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PLANS TO RAISE CORPORATE TAX, CUT SUBSIDIES

KUWAIT: Kuwait may raise the corporate tax rate to 10 percent for local firms and impose limits on energy subsidies, the commerce minister told a local newspaper yesterday, part of a broad move to introduce fiscal reforms amid pressure from low oil prices. Corporate taxes, currently levied at different rates for local and foreign companies, could rise to 10 percent, Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousef Al-Ali told Al-Anbaa newspaper. "Initial ideas being tossed around are that it will be up to 10 percent. There are companies in the market now paying up to 4.5 percent that will see their taxes rise a little to 10 percent," Ali said.

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COMPANY WITHOUT CONTRACT CHECKING VEHICLES AT BORDER

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Abdullah Al-Turajji said yesterday that a private company is continuing to inspect vehicles at Abdaly crossing point with Iraq although its contract with the customs department expired a year ago. Turajji said the disclosure about the company coincided with the busting of a 200-kg hashish haul with a truck coming from Iraq and after it was inspected by the company. The bust was made by detectives after the truck was allowed to enter by the company.

The lawmaker said he learnt that the company is owned by a woman from the ruling family and whose brother is an assistant undersecretary at the interior ministry. The court of appeals upheld a ruling on April 27 ordering the company to vacate the site, adding that the company collected KD 880,000 after the court ruling.

Turajji said that the director of the customs department told the budgets committee yesterday that he has asked the interior ministry to implement the ruling and evict the company, adding if this is true, the interior minister should launch an investigation into the matter. Head of the budgets committee MP Adnan Abdulsamad said Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh told the committee that work requires the company to continue operating until an alternative is found. Abdulsamad said another company working with the customs department has won damages worth KD 68 million.



MOUNT PLEASANT, South Carolina: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump references fellow candidate Jeb Bush at a Pearl Harbor Day Rally at the USS Yorktown on Monday. — AFP

US LEADERS ASK MUSLIM AMERICANS TO FIGHT BACK

NY SHOPKEEPER BEATEN IN HATE CRIME

WASHINGTON: Facing what President Barack Obama has called a new phase of terrorism, US officials appealed to Muslim Americans on Monday to fight harder against extremist ideology.

The Obama administration has defended Muslim Americans after attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, and the inflammatory rhetoric that came in its wake, while a parallel message to Islamic communities is gaining urgency: please help.



NEW YORK: Muslim shopkeeper Sarkar Haq, who was beaten, is seen at his shop on Monday. — AFP

As Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump suggested banning all Muslims from entering the country on Monday, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson stood in solidarity with an imam and leaders of other faiths at a northern Virginia Islamic center. Johnson would not comment on Trump's remarks but urged Americans not to vilify Muslims or throw a "net of suspicion" over an entire community.

Continued on Page 13

WASHINGTON: A firestorm erupted yesterday over Donald Trump's call for a ban on Muslims entering the United States, as religious leaders, the White House and his rivals on the presidential campaign roundly condemned the proposal. The leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination made the provocative remarks - just his latest on a range of topics on the campaign trail - after last week's shooting that left 14 dead in California by a Muslim couple said to have been radicalized.

In a rare primetime speech to the nation from the Oval Office on Sunday, President Barack Obama called the attack in San Bernardino an "act of terrorism" and vowed to defeat extremism, but also stressed that it was not "a war between America and Islam". Less than 24 hours later, Trump's bombastic bid for the White House plumed what critics called a new low and triggered calls for him to be barred from taking power after he urged a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on".

SEE PAGE 7

In a speech late Monday, the 69-year-old billionaire real estate mogul and reality television star doubled down on his initial statement. "We have no choice," Trump said, saying that Islamist radicals want to kill Americans. "It's going to get worse and worse. We're going to have more World Trade Centers," he said, referring to the deadly attacks on Sept 11, 2001.

His comments were condemned by the White House as "totally contrary" to American values and similarly slammed as far afield as London and Cairo, where Egypt's official religious body Dar al-Iftaa denounced them as "extremist and racist". The strongest reaction came in the United States, including from Trump's rivals in the race to run for the White House in 2016. Senator Lindsey Graham branded the remarks "un-American" and said Trump was only fueling radical Islam.

Trump was the "ISIL man of the year," said Graham, referring to the extremist Islamic State group. "Do you know how you win this war? You side with people in the faith who reject this ideology, which is 99 percent," Graham told CNN, before invoking Trump's campaign slogan - "make America great again". "And do you know how you make America great again?" asked Graham, who is lagging badly in the nomination race. "Tell Donald Trump to go to hell." Other Republican contenders including Marco Rubio, John Kasich, Chris Christie and Jeb Bush, as well as Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan, also rejected Trump's proposal. Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential frontrunner, tweeted: "Declaring war on Islam or demonizing Muslim

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RAMADI: Displaced civilians from Ramadi and around the area cross the Bzebib bridge as they leave their hometowns towards Baghdad on Monday. — AP

IRAQ FORCES RETAKE LARGE PART OF RAMADI FROM IS

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces recaptured a large part of the city of Ramadi from the Islamic State group yesterday, officials said, scoring a significant breakthrough in their fightback against the jihadists.

Baghdad's forces have been fighting for months to secure territory around Ramadi, the capital of the vast Anbar province, and retaking the Al-Tameem area is an important step in the battle for the major city west of Baghdad. Warplanes from the US-led coalition battling IS have backed them in the fighting, carrying out more than 45 air strikes in the Ramadi area in the past week.

"Today, our forces completely cleared the Al-Tameem area after a fierce battle against Daesh gunmen," Sabah Al-Noman, the spokesman for Iraq's counter-terrorism

service, told AFP, using an Arabic acronym for IS. IS fighters "had no choice except to surrender or fight and they were completely destroyed," Noman said. Major General Hadi Irzayij, the police chief for Anbar, confirmed that Al-Tameem had been retaken as did Brigadier General Yahya Rasool, the spokesman for the Joint Operations Command.

"The liberation of Al-Tameem will greatly help in speeding up the liberation of the city of Ramadi," Rasool said. "Iraqi forces are ready and close to entering the centre of the city," Irzayij said. Al-Tameem lies to the southwest of IS-held central Ramadi and Iraqi forces now need to make matching advances to the north in order to attack the jihadists from both sides.

Continued on Page 13

SHEIKH ATHBI DENIES KNOWING 'ABDALY' SUSPECT

By B Izzak and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: A member of Kuwait's ruling family denied in court yesterday allegations linking him to a recently uncovered "terror cell". Sheikh Athbi Al-Fahd Al-Sabah yesterday told the criminal court that the main suspect in the Iran-linked terror cell is unknown to him and that he had never asked him to hide the weapons.

The prime suspect in the 26-member cell had told the court that he was a member of the resistance against the 1990-91 Iraqi invasion and that Sheikh Athbi, who was a resistance leader, had asked him to hide a quantity of arms. Sheikh Athbi, who was the head of the secret service, said that he does not know the man and never gave him any instructions.

During the hearing, defense lawyer Khaled Al-Shatti questioned the validity of the arrest warrants issued to arrest his clients. He also refuted some of the points mentioned in the arresting officer's report, noting that the officer was only two years old when some of the incidents happened and had not been even born when others took place.

Shatti also demanded dropping the charges because the accusations made took place more than 10 years ago and stressed that his clients kept the weapons in case Saddam Hussein decided to launch another invasion of Kuwait. Shatti also refuted charges of spying on the Kuwaiti government during the invasion, noting that the government was headquartered abroad then. He also wondered how the arresting officer finished writing his report and accusations against all defendants within 48 hours.

Moreover, Shatti argued that Al-Qaeda launched several terrorist attacks against Hussein in Kuwait after Saddam was toppled, while none of the defendants had ever shot a single bullet against

Continued on Page 13



GAZA CITY: Palestinian entrepreneurs brainstorm ideas as they compete for acceptance in the third version of Mobaderoon project, hosted by the Islamic University's Business and Technology Incubator, on Nov 24, 2015. — AP

IN WAR-TORN GAZA, A TINY HI-TECH SECTOR EMERGES

GAZA CITY: As a student graduating from computer college two years ago, Mohammed Qudih was dreading the "painful" unemployment in the Gaza Strip - a war-battered coastal territory where nearly half the population is without work. Today, the 25-year-old engineer boasts about his company, its 20 full-time staff and the final cheque he is issuing to cover the \$40,000 spent on designing and furnishing the office.

The firm, called Haweya for Information Technology, specializes in branding for new or restructuring businesses. Its name in Arabic means "identity". "I was shocked by the painful work situation in Gaza; there were no jobs and getting a job is very, very difficult. That's where the idea came from," Qudih said, sitting behind a white laptop on his dark wooden

desk. It is a rare success story in Gaza, whose economy has been battered by an Israeli and Egyptian blockade and a 50-day war between Israel and the territory's Hamas rulers last year. Israel considers Hamas, an Islamic militant group committed to its destruction, to be a terrorist organization.

Qudih said the idea for his startup had been in his mind since he entered university in 2009. Five years later, Haweya saw light after receiving support from the Mobaderoon project. The program, which means "entrepreneurs" in Arabic, is administered by the Palestinian Welfare Association, a development agency, with funding from the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

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BINGHATTI VIEWS

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KUWAIT MOST ATTRACTIVE WORK PLACE FOR GCC NATIONALS: REPORT

RIYADH: A recent Gulf economic report showed that the State of Kuwait has been the most attractive country for GCC nationals seeking employment. The report which was prepared by the GCC's General Secretariat said that Kuwait ranked first in attracting nationals of other GCC Member States to work in the government and private sectors in 2014. The report, which coincides with the 36th GCC summit due in Riyadh today, added that the number of GCC citizens working in the public sector of other Member States amounted to 11,500 in 2014. It pointed out that the United Arab Emirates ranked second with nine percent and attracted more than 1,000 employees, while Qatar ranked third with 290 employees representing 2.5 percent, while the Kingdom of Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia came fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.

The report noted the issuance by the Supreme Council in its 21st round in Manama in 2000 of a decision approving the treatment of GCC citizens working in the civil service in any Member State the same treatment of citizens of the state they are working in. The Supreme Council also issued a decision at its 23rd round in Doha in December 2002 on the application of full equality in treatment between citizens of the GCC countries in the government labor field, social security, retirement and the removal of restrictions facing them.(end)

GCC citizens

Meanwhile, a recent report showed that Kuwait is ranked first among the Gulf states in the number of GCC citizens studying in its government schools amounting to 15,224 students including 7,002 males and 8,222 females. According to a statistical report by the information sector in the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the number of GCC citizens registered in the public schools in the GCC states amounted to 42,581 of whom 21,797 were males and 20,784 were female students in all stages of public education in 2014. It said that the GCC Supreme Council agreed in November 1985 on the treatment of students in general education the same as those of the GCC state they are studying in. This decision, which flows into the policies and support of the efforts of Gulf citizenship, is one of the important steps taken by the Gulf Cooperation Council in the early years to facilitate movement of citizens among member states and to provide them with decent accommodation.

Property owners

In other statistics, Kuwaitis have ranked in second place for ownership of real estates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in 2015 with 8,535 owners. According to a report prepared by the information sector in the GCC Secretariat, some 8,981 Saudis have owned properties in other GCC states in 2014 followed by the citizens of the State of Kuwait with 8,535, then Qatar with 1,885, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE with 1,708, 1,369 and 1,031 respectively.

The report said that allowing the GCC citizens to own properties in other member states constitutes one of the ten principles of the Gulf Common Market defined by the Economic Agreement of 2001 where ordinary GCC nationals in any GCC state are treated the same with its citizens without discrimination.

The report shows that the United Arab Emirates ranked first in attracting GCC citizens to own properties in 2014 with 17,641 or by 75 percent, whereas the Sultanate of Oman came second, followed by the Kingdom of Bahrain in third place with 2,154 while Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively. — KUNA

GCC STATES STRIVE TO CONTINUE MARCH OF DEVELOPMENT: REPORT

AMIR HEADS KUWAIT'S DELEGATION TO GCC SUMMIT

KUWAIT/RIYADH: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the accompanying official delegation head today for Riyadh, the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where His Highness will chair Kuwait's delegation to the 36th session of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Supreme Council meetings.

The General Secretariat of the GCC has asserted keenness of the member states to boost the principle of joint action, support this worthy process of the Council and develop the capabilities to achieve more accomplishments to meet the aspirations of the GCC citizens.

The Secretariat said in a report released on Tuesday on the occasion of the 36th GCC summit due here on Wednesday and Thursday that the foundations of the march of development were initiated by the GCC leaders since the first summit in Abu Dhabi in May 25, 1981 and would continue. It added that the GCC leaders through their constant meetings and their wise leadership have set the axioms of the council and strengthened its pillars to meet the aspirations of the GCC citizens. It said that the GCC leaders have also consolidated the march of the council and instilled the concept of GCC citizenship and coordinated in all political, economic, military, security and health fields as well as in the areas of education, science, youth and sports, social services and research.

Issues of concern

The report said that the political affairs sector in the Secretariat is keen on following up and implementation of the political directives issued by the supreme council, ministerial council and the joint meetings with other international entities over issues of concern to the GCC states.

Such issues are pertinent to Iran's occupation of the three islands of the United Arab Emirates, Iranian nuclear program, the situation in the Palestinian territories, developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and others.

In the economic sphere, the report pointed to the achievement of coordination, integration and interdependence among the GCC countries in all fields, including trade policies and the coordination with other international blocs.

The report noted the adoption of the Supreme Council of the principle of entering into direct negotiations between the GCC countries as a group and the international



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday the chief judge of the Constitutional Court, the acting chief judge of the Supreme Judicial Council and the deputy chief judge of the Court of Cassation, Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa. — Amiri Diwan photo

economic groups. They also decided to form a team of experts (negotiating team) in order to assist the Secretariat in its contacts with countries and economic groups on behalf of the GCC countries as the Ministerial Council authorized the adoption of cooperation goals and policies with international economic groups and states.

The report said that the GCC countries have adopted a unified Gulf strategy for relations with states, regional groups and international economic organizations to deal with these developments and keep pace with the global trend towards the establishment of economic blocs and the growing forces of globalization and component liberalization of trade and investment.

It added that the Supreme Council approved a long-term strategy for the GCC states' relations and negotiations with regional blocs and international organizations that should be pursued by the GCC countries in their negotiations and relations with other countries and economic blocs so as to reach the unified Gulf voice.

It added that the Gulf states sought to support collective action and informed the international economic groups that the GCC countries are working as one group in order

to create a collective bargaining power to support the Council's negotiating center with international economic groups in various economic fields. The report indicated that the GCC states sought to achieve coordination, integration and interdependence between them in all economic fields.

Full integration

It noted that the GCC states have sought to achieve full integration and coordination in all spheres through, thus, the Committee on Financial and Economic Cooperation believed it was significant to come up with a study to deepen economic integration among the GCC countries work on a draft general framework of the study (economic integration) has been completed where the experienced bodies would be called to carry out the study in accordance with the agreed reference framework.

In the framework of the efforts of the GCC countries to combat money laundering, the General Secretariat has been assigned to contract with relevant experts to hold regular training programs at the level of the GCC countries in the field of risk assessment at the national level to help the GCC countries to shape their strategies in this area.

In terms of military cooperation, the report said that the march of joint defense work has seen many achievements during 2015, including the completion of unified military leadership studies in the GCC countries and related needs of human resources, operational budget and follow-up completion of the needs and requirements of the common military headquarters in Riyadh and the completion of the establishment of the Consolidated maritime operations center.

It noted that work is underway for the official opening of the center. It pointed out that the Council was currently working on the preparation of a unified strategy to protect against electronic warfare, wars of the virtual space, compatibility and integration of command, control and communications systems of the GCC armed forces. The GCC also sought to unify the combat doctrine and concepts, joint training and determine the capacity and capabilities of current and available resources in the GCC countries to serve the war effort and defense integration.

Armed forces

The report also said the GCC states are working to create a unified coordination mechanism of the armed forces of the GCC States to buy weapons and equipment, hardware and kinds of ammunition, the selection and the establishment of strategic storage sites for weapons and equipment, devices and ammunition among the GCC countries.

It pointed to the completion of the preparation of a document setting out the foundations and controls of the media in the military field for the GCC countries and the setup and preparation for the implementation of the joint military exercises.

The report said the GCC has also accomplished a number of matters pertinent to countering extremism associated with terrorism in 2003 and the signing of the GCC states of GCC agreement to combat terrorism in 2004. In the health sphere, the report said that the GCC health ministers have approved the concept of equality of GCC nationals for the same treatment in any GCC states.

In the sport and youth sphere, the report pointed to the GCC states' work on implementing the joint work plan through holding various training courses for sport officials and training of leaders as well as setting up of camps. In the education and scientific research sector, the report said the GCC states have sought to achieve equality in education for all GCC states. — KUNA

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TRANSCRIPT OF IMF CONFERENCE CALL ON KUWAIT'S 2015 ARTICLE IV CONSULTATION

WASHINGTON: The following is a transcript for a conference call held recently featuring IMF officials Prasad Ananthkrishnan, Mission Chief for Kuwait, Middle East and Central Asia Department, and Wafa Amr, Senior Communications Officer, Communications Department, discussing Kuwait's 2015 Article IV Consultation:

Amr: Thank you for joining us today. This is Wafa Amr from the Communications Department. Welcome to the conference call on Kuwait's 2015 Article IV Consultation. Mission Chief Prasad Ananthkrishnan is going to speak, and then take your questions.

Prasad: Yes, thank you, for listening in. Let me give a short introduction. You all know that a decline in oil prices has adversely affected Kuwait's fiscal and current account balances, and it has slowed down growth in 2014 and 2015. In the government's presentation, when you exclude the mandatory transfers to the Future Generations Fund, and the investment income from the Fund, the fiscal position will get into a deficit, but because they already have high financial buffers, and they have borrowing space, the governments will be able to smooth the adjustments, but since the oil price decline is very steep, the adjustments should start now.

And what we have been recommending to the authorities is that adjustments should be smooth, over the medium term, and many of the cuts should fall on the current spending while they should maintain the capital spending so that the impact on growth is mitigated.

Now, in the medium term, the fiscal and external positions in the current trend of oil prices will deteriorate further, and the main objective of the authorities should be, for the longer term, to diversify the economy, creating high productivity jobs for Kuwaitis, and also to depend, Kuwait's-or we can say dependency on oil revenue. Now, the government has already started focusing on many of these issues, and more needs to be done in the area of private sector investment and job creation. Thank you. I'll stop at this stage, and I will see if you have any questions.

Amr: Okay. So, we'll take questions from you now.

Questioner: Hi. My question is, obviously, the decline in the oil prices, and you said it has impacted liquidity, and unfortunately, this has impacted-it seems like it has impacted the Kuwaiti dinar in the forward market. What are your thoughts on tightening liquidity in the Kuwaiti banking system? And do you think it would put pressure on the economy and the currency, I guess, you know, just in general?

Prasad: Yes. You see, at this point in time, when you look there you will see there has been slower growth in the profits and in the credit, but the Kuwaiti economy is still flush with liquidity. When you see the balance sheet of the banking system, they have a lot of excess liquidity sitting in the Central Bank. And at this point there's no issue with liquidity, but definitely as the oil prices go down, and if there is no adjustment in the fiscal, there could be some tightening in the banking system liquidity.

But our assessment as far as the economy and exchange rate is concerned, is that given the structure of Kuwait, the currency pegged is appropriate, and it's been serving Kuwait well, in terms of delivering monetary stability, and Kuwait has enough reserves with the Central Bank, have also with the government to maintain the banks. But, in the longer term, given the large terms of great shock, fiscal consolidation will be needed to support the exchange rate peg over the longer term.

Questioner: Hello, Prasad.

The question is, is there a need to issue bonds to finance the needs of the budget this year?

Prasad: Okay. You see, now Kuwait, as I said, according to the definition of the authorities, which is that they have a rule of transferring 10 percent of their total revenues to their General Reserve Fund, then there is a deficit. Now, either they can draw

on buffers, or they can borrow. So that particular gap in the fiscal deficit will have to be financed. So, either they take the money to the General Reserve Fund, and then bring it back to close the gap, or they borrow. So it's their choice; right?

And to some extent, if they have a good strategy for borrowing, which takes into account the impact on the liquidity in the banking system, the impact on clouding out of credit, the impact on the reserves, of the foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank, when you take all these into accounts, there is space for borrowing, and the government can borrow within the space to-which will also help developing the domestic debt market.

But then there is a choice of buffers, or domestic borrowing or international borrowing. And that mix will have to be determined carefully.

Questioner: Hi, Prasad. What are your thoughts on this-you know, the Kuwaitis are reviewing potentially the subsidies. I mean, do you think that there is a strong need for a subsidy cut? What is your kind of feedback from discussing with authorities on the issue of subsidies?

Prasad: Yes. As I said, the main instrument that Kuwait has for its macroeconomic management is fiscal, right. And they have to reduce their dependency on oil if they have to adjust their fiscal position. And it has to naturally fall on the expenditure side, and within the expenditure side, on current. And subsidy is a very natural candidate, and at this point in time. Even both from a fiscal point of view, and from an efficiency point of view, subsidy is a candidate for adjustment.

And they have the-Kuwait has already started subsidy reform on diesel, and kerosene, and aviation fuel, and they are naturally extending it to other products, broad products, and the authority's view is that they would go very gradually, they will make sure that people who deserve those subsidies are not affected, and they have a sequencing that they would go into fuel subsidies first, because it also does not need any legal changes, and electricity and water, these subsidies will require some legal changes, and that will come further down the line. It is essential, and there is a willingness to do it.

Questioner: Thank you. And my second question, I mean, are you maintaining your GDP growth forecast for Kuwait, or is there a revision? What are the variables?

Prasad: What do you mean by this then, sorry?

Questioner: Are you revising potentially your-Are you maintaining your GDP growth forecast for Kuwait, the real GDP growth forecast, or are you maintaining them as is? And what are the potential dangers?

Prasad: Yes. We are maintaining them as is, in the Article IV Report that got published three days back; that growth is slowing down from 3000 — 3.2 per-Okay, I'll talk about non-oil growth, okay, because the oil sector growth depends on the production, that can change. If Kuwaitis produce more oil than the oil-real oil GDP growth can change. The non-oil GDP, we have 3.2 percent in 2014, which will go down in 2015 and 2016 to 3 percent.

And given the fiscal projections that we have there, where we have shown a path of capital expenditure, as of now, that will see some improvements in the non-oil GDP growth in the outer years. At this point in time, this is what's been happening.

Questioner: Sorry. Can you repeat that, on the capital expenditure?

Prasad: You see, we have a projected profile of capital expenditure spending in our Article IV Report. Right? Based on a set of oil prices that we are showing there. So, on that trajectory, then growth, non-oil growth will improve in the outer years.

Amr: Okay. Thank you very much for joining this conference call on Kuwait.



KUWAIT: A number of citizens covered by the government's housing program staged a sit-in outside the National Assembly's building yesterday morning, calling for the distribution of plots of land in Khaitan's blocks three and four to citizens instead of selling them in an auction. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

TEMPERATURES TO DROP TO ZERO: METEOROLOGIST MINISTER SUBAIH CRITICIZED OVER STATEMENTS

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Meteorologist Essa Ramadan expects temperatures to drop to zero in the desert and six degrees Celsius in urban areas. "According to Kuwait Meteorological Center detectors, temperature in desert areas is 0-4 degrees centigrade and 6-9 in urban areas," he said, expecting the cold weather to continue through today despite being sunny, and expected the temperature to record 15 C by daytime and drop to zero in the desert and 3-7 C in urban areas.

Subaih's statements

Lawyer Bassam Al-Asoussi who represents former undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) Abdul Mohsen Al-Mutairi criticized Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Subaih for statements she made in a TV interview in which she indicated that her decision to refer his client to retirement was made 'for the state's best interest.' "Did he commit any violations or worked against the state's greater good? If so, why was he not referred to prosecution?" he wondered, describing the minister's statements as 'punishable by law' and that the minister would have to further explain how his client worked against the country's greater good. Meanwhile, MP Saud Al-Hurajji denied apologizing to Minister Subaih 'as she claimed in the interview.' "Unfortunately, although being responsible for two portfolios, minister Hind Al-Subaih does not realize the meaning of some words," he said. He further explained that what he did was

only to comment on a misquote during a press conference and that he thus had to explain what he meant in a parliamentary session during which he stressed that he would not stop 'fairly and impartially' monitoring the minister's performance. "We will not follow in her steps in unlawfully avenging Kuwaiti citizens whose only fault is that they support a lawmaker threatening to grill the minister," he said. Furthermore, Hurajji said that he had no problem in supporting the grilling motion his colleague Mohammed Al-Enezi intends to file against Subaih. He also promised to file one himself unless the minister stops what he described as 'rampant corruption in MSAL.'

Fashion show

MP Humoud Al-Hamdan yesterday filed an enquiry asking Minister of Education Bader Al-Essa about a concert and fashion show recently held at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), describing it as a disaster. Hamdan said that the event was held under the title of 'Arab Fashion Day,' during which female students performed dances and songs in the presence of a male audience including the dean and others. He added that videos from the concert were posted on social media networks.

Duo acquitted of drug trafficking

The criminal court yesterday acquitted two expatriates charged with drug trafficking and who were facing capital punishment according to Kuwaiti laws. According to the public prosecution, the two defendants were arrested for committing a traffic violation and run-

ning a red traffic light, and on searching their vehicle, policemen found six sacks of hashish. According to the arresting officer's report, he found a scale they allegedly used in selling the drugs. In his argument, the defendants' lawyer Soud Al-Najdi proved that the vehicle his clients drove did not belong to them, and accordingly, the drugs found in it do not necessarily belong to them. He also noted that his clients had denied the charges instantly. Accordingly, the court acquitted them for 'void arrest procedures.'

New ambulances

The Health Ministry is due to receive 54 new ambulances fully equipped with the latest security, safety and emergency service technologies within a few days pending launching them by the beginning of the new year. Notably, the ministry had started using eight ATV-ambulances at camping sites that are remote from urban areas and during special vacations, holidays and national ceremonies.

False claims

The local logistical company released a statement yesterday in which it stressed its commitment to the contracts signed with governmental and non-governmental bodies, and strongly denied violating any of those contracts conditions as 'claimed' by some media and lawmakers. The company strongly denied usurping any lands in ports or elsewhere, and stressed that this had been verified by a report made by a special committee that was formed by Minister of Communications Essa Al-Kandari on October 12.

INTERIOR MINISTRY OVERSEES JABER STADIUM SECURITY PLAN

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah chaired a meeting to discuss security preparations for Jaber Stadium's reopening ceremony. The meeting was attended by State Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, Interior Ministry's

Undersecretary Lieutenant General Suleiman Al-Fahad and field assistant undersecretaries, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Health, Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) and the Amiri Guard. In other news, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled issued a decree to create new posts in the Interior Ministry named 'Assistant Undersecretary for Land Borders Security Affairs,' and 'Assistant Undersecretary for Sea Borders Security Affairs.'

EQUATE HOLDS MEETINGS WITH KNPC

KUWAIT: EQUATE Petrochemical Company, Kuwait's first international joint-venture in this industry, hosted a number of meetings with delegations from Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) to discuss industrial affairs and best practices.

With the attendance of a number of leaders and employees from KNPC and EQUATE, participants discussed several topics regarding industrial matters, maintenance operations, work processes, contractor management, strategic planning, stakeholder relations, official regulations, customs affairs, devising schedules, developing task lists, as well as Environment, Health and Safety (EH&S).

In addition, discussions included EQUATE Turnaround (TA) 2014 with the participation of over 12,000 employees and contractors. Finalized in 30 days, the TA 2014 is a world-record breaking achievement for petrochemical plants throughout the globe.

The meeting is part of ongoing collaboration between EQUATE and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and Subsidiaries, especially KNPC which provides ethane gas and other refinery products as feedstock that are used for the manufacturing of polyethylene and other products by EQUATE. KNPC has a 40 percent in Kuwait Aromatics Company (KARO), which owns Kuwait Paraxylene Production Company (KPPC) as part of the Greater EQUATE joint-venture that has EQUATE as its single opera-

tor. During the meetings, KNPC was represented by the Manager of Clean Fuels Project Abdullah Al-Ajmi, Team Leader Fahed Al-Hadeya, Team Leader Wael Al-Jassem, Senior General Practitioner Dr Ghaydaa Al-Shuraiaan, Team Leader Ahmad Al-Ali, Team Leader Fayez Al-Khuzam, Senior Engineer Mohammad Al-Marzouq, Senior Engineer Mohammad Mashhadi, Senior Engineer Bader Al-Otaibi, Senior Engineer Yacoub Al-Baloul. EQUATE's participants included Senior Operations Director Ahmed Al-Shuwaib, Corporate and Government Services Leader Yaqoub Al-Kandari, Government Affairs Category Leader Mohammad Al-Boloushi, Site Reliability and

Maintenance Leader Abdulwahab Al-Ghanim, Maintenance Leader Fahad Al-Nasser, Maintenance Leader Mohammad Sabeq, External Shared Services Leader Ashraf Al-Qattan, Maintenance Leader Kannan Parthasarathy, Maintenance Leader Abdullah Ridha, Maintenance Leader Waleed Al-Dousari, Senior Contract Services Engineer Jasm Al-Jafar, Senior Maintenance Engineer Omar Al-Obaidan, Senior Reliability Engineer Shohabuddin Masood, Mechanical Integrity Engineer Bader Al-Anzi, Maintenance Activity Coordinator Ahmad Al-Abob and Senior Corporate Communications Executive Ali Al-Hamad.



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KUWAIT: The traditional unity ASEAN photo-op.

MALAYSIA HANDS OVER ACK CHAIRMANSHIP TO LAOS

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The ambassadors of ASEAN member countries gathered yesterday at the Malaysian Embassy in Kuwait for the formal handover ceremony of the chairmanship of the ASEAN Committee in Kuwait (ACK) from Malaysia to Laos. The ceremony was held in the presence of various ambassadors and representatives of GCC countries, officials from the government of Kuwait and Saud Al-Nasser Al-Sabah Kuwait Diplomatic Institute, and academicians including guest speaker Dr Mark Speece, Associate Professor, American University of Kuwait.

The handover was led by Malaysian Ambassador to Kuwait Ahmad Rozian Abd Ghani to new chairman Phouangkeo Langsy, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos. The ACK was established in May 2011, comprising of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The chairmanship of ACK follows that of the chairmanship of ASEAN, and the term lasts for one year.

"I am truly honored to have been given the trust to chair the ACK in my very first year in Kuwait. The primary objective of ACK is to maintain and strengthen relations between ASEAN

and Kuwait. The ACK also serves to promote awareness on the roles and functions of ASEAN. Today's event, we hope, will lead to better engagement in the future," said Ahmad. The ACK has continued to advance ASEAN interests in Kuwait and continued to strengthen inter-ASEAN comradeship via various joint programs such as the ASEAN Day, which is celebrated on August 8 annually, the ASEAN Family Day and the ASEAN futsal and bowling tournaments.

Humble beginnings

The Laotian ambassador promised to continue the leadership ACK has established. ASEAN began with humble beginnings in 1967 when it formed a new association that has grown to 10 nations today. "We have stressed community and consensus-building, over the excesses of individualism and the seeking of selfish objectives. Non-violence over confrontation. Moderation over extremism. Showing respect, not just to our friends but also to our foes. Peace-seeking and peace-building, instead of fanning the flames of conflict and war," Langsy added.

The Malaysian ambassador mentioned that ASEAN has made a direct financial difference to hundreds of millions of people. "The ASEAN free

Malaysian Ambassador to Kuwait Ahmad Rozian Abd Ghani (right) hands over ACK chairmanship to Phouangkeo Langsy, the Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Laos.

trade area, or AFTA, has reduced tariffs to zero or near zero. This has reduced the prices of countless goods. Without AFTA, our firms would find it harder to access each other's markets. Without ASEAN, unemployment would be higher. The overall rate among our ten nations is a comparatively low 3.3 percent - which economists attribute not just to countries, but to ASEAN attracting substantial flows of foreign direct investment. Without ASEAN, our citizens would not enjoy visa-free travel through nine out of our ten member states. Without ASEAN, and the mutual recognition agreements we have put in place, our professionals would find it far harder to work in each other's countries," he stressed.

In his acceptance address, Langsy said he's ready for the new challenges and cooperation ahead. "I would like to assure you that as new chairman for the year 2016, I will do my best to promote ACK and to implement our programs and activities planned for 2016 and to strengthen our ties with Kuwait and other countries. I will count on your support constructively during my chairmanship of ACK," he noted.

Dr Speece later presented some facts regarding ASEAN from the perspective of people from outside ASEAN.

THAI EMBASSY CELEBRATES NATIONAL DAY

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Speaking during a ceremony held recently to celebrate Thailand's National Day, Minister of State for Housing Affairs Yasser Abul stressed that Kuwait and Thailand have a very strong relationship and that Kuwait is always keen on cementing ties with everybody in order to bridge the gaps between all peoples. Meanwhile, Ambassador of Thailand to Kuwait Prasas Prasasvintchai

strongly hailed both countries' relations, noting that they go back 62 years. He added that both countries would sign special agreements soon in education and investment. He also expressed hope that Kuwait's foreign minister would visit Thailand in March 2016 during the Asian Dialogue Forum due to be hosted by Thailand. The ambassador also noted that a new visa regime would be effective from November after it is published in the Thai official gazette.



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Housing Affairs Yasser Abul (right) and Ambassador of Thailand to Kuwait Prasas Prasasvintchai (center) attend the ceremony. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MARTYR'S OFFICE CELEBRATES SILVER JUBILEE

KUWAIT: Under the auspices of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the Martyr's Office at the Amiri Diwan was held late Monday. Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs and Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Martyr's Office, Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, represented His Highness the Amir in the event in which the national anthem was played and some verses from the Holy Quran were recited.

"The Kuwaiti martyrs sacrificed their souls for the sake of the homeland raising the words of His Highness the Amir that Kuwait is the entity which gathers its citizens and a safe haven for them," Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah said in a speech at the celebration.

History will immortalize those heroes and martyrs who will be honored by Almighty Allah in the hereafter, he added. "On the 25th anniversary of the Iraqi invasion, we pledge to our brothers, sisters and sons, who had fallen as martyrs in defense of the homeland, that we will forever remember them and their gallantry," he said.

"The martyrs offered sacrifices to make

Kuwait a free and dear homeland in which we and the coming generations live in peace," he noted. Sheikh Ali said that the martyrs will remain engraved on "our hearts and the hearts of our generations". He stated that His Highness the Amir is always keen on honoring and immortalizing the martyrs. "Our sons have sacrificed their souls for the sake of their homeland which is governed by a wise leader who maintains its security and territorial integrity," Sheikh Ali concluded.

Meanwhile, Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Office of the Martyr Fatma Al-Amir delivered a speech in which she greeted the attendees. "I highly appreciate all attendees at the festival which is held under the auspices of His Highness the Amir, the Humanitarian Leader, on the occasion of 25th anniversary of founding Martyr's Office," she said.

During the celebration, a short film was presented on the key achievements of the Martyr's Office. At the end of the event, Sheikh Ali Jarrah honored outstanding sons of martyrs and people who contributed to the march of the Martyr's Office. — KUNA

COP21 DRAFTS AGREEMENT TO FIGHT GLOBAL WARMING

KUWAIT: Following one week of negotiations in Le Bourget, representatives of the 195 member countries in the UN's agreement on climate change, who are currently taking part in the COP21 conference held in Paris, initially agreed on Saturday to draft an international agreement on fighting global warming that is due to be officially signed next week.

The draft was made in forty eight pages divided into two parts; the first with solutions suggested by diplomats supervising various work groups taking part in the conference. Notably, the conference kicked off a week ago with the attendance of 150 heads of states and cabinets, including Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



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التبليغ Al-Anbaa

I WAS THERE

By Saleh Al-Shayaji

Being close to a certain incident does not necessarily mean you know all details about it or even know that it happened in the first place. Some people may brag saying that they 'were there' at a scene where this or that incident took place. They would then unleash their imagination and proudly start making up stories about it.

We once had a friend, may the Almighty have mercy on his soul now, of this very particular type of people. He was always an eyewitness to all incidents wherever they happened. He always had more to tell in details about all incidents. Knowing this, we once arranged for playing a practical joke on him. The story goes back about 40 years when we were in Cairo and read the news about the death of a famous movie star in the morning paper. However, that very particular star appeared on TV the same evening to deny his death.

Knowing that our eyewitness friend would soon come, we agreed to mourn for that star's demise and ask him to tell us all the details he had about his death and burial and so on, because we were sure he knew nothing about the denial on TV and that he would never miss such an opportunity to practice his fantasy and imagination, especially since he was somehow closely related to the movie business. The aim behind that practical joke was to help our friend get rid of those lies.

On arrival, we acted as planned and released him from blame for being late, and then asked him to tell us about the death and details about the funeral. As soon as he finished his story, we all burst into laughter and told him that the man had not died and that he was still alive and kicking. Nonetheless, and because 'old habits die hard' and instead of feeling ashamed and apologizing for his lies, our friend boldly said: 'I knew it. I was just kidding with you!'

—Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

TEACHER BEATS SECOND GRADER

KUWAIT: A second grader was beaten by his teacher in the Mohammad Al-Shayji School in Hawally, and the beating left scratches on his hand. His mother informed the school principal and asked her to take action. Elementary Education Supervisor in Hawally Education Zone Laila Al-Shareef said the principal carried out an investigation into the incident, but the teacher denied beating the student. The principal then asked other students in the classroom who confirmed the child's account that she did beat the boy. The principal warned the teacher not to repeat her actions again with any student, otherwise she will be referred to legal affairs.

Swindler arrested

Hawally detectives arrested a Ukrainian national who swindled a citizen when he convinced her of opening a European style cafe and took KD 22,500 before escaping. Detectives arrested him following attempts to disappear by changing his address and moving to Ahmadi. The citizen went to Meidan Hawally police station and told them the man made her believe that he has an idea of a profitable project which is a European style cafe, and agreed on the location, and gave him the money, then he disappeared. He was arrested when detectives traced his location through his mobile phone with the use of satellite technology. The suspect admitted the charges.

Drunk driver arrested

A driver, drove a truck loaded with fuel into a military zone while intoxicated. The driver, from Nepal, was arrested by the guards and taken to Sabah Al-Salem police station, where he was charged.

No snake found

Farwaniya police received a call about a snake in a Ferdous area house, but when a search was caused, no snakes were found.

Girl alleges rape attempt

A bedoon girl accused a citizen of attempting to rape and kill her. She said that while in her car near Qurain markets, the suspect cut her off and walked towards her with a knife in his hand. The girl ran into a restaurant and entered a cabin, only to find him behind her, and attempting to rape her while saying "there is no need for an apartment," she alleged.

Youths in Hawally arrested in stabbing

Hawally detectives arrested three youth, one a juvenile, for allegedly stabbing a friend of theirs. A citizen told Meidan Hawally police that his son was stabbed by three persons, who were identified by detectives and confessed to the stabbing.

Prostitution ring busted

Vice detectives put an end to the activity of a prostitution network in Salmiya. The network members were using two apartments on two floors. One was located on the fifth floor where an Arab man agrees with the client and receives the money then gives a signal to those on the sixth floor to receive him. Police sent an undercover source and the arrests were made.

Death in farm dispute

Jahra detectives arrested an Indian man for killing a colleague of his in Abdaly farms following a dispute while drinking alcohol. Police received a call about a corpse with blood on it near Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad road near the 69th kilometer mark. The body was inspected and recovered by the coroner. Detectives summoned coworkers of the victim, a 33 year old Indian, and questioned them, and found out one aged 32, admitting that there was a fight between him and the victim while drinking, then a fight ensued and the victim fell on a rock leading to his death. The public prosecution is investigating. — Al-Rai, Al-Anbaa



التبليغ

Al-Anbaa

REMOVE THE COACH

By Nasser Al-Enezi

Many people speak about having to remove the coach in case of bad results in one or two matches, as if such demands are part of football rules that must be implemented. Of course they are not and cannot be accepted, otherwise there will not be a coach to remain in his job for one season, but there is no harm in listening to those around the team and its fans, then take whatever agrees with the administration's plan and the coach's views. We are not in support of quick judgment in evaluating the new coach regardless of results, except in hopeless cases, and the most suitable thing is to keep him until the end of the season, then evaluate him.

Jahra Club is distinguished with signing contracts with successful coaches in our soccer field, including for example Serbia's Dragan, who won the league during the 1989/1990 season. He then went on to coach Qadsiya and Arabi clubs. In previous seasons, it signed Brazil's De Silva with whom it got the best results followed by Serbia's Boniac before moving to Arabi last season, and almost won the league, if it was not for bad

luck at the last minute. It is led by Albania's Sekandar Giga now, and he failed in the last two matches with Shabab and Sahel, and we are not demanding his ouster. Also, Arabi coach Louis Philipi cannot be judged after he faced top teams like Jahra, Qadsiya, Kazma and Kuwait in consecutive rounds.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

We are not in support of quick judgment in evaluating the new coach regardless of results



ZAIN SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES "DO NOT DISTURB" CAMPAIGN FOR ONLINE GAMERS

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, successfully concluded its latest campaign for online gamers entitled "Do Not Disturb", wherein Avenues Mall visitors enjoyed an interactive and live online gaming experience on Zain's ultrafast LTE-A network.

The campaign's closing day witnessed an all-day gaming tournament at the company's dedicated booth at Grand Avenue; where over 80 participants took part in the exciting and interactive tournament through 16 Playstation 4 devices that were linked

through a Local Area Network. The winners of the first, second, and third place titles were awarded with valuable gaming prizes.

Zain was keen to take an extra step to meet the demands of gamers and provide them with the ultimate online gaming experience, as it offered everyone the opportunity to try its most advanced LTE-A network through PlayStation 4 devices that were available at its dedicated booth.

This campaign highlighted Zain's eagerness in keeping pace with the ongoing changes of needs and wants

of its customers. With this latest announcement, Zain was keen on strengthening its leading position in providing special services and offerings designed for the gaming community. In efforts of providing the best gaming experience, Zain specially designed the latest campaign to surpass customers' expectations. The company is well aware of the rising demands of Internet usage by online gamers, and thus has presented this campaign and exclusive offer to elevate their telecommunications experience.



التبليغ Al-Anbaa

LACK OF IDEAS AND THEORIES

By Sami Al-Nisf

In the early 1990s, I met the prominent American writer and thinker Thomas Freidman, who had just returned, along with the US foreign secretary at that time, Madeline Albright, from China, that had not yet started its industrial development.

According to what he told me, Stalin's communism had failed in China and that getting out of its grip and a quick shift towards free economy, just like what happened in Russia and Eastern Europe after the European Spring in the late 1980s, would cost around 400 million Chinese their jobs and that this would jeopardize world stability. He even mentioned one example about the Chinese railway service that employs around 11 million, while it only needs 2 million of them.

A few years later, I visited China and read a statement by the Chinese minister of education in China's English daily, China Today, where she announced success in the sixth phase of introducing modern technology to around 900 million farmers in remote areas in preparation to having them use advanced modern technological agricultural methods instead of manual ones. The US later opened American and European markets to Chinese products. It is clear that the US had listened to Freidman's fears and positively dealt with them. And now there are no fears that 400 million Chinese might wake up jobless and wreck the whole world's stability, as Napoleon once said. On the contrary, hundreds of millions Chinese are actively working making the world happier with the quality of their products!

One of the major problems in the Arab world is that our countries never listen to thinkers, theorists and the educated elite. They even suppress, alienate and disrespect them. You would rarely find one of them well-known and close to authorities or even within courtiers, who can either make or destroy nations. There is one exception to that in the GCC states, that have been racing against the clock because they fully support and listen to thinkers and creative citizens, Arabs and foreigners, regardless of their nationality. What matters is their creativity, achievability and ability to give.

In this regard, President Mubarak's bright years in office were those when he was surrounded by intellectuals like Dr Osama Al-Baz and Dr Mustafa Al-Feqi. But ever since, Egypt has been going backwards and Mubarak was toppled when he relied more on people who benefited from him more than they gave their country, such as Ahmed Ezz, Safwat Al-Sharif, Habib Adli and their likes.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

KSE RELEASE 90 EXPATS

KUWAIT: The Stock Exchange Public Authority handed 90 expatriate employees pink slips effective March 31, 2016. But the way the termination notices were delivered was criticized, because three employees of the authority went around departments and handed the envelopes to the concerned employees. The criticism did not come from expats only, but from their Kuwaiti colleagues too. The letters included two paragraphs, the first thanking them for their efforts that helped the advancement of the entity, and the second said "we are sorry to inform you that the authority no longer wants to renew your contract for another period". This was a surprise to workers who spent most of their lives in the service of the exchange. The director of one sector expressed his displeasure with what happened and the way concerned authorities acted with people who have been working there for years. — Al-Rai

GOV'T ACTS TO FILL LEGISLATIVE VOID

KUWAIT: The government is discussing the referral of a proposed law on urgent basis to the National Assembly to fill the legislative void if the constitutional court strikes out the decreed law of the anticorruption authority. Informed sources said the Cabinet will send the "Transparency Support Authority" proposal as an alternative to the anti-corruption law if it is rendered unconstitutional. Meanwhile, MP Ahmad Al-Qudhaibi warned against what he described as a conspiracy to scrap the anticorruption authority, adding that the government's delay in submitting its amendments may be linked to the date of the constitutional court ruling. Qudhaibi said the amendments made by the authority to its law were presented to Justice Minister Yaqoub Al-Sane four months ago, and he in turn sent it to the fatwa and legislation department, which has not finished its report on the law. — Al-Qabas

STUDY TO BUILD RACING CIRCUIT

KUWAIT: The ministerial economic committee is studying a proposal to build a car circuit for youth at the Public Authority for Youth and Sports land at a cost of KD 40 million. High-ranking ministerial sources said the 'Amiri wish' to build the circuit according to international standards aims at providing a safe environment for a large number of youth to practice their favorite hobby of motor sports. — Al-Anbaa

UNAUTHORIZED SEARCH VOIDS ARREST: COURT

KUWAIT: The criminal court said searches by policemen at checkpoints beyond normal limits is illegal. The court said precautionary searches by policemen should not progress to other things without justification, and any violation will be considered null without a warrant from the prosecution. The appeals court upheld a ruling of the court of first instance which exonerated an Egyptian, saying that just because a suspect is walking in the street does not say a thing about the officer's knowledge about the existence of a charge that justifies stopping and searching him as a precaution, as the officer had said. The court said the purpose behind the precautionary search is to make it easier to arrest the suspect, to take away what he may be carrying in the form of weapons or other things that may help him escape, and the policeman should not go beyond that to further searches, otherwise the search will be illegal and all evidence taken from that search will be thrown out. — Al-Jarida



Pontiff opens door to Catholic Jubilee

ISLAMIC STATE SONG 'IN MANDARIN' WORRIES CHINA

NEW TERROR THREAT FRAYS AMERICAN UNITY

WASHINGTON: After two grinding decades of combating Islamist terror, America is split asunder, divided not just on how to defeat the Islamic State, but on the magnitude of the threat the group poses. Gone is the grief-fueled solidarity that flowed seamlessly in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Within minutes of President Barack Obama calling for unity in a landmark Oval Office address Sunday, Republicans made clear they would not, could not, oblige.

A call to come "together around our common ideals as one nation, as one people," was met by Republican frontrunner Donald Trump's response "is that all there is? We need a new president-fast!" With less than a year until the November 2016 vote, the spirit of hyper-partisanship is not really a surprise. "For decades, national security has been that one thing that at least temporarily you could rally people, whether it was jingoism or whatever it was," said Patrick Skinner, a former CIA case officer now with the Soufan Group. "Now, not even natural disasters can even temporarily unify, even attacks are immediately politicized." "We can't even agree on gravity," he said.

The emergence of a new style of home-spun Islamist threat has only magnified the divide. After the much bloodier 9/11 attacks, President George W Bush rallied the nation behind drastic action, vowing to tackle "the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." In less than a month, lawmakers-Republican and Democrat-had voted

overwhelmingly to take "necessary and appropriate force" and US troops had invaded Afghanistan in a bid to deny Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda a safe haven. Today, there is no such obvious, unifying response. The San Bernardino assailants lived in America, one of them grew up in America and they seemingly had only ideological links with Islamic State.

"There is no airstrike that is going to help San Bernardino," said Skinner. "The fight against Islamic State is a nuanced fight." Obama has approached the problem in a similar vein, like a malignancy that has to be systematically removed, but one that can only become an existential threat if America responds by undermining its own values. In framing his response, the mistakes of Iraq and Afghanistan wars loom large. Obama is adamant that becoming enmeshed in another large-scale ground war in a Muslim country would be costly and would only fuel radicalism.

'A nation at war'

Republicans see Obama dangerously underestimating a group that is deserving of the same action that was meted out against Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. "ISIS has become, in the last few years on Obama's watch, the wealthiest, most powerful terrorist network in the history of the world," according to Marc Thiessen, a former Bush speechwriter. "They have the resources to cause immense damage if they are not pinned down and stopped and their gains reversed." "Make no



NEW JERSEY: Muslim men pray at a mosque in Jersey City, New Jersey. Muslim American leaders accused Republican Presidential hopeful Donald Trump of incitement for demanding a 'complete shutdown' of Muslims entering the US after a New York shopkeeper was beaten in an alleged hate crime. — AFP

mistake," said House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul, "we are a nation at war."

"I believe 2015 will be seen as a watershed year in this long war-the year when our enemies gained an upper hand and when the

spread of terror once again awoke the West," he added. The White House has sought to deflect that kind of comment as "divisive rhetoric" from the campaign trail. "A lot of these issues are being discussed in the context of a hotly competitive presidential election," said

White House spokesman Josh Earnest. "If we spent a lot of time worried or focused on that, we'd be focused on the wrong thing."

But the policy prescriptions are becoming increasingly difficult to dismiss. Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States is likely to reverberate beyond the echo chamber of the 2016 campaign. Some within the Republican party privately and ruefully admit that type of strategy is designed to appeal to white evangelicals who make up the base of the party and feel themselves and their religion under threat. Obama's repeated calls for gun control measures that would have done little to thwart San Bernardino has only fueled that sense of threat. But many more Republicans say there is genuine anger that Obama has let his guard down in tackling the IS group.

According to Thiessen, "9/11 took the entire country by surprise, today there is a red light flashing and they are putting a piece of tape over it, so people are frustrated." "I don't think that he ran for this job in order to be commander-in-chief, it's one of the responsibilities, but it wasn't his motivation," he said. "It's a burden rather than the core of the job." The deep and increasingly personalized divisions may only make unity and the fight against Islamic State more difficult, experts warn. "It's better to fight an enemy if you are united, of course we are not the United States right now, we are the divided states," said Skinner. "I don't know how it gets better." — AFP

MAID WINS REPRIEVE FROM DEATH BY STONING IN SAUDI

SAUDI EXECUTES PAKISTANI HEROIN SMUGGLER

COLOMBO: Saudi authorities have agreed to retry a Sri Lankan housemaid sentenced to death by stoning for adultery, her country's deputy foreign minister said yesterday. Harsha de Silva told parliament in Colombo the government had secured a fresh trial for the woman after Sri Lankan diplomats visited her in a Saudi jail over the weekend. "Through our intervention, they (Saudi authorities) have agreed to reopen the case," de Silva told parliament.

"This can be considered a big victory. We will provide her with legal counsel," he added, without elaborating on the grounds for a retrial. The woman, a 45-year-old married mother of two who has not been named, was convicted of adultery in August. She was sentenced to death by stoning, while an unmarried Sri Lankan man convicted alongside her was sentenced to 100 lashes. Sri Lankan lawmakers from all parties have united in urging the government to secure clemency for the woman and a pardon for the man.

Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera met the Saudi envoy to Colombo last week and expressed concern over the case, which has sparked calls for a ban on Sri Lankan women travelling to Saudi Arabia for domestic work. There were similar calls in 2013 when Saudi Arabia beheaded a Sri Lankan woman convicted of killing a baby in her care in 2005, when she was 17 years old. Sri Lanka's Muslim minority on Monday appealed to Saudi King Salman to intervene and pardon the couple. Under the

conservative kingdom's strict Islamic sharia legal code, murder, armed robbery, rape, adultery, drug trafficking and apostasy are all punishable by death.

Pakistani executed

In another development, Saudi Arabia yesterday executed a convicted Pakistani heroin smuggler, adding to a toll which rights group Amnesty International says is the kingdom's highest in two decades. The ministry of interior said Khan Iqbal was put to death in the holy city of Makkah for smuggling a large amount of heroin in his intestines. According to AFP tallies, Iqbal is the 149th local or foreigner put to death this year, against 87 for all of 2014. London-based Amnesty says the number of executions in Saudi Arabia this year is the highest since 192 people were put to death in 1995.

The toll has rarely exceeded 90 annually in recent years, it said. Reasons for the surge are unclear. Over the last few weeks, however, there has been a marked drop in executions, all of which are reported by the official Saudi Press Agency. Rights experts have raised concerns about the fairness of trials in the kingdom and say the death penalty should not be applied in drug cases. Last month the European Union issued a statement saying a number of people had been put to death recently in Saudi Arabia after convictions for drug trafficking. "The European Union is opposed to capital punishment in all cases and without exception," it said. — Agencies

US REVIEWING FIANCE VISA PROGRAM AFTER SHOOTINGS

WASHINGTON: Tashfeen Malik, the wife accused in the California shootings, was one of just 519 Pakistanis allowed into the country last year specifically to marry a US citizen. Malik's path to the United States immediately highlighted the US government's immigration vetting practices after she was identified as one of two attackers in San Bernardino, California. The FBI said Monday she and her American husband had been radicalized for some time. That raised the prospect that Malik's anti-American sentiments could have surfaced before US officials evaluated whether she should be allowed to move here.

The Obama administration is reviewing the program, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said Monday. He did not say what changes were being considered. The K-1 visa program is among the smallest visa categories managed by the government. Of more than 9.9 million visas issued in fiscal 2014, just 35,925 - roughly 0.3 percent - were fiancé visas, according to State Department figures. Much of the focus is on rooting out marriage fraud. A couple must prove they have physically seen each other within the past two years, unless meeting in person would violate "strict and long-established customs" or cause an "extreme hardship." "This visa has been totally under the radar," said Marc Rosenblum, deputy director of the US Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Center. "The issue of marriage fraud has definitely gotten a lot of

attention, just not as a security vulnerability." Applicants are subject to a vetting process that includes at least one in-person interview, fingerprints, checks against US terrorist watch lists and reviews of family members, travel history and places where a person has lived and worked. But checks for information about an applicant against entries in intelligence databases and criminal records can be hampered if the underlying information is incomplete.

DHS spokeswoman Marsha Catron said officials from DHS and the State Department are reviewing the fiancé visa program "to assess possible program enhancements." The administration is also reviewing the Visa Waiver Program, which allows most citizens from 38 countries to travel to the United States without applying for a visa. Foreigners applying from countries recognized as home to Islamic extremists, such as Pakistan, undergo additional scrutiny before the State Department and Homeland Security Department approve permission for a visa.

Malik had been living in Pakistan and visiting family in Saudi Arabia before she passed the background check and entered the US in July 2014 with Syed Farook, a US citizen whose family was originally from Pakistan. The vetting process is similar to but less stringent than the process used to approve refugees from Syria. It is far more extensive than checks made for traditional tourist visas, Rosenblum said. —AP

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ISLAMIC STATE SONG 'IN MANDARIN' WORRIES CHINA

BEIJING: A Chinese-language song purportedly released by Islamic State shows the need for closer global cooperation against terrorism, China's Foreign Ministry said yesterday, as a senior official said the fight against Islamist militancy had made progress. China relies on the Middle East for oil supplies, but tends to leave diplomacy there to the other permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely the United States, Britain, France and Russia. It has urged greater coordination to fight terrorism after attacks in Mali and Paris and the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkey, but has long said there is no military solution in Syria, with state media criticizing the West and Russia for

air strikes there.

Over the weekend, Islamic State's propaganda arm, Al Hayat media centre, appears to have put online a recording in Mandarin that exhorted its "Muslim brothers" to awaken. In the four-minute song titled "I am Mujahid", a man chants: "To die fighting on the battlefield is my dream," and "No force can stop our advance." Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said she could not comment on whether the recording was issued by Islamic State, but said it showed that "terrorism is the common enemy of mankind" and the need to stop extremists using the Internet.

"In the face of terrorism, no country can

stand on its own, and the international community should stand closer together and cooperate to jointly strike against all forms of terrorism," Hua told a regular news briefing yesterday. Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping told a separate briefing Beijing had already joined in anti-terrorism cooperation with Washington and Moscow, but gave no details. "At present, relevant countries have proactively coordinated and consulted on their anti-Islamic State actions in Syria and they have had definite progress on fighting terrorism," Cheng added. As China's economic and business interests abroad grow, it has increasingly been affected by the activities of militant groups.

Three Chinese executives were killed in Mali when Islamist militants stormed a hotel, and Beijing vowed justice when the Islamic State killed a Chinese captive in November. Chinese officials warn that some Muslim Uighurs, an ethnic group from the western region of Xinjiang, have travelled to battlegrounds in Syria and Iraq. The government says it faces a serious threat from Islamist militants and separatists in energy-rich Xinjiang, where hundreds have died in violence in recent years. Rights groups, however, doubt that a cohesive militant Islamist group exists there, saying the violence stems from popular anger at Chinese controls on religion and culture. — Reuters



Photo shows a general top view of the flight deck of the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier. A series of political spats that erupted in Baghdad over the past week surrounding foreign forces on Iraqi soil have exposed the increasing weakness of Iraq's central government and a growing disconnect between Washington and Baghdad in the US-led coalition's fight against the Islamic State group. — AP

RECKLESS ARMS TRANSFERS TO IRAQ 'FUELLED IS CRIMES'

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCHDOG CALLS FOR TOUGHER CONTROLS

BAGHDAD: Decades of irresponsible arms transfers to Iraq fuelled the Islamic State group's firepower and ability to carry out atrocities on a massive scale, Amnesty International said in a report published yesterday. The London-based human rights watchdog called for tougher controls in order to put a stop to the alarming fallout from the proliferation of weapons in the country. "The vast and varied weaponry being used by the armed group calling itself Islamic State is a textbook case of how reckless arms trading fuels atrocities on a massive scale," Amnesty researcher Patrick Wilcken said in a statement.

"Poor regulation and lack of oversight of the immense arms flows into Iraq going back decades have given IS and other armed groups a bonanza of unprecedented access to firepower," he said. The huge amounts of internationally manufactured weapons IS seized when it took Iraq's second city Mosul in June 2014 were used to take over other parts of the country and commit crimes against civilians, the report said. Besides its massive haul in Mosul, the jihadist organization also captured vast quantities of military equipment when it seized army and police bases in Fallujah, Tikrit, Saqlawiya, and Ramadi as well as in Syria.

As Iraq's security forces battle to recapture Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, their task is complicated by IS' acquisition when it seized the city in May of what Amnesty said were "more than 100 armoured fighting vehicles, including dozens of tanks and armoured personnel carriers." IS has disseminated these windfalls across its multiple fronts very effectively, with some weapons seized in Mosul in use barely two weeks later in an area of northern Syria some 500 kilometers (310 miles) away. Amnesty inventoried the weapons IS is confirmed to possess and said the results "reflects decades of irresponsible arms transfers to Iraq."

'Wake-up call'

While IS' staple remains Russian-designed weapons such as the Kalashnikov assault rifle, Amnesty found that the group has been using arms and ammunition from at least 25 countries. In the small arms category alone, IS' choice of rifles ranges from the Iraqi-manufactured Tabuk to the US-made Bushmaster E2S and also includes the Chinese CQ, the German G36 and the Belgian FAL among others. The Iraqi army's stockpile swelled around the 1980-1998 Iraq-Iran war, which the report described as "a seminal

moment in the development of the modern global arms market." Iraq was also flooded with weapons after the 2003 US-led invasion and fresh deals reached after the 2011 US pullout are continuing to pour arms into the country. Amnesty said the export countries-including all five permanent members of the UN Security Council-were well aware of the risks of transferring arms to Iraq, where corruption is endemic and control mechanisms very weak.

"The legacy of arms proliferation and abuse in Iraq and the surrounding region has already destroyed the lives and livelihoods of millions of people and poses an ongoing threat," Wilcken said. "The consequences of reckless arms transfers to Iraq and Syria and their subsequent capture by IS must be a wake-up call to arms exporters around the world," he said. The rights group called for a complete embargo on Syrian government forces, and a "presumption of denial" rule on arms exports to Iraq conditioning transfers on strict assessments. It also called for the ratification of the global Arms Trade Treaty by states that have not already done so, such as the United States, Russia and China. — AFP

JIHADIST VETERANS POSE A GENERATIONAL THREAT

PARIS: Even if the Islamic State group is one day defeated on its territory, the world could face an even greater threat from tens of thousands of battle-hardened jihadist veterans, experts have warned. US intelligence services estimate some 30,000 people have joined the ranks of IS from around 100 countries, adding to the huge number that have fought with older Islamic extremist groups over the decades. In Afghanistan alone between 1996 and 2001, some 10,000 to 20,000 people received jihadist training, many under the guidance of Osama Bin Laden. After the fall of the Taliban regime, many of those fighters dispersed around the world, taking their radical ideology and knowledge with them. Officials warn that jihadist veterans pose a major long-term threat that Western institutions are ill-equipped to handle.

"Just the current wave-of around 250 returning fighters (coming to France) - is a complicated problem," said a senior French counter-terrorist official, speaking on condition of anonymity. He said the vast majority will be tried and imprisoned, and the rest closely monitored, but the difficulty of finding evidence against returning fighters means many are jailed for only five to seven years. "That means that in four or five years, the first will start leaving prison. The problem will return," said the official. "That's why we have to prepare now, and see how we can return these people to society. Some will be traumatized for years. We need to think about rehabilitation. It's a huge job."

'Even worse than IS'

Regardless of current efforts to tar-

get the group with air strikes and diplomatic efforts in Syria and Iraq, IS has prepared the ground for years of global insurgency by gathering so many people in its self-declared "caliphate". Fragmenting or dispersing the group can have its own terrible side-effects. "Since only the most battle-hardened, the most radical will survive, we will find ourselves with something even worse than IS," said Mathieu Guiderre, a radicalization expert at the University of Toulouse.

"Don't forget: we thought we had eliminated Al-Qaeda by killing bin Laden, but the fragmentation of Al-Qaeda led to something worse." Faced with the slow-moving institutions of the European Union and other Western countries, "we risk always being one step behind in the war," added Guiderre. "Jihadists know perfectly how to adapt to new conditions. They will create new structures and forms of action adapted to their environment, and become increasingly difficult to combat." In its own territory, attacks on IS are also likely to worsen the violence against civilians in their immediate region, at least in the short term. "If there is a perception that the local population is assisting the recapture of territory from the group, then there is absolutely a risk that the group will become more vicious," said Matthew Henman, head of IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre in London. "Targeting civilians is also a good way of undermining security and stability after the recapture of territory-highlighting that the government still can't protect civilians," Henman added. "There might also be an increasing effort to send foreign fighters back to their countries for reprisal operations." — AFP

YEMEN FACTIONS AGREE TO TRUCE DURING UN-BACKED PEACE TALKS

ADEN: Yemen's government said yesterday that the country's warring sides are preparing to observe a week-long truce from December 15 while UN-mediated peace talks take place in Switzerland. The United Nations has tried to bring pro-government forces and Iran-backed rebels to the table for months to end a war that has killed thousands and plunged the impoverished nation into a profound humanitarian crisis. "An agreement on a ceasefire between the government and the putschists should enter into force on December 15 with the start of negotiations," Foreign Minister Abdel Malak Al-Mekhlafi said.

UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said on Monday that a swift halt to the fighting-which has dramatically escalated since a Saudi-led coalition began bombarding insurgents in March-was imperative for those caught up in the conflict. Ould Cheikh Ahmed told reporters that three delegations would take part in talks likely to be held outside Geneva and which will last "as long as it takes". Talks will focus on four main areas, including the terms for a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of armed groups from the areas under their control.

Confidence-building measures will be another area of dialogue, including broadening humanitarian access in the country where aid workers have been killed and kidnapped. Delegates will finally try to hammer out a political future for Yemen, a country plunged into worsening chaos since the insurgents overran the capital Sanaa and expanded south, forcing the



ADEN: Yemeni government's security forces stand guard during the funeral of Aden's governor Jaafar Saad in Yemen's second city yesterday. — AFP

government to flee to Saudi Arabia before it returned to second city Aden last month. The delegations will include representatives of President Abdrabbo Mansour Hadi's government, the Houthi rebels and officials from the General People's Congress (GPC), who are loyalists of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Though not formally aligned, some GPC members have expressed support for the Houthis.

Truce 'could be extended'

A source in Hadi's cabinet said the truce would last seven days, as specified in a letter sent by Hadi to the UN Security Council. The agreement reached ahead of talks calls on the rebels to "lift the siege of towns, allow the entry of humanitarian aid and free military and political detainees," the source said, adding that the truce "will be supervised by the UN and could be

extended if respected by the (rebels)". There was no immediate confirmation from the rebels that they would abide by a ceasefire, but Ould Cheikh Ahmed has said he is certain that the Iran-backed Houthis will show up for talks. The UN envoy said Riyadh has promised to observe the ceasefire and pause its aerial assault on rebel positions during talks. "By respecting the ceasefire, the Houthis could signal their good intentions to move forward on implementing (UN Security Council) Resolution 2216" calling on rebels to withdraw from territory they seized, the cabinet source said. The truce announcement followed the killing Sunday of the governor of Aden, Jaafar Saad, in an attack claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group, which has threatened further violence. Jihadist groups have exploited the conflict by making sweeping gains. — AFP

News

in brief



MOSCOW: Police block off the area after an explosion occurred at the bus stop on Pokrovka street, just over 1.6 kilometers from Red Square in Moscow yesterday. — AP

Five injured in blast at Moscow bus stop

MOSCOW: Five people were lightly injured when a home-made explosive detonated at a bus stop in central Moscow, authorities said yesterday. The device went off Monday night on Pokrovka Street, a trendy area in central Moscow dotted with bars and restaurants. "A hooliganism inquiry has been opened," Moscow police spokesman Maxim Kolosvetov said. Preliminary information suggests the makeshift explosive was thrown either from a car or a nearby residential building and hurt "several" people, another Moscow police spokesman, Andrey Galiakberov said. A spokeswoman for the health department of the Moscow city hall said separately that four people received medical attention Monday night and three of them were hospitalized. A fifth person turned to the authorities for help and was hospitalized yesterday, she said. Smashed glass could be seen at the bus stop and several police cars, fire engines and an ambulance were at the scene, an AFP correspondent reported from the scene Monday night.

6 Afghan migrant children drown off Turkish waters

ISTANBUL: At least six children died yesterday when a boat carrying Afghan migrants sank in Turkish waters while on its way to Greece, local media reported. The Turkish coastguard recovered the bodies of the children, including a baby, and were still looking for two other migrants reported missing, the official Anatolia news agency said. The inflatable dinghy sank in strong winds and high waves near the town of Cesme in western Izmir province, Anatolia said. It was apparently heading for the Greek island of Chios. Eight other migrants, all wearing life jackets, were rescued, Dogan news agency said. In a separate incident, the body of Sajida Ali, a five-year-old migrant girl, washed up on a beach in Cesme on Monday, Dogan said. The picture of three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi, whose body was found washed up on a Turkish beach in September, horrified the world, pressuring European leaders to step up their response to the refugee crisis.

Air France flight diverted to Montreal after threat

PARIS: An Air France flight from San Francisco to Paris was diverted to Montreal after an unspecified anonymous threat, and the passengers landed and disembarked safely before authorities declared it a false alarm. At least 15 fire trucks and police cars met Flight 83 at the Montreal airport, and Canadian authorities verified the aircraft, passengers and baggage. Air France tweeted Tuesday: "after a full security search, false alert confirmed by local authorities following an anonymous threat." Earlier, the airline had said the crew decided to divert "as a precautionary measure." Air France said an investigation will be carried out into the origin of the threat, and promised to send passengers safely to their destinations. Spokeswoman Ulli Gendrot said all passengers were safely off the plane. She would not elaborate on the nature of the threat. Airlines around the world face sporadic threats and occasionally divert planes as a result.

French troops questioned in African child rape case

PARIS: Four French soldiers were questioned yesterday in an investigation into alleged child rape in Central African Republic, officials said. It appears to be the first time anyone has faced judicial questioning in the case - at least 19 months after the accusations first surfaced against French troops who were sent to protect Central African civilians displaced by sectarian violence. The disturbing case, long kept secret from the public, has raised questions about how international peacekeeping forces handle suspected abuses by their soldiers. One of the four soldiers questioned Tuesday has been formally detained, and the others are still being interrogated as suspects, according to Paris prosecutor's office spokeswoman Agnes Thibault-Lecuire. No one has yet been charged in the case, which is being handled by Paris magistrates.

Train accidents kill 14 in east and northern India

PATNA: Two train accidents in eastern and northern India have claimed at least 14 lives, officials said yesterday. A speeding train rammed into an SUV at an unmanned railroad crossing in eastern India, killing all 13 people in the vehicle, said SN Pradhan, a top police officer. The SUV was crossing the railroad track in Jharkhand state when it was hit by the passenger train late Monday night, Pradhan said. The dead included five children. Pradhan said police were investigating claims by witnesses that a tire from the SUV became stuck in the track, and that the vehicle was struck before people could climb out. In a separate railway accident near the Indian capital, two trains collided, killing the driver of one of the trains. Neeraj Sharma, a railways spokesman, said at least 50 people were injured in the accident, which occurred 60 kilometers south of New Delhi. Reduced visibility caused by pollution and the onset of winter may have contributed to the accident, Sharma said. India operates one of the world's largest railroad networks, with about 23 million passengers traveling by train every day, but safety standards on the massive state-run railway network are a concern.

PROTESTING RUSSIAN TRUCKERS FOCUS ANGER AT PUTIN'S FRIENDS

STUPINO: Like most Russians, the truck drivers parked up at the "Doughnuts" roadside cafeteria south of Moscow care little for opposition politics, but a new government policy has made them rethink their attitudes to Vladimir Putin. As of last month, the state has started charging a fee for every kilometer that trucks over 12 tons in weight drive over Russian roads. Drivers angry at the extra charge have staged protests and go-slows around the country.

Compounding their anger is the fact that the company awarded the contract to collect the fees is co-owned by Igor Rotenberg, son of Putin's judo partner and part of a generation of people close to the Russian president who have acquired fabulous wealth. At the Doughnuts cafe, 90 km (55 miles) outside the capital, truckers grumble about Putin. "We vote for him unanimously, and he does this bad stuff to us?" said Vladimir, on a run from the southern city of Volgograd.

The economy is in recession because of low prices of oil, Russia's main export, and Western sanctions imposed over the conflict in Ukraine. The authorities have had to tighten their belt, prompting protests over issues such as car parking fees and hospital closures. Most of these are divorced from politics: demonstrators focus on narrow issues, they may blame local officials, but rarely do they target their anger on Putin or the system he has built during 15 years in power.

Any political protests aimed against Putin's rule tend to be small, restricted to the urban intelligentsia, and quickly peter out. The drivers at the truck stop, most of them dressed in tattered track suits, do not belong to that group. Yet their protests have taken on a political flavour, making them an unusual phenomenon in Putin's Russia. "Why this Rotenberg character? This person, who is he to us?" asked another driver from Volgograd, who did not give his name. "We don't want a revolution. We don't want things to be like they were in Ukraine," he said. "(But) the state cannot treat people this way."

Putin's friends

In April 2013, the Russian government opened a tender to find an operator for its new road-charging system. The idea, the government said, was to follow European countries such as Germany in making the heaviest road users contribute most to their upkeep. After announcing the closure of the bidding, then re-opening it, the state roads agency announced in August last year it was scrapping the tender altogether. The following month it said it was in talks to award the contract, without an open competition, to a company called RT-Invest Transport Systems, which had been specially created for the contract.

According to its Internet site, the firm has two co-owners. One is RT-Invest, a unit of Rostec, a state industrial conglomerate

whose chief executive is Sergei Chemezov, a close associate of Putin who is subject to European Union and US sanctions imposed over Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

The other is Igor Rotenberg. He is the son of Arkady Rotenberg, a friend of Putin from his days in Russia's second city of St Petersburg who was also his regular sparring partner in judo sessions. Arkady Rotenberg has earned millions of dollars from contracts awarded by state entities, and, with his brother Boris, is subject to US Treasury sanctions imposed over the Ukraine conflict. Arkady Rotenberg was among dignitaries who played an exhibition ice hockey match with Putin on his birthday on Oct. 7 this year.

Asked if Arkady Rotenberg's relationship with Putin had helped his son win the contract for the road tariff system, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "No, it didn't help." He referred other questions about the deal to the transport ministry and the roads agency. A spokesman for the ministry said the international tender to find an operator had to be called off because of the "geopolitical situation". He said the selection of the operator had taken place in the most open and transparent way possible, with the media, truckers, and trade unions all involved.

The state roads agency said the operator does not get the fees that road users pay, but simply passes them on to the state budget for the upkeep of roads. RT-Invest, the unit through which Rostec co-owns the road-charging operator, said in a statement that Igor Rotenberg was a partner because he had experience of major transport projects, his company had technological know-how, and he had put up a significant amount of capital. The operator itself did not respond to Reuters questions.

Tide of protest

Gauging the scale of the truckers' protest is difficult. They are not organized into a single group, the sector is dominated by small players who often own only one truck, and their protests are unannounced and short-lived. Drivers last month in the southern region of Dagestan formed a column of dozens of trucks that obstructed traffic on a major highway, according to local media. Demonstrations and go-slow protests have been reported in the central regions of Perm and Yekaterinburg, and in Rostov in the south. Protest leaders have been talking about driving to Moscow and jamming up the capital's ring-road, but that has failed to materialize. Drivers said the police were listening in to truckers' radio communications and intercepting any vehicles they suspected were heading to a protest. The government has made some concessions. It has reduced the rate of the tariff to 1.5 roubles (\$0.0215) per km, from 3.5 roubles, and also slashed the fines for non-payment. —Reuters

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT'S WOES DEEPEN

RIFT BETWEEN ROUSSEFF AND VP AGGRAVATES POLITICAL CRISIS

BRASÍLIA: Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was left fighting for political life yesterday after her vice president, leader of the main party in the coalition government, indicated he may side with opponents in the battle over her impeachment. Backroom dealing intensified in the capital Brasilia with Congress expected to complete the formation yesterday of the special commission that will recommend pursuing or rejecting the case against Rousseff.

The commission will then hear from Rousseff. She is accused of illegal budgeting maneuvers, but says the practices were long accepted by previous governments and that the attempt to bring her down is a "coup." On paper, Rousseff has the numbers between her Workers' Party and main coalition ally PMDB to survive an impeachment vote when the commission sends the case to the full lower house of Congress.

However, those calculations were thrown into doubt with the publication overnight of an angry letter from PMDB leader and Vice President Michel Temer in which he all but announced their political divorce. Temer told the president that during her first term in office starting in 2011 he was reduced to a "decorative" role and that she has shown an "absolute lack of confidence" in him. The letter stops short of declaring support for her impeachment, but neither does Temer give his backing, strongly indicating that the PMDB is eying a split. If Rousseff is forced from office, Temer would become interim president. The turmoil has alarmed markets in the world's seventh biggest economy, which is already suffering from recession and a huge corruption scandal centered on state oil company Petrobras.

Political 'war'

Andre Perfeito, chief economist at Gradual Investimentos, said the "climate of war" suggested that "the impeachment process... will drag out for longer than initially thought." "In the letter divulged yesterday by Vice President Michel Temer, we clearly see that there is not much more room for cooperation" with Rousseff. Although Rousseff has given no public reaction, Globo newspaper columnist Gerson Camarotti



BRASÍLIA: Brazilian Vice President Michel Temer speaks during a meeting with Prince Haakon of Norway at Planalto Palace in Brasilia in this file photo. — AFP

said "the government's interpretation is that the letter was a declaration of a split"

Temer's office insisted, however, he was not breaking with the government but rather "defending the reunification of the country," according to Globo. As recently as Monday the president had said she believed Temer would stand by her. To defeat impeachment, Rousseff needs more than one third of votes in the lower house, which will consider the case after the commission makes its recommendation. If the house did vote for impeachment, the Senate would then hold a trial, with a verdict to impeach needing two thirds of support. Only a year into her second term and with popularity ratings of barely 10 percent, Rousseff has come out swinging since months of impeachment rhetoric in Congress ended with the launching of the process last week. She called on Congress

to speed up proceedings and to scrap the annual holidays that run from December 23 through to February when the carnivals are held.

Brazil, host of the 2016 Rio Olympics, is in a deep gloom, with GDP down 4.5 percent in the third quarter year-on-year, and the national currency down a third against the dollar this year. Rousseff is also tainted by the Petrobras scandal, which has sucked in leading politicians and business figures, exposing the depth of corruption at the highest levels in Brazil.

Even though Rousseff herself has not been linked to any Petrobras-related crimes, the saga is adding to the sense of drift that has plagued her second term. Some experts believe Rousseff is being tried for political reasons, as punishment for having presided over a general decline, rather than the arguably technical crimes of accounting malpractice. — AFP

MUSLIM CABBIE ATTACKED BY PASSENGER AWARDED \$350K

ALEXANDRIA: A Muslim cab driver who said a passenger berated and physically attacked him over his religion was awarded \$350,000 in damages by a federal civil jury. The jury in Alexandria, Virginia, found Monday that Ed Dahlberg assaulted Mohamed Salim in 2013 and that Dahlberg's actions were motivated by animosity toward the cabbie's religion.

They awarded Salim \$100,000 in compensatory damages and \$250,000 in punitive damages. Salim says he was punched by Dahlberg after Dahlberg spewed a stream of epithets at Salim because of his religion. Salim recorded parts of the encounter on

his phone. Salim sued Dahlberg in civil court in US District Court in Alexandria after Fairfax County prosecutors declined to bring criminal charges against Dahlberg.

Dahlberg admits using bad language but denies injuring Salim. Dahlberg told The Washington Post in a phone call, "I'm ruined. I'm absolutely ruined." The key piece of evidence was an 11-minute smartphone recording of the conversation between Salim and Dahlberg. The conversation began as a friendly one, but took a turn when Dahlberg asked Salim about jihad. Dahlberg, who acknowledged he was drunk, became enraged when he felt Salim was

unwilling to denounce the Sept 11 hijackers, and Dahlberg unleashed a stream of expletives about Salim and the Muslim faith.

The recording was not definitive in terms of confirming Salim's allegation that Dahlberg punched him multiple times, causing a hairline jaw fracture. Dahlberg's lawyers questioned Salim's truthfulness, saying he lied about being a veteran of the Iraq War when he talked to reporters about the incident, as well as in a court deposition. Defense lawyer Steven Bancroft said Dahlberg is apologetic about his language on the recording but "there is much more to this case than that tape." —AP

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A handout picture shows police officers arresting a woman suspected of collaborating with Islamic State on Spain's Canary island of Fuerteventura. Spanish police yesterday arrested a man and a woman from Morocco suspected of recruiting jihadists and launching terror threats against Spain and France, the country's interior ministry said. — AFP

FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN SYRIA, IRAQ 'MORE THAN DOUBLED'

HONG KONG: The number of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria has more than doubled since last year to at least 27,000, a report by an intelligence consultancy said yesterday, highlighting the global dimension of the conflict. The figures, compiled by The Soufan Group, indicate that efforts by countries around the world to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria and blunt the appeal of violent organizations such as the Islamic State group (IS) appear to have made little impact.

"The foreign fighter phenomenon in Iraq and Syria is truly global," the New York-based organization's report said. "The Islamic State has seen success beyond the dreams of other terrorist groups that now appear conventional and even old-fashioned, such as Al-Qaeda. It has energized tens of thousands of people to join it, and inspired many more to support it." In all, between 27,000 and 31,000 foreign fighters

from 86 countries have travelled to Iraq and Syria, The Soufan Group said, compared to a figure of around 12,000 foreign fighters in Syria when it last published a similar study in June 2014. The largest number travelled to the two countries, across which IS controls a swathe of territory, from the Middle East and the Maghreb, with around 8,000 foreign fighters each. Around 5,000 made their way from Europe, with a further 4,700 from former Soviet republics. The Soufan Group added that between 20 and 30 percent of foreign fighters were returning to their home countries, creating major challenges for domestic security agencies as IS in particular looks to carry out an increasing number of attacks overseas. The group claimed responsibility for a massive attack in Paris last month that left 130 dead, and its fighters have been held responsible for violence in a litany of countries ranging from Iraq to Bangladesh. — AFP

IN RARE TEST, MERKEL BATTLES PARTY'S REBELS ON REFUGEES

BERLIN: In past years, Angela Merkel has been feted like a superstar at annual meetings of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, earning thunderous ovations for defending German interests in the euro crisis and facing down Vladimir Putin over Ukraine. But a CDU congress in the southwestern city of Karlsruhe next week is shaping up to be a very different affair. Under intense pressure from conservative allies to reduce the flood of refugees into Germany, the 61-year-old chancellor faces the biggest test of her authority from within the party in years.

The influential youth wing of the party has openly defied her in the run-up to the glitzy two-day event by demanding she

Karlsruhe, a city which sits near the border between Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, two of three German states that will hold elections in March. First, the number of migrants arriving in Germany has slowed significantly since late November, largely because of colder weather which has made it more difficult for refugees to travel from Turkey to Greece and then up through the Balkans. "It's too early to declare a change in the trend but it is positive," Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said on Monday.

Also, a sharp months-long slide in support for Merkel and her conservative bloc appears to have come to a halt. An Emnid survey last weekend put the CDU/CSU on 37 percent, up from 36 percent a month ago, and still 12 points ahead of the rival Social Democrats (SPD). A separate poll from Infratest dimap showed Merkel's popularity rising 5 points to 54 percent. "I see a lot of support in the party for Angela Merkel's course," CDU General Secretary Peter Tauber said at the weekend, dismissing suggestions her authority was waning.

'Catastrophic mood'

But some CDU members described the mood in the party as abysmal. For the first time in years, off-the-record conversations with lawmakers in Berlin are littered with criticisms of Merkel, echoing the era before she became chancellor when a cabal of conservative men worked behind the scenes to undermine the protestant pastor's daughter from communist East Germany. Last week, former Saxony justice minister Steffen Heitmann became the first prominent member of the CDU to announce he was leaving the party. In a letter to Merkel which was leaked to the media, he said he had never felt "so foreign in my own country".

The atmosphere could not be more different than it was back in 2012, when at a CDU congress in Hanover, Merkel was re-elected party leader by 98 percent of delegates, a score so high that German reporters jokingly likened it to the sham elections of East German leaders during Merkel's youth. "The mood among conservative members of parliament is really catastrophic right now," said one senior CDU lawmaker, declining to be named. "Merkel is totally isolated." "She needs to wake up," said another top ranking party member. "Merkel's solution to this crisis depends on the goodwill of people like (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and (Turkish President Tayyip) Erdogan. It simply won't work."

A close aide to the chancellor, speaking on condition of anonymity, played down the extent of the discontent, estimating that only a third of party members were really in favor of a tougher course, through caps, border closures or more radical measures. Merkel has resisted such steps, arguing that the influx must be tackled outside Germany, through negotiations to resolve the war in Syria and by encouraging neighboring Turkey to improve conditions for refugees there and convincing European partners to accept quotas of asylum seekers. "Merkel will not budge on this," the aide said. "If there really is a majority at the congress for caps on refugees, this would point to a problem at the top, but we don't expect this." — Reuters



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel (center) casts her ballot at a plenary session of the German lower house of parliament Bundestag as deputies vote on a stepped-up German role in the fight against the Islamic State group. — AFP

agree to an "Obergrenze", or cap on the number of asylum seekers Germany accepts - a step she has repeatedly rejected on the grounds it would be impossible to enforce. Her Bavarian allies, the Christian Social Union (CSU), have been pressing for a cap for months, and even some of Merkel's own ministers are lobbying openly for a tougher stance from the chancellor, who marked 10 years in office last month and must decide by next autumn whether she will seek a fourth term in 2017.

"Merkel has never endured such sharp criticism from within her own ranks since becoming chancellor," read a front-page editorial in conservative daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Monday. "Under no circumstances can she allow the congress to approve a resolution on refugee policy that includes the word 'Obergrenze'."

Two recent developments are working in Merkel's favor ahead of the meeting in

POPE FRANCIS OPENS THE DOOR TO CATHOLIC JUBILEE

MACHINE GUNS, NO-FLY ZONE GUARD OPENING OF HOLY YEAR

VATICAN CITY: Tens of thousands of Roman Catholics backed up for blocks at the Vatican yesterday for the strictest security checks in living memory as Pope Francis began a Holy Year with a call to set aside "fear and dread". Francis launched the year-long religious event, also known as a Jubilee, by pushing open the usually bricked up bronze Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica and passing through it, following a Mass attended by about 70,000 people in the square outside, according to a Vatican estimate.

Holy Year has long been expected to draw millions to Rome but is opening in the immediate aftermath of attacks in Paris and California. From early morning, police checked pilgrims, reporters, diplomats and even priests entering the area starting several blocks from St Peter's Square. Some underwent two body and bag searches as they made their way forward before passing through metal detectors. "The risk of terrorism will never be zero, we cannot provide absolute security, but we are working to attain the level of security that people rightly ask for," Rome police chief Franco Gabrielli said.

In his homily, Francis urged the faithful to have courage in their spiritual and daily lives: "Let us set aside all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved. Instead, let us experience the joy of encountering that grace which transforms all things," he said. During the year-long celebrations, one of the most important events in the 1.2 billion-member Church, the faithful will make pilgrimages to Rome and other religious sites around the world. A frail looking former Pope Benedict, 88, made one of his few appearances since his shock resignation in 2013. Benedict, who lives in seclusion in the Vatican, embraced Francis before the door.

Rite of passage

By passing through the holy door of a church during a Holy Year, Catholics symbolically pass from sin to grace. Holy Years normally take place every 25 years unless a pope decrees an extraordinary one to bring attention to a particular need or topic. The next one was to be held in 2025 but Francis, 78, called a special one on the theme of mercy, a major part of his push for a less judgmental and more inclusive Church. "We have to put mercy before judgment," the pontiff said in his homily.

The Church teaches that a Holy Year should be a time of reconciliation with adversaries and an occasion to promote solidarity, hope and justice in the world. Faithful who make pilgrimages to religious sites or do good works during a Holy Year can receive indulgences, or the remission of punishment for sins, under certain conditions. The airspace over most of Rome was closed and transport of petrol, gas, weapons, explosives and fireworks was banned. A no-go zone was instituted for vehicles around the Vatican and rubbish bins sealed or removed.

"This security was necessary. It worked very well and it was worth it because we feel safe," said Corrado De Gioia, who came to Rome from Treviso in northern Italy. Soldiers augmented regular police for a total security force of around 3,000, making the area around the Vatican sometimes seem more like one where a protest demonstration was expected instead of a religious event. Some were unnerved by the show of force. "Regarding the security, it made me afraid. Those who come here as pilgrims meet the soldiers carrying machine guns, it's scary, you feel threatened," said Italian tourist Daniela Santi. — Reuters



VATICAN: Pope Francis opens a 'Holy Door' at St Peter's basilica to mark the start of the Jubilee Year of Mercy in Vatican. — AFP

DENVER 'TOUGH LOVE' THERAPY AIMS TO TURN LIVES AROUND

DENVER: Paul Thompson started sniffing glue at 10 years old. It seemed harmless enough at first but it was the first step on a road to addiction and crime. At 17 he was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a court in Boulder, Colorado for armed robbery. After his release he spent further stints in prison for parole violations, Thompson says. Shunned by family and friends, Thompson says he had no one to call. That's when, in 1989, the "tough love" of Peer 1 in Denver, Colorado, came in. He contacted the facility on the advice of a fellow inmate, and, aged 36, was accepted into the program. More than two decades later Thompson is still at the treatment centre, where he is now the assistant director.

Men at the 126-bed drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, many having spent years in and out of prison, are responsible to each other. If one breaks the rules, others are obliged to report it or suffer the same sanctions imposed by their Peer 1 brothers. With histories of abuse as children and living on the streets, the men live in for up to 12 months. The therapy comprises sessions from family group therapy to confrontational group accountability sessions and trust-building exercises.

"It's hard for a person who's been a criminal all his life to tell on another Peer brother," says Thompson. "We teach them 'no more victim, no more victimizing,'" he says. "It's OK to hold someone accountable." Peer 1 is a Therapeutic Community where members work to change their lifestyles and support each other. More than 600 such programmes operate in the United States and Canada, focused on substance use and mental health, according to Treatment Communities of America, a professional association.

Complex criminal histories

The program, part of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado's School of Medicine, targets men with long and often

complex criminal histories for offences from theft to burglary, possessing and dealing in drugs to assault and fraud. Sanctions for breaking the rules - smuggling in cigarettes, making a disallowed phone call - take the form of what the community calls a "therapeutic benefit" such as having to stare at a wall and meditate for stretches of an hour at a time or making and wearing an object that illustrates wrongdoing.

"It's kind of humiliating but it forces them to rethink their actions," says Ilse Goethals, a lecturer at University College, Ghent, who has done research on Therapeutic Communities in Belgium. Under the program, the most serious transgressions are possessing drugs and threatening or using physical violence. Consequences for participants range from having their heads shaved publicly to being thrown out of the program and sent back to prison. "Clients who are in prison often start with less internal motivation but they tend to stay in therapy long enough for it to have some benefit," said Goethals. About 60 percent of clients complete intensive Therapeutic Community programs in Colorado, Peer 1 among them, the state's Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) says.

Most men who join Peer 1 display antisocial behavior, program staff say. Their pasts include parole violations, rejection from other programs and failed probation. Where others have said there's no hope for them, Peer 1 aims to give them another chance. Of those in Colorado who complete intensive therapy such as this two-year program in Denver, 11 percent commit another crime within 1 year and 21 percent within 2 years, the DCJ says.

No comparable rates for prisoners who had not taken part in such programs was available, said Kim English, DCJ research director. "We are not here to treat the career criminal," says director Kenneth Gaipa. "We believe that the criminality is tied to the substance abuse and if we treat the substance abuse the criminality will go by the wayside." — Reuters

HOMETOWN OF THE CALIFORNIA SHOOTERS REELS AFTER ATTACK

LOS ANGELES: Residents of Redlands, a small town east of Los Angeles, tried to come to terms Monday with their newfound fame as the site of one of the deadliest mass shootings in America. The street where the husband and wife behind the carnage that left 14 people dead and 21 others injured lived has returned to a semblance of normalcy. But the faces of residents betray the horror and shock left in the aftermath of the December 2 attack.

"My daughter wants to move out, she is terrified," said one woman who lives two doors down from the townhouse that Syed Farook and his Pakistani wife Tashfeen Malik rented. The woman, who did not want to give her name and spoke in Spanish, said she had never had contact with the couple who died in a shootout with police following the carnage that President Barack Obama branded an "act of terrorism." "People don't mix here."

They go into their homes through their garage and also go out that way," she said. "I have been living in Redlands for 30 years and nothing has ever happened here. "But now everyone is scared," she added. "I am a Jehovah's Witness and nobody will open the door anymore." A few houses down the street, Amanda Witherspoon, 37, a nurse's assistant, said she had once spoken to Malik as she strolled down the street with her baby daughter, now aged six months. "She was friendly but in a kind of standoffish way," Witherspoon said. "It didn't seem she wanted to have a conversation."

Traumatized schoolchildren

Witherspoon said her 11-year-old daughter had been traumatized by the assault, refusing to go to school for two days afterwards. "She thought maybe they would come to the school even though I told her they were no longer around," Witherspoon said. "She was rattled by it." An official at a nearby school said several parents had not brought their children



CALIFORNIA: Khadija Zadeh takes a picture of a memorial to the 14 victims, including photos of Yvette Velasco and Damian Meins, during an interfaith memorial service at the Islamic Center of Redlands for the victims of the San Bernardino mass shooting. — AFP

to study since the carnage at a year-end party organized by Farook's employer.

Elizabeth Abbinante, 35, an administrative assistant who works in the area, said she didn't feel safe anymore in the town that has a large Arab and Muslim population. "I'm on edge. I'm suspicious. When the phone rings, I'm afraid something terrible has happened," she said. "You see this white truck?" she asked, pointing to a vehicle nearby. "They were listening to Arabic music. I couldn't help but turn around." At a gas station in the neighborhood, customers were tense and said they were now on the lookout for anything suspicious. Doug Olson, a 72-year-old retiree, said

he feared having "a gun put to my head." The station's owner, Daya Sing, who is Indian, said he has already noticed a change in people's attitude. "People give me bad looks," he said. "I don't have anything to do with this community." The local mosque, where Farook went about three times a week to pray during his lunch break, was deserted.

Cesar Paredes, 28, whose house adjoins the mosque and whose landlord is the mosque's owner, said he feared a backlash against the community. "It's becoming crazy these days," he said. "How many Muslim people are there? Millions, and for a few bad apples everybody starts thinking they are all like this." — AFP



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THREE CHEERS FOR CHINESE BANQUET GURU

HARBIN: Lavish meals loaded with booze have long been a mainstay of Chinese politics and business for centuries, but for many they are more a source of anxiety than joy. For some, salvation has come in the form of a middle-aged former wedding planner. At the "Art of Communication School" in the northeastern city of Harbin, businessmen and bureaucrats are taught to drink themselves up the social ladder. Its middle-aged founder Xiu Weiliang appears an unlikely guru, softly-spoken with a penchant for woolly jumpers, and frequently mopping sweat from his brow in class.

But he says more than 4,000 students have taken his classes in the last decade. "The banquet table is the place for Chinese people to exchange their feelings," said Xiu, beaming from behind a wooden desk in his office. In the "Tricks of the Dining Table" course, his charges are drilled on seat selection, lazy Susan control, and making obsequious toasts to their bosses. But declining alcohol is also a key part of the curriculum, added Xiu. "Some people will encourage you to drink to excesses and lose control to achieve their aims," he said, adding it was crucial to know how to "turn down a drink without hurting someone's feelings."

Business meetings across China often take place around a dinner table and punctuated by shots of baijiu—a domestically brewed grain alcohol. That has fuelled a mini industry in self-help books such as "Chinese Style Banquet: Mind Reading Techniques". Some of the tomes underline the sexism of this dining culture, where women are often expected to act merely as decoration. Such titles include "Women at Banquets: Flexible Accompanying Skills" and "Relationships Come From Drinking", which strictly demarcates differing gender roles at dinners. Authors for the latter suggest: "When women are at the banquet table, it's usually in a supporting role... that requires casting aside arrogance."

Fear of feeding

Many in China lament the culture of forced drinking and Xiu said that his students—male and female—often found the prospect of office banquets left them in panic. "For Chinese people, there are many problems which can only be resolved at the dining table," sales manager Zhuang Kelu said. After a 12 class term, she said, "I now know phrases to use to indirectly refuse a drink... I am no longer afraid of business banquets."



HARBIN: A woman applauds outside a classroom as Xiu Weiliang (not seen), founder of 'Art of Communication School', teaches a class on public speaking at his school in the northeastern city of Harbin, northeast China's Heilongjiang province. — AFP

Members of China's ruling Communist party have for decades cut deals over drinks with reports of public funds used for alcohol-fueled popular resentment.

In 2011 a chief executive at China's

state-run oil giant Sinopec was suspended after it was revealed the company spent more than one million yuan on vintage wine and spirits in a single sitting, including Chateau Lafite. As part of

an austerity drive allied to President Xi Jinping's corruption crackdown, the ruling Communist party has ordered officials to limit themselves "four dishes and one soup", as it tries to placate public anger. High-end alcohol sales in China have been hit by the measures, and Xiu says he is shifting his pedagogy towards speechmaking instead. "Now the government has banned officials from deciding matters over meals... I started a class called: 'Better public speaking will change your life'," he said.

The approach seems to have paid off, with high-level Harbin city officials touring the school this summer. But he still runs banquetting courses, with the final class taking place around a dining table loaded with dishes. "In the hotel—that's when the real action happens," Xiu said. When a dozen of his brightest graduates gathered for a meal, generous toasts were the order of the day. "Before, I couldn't say anything at the banquet table," said one middle-aged man, standing up with a glass of red and asking to remain anonymous. "He explained his concept to me. I thought, as the head of a company, it's exactly what I need. "In the classroom we call him 'Big Brother,'" he added, tilting his wine and taking a deep chug. "Thanks, Big Brother." — AFP

MALAYSIA PM SAYS HIS CONSCIENCE IS CLEAR AS PARTY TENSIONS MOUNT

NAJIB SAYS FUNDS IN HIS ACCOUNT 'A GIFT'

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said he had done nothing wrong in receiving hundreds of millions of dollars into his personal bank accounts, as a senior party rival called on him to step aside over a festering funding scandal. Najib has so far weathered calls for him to quit over allegations of graft at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) and his receipt of 2.6 billion ringgit (\$610.8 million) in what he says was a political donation. But pressure mounted on Najib as his United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) gathered yesterday for its annual meeting, after UMNO's deputy leader called on members to remove a "cancer" from the long-ruling party that looks increasingly at risk of losing the next election in 2018.

In his most detailed explanation since the scandal erupted in July, Najib said his conscience was "absolutely clear". Malaysia's Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) questioned Najib over the deposits at the weekend and said on Monday that it had also interviewed the unidentified donor in the Middle East. "Firstly, the 2.6 billion ringgit is neither public funds nor 1MDB's money. This was confirmed by the MACC," Najib said in an interview with state television TV3. "It's a donation, a gift. A donation is not illegal under any legal provision." Malaysia's Central Bank was aware of the accounts' existence, he said, adding the donor did not see it as a bribe and expected nothing in return.

The Wall Street Journal said in July that the funds had been discovered in Najib's accounts by investigators probing accusations of financial irregularities at 1MDB. Najib, who chairs 1MDB's advisory board, has denied the money came from 1MDB, which is being investigated by several foreign agencies. The Wall Street Journal reported in September that the FBI had launched an investigation into allegations of money-laundering at the 1MDB. The following month, an FBI spokeswoman told Reuters the US government was reviewing Goldman Sachs' business relationship with 1MDB as part of a broader, wide-ranging investigation into the fund. 1MDB says it has never been contacted by the FBI.

Cancer and pus

The scandals have shaken investors in

Southeast Asia's third-biggest economy and rocked public confidence in the coalition led by Najib's UMNO, which has held power since independence in 1957. Backing for the government among the ethnic Malay majority that forms the bedrock of UMNO's support sank to new lows in October, according to a poll from research firm Merdeka Center.

In a speech to his supporters on Monday night, UMNO's Deputy President Muhyiddin Yassin called on the prime minister to step aside until the investigations were completed. "I would like to suggest that the prime minister take a rest for now," he said. "Allow the investigations to proceed freely, transparently and fairly... go on leave until the case is over." Muhyiddin was ousted as deputy prime minister earlier this year for his criticisms of Najib over the 1MDB affair. "I would rather appeal to UMNO to undergo painful surgery than face the uncertain future in a state of coma and slow death later," Muhyiddin said.

"Let me be straight... whoever is the cancer and pus in UMNO must be discarded. In order to save the party, race and country, we must get rid of the cancer and pus," UMNO said on Tuesday that Muhyiddin's speech would be scrutinized by a special committee to see if it violated the party's laws. Najib, 62, still enjoys the backing of most of UMNO's powerful division chiefs, and even his fiercest internal critics, such as influential former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, accept that he cannot be unseated. Analysts say there is no obvious contender to replace Najib, and he has proved adept at playing the networks of patronage that underpin UMNO.

The opposition is also weak without charismatic leader Anwar Ibrahim, who was jailed on charges of sodomy in February, a verdict his supporters say was politically motivated. But the uncertainty created has hit an economy already reeling from falling oil and gas prices, with the ringgit losing nearly a quarter of its value against the dollar this year. As the party gathered for its annual meeting, Najib responded to his critics with an appeal for unity. "I want the party to remain united," he said in the TV3 interview. "I do not want to see the party in chaos or divided... I want party members to close ranks." — Reuters



CHENNAI: India's Congress party vice president Rahul Gandhi lifts a child as he meets people affected by the floods in Chennai, India yesterday. — AP

CONGRESS STALLS PARLIAMENT OVER GOVERNMENT'S 'GANDHI VENDETTA'

COURT CASE ALLEGES GANDHIS MISUSED PARTY FUNDS

NEW DELHI: India's main opposition Congress party yesterday held hostage Prime Minister Narendra Modi's hopes of passing a crucial tax reform, stalling parliament and accusing his government of running a "vendetta" against the Nehru-Gandhi family. The government wants to introduce a nationwide goods and services tax (GST) to replace a long list of state levies, raising hopes that it would boost investment by making it easier to do business in India's vast internal market. Despite having a substantial majority in the lower house, Modi needs the support of opposition parties to get the bill through the upper house.

Hopes were raised for the long-delayed legislation to be passed this year after Modi met Congress president Sonia Gandhi last month and both parties showed signs of compromise. But those prospects of compromise were cast in doubt on Monday, when a judge ordered Gandhi and her son Rahul to appear in court in a case brought by a prominent member of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. Furious Congress members stormed the wells of both houses of parliament, shouting slogans against the case and alleging a "political vendetta" by Modi, who has moved to weaken the legacy of the Gandhis since dislodging them from power last year. "I am not scared of anyone," Sonia Gandhi told journalists in parliament.

Parliament was adjourned until today following the uproar, but Congress workers carried their protests into the streets. "The GST bill has gone for a sky walk," Anand Sharma, the Congress party's deputy leader in the upper house, told Reuters, indicating swift passage of the measure was unlikely. Another senior Congress leader said disruptions in parliament would continue, but did not say for how long. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty ruled India for most of its post-independence era after 1947 and helped shape the country's institutions. Detractors, including Modi, accuse

the family of retarding economic development with socialist policies. The case, brought by BJP member Subramanian Swamy, alleges the Gandhis used \$13.5 million of party funds to pay debts accrued by a newspaper business. The Gandhis deny wrongdoing. Abhishek Manu Singhvi, a Congress spokesman and lawyer for the Gandhis, said they were willing to appear in court, but sought more time. The court will

hear the case on Dec 19. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the government had no role in the case, adding that the Gandhis could explain their concerns in court but their party should not disrupt parliament. "All parties must come together (on GST)," Jaitley told broadcaster Times Now. "Anybody who tries to create hurdles in passing that GST will be doing great damage to this country." — Reuters

JAPAN LAUNCHES ANTI-TERRORISM UNIT AHEAD OF SUMMIT, OLYMPICS

TOKYO: Japan launched a new counterterrorism unit in an air of secrecy yesterday, with journalists only allowed to photograph its 24 members from behind. The country is expanding its international espionage work after being shocked by the deaths of five Japanese citizens at the hands of Islamic militants this year. The recent Paris attacks have also raised fears ahead of a Group of Seven summit in Japan next year and the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020. It's mostly uncharted territory for Japan, which has never suffered a terror attack by outsiders in its modern history.

"The country is inexperienced, and its counterterrorism capability is untested," said Motonobu Abekawa, a former official at the Public Security Intelligence Agency and a terrorism studies expert at Nihon University. "People have long thought terrorist attacks are a distant problem abroad." Japan began exploring ways to boost public safety and intelligence after the Islamic State group killed two Japanese hostages in Syria early this year. An attack on tourists at a museum in Tunisia later claimed three more Japanese lives. During the hostage crisis, Japan often appeared at a loss for quality intelligence. Japanese agents should develop their own sources so they don't have to rely on US or British agents for information, Abekawa said. "I hope eventually they can be counterparts of MI6 or the CIA," he said. The new Counterterrorism Unit-Japan includes staff from the foreign and defense ministries, the National Police Agency and the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, Japan's version of the CIA. Initially made up of four leaders and 20 Tokyo-based experts focusing on Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and north and western Africa, it eventually is to also include 20 intelligence officers assigned to overseas posts, possibly in Amman, Cairo, Jakarta and New Delhi.

News photographers covering the launch were told they couldn't show the faces of the team, only their backs, as they sat in rows of plastic chairs in the prime minister's office. "Collecting and centralizing intelligence on terrorism has become urgent tasks as the risk of attacks grows," Chief Cabinet Secretary

Yoshihide Suga told the unit members. "The unit will be used as a crucial mission to secure the lives of Japanese in and outside the country."

Japan has no institute to train intelligence agents, so they will have to learn on the job. "Japan is still a novice in counterterrorism measures, and there are lots of blind spots," said Koichi Ozumi, an expert on risk management and terrorism at Aomori Chuo Gakuin University. "The biggest concern is intelligence gathering. There is a serious shortage of experts who can gather real intelligence and analyze it." In its annual security report published Monday, the National Police Agency stressed the need to raise alert levels for next year's G-7 summit in western Japan because it could be "a perfect target" amid escalating extremist attacks in Europe and the Middle East.

Last month's Paris attacks prompted splashy stories about potential targets in Tokyo in weekly magazines. A "Tokyo terror target map" in one included a popular electronics district, an upscale shopping mall during the Christmas season and a major shrine. Japan plans to obtain passenger information from airlines, install body scanners at major airports and step up identification of foreign visitors at hotels. A new police unit will search for Internet content related to extremist groups. Some experts raised caution over the security measures, saying they could help the government exercise undue power over citizens and interfere with their freedom of information.

"There is a risk that the terrorist attacks in Europe will be used as an excuse by Japan's authoritarian lawmakers and police bureaucrats to expand their powers," said Jiro Yamaguchi, a political science professor at Hosei University. In an article he wrote in The Japan Times, he cited a 2010 leak of internal police documents showing false accusations against Muslim residents in Japan treated as terrorism suspects. Japan's strict gun controls, the importance attached to conformity, its strict immigration policy and the language barrier may have made it difficult for Islamic extremists to take root in the country, Abekawa said. — AP



KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian Muslim woman walks past Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's poster during the 69th United Malays National Organization (UMNO) general assembly in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AP

AFGHANISTAN CONFERENCE OPENS, BUT HOPES FOR PEACE TALKS SLIM

ISLAMABAD: A conference aimed at shoring up support for war-ravaged Afghanistan opened in the Pakistani capital yesterday, with a top Afghan official calling for an urgent, united response to the global menace of militancy. The "Heart of Asia" meeting, an annual gathering of Asian and other countries, comes months after the first, inconclusive talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. "The wave of terrorist activities, including those of Daesh in various parts of the region and the world, once again reminds us of the gravity of this menace confronting today's humanity and the urgency for a united position against this evil phenomenon," Afghan Deputy

Foreign Minister Hikmat Khalil Karzai told the conference. The Islamic State militant group is also known as Daesh.

The two-day meeting will focus on energy, infrastructure and investment deals to shore up commitment to Afghanistan but the threat of an intensifying Taliban insurgency will hang over proceedings. The Afghan Taliban and the government held inaugural talks in Pakistan in July, but the effort to end the 14-year insurgency stalled when after news leaked that Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar had been dead for two years. News of Omar's death triggered a violent split in the Taliban, further undermining hopes for

the negotiations. Last week, the new leader of the main Afghan Taliban faction, Omar's deputy, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, was reported killed or wounded by rivals.

A weekend audio message claiming to be from Mansour refuted the reports, but some Taliban have questioned its authenticity. The United States hopes Pakistan will help resuscitate the talks, a senior US official said. "Pakistan has real influence with the Afghan Taliban, and our hope is that it will use that influence to encourage the Taliban to engage in the reconciliation process," US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in India as he prepared to fly to the conference. — Reuters

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Issues

POLLS OFFER HOPE
FOR CAR REFUGEES
IN CAMEROON

By Josiane Kouagheu

With her two-month-old baby on one arm, Mariam Gary squats down in the dimly-lit kitchen to fry fish over a wood fire as she prepares dinner for her five children. Daily survival is a struggle for Mariam in the simple clay house in a small town in eastern Cameroon, home for the 33-year-old and her children since they fled fighting in the Central African Republic more than two years ago. Since mainly Muslim Seleka rebels briefly seized power in a coup in early 2013, the majority Christian Central African Republic has been torn by religious violence which has killed thousands, uprooted almost a million and divided the nation.

"We fled Bangui and walked to Cameroon without any belongings or money. I lost my brothers and sisters along the way, cut to pieces by machetes," Mariam said, her eyes flooding with tears. Mariam is one of 250,000 refugees from the Central African Republic living in eastern Cameroon, more than half of whom have fled across the border since the coup sparked violent reprisals by Christian militia groups.

She is fortunate to have a home in the town of Mandjou, where some refugees sleep outside and people live off aid provisions of rice, beans and biscuits, but the young widow still struggles to provide for her children. "I am forced to sell most of the food I receive to pay my monthly rent (of \$8) and school fees for my children - life is very difficult," said Mariam, whose husband died of malaria six months ago because they could not afford to pay for treatment.

Almost a third of the refugees are spread across camps while the rest live with families in local communities. None of them know when they might be able to go home, said Khassim Diagne, Cameroon representative at the UN refugee agency (UNHCR). Sectarian violence in the Central African Republic risks derailing internationally-backed elections now set for Dec 27 after being postponed in October due to the fighting, leaving the fate of the refugees in Cameroon in limbo. "We are not expecting masses to suddenly march back to the Central African Republic, but if you have peaceful elections then people may start heading home in early 2016," Diagne said.

Vote Offers Hope

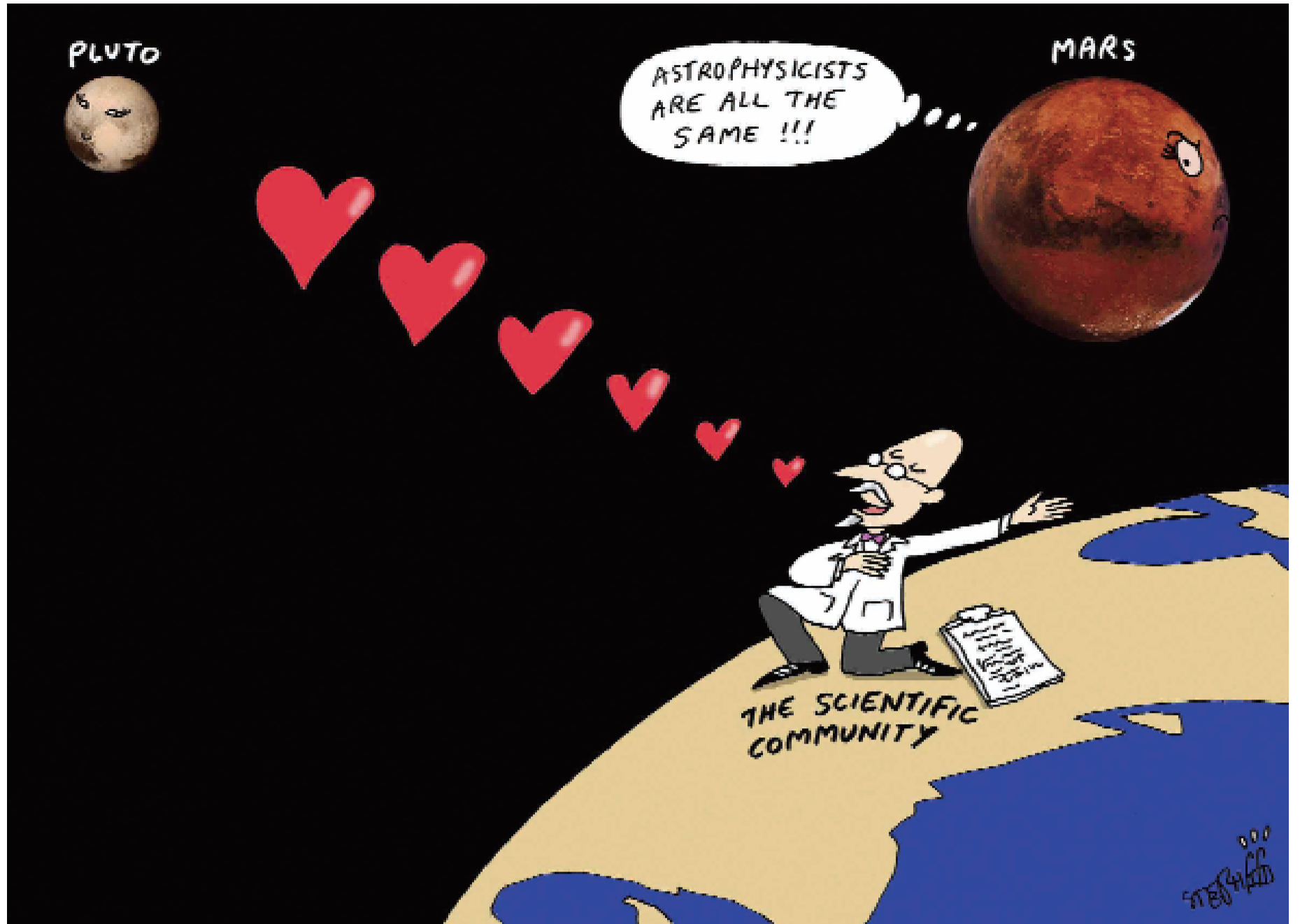
Mariam is one of tens of thousands of women refugees in eastern Cameroon who are striving to make money to ensure an education for their children, with the support of the United Nations and aid agencies which provide supplies and equipment. In the Gado-Badzere camp - home to 23,000 refugees, half of whom are women and children - 27-year-old Diarama Adama grins as she admires the sewing machine she was given a fortnight ago and proudly shows off the dress a customer has paid her to make.

Another woman, Awa, and her two sisters, grind peanuts into groundnut oil to sell to other refugees and on the streets outside the camp in the eastern Garoua-BoulaO district to feed and school the 18 children they have between them. "When women arrive at the camp, they are sad, demoralised, and unmotivated. But by offering income-generating activities, we want to give them hope," said Achille Ndong, team leader for UN Women in the Gado-Badzere camp.

Awa's son, 15-year-old Mohamed Moussa, wants to return home to help rebuild his country, and said he begged his father and other men to register to vote in the upcoming elections. "I saw how men killed my neighbours, my uncle and my grandfather," said Mohamed, while playing with his friends. "I want to become a judge to punish those who kill." Almost half of the 70,000 refugees living in camps who are eligible to vote have registered to do so, and will cast their ballots from polling stations within the camps, according to Diagne from the UNHCR.

Sitting on a mat outside of a warehouse in the camp, 64-year-old Celine Asta, who suffers from diabetes and anxiety, recalls how two of her six children and her husband were killed as they fled the capital Bangui two years ago. Despite the pain and trauma she has suffered, Celine remains positive and hopeful for the future of her country. "I am registered on the electoral roll - my one dream is to vote for a candidate that will bring lasting peace to the Central African Republic." — Reuters

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THE BROTHERS FAROOK: VETERAN AND KILLER

By Edward McAllister and Yasmeen Abutaleb

One brother liked to party and chase girls. After high school, moved by what he saw as his patriotic duty, he enlisted in the Navy and received two medals recognizing his contributions to "the global war on terror". The other was deeply religious and became increasingly intolerant, ultimately nursing a growing hatred that led him, along with his wife, to open fire on a San Bernardino holiday party last week, in what law enforcement officials have termed a terrorist attack.

Syed Raheel Farook and his younger brother Syed Rizwan Farook grew up in the same house, attended the same high school two years apart and, as teenagers, often socialized in the same groups. But as they grew older their paths diverged. Rizwan is now dead, gunned down by police in Southern California after joining with his wife in killing 14 people and injuring 21. Raheel is alive and left to wonder what went wrong.

The contrasting lives of the Farook brothers, described by friends, neighbors and former classmates who knew them both, is a disturbing tale, in part because there are so few clues to why they turned

out so differently. The family, including Raheel, declined repeated requests through their lawyers for comment for this story. But those who knew the brothers say that by high school, their differences were apparent and growing. "Most people here go to mosque to please their parents," said Shakib Ahmed, who attended mosque with the Farooks.

Raheel, the older brother, was that kind of kid, he said. He went to Friday prayers, but he also liked to drink and had a girlfriend in high school who wasn't Muslim. Rizwan was quieter and more serious - and far more religious. Only with his older brother, friends said, did they see Rizwan lose his temper. "He was nice to everyone else, but he was kind of the dominating type. He would yell at his brother," Ahmed said.

Physical Distance

Soon after graduating from high school in 2003, with the US invasion of Iraq just months old, Raheel joined up and went off to boot camp in Illinois, according to naval records. In 2004, he was assigned to serve on the USS Enterprise as an information system technician. Back home, Rizwan, a bright boy, finished high school a year early according to school records. In the years

that followed, friends and neighbors say, he quit wearing jeans and polo shirts and donned robes. "I noticed a change with the clothes and the beard," said Ahmed.

At home, there was increasing turmoil. In 2006, the boys' mother, Rafia Farook, filed for divorce from her husband Syed after more than 24 years of marriage, according to court documents. In court filings, Rafia cited multiple instances of domestic abuse, asserting that her husband was "mentally ill" and threatened "to kill himself on a daily basis." During one violent incident, she said, her son came between them "to save me".

Gasser Shehata, a friend of Rizwan's from a San Bernardino mosque, said that Rizwan talked to him in recent years about his religious issues with his dad while growing up, and how he came to side with his mother in their disputes. Shehata said that Rizwan told him that his father refused to pray regularly, which was a source of tension. When Rizwan joined the dating site bestmuslim.com in 2013, his profile described how he spent much of his free time "memorizing the Qur'an and learning more about the religion."

He was looking, he wrote, for a woman "who takes her religion very seriously and is always trying to improve her religion and encouraging others to do the same." Even as

the distance between the brothers grew, they remained bonded. Attendees at Rizwan's wedding reception last year at the Islamic Center of Riverside said Rizwan seemed to enjoy his brother's easy and relaxed manner with the guests, even though he said little and seemed withdrawn. At one point, Raheel even teased his younger brother, calling him "Rizi," which Rizwan took in good humor.

Some of those who knew the Farooks have thought deeply about the brothers and their differences in recent days. But many of the things they come up with could apply to any siblings. "Raheel was just a normal ... guy," said Usmaan Arshad, who attended La Sierra High School with the brothers. "No one talked to Rizwan," he said. Rose Aguirre, a neighbor of the family for years, said the difference between the Farook sons had seemed to her to boil down to the fact that Raheel was "more personable, more Americanized" than his brother.

But those characterizations worked only before last week, when it became apparent that the differences went far deeper. Attorney David Chesley told CNN on Monday that Raheel "is very upset with his brother." "He's totally depressed and broken with grief." — Reuters

FRENCH UNITY AGAINST FAR-RIGHT CRUMBLES

By Ingrid Melander

When far-right National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen made it to the second round of the 2002 presidential election, shocked voters and mainstream parties united to keep him out of power. Fast-forward 13 years, and everything has changed. His daughter Marine, now leading the anti-Europe, anti-immigration party, and targeting the French presidency in 2017, topped the polls in the first round of regional elections on Sunday in a historic win. This time, panicked Socialists and conservatives do not agree on how to react. Even if they did, opinion polls show many of their voters do not want such alliances anymore.

"The old system died tonight," Marine's niece Marion Marechal-Le Pen proclaimed on Sunday after she won 40.5 percent of the vote in southeast France. She may well be right. In 2002, hundreds of thousands took to the streets to say they didn't want the far-right in power and Le Pen senior lost by a huge margin in the run-off after left-wing supporters voted for centre-right Jacques Chirac.

Ahead of this year's regional elections run-offs on Dec 13, there have been no signs of any such rallies being planned against the far-right party, which has been boosted by fears over the Islamic State attacks that killed 130 people in Paris last month, as well as by record unemployment and immigration. "There is no comparison with 2002," said Viavoice pollsters' chief Francois Miquet-Marty.

"The National Front (FN) does not scare people as much, Socialist voters are more reluctant to vote for Nicolas Sarkozy's (conservative) party, and people are more willing to accept the idea of FN regions, it is not as repulsive to them as seeing Jean-Marie Le Pen become president," Miquet-Marty said. Faced with the prospect of the FN winning one or several regions on Dec. 13 and using them as a platform for the 2017 presidential elections, Socialist President Francois Hollande and his predecessor Sarkozy took diametrically opposite decisions. Both are proving divisive

within their own camp.

Sticking to a decades-old tradition of mainstream French parties allying to keep the far-right out of power at all cost - dubbed the "Front Republicain" or "Democratic barricade" - the Socialists are pulling out of at least two regions and have called on their voters to back

'No Accident'

"We do not own the voices of our voters," Sarkozy's former foreign minister Alain Juppe said after the Republicans issued a statement ruling out alliances with the Socialists which they said "would give the French the feeling that we are confiscating the election by striking tactical deals

to French democratic values.

In 2015, with Marine Le Pen having strived to "de-demonise" the FN to make it more palatable to mainstream voters, many think such alliances are no longer justified. Besides, Juppe said, even if the Republicans decided to pull out of some areas in favour of the Socialists, the FN might still win. Jean-Pierre Raffarin, a former conservative prime minister, publicly disagreed, saying that trying to beat the far-right should trump any other considerations.

In another sign of how mainstream parties are at odds internally over how to stop the rise of the far-right, the Socialist candidate in the northeast is refusing to drop out of the race for the run-off. And there is no guarantee that either party will benefit from their strategies. "There is a pressure within the Left that is more about taking the moral high-ground than about politics. Does that guarantee that the FN will be beaten in the second round? The answer is no," Harris Interactive pollster Jean-Daniel Levy said.

And Sarkozy - whose hopes for a landslide win because of the weakness of the Socialists were dashed by the rise of the far-right - could see his presidential ambitions for 2017 take a hit if the FN scores big wins on Sunday. How to deal with rival parties is all the more complicated for him because opinion polls now show that over half of his party's voters do not rule out alliances with the FN itself, political analyst Sylvain Crepon said. Such pacts with the far-right would represent a significant reshaping of the traditional political landscape in France.

Another big difference with 2002 is that, at the time, Jean-Marie Le Pen's qualification for the second round was completely unexpected and he did not follow it up with successes in other elections. He sought to attract protest votes, not victories - but the opposite is the case for his daughter, which further explains why how dealing with her rising popularity is such a major headache for the mainstream parties. "What happened yesterday is no accident," Levy said of the regional election first round. "It is a deeply entrenched trend." — Reuters



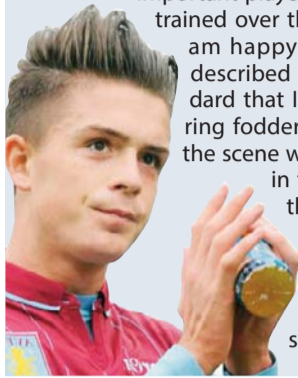
The president of the French far-right Front National party Marine Le Pen reacts after the announcement of the results of the first round of the regional election in the Nord Picardie region on Dec 6, 2015 in Henin-Beaumont. — AFP

Sarkozy's Republicans there. But Sarkozy and most of his party's top officials have rejected any such move, saying it is undemocratic and could well be counter-productive. Sarkozy first broke with that tradition four years ago and his party insists he won't budge.

behind their backs". The "Front Republicain" term was first coined for a centre-left coalition in 1956, when France was at war in Algeria. It aimed to counter the rise of the populist Poujadiste movement to which Le Pen senior belonged at the time, and was regarded as a bulwark against any threats

GREALISH RETURNS TO ASTON VILLA

LONDON: Jack Grealish has returned to first-team training at Aston Villa after being dropped on disciplinary grounds, manager Remi Garde revealed yesterday. The 20-year-old playmaker was forced to train with Villa's under-21 squad after being pictured in a nightclub after last month's 4-0 defeat at Everton, but Garde has now ended his period of exile. "Jack is back with the group now," Garde told in-house television station AVTV. "I am pleased to have him back because he's an important player for the group." "I am also pleased regarding how Jack trained over the past two weeks with the under-21s. Jack is back. I am happy for that, and for the team." Garde had previously described Grealish's behaviour as "not of the professional standard that I expect from my players". Grealish has become recurring fodder for Britain's tabloid newspapers since bursting onto the scene with Villa last season. He was pictured lying on his back in the street, apparently asleep, following a night out on the Spanish island of Tenerife and has also been caught inhaling nitrous oxide, otherwise known as laughing gas. Villa have drawn two and lost two in the Premier League since Garde's appointment as the successor to Tim Sherwood, leaving them seven points adrift of safety at the foot of the table. — AFP



SINGAPORE RUGBY BEAT WORLD RECORD FOR MOST PASSES

SINGAPORE: Singapore late yesterday surpassed the world record for most rugby passes in an hour as part of activities before it hosts a leg of the World Rugby Sevens Series next year, organisers said. Twenty-one national players completed 4,002 passes during the time period, beating the Guinness Book world record of 2,336 set by Maccabi GB junior team in England in 2013, Singapore Rugby said in a statement. The rules call for players, standing at least 5.0 yards (4.6 metres) apart, not to drop the ball during the entire hour, and every pass must be a standard rugby pass. The record-breaking attempt was part of a daylong carnival to drum up support for Singapore's hosting of the eighth leg of the World Rugby Sevens series on April 16 and 17 at the city-state's National Stadium, the organisers said. The series kicked off in Dubai earlier this month and will go to South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Canada and Hong Kong before coming to Singapore. France and England host the final two legs. — AFP

SLADE OUT FOR FOUR MONTHS

LONDON: England's Henry Slade will miss the Six Nations after Exeter announced yesterday that he will be out for around four months after sustaining a broken leg and ankle damage. The 22-year-old centre was stretchered off during his side's 41-27 Premiership victory at Wasps on Saturday following a tackle by opposing winger Sailosi Tagicakibau. He had a plate and wiring inserted into his leg on Sunday during what head coach Rob Baxter described as a "pretty major operation". "The reality is it is a decent injury, so you would normally talk around four months for an injury like this," Baxter said in comments published on the Exeter website. "That can change relatively significantly both ways, though, depending on a number of factors. We are certainly not pencilling in any date for Henry's return because we know it is long-term. We will start talking about a return date in eight to 10 weeks' time when we know a bit more. It will take a bit of time though, and a lengthy rehab process." — AFP



Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium

OMAR ABDULRAHMAN TO PLAY IN KUWAITI ALL-STAR TEAM

KUWAIT: Kuwait Champions Challenge yesterday announced Omar Abdulrahman to play in the Kuwaiti all-star team against the Football Champions Tour team on Friday, December 18 at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in the State of Kuwait. Omar Abdulrahman will join Aboutrika in the Kuwaiti all-star team.

Ronaldinho, Scholes, Pires, Puyol, Zambrotta, Del Piero, Figo, Salgado, Shevchenko, Nesta, Deco, James, Gerrard, Carragher, Pirlo and Lehmann were announced as part of the Football Champions Tour team.

The Football Champions Tour team will be managed by Carlo Ancelotti, the only manager to have won the UEFA Champions League three times and reached four finals, regarded as one of the best most successful managers of all time.

The Football Champions Tour team will play against a team of Kuwaiti all-star players who will be chosen by the people in Kuwait themselves.

Votes for players joining the Kuwaiti all-star team closed on Monday night. The Kuwaiti all-star team will be announced later. The team will be managed by renowned Kuwaiti coach, Mohammed Ibrahim.

The referee of the Kuwait Champions Challenge will be Pierluigi Collina, the Italian football referee widely considered the best referee of his generation, having been named FIFA's "Best Referee of the Year" six consecutive times.

Meanwhile, the Jaber Stadium celebration countdown began, which is being held under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and participation of world soccer legends on Dec 18, while the organizing committee is racing with time to remove all obstacles to ensure the success of this event.

Tickets were put out through the official site of the event and at the Public Authority for Sports, as tickets will be available everyday except on Friday. Tickets will also be available at clubs except on Friday

also. The clubs are Salmiya, Arabi, Kuwait, Fahaheel, Kazima and Jahra from 5 pm until 9 pm.

Meanwhile Kuwait coach Mohammad Ibrahim will lead Kuwait stars, as Italy's Ancelotti will lead the world legends. Egypt's Mohammad Abotrika will participate in the event along with UAE's Amouri who will be with the Kuwait team. Kuwait's Club current manager former national team and Qadisiya club manager Mohammad Ibrahim, nick named the general said he was very happy to lead Kuwait's team in this historical event. He thanked the organizing committee for selecting him to lead Kuwaiti stars and considered it as a "big honor."

The football challenge will be preceded by an opening ceremony, including a concert bringing Kuwaiti and Arab singers together to perform for over 60 thousand spectators at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. The ceremony will also include a fireworks show.



Omar Abdulrahman

OSCAR PISTORIUS BAILED, TAGGED AND FREE TO ROAM

PRETORIA: Oscar Pistorius, who murdered his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day 2013, was granted bail yesterday and has the freedom of South Africa's capital Pretoria as he waits to appeal his conviction in April.

The Paralympic champion, nicknamed "Blade Runner" because of the prosthetic legs he uses to race, was granted bail of 10,000 rand (\$686), after spending the last two months under house arrest at his uncle's home in a wealthy Pretoria suburb.

Pistorius had been meant to serve

the rest of a five-year sentence there but the Supreme Court upgraded the 29-year-old's conviction to murder from culpable homicide last week. He will appear in court on April 18 to give an update on his appeal at the constitutional court.

He faces a minimum 15-year sentence for shooting Steenkamp in a case that has fascinated and divided South Africa, a country beset by high levels of violent crime.

Rights groups say the white track star has received preferential treatment. On

Tuesday, South African High Court Judge Aubrey Ledwaba said Pistorius could leave the house between 7 a.m. (0500 GMT) and noon and, with permission from the authorities, travel within a radius of 20km (12 miles).

Pistorius has been ordered to hand in his passport and wear an electronic tag. When he was arrested in 2013, Pistorius had to set aside bail of 1 million rand, but yesterday he argued for a reduced amount, saying his means had diminished. "I have lost all my assets and only possess my personal assets," he said in his written bail application.

"I have no income, but will continue to seek employment ... It was difficult to obtain employment due to my conviction and correctional supervision conditions."

Pistorius lost millions of dollars in endorsements and sponsorships, after reaching the pinnacle of his fame in London 2012 when he became the first double amputee to run in the Olympics, reaching the 400-metres semi-finals.

Pistorius, who also said in his application that he had enrolled in a correspondence course for a degree at the London School of Economics, was dressed in a black suit and tie and appeared calm during the proceedings.

There was no immediate comment from Steenkamp's family. Barry Steenkamp, Reeva's father, welcomed the murder conviction last week, saying "it was a fair decision". Pistorius' lawyer Barry Roux said the appeal would cite grounds including the appeal court reconsidering a trial court finding that Pistorius felt his and Steenkamp's life were in danger when he fired the shots. — Reuters



PRETORIA: Oscar Pistorius, center, leaves a courtroom of the High Court in Pretoria, South Africa, yesterday. Judge Aubrey Ledwaba granted Pistorius bail and extended his house arrest for the murder conviction of his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp until April 18 2016. — AP

BACH RENEWS CALLS FOR FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION, DOPING

LAUSANNE: International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach called for renewed efforts yesterday to combat corruption and doping, saying recent scandals are undermining the credibility of sports and unfairly casting suspicion on millions of clean athletes.

Bach called on all sports organizations to follow rules of "good governance" to prevent the type of corruption cases that have rocked the global governing bodies of soccer and track and field.

In an op-ed piece published in several newspapers around the world, Bach did not specifically name the scandals enveloping FIFA, the IAAF and Russia's track and field program, but the references were clear and unmistakable.

His comments came as the IOC executive board discussed issues of ethics and governance on the first day of a three-day meeting in Lausanne.

"As an Olympic medalist, recent developments in some sports are particularly upsetting," said Bach, a former fencer. "What saddens me most as a former athlete is that they erode the trust in the clean athlete." "For their sake and the credibility of sports competitions, they have to be protected from doping and corrupting influences," Bach added.

Bach has repeatedly distanced the IOC from the scandal at FIFA that has led to a wave of arrests and indictments of dozens of soccer and marketing officials on racketeering charges and the suspensions of FIFA President Sepp Blatter and UEFA head Michel Platini. Blatter is a former IOC member.

"Fighting corruption means that good governance for sports organizations is essential," Bach said. The IOC went through its own major corruption scandal in the late 1990s, with 10 members ousted for receiving cash and other favors during Salt Lake City's winning bid for the 2002 Winter Games.

Worst side-effect

Bach said the IOC now has audited financial reports, term and age limits for all members, and independent audit and ethics commissions. "We have called on and we expect all sports organizations to follow this route," he said.

In a damning report released last month, a World Anti-Doping Agency panel alleged widespread, state-sponsored doping in Russia's track and field program. The IAAF responded by suspending the Russian federation, a sanction that could keep the country's track and field athletes out of next year's Olympics in Rio de Janeiro unless credible reforms are enacted in time.

Kenyan athletes are also under scrutiny after a series of drug scandals. And three senior Kenyan athletics federation officials were suspended over accusations they subverted the nation's anti-doping system and siphoned money from Nike.

Because of all the scandals, clean athletes "see the finger of suspicion pointing at them," a situation akin to "the very worst side-effect of doping," Bach said. The IAAF itself was caught up in scandal when its former president, Lamine Diack, was arrested and charged by French authorities with corruption and money-laundering, stemming from allegations that he took money to cover up positive tests in Russia. The IAAF's former anti-doping manager was also among those arrested.

Olympic leaders recently decided that drug-testing should be taken out of the hands of sports organizations to make the system more independent and credible. The IOC has asked WADA to take over testing on a global level, and for the Court of Arbitration for Sport to handle all drug sanctions.

Bach urged governments, which provide 50 percent of WADA's funding, to ensure their countries are fully compliant with global anti-doping rules and to crack down on dealers and corrupt doctors and coaches "with the full force of the law." — AP

S LANKA ROCKED BY DRUG SHOCK AHEAD OF NZ TEST

WELLINGTON: Wicketkeeper Kusal Perera's shock suspension after failing a drugs test has left Sri Lanka reeling ahead of the two-Test series against New Zealand starting in Dunedin tomorrow.

After Dhammika Prasad's series-ending back injury, it was the second damaging blow for Angelo Mathews' new look side in what was always going to be an uphill battle in testing New Zealand conditions.

Perera, 25, one of Sri Lanka's new brigade following the retirements of several stars including Kumar Sangakkara, was sent home on Monday after returning a positive result to a banned steroid from a random test during their recent series against Pakistan.

He is the second Sri Lankan international to fail a dope test following batsman Upul Tharanga's suspension for three months after testing positive dur-

ing the 2011 World Cup. The loss of the three-Test keeper follows the back injury suffered by leading fast bowler Prasad in a warm-up match against a modest New Zealand Board President's XI.

It was not the hit-out the tourists were hoping for with Dimuth Karunaratne's 93 in the first innings, backed by 63 from Udara Jayasundara and 61 from Kithuruwan Vithanage in the second, the only scores of note.

The Sri Lankan batsmen can expect no mercy when the first Test starts at Dunedin's University Oval on Thursday with New Zealand coach Mike Hesson ordering green, seaming pitches to suit his pace attack.

New Zealand are at their best playing at home, which Sri Lanka learned the hard way 12 months ago when bowling spearheads Tim Southee and Trent Boult took 22 wickets between them as the

Black Caps completed a 2-0 series whitewash.

Mathews' side return a year later, still in a rebuilding phase, to face a settled New Zealand line-up looking for a confidence boost after losing their recent away series defeat to Australia.

'PACE AND BOUNCE'

The Brendon McCullum-led New Zealanders are brimming with confidence in home conditions where they have not lost a Test nor a series since going down 0-1 when South Africa visited in 2011-12.

They are also a team that played better than the 0-2 scoreline in Australia last month would indicate.

"We are back in conditions we are familiar with and grounds we are familiar with and hopefully we can show the high standards we have shown over the

last couple of years," said Southee yesterday.

"It's typical Dunedin weather. We find it cold so I'm sure the Sri Lankans will find it even worse." In Australia, only opener Martin Guptill and off-spinner Mark Craig failed to shine but Hesson is prepared to keep faith with the out-of-form pair.

"Mark and Martin didn't perform to the level they would have liked over in Australia, but both have shown in the past what they're capable of and we're confident they'll make valuable contributions in the upcoming series," he said.

"We think it's a strong squad, but equally we've got a group of players on the fringe of selection who are ready to be called upon if necessary." Guptill aside, New Zealand are strong at the top of the order led by the impressive Kane Williamson who has averaged 89.90 in

the past 12 months.

Ross Taylor has averaged 52 in the same period including a 290 against Australia while McCullum, as he showed with his 195 in the first Test against Sri Lanka a year ago, can destroy any attack once he gets going.

With New Zealand's two leading all-rounders, Corey Anderson and Jimmy Neesham, sidelined by injury, left-arm seamer Neil Wagner, who was not required in the Australia Tests, has had his chances of a start boosted by Hesson's call for green tops.

"I think our pitches need to be green to keep pace in them with the clay we use," Hesson said. "If we go in with something that looks a bit dry then it tends to turn into a bit of a dead duck. We certainly like to keep the game moving with a wicket that's got a bit of pace and bounce." — AFP



NEW DELHI: Shashank Manohar (C), head of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), BCCI honorary secretary Anurag Thakur (R) and Indian Premier League chairman Rajeev Shukla (L) attend a press conference in New Delhi yesterday. The IPL governing council met to decide which two new teams would play in the league over the next two years. — AFP

ICC TARGETS WORLD TWENTY20 ON US SOIL

SYDNEY: Cricket chiefs hope to stage a Twenty20 World Cup in the United States within a decade as the game ramps up efforts to crack the huge American sports market, a report said yesterday. The International Cricket Council's head of global development Tim Anderson said the world governing body had ambitions to further popularise the sport in a country more used to baseball, basketball and gridiron. While still alien to many Americans, thousands travelled from the United States to this year's 50-over one-day World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, while a lucrative broadcast deal with the United States is already worth big money to ICC.

"If we continue to make good progress, we would (hope to) see a World Twenty20 in the USA in the next rights cycle," Anderson told the Sydney Daily Telegraph, with the newspa-

per pointing to 2024 as the likely date. "We think that'd be a great concept. Other sports have done that, not just football, but rugby are doing that with major events as well so we see that as a medium-term goal."

India are scheduled to hold the next Twenty20 World Cup in 2016 with Australia hosting the event in 2020. Cricket greats Shane Warne and Sachin Tendulkar recently took a number of former international stars to the US for a three-match ICC-sanctioned T20 series, attracting large crowds.

Among the throng of big-name retirees playing were Brian Lara, Courtney Walsh, Curtly Ambrose, Muttiah Muralitharan, Wasim Akram, Jacques Kallis, Ricky Ponting, Matthew Hayden, Glenn McGrath and Brad Haddin. Some of the world's biggest active players could also be padding up in the United States soon.

"In the shorter term, our full members are keen to play some big cricket in the USA. I think that'd be a fantastic way to take cricket to a new heartland for the game," said Anderson.

"There's already an ODI-accredited venue in Florida (and another potential site in Indianapolis) but, within the next 12-18 months, you could potentially have full members playing cricket (one-day internationals) in the USA." To strengthen its bid to establish itself in the American market, the ICC is also looking at trying to enter the country's college sport programme to boost participation at a grass roots level, the report said.

The ICC's full members are Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, West Indies and Zimbabwe. — AFP

NEW IPL TEAMS UNVEILED AFTER FIXING SCANDAL

NEW DELHI: Teams from the western cities of Pune and Rajkot won an auction yesterday to compete in cricket's Indian Premier League, replacing two franchises that were banned over a corruption scandal. The Twenty20 tournament's chairman Rajiv Shukla said that New Rising, a subsidiary of the Sanjeev Goenka group, bagged the Pune franchise, while Delhi-based Intex Mobsiles picked up the Rajkot team in open bidding. Shukla said the owners had not paid the usual franchise fees to tournament organisers for the right to field teams, but would instead forgo payments from a central pool of money made up of cash from TV rights and sponsorship. "This speaks to the enduring popularity of the tournament, that instead of us paying them money they are going to pay us," Shukla told reporters after the auction in New Delhi.

New Rising have agreed to pay around \$3.4 million annually for the Pune franchise for the next two years and Intex will pay around \$1.5 million for the Rajkot team.

The auction followed the decision by India's cricket board to ban the Chennai Super Kings and the Rajasthan Royals from the glitzy tournament for two years on the recommendation of a Supreme Court-appointed panel. The 2013 IPL season was mired in controversy after police launched legal proceedings against several officials from the two teams and three Rajasthan Royals' players for illegal betting and spot-fixing. Five players from each of the Chennai and Rajasthan franchises will be drafted into the new teams on December 15, while the rest will feature in an auction in Bangalore on February 6, Shukla said. Both Chennai and Rajasthan are expected to return to the IPL after their bans end following the 2017 edition.

The new buyers have ensured the IPL will remain an eight-team event for at least the next two years. "We are very excited to be associated with a popular brand like the IPL," said Intex director Keshav Bansal.

The barred Chennai Super Kings, led by India's World Cup-winning captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, are the most successful team in the IPL's history, having won the tournament in 2010 and 2011 and finishing runners-up on four occasions. Rajasthan Royals won the inaugural event in 2008 under the captaincy of Australian spin legend Shane Warne, but have failed to make the final since then.

Since its launch in 2008, the IPL has become hugely popular by paying mega salaries to big-name internationals who perform against a glamorous backdrop of dancing girls and Bollywood stars, who part-own the teams. But despite attracting big audiences, it has been dogged by scandal, including allegations of corruption, spot-fixing and crooked umpires. — AFP



TAUNTON: In this photograph taken on September 1, 2010, Pakistan cricketers Mohammad Aamer, (L) Mohammad Asif (Back C) and captain Salman Butt (R) leave the team hotel in Taunton, in south-west England. Former Pakistan captain Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif will be allowed to return to Pakistan's domestic cricket in January, three months after their spot-fixing bans ended, officials announced on Sunday. — AFP

TALKING POINTS FROM INDIA-S AFRICA TESTS

NEW DELHI: Five talking points after India won the four-Test series against South Africa:

UNPLAYABLE ASHWIN

Yet again Ravichandran Ashwin masterminded a series win for India, this time an impressive 3-0 scoreline over the world's top-ranked Test side. The prolific off-spinner's 31 wickets in seven innings at an average of 11.12 earned him a man of the series award for the fifth time in his four-year Test career. The performance lifted him to second place in the ICC Test bowling rankings.

SOUTH AFRICA FLAIL AWAY

A great cricket team is one which wins consistently both home and away and South Africa had not lost an overseas Test series since 2006. But that proud record ended with the defeat on Indian soil. Hashim Amla's Proteas still remain the top-ranked side, but the lead over new number two India is just four rating points. South Africa face England at home later this month with another defeat meaning they would be knocked off their perch.

WERE DUST BOWLS SPORTING PITCHES?

As India's spinners made South African batsmen hop and jump, a debate raged over the underprepared pitches that were laid out for the series. Two of the first three Tests ended in less than three days. India team director Ravi Shastri said there was no rule that prohibited spinning pitches, just as there was no rule against the seaming or bouncy wickets that his team encounters overseas. South Africa refused to blame the wickets, saying it was their batsmen's inability to tackle the turning ball that cost them the series.

TOUR TO FORGET FOR AMLA

It is rare for Hashim Amla to fail, especially so for an entire tour. Amla, one of the finest batsmen of his generation, averaged just 17.80 in the five-match one-day series that preceded the Tests. The right-hander fared worse in seven Test innings, making just 118 runs at an average of 16.85. Amla's lack of form was a huge surprise and disappointment given that in six previous Tests on Indian soil he had amassed 823 runs at an average of 102.87 with four centuries.

HOME COMFORTS

India made the most of their first Test series at home in two years after being battered and bruised overseas. They had lost just one of their last 17 series on home soil since 2004 and five of their last six home Test wins have come inside three days. With India due to play a majority of their series over the next three years at home, a return to number one is a real possibility. India were last the top-ranked Test team between 2009 and 2011. — AFP



Ravichandran Ashwin

CONCACAF DECIDE AGAINST SELECTING NEW PRESIDENT

MIAMI: CONCACAF, the crisis-hit governing body for soccer in North and Central America and the Caribbean, whose acting president Alfredo Hawit was arrested last week, have decided not to appoint a new interim leader.

Hawit was arrested in Zurich on Thursday and was indicted by the US Department of Justice on corruption charges as part of their investigation into world governing body FIFA. The Honduran had taken over the helm of CONCACAF following the May arrest of previous president Jeffrey Webb, also on corruption charges, in Zurich before a FIFA meeting. Webb has pleaded guilty to the charges after being extradited to

the United States.

Cayman Islander Webb himself had come to power after the downfall of long-term CONCACAF president Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago who has also been indicted and faces extradition to the United States, which he is fighting.

Miami-based CONCACAF announced on Monday that they would not select another interim president and would instead leave their executive committee (Exco) to run their affairs until a congress in Mexico City on May 12.

"The CONCACAF Exco concluded that, in light of current events, it is critical that the Confederation's next

President be determined by a public election and the scrutiny that comes with it," read the statement.

The organisation said their elected leaders would "serve in an advisory capacity" to CONCACAF's acting general secretary, Ted Howard, and director-level staff. "It is critical for the Confederation's future that the next President be elected by the full Congress, rather than statutorily appointed," Jamaica EXCO member Horace Burrell said in the statement.

"Under this leadership structure, CONCACAF can ensure there is sufficient time to publicly vet candidates while the Confederation focuses on continued implementation of strong reforms," he

added.

Burrell was banned for three months by FIFA from taking part in any football-related activities for violations of FIFA's Ethics code at a meeting of the Caribbean Football Union in 2011.

That meeting formed part of the 'cash for votes' scandal surrounding Qatari Mohammed Bin Hammam's bid to be FIFA president. Burrell has denied any wrongdoing.

The United States is a member of CONCACAF and it was a longtime American soccer official, Chuck Blazer, who became an important cooperating witness after secretly pleading guilty in 2013 to criminal charges.

Blazer was once CONCACAF general secretary and a former FIFA executive committee member. Officials from CONCACAF member countries Guatemala, Panama and Honduras were part of the latest Department of Justice indictments announced last Thursday.

Twenty seven soccer officials are under indictment in the United States over allegations they ran bribery schemes totaling as much as \$200 million in the sale of television and marketing rights for soccer tournaments and matches. In addition, 12 people and two sports marketing companies have been convicted in the investigation by US prosecutors. — Reuters

BERDYCH READY TO STEP UP

MANILA: Czech player Tomas Berdych said yesterday he is ready to break the stranglehold of the tennis elite who have taken the lion's share of the major men's tournaments in the past decade.

Only Marin Cilic, the 2014 US Open winner, and Juan Martin del Potro at the same tournament in 2009, have broken the stranglehold of the current top five men's players in the past 10 years. Berdych, ranked number six but at 30 surely nearing the final years of his pro career, fell short at the semi-finals of the 2015 Australian Open, his best Grand Slam result this year.

"I am trying to get myself in the best possible shape next year," the 33-year veteran told reporters in Manila when asked if he thought he would finally break his Grand Slam duck. "My preparation, I think, is going pretty well," the hard court specialist added.

Berdych is in Manila this week for the second leg of the International Premier Tennis League circuit, which began in Japan last week and will also have stops this month in India, Dubai and Singapore.

He reached a record-high ranking of fourth in May during a year in which he got married and also reached the fourth round at Roland Garros, Wimbledon and Flushing

Meadows.

But he went furthest in Australia before being beaten in an explosive semi-final against Andy Murray, now the world's second-ranked men's player.

The first Grand Slam of 2016 starts in Melbourne on January 18. For most of his professional career, Berdych has played in the shadow of the now third-ranked Roger Federer, fifth-ranked Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, the world's top player, who together have won 41 Grand Slam titles.

Number four Stan Wawrinka and number two Murray, who have three Grand Slam titles between them, are the other two players now ahead of Berdych in the world rankings.

Retired former world number one Carlos Moya and former world number two Goran Ivanisevic however said that on current form it would be difficult to bet against the world's top four at the Australian Open.

"There are a few guys that I believe will step up next year," Moya added, naming younger players like Milos Raonic, Nick Kyrgios and Grigor Dimitrov. However Ivanisevic said it would take the young guns "another five years or six years" to break through. "I don't see any surprises" for 2016, the Croat added. —AFP



LIVERPOOL: Everton's Gerard Deulofeu, centre, controls the ball with Crystal Palace's Yohan Cabaye and Pape N'Diaye Souare, left, during the English Premier League match at Goodison Park, Liverpool, England, Monday.— AP

LUKAKU SALVAGES 1-1 HOME DRAW WITH PALACE

LIVERPOOL: Romelu Lukaku extended his red-hot streak as the Everton striker's late equaliser rescued a 1-1 draw against Crystal Palace on Monday. Lukaku has been in superb form over the last month and Palace were unable to subdue the Belgium international, who poked home from close-range with nine minutes remaining at Goodison Park.

The former Chelsea star now has 50 goals in 100 appearances for Everton since first joining them on loan in 2013 before making what now looks a bargain £28 million (\$42 million, 38 million euros) permanent move a year later.

He has 14 goals in all competitions this season, with seven of that total coming in his last six matches. Lukaku's latest crucial intervention was well-timed, coming just five minutes after Palace defender Scott Dann had headed the visitors into the lead.

Everton moved up to ninth place in the Premier League in extending their unbeaten run to seven matches in all competitions, while Palace climbed to the lofty heights of sixth.

"I am proud but I'm a team performer, so I'm happy with the record but disappointed we didn't get the three points," Lukaku said of his goal milestone.

"After their goal we reacted well, it shows we

have great character in the team." Everton had scored 10 in their last two home league matches, but if the watching Wayne Rooney was expecting another goal spree from his former club, the Manchester United captain was destined to leave disappointed.

Instead he had to make do with appreciating the talents of the powerful Lukaku and his Everton team-mate Ross Barkley.

In a low-key first half, Lukaku was unlucky not to open the scoring when his shot beat Palace goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey but rebounded off the inside of the far post and flew across the face of goal.

Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard's legs came to the rescue after the break to deny Yannick Bolasie on the breakaway.

Then Dann's blushes were spared only by the crossbar as he almost headed Barkley's in-swinging free-kick past Hennessey into his own net.

Liverpool fan Dann thought he had completed a memorable Merseyside double, having scored the winner at Anfield a month ago, when he headed in from a corner in the 76th minute.

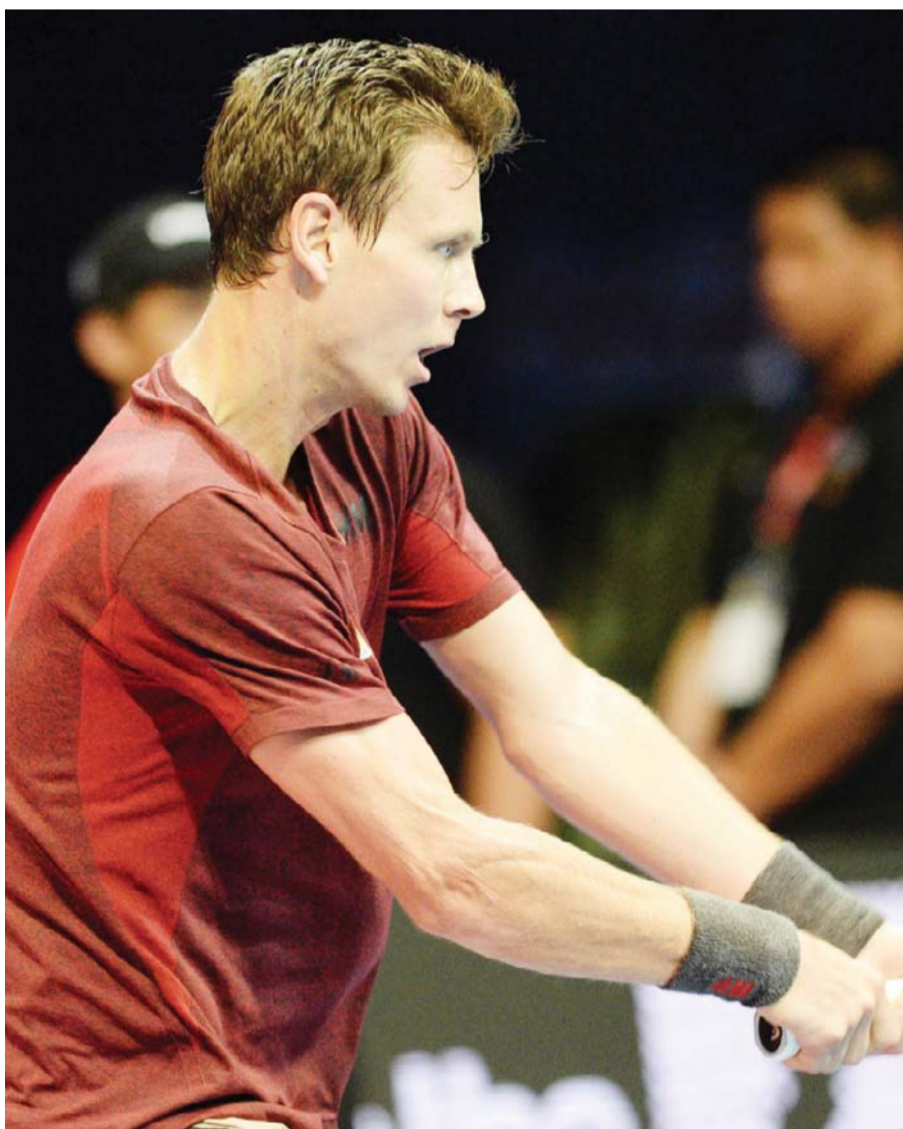
But Lukaku had the final word with nine minutes to go when he converted Gerard Deulofeu's low cross with an outstretched boot from virtually on the goalline. —AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Barcelona	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
AS Roma v Bate Borisov	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Dinamo Zagreb v Bayern Munich	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Olympiacos v Arsenal	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Dynamo Kyiv v Maccabi	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Chelsea v FC Porto	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
Valencia v Lyon	22:45
beIN SPORTS	
KAA Gent v Zenit	22:45
beIN SPORTS	



MANILA: The Czech Republic's Tomas Berdych of the UAE Royals hits a return against Australia's Nick Kyrgios of the Singapore Slammers in the men's singles event of the International Premier Tennis League (IPTL) competition in Manila on yesterday. — AFP

NEVILLE HANDED CHANCE TO BECOME INSTANT VALENCIA HERO

VALENCIA: Gary Neville will be handed a baptism of fire as Valencia boss when the Spanish side host Lyon in the Champions League today hoping to seal their place in the last 16. The match will be Neville's first as a head coach after he was surprisingly hired by business partner and Valencia owner Peter Lim until the end of the season despite his lack of managerial experience. To reach the knockout stages for the first time in three years, Valencia need to win and hope that Belgian champions Gent don't beat the already qualified Zenit St Petersburg.

"I've only known one way in football which is to expect to win every match," said Neville on his unveiling at the Mestalla. "You can't always do that but that is what you should expect, it's what I expect and what a club of this size expects and the fans too. Everything that I do, I do with the aspirations to do the absolute best, it's the way I've approached everything I've done and this will be no different. Valencia will get every ounce of enthusiasm I can give. Hopefully that can lead to success. I'm aware of the expectation and I know that if I fall below it I won't be here."

Neville watched on from the stands as Valencia salvaged a point against European champions Barcelona on Saturday in front of a vociferous home support thanks to Santi Mina's late equaliser.

Gary's brother Phil Neville was part of the caretaker coaching staff against Barca and will continue as assistant having joined the club under Neville's predecessor Nuno Espirito Santo

at the start of the season. On top of the confidence gained for taking a point from Barcelona, morale amongst the Valencia camp should be boosted by the return of a number of key players.

Former Manchester City striker Alvaro Negredo could return for the first time since early October after he was discarded by Nuno after a fall-out between the two before undergoing surgery for appendicitis last month. Shkodran Mustafi and Javi Fuego are also expected to return from injury, whilst right-back Joao Cancelo returns from suspension. Neville admitted the Valencia fans are right to have misgivings about the appointment of a coach with no previous experience and who doesn't speak Spanish, but he has already tried to win them over by opening his first full training session to the supporters.

And he could hardly have picked a better opponent to face in his first outing than a Lyon side in crisis having failed to win any of their last five matches.

The latest embarrassment for Hubert Fournier's men came with a 2-0 defeat at home to Angers in the last ever league game at the Stade Gerland on Saturday. Lyon are already eliminated from all European competitions after taking just one point from their opening five group games. Moreover, the French side are hampered by injuries to several key players. Nabil Fekir, Gueida Fofana, Aldo Kalulu and Christophe Jallet are all long-term absentees, whilst Jordan Ferri is suspended. —AFP



VALENCIA: Valencia's British coach Gary Neville (bottom L) talks to assistant Phil Neville (bottom R) during a training session at the Valencia's Sport City in Valencia yesterday, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League match Valencia CF vs Lyon. — AFP

MESSI HEADS ECLECTIC CAST AT CLUB WORLD CUP

TOKYO: Lionel Messi is the most famous of a variety of characters at the Club World Cup which includes Auckland City's part-timers, former Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari and bunny-hopping Congolese goalkeeper Robert Kidiaba.

Messi's Barcelona are runaway favourites to win the somewhat quirky tournament which, as much as anything, serves as reminder of the chasm which separates club football in Europe from the rest of the world.

The Catalans head a field which also includes South American champions River Plate, CONCACAF's America, African champions TP Mazembe, Scolari's Guangzhou Evergrande, the champions of Asia, and Oceania's Auckland City.

Sanfrecce Hiroshima, who qualified as champions of host nation Japan, complete the lineup. The tournament, successor to the sometimes volatile

games in the Intercontinental Cup, is largely unloved and ignored in Europe, yet regarded as the pinnacle for teams in other parts of the world.

South American sides, in particular, spend months preparing and are invariably followed by thousands of fans who travel halfway around the world. "My feeling is that even though they're finals, the European teams feel that they're going to end up winning," said River Plate midfielder Lucho Gonzalez.

"When they start out feeling that relaxed they often end up having a tougher test than they expected. For us, though, these kinds of games are like touching the sky."

MODERN FOOTBALL

The dynamics of modern football means that the top South American players will be playing against, rather than for, their region's representatives. While European champions Barcelona

will be fielding Brazilian Neymar, Uruguayan Luis Suarez and Argentine Messi in a dream strikeforce, River Plate will have to make do with mainly journeymen professionals.

River Plate's team is fairly typical of South American club football where, for many players, a career in Russia, Ukraine, the Middle East or Australia can be preferable to staying in the ramshackle domestic game.

River have three types of players in their squad - youngsters still hoping to move abroad, veterans who have returned home to play out their careers and those who are not good enough to make the move.

Their nickname, the "Millionaires", is especially ironic given that their entire squad is worth less than Neymar or Messi alone. Despite this, River, who have enjoyed a stunning revival under former Argentina midfielder Marcelo Gallardo, are still seen as the main chal-

lengers to Barcelona.

Sanfrecce Hiroshima and Auckland City, a team largely made-up of part-time professionals who last year reached the semi-finals and took South American champions San Lorenzo to extra-time, kick-off the tournament on Thursday.

The winners will progress to the quarter-finals of which there are two where they will face TP Mazembe in Osaka on Sunday with River Plate awaiting in the semi-finals.

BOUNCING KIDIABA

Mazembe, from Democratic Republic of Congo, became the first African team to reach the final in 2010 when they stunned Brazil's Internacional.

Their most easily identifiable player is Kidiaba, who celebrates goals by bouncing around his goalmouth on his backside. In the other quarter-final, also on Sunday, America face Guangzhou where

Scolari is attempting to revive a career which has been blighted by Brazil's 7-1 defeat by Germany at the World Cup on home soil last year.

The winners of that match meet Barcelona in the semi-final. Scolari, an old hand in knockout games, would like nothing more than a chance to try and knock the European champions out of their stride with some of his well-documented spoiling tactics.

Winning the Asian Champions League has already helped Scolari put his awful 2014 behind him. "I'd like to summarise my answer in one sentence: the winners are those who will not give up," the man known as Big Phil said after Guangzhou beat Al Ahli over two legs to win the Asian trophy.

"My next target is the Club World Cup, and why not? Because I have such a great team, great players and a great club and so, of course, we can realise that dream." —Reuters

UTD'S VAN GAAL NEEDS TIME TO PROVE HIS WORTH: SCHMEICHEL

BELGRADE: Manchester United manager Louis Van Gaal needs to be given more time so that the club can reap the rewards of allowing him to develop his own ideas, former United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel said yesterday.

Speaking at a news conference in Belgrade, Schmeichel defended Van Gaal's style, which has been criticised by many fans and pundits as boring.

"When we picked someone like Louis Van Gaal, who has a very big ego and personality, we also picked his way of playing football," said the popular Dane, who won five Premier League titles, three FA Cups and the 1999 Champions League with United.

"It is clear that for a certain period of time, while he is rebuilding the team, we have to accept playing in a certain way which perhaps isn't the Manchester United way. The objective of Van Gaal's first season in charge was to get back into the Champions League and he achieved that. This season, the goal was to do better and the team are doing better.

"Although the fans keep asking the team to attack, attack, attack, they understand that they need to give Van Gaal time." Schmeichel was speaking at an event to mark the second anniversary of United's partnership with Eurobank Serbia ahead of United's crunch Champions League game against German side VfL Wolfsburg yesterday.

"Not being in the Champions League last season was very hurtful, as it's a massive incentive for this club to always be among the best in the world," he said.

United, who are fourth in the Premier League, three points behind surprise leaders Leicester City, missed out on Europe's premier club competition last

term after finishing seventh in 2014 under David Moyes.

Still cutting the imposing figure that bossed the penalty area during his 1991-1999 spell at United, the 52-year old pointed to United's dramatic 2-1 win over Bayern Munich in the 1999 Champions League final as an example of their character.

ASTONISHING TWIST

United were 1-0 down heading into stoppage time and scored two goals in 90 seconds, producing arguably the most astonishing ever twist to a European final.

"We knew we had three minutes to change the game, we threw caution to the wind and that was the way we played football with our backs against the wall," Schmeichel said.

"We got results in many of those games and after beating Bayern, it took us a week to realise the magnitude of our achievement."

Schmeichel emphasised the enormity of the task United faced when Alex Ferguson, who steered the club to 13 league titles, five FA Cups and two Champions League trophies, retired in 2013 after 27 years as manager.

"Ferguson's interaction with individuals was his priority. He made it his mission to understand each and every person he worked with, whether they were players or staff," he said.

"He always knew what buttons to push to get the maximum out of every individual. Also, he always understood the big picture. During his 27 years in charge, the world kept changing and while he was part of the reason world football had changed, he had the unique ability to adapt to all changes." — Reuters



LONDON: Chelsea's John Terry, center, chats with goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois during a training session at Cobham training ground, London, yesterday. —AP

CHELSEA'S EURO FATE HANGS IN BALANCE

LONDON: Jose Mourinho faces a decisive moment in his fight to save his job as the beleaguered Chelsea manager bids to avoid a catastrophic exit from the Champions League against Porto yesterday.

Mourinho is on the brink of being sacked by Blues owner Roman Abramovich after Saturday's stunning 1-0 home defeat against lowly Bournemouth left the crisis-torn Premier League champions languishing just two points above the relegation zone.

Mourinho was given a public vote of confidence by Chelsea at the start of October, but Abramovich's patience is wearing thin as the club's worst start to a season in his 12-year ownership shows no signs of improving.

Although Mourinho has continued to insist he retains the support of his players amid rumours of a dressing room mutiny against his hard-line style, the limp manner of their surrender against Bournemouth suggested otherwise.

Abramovich held talks with his closest Chelsea aides, Marina Granovskaia and Michael Emenalo, over the weekend and it is reported the Russian told Mourinho he must lead the team into the last 16 of the Champions League to avoid the axe.

Chelsea need only a draw at Stamford Bridge in their final Group G fixture to be certain of a place in the knockout stages, but what in previ-

ous years would have been a forgone conclusion for a team managed by Mourinho now looks a decidedly more taxing task.

Once virtually unbeatable at the Bridge under Mourinho, Chelsea have lost four times on home turf this season and Porto, who need a win to be sure of progressing, are unlikely to prove a pushover after beating the west Londoners in Portugal earlier this season. Faced with by far the worst run of his glittering managerial career, Mourinho has responded by ramping up his demands and he called the players in for extra training on Sunday, a move said to have been met with a far from enthusiastic response.

FINAL BLOW

It would be the ultimate irony if the Portuguese club where Mourinho made his name by winning the 2004 Champions League deliver the final blow that ends his second spell with Chelsea.

And after so many unexpected setbacks this season, Mourinho admits he can take nothing for granted against Porto. "It's a knockout game," Mourinho told Chelsea TV. "It's a group phase where normally you still play for points."

"But the reality is that it's a knockout. Chelsea or Porto, one will be out. For sure, a big game." Dynamo Kiev are two points behind Chelsea and Porto and if the Ukrainian club fail to beat

Maccabi Tel Aviv, Mourinho's men would qualify even if they lose to Porto.

But Mourinho would rather not reach the last 16 through the backdoor. To convince Abramovich he is worth persevering with, he knows Chelsea need to recapture the swash-buckling form that helped them open up such a big lead in the Premier League last season.

And to do that, he somehow has to drag an improvement from a group of forwards, most notably Diego Costa and Oscar, playing as if they had only just been introduced to each other. "We didn't score against Stoke, we didn't against Tottenham. We scored one goal to win the game against Norwich. It's difficult for us to score goals," Mourinho said.

"Scoring goals is a lot about individuals. The creation is collective, but the finishing is something very individual and at this moment we're not having that." Porto warmed up for their trip with a 2-1 win over Pacos Ferreira on Saturday that extended their unbeaten run in the Portuguese league to 12 matches.

Mourinho, perhaps already fearing the fates are aligning against him, had a downbeat take on that result as well. "The percentage of victories (for big clubs in Portugal) is so high that you can think about other competitions," he said. "In England our situation is so bad we have just to focus on the Premier League." —AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (L) and his teammate Bayern Munich's Spanish midfielder Thiago Alcantara (R) joke during a training session on the eve of the UEFA Champions League Group F football match between Bayern Munich and Dinamo Zagreb in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

UEFA Champions League tables

PARIS: UEFA Champions League tables for groups E-H ahead of Wednesday's final round of group matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Group E								
Barcelona	5	4	1	0	14	3	13	—qualified
Roma	5	1	2	2	11	16	5	
Bayer Leverkusen	5	1	2	2	12	11	5	
BATE Borisov	5	1	1	3	5	12	4	

Group F								
Bayern Munich	5	4	0	1	17	3	12	—qualified
Olympiakos	5	3	0	2	6	10	9	
Arsenal	5	2	0	3	9	10	6	
Dinamo Zagreb	5	1	0	4	3	12	3	

Group G								
Chelsea	5	3	1	1	11	3	10	
Porto	5	3	1	1	9	6	10	
Dynamo Kiev	5	2	2	1	7	4	8	
Maccabi Tel Aviv	5	0	0	5	1	15	0	

Group H								
Zenit St. Petersburg	5	5	0	0	12	4	15	—qualified
Gent	5	2	1	2	6	6	7	
Valencia	5	2	0	3	5	7	6	
Lyon	5	0	1	4	3	9	1	

Note: Top two in each group qualify for last 16, team in third goes into draw for Europa League last 32.

DOUBLE 'D' WILL BE KEY FOR ROMA

MILAN: Embattled Roma's "desire and determination" will be key when they host BATE Borisov in a Champions League clash today in a tight Group E, according Radja Nainggolan. Roma host the Belarusian champions looking to book their ticket for the knockout phase for the first time since being outclassed 6-2 on aggregate by Shakhtar Donetsk in 2011.

Yet, a fortnight after a 6-1 drubbing by champions Barcelona left them second in Group E on the same number of points as third-placed Bayer Leverkusen, with BATE only a point further behind, Roma remain stuck in crisis mode.

Roma's Nou Camp calamity was followed by a 2-0 home defeat to Atalanta and Rudi Garcia's men dropped more points in a 1-1 draw away to Torino on Saturday. Although still in title contention at five points behind Inter Milan, the pressure is building on Roma's French coach Garcia to come good having seen his side slip several times in this group campaign.

But Belgian international Nainggolan, one of Roma's key midfield components, has given Garcia his backing. "We have plenty of belief, we're a strong group and we're just waiting to get back to winning ways," Nainggolan said after

Saturday's draw in Turin. "On Saturday) we showed lots of desire and that's the first thing you need to get results. Good football comes after that."

"We have a Champions League match to prepare for on Wednesday, which will be tough, just as today's game was. "We have to approach it with the same desire and determination. We know we have to win to go through, so we'll knuckle down and try to secure the points against BATE."

A win would be the first of any kind for Roma since they beat Lazio 2-0 in the city derby at the beginning of last month, but the fact Group E is wide open won't make the task any easier—all three clubs sitting behind Barcelona can still snatch the second remaining spot.

KNOCKOUT STAGE

While Roma would also qualify if they draw and Leverkusen fail to beat Barcelona, a Leverkusen win coupled with a Roma draw or defeat would see the Bundesliga side advance. If BATE beat Roma for the second time in this campaign and Leverkusen do not win in Germany, the Belarusians will advance to the knockout

stage for the first time. Having shipped 18 goals in 15 league games and a table-topping 16 in Group E, Roma's chances would perk up with an overall improvement in their defensive game.

But in the high-octane atmosphere of a Champions League decider, who scores first could be key. The spotlight is firmly on Roma striker Edin Dzeko, although the Bosnian is likely to be without at least one of his two wingers. Ivory Coast winger Gervinho returned from a thigh muscle problem on Saturday only to limp off 26 minutes into the game and, having trained apart from the squad on Monday, looks to be unavailable. In the absence of Gervinho and Mohamed Salah, Roma remain winless but hopes are growing the Egyptian could yet win his late fitness battle. Salah on Monday completed his first training session since suffering ligament damage in the 2-0 derby win over Lazio but at this stage the pacy winger remains doubtful.

Roma's failure to reach the last 16 for the second consecutive year would cost them millions, a threat the club's American president James Pallotta seemed to underline with a curt response on Saturday: "I'm not satisfied." —AFP

Sports

Omar Abdulrahman to play in Kuwaiti all-star team

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Chelsea's Euro fate hangs in balance

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ICC TARGETS WORLD TWENTY20 ON US SOIL

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LANDOVER: Dallas Cowboys free safety J.J. Wilcox (27) pulls down Washington Redskins running back Chris Thompson (25) during the second half of an NFL football game in Landover, Md., Monday. — AP

COWBOYS TOP REDSKINS 19-16 ON BAILEY'S GOAL

LANDOVER: Sure was ugly, devoid of any style points or many scoreboard points until the final 1 1/2 minutes. Perhaps fittingly, a fumbled punt return by Washington's DeSean Jackson deep in his own territory led to Dallas' only touchdown.

Dez Bryant's sideline pouting aside, the receiver and the Cowboys will gladly accept the victory, because it means they're somehow still in the thick of the playoff chase in the woeful NFC East. With a wild finish capping an otherwise dull game filled with turnovers, punts and penalties, the Cowboys edged the Redskins 19-16 on Dan Bailey's 54-yard field goal with 9 seconds left Monday night.

After combining to score 18 points in the first 58 1/2 minutes, the teams combined for 17 the frenzied rest of the way. Dallas scored the game's first TD with 74 seconds remaining to lead 16-9 after recovering Jackson's miscue on an ill-advised return, Washington tied it on Jackson's 28-yard TD catch, and then Bailey hit the go-ahead kick.

The last-place Cowboys (4-8) won for the first time this season without Tony Romo at quarterback, and made quite a jumble of their division. They are only one game behind the

Redskins, New York Giants and Philadelphia Eagles, who are all 5-7.

Washington had won its past five home games, but this loss continued a pattern: The Redskins have not won in consecutive weeks all season. With the score knotted at 9-9, Jackson - who hadn't been used as a punt returner this season until last week - caught the kick at his 16, began running up the field and got past the 20, before reversing course and heading backward all the way to the 1. As he again tried to move forward, Jackson was surrounded and the ball popped out, recovered by punter Chris Jones at the 15 with 86 seconds remaining.

PERFECT PASS

Dallas needed only two plays to cash in, jumping in front on Darren McFadden's 6-yard touchdown run. A 41-yard kickoff return plus a 15-yard facemask penalty on J.J. Wilcox set the Redskins up at Dallas' 43, and four plays later, Jackson hauled in a perfect pass from Kirk Cousins in the back corner of the end zone to pull even with 44 seconds to go.

That left enough time for Matt Cassel - previously 0-4 as a starter in place of the injured

NFL result/standings

Dallas 19, Washington 16.

American Football Conference								National Football Conference								
AFC East								NFC East								
W	L	T	OTL	PF	PA	PCT		W	L	T	OTL	PF	PA	PCT		
New England	10	2	0	1	375	247	.833	Washington	5	7	0	1	257	286	.417	
NY Jets	7	5	0	0	295	248	.583	Philadelphia	5	7	0	0	278	302	.417	
Buffalo	6	6	0	0	296	278	.500	NY Giants	5	7	0	1	307	296	.417	
Miami	5	7	0	0	240	300	.417	Dallas	4	8	0	2	223	277	.333	
AFC North								NFC North								
Cincinnati	10	2	0	0	334	196	.833	Green Bay	8	4	0	0	289	238	.667	
Pittsburgh	7	5	0	1	311	240	.583	Minnesota	8	4	0	0	238	232	.667	
Baltimore	4	8	0	1	272	291	.333	Chicago	5	7	0	2	251	290	.417	
Cleveland	2	10	0	1	216	347	.167	Detroit	4	8	0	0	253	315	.333	
AFC South								NFC South								
Indianapolis	6	6	0	1	259	305	.500	Carolina	12	0	0	0	373	243	1.000	
Houston	6	6	0	0	253	264	.500	Tampa Bay	6	6	0	0	271	298	.500	
Jacksonville	4	8	0	1	275	341	.333	Atlanta	6	6	0	1	279	257	.500	
Tennessee	3	9	0	0	245	296	.250	New Orleans	4	8	0	1	299	380	.333	
AFC West								NFC West								
Denver	10	2	0	0	269	210	.833	Arizona	10	2	0	0	382	232	.833	
Kansas City	7	5	0	0	321	240	.583	Seattle	7	5	0	2	305	229	.583	
Oakland	5	7	0	0	284	314	.417	St. Louis	4	8	0	1	189	257	.333	
San Diego	3	9	0	0	247	324	.250	San Francisco	4	8	0	0	178	291	.333	

Romo this season - to take Dallas 20 yards in five plays for Bailey's fourth field goal of the evening. Washington's Dustin Hopkins made three kicks but missed one from 43 yards with about 7 1/2 minutes remaining.

The teams combined for 16 penalties for 144 yards, along with 10 punts, seven in the first quarter alone. Dallas lost three fumbles, including two by McFadden in his team's own territory, but that trio of turnovers led to only three points for Washington.

Both QBs were mediocre, with Cousins going 22 for 31 for 219 yards, the one TD and zero interceptions, marking the first time Washington has lost this season when he avoided throwing a pick. Cassel finished 16 for 29 for 222 yards, with several of his throws landing nowhere near teammates.

Bryant was yelling and cursing and generally carrying on along the Cowboys' sideline in the first half, apparently upset about not being thrown the ball. By halftime, he had zero catches and had been targeted twice.

He finished with three receptions for 62 yards, including a diving 42-yard grab that led to - what else? - a field goal. — AP

LEICESTER CAN WIN TITLE IF THEY BOOST SQUAD

LONDON: Leicester City could win the Premier League this season if the club's owners back their manager with funds in the January transfer window, former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has said.

The Foxes are two points clear of Arsenal at the top of the division with more than a third of the season gone, and Ferguson urged the management to add to their "limited" squad. "What is the manager Claudio Ranieri saying to the owners? Because if I were him I'd want an investment in January because this is a big opportunity," Ferguson told the Daily Telegraph. "They (Leicester) could win the league the way they are playing at the moment and they have goals in their team. At the moment, he (Ranieri) can pick the same team because he has a limited squad and is doing very well.

"But if he wants to win the league, I think he should add to it. And I think there may be a great chance." The Foxes have a tough run of fixtures against Chelsea, Everton, Liverpool and Manchester City before the transfer window opens, and Ferguson questioned whether the squad has the depth to be fighting for the title at the end of the season.

"For a small club historically like Leicester City, they have a challenge. How far can they go with this present squad, can they last the whole season?" he said.

"This is a team with fantastic vitality, speed, energy... but, the question is, how long will it last? Have they the resources to continue throughout the season?" — Reuters



LAUSANNE: UEFA president and FIFA vice president Michel Platini speaks to the press as he arrives at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) to appeal against a 90-day suspension in Lausanne yesterday. The appeal is part of a new campaign by Platini to get back into the election for a new FIFA leader on February 26. — AFP

PLATINI PLEDGES TO TELL 'ONLY THE TRUTH'

LAUSANNE: Suspended UEFA President Michel Platini arrived at the Court of Arbitration for Sport yesterday pledging to "tell the truth, only the truth" as he appeals against a 90-day ban from FIFA.

Platini hopes sport's highest court will freeze the ban by Friday, which would allow the Frenchman to resume campaigning for the FIFA presidency ahead of the Feb. 26 election. It would also allow him to attend the 2016 European Championship draw on Saturday in Paris. The CAS panel judging Platini's appeal must decide whether a ban from duty pending a full ethics investigation was an excessive sanction. Platini was the clear favorite to succeed Sepp Blatter as FIFA president until they were quizzed by Swiss authorities on Sept. 25 over an alleged "disloyal payment" of \$2 million to the Frenchman from FIFA in 2011.

"I want to tell (the judges) more than what I told you (the media)," Platini said, smiling for reporters as he entered the court building. Platini and Blatter face possible life bans when they appear before the FIFA ethics committee at the governing body's headquarters in Zurich next week.

The case centers on the payment and timing of the \$2 million that Blatter approved should be paid to Platini in 2011 as backdated salary. Platini was a presidential adviser to Blatter from 1998-2002. Both deny

wrongdoing, but acknowledge there was only a verbal agreement which they say is valid under Swiss law. Still, FIFA was not required to pay Platini when more than five years elapsed since the work was completed. The timing of the payment, which was not disclosed to the FIFA and UEFA executive committees, also raised suspicion. It came as Blatter was preparing for a presidential election challenge by Mohamed bin Hammam of Qatar. During the campaign, Bin Hammam acknowledged he was ready to discuss a power-sharing deal with Platini as a condition of securing European votes.

Platini-led UEFA urged its voting members weeks before the June 2011 election to side with Blatter, who was elected unopposed when Bin Hammam was implicated in a bribery scandal.

Platini could return to CAS in January if the FIFA ethics committee sanctions him for offenses ranging from bribery and conflicts of interest to breaching confidentiality rules.

Platini has been discussing details of the case in media interviews and appeared to continue some UEFA duties. The ethics panel has said it hopes to return verdicts on Platini and Blatter before Christmas. Blatter has not yet appealed his provisional ban at CAS. — AP

Kuwait Times BUSINESS

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Northern Gulf launches all-new Tuscan, Creta

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DONGES: A tanker truck arriving to refill at the French oil giant Total refinery of Donges, western France, to supply gas to stations in the region. Oil prices slid yesterday, approaching seven-year low points on a global supply glut and weak demand growth. — AFP

BRITISH MANUFACTURING OUTPUT FALLS

CHINA'S IMPORTS, EXPORTS DROP IN NOVEMBER

LONDON: British manufacturing output fell unexpectedly in October, denting hopes the sector might soon help to drive the country's economy towards a more balanced recovery, data showed yesterday. Meanwhile, Chinese imports and exports both fell in November, official data showed yesterday, the latest poor figures from the world's second-largest economy.

The British manufacturing output fell 0.4 percent on the month in October, against expectations for it to stagnate following a 0.9 percent surge in September, the Office for National Statistics said yesterday. Britain had the fastest-growing advanced economy in the world last year and is likely to be at the head of the pack again this year. But it has relied heavily on domestically focused services for growth, frustrating hopes for a better-balanced recovery.

Manufacturing has so far failed to contribute positively to economic growth this year, impeded by a slowing global economy. Yesterday's figures do little to counter some surveys that have shown the sector could be heading for a steeper downturn. Improved North Sea oil and gas extraction helped wider industrial production edge up in October. Economists said this kept the economy on track for quarterly growth of around 0.6 percent in the last months of the year, up slightly from the third quarter. But some expressed reservations about the balance of the upturn. "While we expect the overall economic recovery to pick up the pace again in coming quarters, a sustained rebalancing towards production and exports still seems a distant prospect," Ruth Miller, economist at Capital Economics, said.

An industry survey published on Monday pointed to a weaker outlook for British manufacturing next year, with output and new orders falling to levels not seen since 2009. While markets showed little reaction to the data, sterling sank back below \$1.50

yesterday, hurt by a bearish round of forecasts for the pound from several big banks.

Compared with October 2014, manufacturing output was 0.1 percent lower, against expectations for a 0.1 percent rise. Industrial output increased 0.1 percent on the month as expected, while on the year it was up 1.7 percent, beating a Reuters poll forecast for a 1.2 percent upswing.

But industrial production is still almost 9 percent below its pre-downturn peak in early 2008. Manufacturing output is around 6.1 percent below its peak. The ONS said other manufacturing and repair - notably the repair of aircraft - was the biggest downward driver on industrial production in October.

China exports data

China's exports sank 6.8 percent year-on-year to \$197.2 billion in November, Customs said - a marginal improvement on the previous month, but worse than the five percent drop forecast in a Bloomberg poll of economists. Overseas shipments have been declining every month this year except for February, when the figures were skewed by the Chinese New Year. Imports tumbled 8.7 percent to \$143.1 billion - the 13th straight month of declines, but narrowing significantly from an 18.8 percent slump in October. The figure was better than the 11.9 percent drop estimated in the Bloomberg survey. China is a key driver of global growth and its shipments of finished goods, along with its demand for the resources to manufacture them, affect nations across the world.

Analysts attributed the slower fall to Beijing's monetary easing policies and the slump in global commodity prices late last year, which lowered the basis for comparison. "Although disappointing exports data suggest that foreign demand remains subdued, a recovery in imports hints at a policy-dri-



RIZHAO: Containers being unloaded from a cargo ship at a port in Rizhao, east China's Shandong province. Chinese imports and exports both fell again in November, Customs said, the latest ambivalent figures from the world's second-largest economy. — AFP

ven pick-up in domestic demand," wrote Julian Evans-Pritchard with research firm Capital Economics in a note.

The government has turned to monetary loosening to stimulate growth, cutting interest rates six times since November last year. Louis Kuijs, an analyst with Oxford Economics, said the import figures indicated "a stabilization of domestic demand momentum", while the exports data showed the competitiveness of Chinese manufacturers had been undermined by rivals' currencies such as the euro and yen depreciating against the dollar.

"China's November export data suggest that

ened to 7.3 percent last year, the slowest pace since 1990, as traditional drivers such as exports and investment increasingly run out of steam.

Analysts and Chinese politicians say the country needs to rebalance away from reliance on exports and fixed-asset investment towards a consumer-driven economy.

But state intervention struggled to halt a stock market rout this summer, increasing doubts over policymakers' ability to transition to a more market-based economy. The trade surplus stood at \$54.1 billion in November, down from \$61.6 billion recorded in October, according to official figures. Foreign exchange reserves, the world's biggest, declined to \$3.44 trillion last month, their lowest level in nearly three years, official data showed Monday, with analysts blaming "record" capital outflow on expectations the yuan, or Renminbi (RMB), will depreciate.

But ANZ economists said yesterday the sizeable monthly trade surpluses should "help offset capital outflows and fend off depreciation pressure on the RMB." However the yuan's exchange rate was "bound to become more volatile going forward" as China continues loosening its currency regime, they said in a note. The International Monetary Fund decided last week to include the yuan in its elite reserve currency basket, after a long campaign by Beijing. China has pledged to move towards making the yuan fully convertible by 2020, without setting an absolute target.

The gloomy trade figures sent Chinese stocks down yesterday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closing down 1.89 percent at 3,470.07. The government is scheduled to release other key economic indicators for November later this week, including inflation on Wednesday and fixed-asset investment and industrial output at the weekend. — Agencies

KUWAIT RANKS FIRST IN ATTRACTING GCC BANKS

RIYADH: Kuwait ranked first in attracting branches of Gulf commercial banks with eight branches, followed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with six branches each, three branches in Bahrain and two branches in Oman and Qatar. The General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council said in a report released yesterday on the occasion of the 36th GCC summit due here today and tomorrow that the last 10 years have seen an increase in the field of taking advantage of the GCC's decision to allow commercial banks to open branches in other Member States where the number rose from 14 branches in 2005 to 27 branches in 2014.

The report said the commercial banks of the United Arab Emirates are the most prevalent in the other GCC countries, with eight branches, followed by Bahrain with six, Qatar and Kuwait with four branches each in other GCC countries.

It pointed to the rising number of benefi-

aries of the decisions taken by the Supreme Council since 1982 which allowed citizens of member countries to operate a number of economic activities in other GCC countries. The report said that the council also allowed GCC citizens to operate retail and wholesale trades in all Member States and permitted operation of all economic activities and professions with the exception of 17 which gradually were reduced to four including Hajj and Umrah services, foreign labor recruitment offices, establishment of newspapers, magazines, printing, publishing and commercial agencies.

Joint stock firms

The General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council said yesterday that the number of permitted companies for trading by the citizens of the GCC countries amounted to 650 joint-stock companies with a capital of up to \$245 billion, noting that the number

of Shareholders of GCC citizens in these companies amounted to 516,000 in 2014. The Secretariat said in a report that the United Arab Emirates ranked first in attracting 278,185 shareholders of GCC citizens, or 54 percent of the total number of shareholders in the GCC stock markets.

It added that Qatar came in second place with 167,654, followed by Oman which ranked third with 35,679, then Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait with 27, 618, 5,149 and 1,488 respectively.

It noted that the proportion of joint-stock companies allowed for trading by the GCC nationals in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait reached 100 percent and reached 95 percent in Oman and 74 percent in the United Arab Emirates. The GCC decided in December 1988 to allow GCC citizens to own shares of joint stock companies and transfer their ownership in accordance with the rules attached to the decision. — KUNA

OIL PRICE HITS FRESH POST 2009 LOWS AS GLUT GROWS

LONDON: Oil prices resumed their slide yesterday, with US crude falling below \$37 per barrel and Brent below \$40 for the first time since early 2009, amid fears the world was running out of storage capacity as a global glut intensifies. The global oversupply is being compounded by OPEC's failure last week to agree a production ceiling, with members Iran and Iraq promising to ramp up output and exports next year.

Benchmark Brent and WTI futures both fell more than 6 percent on Monday, and yesterday they hit fresh lows last seen during the credit crunch of 2008/09. Brent futures were down 23 cents at \$40.50 a barrel by 1450 GMT. US crude was trading at \$37.44 a barrel, down 11 cents from its last settlement. "The lower levels are largely the result of a renewed focus on fundamentals now that the bulls' hope for

an OPEC cut is off the table," JBC Energy said in a note. The failure to agree production levels means OPEC core members are readying for new battles for share in a market already heavily oversupplied and consuming almost 2 million barrels per day less than it is producing.

"OPEC has lost control of the oil market and unless something fundamental changes that causes demand to overtake the oversupply in the market, the path of least resistance is the 2008 lows of \$35-\$38," said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets.

If Brent falls below \$36 per barrel, it would reach levels last seen in 2004 at the start of the so-called commodities super cycle. "We are only around \$5 away and the oil price has moved almost \$5 in the last two days. It might seem miles away, but it's not really," said Tamas Varga, analyst at PVM Oil Associates. — Reuters



ONTIME, TRINKETS AND FOSIL AWARD STAFF FOR EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE

TEAMS' EFFORTS AND DILIGENCE RECOGNIZED AT A QUARTERLY CEREMONY



KUWAIT: Otime, Trinkets and Fossil recently conducted the quarterly Outstanding Performers event where they recognized talent and applauded the extraordinary performance of staff members across branches, for the third quarter of 2015. The event was held on November 30th 2015, at the Salwa Al-Sabah Ballroom in Salmiya.

The staff members were given awards across categories like the highest transaction value, highest average UPT, highest percentage of selling units per store and highest individual budget achieved.

Commenting on the event, Mohamed Y Al-Sager, Managing Partner, Alyasra Fashion said, "We have great confidence in the talent and capabilities of our diverse teams. They have been

exemplary team players, strong, efficient and rearing to take up new challenges in 2016. I would like to thank every member of our staff for their continuous efforts and commitment. They are the true reason behind our success."

The event that started with the senior management addressing the august gathering, was followed by welcoming of new joiners, the awarding ceremony, a trivia quiz and raffle draw contest. In line with business' approach towards rewards and recognition, the event left the teams feeling appreciated, entertained and motivated to perform and achieve their true potential. As a group that understands and immensely values team effort, Otime, Trinkets and Fossil look forward to conquering greater heights in the year 2016.

AS IRON ORE BOOM ENDS, AUSTRALIA'S PILBARA TARGETS TOURISTS, FARMERS

PORT HEDLAND, Australia: Aqua farms growing super foods could soon materialize in the rust-red dust of the Australian outback, alongside wheat fields, haystacks and cattle herds, as tumbling iron prices drive the minerals-rich Pilbara region to transform itself.

On a small patch of desert 250 km (155 miles) south of the Pilbara's Port Hedland, InterClinical Laboratories has started Plankton Farms to propagate a type of micro-algae called *Dunaliella salina*, renowned for its antioxidant properties. Work on the algae farms is in its infancy but the green micro-algae, which grows naturally in Australian salt lakes, could one day benefit nutrient-deficient people worldwide, according to InterClinical's founder Ian Tracton.

"We were looking for a place with lots of sunny, cloudless, hot days and that's what the Pilbara offers," Tracton said. "We're the only flower in the area, surrounded by the resources industry just about everywhere you look."

A further 200 kms (125 miles) inland, agronomists are conducting trials using water from mines to grow crops for use as biofuels and cattle feed, sometimes in partnership with the mining companies.

"The strong sentiment is let's not be a mining town, but a town with a mine," said Terry Hill, acting chief of the Pilbara Development Commission, which has A\$1.7 billion (\$1.25 billion) to help transform the Pilbara.

But the transformation will be slow and not generate the staggering economic prosperity seen during the mining boom years when steel mills paid upwards of \$200 a tonne for iron ore. The price today is closer to \$40. The biggest obstacles are the environment and isolation. A part of the Pilbara holds the world record for a heatwave, recording 160 days in a row over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius) in the summer of 1923-1924, according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.

Agriculture, aquaculture and tourism top the list of new industries, despite the harsh conditions and lack of even basic amenities outside the few towns peppering this northwestern corner of Australia, which is three times the size of England.

INDUSTRIAL TOURISM

The number of tourists lining up to see the world's longest trains dump iron ore into ships bound for China, or view rollercoaster-like mine conveyor belts and three-storey high truck tyres, is not large.

But promoters have tagged it "industrial vacationing" and hope it will put the Pilbara iron belt on the tourist map. "We are encouraging all different types of visitors to come to the Pilbara for the experience," said Jane Knapp, manager of the Karratha

Visitors Centre, which offers behind-the-scenes looks at ship loadings and a view of a salt processing plant.

Karratha Visitors tour costs between A\$19.95 and A\$49.95 and numbers are up from last year. Iron ore's boom-to-bust trajectory is punching a big hole in the Australian economy, and nowhere more so than in the Pilbara. The 400,000 square kms (248,000 sq miles) expanse is the sixth-biggest economy in Australia and produces 90 percent of the country's iron ore exports - worth \$40 billion last year.

This month construction finishes on Roy Hill, the last of the mines poking the landscape with giant pits, at a cost of \$10 billion and controlled by Gina Rinehart, one of the world's wealthiest women.

"We won't be seeing any more of these mega-projects coming out of the Pilbara for many years, if not decades," said Gavin Wendt, an analyst for MineLife, a sector consultancy. "The market's just not there anymore."

ASIAN DINING BOOM

Rinehart and others who made billions selling iron ore to Asia are now scooping up land alongside their mines to farm and raise livestock as an Asian "dining boom" unfolds. Mardie Station, south of Karratha, is owned by Chinese mining company Citic Pacific and runs a herd over a half-million acres. "We are determined to ensure that the Australian agricultural industry's future in China is as bright as our mining future," said Andrew Forrest, founder of Fortescue Metals, the Pilbara's biggest mining rights holder.

Forrest's pastoral land holdings in Western Australia state exceed 1 million acres. In 2014, he acquired Harvey Beef, which employs 400 people and processes more than 130,000 head of Pilbara cattle a year. Rio Tinto already irrigates 85,000 acres to grow hay using water from a mine. The company also runs 25,000 head of cattle on Pilbara land.

Pilbara politician Brendan Grylls sees the end of the mining boom, which fuelled sky high wages and home prices and caused an exodus of residents, as a chance to repopulate towns and establish new permanent communities in the isolated region.

"Rents at A\$2,000 a week weren't helpful, only miners could afford that. If you tried to do a tourism business in the last 10 years, everyone would have laughed at you," said Grylls.

The end of the mining boom has seen home values in the Pilbara fall as much as 32 percent, but also left thousands jobless. "This was a dream, but like most dreams, one day we woke up and it was over," said Thomas Reid, an immigrant from Manchester in Britain who drove a truck hauling iron ore for A\$180,000 a year before being laid off in 2012. He now delivers furniture in Perth. — Reuters

FEEL-GOOD FIGURES BELIED JAPAN'S PHANTOM RECESSION

UNEMPLOYMENT AT JUST 3.1%, A TWO-DECADE LOW

TOKYO: Even before yesterday's revised figures banished what preliminary data said was Japan's fourth recession in five years, it was an unlikely downturn, complete with high employment, heaving hotels and tinkling cash tills.

After the economy shrank in the second quarter, preliminary figures for a 0.8 percent contraction in the third quarter fitted the definition of a recession - two consecutive quarters of negative growth - but final figures for the July-September period put the economy back on the front foot with growth of 1 percent. Though exports have taken a hit from China's slowdown, and wage growth is lacklustre, the world's third-largest economy hadn't been behaving like it was on the ropes.

The labor market is near full employment, with just 3.1 percent out of work, the lowest level in two decades. Hotel occupancy rates are also high. They recently averaged 90 percent in Nagoya, the central Japanese city that carmaker Toyota calls home.

"When there's a big conference, hotel rooms become fully booked. We're seeing a construction rush of high-rise buildings with plans to build some new hotels," said Hiroyasu Naito, deputy chairman of Nagoya's chamber of commerce.

"There's a shortage of construction workers, security guards and truck drivers. In some sectors, we're seeing wages rise." For now at least, it is part-time workers who are seeing most of the benefit, both in hiring and pay. Part-time pay has jumped 3.8 percent since the Bank of Japan adopted a massive stimulus program in April 2013.

That is leading to a steady gain in household income, which is working its way into spending. Department store sales rose for the fourth straight month in October on brisk demand for jewellery and luxury goods, helping operators like Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings revise up its earnings forecasts for the year to March 2016.

Overall retail sales rose 1.8 percent in the year to October, with supermarket sales up for the seventh straight month. "I think the economy is getting better," said a smartly dressed woman waiting for a dinner partner in Tokyo's business district. "When the economy gets better, I tend to spend more."

SHORT CYCLE, LONG ROAD

And it's not just a big-city phenomenon. Izumi Co, a midsize supermarket operator in Hiroshima, western Japan, is also not feeling the pinch of recession.

"High-end products are selling well, such as the most premium 'wagyu' beef sold on our shelves," said spokesman Ikuo Goto. Capital expenditure is showing signs of life, too, with a government survey finding investment rose at the fastest pace in more than eight years in the third quarter.

Indeed, capital expenditure accounted for much of the swing in the revised third-quarter figures, flipping from a 1.3 percent preliminary drop to a 0.6 percent rise. Despite concerns over soft Chinese demand, 80 percent of firms polled by Reuters said they were sticking to their spending plans for the second half of the fiscal year.

Some analysts say Japan's economic cycle has become shorter as companies adjust inventory more quickly to fluctuations in demand, which means the economy tends to contract more frequently but the downturns are fairly shallow and short-lived.

So instead of responding to these short-term fluctuations, the government ought to take a



TOKYO: Cranes are used to load containers onto a cargo ship at a pier in Tokyo yesterday. Japan sidestepped its second recession in as many years after revised data showed that the economy actually grew last quarter. —AFP

longer view, says Hideo Kumano, chief economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "What the government really needs to do is to implement steps to strengthen Japan's potential growth," he said. But there is no quick fix for the long-term structural problem of Japan's dwindling working-age population. So when companies like Hakuho Co, which produces brushes for traditional Japanese calligraphy and for make-up,

think ahead, they aren't putting all their eggs in the Japanese basket.

For now, Hakuho's general manager Ko Takamoto says domestic sales are very strong, but the company has wider horizons for the plant it opened in May. "Our new plant is aimed at boosting production to meet overseas demand ... We see growth prospects in Asia and the Middle East," he said. — Reuters

ARABIA AVIATION AND MEDIA SUMMIT 2015 KICKS OFF IN BAHRAIN

MANAMA: The 2015 edition of Arab Aviation and Media Summit (AAMS) got underway in Manama, Bahrain, today with an official keynote address by His Excellency Engineer Kamal bin Ahmed Mohammed, Minister of Transportation and Telecommunications-Kingdom of Bahrain, to kick off the two day conference.

Attended by over 200 industry leaders and media, this year's conference covers a variety of issues, including the overall impact of aviation and tourism on Arab economies. Industry thought leaders are set to discuss the direct and indirect benefits of aviation and tourism sectors on regional economies and how the activities and the consequent benefits can be expected to grow in the future. They will also discuss the growing significance of private sector contribution and the importance of opening up the sector to increased foreign investments.

A joint initiative by leading industry organizations such as Air Arabia, Airbus, among others, Arab Aviation and Media Summit is often described as the 'voice of the industry' and is the largest assembly of Arab media together with top executives from the aviation and tourism industry. It takes place in a different Arab city every year drawing attention to the host city travel and tourism experience as well as facilitating for a large audience of Governments, decision makers and media to share, learn and exchange.

"The aviation sector's growth in the Arab world has greatly benefited the tourism sector and thereby contributing to the growth of the economy underpinned by consistent growth which continues to drive investment, job creation and bilateral trade," Adel Ali, Chief Executive Officer, Air Arabia Group, said ahead of the summit. "Although the sector will continue to be regarded as a catalyst for future economic growth, the industry is still faced with numerous challenges for growth. The idea behind the AAMS platform is to create meaningful dialogue on how some of the unique challenges can be resolved while continuing to unlock exciting opportunities for the decades to come."

The 2015 edition of the summit is held in partnership with Bahrain's Ministry of Transportation & Telecommunications and Bahrain Airport Company.

This industry initiative is supported and endorsed by many world leading organizations such as Airbus Middle East, Air Arabia Group, CFM, Amadeus, Alpha Aviation, ITP Group among many other supporting partners. This year's edition of the event will also feature 'The Little Engineer' workshop - an education organization dedicated to educating young minds through interactive programmes. Supported by Airbus and Air Arabia, 'The Little Engineers' workshop aims to instill a passion for science, technology and engineering among young nationals.



KUWAIT: Ramy Ahmed, Raed Turjuman, Hyundai representatives, business partners and Northern Gulf's senior management during the launch of all-new Tuscan and Creta models during a ceremony held at its main showroom in Shuwaikh.



Northern Gulf launches all-new Tuscan, Creta at Hyundai Shuwaikh Showroom

Tuscan delivers class-leading design, technology ♦ Creta strengthens SUV portfolio

KUWAIT: Northern Gulf recently launched Hyundai's all-new Tuscan and Creta models during a ceremony held at its main showroom in Shuwaikh. Both models are expected to be received positively by the local market, thanks to Hyundai's exceptional services and the strengths of both models. The Tuscan offers bold and athletic design, new technological features and class-leading driving performance, setting new standards for its sector and ticking all the boxes for young families looking for a highly versatile car. Meanwhile, the Creta - Hyundai's brand new and most affordable compact SUV - is a versatile model that is expected to make its presence felt with its dynamic styling, robust build and modern premium approach.

The ceremony kicked off at 12:00pm on the 16 of November, in the presence of regional Hyundai representatives; amongst them Ramy Ahmed, Africa & ME Dealer Developments Manager as well as media and business partners, and Northern Gulf's senior management. The event included speeches delivered by the company's top executives and Hyundai representatives. Raed Turjuman, the company's CEO, welcomed the event attendees on behalf of Sheikh Humoud Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, Northern Gulf's Chairman.

On the occasion Raed Turjuman also said, "We are pleased to launch these two exceptional models in the Kuwaiti market, and we're confident that they will add tremendous value to the SUV and compact SUV segments from Hyundai, thanks to their impressive features, technology and safety specifications." He reiterated Hyundai's efforts in delivering on the expectations of car enthusiasts who look for quality and performance, and promised that Hyundai would always aspire to meet those expectations head on.

The Creta is the latest Hyundai to follow the company's Modern Premium brand direction, and at an affordable price point. Inside the high quality cabin, which features silver chrome finishing and a soft touch dashboard, every detail is designed to



including ultra-high tensile steel for more body rigidity and structural strength. The Creta can also be specified with six airbags, ABS, VSM, HAC (Hill Ascent Control), ESC (Electronic Stability Control) and RPAS (Rear Parking Assistant System).

When it comes to performance, the Creta is extremely versatile, and is available with a choice of 1.6 Dual VVT petrol and U2 1.4 CRDi and U2 1.6 CRDi VGT diesel engines. Set to appeal to a range of customers across Africa and the Middle East, full pricing and specifications for this affordable compact SUV are set to be announced later this month.

For the first time on a Hyundai Motor Company compact SUV, the All-New Tucson introduces a smart powered tailgate that opens at the approach of the key-holder, and a Blind Spot Detection system that monitors the side and rear of the vehicle for approaching vehicles. These cutting-edge technologies are complemented by other useful features such as the smart entry and engine start, an electric parking brake, automatic



provide the utmost comfort and convenience. The dashboard is a hub of useful technology including a 7" audio video navigation system, smart key with push button start and fully automatic temperature control with cluster ionizer.

Structural strength

In line with Hyundai's commitment to produce the safest cars on the market, the Creta's body shell has been developed using advanced engineering techniques and high quality materials

cruise control and a next-generation navigation system that offers improved convenience and smart driving.

When it comes to protecting occupants the All-New Tucson has been designed to be one of the safest cars in its class, as reflected by the 5-star rating it has received in both the European and North American NCAP crash tests. When it comes to active safety systems, the model can be specified with hi-tech features such as a parking assist, an intelligent tyre pressure monitoring sys-



tem, Electronic Parking Brake and Hill-start Assist Control.

New platform

Built on a completely new platform, All-New Tucson delivers ride comfort without compromising driving dynamics. Every element of the chassis has been developed to ensure enhanced high-speed and cornering stability. Best-in-class aerodynamics and structural rigidity combine with an improved front and rear suspension and

the integration of enhanced noise reduction techniques to establish the model as truly premium package.

Ensuring that customers can choose from a suitably impressive range of engines to complement the high quality driving experience, the All-New Tucson offers a choice of Gamma 1.6 GDI and NU 2.0 MPI petrol engines with a top speed of 182 KPH, and two diesel units. The R 2.0 VGT with a top speed of 186 KPH and the manual U2 1.7 litre CRDi with a top speed of 176 KPH,

depending on transmission, drive train. All units are mated to 6-speed gearboxes, with both 2WD and 4WD models dependent on specification and market availability. Always focused on being economical, the fuel consumption of the All-New Tucson has reduced by 13 percent compared to its predecessor.

With families in mind, Hyundai Motor Company designers took time to ensure the new compact SUV offers the highest levels of comfort and versatility. The luggage compartment is over 10 percent bigger than in its predecessor, while the larger dimensions deliver more headroom, shoulder room and front row legroom. At the same time, taking the region's climate into account, fans under the seat cushions pump out chilled air on models equipped with air-ventilated front seats, while rear air vents and a panoramic sunroof are also available.

Northern Gulf continues to apply the company's service oriented vision, delivering exceptional customer service to all Hyundai customers. Thanks to this dedication, Hyundai Kuwait has been able to achieve record-breaking customer satisfaction ratings, which has reflected in better sales performance and more market share.

Northern Gulf expends tremendous effort in developing strategies and campaigns to guarantee customer satisfaction, in line with Hyundai's global strategy, and to bolster Hyundai's position as a leading automotive brand that has been able to compete with older legacy brands in record time.



BINGHATTI DEVELOPERS

EXPANDING WITH A VISION AND MISSION

Emanating from Bingham Holding, Bingham Developers is a property developer headed by CEO and Head of Architecture Muhammad Bingham Aljbori. Headquartered in Dubai, the dynamic company offers iconic properties with groundbreaking architectural designs, timely delivery, and unrivaled lifestyle amenities. Empowered by experience since 1890, the brand seeks to redefine the norms of the industry by introducing world class materials and quality at reasonable prices while balancing the traditional elements found in Middle Eastern art and architecture with modern design and aesthetics.

Bingham Developers recently shifted its focus from projects tailored for institutional investors to a holistic solution for end users. The company has developed a solid reputation built on a strong portfolio of completed projects and has produced a viable alternative to some of the larger market players. The company has completed multiple projects throughout Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi.

Bingham Developers' modern vision emphasizes iconic buildings which blend form and function to deliver timeless elegance. Acting as a counterweight to the excess of developers focusing on the higher end of the residential market, Bingham Developers concentrates on producing high quality, iconic, mid-segment properties with the intention of responding to the lack of supply currently available in the fast-growing and sustainable mid-segment market.

In Dubai's ever-growing property market, Bingham Developers distinguishes itself by pursuing and exploiting undervalued investment opportunities with extraordinary speed and innovation. Backed by a dynamic approach that mitigates bureaucracy, cost overruns and transactions costs, the company has developed a solid foundation for future developments within a short timeframe.

The company's attention to detail ensures that only the highest standards are associated with any Bingham Developers building. Each building features world class materials from distinguished international suppliers. Sanitary fixtures are from Grohe and Villeroy & Boch, Handcrafted marble imported from Italy drapes the walls and floors, high quality ceramics from RAK Ceramics is used throughout the buildings, Mitsubishi Lifts and ABB Switchgears are standard, as well as a Health Club by Technogym. The company focuses on providing these world class brands to distinguish itself from other developers in this niche of the market overlooking these details.

Whether it is the value-driven ideas brought to life, the unmatched attention to detail, or the commitment to exceptional quality, the company is a reflection of all the great things Dubai has to offer.

CEO Profile

As the CEO & Head of Architecture at Bingham Developers, Eng. Muhammad Bingham Aljbori has spearheaded the dynamic growth at the company with more than 12 projects launched in 2015 throughout the UAE.

Aljbori's position as CEO & Head of Architecture stems from his education as an architect and his background in business, enabling him to balance the creativity required to

produce iconic designs while retaining the pragmatism necessary to build and grow a successful business.

Raised in the UAE throughout its growth and expansion, Aljbori was intrigued by the idea of combining the traditional elements found in Middle Eastern art and architecture with modern design and aesthetics. Aljbori also takes pride in ensuring each development is built with the best materials and highest quality finishing while also remaining reasonably priced for middle class buyers.

Having successfully established a common ground between international and local trends through the expansion of Bingham Developers, Aljbori has developed a solid reputation built on a strong portfolio of completed projects. Within a short timeframe, Aljbori has produced a viable alternative to some of the larger market players in the UAE.

Dynamic growth

Muhammed Bingham Aljbori is young, suave and articulate and as the CEO and Head of Architecture at Bingham Developers, he has led the company's dynamic growth with more than 12 completed and upcoming projects.

Aljbori believes the recent government initiatives to curb speculation in the market have provided stability and maturity in the Dubai Real Estate Sector.

In this exclusive interview, Aljbori sheds some light on his mission and vision for Bingham Developers' future growth and expansion.

KT: Could you please tell us about Bingham Developers?

Aljbori: Bingham Developers emanated from Bingham Holding as the real estate development branch of the Bingham Holding group of companies. The company's operations focus on Dubai, however we have rapidly expanded to other Emirates with upcoming projects in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah.

We began operations in 2014 and currently have a portfolio of more than 12 projects. We mainly focus on the mid segment of the market in areas like Dubai Silicon Oasis and Jumeirah Village Circle. However, we have ensured diversity in our projects with high-end luxury projects such as the Swarovski Sparkle Towers in Dubai Marina, a joint venture with Tebyan Real Estate Development, a project worth over AED 1 billion.

KT: What are the design elements that you have included in your projects that makes them unique?

Aljbori: As an architect, I believe the design of the building should reflect the designer's soul. This is the reason I choose to personally design all Bingham Developers buildings, as I firmly feel that every great brand should reflect the passion and vision of its founder. As a car enthusiast, I often refer to the leviathans of automobile history such as Enzo Ferrari and Ferruccio Lamborghini—their brands and products still carry the souls and passion of their founders today.

The design philosophy that I follow in most of my buildings is the concept of singularity vs collectivity. To me, a building is a place where individuals come together to live

as one community. A community is made up of individual elements, and when you bring those elements together, you create an amalgamated, unified entity.

In Bingham Apartments the individual element was cubes, but when it came to Bingham Views, the cubes evolved to take a shape where they seem to be cut and positioned at different angles to provide a truly unique design.

KT: What can you tell us about the finish of Bingham Views?

Aljbori: Whether it's Bingham Views, Bingham Apartments, or any other Bingham Developers project, we have ensured that only the highest standards are associated with our buildings. In all our projects, we feature world class materials from distinguished international suppliers. Some examples are our sanitary fixtures from Grohe and Villeroy & Boch, Handcrafted marble imported from Italy, high quality ceramics from RAK Ceramics, Mitsubishi Lifts, ABB Switchgears, and a Health Club by Technogym. We focus on providing these world class brands to distinguish ourselves from the developers in the market overlooking these details.

KT: Please tell us about the payment plans that are on offer?

Aljbori: Our payment plan for Bingham Views consists of a down payment of 10% and a 5% payment every month until 50% of the purchase price is paid, the remaining 50% payment is due upon completion and handover of the building.

KT: Which income segment are you targeting?

Aljbori: We are focused on providing high quality homes for middle class families in the UAE, most of our buyers are taking home a salary in the bracket of AED15,000 to AED30,000. We offer the best quality in the mid segment and our strong reputation for timely delivery is crucial to end users and investors who want to avoid the delays that have plagued the Dubai Real Estate Sector in the past. Our projects are consistently yielding their investors more than 10 percent net returns making the decision for investors very simple.

The brands and materials that we use in our projects are rarely found in mid segment properties, and the designs of our buildings offer a unique home that people are proud to live in. Our aim in this segment is to offer people what they dream of in a home at a reasonable price. Instead of paying AED130,000 in rent every year with no investment return, a client can purchase and own their own home which can provide capital gains and a solid rental yield for investors. You can now pay a reasonable price and get a product that has hitherto not been offered in this niche.

KT: What were some of the earlier projects of Bingham Developers?

Aljbori: Bingham Residences has an interesting story behind it, the proposed design for it was very rich and classical, and when I came on board, I suggested a change in the design to something more fresh, chic, and modern.

Within one week, I changed the design of the entire building to something completely different. The first week after completion witnessed an avalanche of enquiries from end users in the community, however we had already finalized an agreement with a Class A hotel operator for the full building.

When we realized that there was strong demand for our exclusively designed and innovative product, we decided to launch something for end users rather than just focusing on institutional investors, and that's why we launched the Bingham Apartments project. It was a great success for the company and we were blessed that it exceeded our expectations.

We conducted a survey regarding what attracted buyers to our project the most, and it showed that our design and architecture was the number one reason. The feedback that we received is what encouraged us to push forward with more projects.

At Bingham Developers, we focus on giving our clients something to be proud of, we ensure that they live in a building that is truly iconic and representative of our brand.

KT: Please tell us about the current state of the real estate market and how it may affect the sales of Bingham Views?

Aljbori: Anytime I hear concerns about the health of the Dubai Real Estate market, I smile, because I see it as the perfect time to buy. Today it is undeniable that Dubai is a mature Real Estate market, any mature market should experience corrections. These corrections occur to prevent a repeat of the 2008 downturn. Furthermore, the leadership of the UAE Government has ensured that the country remains a stable and secure safe haven for investors throughout the MENA region.

Under the prudent vision of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Dubai government has wisely introduced new regulations through the Real Estate Regulatory Authority. We support the government's initiatives to stabilize the market from any volatility and we feel that it is best for the long term sustainability of the Dubai and UAE Real Estate Market.

KT: What are the future plans for Bingham Developers?

Aljbori: Our strategy is very clear; expansion, expansion, and more expansion. We are aiming for 300 percent growth over the next 2 years. We're planning our growth in other Real Estate sectors including commercial buildings and the hospitality and industrial sector. Bingham has just recently broken ground on a manufacturing facility in Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi covering nearly half a million square feet.

KT: Do you have any new projects in the pipeline?

Aljbori: We are planning to launch a signature Bingham project in a prime location of Dubai Silicon Oasis within the next couple of months. The modern architectural concept is inspired by the rich heritage and culture of the UAE.



KUWAIT: Cityscape Kuwait, the premier international real estate investment and development event takes place from 9-11 December at Kuwait International Fairgrounds, Mishref.



CITYSCAPE KUWAIT OPENS TODAY

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION A KEY FEATURE OF THE EXHIBITION

KUWAIT: Held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, the 2nd edition of Cityscape Kuwait opens its door today with a strong presence of international exhibitors.

Hosted at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds, Meshref from 9-11 of December, this year's event is set to welcome more than 70 exhibitors, from 10 countries including Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Europe.

Speaking about the international participation at this year's event, and the willingness of Kuwaiti investors to seek opportunities outside of their national borders, Deep Marwaha, Group Director of Cityscape commented "Encouraged by low oil prices, Kuwaitis are diversifying their investments both at home and in overseas markets. Over the last decade outward foreign investments by Kuwaitis have helped boost the Gulf country's economic leverage in both the region and in the world."

He continued "The figures speak for themselves; Kuwaitis invested nearly USD 14.2 billion abroad in 2007 alone. Almost ten years later, Kuwaitis are still looking at opportunities abroad. Kuwait is the Middle East's largest and the world's seventh largest foreign investor, according to the World Investment Report of 2015, released by

the United Nations Conference Trade and Development (UNCTAD)."

Dr Onder Halisdemir, Chief Executive Officer of Agaoglu Group of Companies commented on the demand from Kuwaiti based investors, he said: "Agaoglu has experienced an increase of interest from the Middle Eastern investors due to the high quality projects being presented and the strong ties between our very similar cultures. As the leading real estate and the construction company in Turkey, we are proud to be a part of the growth in the Turkish real estate market offering very attractive incentives to the Kuwaiti investors."

Having already established its first international office in the region in 2013, Agaoglu will be participating at Cityscape Kuwait to showcase their projects at this significant real estate platform and enhance connections with Kuwaiti investors.

Mohamed Afifi, CEO of HMG Properties who will be showcasing projects based in the US and other international markets, believes that now is a very good time for investors to consider diversifying their portfolio. He stated: "At Cityscape Kuwait, HMG will showcase its latest projects in Britain, Spain, USA, Egypt, Lebanon and

Turkey. The exhibition consists a solid ground to promote our projects while reaching our target audience who are looking for state-of-the art residential and commercial real estate around the world"

Afifi confirmed that Cityscape exhibitions are the best platforms for real estate developers to share their real estate services.

Benoy Kurien, General Manager, of UAE based Al-Hamra Real Estate Development commenting on the why the UAE is such an attractive destination for international and regional investors said: "We have witnessed consistently high sales demand and take-up of existing stock at Al-Hamra Village as investors recognize the quality-value dynamic thanks to the emirates higher yields and sustainable rental rate increases. The freehold, tax free environment and optional residency visa combined with a high quality of life ensure Al-Hamra is a popular choice for both investors and those looking to set up home."

Kurien confirmed that Cityscape Kuwait is an excellent platform to meet Kuwaiti investors and network with, he said: "Kuwait represents a very important market for AHRED. Investors are well versed in the opportunities the UAE real estate market offers and Kuwaiti

investors are well represented for such a small population. We are committed to ensuring Al-Hamra's portfolio of exceptional quality and value-for-money remains front-of-mind in this important market."

AHRED will be showcasing three unique properties during the exhibition. These include two categories of villas for the multi-million dollar luxury Falcon Island Development, the five-bedroom beach villas starting from \$2 million and the spacious 5 bedroom park villas starting from \$1.3million. The company will also be highlighting the newly launched spacious six bedroom Bayti Premium Villas priced from \$953,000 as well as the Bab Al Bahr studio, one, two and three bedroom apartments and penthouses. These start from \$107,800 with just a 25% deposit and incorporating an optional two year payment plan with 0% interest, AHRED will guarantee an incredible 18% return over two years."

Aside from the exhibition, the three-day event is set to feature many new development including the free to attend seminars which will take place and a family day on the 11th.

Cityscape Kuwait 2015 returns with support from sponsors: NBK, Al Hamra Real Estate Development, Al-Marjan Island and Mazaya.

TAKE THE A TRAIN? APPLE, GOOGLE AND OTHER APPS CAN TELL YOU

NEW YORK: HopStop, a pioneer in offering transit directions in major cities, disappeared in October - not because it failed, but because Apple bought it and shut it down after putting its engineers to work building Apple's own transit-navigation service. That feature went live on Apple Maps in September, narrowing a major feature gap with Google Maps. Such transit services offer you navigation routes via train and bus, usually based on published transit schedules. Some also offer limited real-time arrival information. Although Apple's transit service doesn't cover as many cities as HopStop and Google Maps, it has its strengths, including improvements in getting you to and from subway stations. Here's a look at how Apple Maps, Google Maps and a few smaller rivals stack up in this respect.

Apple Maps

Apple is expanding its transit service gradually. In the US, it's currently limited

to Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay area and Washington, DC. It also covers Berlin, London, Mexico City, Sydney and Toronto, plus more than 300 cities in China. Coverage areas include some suburbs. Where Apple has gone further is in sending teams to map out subway stations. Rival mapping services typically use a station's center point to offer walking directions to and from the station. Given that stations can stretch for blocks, this approach can mean more walking if there's a closer entrance just around the corner. Apple Maps can direct you to that closer entrance - and to a specific subway exit with directions that reflect the wording you'd see on signs within the station. You get better directions as a result - unless you're looking at a sprawling subway station that serves multiple routes. Apple might direct you to an exit on a different platform, potentially leading you on a maze-like journey through tunnels and up or down stairs. Sometimes it's eas-

ier just to use the closest exit and walk aboveground.

Google Maps

Google has been offering transit directions longer. Google Maps now covers public transit in hundreds of cities on every continent except Antarctica. In California alone, it works in about 70 cities - even Yosemite National Park. Google also covers more devices. While Apple Maps requires an iPhone, iPad or Mac, Google Maps has an Android app and works on other devices through a Web browser. Even on Macs, Apple Maps requires a dedicated app. But Google Maps doesn't offer precise directions to station entrances and exits. And while Google Maps recently updated its Android app to offer directions without an Internet connection, that's limited to driving directions.

Moovit

Moovit gets the same official data

from transit agencies that Apple and Google Maps get. But it supplements that with crowdsourcing, a fancy term for free labor from people around the world. Volunteers improve coverage by adding information on bus routes and schedules from smaller transit agencies that don't provide mapping data. Moovit now covers 800 cities worldwide. Moovit is particularly good at accounting for service changes and disruptions. New York's transit agency, for instance, provides warnings about such changes, but the timetables aren't automatically updated. As a result, Google and Apple will sometimes direct you to a subway that skips a particular stop, while warning you that you can't get on there. Moovit has teams to manually adjust the timetable data so that the route offered reflects what's actually running. One feature added last week: Real-time information on when your train or bus is coming. Rival services typically rely on scheduled stops. You're

on your own, though, figuring out entrances and exits. Moovit has apps for Apple and Android mobile devices and Windows phones.

Citymapper

As with Apple Maps, Citymapper offers specific exit information. Citymapper now covers 29 cities worldwide and is available on Apple and Android mobile devices. The best part: It tells you what part of the train to get on so that you're closer to your destination when you get off.

Transit

Transit presents route choices in a grid, which takes getting used to. Others tend to give you recommendations to reduce work on your part. But Transit does offer real-time schedules, along with information on nearby bike- and car-sharing services. It covers more than 100 cities worldwide on Apple and Android mobile devices. — AP



CARACAS: In this file photo, a "supermoon" is seen during the stages of a total eclipse in Caracas. —AFP

NEW US SPACE MINING LAW TO SPARK INTERPLANETARY GOLD RUSH

NEW YORK: Flashing some interplanetary gold bling and sipping "space water" might sound far-fetched, but both could soon be reality, thanks to a new US law that legalizes cosmic mining. In a first, President Barack Obama signed legislation at the end of November that allows commercial extraction of minerals and other materials, including water, from asteroids and the moon.

That could kick off an extraterrestrial gold rush, backed by a private aeronautics industry that is growing quickly and cutting the price of commercial space flight. The US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act of 2015 says that any materials American individuals or companies find on an asteroid or the moon is theirs to keep and do with as they please.

While the Space Act breaks with the concept that space should be shared by everyone on Earth for scientific research and exploration, it establishes the rights of investors to profit from their efforts, at least under US law. Christopher Johnson, a lawyer at the Secure World Foundation, which focuses on the long-term sustainable use of outer space, said the law sets the basis for the next century of activity in space. "Now it is permissible to interact with space. Exploring and using space's resources has begun," he said.

Smaller startups impatient

The US move conjured visions of the great opening of the United States' Western frontier in the 19th century, which led to the California Gold Rush of 1849. But for the moment, the costs of pioneering the economic exploitation of space remain exorbitant and the risks high. Large companies are still studying their options, but smaller startups are impatient to get going, like Planetary Resources, launched in 2012 by Google co-founder Larry Page.

"It has often been a question as to whether a commercial company will be able to go out and develop a resource," said Chris Lewicki, president of Planetary Resources, which bills itself as "The Asteroid Mining Company." But now, the Space Act "allows us to give assurances to our customers and investors as we build a resource business in space," Lewicki told AFP. "Since the passage of the law, we've been getting a lot of support messages and our current investors are very excited," he added.

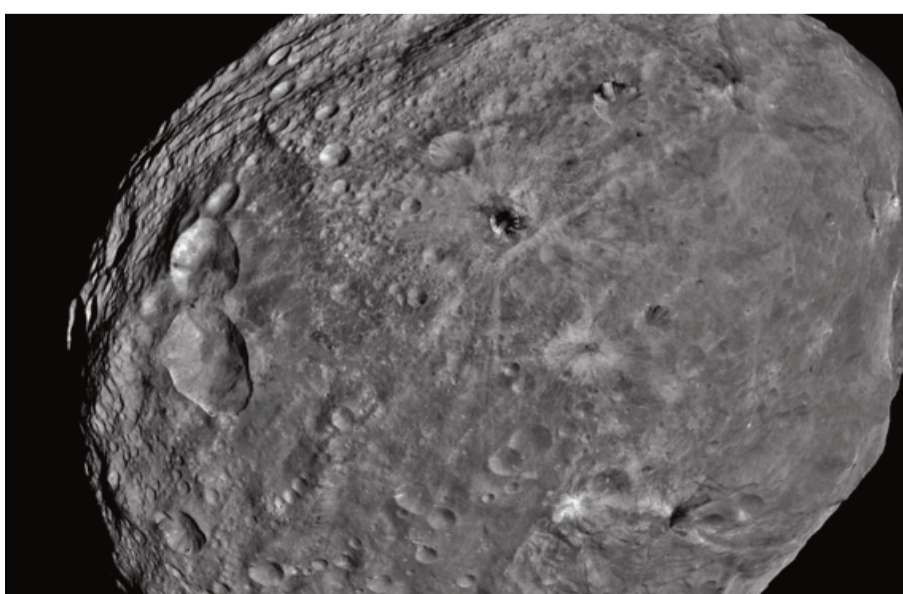
Meagan Crawford, vice president at another ambitious asteroid miner, Deep Space Industries, said that with the law's passage investors are no longer fretting that they are wasting their money. "This is absolutely a big win for us. We don't seem crazy any more. We don't have to work very hard to convince investors." According to NASA research, of some 1,500 asteroids within easy reach from Earth, possibly 10 percent have valuable mineral resources.

Refueling satellites

Both companies see great possibilities in space: deposits of nickel, iron ore, gold and platinum that could support the space industry in the same way that the huge deposits of iron ore in the US upper midwest laid the foundations for the Detroit auto industry. But their first target is water frozen in substantial deposits on relatively close asteroids. The water's value, more than just to drink, is in providing hydrogen fuel for space vehicles. It could supply a refueling station for the rockets, for instance, destined to explore Mars. And it could be used to refuel satellites in orbit.

Lewicki says an in-space fueling station could save hundreds of millions of dollars in water transport costs. "If we can store that water there, we can refuel rockets, satellites - it will be a huge opportunity. "You can refuel your rocket in orbit; that makes it easier to get it there, and cheaper." The first space prospecting missions could be launched from 2017, the companies say, and extracting minerals could begin as early as 2020. Deep Space Industries is planning the deployment of 25-32 kilogram (55-70 pound) mini-satellites to asteroids with good prospects to better assess their resources and bring back samples.

For its part Planetary Resources has already identified asteroids for exploitation using space telescopes placed in orbit last year. It plans to launch a small exploration satellite early next year, Lewicki said. The two companies estimate that the new space gold rush could need around \$3 trillion dollars over the next 10-15 years. For that, they need global support for their operations, and need to begin pressing other governments to adopt laws similar to the US Space Act that will recognize a company's rights to any space mineral riches it can harvest. — AFP



This file image provided by NASA, obtained by the Dawn spacecraft, shows the giant asteroid Vesta. — AFP

APPLE MAPS, ONCE A JOKE, NOW DOMINATES IPHONES

GOOGLE BENEFITS AS DEFAULT ON ANDROID

NEW YORK: Apple Maps quickly became the butt of jokes when it debuted in 2012. It overlooked many towns and businesses and misplaced famous landmarks. It marked New York's Madison Square Garden arena as park space because of the word "Garden." The service was a rare blunder for a company known for simple, easy-to-use products. It's a different story three years later. Apple fixed errors as users submitted them. It quietly bought several mapping companies, mostly for their engineers and other talent. This fall, it added transit directions for several major cities, narrowing a major gap with Google. Apple Maps is now used more widely than Google Maps on iPhones.

"They really did a great job in a short amount of time," said Alex Mackenzie-Torres, a former Google Maps manager who's now with competing transit app Moovit. "Apple has something that few companies have - simplicity in design mixed with high doses of pragmatism and practicality." Apple's significant investment in fixing Maps underscores how important maps and related services are to tech companies. Location is key to helping phone users find restaurants and shops, discover things to do and just get around. It's also big business, as app makers tap into the core mapping functions of phones to direct people in helpful ways and sometimes offer them bargains based on where they're standing.

The quick turnaround also demonstrates how easily companies like Apple can steer people to their own services. Google Maps and various third-party apps offer many features that Apple Maps lacks, yet Apple cleverly turned user inertia to its advantage. Many people use Apple Maps just because it comes with the phone. Even if you've taken the trouble to download a competing app, other iPhone services such as Siri and Mail will invariably take you to Apple Maps.

Next leading competitor

Without the ability to steer users this way, Apple "would not be in the position they are in," IDC analyst John Jackson said. "Not that they aren't improving the experience, but this helps the cause." Apple says its mapping service is now used more than three times as often as its next leading competitor on iPhones and iPads, with more than 5 billion map-related requests each week. Research firm comScore says Apple has a modest lead over Google on iPhones in the US, though comScore measures how many people use a service in a given month rather than how often.

Google still dominates among all US smartphones, though, in part because Apple Maps isn't available on Google's Android system, which is more prevalent than iPhones. In October, Google Maps had more than twice as many smartphone users as Apple Maps. Much like Apple, Google benefits as the default on Android.

For years, Google provided the default map-

ping service on iPhones. That changed as more people relied on turn-by-turn voice navigation with automatic rerouting, a feature Google offered only on Android. Apple built its own service from scratch and knocked Google Maps off the iPhone's home screen.

Fast learners

Google's initial forays into voice navigation in 2009 had problems, too, including directing motorists to left turns at no-turn intersections. But by 2012, Google Maps had improved significantly. By then, more people knew how a mapping service ought to work - and Apple's new offering fell short. "I heard so many different horror stories that I was almost hesitant to try it," said Rick Ostapowicz, an iPhone owner in Catonsville, Maryland. "I remember once, it was taking me on a road that no longer existed."

CEO Tim Cook apologized and promised that Apple would "keep working non-stop" to deliver the best experience possible. Without much fanfare, the service gradually improved. "We are fast learners and we are fast at fixing things," said Greg "Joz" Joswiak, an Apple vice president who oversees product marketing for iPhones and related services. "We learned the maps business incredibly fast."

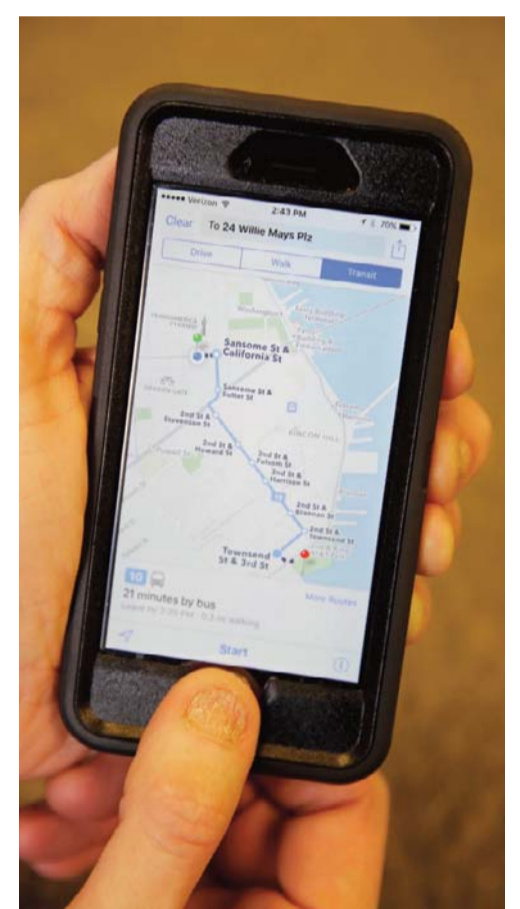
Apple now gets data from more than 3,000 sources for business listings, traffic and other information. In adding transit, Apple sent teams to map out subway entrances and signs. That results in more precise walking directions, as stations can stretch for blocks and the center point used by some services isn't necessarily the closest. Apple also started sending out vehicles with sensors to map roads, similar to Google's long-standing practice.

Default behavior

By making Maps a core iPhone feature, Apple made it easier for outside developers to include mapping features in their apps. When you go to Yelp, you can find directions to a business with one tap. When you go to the Starbucks app, you can see all the nearby stores. On the flip side, the iPhone's Siri voice assistant leads direction requests straight to Apple Maps, as does tapping on an address in Mail and other apps. With that integration, users like Ostapowicz no longer hesitate. The default behavior isn't just a competitive advantage for Apple; it's a convenience for many users. But default settings mean nothing if the experience isn't good - as it most definitely wasn't three years ago. Kristi Denton, an iPhone user in Austin, Texas, said that after getting bad directions with Apple Maps long ago, she has gone as far as to copy addresses and paste them into Google to avoid the default Apple service. Lots of users, though, have returned. And many new iPhone users never experienced Maps at its worst.

Third-party apps

Google Maps, of course, has also been



SAN FRANCISCO: In this photo, the Apple Maps app displays transit directions in San Francisco. Apple, Google and several smaller companies all help you get from point A to B via public transit. —AP

improving. Last month, Google started letting motorists store mapping data on their phones so they can look up businesses and directions even when cellular service is spotty. It's available on Android now and coming to iPhones soon. Google also has mapped such indoor venues as shopping malls and faraway lands as the Galapagos Islands. Google has better search tools for landmarks and business listings and offers transit maps for more regions than Apple. Google also provides biking directions and options to exclude highways and toll roads from driving directions.

Third-party apps, meanwhile, have their own innovations. Waze - now owned by Google - is a popular app for motorists to share traffic information and avoid jams. Moovit is better than both Google and Apple at factoring in temporary service changes in mass transit, while Citymapper offers suggestions on whether to board the front, middle or back of a train. Apple says it's not done improving Maps. But ultimately, Apple Maps doesn't need to be the best. It just needs to be good enough that its users won't look for something else. —AP

S KOREA UNVEILS AMBITIOUS GREEN CAR PUSH

SEOUL: South Korea unveiled yesterday an ambitious plan to dramatically increase the production of environmentally friendly cars by 2020, as part of global efforts to cut carbon emissions and curb climate change. Under the policy goals released by the energy ministry, the annual output of "green cars" like hybrid and electric-powered vehicles would increase sharply from 80,000 this year to 920,000 over the next five years. Seoul eventually hopes such vehicles would account for 20 percent of all cars sold in the domestic market, compared to the current share of just two percent.

The issue of vehicle emissions has taken on a higher public profile recently in South Korea as a result of the scandal involving Volkswagen and faked emissions standards. Last month, the environment ministry ordered the German automaker to recall 125,500 diesel vehicles sold here and fined the company more than \$12 million.

The energy ministry said the new green car policy would help Seoul cut carbon emissions by 3.8 million tons over the next five years. It vowed to invest 150 billion won (\$127 million) to help local carmakers like Hyundai improve the range of battery-powered cars and eventually drive down prices. Hundreds of new electric charging stations will be built across the nation with a target of 1,400 by 2020, compared to the current number of 400.

"Environmentally-friendly cars...will account for 50 percent of the global auto market by 2030," the ministry said. South Korea has been

slow in adopting green car technology, with consumers turned off by high prices and a lack of charging stations. But Hyundai - the South's largest automaker - has been seeking to expand its presence in the global green car market that

is currently dominated by Japan's Toyota. Hyundai, which forms the world's fifth-largest carmaking group along with its smaller affiliate Kia, plans to triple its number of fuel-efficient car models to 22 over the next five years. —AFP

UK POLICE CAMPAIGN TARGETS HACKERS AS YOUNG AS 12 YRS

LONDON: Britain's National Crime Agency yesterday launched a campaign to discourage youngsters from becoming hackers after it found the average age of suspects had plummeted to 17. The NCA's #CyberChoices campaign targets parents of boys aged 12-15 who may be involved in cyber-crime without their knowledge. The advertisement features a teenage boy, his mother and his father sitting on the family sofa, with the parents boasting about how intelligent their son is and his IT expertise.

It is only when they mention that he joked about robbing a bank that the parents realize their son is actually a hacker, and the advertisement ends with all three being quizzed by officers from the NCA, Britain's main agency fighting organized crime, trafficking and cyber-crime. "Over the past few years the NCA has seen the people engaging in cyber crime becoming younger and younger," said Richard Jones, head of the National Cyber Crime Unit's Prevent team.

The average age of suspected cyber criminals featured in investigations involving the NCA this year was 17, compared to 24 last year, said the agency. "We know that simply criminalizing young people cannot be the solution to this and so the campaign seeks to help motivate children to use their skills more positively," said Jones.

"These individuals are really bright and have real potential to go on to exciting and fulfilling jobs. But by choosing the criminal path they can move from low level 'pranking' to higher level cyber crime quite quickly," he added. The campaign aims to educate parents on common forms of cyber-crime such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks that can knock out websites by flooding them with data. Younger hackers have also increasingly used software called Remote Access Trojans (RATs) that allow people to remotely monitor and take full control of another computer. The youngest purchaser of such software was just 12 years old, the NCA revealed. —AFP

MATERNAL HORMONAL IMBALANCE LINKED TO CHILD AUTISM

STOCKHOLM: Children born to mothers with a hormonal imbalance run a much higher risk of developing autism, according to a new study released by Sweden's Karolinska Institutet yesterday. The findings, published in the journal *Molecular Psychiatry*, link an imbalance called polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in children.

ASD represents a range of neurodevelopmental disorders in children. "We found that a maternal diagnosis of PCOS increased the risk of ASD in the offspring by 59 percent", said Kyriaki Kosidou, lead researcher at Karolinska's Department of Public Health Sciences. The causes are not entirely clear, but evidence suggests that exposure to certain sex hormones

early in life from mothers with PCOS who are producing excessive amounts of androgens can play a role in the development of autism in children. "The risk was further increased among mothers with both PCOS and obesity," Kosidou said in the press release.

Between 5 and 15 percent of women of child-bearing age are affected by

PCOS. The researchers conducted a population-based nationwide study of all children born in Sweden from 1984 to 2007. They identified around 24,000 ASD cases. ASD is about four times more common in boys than girls, but there were no observed differences in risks between boys and girls in the study. The mechanisms that explain the link

between maternal PCOS and ASD in the children were not fully explored in this epidemiological study. Further studies are necessary to fully explain the findings, according to researchers. "It is too early to make specific recommendations to clinicians in terms of care for pregnant women with PCOS," said Renee Gardner, senior investigator on the study. — AFP



BEIJING, China : Pedestrians wearing face masks walk along an elevated walkway amid heavy air pollution in Beijing yesterday. — AFP photos

BLANKET OF HUMID AIR TRAPS SMOG IN BEIJING

VEHICLES TAKEN OFF ROADS, SCHOOLS TOLD TO CLOSE

BEIJING: A blanket of humid air trapping smog brought Beijing's first pollution "red alert" yesterday although many residents ignored warnings to limit time outdoors and authorities said the pollution would last several more days. Hundreds of people, including toddlers, packed Tiananmen Square to watch a daily flag-raising ceremony while China's state radio said some motorists were ignoring a ban on vehicles bearing odd-numbered licence plates. Rapid industrial

growth and car ownership over the past decade or more have led to high levels of pollution in major urban areas and Chinese researchers have identified the problem as a major source of unrest. Certain weather conditions can exacerbate the problem.

Environment Minister Chen Jining called a special meeting late on Monday to urge greater vigilance against pollution in Beijing and nearby cities and he increased the number of environmental inspection teams to

12, ThePaper.cn, a state-backed news website, reported. Smog has been a public health concern in Beijing for years but the government's response has come under extra scrutiny in the past week because it faced heavy criticism for not issuing a red alert during an earlier episode of hazardous smog. A red alert means nearly half of vehicles are ordered off the roads, heavy vehicles banned, schools advised to cancel classes, businesses recommended to allow flexible working hours and all "large-scale, outdoor activities" should be stopped.

"This measure reflects that the government, at least, has the courage to face this problem," said Ma Jun, director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs, a Chinese environmental group, referring to the red alert. "Before, they were more or less somewhat reluctant to acknowledge the problem. Now there's a willingness to face this problem directly." The red alert has been imposed until tomorrow. Environmental group Greenpeace called it "a welcome sign of a different attitude from the Beijing government".

'Feels like chemical warfare'

Bernhard Schwartlander, the World Health Organisation's representative in China, said the alert "means,

first and foremost, that the Beijing authorities are taking air quality, and related health issues, very seriously". The Beijing City Emergency Office said "still weather, reduced cold temperatures and an increase in humidity" prompted the alert, the Xinhua state news agency reported. In the northern city of Taiyuan, six people were killed and four injured in a 33-vehicle pileup on a highway cloaked in smog, the Xinhua said. Some people in Beijing tried to dodge the restrictions. State media showed a policeman removing paper stuck over the last, odd, digit of a car's license plate.

By late afternoon, the US embassy's monitoring station recorded "hazardous" air quality. Many city residents donned industrial-strength face masks. "I feel like I'm engaged in chemical warfare," one commuter said on social media. Still, the ruling Communist Party's official *People's Daily*, without a hint of irony, praised China's contribution to fighting climate change in a commentary written to coincide with climate talks in Paris. "People everywhere are looking forward to China's continuous progress on the road to green development, acting as a model for the world to tackle the challenge of climate change," the newspaper said. — Reuters



BEIJING, China : A bird flies over the grounds of the Temple of Heaven amid heavy air pollution in Beijing.

TREE BY TREE, AFRICA PLEDGES TO RESTORE NATURAL FORESTS

JOHANNESBURG: Tree by tree, more than a dozen African governments pledged to restore the continent's natural forests at the United Nations climate talks. The earth has lost more than half its forests over the course of human history, according to the World Resources Institute. The deforestation of the world's tropical forests has contributed to climate change by producing up to 15 percent of global carbon emissions, the organization said.

The AFR100 initiative is a pledge by African nations to restore 100 million hectares (about 386,000 square miles) of forest by 2030, according to the organization. "As the world forges a climate agreement in Paris, African countries - which bear the least historic responsibility for climate change - are showing leadership with ambitious pledges to restore land," said Andrew Steer, president and CEO of the World Resources Institute.

Wanjira Mathai, daughter of the late Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai, described the AFR100 forest restoration project as unprecedented. "I have seen restoration in communities both large and small across Africa, but the promise of a continent-wide movement is truly inspiring," said Mathai, chairwoman of the Green Belt Movement founded by her mother. "Restoring landscapes will empower and enrich rural communities while providing downstream benefits to those in cities. Everybody wins."

During the Global Landscapes Forum at the UN climate talks, the World Bank and the German government and other partners, set aside more than \$1 billion in development funding and \$540 million in private funding for the African reforestation. More than a dozen African countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, have pledged millions of acres to the project. West African nations along the Sahara desert have also pledged to plant more trees to stop the ever encroaching desert from destroying more arable land. "Restoring our landscapes brings prosperity, security and opportunity," said

Vincent Biruta, Rwanda's Minister of Natural Resources.

"With forest landscape restoration we've seen agricultural yields rise and farmers in our rural communities diversify their livelihoods and improve their well-being. Forest landscape restoration is not just an environmental strategy, it is an economic and social development strategy as well." Among the pledging countries is Madagascar, where the island forests are home to some of the world's most unique plants and animals, all under threat from deforestation. Satellite images of the island show forests that have been slashed and burned, according to the World Wildlife Foundation.

To astronauts observing from space, Madagascar seems like an island bleeding into the ocean as its rich red soil, eroded by decades of unregulated logging, runs into the ocean, leaving behind cratered land unfit for farming, according to the foundation. Some of the countries that are home to the Congo Basin, which conservationists call the earth's second set of lungs, after the Amazon Basin, have also signed up to the project. The Democratic Republic of Congo has pledged 8 million hectares (20 million acres) to the restoration project. But these pledges may face challenges from the global timber industry, exacerbated by illegal logging, which is the biggest cause of deforestation, according to environmental protection group Greenpeace. Despite laws to prevent this, it has never been easier to illegally chop down trees in the Congo Basin, the group said. Corruption in the Congo Basin region has undermined reforms to the timber industry, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where protected wildlife areas are increasingly disturbed, according to a Greenpeace report published earlier this year. If this initiative succeeds, it would improve the lives of people living around forests and to the ecosystem as a whole, said Victorine Che Thoenen, leader of Greenpeace's Congo Basin project. — AP

JAPAN'S DEATH SPECIALISTS EXHIBIT SKILLS AT EXPO

TOKYO: Specialists in the fading profession of preparing bodies for funeral and cremation in Japan gave a rare glimpse of their skills at the Tuesday opening of a Tokyo exhibition focused on the business of death and dying. Practitioners of "nokan" - translated as "encoffinment" - took part in what organizers said was Japan's first ever contest to demonstrate their techniques, as a pianist and a guitarist played peaceful, relaxing music.

The contestants demonstrated their skill over the course of 15 minutes in dressing live models who laid still on Japanese-style futons, or floor mattresses. Sayuri Takahashi knelt gracefully before a motionless female figure on the floor, gently maneuvering the arms and legs to dress her in a shirt, slacks and socks, the light of artificial candles flickering behind. The

partially clothed model was covered with a Japanese-style robe to hide exposed skin, the favored way of dressing the dead to maintain modesty when family members are watching.

The competition was part of the inaugural Life Ending Industry Expo, which attracted more than 200 companies in the business of death. The craft of the specialists, who are known as "nokanshi", is declining in Japan's bigger cities but remains fairly common in the country's rural areas. The work overlaps somewhat with that of morticians in Western countries, though in Japan embalming of bodies is rare and wakes and funerals are still sometimes held in the family home. It came to worldwide attention in 2009 when the Japanese film "Departures" won the Oscar for best foreign language



TOKYO, Japan : Twenty-seven-year-old Sayuri Takahashi (top) performs her skills in "nokan" — translated as "encoffinment", or the preparation dead bodies before cremation, during a contest at the Life Ending Industry EXPO 2015 in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos



TOKYO, Japan : A hearse decorated with a traditional Japanese shrine is displayed at the Life Ending Industry EXPO 2015.

film for its depiction of an out of work cellist who becomes a nokanshi in smalltown Japan.

"We wanted the public to know more about nokanshi as there weren't enough specialists after the 2011 disaster," said competition organizer Koki Kimura, referring to the devastating earthquake off Japan's northeastern coast and subsequent tsunami on March 11 of that year in which more than 15,000 people died. A panel of three judges examined not only how well the models were dressed but also how gracefully the nokanshi completed the whole process. "The kindness and politeness towards the family of the deceased combined with efficiency are key," Shinji Kimura, one of the judges

and a former advisor to the lead actor in "Departures", said.

"We want to do our best for the final departure of the deceased," said Kimura, who has 30 years of experience as a nokanshi. "So it should not be mechanical." Takahashi, the 27-year-old winner who was awarded a trophy and an undisclosed sum, said she started her job three years ago after learning about the profession following a death in her own family where the body was attended to by a nokanshi. "My relative's face looked peaceful," she said after the contest, adding that the Oscar-winning movie also inspired her choice. "I'm most happy when the family of the deceased tell me they're grateful for what I did." — AFP

NO LETUP IN FIGHT AGAINST HEPATITIS C DESPITE LOW PREVALENCE

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Although Kuwait has the lowest prevalence of hepatitis C in the region, the country continues its campaign to control if not totally eradicate the virus. Speaking at the second Hepatology Club meeting held at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Chairman Dr Bader Al-Enezi underscored Kuwait only has a 0.5 to 0.8 percent prevalence of the hepatitis C virus. "It's not high, and if you include expats too, it's still very limited"

Dr Enezi said the Hepatology Club meeting comes in light of a new treatment and strategy available now. "We have a new treatment and strategy in dealing with hepatitis C. We try to prevent the consequences and complications for patients - we have available treatment to cure the disease. With this meeting, we'll have more clarifications and recommendations to find new ways and solutions to handle the hepatitis C virus. We care for all patients"

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne infectious disease that is caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV), affecting the liver. The infection is often asymptomatic, but once established,

chronic infection can cause inflammation of the liver (chronic hepatitis). This condition can progress to scarring of the liver (fibrosis) and advanced scarring (cirrhosis). In some cases, those with cirrhosis will go on to develop liver failure or other complications of cirrhosis, including liver cancer. The hepatitis C virus is spread by blood-to-blood contact. The good news is there is a new medicine now for the hepatitis C virus.

Asked if there are preventive tools to avoid contracting the hepatitis C virus, especially during sexual activities, Enezi said people with hepatitis C can engage in normal sexual activities with their legal partners. "Sexual activities should not be halted if one has hepatitis C, because even with the virus, there is a very low rate of transmitting the disease to one's partner. There is no need to use any preventive means, especially if one has a single partner. As per statistics, there is a less than 2 to 5 percent probability of contracting the virus during sex. You don't need to change your sexual behavior if you have the hepatitis C virus," he noted.

Hepatitis is a liver condition characterized by the presence of inflammatory cells in the tissue of the organ. The condition can be self-limiting, heal on its own or can progress to



acute liver infection and worse, cancer. "Hepatitis is acute when it lasts less than six months and chronic when it persists longer, and it depends on what hepatitis virus a patient may have," stressed Dr Enezi.

The hepatitis A virus is the least dangerous viral infection - however, if contracted, it can weaken liver function. Hepatitis B is more lethal than any other hepatitis virus, and this is why the government of Kuwait has been active in its campaign to control the spread of viral infections in the country.

In an interview with Kuwait Times, Dr Enezi restated that the prevalence of hepatitis in Kuwait is very low compared to other countries in Asia, particularly China. "The fact is that many people in Kuwait don't know they have the virus. They need to consult their doctors and get injected with the hepatitis vaccine to prevent this disease from spreading," he said.

How is it Transmitted?
Common causes of hepatitis include over-

consumption of alcohol, blood transfusion and drugs. People vulnerable to hepatitis are those living with multiple sex partners, families with infected members and people who share needles/syringes-for drug use or blood transfusions, razor blades, contaminated foods, toothbrushes, unsterilized medical equipment, health workers and mother to baby transmissions. "I suggest vaccination. Kuwait has already been implementing compulsory vaccination for all children born in Kuwait, free of charge. It's a good government initiative and it's continuing to do so. Adults can also visit our health centers all over Kuwait to get the vaccine for a minimal charge," Dr Enezi advised.

Professor Dr Markus Peck, Secretary General of European Association for the study of Liver, was invited to the Hepatology Club meeting. He is the doctor behind guideline development and public policies connected to hepatitis in Europe. "I will be sharing our experiences at the European Liver Association and how the techniques we learned can be transferred here in Kuwait. This meeting is a very important step to deal with the hepatitis virus in Kuwait. Education and identifying people with the disease is also very important," Dr Peck mentioned.



FRESNO, California: In this photo 9-year-old Carlos Velasquez drinks well water from a hose at a trailer park near Fresno. — AP photos



FRESNO, California: Water is pumped from a well into a drainage ditch along agricultural land near Fresno.

SWINE FLU OUTBREAK KILLS 33 IN THREE WEEKS IN IRAN

TEHRAN: An outbreak of swine flu has left 33 people dead in two provinces of southeastern Iran in the past three weeks, the official IRNA news agency reported on Monday. IRNA quoted Deputy Health Minister Ali Akbar Sayyari as saying there had been 28 deaths in Kerman province and five in Sistan-Baluchistan and warning the H1N1 virus was likely to spread to other areas including the capital Tehran. "The health ministry predicts that the virus will spread in the coming days to Tehran, West and East Azerbaijan and Kermanshah provinces more than to other places," he said.

Nearly 600 people have been hospitalised in Kerman province over the outbreak, the head of the province's medical university, Ali Akbar Haghdost, told the ISNA news agency. "Traces of the H1N1 virus were uncovered three weeks ago and we were the first province to report the epidemic," Haghdost said. He called for limited travel during a three-day holiday weekend due to start on Thursday in order to prevent the spread of the virus. Haghdost suggested the outbreak was now under control. "We have received 5,000 doses of vaccines today and a shipment of 15,000 will arrive tomorrow," he said.

Health Minister Hassan Hashemi said on Sunday the number of deaths from flu was similar to previous years, but that it was evolving and becoming harder to treat. "This flu comes from beyond our borders, especially from Sistan-Baluchistan" near Pakistan, Hashemi said, quoted by the Youth Journalist Club (YJC) state television website. "But every year it becomes wilder and more resistant" to treatment, he added. YJC only referred to the illness as the flu, and made no mention of swine flu. Patients suffering from diabetes, cardiovascular, kidney, lung diseases and cancer, as well as the elderly, children under five and pregnant women are more sensitive to the virus and must be vaccinated, said Sayyari.

A senior official from the Health Ministry's Infectious Disease Department on Monday reported the state of swine flu to parliament's hygiene and treatment committee, IRNA reported. A major H1N1 outbreak in 2009 sparked a World Health Organization pandemic alert in June 2009, after the virus emerged from Mexico and the United States. The alert was lifted in August 2010 and the outbreak left some 18,500 people dead in 214 countries. The first instance of swine flu in Iran was reported in June 2009 when a 16-year-old Iranian boy entered the country with his family on a flight from the United States. — AFP

FEAR AT THE TAP: URANIUM CONTAMINATES WATER IN THE WEST

FRESNO, California: In a trailer park tucked among irrigated orchards that help make California's San Joaquin Valley the richest farm region in the world, 16-year-old Giselle Alvarez, one of the few English-speakers in the community of farmworkers, puzzles over the notices posted on front doors: There's a danger in their drinking water. Uranium, the notices warn, tests at a level considered unsafe by federal and state standards. The law requires the park's owners to post the warnings. But they are awkwardly worded and in English, a language few of the park's dozens of Spanish-speaking families can read.

"It says you can drink the water - but if you drink the water over a period of time, you can get cancer," said Alvarez, whose working-class family has no choice but keep drinking and cooking with the tainted tap water daily, as they have since Alvarez was just learning to walk. "They really don't explain." Uranium, the stuff of nuclear fuel for power plants and atom bombs, increasingly is showing in drinking water systems in major farming regions of the US West - a naturally occurring but unexpected byproduct of irrigation, of drought, and of the over pumping of natural underground water reserves. An Associated Press investigation in California's cen-

tral farm valleys - along with the US Central Plains, among the areas most affected - found authorities are doing little to inform the public at large of the growing risk.

Safety standards

That includes the one out of four families on private wells in this farm valley who, unknowingly, are drinking dangerous amounts of uranium, researchers determined this year and last. Government authorities say long-term exposure to uranium can damage kidneys and raise cancer risks, and scientists say it can have other harmful effects. In this swath of farmland, roughly 250 miles long and encompassing major cities, up to one in 10 public water systems have raw drinking water with uranium levels that exceed federal and state safety standards, the US Geological Survey has found. More broadly, nearly 2 million people in California's Central Valley and in the US Midwest live within a half-mile of groundwater containing uranium over the safety standards, University of Nebraska researchers said in a study published in September.

Everything from state agencies to tiny rural schools are scrambling to deal with hundreds of tainted public wells - more regulated than pri-

ivate wells under safe-drinking-water laws. That includes water wells at the Westport Elementary School, where 450 children from rural families study outside the Central California farm hub of Modesto. At Westport's playground, schoolchildren take a break from tether ball to sip from fountains marked with Spanish and English placards: "SAFE TO DRINK." The school, which draws on its own wells for its drinking fountains, sinks and cafeteria, is one of about 10 water systems in the farm region that have installed uranium removal facilities in recent years. Prices range from \$65,000 for the smallest system to the millions of dollars.

Just off Westport's playground, a school maintenance chief jangles the keys to the school's treatment operation, locked in a shed the size of a garage. Inside, a system of tubes, dials and canisters resembling large scuba tanks removes up to a pound a year of uranium from the school's wells. The uranium gleaned from the school's well water and other Central California water systems is handled like the nuclear material it is - taken away by workers in masks, gloves and other protective garments, said Ron Dollar, a vice president at Water Remediation Technology, a Colorado-based firm.

General fund

It is then processed into nuclear fuel for power plants, Dollar said. Before treatment, Westport's water tests up to four times state and federal limits. After treatment, it's safe for the children, teachers and staff to drink. Other Central California farm schools opt to buy bottled water in place of drinking fountains, which are off limits because of uranium and other contaminants. "We don't have a choice," said Terri Lancaster, principal of the 260 students at Waukena elementary school in rural Tulare County. "You do what you have to do."

Until winning a state grant to pay for trucked-in drinking water, her school was spending \$10,000 a year from its general fund on bottled water. Meanwhile, the city of Modesto, with a half-million residents, recently spent more than \$500,000 to start blending water from one contaminated well to dilute the uranium to safe levels. The city has retired a half-dozen other wells with excess levels of uranium. State officials don't track spending on uranium-contaminated wells. But the state's Water Resources Control Board identified at least \$16.7 million the state has spent since 2010 helping public water systems deal with high levels of uranium. — AP

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HILTON KUWAIT RESORT CELEBRATES SUCCESSFUL 2015 WITH CORPORATE GALA

KUWAIT: Hilton Kuwait Resort celebrated a successful year with guests and corporate partners at the hotel's 2015 Annual Corporate 'Winter Heaven' themed gala.

Ziad Tantawi, General Manager of Hilton Kuwait Resort along with John Riad, Director of Business Development and Sylvia Matei, Director of Sales sided by the Sales, PR and Marketing team gave a warm welcome to the

elite guests wishing them a pleasant time.

Hosted by the famous MC Tamara Saab, the party was held in the hotel's impressive Al-Dorra Ballroom, where guests were treated with entertainment from the famous iPad magician Cédric Faure - flown from France to perform in this special occasion - amidst a backdrop of wintry snowflake decorations. During the party Ziad Tantawi, The General

manager of Hilton Kuwait Resort gave an engaging speech, where he thanked all partners for their continuous support throughout 2015, whilst guests enjoyed a lavish dinner, comprising of the best international cuisines, prepared by Hilton Kuwait talented chefs.

The party also served to honor company's representatives from prominent Kuwait businesses that have supported and contributed

to Hilton Kuwait Resort's successful year. Ziad Tantawi commended the business partners for their efforts and support throughout 2015. He commented "I felt a great sense of pride celebrating the successful year the Hilton Kuwait Resort has had with the people who have contributed to our success. This event provided us with the perfect opportunity to thank those individuals and companies who

have showed continuous support throughout the year."

In addition to the delicious cuisine and world-class entertainment guests enjoyed throughout the evening, a raffle draw also took place with guests winning valuable gifts including free night stays in Hilton Hotels and Resorts around the world as well as precious gifts from Hilton.



ICAI KUWAIT CHAPTER HOLDS FAMILY DAY



The Kuwait Chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India held their 8th Annual Family Day event at the Corner Football Stadium, behind Aqua Park near Kuwait Towers. The one day event was well attended by over 200 members along with their families. The venue which was at the stadium overlooking the beach and the pleasant weather made it an impeccable day. The event began with a welcome speech by Prasantha Shetty followed by

games and entertainment organized and run by the members of the Social and Youth Committee led by Ritu Sharma and Noel Cheria.

The games lined up included Room Service Race, The Boat Ride, Roller Coaster Ball, Bucket Steps, Worm-a-loop, Bag Race, Dizzy Love Birds, The Upside Down Walking and a magic show which enthralled the children. The highlight of the day was Raffle which kept the audience glued to their tickets in the hope of winning big.

Several prizes were handed out through the day. The prizes sponsored included Airline tickets, lunch and dinner vouchers at top restaurants, personal and home accessories and scores of freebies.

Ambassador of India Sunil Jain and his wife Dr Gargi Jain graced the occasion with their presence and Sai Devata concluded thanking all the attendees and sponsors who made the event a success. Overall everyone had good memories to take back home.



PRAISE GOD MINISTRY HOLDS 10TH THANKSGIVING FESTIVAL

The Praise God Ministry (PGM) held its 10th Anniversary Celebration of Stuthi Swarlapana, a kind of "Kuwaiti thanks giving" event last weekend.

The Festival was attended by over 3,500 people who celebrated the evening with two hours of musical and dramatic performances involving 6 dances, a song and a drama. Two video presentation highlighting the journey of the festival and the change of the skyline of Kuwait over the last 10 years were also presented.

Stuthi Swarlapana or The Divine music festival is rooted in the Word of God, which commands us that we should love God first with all our heart and then love our neighbor like we love ourselves.

This festival is an opportunity for each of us to thank God every year for overcoming many challenges and allowing us to reach the last month of the year safely. It also is an event that is designed to thank our host nation Kuwait for giving each one us an

opportunity to be gainfully employed and serve this nation.

The festival is held each year as a way of saying thank you to underprivileged members of the workforce in Kuwait by providing them an opportunity to participate as well as enjoy themselves at an evening of thanksgiving and entertainment and enjoy a home cooked dinner at the end of the show.

The event was opened by NECK Common Council, President Pastor Amanuel Ghareeb. The keynote speaker was a very special guest, Wilson Varghese CEO, Trade Links Group.

Pastor Ratna Maitra Founder and senior pastor of PGM said - "The 2015 Festival was a huge success as evidenced by growth in the size of the audience, the quality of the entertainment presented and well as the use of technology". She further added that:

"I would like to give special thanks to Pastor Amanuel Ghareeb and Wilson Varghese for giving us their time and word of

encouragement. Varghese spoke of the power of prayer and depending on God in our daily lives as keys to joy, peace and success in life.

"The Stuthi Swarlapana, or Praise Music festival, is our way of expressing our gratitude to everyone in our congregation - our family members, our mentors, our pastors, our friends, colleagues and the community."

An honor ceremony was held to recognize members of PGM who have been serving the ministry for over a decade. These individuals have shown consistent commitment to serve people in need and to serve the PGM community. It never stops to amaze us see these individuals - "Continually care and serve".

Above all, Pastor Ratna concluded, "I would like to thank all the members of our congregation and the broader community for being part of this big and loving family. Like previous festivals, this year's event required a lot of hard work, sacrifice and commitment from many of the PGM family

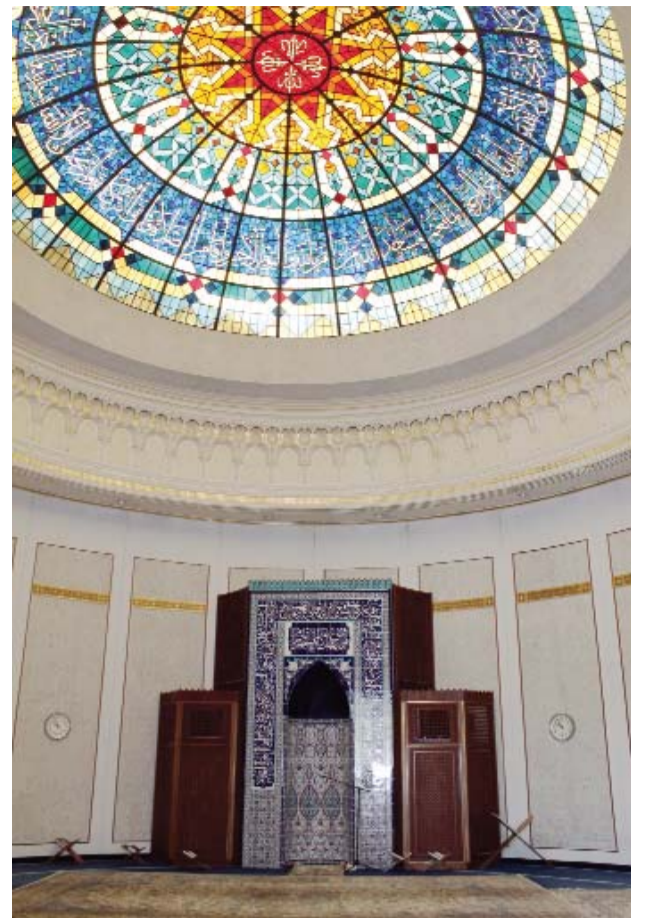


members. Each member of the organizing teams have worked very hard over the past two months to make the evening a grand success. Without their fantastic help and support, we would be unable to hold this event. It warms everyone's heart to see so much generosity from those who have so little".

KGA FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

The much awaited 7-a-side Football tournament will be held on Friday, 18th December 2015 at 6:00 am at the Al-Bayan Stadium, under the auspices of Kuwait Indian Football Federation. The event coincides with Kuwait Goan Association's Nagoa Verna, a formidable football association involved in sports and cultural activities among the Indian expatriate community. Any KIFF affiliated club/association, wishing to field more than two teams, please contact the organizer on Tel: 99695677/99865349/66424531 or 99376171. The draw will be held on 11th December at 10.00 a.m. on the Bayan Grounds. For more info, email: kgakuwait@gmail.com. The Last date to accept the entry for fielding two teams is today, Wednesday 9th December 2015.





IWG MEMBERS VISIT BAHRAIN

Members of the International Women's Group (IWG) - Kuwait Branch visited the Kingdom of Bahrain recently following an invitation from Bahrain's Ambassador to Kuwait Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who contributed heavily in preparing a special program for the guests. Twenty eight spouses of ambassadors and IWG members enjoyed a historic, cultural journey that included tours to the Kingdom's land-

marks and museums. The trip started with a trip to the Dar Al-Quran Museum, after which the group visited Bahrain's National Museum, where they were given a demonstration to the civilizations that lived in the country as well as the culture of Bahraini social life. The group also visited the museum's theater, which includes Bahrain's opera house. On the second day, the guests visited worship places

in the kingdom, including the Al-Fatih Mosque, the Jewish Synagogue, and a historical church, then met with Sheikha Hind bint Salman Al Khalifa, Chairperson of the International Union of Bahraini Businesswomen. On the third day, the group visited the Supreme Council for Arab Women, while on the fourth they visited the Qal'at Al-Bahrain (Bahrain Fort).



Johny Lever and Kamal Hussein with Ashfaq Khan cutting the cake

CONTINENTAL HOTEL HONORS JOHNY LEVER

Kuwait Continental Hotel honored King of Indian Comedy Johny Lever. The hotel held a party for him in one of its best Restaurants with Indian Touch; the 'Darbar' Restaurant, where the guests enjoyed delicious Indian food with a variety recipes. Also, the Group of Indian Culture Society shared the celebrating of the Bollywood star with their president Ashfaq Khan, with the much-awaited 'Johny Lever Live' show that was held for the first time in Kuwait. Kuwait Continental Hotel gave honor to Johny Lever and his team. Kamal Al-Din, General Manager of the hotels group expressed his gratitude and appreciated ICS mission. On this occasion, mementos and gifts hampers were presented to the artist and his team. The 'Johny Lever Live' was organized as part of the 10th anniversary celebrations of Indian Cultural Society Legendry.



Kamal Hussein honors King of Comedy Johny Lever

Johny Lever was accompanied by his young daughter, actress and stand-up comedian Jamie Lever and reality show fame humor poet and standup comedian Gaurav Sharma. The occasion was celebrated with cutting cake

and continental and dinner in charming weather in Darbar. Johny Lever, his Team and Ashfaq A Khan President of ICS expressed their special thanks to Kamal for his care and for his best hospitality.

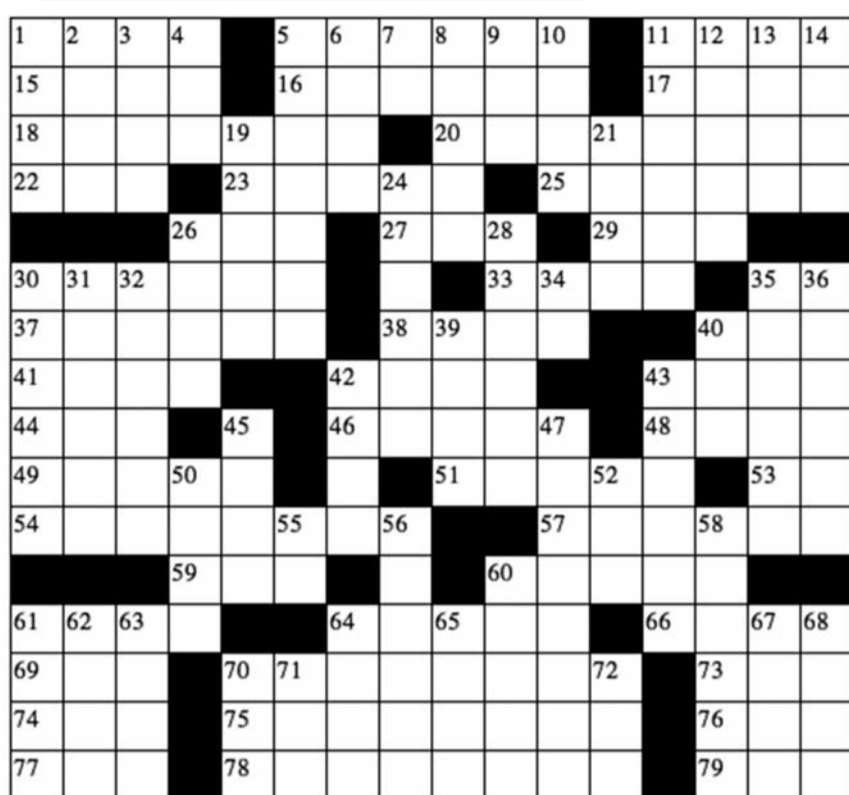


Kamal Hussein honors Johny Lever's daughter



Kamal Hussein with the King of comedy with the Indian culture group

CROSSWORD 1104



ACROSS

- 1. Type genus of the Amiiidae.
5. A river in Germany.
11. A narrow strip of land that juts out into the sea.
15. The (prehensile) extremity of the superior limb.
16. Report or maintain.
17. A substance for packing a joint or coating a porous surface to make it impervious to gas or liquid.
18. Of or relating to or characteristic of Afghanistan or its people.
20. Someone who tries to embarrass you with gibes and questions and objections.
22. The cry made by sheep.
23. Jordan's port.
25. Swelling from excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue.
27. A defensive missile designed to shoot down incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles.
29. How long something has existed.
30. (Old Testament) The 2nd son of Jacob and one of the 12 patriarchs of Israel.
33. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
37. A city in east central China.
38. In bed.
41. Any property detected by the olfactory system.
44. A message whose ingenuity or verbal skill or incongruity has the power to evoke laughter.
46. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo.
48. A Hindu prince or king in India.
49. Make understand.
51. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
53. In operation or operational.
54. Civilians trained as soldiers but not part of the regular army.
57. East Indian tart yellow berrylike fruit.
59. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
61. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
66. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
69. A white linen liturgical vestment with sleeves.
73. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
74. (informal) Of the highest quality.
75. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
76. An antiviral drug used in the treatment of AIDS.
77. The seventh and last day of the week.
78. A mountain peak in south central Sri Lanka (7,360 feet high).
79. (meaning literally 'born') Used to indicate the maiden or family name of a married woman.

DOWN

- 1. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
2. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
3. Any tree or shrub of the genus Inga having pinnate leaves and showy usually white flowers.
4. Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.
5. A city in eastern China on the Yangtze River.
6. English essayist (1775-1834).
7. Being ten more than one hundred forty.
8. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
9. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
10. Make anew.
11. A vehicle mounted on runners and pulled by horses or dogs.
12. Food prepared by cooking and straining or processed in a blender.
13. A distinct part that can be specified separately in a group of things that could be enumerated on a list.
14. A three-tone Chadic language.
19. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
21. A toothed wheel that engages another toothed mechanism in order to change the speed or direction of transmitted motion.
24. United States writer of poems and plays about racial conflict (born in 1934).
26. An emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger (usually accompanied by a desire to flee or fight).
28. An unnaturally frenzied or distraught woman.
31. A salt or ester of hydriodic acid.
32. Largest and most widely distributed genus of bats.
34. A public promotion of some product or service.
35. South American shrub having edible greenish plumlike fruit.
36. Having an oblique or slanted direction.
39. A small cake leavened with yeast.
40. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
42. United States tennis player who was the first Black to win United States and English singles championships (1943-1993).
43. A genus of orb-weaving spiders including common garden spiders and barn spiders.
45. A round shape formed by a series of concentric circles.
47. Archaeobacteria requiring a salt-rich environment for growth and survival.
50. (of persons or their actions) Able or disposed to inflict pain or suffering.
52. Tag the base runner to get him out.
55. A state in the eastern United States.
56. An immovable joint (especially between the bones of the skull).
58. Of or relating to or characteristic of Syria or its people or culture.
60. Brightly colored tropical freshwater fishes.
62. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
63. Assist or encourage, usually in some wrongdoing.
64. A fraudulent business scheme.
65. A sign of something about to happen.
67. An edge tool used to cut and shape wood.
68. Moderate or restrain.
70. Syndrome resulting from a serious acute (sometimes fatal) infection associated with the presence of staphylococcus.
71. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
72. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

Yesterday's Solution

A crossword puzzle solution grid with letters filled in.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Professional advice may work in your best interest-whether you give or receive, it does not really matter. You have a sense of mass psychology about how to organize sale items or fast sale items and can manipulate sensitive areas of the public mind.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You appreciate the freedom to express your ideas in the workplace today-others are listening. You are good at laying out a foundation for yourself and others to build upon.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

A new goal in the workplace seems to be a good idea, but you may wonder if you are on the right track. The goal is probably a very good one, so keep the plans on paper for now and use the next few weeks to firm up your idea.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Conversations at a meeting may take the road to a misunderstanding-careful. Perhaps rephrasing your words or asking another to rephrase his or her words would be helpful toward a better understanding.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Those in authority know of your ability to manage and direct other people. They could be seeking you out to take responsibility for a particular job requiring your special talents.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

A great deal of interaction with your co-workers may keep you in the same job position for much too long. If you want to encourage your supervisor to pay attention to your great potential, you will do well to request work that would put you in a position of leadership.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your business expertise is showing this morning as you try to find the code, equation or key to some difficult problem. Figuring out how to organize people or a project is likely to be a topic of special appeal, as well as a challenge.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your desire to try something totally new and different could lead you on an investigation of some rather far-out ideas. Everything is working in your favor to help bring out your unique qualities.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You are feeling re-energized. You consider any difficulties you might encounter as a privilege that you can handle. You work to find the answer that will pull in the best for everyone.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Spend some time in thought before making your final decision about an important work issue. This is a time when it will pay for you to be very careful in making a decision that might involve a change in direction where your professional life is concerned.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today you may find yourself lecturing or judging. Your thoughtful appreciation for ideas and thoughts should make this an excellent time to think and study. You may find yourself in the middle of a very enjoyable long conversation, writing a letter, or making a special phone call.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You will see that your businesslike abilities are at a high point. You could find yourself involved in some in-depth discussions now-you are at your mental best. Now is the time you will see why it is you had to study that dull class that was required in high school.

WORD SEARCH

Christmas Gift Ideas

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 13 letters spell an additional Christmas gift idea.

A word search grid with various words hidden, such as SOCKS, SCENT, MUSIC, etc.

- BAKING, BELT, BOOK, BRACELET, CANDLES, CANDY, CHOCOLATES, CLOTHES, COFFEE MAKER, COFFEE MUG, COLOGNE, COOKIES, DOLL, EARRINGS, ELECTRONICS, FLOWERS, GAME, GIFT BASKET, GIFT CARD, HERBAL TEAS, JEWELRY, MONEY, MOVIE, MUSIC, NECKLACE, NECKTIE, PANTS, PENDANT, PERFUME, PLANT, SCARF, SHIRT, SLIPPERS, SNEAKERS, SOCKS, STUFFED ANIMAL, SWEATER, TELEVISION, TOOL SET, TOY, TREE ORNAMENT, WATCH, WINE.

Yesterday Solution

Christmas Tree

A Christmas tree shape where each branch contains letters from words hidden in the grid.

- ANGEL, ARTIFICIAL BRANCHES, CANDY CANES, CELEBRATION, DECEMBER, DECORATE, DECORATIONS, FESTIVE, FRESH CUT, GARLAND, GIFTS, GREEN, LARGE, LIGHTS, NEEDLES, ORNAMENTS, PINE, PRESENTS, PURCHASE, REAL, SCENT, SETTING UP, SKIRT, SMALL, SPRUCE, STAND, STAR, TAKING DOWN, TINSEL, TOPPER, TRADITION, TREE FARM, TREE LOT, TRUNK, WATER, YEARLY.

The hidden message is: THE TRADITION OF HAVING A CHRISTMAS TREE ORIGINATED IN GERMANY

Daily SuDoku

A 5x5 Sudoku puzzle grid with some numbers filled in.

Yesterday's Solution

A 5x5 Sudoku puzzle solution grid.

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Hospitals

Table listing hospitals such as Sabah Hospital, Amiri Hospital, Maternity Hospital, Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital, Chest Hospital, Farwaniya Hospital, Adan Hospital, Ibn Sina Hospital, Al-Razi Hospital, and Physiotherapy Hospital with their respective phone numbers.

Clinics

Table listing various clinics including Kaizen center, Rawda, Adaliya, Khaldiya, Kaifan, Shamiya, Shuwaikh, Abdullah Salem, Nuzha, Industrial Shuwaikh, Qadsiya, Dasmah, Bneid Al-Gar, Shaab, Qibla, Ayoun Al-Qibla, Mirqab, Sharq, Salmiya, Jabriya, Maidan Hawally, Bayan, Mishref, W Hawally, Sabah, Jahra, New Jahra, West Jahra, South Jahra, North Jahra, North Jleeb, Ardhiya, Firdous, Omariya, N Khaitan, and Fintas with their phone numbers.



PHARMACIES ON 24 HRS DUTY

Table listing pharmacies categorized by Governorate (Ahmadi, Jahra, Capital, Farwaniya, Hawally) with columns for Pharmacy Name, Address, and Phone Number.

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 2627 - 2630 Fax: (+965) 24348714 www.met.gov.kw

DAY: Tuesday

08/12/2015

Issue Time 07:00

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h

BY NIGHT: Very cold with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 10 - 30 km/h

Weather forecast section including a 'WARNING' box (No Current Warnings), a 'STATION' table with temperature ranges, an 'SFC. CHART' map, a '4 DAYS FORECAST' table, and 'PRAYER TIMES' and 'RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT' tables.

INTERNATIONAL CALLS



Large table listing international call numbers for various countries including Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Anguilla, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bermuda, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burkina, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Central African, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Cook Islands, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Cyprus (Northern), Czech Republic, Denmark, Diego Garcia, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, England (UK), Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Falkland Islands, Faroe Islands, Fiji, Finland, France, French Guiana, French Polynesia, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Gibraltar, Greece, Greenland, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guam, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Holland (Netherlands), Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Ibiza (Spain), Iceland, India, Indian Ocean, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Lesotho, Macao, Macedonia, Madagascar, Maldives, Malaysia, Malawi, Maldive, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Martinique, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Montserrat, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar (Burma), Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norfolk Island, North Korea, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Helena, Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, Saint Pierre, Saint Vincent, Samoa US, Samoa West, San Marino, Sao Tome, Saudi Arabia, Scotland (UK), Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Serbia, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tonga, Tokelau, Trinidad, Tunisia, Turkey, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, USA, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Virgin Islands UK, Virgin Islands US, Wales (UK), Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



PRIVATE CLINICS

Table listing private clinics categorized by specialty: Ophthalmologists, Plastic Surgeons, Paediatricians, Endocrinologist, Family Doctor, Psychiatrists, Gynaecologists & Obstetricians, Dermatologist, Dentists, Neurologists, Gastrologists, Physiotherapists & VD, Rheumatologists, Internist, Chest & Heart, Consultant Cardiologist.

Contact information for various centers: Psychologists / Psychotherapists, Soor Center, Kaizen center, Noor Clinic, and William Schuilenberg, RPC 2290-1677.



A thick blanket of early morning fog partially shrouds the skyscrapers of the Marina and Jumeirah Lake Towers districts of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. — AP photos

Dubai Marina is glitzy 'Manhattan' playground

With its glistening skyscrapers and man-made waterways, Dubai Marina is a playground for the rich. Dubai's rapid transformation from a desert outpost into one of the world's most architecturally stunning cities is mapped out in the Marina. What 15 years ago was mostly empty land is today a bustling neighborhood with a skyline that pierces through the clouds. More than 150 high-rise buildings, stacked row after row, make up this 50 million square foot (4.65 million square meter) waterfront neighborhood built around a man-made canal where the wealthy park their yachts.

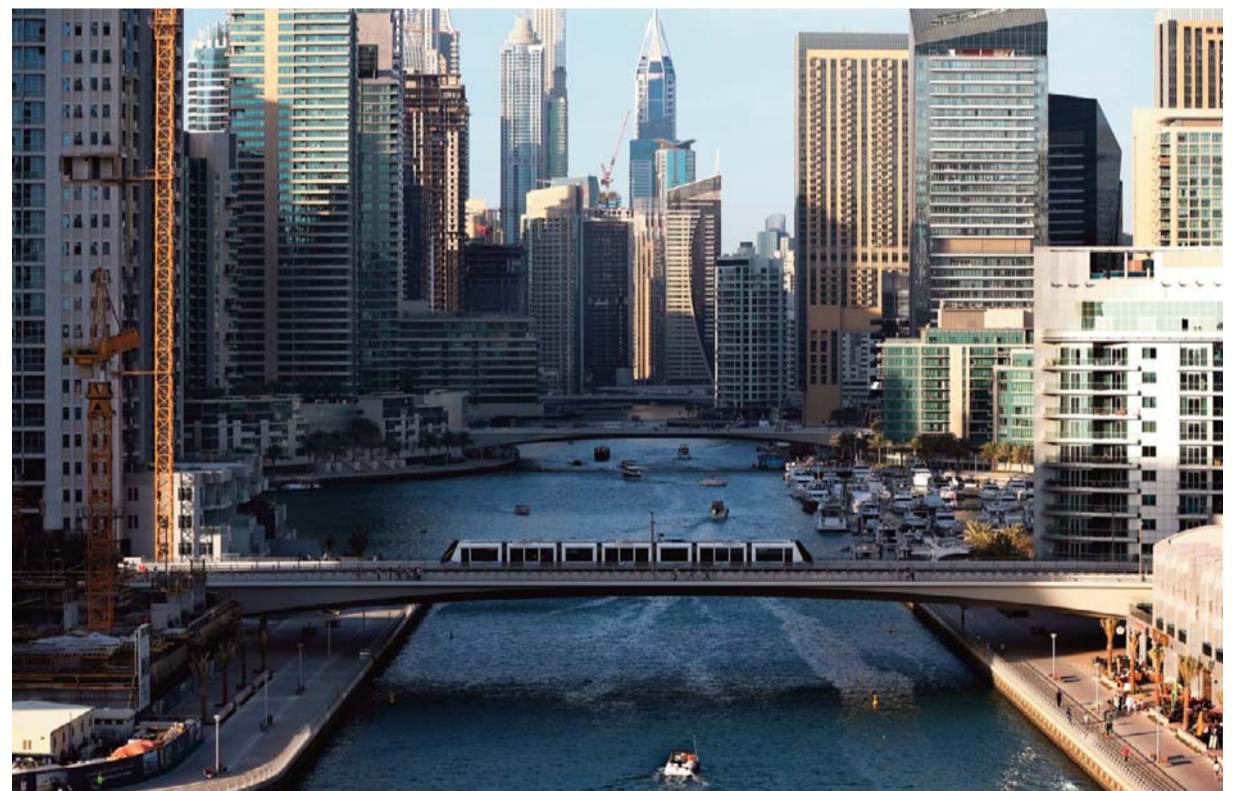
The area is sometimes referred to as the Manhattan of the Middle East and some of its buildings are promoted by realtors as having "Manhattan-style" architecture and amenities. A 12,400 square foot (1,152 square meter) apartment in the Marina was put on the market this year for a cool 56 million dirhams, or about \$15.25 million.

Unlike Manhattan, though, Dubai's year-round sunshine gives the Marina a summer vibe throughout the winter months, when temperatures rarely drop below 75 degrees Fahrenheit (24 Celsius) during the day. On weekends, alcohol-fueled party boats ferry Russian and Western expatriates down the canal as speed boats and jet skis buzz in the water.

Trendy restaurants and bars along the canal reflect the myriad of cultures and people drawn to Dubai, a modern city-state in the United Arab Emirates where foreigners far outnumber the locals. Children can ride on a carousel, splash in a fountain and watch street artists perform on the

canal's promenade. Around sunset, when the blistering heat of the day begins to subside, people jog and ride bikes.

The Marina boasts the world's tallest residential building, the Princess Tower, which reaches 1,355 feet (413 meters) high. The Marina 101 is currently being built to soar to 1,417 feet (432 meters). The neighborhood is one of many clusters of neck-bending skyscrapers throughout Dubai, built by armies of low-paid migrant workers, many of them from the Indian subcontinent. These workers provide the manpower to build high-rises, shopping malls, highways and other mega-construction projects sweeping through the region. While the wages they come for offer hope of a better life, they are far too meager for most to ever dream of calling the Marina they built home. Here is a series of photos taken by Associated Press photographer Kamran Jebreili, who captured moments of daily life throughout Dubai Marina. — AP



Tram crosses a bridge over a canal that forms the Marina waterfront district of Dubai.



Children enjoy playing in a fountain at the Marina waterfront in Dubai.



Visitors and tourists watch an entertainer perform during a street festival on the Marina waterfront in Dubai.



Yachts are moored at the southern end of the Marina waterfront in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Travel



A man dives into a hotel pool in the Marina neighborhood of Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



As the early morning fog lifts, a woman jogs in front of giant skyscrapers at the Marina waterfront in Dubai.



Men work out in a gym along the Marina waterfront in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



With the Marina skyline as a backdrop, a Muslim man performs the afternoon prayer on Jumeirah Palm Island's walkway.



A girl enjoys riding a carousel horse at the Marina waterfront in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



A security guard takes a selfie on the roof top of a 60-floor tower as the early morning fog partially shrouds the skyscrapers of the Marina and Jumeirah Lake Towers districts of Dubai.



A waiter carries a tray of traditional Arabic food at a restaurant by the water canal at the Marina district, in Dubai.



A worker walks on wooden scaffolding while fixing a window frame at a construction site in the Marina neighborhood of Dubai.



People use recreational vehicles opposite the Marina district of Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



A man does a flip into the water opposite the Marina Waterfront skyline in Dubai.



People use recreational vehicles opposite the Marina district of Dubai.



Tourists of different nationalities board a dhow for a cruise as the sun sets in the Marina neighborhood of Dubai.



Laborers install paving stones in front of an advertisement for luxury real estate, in the Marina district of Dubai.



A laborer carries his lunchbox as he leaves a construction site for the day at the Palm Jumeirah opposite the Marina district, in Dubai.



Guests dance on the GuGu boat during a private party opposite the skyline of the Marina Waterfront in Dubai.



London: A place worth visiting in Christmas

By Nawara Fattahova

I didn't expect to fall in love with London after visiting it again after my first visit as a child many years ago, but I did - head over heels. This great visit was realized thanks to Gulf Air that organized this trip, with the Park Tower Knightsbridge, a Luxury Collection Hotel, accommodating the press group.

The entire journey was wonderful and the experience was incredible. We were fortunate that the weather was exceptionally mild during the three days of our stay, as usually during this period of the year it's much colder. Also, it rained only once lightly. The people were nice, polite and helpful. Also, the location where we stayed was amazing and everything was nearby.

On the first day of the trip, the media group got a great opportunity to visit the headquarters of the BBC. We were able to watch the hundreds of reporters working in their offices that are all open with transparent partitions, which is the new concept of work environment. It was a really great experience to improvise as a radio anchor, as our group was allowed to participate in an episode of a horror radio series. After watching some of the BBC Earth nature documentaries, followed by lunch, we were able to buy souvenirs near the main gate of the building.

On the second day, we also lived another unforgettable experience of personally preparing chocolate bars and chocolate bubbles for a Christmas tree. After welcoming the group with hot drinks at Rocco Chocolates, Sam Smallman, Retail and Events Manager, presented information about the kinds of chocolate, its origin, process of production, characteristics, and many other interesting tidbits.

The group then made our own flavored chocolate bars and balls. Sam was giving instructions, and we had a variety of about 20 different ingredients or additives that we were able to add to our bar from spices, decorations, dry fruit, nuts and others. After the chocolates hardened, we were able to wrap them.

Luxury Hotel

The amazing Christmas spirit combined with the unique fragrance of the season welcomes guests when first entering the Park Tower Knightsbridge hotel, giving guests a touch of trance and comfort. The staff welcomes the guests warmly with wide smiles on their face, making them feel at home as precious guests.

The Park Tower Knightsbridge in London is a member of The Luxury Collection, a portfolio of Starwood's renowned hotels and resorts worldwide. Opened in 1973, the circular The Park Tower Knightsbridge stands elegantly amidst the historic streets that define one of London's most stylish and beloved districts. Modern Knightsbridge is undisputedly the city's most coveted address - partially due to its stunning development by famed architects Henry Holland and Thomas Cubitt. A vibrant mix of luxurious shopping, graceful living and fabulous dining attracts discerning visitors from around the world.

The Park Tower Knightsbridge was built by acclaimed architects Richard Robin Seifert & Partners. Architecturally speaking, the hotel's innovative circular shape and panoramic windows affording 360-degree views were considered extremely avant-garde for the time. In 1989, the hotel became part of The Luxury Collection and to this day, remains true to the highest standards of hospitality, style and service.

The Park Tower Knightsbridge provides a selection of impressive Penthouse and Panoramic Suites where exceptional service and discreet touches of luxury characterize the guest experience. The guest rooms, with their curved walls, contemporary dEcor, luxurious furnishings, and re-molded bathrooms in Italian marble, complete with spacious walk-in showers, provide the perfect haven to relax and unwind.

The hotel offers beautifully appointed bedrooms ranging from the largest standard guest rooms in London to the stunning Penthouse Suites on the 17th floor with uninterrupted panoramic views of London. Total of 280 rooms including 5 glorious Penthouse Suites, 8 Panoramic Suites, 40 Panoramic Rooms, 7 Executive Floors and 198 Non-Smoking rooms are ready to welcome the Hotel's guests.



To truly enhance your stay, experience The Park Tower Butler, who reaches beyond the white-gloved service of yesterday to a more contemporary interpretation. With this option, included when reserving any of the Suites and available for a supplement when staying in a Panoramic Room, your stay begins before you arrive when your personal butler contacts you to begin planning your itinerary and navigating any special requests.

Classic Rooms at The Park Tower Knightsbridge embrace a warm and contemporary decor. From the handcrafted furniture and marble bathroom, to the 32" flat screen TV with 42 satellite channels in 8 languages, with movies and music on-demand and iPod docking station, Classic Rooms are a sophisticated marriage between traditional and modern features.

They are equipped with Wi-Fi/Wired High Speed Internet Connection Mini-bar and In-room safe.

The freshest fish, the finest French cooking and one of London's most coveted addresses combine to make One-O-One Restaurant an appealing mix of food and fashion. French Executive Chef, Pascal Proyart devotes a large part of his menus to fish. Signature dishes include Norwegian red king crab leg and hand dived West Coast scallops. Interior Design leader Hirsch Bedner was inspired by Chef Pascal Proyart's cuisine to create the unique decor of One-O-One Restaurant. His masterpiece, the Oyster Table, stands in the restaurant's lounge, where breakfast is also served every morning.

Elegant and chic, the ambience of The Knightsbridge Lounge is evocative of a yesteryear Grand Salon. During the

day, it is the perfect setting for a delightful afternoon tea. In the evening, it welcomes you under its impressive 18 foot chandelier for a glass of drink. Then the Hyde Bar - offers cocktails and spirits in a traditional and hospitable atmosphere.

The hotel caters for private dinners and meetings up to 150 in a choice of four meeting rooms which include the club-like atmosphere of the Exploration Suite or the splendid dEcor of the Trianon Room. A full range of catering services can be arranged for Private Dining through to Banqueting with tailor made menus such as canapés, finger buffet through to gourmet dining. Additional facilities include a 24-hour business center with printing facilities and other business services such as secretarial services on request, translation services on request, shipping and packaging on request, fitness center, in-room spa services gift shops and 24 hour secure car parking and car rental.

Located in the heart of Knightsbridge, London, The Park Tower Knightsbridge is just moments from Hyde Park and some of the finest shops in the world such as Harrods and Harvey Nichols, with the designer shops of Sloane Street only a few minutes' walk away. It's a stone's throw from Knightsbridge underground, and has direct link to London's Heathrow (12 miles) and Gatwick Airports.

Afternoon Tea

The Park Tower Knightsbridge's Distinctly Knightsbridge Afternoon Tea is inspired by the iconic hotel's Knightsbridge surroundings and is served daily in the beautifully-decorated Knightsbridge Lounge. Created by The Park Tower Knightsbridge's renowned Executive Head Chef, Pascal Proyart, guests can savor an exceptional selection of sandwiches, desserts and pastries in a space inspired by nearby Hyde Park. Taking cues from the diverse flora of the park, the intricate silk wall covering in The Knightsbridge Lounge features a canopy of hand-painted and hand-embroidered magnolia trees, whilst furnishings feature a color palette of sage greens, milky creams and shimmering silver redolent of Hyde Park's soft foliage.

To accompany their Distinctly Knightsbridge Afternoon Tea, guests can choose from a selection of traditional British teas, tisane infusions and oriental teas. Guests wishing to make the occasion even more memorable can also opt for one of three specially-created cocktails. Alongside the Distinctly Knightsbridge Afternoon Tea, The Knightsbridge Lounge also serves an indulgent array of hot chocolates. Developed by local artisan chocolatiers Rocco Chocolates and Chef Pascal, the hot chocolates are made with Rocco's finest organic cocoa and steamed milk. Pascal's flavor combinations include an orange hot chocolate infused with orange zest and oil, a spiced hot chocolate with chilli and allspice and a blackcurrant and vanilla hot chocolate made with herbal tea.

The Distinctly Knightsbridge Afternoon Tea is served daily from 3pm to 6pm in The Knightsbridge Lounge and costs £37 per person. Champagne cocktails cost an additional £16 each and hot chocolates are priced from £8-£12 each. For younger Afternoon Tea aficionados, the hotel offers a Children's Afternoon Tea for £19.50 per child (under 12 years old).





This handout picture taken by Danny North and released by LIVENATION shows U2 guitarist The Edge (left) and Matt McJunkins, touring bassist for Eagles of Death Metal, during a performance with their bands.



This handout picture released by LIVENATION shows U2 frontman Bono (third left) and Jesse Hughes (fourth left) of the Eagles of Death Metal performing with their bands at the packed 16,000-seat AccorHotels Arena in Paris. — AFP

Eagles of Death Metal members revisit Paris attack site

Members of California rock band Eagles of Death Metal yesterday revisited the ravaged Paris theater where they survived a massacre by Islamic extremist suicide bombers. Solemn and silent, they came to the now-shuttered Bataclan theater in eastern Paris, whose facade has become a shrine to the at least 89 people killed inside. Band members laid flowers at the site under a persistent December rain, some embracing as they stared at the wreaths, notes and banners

heaped in mourning and tribute.

Singer Jesse Hughes covered his face with emotion as he paced back and forth. Drummer Julian Dorio wiped away tears. The band members escaped the carnage by hiding in a dressing room. Co-founder Hughes said in an emotional interview with Vice and HBO that he wants the group to return there when the concert venue reopens. The band made a surprise return to Paris and performed with U2 on Monday night,

their first on-stage appearance since the Nov 13 attacks, which killed 130 people overall and terrified the country.

U2 were playing the last of four concerts in Paris, two of which had been postponed when France announced a state of emergency following the attacks. U2 frontman Bono told the audience they said he wanted to introduce "some people whose lives will forever be a part of this city of Paris. These are our brothers. Our fellow troubadours. They were robbed of

their stage three weeks ago, and we would like to offer them ours tonight." The two bands then played the Patti Smith song "People Have the Power." Hughes told U2 and the crowd, "We love you too, so much for giving us this opportunity. I look around and what do I see, nos amis, our friends. I love you guys so hard, and I will never stop rocking and rolling." — AP



Fetty Wap performs at the Hot 97's 'Busta Rhymes & Friends: Hot For The Holidays' at the Prudential Center on Saturday, Dec 5, 2015, in Newark, NJ.



In this Friday, July 10, 2015, file photo, singer Taylor Swift performs during her '1989' world tour at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ. — AP photos



In this Sunday, June 28, 2015, file photo, Kendrick Lamar performs at the BET Awards at the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles.



In this Sunday, Nov 22, 2015 file photo, The Weeknd performs at the American Music Awards at the Microsoft Theater, in Los Angeles.

Queen Latifah lands lead role in Lee Daniels' Fox music pilot

Queen Latifah has landed a lead role in Lee Daniels' untitled music project at Fox, which was formerly titled "Star," Variety has learned. Three more regulars-all relative newcomers-have also been cast. The Untitled Lee Daniels Music Pilot goes into production this month in Atlanta, and while the potential series has only been ordered to pilot at this point, Queen Latifah's star power, combined with Daniels' "Empire" track record at Fox, makes the project a strong contender for the 2016-17 television season.

The pilot revolves around three young women, who form a girl group with hopes of making it big in the music industry. The project has been described in the vein of "Dreamgirls," while incorporating the manufacturing of modern-day girl groups, showcasing the allure and heartache of the cut-throat music scene, and exploring cultural themes from a new perspective. Queen Latifah will anchor the young cast, playing Carlotta, the owner of an Atlanta beauty salon who has an amazing voice and becomes a surrogate mother to the three girls in the group, even though she doesn't approve of their musical dreams.

Following a nationwide casting call, actress and singers Jude Demorest, Ryan Destiny and Brittany O'Grady have been cast as the leading girl group members. Demorest ("Dallas," "The Middle"), from Washington, DC, will play Simone, Star's younger sister who spent her childhood in and out of foster homes after the death of her mother, and who will do anything to become the star she was named to be; Destiny ("Low Winter Sun"), also from Detroit, has been cast as Alexandra, the wealthy 20-year-old who grew up on New York's Upper East Side, but who, for years, has tried to put her privileged world behind her, so she can make real, authentic music; and O'Grady ("The Messengers"), from Washington, DC, will play Simone, Star's younger sister who dreams of the day Star will return to rescue her from the abusive foster home in which she was placed five years before.

In addition to the lead trio, TMZ reports that transgender model Amiyah Scott—who was in contention to be a "Real Housewives of Atlanta" cast member—has also joined Lee Daniels' project, though the site incorrectly reported the pilot is an "Empire" spin-off. Fox declined to comment on Scott's character details.

Untitled pilot

Hailing from the "Empire" co-creator, Daniels' untitled project is not an "Empire" spinoff or directly related to the hit Fox series,



Queen Latifah

despite conflicting reports. But, similarly to "Empire," the Queen Latifah-starrer is a primetime soap opera set in the world of music, and Fox boss Dana Walden hasn't ruled out crossover episodes, should it go to series. "It is modern-day music in Atlanta and 'Empire' is modern-day music business in New York. It's not inconceivable that the two shows can cross," Walden said when the pilot was announced. However, while not officially in development, Daniels has discussed the possibility of a separate "Empire" spinoff, and has thrown around the idea of a show revolving around young Cookie's life, following the early days of the character made famous by Taraji P. Henson.

Recently, "Empire" showrunner Ilene Chaiken told Variety that there is no spinoff in the works, but she did allude to the possibility brought up by Daniels, saying, "In our world, there may well be storylines and characters that we can spin off, but that's not what we are focused on right now, and nothing official or concrete is happening with regards to it." Produced by 20th Century Fox Television, the untitled pilot is the first to emerge from Daniels' overall multi-year deal with the studio. The "Empire" co-creator will write, direct and exec produce the pilot, while Tom Donaghy will also serve as writer and exec producer. Pamela Oas Williams ("Lee Daniels' The Butler") and Effe Brown ("Dear White People") are also exec producers. — Reuters

Holmes hits up Miami's Art Basel for first time

Katie Holmes sings, dances and is even making her directorial debut, but the actress admits she's not much of an art collector and was eager to explore Art Basel Miami Beach for the first time. Holmes walked the red carpet for a party toasting her Ocean Drive magazine cover at a private home on South Beach on Friday night. "I really appreciate art," said Holmes, who said she follows Jose Parla on Instagram and is friends with the photographer who goes by JR. She's also a fan of Cy Twombly. "I have a toe in the art world."

She also enjoys painting with Suri, her 9-year-old daughter with ex-husband Tom Cruise, but says dismissively "it's just a hobby. We just have fun." Holmes, who wore a red Azzedine Alaia dress and Manolo Blahnik heels, was among dozens of celebrities who descended on the prestigious art fair this week, including rocker Lenny Kravitz, who unveiled a photo exhibit, Alicia Keys, Eva Longoria, Ricky Martin and Leonardo DiCaprio. In February, Holmes will star in the upcoming movie "Touched With Fire" produced by Spike Lee.

"It's a love story between two people that are afflicted with bipolar disorder so it was an undertaking ... Christine Lahti played my mother, which was incredible." She'll also reprise her role as Jacqueline Kennedy and take a turn directing in the Reelz Channel miniseries "The Kennedys: After Camelot." Greg Kinnear starred as President Kennedy in the 2011 miniseries "The Kennedys." "Hopefully you just get better every time you do it," she said of her recent directing gigs, which includes the upcoming movie "All We Had."

The actress, who is known for being a fiercely private, yet down-to-earth New Yorker who frequents the subway, appears untouched by the Hollywood limelight. "Hollywood is a business so if you approach it like that ... it's a business. That's all." Holmes, who is the youngest of five siblings, said she'll go home to Ohio for the holidays, where she has lots of nieces and nephews to play with. "We'll probably be making a lot of Christmas cookies," and playing board games, said Holmes is a fan of the old-school games Pictionary and Scattergories. "I always love the New Year because it's the calm after the holidays." — AP



Actress Katie Holmes poses on the red carpet at the Ocean Drive magazine party at a private home on Friday, Dec 4, 2015, in Miami Beach, Fla. — AP

MTV's list of top musical artists has Adele at No 7

Hello? MTV is out with its list of 2015's top musical artists, and Adele only made it to No 7 despite selling more than twice as many albums as anyone else this year. Fetty Wap, whose songs "Trap Queen" and "My Way" established him as a rapper to watch, was named top artist. Drake's booty call groove, "Hotline Bling," was chosen by the network's staff as the best song of the year.

Besides Fetty Wap, MTV judged Taylor Swift, Drake, The Weeknd, Justin Bieber and Kendrick Lamar above Adele for best artist. Adele sold nearly 4.5 million copies of her new album, "25," in the US in just two weeks. The No 2 album in sales, Swift's "1984," has sold just under 1.8 million copies for all of 2015, the Nielsen company said. "There's a strong argument that (Adele) could be No. 1 and we welcome that back-and-forth," said Eric Ditzian, MTV's senior news director. "We wanted to take into context all of 2015."

Adele's new disc was released Nov 20, with the "Hello" single out a month earlier. Besides sales, MTV considers streams, impact on pop culture and an artist's contact with fans

through social media in its decision. Adele is relatively low key in social media and, thus far, hasn't made songs from "25" available for streaming through sources like Spotify. Fetty Wap "just absolutely came out of nowhere and blew us away," Ditzian said. MTV is impressed with how the rapper, born Willie Maxwell in Paterson, New Jersey, wasn't held back by a disability. Fetty Wap lost his left eye to glaucoma as a youngster.

Adele's "Hello" was everywhere for the past month, but ranked No 2 to Drake for best song. "Hotline Bling" was "inescapable in a very good way," Ditzian said. Rounding out MTV's Top Five best songs were "Can't Feel My Face" by The Weeknd, Lamar's "Alright" and "Shut Up & Dance" by Walk the Moon. MTV said the best movies of 2015 were "Furious 7," "Straight Outta Compton" and "Dope." Gigi Gorgeous was MTV's first-ever social media star of the year. — AP

And the Kimye baby's name is ... Saint West

And the baby de jour's name is ... Saint West. Kim Kardashian West and hubby Kanye announced the name of their new boy via Twitter and her app. North's sibling was born Saturday, weighing in at 8 pounds, 1 ounce. Saint is in fine company. His cousins include Reign Aston Dick. Kardashian West has tracked her pregnancy online for her 37 million Twitter followers, posting an image late Friday of her bare belly with the caption, "Ready whenever you are lol." North was born in 2013. Kardashian, 35, and West, 38, were married last year in Florence, Italy, in a gala ceremony filmed for E!'s "Keeping Up With the Kardashians." West proposed to his bride in October 2013, renting out San Francisco's AT&T Park for the occasion. — AP



In this Monday, June 1, 2015, file photo, Kim Kardashian, left, and Kanye West arrive at the 2015 CFDA Fashion Awards at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, in New York. — AP



Australian singer Kylie Minogue (right) poses with her waxwork in a Christmas special during a photocall at Madame Tussauds in London yesterday. — AFP photos



This undated product image released by Timothy Daly and Tim Isom shows felted earrings and a necklace from Jenne Giles's book, "Felt Fashion" (Quarry Books, 2010).

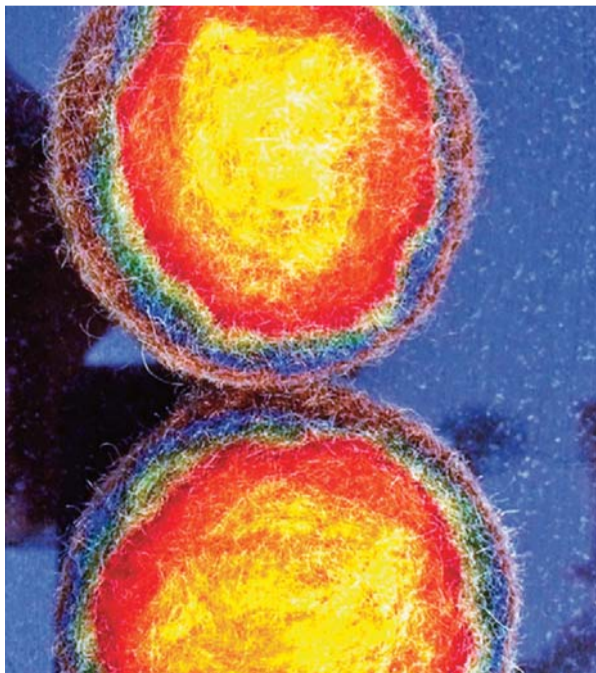


Photo shows felted geodes in Denver.

Felting transforms raw material into work of art

Seven years ago, Jenne Giles was a San Francisco painter and sculptor who didn't know felting existed. Now she works almost exclusively in the medium, stretching the possibilities of felt in fashion. There's a soft-sculpture aspect to wet felting that is attractive to Giles, who sells her ruffled scarves in museum gift shops and online at the Artful Home. It's tactile and hands-on, like working in clay, she says. "It incorporates all the things that I love," says Giles, author of "Felt Fashion: Couture Projects from Garments to Accessories" (Quarry Books, 2010).

"It's an ancient medium," she adds. "It's right there at the dawn of mankind, after making clothing from leather and sinew." Felting has two methods: Needle felting uses a barbed needle that pokes dry wool roving - raw fleece - into place. It's often used to make cute critters and dolls. Needle felting is not as permanent or sturdy as wet felting, which uses hot, soapy water and agitation to enmesh wool fibers so tightly that they cannot be pulled apart.

Many artists combine wool with other fibers, such as silk, in their wet-felted projects. Yet another method that is often called felting involves agitating a knitted wool item, such as a bag or scarf, in soapy, warm water to compact its fibers, shrinking it. But in the felting community, this method is set apart as "fulling." Whereas needle and wet felting begin with wool roving, the knitting-and-fulling process uses wool yarn. Leah Adams combines needle and wet felting in colorful geodes, and sells kits for them at her Etsy shop, kneek (short for "knitting geek"), or SpiderFelt.

Create a textile

Adams moved her art studio out of her Seattle home nine months ago, and just moved it again - to gain more felting space. "I have not exhausted everything I can imagine," she says. In the five years she's been felting, Adams has made her share of scarves so she's turning to larger, more time-consuming projects like wall hangings. She encourages non-felters to give it a try.

"The materials are cheap. It's not a huge investment in time. It's easy to try," she says. Many felters say it's the transformative nature of wool felting that attracts them. "It's a pretty magical experience to start with a raw material and create a textile out

of it," says LeBrie Rich, of Portland, Ore., who's been felting full-time for five years. Rich makes scarves and accessories - a faux-watch cuff, for example - but confesses to a love of felted desserts; view her four-layer cake and three years of felted Thanksgiving dinners created for a Portland knitting store at her website, LeBrie.

Adult supervision

Giles, too, sees magic in wool fibers being transformed from a loose state to a tightly entangled one. The texture changes, and colors deepen. "There is kind of a moment in felt-making where before the wool becomes matted, it looks exactly like paint strokes," she says.

Needle-felting several colors into a ball - or into one of Adams' geodes - provides another avenue for surprise when the ball or geode is cut open. This is fun to do with children, who can start needle felting as young as 4 and 5 with adult supervision, according to Adams. A felted scarf is another good beginner's project, says Rich. All you need to get started is wool roving, soap and hot water.

Learn how to do either felting technique by viewing tutorials online, including on YouTube. The International Feltmakers Association explains materials and techniques, while FeltUnited, a non-profit that connects felt artists worldwide, posts an eclectic online gallery of works.

Adams suggests perusing the web links at "Feltmaker's Links FAQ," provided by Feltmakers, an online discussion group. She recommends reading "Uniquely Felt" (Storey Publishing, 2007), by Christine White, to learn basic techniques. Buy wool roving at yarn or crafts stores, or online at Etsy, New England Felting Supply (owned by White) or Outback Fibers, which also posts instructional videos. Giles foresees continued innovations in felting. "I think there are a lot of unexplored possibilities for it," she says. "We're at a real beginning stage in the Renaissance of felt-making, of what's possible." — AP



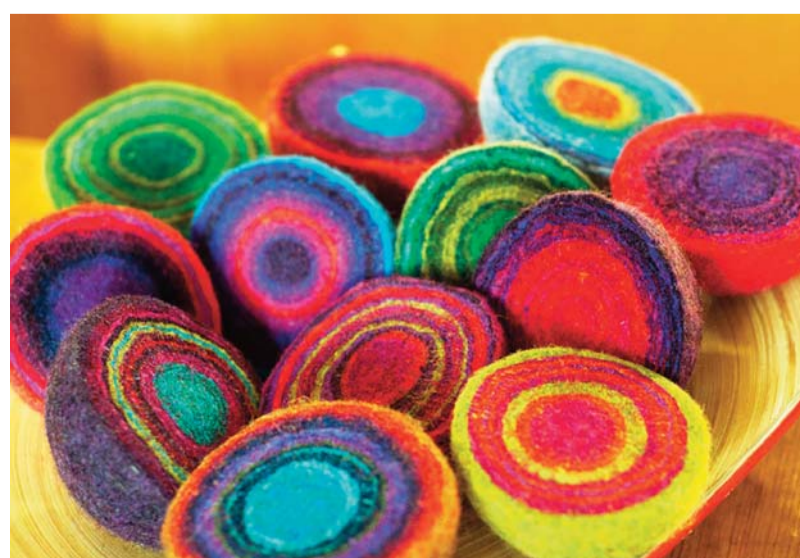
This photo provided by The Midnight Laboratory shows the 'tri-container' that Cory Phillips, of Erie, Colo., invented using lacrosse balls during the felting process.



This undated photo courtesy of Leah Adams/SpiderFelt shows a scarf designed by Adams.



This photo provided by Leah Adams shows how to wet felt wool roving into balls that can be sliced to reveal the colorful interior.



This photo provided by Leah Adams shows how to wet felt wool roving into balls that can be sliced to reveal the colorful interior by Adams, of Seattle, Wash, who has felted geodes for years.



This photo provided by The Midnight Laboratory shows wool bowls that Cory Phillips, of Erie, Colo., makes by wet felting and slicing balls to reveal their colorful interior. — AP photos