was suspended a few months ago following the detection of some coronavirus cases in the country.

Some people have criticised the drainage network, especially in new projects such as the Salwa Road underpasses, one of which has been closed because of flooding caused by rains.

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Khalid Al Sayed

A view of Doha skyline.

Events in Qatar

Jazz in the Park
When: April 16, 7pm-8pm
Where: Museum of Islamic Art Park
What: The Museum of Islamic Art has partnered with Jazz at Lincoln Center Doha for a series of free world-class jazz concerts in MIA Park.
Free Entry

Richard Serra: Concurrent Exhibitions
When: Till July 6, 8:30am-5:30pm
Where: GMA Gallery Building 10, Katara
What: Richard Serra is among the most important contemporary sculptors. The exhibition organised by the GMA in Doha is one of Serra’s most ambitious ever in that it brings together sculptures and drawings from different periods, ranging from the seminal One Ton Prop (House of Cards) of 1969 (on rare loan from the Museum of Modern Art in New York) to a new large-scale work, Passage of Time, especially created for this occasion.
Free Entry

Plants of Qur’anic Botanic Garden Exhibition
When: April 19 till April 30; 10am-10pm
Where: Katara Gallery — Bldg 18
What: The Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development organises, in collaboration with the Qatar Photography Society and Katara the first exhibition of its kind. The exhibition includes 58 artworks of all the plants mentioned in the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah. These pictures have been captured in Doha, Indonesia, Yemen and other Arab countries.
Free Entry

Kings and Pawns
When: Till June 21
Where: Museum of Islamic Arts
What: This exhibition uncovers the history of board games in the Islamic world, from India to Spain between 7th and 20th century.
Free Entry

Korean Kite Flying
When: April 19; 10am-5:30pm
Where: Katara Esplanade
What: In celebration of the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Korea and Qatar, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea, in cooperation with the Korean Kite Flier Association has organized a Korean Kite Flying Event. The kites, which will be brought in from Korea are of gigantic size and of dynamic shapes and colours, and will be soaring over Doha skies with splendid movements controlled by kite masters of great skills from Korea.
Free Entry

If you want your events featured here, mail details to plus@pen.com.qa