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MP NABIL AL-FADHL DIES DURING ASSEMBLY SESSION

GOVT, ASSEMBLY, MPs PAY TRIBUTE TO PARLIAMENTARIAN



Min 07°
Max 19°
High Tide 10:52 & 21:42
Low Tide 04:16 & 15:59



KUWAIT: MP Nabil Al-Fadhli (center) speaks to Prime Minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah (left) and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah at the National Assembly yesterday, shortly before he died during the parliament session. (Right) The Kuwaiti flag is placed over the seat of Fadhli in the Assembly. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: MP Nabil Al-Fadhli yesterday died on his parliamentary seat apparently of a heart attack, as the government, National Assembly and MPs mourned him as an active parliamentarian. He was 66. The incident took place about half an hour after the start of the Assembly session in which the grilling of Health Minister Ali Al-Obaidi was scheduled to take place. Speaker Marzouk Al-Ghanem said Fadhli died while serving his country and performing his duty, and suspended parliamentary sessions yesterday and today, saying the next session will be held on Jan 12.

Minutes before he died, Fadhli spoke for just over a minute, drawing the attention of his colleagues to focus entirely on Assembly business and not distract ministers and keep them busy signing transactions and forms for the lawmakers. He looked somewhat tired as he sat down. Minutes later, as MP Abdullah Al-Tameemi was speaking, Fadhli fell on the floor and lawmakers near him rushed to his help. They hoisted him up and seated him but he appeared to have breathed his last.

Ghanem quickly came down from the podium and took part in helping other MPs as medics also rushed to his help. They took Fadhli to the Assembly clinic and immediately rushed him to the nearby Amiri Hospital. The cause of his death was not immediately announced but it appears to be a massive heart attack. Fadhli complained of health problems in the past few years and last year he underwent a kidney transplant donated by his son. He was also a diabetic.

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DUBAI: In this Sept 22, 2015 photo, with the Marina Waterfront skyline in the background, laborers work at a construction site at the Palm Jumeirah. — AP

HRW OFFERS GUIDELINES FOR BUILDERS IN GULF

DUBAI: Human Rights Watch released a set of guidelines yesterday that it says construction companies in the oil-rich Gulf Arab states should follow to ensure basic rights for migrant workers. The New York-based rights group's latest recommendations shift the focus toward employers and are aimed at tackling some of the biggest abuses facing millions of low-paid laborers in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council.

They include ensuring that contractors and sub-contractors pay all recruiting fees, provide workers with places to keep their passports, provide decent accommodation, abide by requirements for maximum

working hours and overtime pay, and pay workers their full wages on time. The group also urged companies to appoint outside monitors to ensure workers are receiving basic labor protections in practice, not just on paper.

"In the face of rampant abuse and exploitation of worker's rights in GCC countries, construction firms need to step up to protect their workforce," said the group's Middle East director, Sarah Leah Whitson. Migrant workers in the Gulf are employed under a sponsorship system known as kafala that effectively ties

Continued on Page 15

KUWAIT, IRAQ OVERCOME OBSTACLES JAAFARI DENIES ANY LINK TO ABDUCTION OF QATARIS

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and Agencies

KPC NAMES NEW BOARD

KUWAIT: Kuwait's national oil company, Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC), has named a new board, three weeks after the oil minister was replaced, a source familiar with the matter said yesterday. The identities of the new board members were not immediately known, and comment could not be obtained from the KPC. Nizar Al-Adsani will remain chief executive, the source said. The reshuffle is not expected to mean any change to the oil policy of the OPEC member; Kuwait's oil policy is set by the country's Supreme Petroleum Council.

At the end of November, Kuwait appointed Anas Al-Saleh as acting oil minister, replacing Ali Al-Omar. At that time, sources said there had been friction between the KPC board and Omair on issues including major projects, mechanisms for managing the oil industry, and the return of former officials to their jobs at the company. An official circular announcing the board reshuffle is expected to be issued after approval by the cabinet, the source said. The new board will seek to achieve stability in the oil sector and push ahead with projects, he added. — Reuters

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Iraq have wiped out obstacles and outstanding files that existed over the past years, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said yesterday at a press conference with visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari after the conclusion of the fifth session of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi Joint Ministerial Committee.

Over the past years, Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations have overcome all obstacles, and the two countries addressed issues that were outstanding over decades, Sheikh Sabah said, noting that they stand on solid ground for boosting ties. He said both sides agreed on rejecting all forms of terrorism and the need to unite in facing terrorism and terrorist groups and organizations, especially since both countries had suffered from terrorism.

Continued on Page 15



KUWAIT: Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari (left) and his Kuwaiti counterpart Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah attend the fifth session of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti Joint Supreme Ministerial Committee yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

SPACE X ROCKET NAILS SAFE LANDING IN PIVOTAL FEAT

MIAMI: SpaceX successfully landed its powerful Falcon 9 rocket Monday for the first time, a major milestone in the drive to cut costs and waste by making rockets as reusable as airplanes. Its engines burning bright orange against the dark night sky, the Falcon 9 made a graceful arc back to Earth and touched down upright at Cape Canaveral, Florida, minutes after launching a payload of satellites to orbit, video images showed. "The Falcon has landed," a commentator said above the screams and cheers of people gathered at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, California.

SpaceX, headed by Internet tycoon Elon Musk, is striving to revolutionize the rocket industry, which currently loses many millions of dollars in jettisoned machinery and sophisticated rocket components after each launch. "I still can't quite believe it," Musk said in a teleconference after the landing. "I think this is a revolutionary moment. No one has ever brought an orbital class booster back intact."

Previous attempts to land the Falcon 9's first stage on a floating ocean platform have failed - with the rocket either colliding with the autonomous drone ship or tipping over. But this time, video images on SpaceX's live webcast showed the tall, white portion of the rocket - known as the first stage - appearing to settle down firmly and stick the landing. The rocket reached a height of 200 km before heading back to Earth and touching down at a former US Air Force rocket and missile testing range that was last used in 1978.

Video images were cut off within seconds of the landing, and the SpaceX live webcast returned to its commentators, who described the successful deployment of the rocket's payload of 11 satellites for ORBCOMM, a global communications company. The US space agency NASA applauded the feat. "Congratulations @SpaceX on your successful vertical landing of the first stage back on Earth!" NASA said in a tweet.

Continued on Page 15



CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida: This image shows the first-stage successful upright landing of the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket on Monday at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. — AFP

GROWING IRAN CLOUT SPURS SAUDI ACTION

RIYADH: After years of tense relations with President Bashar Al-Assad, Saudi Arabia has adopted a bolder approach towards Syria, prompted by rival Iran's growing regional influence. The kingdom recently brought Syrian political and armed opposition factions together for unprecedented talks in Riyadh, the culmination of months of maneuvering by the Sunni Muslim power. The step highlighted Saudi Arabia's rising profile in efforts to end the war in Syria, where Shiite Iran gives military and financial support to Riyadh's longtime opponent Assad.

Days later, the kingdom gained world attention by announcing the surprise formation of a 34-nation coalition against Islamic "terrorism". Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir said there were even "discussions among countries" including his, about possibly "sending some special forces in Syria". Experts say the more assertive stance aims to counter an emboldened Iran in an increasingly unstable region. "Saudi's plan has to do with Iran," said a foreign diplomat who considers both the Saudi-led coalition

and the Riyadh talks as part of the same strategy.

Jamal Khashoggi, a veteran Saudi journalist and analyst, said nearly three months of air strikes on Syrian rebels by Assad's other main ally Russia had further accelerated events. "The Russian engagement or intervention, despite how limited it is, added a certain dynamic to the Syrian situation," he said. Diplomats said the coalition was partly in response to Western criticism that Saudi Arabia does not do enough to fight extremists such as the Islamic State (IS), a Sunni extremist group that has seized large parts of Iraq and Syria.

Although the coalition is not - at least for now - structured to take any military action, Riyadh will offer to use its position as lead Sunni state to defeat IS, "but only if the post-conflict political order in Iraq and Syria weakens Iran's influence", and Sunnis in those countries are empowered, said US-based political risk research firm Eurasia Group. Saudi Arabia has long accused Iran of interfering in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon.

Continued on Page 15

MERRY CHRISTMAS



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DOUX TURKEY / DUCK / KG

0.350 KD. | DOUBLE HORSE JAGGERY CUBE/BALL 500GM
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CHILLED PAKISTAN BEEF/KG

0.475 KD. | APPLE ROYAL GALA / KG
0.355 KD. | AFANDI / KG
0.395 KD. | KIWI BOX
0.395 KD. | PEARS CHINA / KG

0.575 KD. | GUAVA / KG
0.325 KD. | GINGER / KG
0.145 KD. | ONION INDIAN / KG
0.120 KD. | COCONUT / PCS

0.580 KD. | KARELA INDIAN (BITTER GOURD) / KG
0.355 KD. | TAPIOCA (KAPPA) / KG
0.355 KD. | SOORAN (CHENA) / KG
0.580 KD. | SMALL ONION / KG

1.490 DONELLI ASSRTRD SPARKLING JUICE 2x750ml
0.990 SWEET DALIA PLUM CAKE 450 GM

1.790 AFIA SUNFLOWER OIL 2x1.8LTR
1.890 ALFA CORN OIL 2x1.8LTR
1.590 NOOR FRYLITE OIL 2x1.8LTR
2.390 ROZANA BASMATI RICE 5 KG
3.890 SONALE PARBOILED RICE 18 KG
0.395 MAGGI SP CHKN NOODLE MP 3 X 60 GM
0.975 MAHAL WHITE RICE 5KG
0.850 ELITE PLUM CAKE 400GM

0.645 COCA COLA 3X 2.25LTR ASSORTED
0.825 GREEN'S QUICK COOKING WHITE OATS TIN 2x500 GM
1.990 DEVAAYA BASMATI RICE 5 KG
2.290 DOUBLE HORSE ROSE MATTA RICE SHORT GRAIN 10 KG
3.475 ALMONDS WHOLE PER KG
2.195 PAVIZHAM THAI PARBOILED RICE 10 KG
0.990 TANG ORANGE POUCH 2x500GM
3.890 ANCHOR MILK POWDER SACHET 2.25KG

29.990 SAMSUNG MOBILE J1 ACE 4G LTE
57.990 SAMSUNG MOBILE J5 4G LTE
46.990 SAMSUNG GRAND PRIME 4G LTE
3.250 PRIMERA 2 IN 1 BLENDER SMART
64.990 EURO STAR LED TV 40" HD +USB+ HDMI



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari. —KUNA

RESOLUTIONS OF CLIMATE CONFERENCE TO HAVE ECONOMIC IMPACT: OFFICIAL

KUWAIT: Kuwait Intellectual Property Rights Society Chairman Sheikh Salman Al-Dawood Al-Sabah stressed the importance of studying the resolutions of the Paris Climate Change Conference as they would have an economic impact on the long term.

These resolutions will create further competition on natural resources including metals, agricultural products and energy sources, said Sheikh Salman, adding that this will also affect international food and drugs production.

Meanwhile, the chairman said that due to the high prices of natural resources, companies may start adding cheap chemicals to their products in order to keep selling them at low prices. He further noted that the conference had set a number of restrictions and tight rules on the consumption of natural resources, which may cause several countries to monopolize these resources.

Sheikh Salman said that Kuwait must establish a national authority to monitor the quality of food and drug products to protect the well-being of consumers. The country also needs to issue a law to protect the rights of both the consumer and producer, as well as bring to justice those who import products with cheap chemicals added to them, he noted. —KUNA

CROWN PRINCE RECEIVES KUWAITI, IRAQI FMS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari and his accompanying delegation attending the fifth session of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti Joint Supreme Ministerial Committee.

During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of enhancing them as well as issues of common interest. The meeting was also

attended by Amiri Diwan advisor Muhammad Abdullah Abu Al-Hasan, Protocol Chief at His Highness the Crown Prince Diwan, Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and Ambassadors of the two countries.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the visiting Foreign Minister, in presence of Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Ambassadors of the two countries. The meeting was attended by Undersecretary of His Highness the Premier Sheikhha Etimad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwaiti Ambassador in Iraq Ghassan

Al-Zawawi. Earlier, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister, Deputy Chief of the Ruling Family Board Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah and Advisor Hussein Nasser Al-Huraiti.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a congratulatory cable to New Chairman of the Court of Cassation Justice Yusef Jassem Al-Mutawa, wishing him best of luck. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent Mutawa similar cables. —KUNA

FRENCH AMBASSADOR SPEAKS ON COP 21

KUWAIT: The following is a transcript of an interview with French Ambassador to Kuwait Christian Nakhle on the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21):



Christian Nakhle

- Why is the Paris Agreement historic?

Using the word historic is not true in most cases, yet it is justified this time. History will record the Paris Climate Conference because one rarely experiences such moments when the entire audience stands to celebrate success the whole world had been anticipating for long. It is a turning point. We have started a new age of international cooperation in one of the most complicated issues facing humanity. This is the first time all countries agree on this issue while the UN has been trying to convince them to reduce emissions that cause global warming for over 20 years.

- What happens now?

The Paris agreement will be referred to the UN in New York, where members will ratify it on April 22, 2016 (World Earth Day) and it will be valid for a full year. It will be in effect once 55 countries responsible for at least 55 percent of the world emissions sign it.

Things may go faster if the world's leading emission-producing countries (US and China) approve the agreement and endorse it quickly. Signing the agreement may or may not be subject to the approval of respective countries according to their constitutional law. There is a great chance that the pact would be put into practice before 2020.

- Is Earth truly saved? Can we trust the goal of limiting temperature increase to 1.5 degrees?

The pact is a turning point, yet there is still much to do, starting with putting the agreement into practice. The aim is to pledge to limit global warming and keep it below two degrees centigrade and follow up the efforts exerted to stop temperature increase at 1.5 degrees. The Paris agreement includes factors that we have though impossible to achieve. It does not solve all problems but sets solid foundations to work on it.

The 1.5 degree goal is ambitious yet central and vital for many countries, especially island countries and less-developed ones, which would face catastrophic consequences if the temperature increases to two degrees centigrade. A team of government climate changes experts called for preparing a special report in 2018 on how to achieve that goal. It is necessary when working on climate to set clear ambitious goals even if they were hard to achieve at the time being. For instance, during the COP20 in Lima in 2014, when we unani-

mously decided to invite countries to set national contributions to limit global warming, few expected the call to succeed. Nevertheless, 186 out of 195 countries made their contributions - that is more than 96 percent of greenhouse gas emissions!

- How developing countries will be helped?

Funds are the keys of trust in the field of combating international climate change. Work will go on in successive phases. The text includes a new financial target by a maximum of 2025. Advanced countries' responsibility to financially and technologically support developing countries is clearly defined. The agreement also encourages other countries to voluntarily contribute.

\$100 billion must be allocated in the form of loans and grants by the beginning of 2020 to fund projects that would enable countries adapt to climate changes (seawater level rise, droughts, etc) and reduce global warming-causing emissions. Those funds will be increased as defined in the agreement. Some developing countries can voluntarily become donors to poorer countries. It is expected to hold the first meeting mentioned in the agreement by 2025 to set new target figures to help poorer countries.

- What can Kuwait do to contribute to realizing this agreement?

Right after the Paris Summit concluded, Kuwait expressed its wish to limit carbon emissions. Accordingly, many promising projects were launched such as the Shaqaya project, which had been previously launched by KISR to develop using renewable energy in Kuwait. A 2,000 megawatt renewable energy plant will be built in the western desert to cover 15 percent of Kuwait's needs of energy. The Shaqaya project will reduce extremely harmful fuel combustions and thus reduce CO2 emissions by 5 million tons.



ALEXANDRIA: Kuwaiti student Talal Hamad Al-Shehab won the 2nd place in Intel's Arab World Science Competition 2015. — KUNA

KSC WINS 2ND, 3RD PLACE IN INTEL'S ARAB WORLD SCIENCE COMPETITION 2015

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti students have won the second and third place in Intel's Arab World Science Competition 2015, held last week in Alexandria, Egypt, Kuwait Science Club (KSC) said yesterday. The students Talal Hamad Al-Shehab and Abdullrahman Rahsead Al-Jassem are from the Kuwait Science and Engineering Competition team organized by the KSC annually, said the Secretary General of the club Dr Adam Al-Mullah.

The students won the second and third places in the competition in the field of physical energy and environmental engineering, he said. The KSC participated in the competition supported by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) with eight scientific projects and nine students were qualified through Kuwait Science and Engineering Competition organized by the club, he added. This achievement is a step in the right direction to win in next Intel's World Competition in the United States, he said. —KUNA



Kuwaiti student Abdullrahman Rahsead Al-Jassem won the 3rd place in Intel's Arab World Science Competition 2015.

SISI HONORS KUWAITI MINISTER FOR POLICY OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

CAIRO: Kuwait's Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane expressed his delight at having been honored in Cairo in a ceremony held yesterday for his policy of promoting religious moderation and tolerance. In a statement to KUNA after the ceremony in which the Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi conferred a medal of honor of the first degree on him, Sane noted the importance of accepting 'the other' and respecting all religions and creeds without discrimination.

He slammed extremist religious thinking which, he said, would lead to acts of terrorism, stressing the need to update the speech clerics use in their sermons in a manner that would not offend the sensibilities of people of other faiths. He lauded the Al-Azhar for following a course of moderation and tolerance worthy of being attended to and learned from by the general public. At this juncture in the history of the region, he said Al-Azhar was well poised to lead the masses in their spiritual lives. —KUNA



CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi honors Kuwait's Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane. — KUNA

KUWAITI, QATARI SOCIETIES PROVIDE AID TO REFUGEES IN NORTH LEBANON

BEIRUT/AMMAN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) jointly with Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) announced that their teams in Lebanon have provided relief aid to around 250 Syrian families in north Lebanon as part of the First GCC Joint Relief Project.

The relief aid included sheets and blankets, Yousef Boutros, relief coordinator for Lebanese Red Cross, stated to KUNA, adding that this aid would contribute significantly to alleviating the suffering of 250 refugee families in Al-Safra district. The joint GCC cooperation project is run under the umbrella of the GCC General-Secretariat, and would have a major role in unifying efforts to aid Syrian refugees, Boutros noted.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Duaij handed over

\$728,000 to two Jordanian charity organizations to be used for supporting the humanitarian situation of the Syrian refugees in the Kingdom. The donation is offered by the Kuwaiti Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS).

\$452,000 will go to activities of the Zakat Alquds Committee, and the rest \$276,000 to the Al-Takaful association that cares for Syrian orphans and refugees families. The Kuwaiti people have always been initiators and pioneers in charity and humanitarian work to help the needy and alleviate their sufferings worldwide, Ambassador Duaij told KUNA. He stressed Kuwait's keenness on receiving reports from the beneficiary bodies to document it and make sure assistance reaches those who deserve it. —KUNA

INFO MINISTER THANKS AMIR FOR PATRONIZING STADIUM'S OPENING

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and State Minister for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah yesterday expressed his thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for patronizing and attending the opening of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud said in a statement to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that the patronage of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for the festivity underlines the concern of the senior leadership to support and care for the state's various sports activities so as to regain its leadership and its position both domestically and internationally. He added that this initiative had a great impact in instilling the spirit of patriotism and loyalty among citizens, football fans and athletes alike.

Sheikh Salman also expressed thanks and appreciation to Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanim and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for attending and supporting this great event, which emphasizes their eagerness for the development of the Kuwaiti sports and its various activities.

He praised the efforts made by the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and acting Minister of Electricity and Water and Chairman of the Organizing Committee for the opening ceremony, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, all members of the Committee and the various actors involved and the security, military, media, sports and



Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah

youth, especially the volunteers and national companies that provided their services free of charge to support this great celebration.

Sheikh Salman stressed that this celebration gathered all components of the Kuwaiti society in an edifice carrying the name of "Amir of Hearts", late His Highness the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah which would be a start of a new sports achievements of the State of Kuwait to raise the flag of the country high in the various regional and international sport events.

In the midst of a packed stadium, His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah announced the official opening of the multi-purpose Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium last Friday. Also attending the event His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, alongside several local officials and notable figures.

The huge event at the 60,000-seater stadium is being marked by the Champions Cup, a match between a star-studded side of ex-internationals, led by renowned Italian coach Fabio Capello, and a Kuwait all-stars side, led by national coach Mohammad Ibrahim.

The global side includes greats such as ex-England internationals David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Jamie Carragher and David James, alongside Italy's Alessandro Nesta and Gianluca Zambrotta, Portugal's Luis Figo and Spain's Carlos Puyol and Michel Salgado.

Brazilian legends Ronaldinho and Roberto Carlos also form part of the global all-stars, along with German keeper Jans Lehman, France's Robert Pires, Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko and Jamaican Dwight Yorke.

On the local side are Bader Al-Mutawa, Abdulhadi Khamis, Yousif Nasser, Fahad Al-Enezi, Mohammad Jragh, Fahad Al-Ansari, Abdulaziz Al-Mashaan, Talal Nayef, Musaed Neda, Fahad Al-Hajeri, Hussain Hakim, Abdullah Al-Buraiki, Khaled Ibrahim, Amer Al-Maatouq, Khaled Al-Rashidi, Sulaiman Abdulghafoor. Former Egyptian star Mohammad Abu Traika and the United Arab Emirates' Omar Abdulrahman will also form part of the local side. — KUNA

Crimes

report

DUO HELD ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING CHARGES

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Residency affairs detectives arrested a mandoub (company representatives) and a citizen who forged the estimated number of workers needed for a farm, as 200 Arab workers are registered to the farm. Following information about the mandoub's activity, he was arrested. He told police that he received KD 150 for each transaction, while the citizen who was also arrested said he received KD 1,000. A visa issued according to similar transactions are often sold to victims of trafficking who come to Kuwait but find no jobs, leaving them to work for others illegally.



Unlicensed weapons

Weapons detectives arrested a citizen with possession of unlicensed firearms and ammunition in Saad Al-Abdullah. Officers found an AK-47 and eight magazines in his house.



Drug possession

Criminal detectives arrested a Saudi national red-handed and trading in drugs, and found 600 gm of shabu (meth) with him along with KD 245 he made from the sales. The suspect was found to be an ex-convict. The market value of the drugs was estimated at KD 21,000. In another case, Ahmadi police arrested an Indian national with 206 suspected liquor bottles in his car. The arrest was made at a checkpoint in Mahboula. Meanwhile, a motorist who was asked to stop but tried to flee was found in an abnormal condition with six syringes in the front seat, seven tablets and eight used syringes, in addition to three used spoons. He was sent to concerned authorities.

Brotherly hate

A citizen in his forties was placed in the intensive care unit at Farwaniya Hospital after being shot in the thigh by his elder brother. The victim said that his brother came to his Firdous house and a verbal dispute ensued, then the suspect fired his weapon.

Workers' fight

Some members of a labor union submitted medical reports following a fight between them, as one side accused the other of destroying the union's furniture.

Accidents

The Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) dealt with several traffic accidents, as it received a call about an accident in Jahra between a sports-utility-vehicle (SUV) that collided with a truck and flipped over. The driver, a citizen, was trapped in because of the seat-belt. The citizen was freed and handed to paramedics. Meanwhile, a call came about a car that flipped over on Maghrib Street between Jabriya and Surra, so Mishref fire center responded, and firemen had to cut the car open and freed the driver. Another call was received about a car catching fire on Sixth Ring Road, so Mishref firemen were dispatched, and they controlled the fire quickly and prevented any explosions. Police and paramedics were on hand.

Traffic campaigns

Traffic department carried a series of surprise campaigns in six governorates during the period from 13-19/12/2015 resulting in issuing 24,118 citations, 946 vehicles impounded, 18 persons detained and 18 expats were sent for deportation for driving without a license.

Municipality statistics

A report prepared by the Public Relations Department of Kuwait Municipality in cooperation of Public Services Department showed that the number of complaints received through Viva Company and Interior Ministry Operations last November was 185, including general cleanliness fields (complaints about presence of trash, not sweeping streets, negligence by cleaning workers, requesting trash dumpsters, trashed used furniture, trees in front of homes, yards, and restaurants. There were also complaints about falling material (trees, metal, tires, light poles, rocks, gravel and sand dunes). In addition, there were complaints about sewer overflow, cars, boats, abandoned chalets, spoiled food, roaming vendors, selling food stuff, roaming butcher, bachelors complaints in Salmiya. The report showed that the highest rate of complaints received was in Hawally governorate with 42, followed by the capital with 37, Mubarak Al-Kabeer 32, Farwaniya 30, Ahmadi 28, Jahra 16. The report said that all complaints received are entered into the municipality's database, and are followed by the hotline employees, after sending them to concerned authorities at the municipality according to governorates.



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah (right) and senior ministry officials attend the ceremony. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MINISTER REWARDS JABER STADIUM SECURITY TEAM

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah yesterday rewarded security force members who took part in securing the opening ceremony of Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, by giving them one week off from work.

Speaking to reporters at the inauguration of the ministry's camp in Subhan

Monday night, the minister also stressed that after six weeks of restructuring the ministry's hierarchical structure, "the time has come to replace senior officials who had not been efficient enough."

Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled also noted that domestic security challenges that Kuwait faces are serious and include terrorism, sabotage, security and traffic, adding that security men are "up to those challenges."

KNPC DENIES SHUAIBA REFINERY FIRE RUMORS

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) strongly denied reports and photos claiming the occurrence of a huge fire at Shuaiba refinery, stressing that the photos were of a previous blaze.

Al-Watan TV's closure

The comprehensive court yesterday seconded an administrative decision closing down Al-Watan TV channel for violating ministry of commerce laws. Meanwhile, the criminal court sentenced a blogger to three years in jail with labor for slandering His Highness the Amir on his Twitter account.

Authority's staff

Employees of the anti-corruption authority that was dissolved by a court order on Sunday demanded protecting

their rights as they had resigned from previous jobs in the public and private sectors before joining the authority. In a statement, the employees said that the court order explained why the authority was dissolved but left some very important points unexplained, although the authority had been established in compliance with His Highness the Amir's wishes. The statement stressed that the Cabinet's statement in this regard was void of how to practically deal with the consequences of annulling the authority law, namely those related to the rights of employees. The statement demanded treating the authority's employees as 'actual ones' to ensure the continuity of paying their salaries and temporarily transfer them to other bodies pending reappointing them once the authority is reactivated.

ENTERTAINMENT CITY'S SPECIAL TIMINGS

KUWAIT: The Entertainment City welcomes visitors tomorrow, December 24, 2015 on special timings; between 1:00 pm and 10:00 pm on the occasion of the Prophet's (PBUH) Birthday holiday, announced Saqer Al-Bader, Public Relations and Media Director at the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC). The city regularly welcomes visitors on weekdays from 4:00 pm to 12:00 am, and on weekends from 1:00 pm to 10:00 pm, Bader added.



Saqer Al-Bader

'EXPLORING ENTREPRENEURSHIP' PROGRAM CONSTRUCTED FOR KUWAIT NATIONAL FUND

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises has announced graduating the first batch of 'Exploring Entrepreneurship' program that is specialized in developing any project idea into a project plan that can be implemented in reality.

The Executive Board Member in Kuwait National Fund for SMEs, Hadeel Al-Shammari has graduated the first batch of the program, and graciously congratulated the attendees and praised their ambitious ideas.

Shammari noted that the Fund's mission is to build an institution that provides a world-class performance level, and strengthening the ability of entrepreneurship in Kuwait. This in return will increase the contribution of small and medium enterprises sector, in supporting the national economy. This program will bring the first steps for entrepreneurs who want to turn their ideas into a successful business ventures.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director of National Fund for SMEs, Meshari Al-Mahmoud explained to the attendees the vision of the Fund; which is focused on building a pioneer community that stimulates creativity, and is able to achieve economic developmental opportunities. The Fund also, is keen on achieving the following three objectives: create productive jobs for Kuwaitis in the private sector; increase the participation of small and medium enterprises in the local economy, and to create a favorable environment for the small and medium enterprises.

Mahmoud explained that this interactive program has been prepared in accordance with the best international practices in entrepreneurship, in which it is inspired by the finest glob-



Executive Board Member in Kuwait National Fund for SMEs, Hadeel Al-Shammari and Executive Director of the National Fund Meshari Al Mahmoud with the graduates.

al training programs in business entrepreneurship, especially in the United States, such as Business Model Canvas and Operation JumpStart. In an effort to help the entrepreneurs to explore their ideas and turn them into successful business ventures. At least 500 thousand entrepreneurs from around the world have been trained in using the same sources, upon which this program is relied on.

Mahmoud then elaborated that one of the main objectives of the program that it helps entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into a business venture, learn the key success factors of the corporate world, and ensure the attainment of the ideas presented by entrepreneurs. As well as, to establish the commercial business scheme with an executive summary.



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) presented a check to the Public Authority of Industry, containing a financial contribution to support its social and sports activities.

MINISTRY CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Under the patronage of Minister of Health Dr Ali Al-Obaidi, the ministry held its first meeting with people with disabilities in Kuwait yesterday at Regency Hotel on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. During her speech on behalf of Obaidi, Director of the health promotion administration at the ministry of health Dr Abeer Al-Baho said: "We are celebrating today the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which was on December 3. UN statistics show that 15 percent of the people in the world are disabled, which is more than 1 billion persons, and 80 percent of them are in developing countries."

She added that statistics also showed that 53 percent of disabled men and 20 percent of disabled women are working around the world. "In Kuwait, there are 4,439 disabled persons, or 2.7 percent of the population," she said. Baho pointed out that the forum aims to give priority to disabled people at hospitals to provide conventional and natural treatments to them, develop early detection for newborn babies, examine the health of couples before



KUWAIT: Health Ministry official Dr Abeer Al-Baho (right) and Sheikha Shaikha Abdullah Al-Sabah (second from left) are pictured with a person with special needs at the event. (Right) Equipment by Al-Sayer Medical Company on display.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

marriage and vaccinate children.

Sheikha Shaikha Abdullah Al-Sabah, Honorary President of Kuwait Disabled Sports Club, said: "The meeting will discuss and focus on issues related to disabled persons and finding solutions on how to integrate them in soci-

ety." She added: "Kuwaitis can do anything, like they did with Jaber Stadium, so all ministries should meet and find solutions to make disabled people work and be active in society. The goals of the forum are to enable this category by creating and exploiting opportunities to



help realize their potential and involve all elements of civil society for their support."

The forum was attended by Kuwaitis with mild to moderate disabilities and their families, as well as governmental and non-governmental institutions and non-profit organizations.

On the sidelines of the forum, an awareness exhibition and workshops for individuals with disabilities were held. The exhibition featured more than 25 organizations that specialize in the affairs of persons with disabilities, and was sponsored by Al-Sayer Medical Company.

KUWAIT PIONEER IN SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY: EXPERTS

KUWAIT: Kuwait pays great attention towards achieving food security; following a strategic plan aiming to create sustainable food sources and develop the economy. According to statements by food security experts told KUNA yesterday, Kuwait is considered as one of the top countries in the field around the world, as it came in the 28th place among 109 countries in 2014, shown by international food security statistics. Moreover, the country is number one in food security in the Arab World.

Kuwait is continuously cooperating with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to execute projects in the field and develop agricultural sustainability, said Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Assembly Affairs Ali Al-Omar. The country has reached a high level of food security, despite the difficulties faced in agriculture due to the lack of water sources, the minister added.

On his part, chairman of the ministerial committee for food security investment Mohammad Al-Monaifi said that Kuwait has followed strategic plans that enabled it to achieve security in accordance with the 1996 World Food Summit measures. According to summit, food security is "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life," Monaifi explained.

Food prices

Meanwhile, committee member Methqal Al-Sartawi noted that prices of food products depends on international markets' prices, the exchange rate of currencies and the costs of importing and exporting.

He stressed on the vital role of Kuwait Investment Authority to develop food security by investing in top international food companies and engaging in foreign investments in the field of agricultural industries. The member also said that the authority has set plans to allow the private sector to transfer and manage food reserves in emergency cases.

In the same context, Acting Director General of Kuwait's Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) Faisal Al-Hasawi said that the authority's priority is to develop the agricultural field despite the extreme desert climate in Kuwait and the lack of arable lands and water resources.

Arable lands in Kuwait are estimated at one million and 540 hectares (about 8.63 percent of total land space), said Hasawi, adding that there is about 4.9 percent of these lands that is still not used. He pointed out that the Authority is increasing domestic agricultural production and improving the performance of the agricultural sector to raise productivity by developing efficient methods use of the available agricultural areas and expansion of the capacities of the acquisition of agricultural technology.

Financing and investment

Hasawi added that PAAAFR also provides the right conditions for financing and investment in local agricultural field and encourage foreign agricultural investment by taking advantage of the investment opportunities available in the Arab region.

He pointed out that the authority sought to develop systems for importing and exporting food in order to ensure the provision of a strategic inventory covers the needs of the population for at least six months. He stressed the importance of supporting the local livestock breeders in order to ease the financial burden on the investor for the costs of production and to provide food for their animals, which represents about 70 percent of the costs of any livestock project.

He added that the Authority started the (Integrated Farm) project to increase the production of white meat by allocate about 185 lots in Al-Wafra agricultural area and 8 lots for poultry farming. He noted that the support policy in the fisheries sector aims to preserve fishery resources and protection from poaching operations as well as encouraging the expansion of aquaculture.

He stated that the capture fisheries are based on fish stocks that make them limited where the territorial waters control them in addition to the biological characteristics of the fish stocks, which means that any increase in production without controls lead to a deterioration in fish stocks and affect the sustainable production.

Fish stocks

For his part, the Director of the Department of Agricultural Extension at PAAAFR Ghanem Al-Sanad pointed to the enrichment of the natural fish stocks project in Kuwait territorial waters, stressing that such a move would provide the protection of fish stocks from depletion and contribute to sustainable development.

He pointed to other projects such as fish farming in sea cages Project in Khairan on 10 square kilometers of maritime site and 2,000 square kilometers of the coastal site, as well as breeding and farming fish and shrimp projects. He said that all the actions taken by the authority is in the direction of maintaining stocks of fish and shrimp, adding that fishing bans have been applied during the breeding season to ensure the sustainability of production.

He said that fish farming has contributed to bridging the gap between production from capture fisheries and domestic consumption of fish and shrimp, where authority has allocated 10 lots for fish and shrimp cultivation with an area of 20,000 square meters for each lot in Al-Wafra agricultural area. For his part, the head of the Kuwaiti Farmers Union Hadi Al-Watari stressed that food security in Kuwait cannot be achieved without local farming to ensure the provision of the consumer's need, praising the direct support of the Public Authority of Agriculture Affairs to farmers. — KUNA

KUWAIT COMMITTED TO KEEPING ALL CHARITY WORK ABOVE BOARD

KUWAIT: The government goes to extended lengths to exercise monitoring charitable work in Kuwait, said Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Subaih yesterday. In remarks opening a forum on the role of societal

participation in furthering the nation's international relations, she stressed that streamlining charitable work in the country was a strategic objective of the government in its goal to preserve the high station it has attained in the field of humanitarian work.

She advocated the partnership of the public and private sectors in safeguarding the achievements of the nation in humanitarian work, while extolling the foreign ministry and the central bank of Kuwait for their cooperation with the ministries she runs in combating terrorism through overseeing that money transfers for purposes of charity remain free of any irregularities.

In similar remarks at the forum, which ended its functions yesterday, deputy chairman of the union of Kuwaiti banks Majed Al-Ajeel highlighted the work of the private sector in actively supporting worldwide relief aid by Kuwait. For instance, he referred to the union's contributions of four million dollars to the cause of the Syrian refugees in response to the Kuwaiti government's plea to the private sector to channel funds for the benefit of the refugees. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister Hind Al-Subaih speaks at the forum. — KUNA

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Crime

Report

KABD MURDERER TURNS SELF IN

KUWAIT: A suspect accused of killing his friend in Kabd last week turned himself to police after returning from Saudi Arabia, where he had initially escaped. The suspect's actions came according to his family's request after they contacted and asked him to return, instead of being pursued by authorities.

Search for thief

Ahmadi detectives are looking for a thief who smashed three ATM machines outside a bank in Ali Sabah Al-Salem area, but escaped when the alarm sounded.

Fugitive in police's net

Special task forces arrested a fugitive wanted to serve a four-year jail sentence on a forgery case, and he was also found wanted by the civil implementation department over a KD 5,000 debt. He was detained pending being sent to concerned authorities.

Ex-con arrested

Police arrested an ex-convict following stiff resistance in Salmiya area. The Kuwaiti man is wanted to serve a nine-year jail sentence over a felony. Police had asked the suspect to pull his vehicle over, but he sped off instead, so he was chased and cut off. The man tried to run on foot, but was caught and brought under control.

Coworkers fight

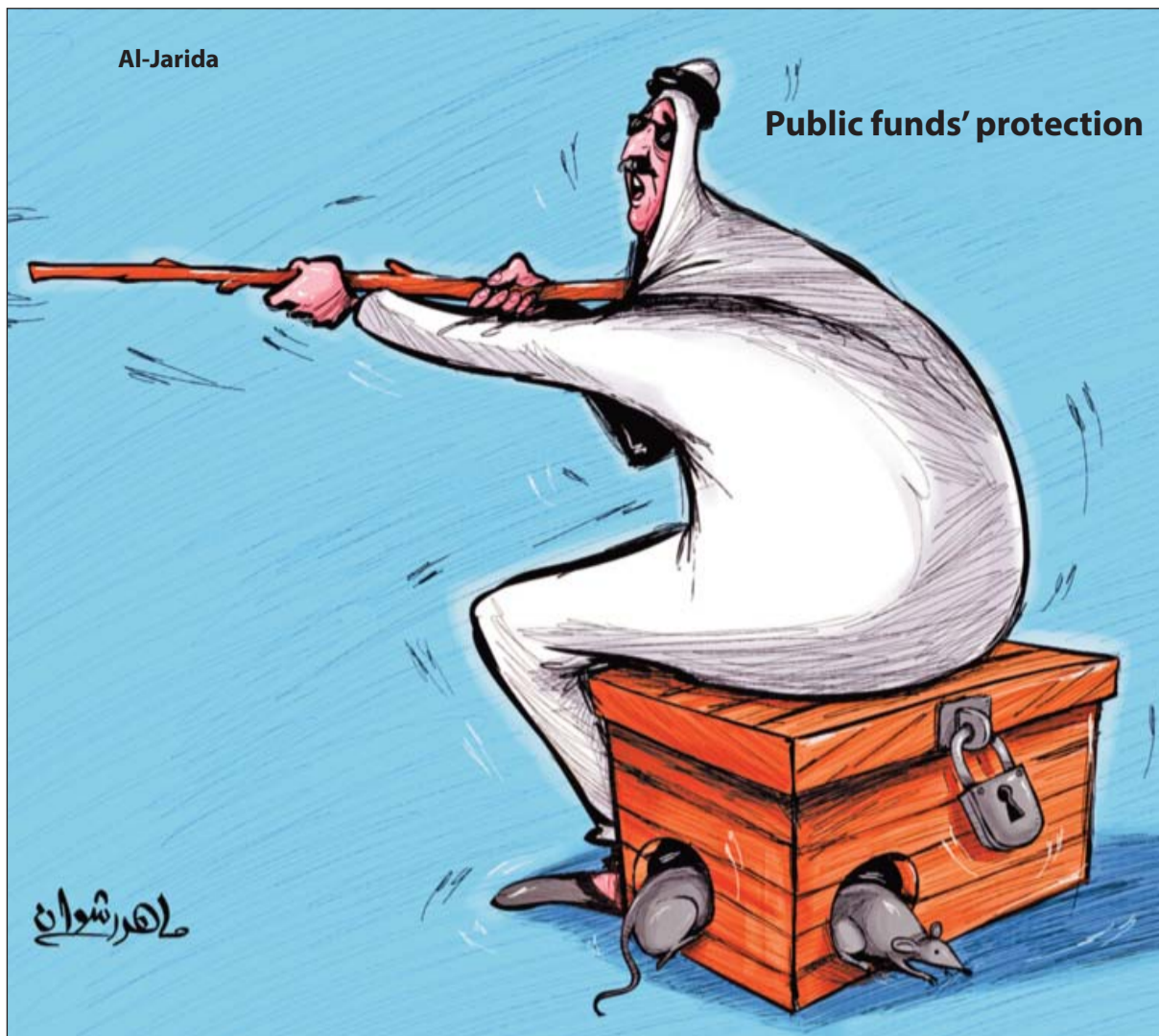
A man accused his colleague of breaking his nose following a dispute that turned into a fist-fight at a construction site. According to a police source, the man said that he and his foe exchanged blows in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area, adding that the suspect broke his nose before escaping. Police are investigating.

Sexual assault

Hawally prosecutor sent a Filipina woman to the medical examiner to document a rape case. A security source said the woman pressed charges against a Lebanese man, saying that she trusted him after he promised her with marriage. She went with him after he told her that his mother wanted to see her, but when she entered his apartment, it turned out to be empty. He raped her inside the apartment before letting her go, the woman told police. —Al-Rai

BURGAN BANK ANNOUNCES KD 125,000 PRIZE WINNER

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced Adel Abdullah Ahmad Al-Edan as the new KD 125,000 cash prize winner in the Yawmi Quarterly Draw. The winner expressed his excitement for being the winner of the cash prize with Yawmi Account from Burgan Bank. The Yawmi Account offers customers more chances to win higher rewards, entitling one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 cash prize every three months. To enter Burgan Bank's Yawmi Quarterly Draws, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD500 in their account for 2 months prior to draw date. Additionally, every KD10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. For more information about the Yawmi Quarterly Draw, customers are advised to visit their nearest Burgan Bank branch, or call the bank's Call Center at 1804080 where customer service representatives will be delighted to assist with any questions on the Yawmi account or any of the bank's products and services. Customers can also log on to Burgan Bank's www.burgan.com for further information.



التحليل

Al-Qabas

SOURCES OF INCOME

By Qais Al-Usta

“We may differ over the timing of the period when oil will be the sole source of income,” and in another paragraph “all I hope for is that the government takes a real decision to present Failaka as a tender to build chalets, theaters and malls”. The previous two paragraphs were written by this columnist in a column dated October 8, 2002. I rewrote something old while reading a statement by the Planning Minister Hind Al-Subaih following the meeting of the Higher Planning Committee chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

After all these years, and after oil prices went down, and we wasted 10 years of a mad rise of oil prices, they just want to conduct a study now! I do not blame the current government; rather I blame the consecutive governments and assemblies. This writer, who is a simple human being, and other colleagues, filled newspaper pages with lines and words, columns and analyses about the necessity of diversifying sources of income and investing in islands, so where was the “mother government” with its advisors, and the pile of “bishts” who are going in and out of its premises? Where are the suggestions of our MPs, or were they busy with the treatment abroad quota, admitting officer students and friendship committees that roamed the world?

Why did we not learn from neighbors, when they turned the desert into the most beautiful resorts? Where are the largest airports and train stations? Why did not we take the opportunity of higher oil prices to build them? Why did the private sector succeed in building the most beautiful malls, while government facilities kept suffering from neglect?

We are fed up from repeating the same talk and we are fed up with constant insistence, but generosity is from what exists, so we repeat the same talk, as the writer is the mirror of the society, and guide me to some unusual thing this government made or making, and I am ready not to write a column, but to celebrate with a habban (popular musical instrument).

Your Highness the PM, a year from now after this drop in oil prices, you will start taking from the fresh flesh, and you will not be able to pay the first chapter of salaries, so go ahead and start calling private sector companies to present to you offers of investing in islands and developing sea transport. Begin with a media campaign to convince those living in GCC countries to visit Kuwait. And please, keep the current finance minister away from this issue, because he is busy transforming Kuwait into a financial center for the northern Gulf by 2035. You made me laugh! Was the message delivered? I hope so. —Translated by Kuwait Times

Why did we not learn from neighbors, when they turned the desert into the most beautiful resorts?

التنبأ

Al-Anbaa

A CRIME NOBODY WANTS TO SOLVE

By Sami Al-Nisf

Instead of becoming one of the easiest flight crash mysteries to solve in view of the speed at which the black boxes, the victims' bodies and the plane debris were retrieved, the crash of the Russian flight shortly after taking off from Sharm El-Sheikh airport turned into the complete opposite and all parties seem to wish to forget this disaster forever and shelve it.

The problem is that in criminal citations, it is enough for the defense team to demand declaring their client innocent and they do not have to identify the real culprits. Things are different with flight crash investigators, where it is not enough, for instance, to deny the involvement of an act of terrorism as the head of the investigation committee declared a few days ago. He ought to provide hard evidence backed by the black box reports and the plane debris to prove it and argue that the crash took place due to the plane's disintegration due to bad conditions, maintenance, age or human error.

The Russian plane crash is most probably an act of vicious intelligence terrorism that was so below standards that everybody is afraid to be accused of being responsible for such a tragic accident. The Russians and the carrier that owns the plane are afraid that investigations might reveal that it was impossible to place the bomb during the very short transit moments at Sharm El-Shaikh airport and that it must have been professionally implanted at another airport where the plane was overnight prior to landing in Sharm.

Western intelligence, which was the first to accuse IS claiming that they had tapped some related communications, are afraid of taking part of the blame if people start wondering about how they managed to only overhear and tap IS communications after the crash without being able to do so before it! In addition, international and local laws mandate exposing sources in terrorism crimes and homicides in order to identify culprits and hold them legally accountable, otherwise withholding such information would be deemed as covering up for the real criminals.

On their part, Egyptian authorities are afraid to be accused of having security breaches at Sharm El-Shaikh airport, which leaves IS, that undoubtedly proved to be a cheap intelligence-made organization that would easily comply to instructions to claim responsibility for such terrorist crimes without even knowing the simplest details about how they had been committed. IS initially claimed to have shot down the plane, then claimed planting a small bomb in the luggage compartment, in addition to many other contradictory statements!

For the sake of assumption, the mysterious disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 can be the result of an act of terrorism plotted with the pilots by tempting them with money or subjecting them to mind-altering chemicals, which ended up by killing passengers onboard by flying at very high altitudes, then depressurizing the plane that ended up crashing the plane at certain coordinates where the pilots got picked up if they had been paid, or left to die if they were under the effect of drugs, just the way somebody did with the culprits involved in the Paris, Brussels and Los Angeles terrorist attacks. There is no alternative to such a terrifying scenario!

—Translated by Kuwait Times



(From right) Representatives of Gulf Bank and Joy Productions accepting the 'Affect Award' at the 3rd Advertising Creativity Awards.

ZAIN STRATEGIC PARTNER OF 'THAMEEN OF KUWAIT'

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced its Strategic Partnership with the second 'Thameen of Kuwait' exhibition that was recently held at Al-Hamrah Luxury Center under the patronage and attendance of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs Sheikhha Al-Zain Al-Sabah.

Zain's strategic partnership with 'Thameen of Kuwait' comes in line with the company's keenness on catering to the further development of the youth sector. Especially that this unique initiative aims at highlighting the achievements of ambitious Kuwaiti youth, ultimately catering to

the further progress of national economy.

'Thameen of Kuwait', meaning "the valuable of Kuwait", is a national project that aims at shedding light on the achievements of talented young Kuwaitis in various fields including the arts, literature, industrial work, inventions, and more. A second exhibition was recently held at Al Hamrah Luxury Center to highlight the achievements of the selected group of youth in an innovative way. The exhibition was also an opportunity for those achievements' highlighted to meet interested investors.

It is worth mentioning that Zain took part in the encyclopedia's inau-

guration ceremony that was held last May with the attendance of HH the Amir's representative Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, where the photographic encyclopedia, in both electronic and printed versions, was officially launched.

Zain will remain a main supporter of such innovative initiatives that cater to Kuwaiti youth. The company will remain dedicated to the further progress of youth development in the country, and will spare no efforts in supporting any entities that exert efforts in advancing the advancement of the youth sector in Kuwait.



GBK WINS 'AFFECT CATEGORY' AWARD

'I AM KUWAITI' COMMERCIAL DELIVERS MESSAGE OF UNITY

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced that it was recently awarded the 'Affect Category' Award at the 3rd Advertising Creativity Awards (ACA) event organized by the Arab Media Forum. The event was held under the auspices of Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Minister of Information and State Minister for Youth Affairs.

The 'Affect Category' award was presented to Gulf Bank for its unity commercial 'I Am Kuwaiti', which was produced in cooperation with Joy

Productions. Gulf Bank created the commercial in an effort to unify Kuwait following the horrific terrorist bombing that took place in Kuwait on 26 June during Friday prayers. The message of the 'I Am Kuwaiti' commercial was simple, relevant, and important; Kuwaitis are one and will remain united as one. The commercial was well received locally, regionally, and internationally for its impactful message. It ran from June to July and was aired on Kuwait television stations and released on YouTube,

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels. You can view it online at Gulf Bank's YouTube channel.

The Advertising Creativity Award 2015 was organized for the third year by the Arab Media Forum, which has proven to be one of the region's most prominent local industry event. The event brought together many ministers, media and advertising executives, journalists, academics, authors, actors, businessmen, and social figures from all around the Arab world.



Troops advance into centre of IS-held Ramadi

BLOOD AND TERROR ON THE STREETS AS PROTESTS GRIP ETHIOPIA

WOLENKOMI: Two lifeless bodies lay on the ground as the terrified crowd, armed only with sticks against gun-toting Ethiopian security forces, fled the fierce crackdown on protesters. Blood seeped through a sheet covering one of the bodies on the road outside Wolenkomi, a town just 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the capital Addis Ababa. "That was my only son," a woman sobbed. "They have killed me." Back at the family home of 20-year-old Kumsa Tafa, his younger sister Ababetch shook as she spoke. "He was a student. No one was violent. I do not understand why he is dead," she said.

Human Rights Watch says at least 75 people have been killed in a bloody crackdown on protests by the Oromo people, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. Bekele Gerba, deputy president of the Oromo Federal Congress, puts the toll at more than 80 while the government says only five have been killed. The demonstrations have spread to several towns since November, when students spoke out against plans to expand the capital into Oromia territory—a move the Oromo consider a land grab. The sight of the protesters on the streets of towns like Wolenkomi—shouting "Stop the killings! This isn't democracy!"—is rare in a country with little tolerance for expressions of discontent with the government.

Tree trunks and stones are strewn on the asphalt on the road west from Addis to Shewa zone, in Oromia territory, barricading the route for several kilometers. Chaos broke out on a bus on the road when it emerged that the police were again clashing with demonstrators in Wolenkomi. "My husband just called me," said a woman clutching her phone, as others screamed and children burst into tears. "He's taking refuge in a church. Police shot at the protesters," she said. The man next to her cried in despair: "They're taking our land, killing our children. Why don't they just kill everyone now?"

The army raided Wolenkomi again the next day, the rattle of gunfire lasting for more than an hour. "They grabbed me by the face and they told me, 'Go home! If you come back here, we'll kill you,'" said Kafani, a shopkeeper. Rights groups have repeatedly criticized Ethiopia's use of anti-terrorism legislation to stifle peaceful dissent, with the US expressing concern over the recent crackdown and urging the government to employ restraint. But Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn declared on television that the government would act "without mercy in the fight against forces which are trying to destabilize the region."

'Land is everything'

Oromo leaders have vowed to keep up their resistance against proposals to extend Addis, and Human Rights Watch



WOLENKOMI: Ethiopians from the Oromo group block a road after protesters were shot dead by security forces in Wolenkomi, some 60km West of Addis Ababa. — AFP

has warned of "a rapidly rising risk of greater bloodshed". "The government can continue to send security forces and act with violence we will never give up," said Gerba. Land is at the heart of the problem. Under Ethiopia's constitution, all land belongs to the state, with owners legally considered tenants—raising fears amongst the Oromo that a wave of dispossession is on its way.

"For farmers in Oromia and elsewhere in the country, their land is everything," said Felix Horne, a researcher at Human Rights Watch.

"It's critical for their food supply, for their identity, for their culture," he said. "You cannot displace someone from their land with no consultation and then inadequately compensate them and not expect there to be any response," Horne warned. Some Oromo have already seen their lands confiscated. Further west, in the town of Ambo, a woman named Turu was expropriated of her two hectares, receiving only 40,000 birr (\$1,900, 1,700 euros) in compensation. "We had a good life before," she said.

Today she struggles to support her four children and her

disabled husband with the 30 birr a day (\$1.40, 1.30 euros) she earns working in a factory. With their own language distinct from Ethiopia's official Amharic tongue, the 27 million Oromo make up nearly 30 percent of the country's population. "The Oromos are seen as more of a threat by the government in part because they are by far the largest ethnic group," said Horne. The proposed expansion of Addis is part of a 25-year development plan to boost the city's infrastructure and attract new investors. It sparked demonstrations last year, but on a smaller scale. — AFP



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ISLAMIC STATE EYEING INDONESIA FOR 'DISTANT CALIPHATE'

SYDNEY: The Islamic State group is working to boost its presence in Indonesia with dreams of creating a "distant caliphate" in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, Australia warned yesterday. Attorney-General George Brandis, who spent Monday in meetings between Indonesian and Australian ministers, police chiefs and security officials, said it constituted a threat to Australian and Western interests. "ISIS has ambitions to elevate its presence and level of activity in Indonesia, either directly or through surrogates," he told The Australian newspaper, referring to the jihadist group by another acronym. "You've heard the expression the 'distant caliphate'? "ISIS has a declared intention to establish caliphates beyond the Middle East, provincial caliphates in effect. It has identified Indonesia as a location of its ambitions." Islamic State, which adheres to a fundamentalist doctrine of Sunni Islam, has already declared caliphates in several areas outside Syria and northern Iraq where it holds a swathe of territory.

Brandis' comments follow Indonesian police foiling plans for a suicide attack in Jakarta and arresting radicals linked to Islamic State. Three-day raids across Java ending Sunday saw the confiscation of explosive materials and an IS-inspired flag as well as nine arrests.

The extremists were targeting shopping malls, police stations and minority groups across the country, Indonesia's national police chief said. Security has been beefed up across the country, with senior ministers from Australia and Indonesia agreeing on Monday to boost intelligence sharing, including on terrorism financing, following bilateral talks in both Sydney and Jakarta. The Australian newspaper said that while Australian authorities believed there was little chance IS could create a caliphate within Indonesia, they were deeply worried the terror group may establish a permanent foothold in the archipelago.

This could allow it to conduct attacks against Western or Australian interests within Indonesia and beyond.

Justice Minister Michael Keenan said

the rise of jihadist groups had destabilized the security of both countries. "The rise of ISIS in the Middle East is something that has destabilized the security of Australia, it's destabilized the security of Indonesia and it's destabilizing the security of our friends and partners, particularly here in the region," he said.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, suffered several major bomb attacks by Islamic radicals between 2000 and 2009, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people. A crackdown has weakened the most dangerous extremist networks although the emergence of IS has sparked alarm that Indonesians returning from battlefields in the Middle East could revive them. Australia is equally concerned at the threat from those being radicalized. Six attacks in Australia have been foiled over the past year, according to the government, but several have not, most recently in October when a police employee was shot dead by a 15-year-old reportedly shouting religious slogans. — AFP



SADAD: Syrian government forces patrol Sadad, a majority Syriac Orthodox Christian ancient town which is believed to be the same town referred to as Zedad in the Old Testament's "Book of Kings". Sadad is in the sights of the Islamic State group which already controls several towns and villages in Homs province, including the famed city of Palmyra, home to ancient ruins that the group has systematically destroyed. — AFP



BEIJING: Police stand guard outside the No 2 Intermediate People's Court where human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang was being sentenced in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

PROMINENT CHINESE LAWYER CONVICTED, BUT AVOIDS JAIL

PU CHARGED FOR INCITING ETHNIC HATRED, PROVOKING TROUBLE

BEIJING: A court convicted one of China's most prominent rights lawyers yesterday of "inciting ethnic hatred" with posts criticizing the government, handing down a suspended sentence that means he avoids jail but will not practice law again. Activists said the three-year suspended sentence for Pu Zhiqiang would serve as a strong reminder to other rights lawyers that the Communist Party, currently engaged in a severe clampdown on dissent, would brook no challenge to its rule.

The Beijing No 2 Intermediate People's Court said Pu was being punished on the charges of inciting ethnic hatred and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", state television CCTV said on its microblog. The charges were based on seven microblog posts that he had published online, criticizing China's ethnic policy in the troubled western region of Xinjiang and several officials, according to his lawyers. Pu, 50, was sentenced to three years in prison but given a three-year reprieve, said lawyer Shang Baojun.

The suspended sentence means Pu does not have to serve prison time as long as he stays under formal probation during that period, legal experts said. Pu was released into "residential surveillance" - a form of detention in China that

is used to keep dissidents in sites away from the public eye - where he will remain for 10 days before being allowed to go back to his home in Beijing, said Mo Shaoping, a second lawyer for Pu. Mo said Pu was allowed to be with his wife but declined to disclose Pu's exact location.

'Pu isn't guilty'

Pu has represented many well-known dissidents, including artist Ai Weiwei and activists of the "New Citizens' Movement", a group that has called on Chinese leaders to make their wealth public. He was the most prominent activist swept up in what rights groups say is the most severe clampdown on dissent in two decades in China. "Pu isn't guilty," Ai told Reuters from Italy by telephone. "He should receive an apology from the state and compensation." Pu had spent nearly 19 months in detention before his trial last week, which lasted just over three hours. His lawyers said he could have faced eight years in prison.

Shang said Pu was relieved and would not appeal. "He said he thanks everyone and he wants to rest," Shang said, recounting a private conversation Pu had with his lawyers after the verdict. "He also said if there's an opportunity,

history will deliver a true judgment." State news agency Xinhua said the court decided "to impose a lenient punishment" due to "the fact that the defendant Pu Zhiqiang truthfully confessed to the facts of the crime and positively pleaded guilty". Shang said Pu had not pleaded guilty. "Having a criminal conviction means he can definitely never practice law again," said lawyer Liang Xiaojun. The United States said it was concerned about the suspended sentence. "We urge the Chinese authorities to restore all of Mr. Pu's rights and permit him to resume his work as one of China's pre-eminent lawyers," said Benjamin Weber, spokesman for the US Embassy in Beijing.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei rebuffed the concern, saying foreign governments had to respect China's judicial sovereignty and not interfere. Police and plainclothes security officers prevented foreign reporters, Pu's supporters and diplomats from the United States, the European Union and Switzerland from approaching the court. It was unclear the extent of the restrictions that would be placed on Pu, though it is likely that he will be placed under police surveillance and prevented from speaking to reporters. — Reuters

TEN DEAD AS CHARTERED PLANE CRASHES IN INDIA

NEW DELHI: A chartered Indian aircraft carrying military personnel exploded in a fireball and killed all 10 people on board after crashing yesterday near New Delhi's main airport, a minister said. The small twin-engine plane went up in flames after crashing into a wall shortly after take-off from the capital's Indira Gandhi International airport. "It's a matter of grave concern that the plane crashed soon after take-off. I am extremely sad to say that all 10 people including the pilot have died," Mahesh Sharma, the junior

civil aviation minister, told reporters. The plane was on its way to Ranchi in the eastern state of Jharkhand and was carrying technicians belonging to India's Border Security Force. The technicians were to repair a helicopter in Ranchi. The crash happened at around 9.50 am moments after the pilot lost contact with ground control, A K Sharma, director of Delhi Fire Services said. Television footage showed security personnel clearing the area of bystanders as fire engines waited on the side. — AFP

SON CHOPS UP FATHER'S KILLER IN REVENGE ATTACK

NEW DELHI: The son of an Indian murder victim has confessed to stabbing his father's killer to death and chopping his body into 12 pieces, one for every year since his father was slain, media reported yesterday. Alam Khan was aged 12 when he saw his father being murdered by a family friend in 2003. He had secretly planned his revenge ever since and finally seized his chance last week when he invited the killer over for a drink. After getting Mohammad Rais drunk at his home in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Khan knifed him to death before using a hammer and hacksaw to dismember the body, he told reporters on Monday after his arrest. He and an accomplice then packed the body parts into plastic bags which they threw into a river. When the bags washed up on the river's banks, police

were only able to identify Rais from a surgery scar on his torso.

Khan was arrested after witnesses recounted how Rais had last been seen visiting his home, and made a full confession. "I played some music at full volume and cut his body into 12 pieces," Khan was quoted as saying by the Times of India. Khan had never told anyone about the identity of his father's killer and had instead waited for 12 years to "realize his dream" of taking revenge. He was "happy it was now done". Police Superintendent Ram Suresh Yadav told the newspaper Khan had confessed to his crime with an "utter lack of remorse". The murder weapons, including the hammer and hacksaw, had been recovered from Khan's home in the district of Moradabad, Yadav added. — AFP

VIOLENCE FLARES IN DJIBOUTI, CONFLICTING CASUALTY TOLLS

DJIBOUTI: The government in the strategic Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti said yesterday that nine people were wounded when gunmen attacked security forces, but an opposition party said 19 people were killed in the clashes. The opposition Union for National Salvation party also said the wounded included its president Ahmed Youssouf, who is in hospital.

Interior Minister Hassan Omar said that an insurgent force had launched an attack before dawn on Monday in Buldhoqo district, close to the capital Djibouti. "Dozens of armed individuals came together before launching an offensive against the security forces, among which there are nine wounded including an officer," he said in a statement late Monday. But the USN, in its version of the incident, said in a statement that 19 of its members were killed and others wounded when police broke up a traditional religious ceremony in Buldhoqo.

It was not possible to immediately clarify the sharply differing reports. Omar said the attacks were intended to, "destabilize our nation and to sow divisions within the national

community". He claimed the violence was "orchestrated by malicious individuals receiving instructions from sponsors who act from abroad" without giving details. Several people have been arrested since the violence. "Police operations already undertaken have allowed the arrest of several people involved in the violence and the identification of seven people who organized them," said Omar. "They will be quickly brought to justice to answer for their actions," he added.

In power since 1999, 68-year old President Ismael Omar Guelleh is expected to run for a fourth term in elections slated for April 2016. Djibouti, a strategic port on the Gulf of Aden with a key position on one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, hosts several foreign military bases, including from the United States, France and Japan. Many of the naval vessels tasked with combating Somali piracy in the region also use the country's port to dock. It is also a contributor of troops to the African Union force in neighboring Somalia, battling Al-Qaeda-linked Shebab militants. — AFP



SHENZHEN: Rescuers work at the site of a landslide that hit an industrial park in Shenzhen, south China's Guangdong province yesterday. — AFP

DOZENS 'STILL MISSING' IN LANDSLIDE AS HOPES FADE

SHENZHEN: Rescuers struggled to claw away a massive mound of mud engulfing an industrial district in China yesterday in a desperate bid to find survivors among 76 missing people following a landslide that occurred despite multiple warnings. Hopes for those still missing in the mud were fading yesterday evening, almost three days after the landslide, even as heavy machinery raked through thousands of tons of soil and rubble that buried factories and residential buildings.

The government revised the number of missing down from 81 to 76 after contacting some of the unaccounted for, officials said during a press conference yesterday. A body discovered the same morning remained the first and only confirmed death. The latest in a series of fatal accidents in the world's most populous country, the tragedy in Shenzhen came only months after almost 200 people died in a massive chemical blast in the port city of Tianjin.

The mudslide was caused by the improper storage of waste soil from construction sites, according to the official newspaper of the Ministry of Land and Resources. Soil was illegally stored in heaps 100 meters high at an old quarry site and turned to mud during rain Sunday morning, according to the Global

Times, afflated with Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily. Documents on the web site of the Guangming New District, where the landslide occurred, show that authorities were aware of problems with the storage and had urged action as early as this July.

In an announcement dated July 10, officials said that work at the site was not being carried out according to approved plans and ordered the Hongao Construction Waste Dump to "speed up" work to bring its operations into line. The government issued a second warning in September, noting that the dump's permit to receive waste had expired and authorities had made it clear that dumping should cease. The city had "pointed out problems at the site and requested steps to correct them", the statement said. Commenters on China's popular Weibo microblogging voiced fury over the apparent failings.

"The lack of safety supervision and passive attitude in taking precautions has caused the whole nation to shake with anger and shocked the world!" user Xizidan wrote in a post that was taken down by authorities, but found on the censorship tracking website Weiboscope. The post said people were angry over accidents including the blasts at Tianjin in August, the sinking of a ferry on the Yangtze river in

June that killed more than 400, and a stampede in Shanghai last New Year's Eve that left over 30 dead. "Through man-made disasters, we're continually using other people's lives to achieve progress in society," another post said, echoing a common complaint that China's rapid economic growth has been achieved at the expense of many of its people.

'Waves of earth'

At the disaster zone, volunteers hoping to help search for bodies said chances were slim for survivors. "I don't think there will be a chance (to save anybody), because it has been some time (since the landslide), and it is dirt and sand," said one woman who gave her name as Qin. Emergency workers were using diggers in an effort to clear the mud. Many had spent the night on the site. People who saw the Sunday morning landslide described "huge waves" of red earth and mud racing towards the industrial park, burying or crushing homes and factories. Drone footage showed how the mud had swept through and over buildings and tossed aside trucks like toys. Around 900 people were moved out of harm's way before the landslide struck. Four people have been rescued, of whom three had minor injuries. — AFP



MICHIGAN: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump greets guests at a campaign rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan. —AFP

TRUMP CALLS CLINTON A 'LIAR' OVER VIDEO CLAIM

WASHINGTON: Democrat Hillary Clinton says Republican Donald Trump has become recruiting fodder for Islamic extremists, and Trump calls her a liar, in what could be a preview of the 2016 general election campaign for president. Trump said Monday that Clinton lied when she said during a Democratic Party debate that the Islamic State group used videos of his comments about Muslims to recruit militants.

The Republican presidential front-runner also took to Twitter to demand an apology from his leading Democratic opponent. "She's a liar!" Trump told more than 6,000 people at a rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Monday evening. He also said Clinton was "crooked" and "not a president." During Saturday's faceoff among Democrats, Clinton said Trump had become the Islamic State's "best recruiter" and said, "They are going to people showing videos of Donald Trump insulting Islam and Muslims in order to recruit more radical jihadists."

There was no evidence to back the claim, and a spokeswoman later said, "She didn't have a particular video in mind." Still, Clinton campaign spokesman Brian Fallon, asked Monday by MSNBC if Clinton would apologize to Trump, insisted, "Hell no." During his rally Monday at Grand Rapids' DeltaPlex Arena, Trump used crude language to portray Clinton as someone who constantly loses, citing her race against Barack Obama for the Democratic nomination in 2008. "She was favored to win and

she got schlonged, she lost," he said.

He also mocked Clinton for returning to the debate late following a commercial break. "I thought she quit, I thought she gave up," Trump joked. He later seemed to acknowledge reports that she got delayed waiting to use a restroom: "I know where she went. It's disgusting, I don't want to talk about it." Trump argued that he is the last person Clinton wants to run against in a general election. "Ask Jeb Bush if he enjoys running against me," he said of the former Florida governor who has been struggling to gain traction despite a massive early fundraising advantage. "Ask Lindsey Graham, did he enjoy running against Trump?" he said of the South Carolina senator who on Monday announced his departure from the race.

Trump also defended the kind words he's been exchanging with Russian President Vladimir Putin, brushing off criticism that he has been too kind to the Russian president. "That's like a good thing, not a bad thing," he insisted. "Wouldn't it be nice if we could get along like with people?" And he made clear that he is opposed to the killing of journalists, after appearing to brush off concerns about Putin's record on a Sunday morning news show. "I don't like that, I'm totally against that," said Trump. "By the way, I hate some of these people ... and some of them are such lying, disgusting people, it's true. But I would never kill. And anybody that does I think would be despicable." — AP

2015 - A YEAR OF IDEOLOGICAL CLASHES, SHOWDOWN VOTES AND HARSH WORDS FOR CONGRESS, GOP UPHEAVAL OVERSHADOWS LEGISLATING

WASHINGTON: For Congress, 2015 was a year of ideological clashes, showdown votes and harsh words. And that was just among Republicans. It was the first year of Barack Obama's two presidential terms when the GOP ran both the House and Senate. That meant a blend of compromise and confrontation. Each side won some priorities and blocked the others, a hallmark of divided government. Republican infighting overshadowed everything for most of the year. Even interventions from on high - a first-ever papal address to Congress by Pope Francis and a Florida man's unauthorized landing of a gyrocopter near the Capitol - barely distracted from the GOP upheaval.

"There were a number of procedural snafus and dysfunctional moments that made this year much more difficult," said moderate Rep. Charlie Dent, R-Pa. Congress enacted bipartisan deals recasting federal education policy, restricting government access to bulk phone records, extending highway programs, easing approval of future trade agreements and resolving a vexing problem of how Medicare reimburses doctors. Before adjourning for the year, Congress sent Obama legislation Friday boosting defense and domestic spending in 2016, lifting a 1970s-era ban on US oil exports and extending dozens of expiring tax cuts.

"The Republican Senate majority is proving that you can still get a lot done with a president from a different party," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky, said Saturday in his party's weekly address. But Republicans failed to repeal Obama's health care law, eliminate Planned Parenthood's federal money or block the international agreement curbing Iran's nuclear program. They fell short on closing the door to Syrian refugees, forcing the president to allow construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline and blocking regulations on clean water, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Obama, in his weekly address, said the 11-hour spending and tax bills he signed were "a pair of Christmas miracles in Washington." Some of the year's turmoil flowed from the GOP's presidential campaign, in which Donald Trump and others have profited by targeting the political establishment. It was bad enough when Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, one White House candidate, took to the Senate floor to accuse McConnell, his own party's chief, of telling him "a flat-out lie" about scheduling a controversial vote. Plenty of GOP senators defended McConnell, but things got worse.

After years of hounding by tea party conservatives, House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, abruptly announced his resignation in September. It took a tumultuous month and public begging by GOP elders to persuade Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis, the youthful 2012 vice presidential nominee, to take the post. At the eye of the Republican maelstrom was the House Freedom Caucus, numbering about 40

hard-right lawmakers. They made Boehner's life miserable because they felt he didn't challenge Obama enough.

In an early sign of trouble, 25 conservative Republicans had cast symbolic votes last January against making Boehner speaker, a job he had held since 2011. The following month, 52 of them abandoned GOP leaders and joined Democrats to oppose a bill financing the Homeland Security Department. They were angry that the measure did not curb Obama's immigration policies. In a sym-

bolic warning, conservative Rep. Mark Meadows, R-NC, proposed ousting Boehner in July with a non-binding motion accusing Boehner of "diminishing the voice of the American people."

Relations between the two camps never healed. Conservative Rep. Matt Salmon, R-Ariz, said Boehner would be "on very thin ice" if he relied on Democratic votes to pass bills opposed by conservatives. Leadership stalwart Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., accused the rebels of "playing fantasy football with their voting cards." — AP

SECURITY FORCES ESCORT MEXICAN TRAVELERS ON 'DEATH HIGHWAY'

MATAMOROS: Twenty cars line up between police cruisers in a violent northeastern Mexican city, ready to be escorted at high speed across a notorious "death highway" infested with gangs that kill and kidnap. Many are Mexican migrants who drove across the border to Matamoros from the United States, bearing gifts for their families for the Christmas holidays. Others are local residents who know the dangers they face driving across Tamaulipas, the state with the highest number of missing people in Mexico - 5,000 out of 26,000 nationally - and regular drug cartel battles.

With that in mind, the federal police launched "Operation Tread" in 2013 to escort civilian cars across Route 101, a ghostly highway with closed or deserted restaurants and businesses along the way. Things here are so bad, it is known as "death highway." Carlos Ortega, a 55-year-old gardener who drove from the northeastern US state of New Jersey, said he learned about the operation in a flier that was handed to him after he crossed the border from Brownsville, Texas. "I'm here because I'm afraid of the problems out there, like robberies, attacks. They take cars and money. You can't travel calmly. We need this operation," he said as he headed to Puebla in central Mexico in a sport utility vehicle with his daughter and two friends.

Tamaulipas is home to the Gulf and Zetas drug cartels, two criminal groups that were once allies but have fought brutal turf wars in recent years. While they have both been weakened by the captures or killings of top leaders, their members still sow fear in the population. A man who lives in Texas said he was stopped at gunpoint three times in past trips across Tamaulipas. "They had large guns. They made me get out and they said they wanted my SUV. I was with my family. I told

them, 'I don't have anything against you. I'd rather pay an extortion fee,' he said.

He didn't know whether they were cartel henchmen or common criminals. But he said they ask travelers to give them between \$30 and \$70. On this trip, his car was loaded with toys, bags and boxes with US goods. He pulled over behind the lead police cruiser, but he was nervous despite the escort. "If there's a fight, the cruiser in front of us won't do much against 10 SUVs that come to steal," the Texas man said.

'Safe point'

After the 9:00 am rendezvous, the caravan set off on its 300-kilometer trip to the state capital, Tamaulipas, a nonstop ride with no bathroom breaks. The officers were armed with assault rifles as they began to speed down the highway, with little space between the cars following behind them. The caravan reaches cruising speeds of 100 kilometers per hour, going faster in some stretches. For those who dare to drive without the police escort, the authorities set up a "safe point" at a gasoline station guarded by police and soldiers so that people can fill their tanks and stretch their legs. The police caravan sped up as it approached San Fernando, the most dreaded part of the trip. It was there that suspected Zetas members slaughtered 72 Central and South American migrants in August 2010. "San Fernando is the hardest part. There are kidnappings there. They take your car and rob you," said Rafael Portales, 37, who buys cars in the United States to sell them in Mexico. Near Ciudad Victoria, the driver of the lead police car waved his hand outside his window to signal the end of "Operation Tread." "Every man for himself from here. May God bless us," said the Texas man as he headed on to another city in his SUV. — AFP

IRAQI FORCES ADVANCE INTO CENTRE OF IS-HELD RAMADI

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces advanced yesterday into the centre of Ramadi for a final push aimed at retaking the city they lost to the Islamic State group in May, officials said. "We went into the centre of Ramadi from several fronts and we began purging residential areas," said Sabah Al-Noman, spokesman of the elite Iraqi counter-terrorism service. "The city will be cleared in the coming 72 hours," he said. "We did not face strong resistance, only snipers and suicide bombers and this is a tactic we expected," Noman said. The fresh push was launched overnight and is meant to result in the full recapture of Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's western province of Anbar. Footage on state TV channel Iraqiya showed soldiers driving down the deserted streets of the bombed-out city, entering homes carefully to spot possible booby traps and retrieving shells and rockets from abandoned IS positions.

The fighting in Ramadi is led by the elite counter-terrorism force, backed by US-led coalition air strikes and also supported by forces from the police, the army and Sunni tribes opposed to the jihadists. IS has lost several key towns in Iraq since Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdish region started fighting back following the jihadist group's devastating offensive 18 months ago. The Shiite-dominated Hashed Al-Shaabi paramilitary forces were heavily involved in the battles that

led to the recapture of towns such as Tikrit and Baiji but they have remained on the fringes in the battle for Ramadi.

Government compound

Retaking the city, an insurgent bastion that saw some of the deadliest fighting against US troops a decade ago, would be the Iraqi federal forces' most significant victory so far. "We built temporary bridges on the Euphrates and our forces were able to cross the river to enter residential areas and gain access to the city centre," a brigadier general said, speaking on condition of anonymity. IS fighters have had plenty of time to dig in since they took full control of Ramadi on May 17 after blitzing government forces with wave after wave of car and truck bomb attacks. The jihadists built tunnels to move without being exposed to the coalition's daily raids but their supply lines were gradually all severed and military officials estimated last week there no more than 300 fighters left in the city. The breakthrough came earlier this month when counter-terrorism forces broke down IS defenses and retook the key southwestern neighborhood of Al-Tameem. After taking a few days to beef up their new positions, Iraqi military leaders had said in recent days a final push was imminent and leaflets urging the population to flee were dropped over the weekend.

"The distance between our forces and the governmental compound, which is located in the central district of Hoz, is less than a kilometer," said the brigadier general, adding that clashes were ongoing.

Civilians fleeing

The provincial headquarters is believed to be one of the main IS bases in the city and was at the heart of deadly fighting earlier this year. According to another military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to talk to the press, 15 families managed to escape from Hoz in the past 24 hours. "They were able to flee the lockdown imposed by Daesh on civilians and they found shelter with the army on the southern side of the city," he said, using an Arabic acronym for IS.

The senior officer said the civilians were mostly children, women and elderly men, who were screened and then taken to a safe area on the edge of Ramadi. Iraq's defense minister, Khaled Al-Obeidi, and other officials said in recent days they believed there were still a few civilians in Ramadi being used as human shields by IS. The coalition said its aircraft had carried out six strikes on IS targets in the Ramadi area yesterday alone. — AFP

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT EUROPE'S MIGRATION CRISIS

BRUSSELS: One million - and counting. The International Organization for Migration says its statistics show the number of people fleeing conflict or poverty who have arrived in the European Union by sea this year has hit the seven-digit mark. Despite increased coast-guard patrols, razor-wire topped fences, tightened security, the reintroduction of border controls, new laws and refugee distribution schemes, nothing has slowed down the arrivals. More than two years after the drowning of over 400 people off Italy's southern coast brought cries of "never again," every record has been broken in 2015. The IOM says the total number of arrivals is more than four times that of last year. Here are some questions and answers about how the EU is handling the crisis:

Where are they coming from?

Most people arriving in Europe are now

entering Greece after taking short trips on rickety boats or inflatable rafts from Turkey. The IOM says more than 820,000 came that way in 2015, many fleeing wars in Syria and Iraq. More than 150,000 have crossed the Mediterranean to Italy this year, mostly from the Libyan coast. Almost 3,700 are dead or missing along the two routes. As winter closes in, the colder weather appears to have slowed the flow somewhat, although this is unlikely to last long.

Where are they going?

Most who come via Greece travel by foot and on trains, buses and trucks north and west through central Europe, en route to the more prosperous countries of western Europe. Germany, which has taken in hundreds of thousands of people this year, and Sweden have been among the most welcoming.

What's been done?

The EU has beefed up the Frontex border agency and launched a naval operation to hunt human traffickers. To ease the number of arrivals and prevent dangerous journeys across the sea, EU nations agreed to resettle some refugees by bringing them directly from countries outside Europe. EU teams were sent to Greece and Italy to fast-track migrant registration and sort out whether those arriving should qualify for international protection or be sent home. Twenty-three nations also agreed to share 160,000 refugees in Greece and Italy to lighten the two countries' burden. The EU is also investing funds, assistance and assets in Turkey and countries neighboring Libya that migrants leave or travel across to get to Europe.

Then how did it get so bad?

Europe has been overwhelmed by the

sheer numbers and the response has been slow. The EU initially tried to respond with policy changes and refused to treat the continent's biggest refugee crisis since World War II as a humanitarian emergency. Border guards and reception facilities were swamped. As the control of Europe's external borders broke down, countries desperate to halt the influx took unilateral measures that undermined confidence and trust, mainly closing borders without informing their neighbors, causing chaos as people looked for alternate routes. A key policy, the system to share 160,000 refugees, has moved at snail's pace. As of Dec. 15, three months after it was introduced, just over 200 people had moved to other countries. Moreover, of the people whose asylum or residency applications have been turned down, just over one in three are actually sent home.

What's in the pipeline?

In an effort to stanch the flow, the EU will give Turkey 3 billion euros to cope with Syrian refugees and ease visa restrictions for Turkish nationals. It has already sped up Ankara's membership process. In exchange, Turkey is to crack down on migrants leaving for Greece. To better control the Turkey-Greece maritime border, the EU will look to endorse before July a European border and coast guard, a new agency that would monitor external borders and intervene when countries are unable or unwilling to respond to big migrant movements. In March, the EU's executive arm will introduce 'smart borders' policies to control entry and exit, better register travelers and change the rules governing the Schengen passport-free zone that allows people to travel without border checks or visas through many countries in Europe. — AP



TEHRAN: Iranian men look at a model of a train at the stand of the Russian company Yuzhno-Uralskiy Heavy Engineering yesterday during the Russia National Industrial Exhibition in Tehran. — AFP

RUSSIA TO START BUILDING NUCLEAR REACTORS IN IRAN

FRENCH SENATE HEAD, ON RARE IRAN VISIT, RAPS US VISA LAW

TEHRAN: Russia will start constructing two nuclear reactors in Iran next week, the spokesman for the Iranian atomic agency said yesterday. It comes a year after Tehran signed a contract with Moscow to build two reactors at the existing Russian-built Bushehr power plant in southern Iran. Work on the two reactors "will commence next week," the state television website quoted Behrouz Kamalvandi as saying. A series of agreements signed between the two countries last year foresees eventually increasing the total number of Russian-built reactors in the country to nine.

The start of construction follows a historic deal between Iran and world powers in July that ends a decade-long standoff over Tehran's nuclear program. The accord does not limit Iran's development of civilian nuclear sites. Construction of the two reactors will be bankrolled by Iran, Sergei Kiriyenko, head of Russia's state nuclear company Rosatom, said last year. Iran plans to build 20 more nuclear plants in the future, including four in Bushehr, to decrease its dependence on oil and gas. Russia backed Iran during two years of

nuclear negotiations with six world powers. The two countries have recently allied to prop up Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad against opposition and jihadist groups, mainly the Islamic State organization.

Rare Iran visit

In another development, the president of the French Senate has criticized new US visa regulations that penalize Europeans who have visited Iran, saying they send the "wrong signal". Gerard Larcher was speaking during a trip to Iran aimed at strengthening relations with France following a landmark deal to curb Tehran's nuclear program in return for a lifting of sanctions. The US measures "can be seen in Tehran as a sign of mistrust" and do not contribute to building confidence with Iran, he told reporters late Monday.

The US bill, passed by Congress on Friday, bars citizens from 38 countries and who are also dual nationals from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Sudan from using a visa waiver program. It also requires people who have travelled to those four countries since 2011, or to a

country Washington has listed as supporting terrorism, to apply for a standard visa, deeming them a risk. "I think it sends the wrong signal... from a democratic country, the great American democracy," Larcher said. He said the move was at odds with the International Atomic Energy Agency's recent closure of its investigation into Iran's past efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

The end of the probe into "possible military dimensions" to Tehran's atomic program was a condition for the July deal to go forward. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said during a meeting with the French delegation that the visa restrictions were "primarily against the independence of Europe." "Europeans must show their independence in the face of discriminatory measures," he said, quoted by the IRNA official news agency. Larcher, on the first visit to Iran by a French Senate president since the 1979 Islamic revolution, on Sunday met President Hassan Rouhani who is expected to visit France in late January. — Agencies

RUSSIA RAIDS HOMES OF KREMLIN CRITIC KHODORKOVSKY'S WORKERS

MOSCOW: Russian investigators yesterday raided the apartments of employees of Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Open Russia group, less than two weeks after Moscow charged the former tycoon with murder. Members of the government's Investigative Committee searched the homes of Khodorkovsky's spokeswoman Kulle Pispanen and employees of his opposition group Open Russia.

The group, citing the Investigative Committee, said the searches were connected to an old case over the allegedly fraudulent privatization in 1994 of a mining and fertilizer company. The 2003 case led to the criminal prosecution of one of Russia's most powerful oligarchs and the dismemberment of his Yukos oil company which have become defining events in the presidency of Vladimir Putin. Khodorkovsky ridiculed the raids and vowed that his organization, which he set up in an attempt to help nurture civil society and rouse Russians against the Kremlin, would press ahead with its work.

"This is rather funny, especially taking into consideration that none of Open Russia's current employees and activists worked at Yukos," he said on Echo of Moscow radio, noting that some of his staff were children in the 1990s. "Insanity is entering its final stages," Khodorkovsky, who spends much of his time in London, added, referring to the authorities. Liberal lawyer Pavel Chikov said the apartments of at least seven people had been searched including those of several Saint Petersburg-based Open Russia coordinators. Writing on Twitter, he said the raids made little sense as a statute of limitations for the alleged crime had expired. The Investigative Committee, which reports to Putin, confirmed the early morning raids.

'I was 12'

Mikhail Roskin, a 24-year-old Open Russia employee based in Saint

Petersburg, said investigators searched the apartment of his relatives. The link to the 2003 case was dubious at best, he added. "I was 12 then," he said. "Back then I cared about everything except Khodorkovsky or politics." Earlier this month Russian investigators charged the former oil tycoon in absentia with organizing the 1998 murder of a mayor in Siberia, a move supporters say is aimed at silencing the self-exiled Kremlin critic. Khodorkovsky was also charged with the attempted murders of two other people.

Once Russia's richest man, Khodorkovsky, 52, spent a decade in prison on charges of tax evasion, fraud and embezzlement which he and his supporters say were trumped up in revenge for the business magnate's political ambitions. Khodorkovsky was unexpectedly pardoned by Putin in 2013 and flown out of the country. He has slammed Putin's system and said he was ready, if called upon, to lead Russia in times of crisis. As investigators announced they planned to press new charges against Khodorkovsky, the Putin critic called a news conference in London, which was broadcast online, calling the Kremlin's agenda "shitty" and saying revolution in Russia was inevitable.

Open Russia this month published a report on allegations by Spanish prosecutors of links between a Russian crime boss and several Putin allies, including the head of the Investigative Committee Alexander Bastrykin. Yesterday's raids come after armed police searched the offices of Open Russia in April, during Putin's marathon annual phone-in session. Activists have complained that after the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine last year, Russian authorities have further tightened the screws, leaving critics with few outlets to express their disagreement with Kremlin policies. — AFP



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) greets Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon ahead of a meeting of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) at the Kremlin in Moscow. — AFP

TAJIKISTAN BANS XMAS TREES AND DECORATIONS IN SCHOOLS

DUSHANBE: Tajikistan has tightened restrictions on celebrations of the traditional festive season in schools in the Central Asian country, banning Christmas trees and gift-giving. This year's restrictions are the toughest yet implemented by the former Soviet country, which has been toning down celebrations of the New Year holiday for some time, notably banning Russia's version of Father Christmas from television screens in 2013. A decree by the education ministry prohibits "the use of fireworks, festive meals, gift-giving and raising money" for New Year celebrations as well as "the installation of a Christmas tree either living (felled wood) or artificial" in schools and universities.

While other ex-Soviet states have been busy setting up big festive trees on the main squares of major cities, a tree will only appear briefly before New Year in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe and is expected to be removed early in 2016. The December-January holiday season is contested in Tajikistan, a majority-Muslim but secular republic

where the population is divided over the benefits of Soviet and Russian influences in society. On New Year's night in 2011-2012, a man dressed in the red robes worn by Father Christmas and his Russian equivalent "Father Frost" was stabbed to death by unknown assailants outside the home of relatives in Dushanbe.

While the man's family claimed the attack had religious motives, police refuted the account and said the three attackers were intoxicated at the time. Days before the murder the country's leading cleric had urged Muslims not to observe New Year traditions. Other holidays perceived as alien to Tajikistan's culture have come under pressure in recent years. In 2013 and 2014, fancy dress zombies and vampires were reportedly detained by police as the government opposed any Halloween celebrations. The country also applies strict regulations to occasions such as funerals and weddings and fined one man around \$600 for marking his birthday with friends in an Irish-themed pub in Dushanbe earlier this year. — AFP

SOME HEED POPE'S CALL TO SUCCOR REFUGEES WHILE OTHERS LOOK AWAY

PARIS ATTACKS HAVE FANNED FEAR OF MUSLIMS

VATICAN CITY: One Catholic parish in Germany tore out its pews to make space for refugees. Franciscan monks near Rome took a family into their hilltop convent. But in northern Italy, a rural priest faced hostility when he asked his flock to shelter Muslims. Four months after Pope Francis appealed to the parishes and religious communities of Europe to each take in one family of refugees, the response is decidedly mixed. Arms have opened wide in some places but indifference, bureaucracy, fear, and xenophobia have reared their heads elsewhere, particularly after the attack by Islamist militants who killed 130 people in Paris last month.

Around a million migrants arrived by sea in Europe in 2015, with some 3,700 dying, according to the International Organization for Migration. Some of them, if Francis is heeded, should be heading to safety among the roughly 120,000 Catholic parishes in Europe. But in Italy - which with more than 25,000 has the largest number of parishes - only about 1,000 have responded, according to Father Giancarlo Perego, head of the Church-affiliated Migrants Foundation. Another 1,500 families had offered to host refugees.

Perego and other Church officials pointed out, however, that many Catholic parishes were already supporting refugee services well before the pope's appeal. Italian bishops have published a "How To" booklet for parishes, dealing with everything from how to prepare parishioners for the arrival of refugees, legal issues, and a glossary explaining terms such as asylum and repatriation. When Francis announced the initiative on Sept. 6, he set the example by welcoming two families into the Vatican's own two parishes.

Mixed welcome

Many of the migrants entering Europe have headed to Germany, where the Catholic Church is one of the richest in Europe, partly because of a Church tax on members, and which has an institutional tradition of helping refugees. More than 3,000 staff members work full time to help refugees and are backed up by about 100,000 volunteers, according to a spokesperson. St Benedikt's parish in the northern port city of Bremen removed pews and confessionals and converted the church into a temporary refugee shelter.



THE VATICAN: Pope Francis caresses a baby as he meets Vatican employees for the annual Christmas greetings in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican. — AP

"This is our duty. We can't sing Christmas carols about opening doors to those in need and at the same time refuse to let anyone enter," said one of its priests, Father Johannes Sczyrba. St Roch church in Brussels opened its doors at night and now shelters about 200 refugees. "The numbers grow and grow and grow. It's like a little explosion," said Father Hugo Van Gee. Gilles Cnockaert, spokesman for Catholic charity Caritas International, said the pope's call was "like an electrical shock" for Belgian Catholics and prompted more than 550 people to offer to house asylum seekers.

But it had not all been welcoming. A number of Catholic prelates, particularly in Eastern Europe, were less than eager and warned of the long-term effects that migrants, most of them Muslim, could have on local culture. "We are not being xenophobic or inhospitable," said Bishop Piotr Libera of Plock in central

Poland. "We are being wise. If you let a stranger into your home, a home that is just being built, a small home, a home that is frail, you may get yourself into a great deal of trouble". In Italy, a major gateway into Europe for migrants, it has also been mixed. The Rome newspaper La Repubblica said only 80 of Rome's more than 300 parishes had responded to Francis' call. The response was much lower in other Italian cities, the paper reported. Parishioners of the church of San Saturnino in an up-scale Rome neighborhood refurbished a two-room apartment for three African refugees. They take turns helping them shop and cook. Father Michael Perry, worldwide head of one of the branches of the Franciscan order, said monks in a convent south of Rome had taken in a refugee family and another convent in the central Rome neighborhood of Trastevere was housing 15 people. — Reuters

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SYRIANS IN REGIME HEARTLAND PIN HOPES ON RUSSIA BOMBING

'THANK YOU, PRESIDENT PUTIN'

LATAKIA: Taiseer Hamash cradled his two-month old daughter Noor Sham in his arms as he stood by the entrance of the tarpaulin tent his family has called home in war-ravaged Syria for over a year. "She has never seen our old house," said the former factory worker, 29, who fled the fierce fighting in his home region of Aleppo. "One day I hope she will be able to grow up in the same streets I did," he said as his two young sons Hussein and Mohammed stood coughing nearby. Hamash and his family are among around 5,000 people who fled the fighting in their home regions and now live in what was once the main sports complex in the government stronghold of Latakia, the coastal heartland of the clan of President Bashar Al-Assad. The displaced-all fierce supporters of Assad's regime have taken over basketball courts and a football stadium as they try to eke out an existence in a city that has managed to escape most of the violence. Now, as the conflict in their homeland grinds on towards a fifth year, they say they have one reason to hope that their desperate situation might change and they may one day head home—Russia's military intervention on the side of Assad.

'Thank you, Putin'

"I say to President Bashar Al-Assad and to President

Putin: thank you to the Russian people for the help offered by their military," said former truck driver Ali Ahmed Edrees, 41, during a stop in a tightly regimented press tour to Syria organized by the Russian defense ministry. "Thank you, Putin, we hope that with the help of God you will rid us of terrorism." Russia launched its bombing campaign in Syria at the end of September at the request of its long-time ally Assad and says it is targeting the Islamic State jihadist group and other "terrorist" organizations in the war-torn nation.

Moscow argues that backing regime forces is the best hope of ending the war. But the West argues that the Kremlin has simply rescued a brutal tyrant who has used barrel bombs and chemical weapons against his own people and that its intervention will only prolong the fighting.

"The Russian forces have come in to help accelerate the military victory but the Syrian army anyway had the intention to carry on its operations to kill the terrorists and chase them from Syria," Latakia's governor Ibrahim al Salem told journalists.

For the displaced people living in the camp the international wrangling over the Russian intervention seems a long way off. Their daily concerns focus more on just get-

ting by and struggling to stay healthy in the tough conditions some have now lived in for years. "The situation according to everyone here is bad-it is better than a lot of other refugee camps but it is still bad," said Sarah Hassan, an English literature undergraduate at the university of Latakia and volunteer with the local NGO Albostan that works in the camp. "They live in tents, there are no bathrooms, kitchens, toilets—the basic human needs are not supplied."

Both the Russian and Syrian militaries say forces back-

ing Assad have pushed back the frontline from Latakia by dozens of kilometers since the start of Moscow's bombing campaign. But there appears to have been little concrete progress around the more fiercely contested cities such as Aleppo to the north. That has left some of the displaced in the camp hoping that Russia might ramp up its involvement still further and send ground troops to Syria. "We want to go home any way possible," said Yasser Edress. "That means we want as many Russian forces to come as possible." — AFP



SEOUL: Wang Yong-yo (left bottom) sits inside a wooden coffin during the 'death experience' program at Hyowon Healing Center in Seoul, South Korea yesterday.—AP

S KOREAN 'MOCK FUNERALS' SEEK TO EASE LIFE STRESSES

SEOUL: In a dimly lit room, people dressed in white burial shrouds slowly sit up inside the wooden coffins where they had been lying, enclosed, for 10 minutes. Blinking, pale and solemn, they say they thought about their past and their loved ones while inside the coffins and vow to live better lives now. "I gained courage to live a new life," Wang Yong-yo, 67, said, sobbing. "I thought about my dead mother ... she was really beautiful when she was young and was very generous."

The mock funerals are part of a "well-dying" trend in South Korea, a sign that the country, once one of the world's poorest after the devastating 1950-53 Korean War, has grown affluent enough to consider quality-of-life issues. Supporters credit the services with helping participants map out better futures, but critics say they are nothing but money-making businesses. A handful of companies conduct the mock funerals, and the rivalry is getting ugly.

One company is suing Hyowon Healing Center, which staged Tuesday's event and leads the industry, claiming it stole the idea. Hyowon, run by a regular funeral service company, began giving free mock funerals in late 2012 as part of efforts to promote its image. It has attracted about 15,000 visitors, ranging from middle school students to elderly people who want to know what their deaths will be like and how to prepare for the end of their lives. Since

starting the program, the company says it has seen a 30 percent increase in the number of people signing up for its funeral home business.

Yesterday's service drew 14 people. Before they climbed into their coffins, they listened to a lecture on life and death, watched a TV documentary on a woman dying of a cancer saying farewell to her family, and wrote their own wills. "I'm so sad. I feel sorry (to my family) that I didn't do anything on my third wedding anniversary and missed a party at my daughter's kindergarten," said Kwan Dae-jung, one of the participants, choked with tears. Many who join the mock funerals seek relief from the stresses of modern life in South Korea, whose suicide rate tops the development world. There is widespread tension, especially among young South Koreans, over highly competitive college entrance exams, job searches, long working hours and widening inequality. But not all is peaceful and contemplative in the mock funeral business. Seoul-based Beautiful Life, which charges up to 50,000 won (\$43) per client, says it now has less than 10 customers per month because of competition from Hyowon, which it accuses of copying its idea. "There should be morality in business," said Kim Giho, the head of Beautiful Life, who plans to sue Hyowon. "That's why I want to strongly deal with them." Hyowon officials deny the accusation.—AP

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Focus

RUSSIA, IRAN
IN MIDEAST
RESURGENCE

By Sammy Ketz

After years of waning influence, Russia and Iran made a dramatic comeback in the Middle East in 2015 as they threw their support behind Syria's embattled President Bashar Al-Assad. A decades-long backer of the Syrian regime, Moscow dramatically raised the stakes this year by deploying its air force to bomb rebels fighting Assad's army. And after years of isolation and crippling sanctions, Tehran returned as a regional power with a seat at Syria's peace talks, denoting growing international legitimacy.

But analysts question whether Russia and Iran's investments will ultimately earn them leading roles in the region, or if they will get bogged down in the Middle East quagmire. "The resurgence of Iran and Russia is obvious, and their interventionism is increasingly unabashed," said Karim Bitar, head of research at the Institute for International and Strategic Affairs. "They are looking to fill the void left by the American retreat" from the region, he added. This interventionist streak is most prominent in Syria, where the nearly five-year-old conflict has worn down government troops. After several years of providing financial aid and military advisers, Moscow launched an air war in support of Assad in September. The strikes have targeted a patchwork of armed forces hostile to the regime, ranging from US-backed rebels to jihadist groups including the Islamic State organization.

'The West Cheated Us'

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Moscow lost its influence in the Middle East - where it had invested time, energy and financial resources for years - seemingly overnight. In May 1994, it watched powerless as the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Yemen buckled under pressure from the Saudi-allied north. Less than a decade later, Russia's influence in Iraq dimmed with the ousting and death of Saddam Hussein following the US-led invasion. History seemed to repeat itself in Oct 2011 with the UN-sanctioned military campaign in Libya against Russia ally Muammar Gaddafi.

"The West cheated us. We will never forgive them for unilaterally using the UN resolution to take over Libya. Never will we let them take over Syria," a high-ranking Russian diplomat in Damascus told AFP. Syria is Moscow's last foothold in the Middle East, and its loss would reduce Russia to a second-rate power. The "inflexibility" of Russia's stance on Syria, Bitar said, stems partly from a desire to protect its strong bilateral ties with its last "client state" in the Middle East.

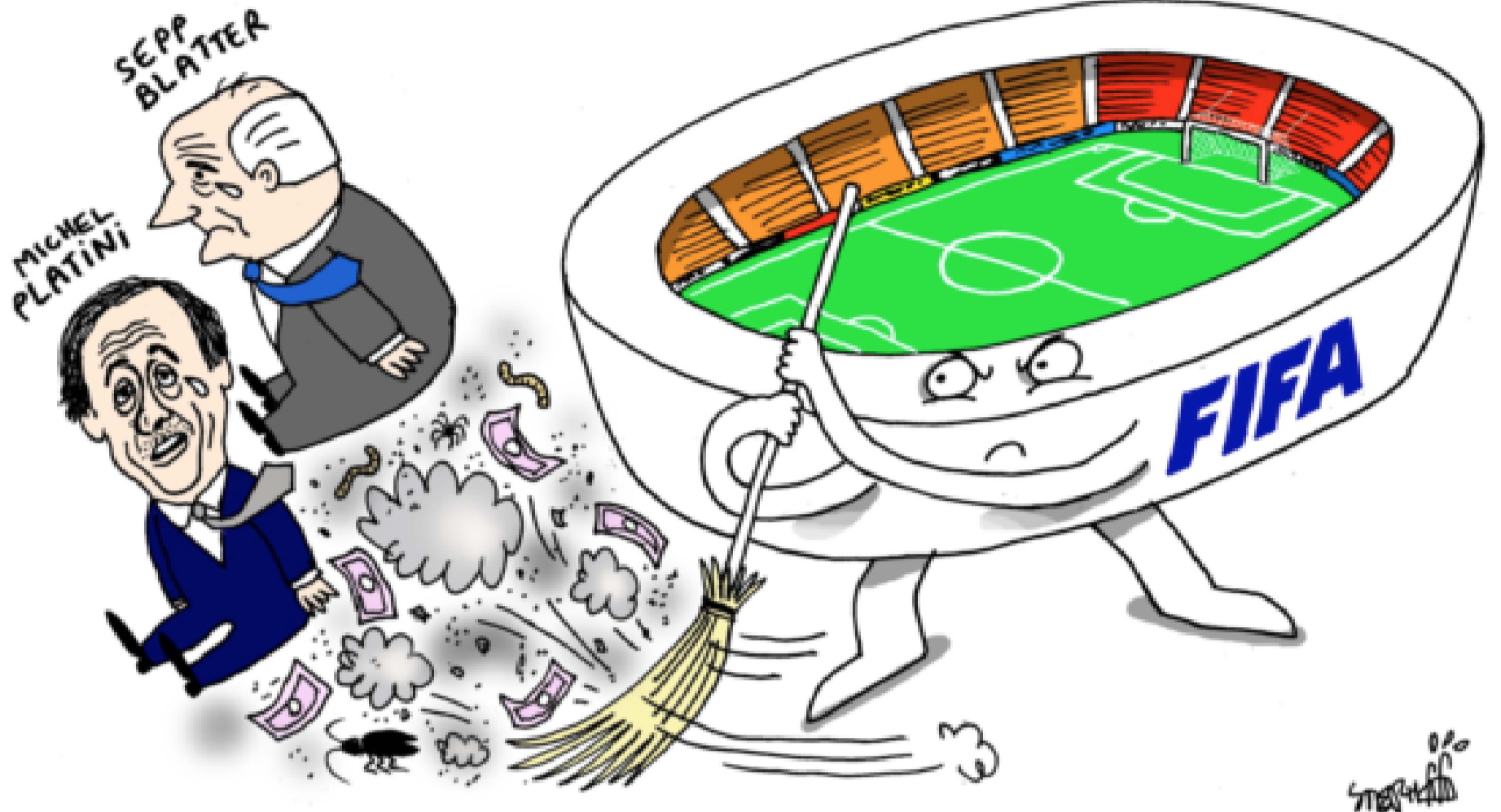
But it also seeks to present itself as a protector of the region's Christian minority and to act on a policy of "revanchism after being humiliated since 1989," he added. Russia's national interest has pushed it to act in the Middle East, so that it doesn't have to fight the fire (of Islamist ideology) near our borders," said Ajdar Kourtov, head of the National Strategy Problems Journal, which is close to the Kremlin. "Russian leaders aspire to restore Russia's rank in international politics, a rank comparable to what the Soviet Union had," added Kourtov.

'Painful Consequences' Ahead?

Moscow is already beginning to reap the benefits of its intervention in Syria. Russia has developed links with Egypt, Jordan and Gulf countries, and has secured a central role in finding a political solution to Syria's crisis. US Secretary of State John Kerry recently called Russia's role "constructive". Iran, too, has invested heavily to protect its ally in Damascus and has been given a role in international peace talks on Syria for the first time. It has dispatched the elite Revolutionary Guards as well as the allied Shiite Lebanese militia Hezbollah to bolster Assad's forces and push back rebel advances across Syria.

Iran's regional influence has surged since the signing of a landmark nuclear deal with world powers under which economic sanctions will be rolled back. In a bid to eclipse regional rival Saudi Arabia, Iran has also consolidated its influence in Iraq and Lebanon through Hezbollah. "Russia and Iran started to work together to prevent the region from completely collapsing," said Mohammad Marandi, dean of world studies at the University of Tehran. "We will see, in the coming weeks, other actors, other countries, moving closer toward the Iranian-Russian position regarding extremism and the role extremism is playing," Marandi added. But the game is far from over. Tehran and Moscow, Bitar warns, "could be adversely affected as not a single intervention in the Arab world has ended without unintended, and often painful, consequences for those who dive headfirst into this mess." — AFP

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ASSAM'S BORDER FARMERS FENCED IN

By Amarjyoti Borah

Glok Das, a farmer in India's northeast Assam state, is happy with the harvest produced by his main 6-hectare farm. But he'd love to sell another 4-hectare plot, just half a kilometre away, even though it's equally fertile. Why? It sits on the other side of a barbed-wire fence marking the Bangladesh border, and that means he can't irrigate it. The fence was built in 1987 to prevent illegal migration from Bangladesh to India. It traces a line about 150 yards inside the actual border, on Indian land, since no treaty agreement allowed a fence to be built on the border itself.

Large tracts of Indian land, including some villages, were left on the far side of the fence. In the Golokganj sector of Dhubri district, more than 8,000 farmers struggle with a fence between their homes and their land. They are allowed to cross though the fence each day to work their holdings, but only at set hours. Now changing climatic conditions in the region for the first time require farmers to irrigate their land frequently to get a good crop - but legal and bureaucratic obstacles make it hard to invest in irrigation on the far side of the fence, meaning harvests there are two-thirds lower than those on the Indian side. "With climate change, there has been a change in the rainfall pattern and also the flood intensity, which is making agriculture difficult in many areas in the state," said Girin Chetia of the non-profit North East Affected Areas Development Society. Those changes

mean farmer Safikul Islam now wants to get rid of his 5 hectares of land on the wrong side of the fence, and next to Das' plot.

Less Grain Across the Fence

Both farmers say their land on the Indian side of the fence yields nearly 1,500 kg of rice a year, while an equivalent area on the Bangladesh side produces no more than 500 kg. "The land on both sides is equally fertile, however we suffer as we don't have any irrigation facilities there. This takes a major toll on our land on the other side of the border," said Das. "We have been traditionally dependent on the rainwater for our cultivation (for) generations, but now as the rainfall has become unpredictable, it is not possible," said Munin Das, a 52-year-old farmer who owes 4 hectares of land on the Bangladesh side of the fence. "We need irrigation facilities to be able to cultivate our land and get good yields," he said.

By law, construction of any concrete or permanent structure is forbidden near the fence, local people say. "Even the idea of building any small irrigation project or building any project for water harvesting does not arise," said Dinesh Kumar Sarkar, a former legislator from Dhubri who also owes agricultural land on the other side of the fence. Sarkar said that even taking tractors onto the land requires a lengthy bureaucratic process.

Local people worry they will have to give up farming on the Bangladesh side of the fence as a result of the weather changes, and complain that neither the district administra-

tion nor the Indian government's Border Security Force (BSF) have been sympathetic to their problems.

8 to 4 Farmers

Gates to cross the border are open from 8 am to 4 pm, Sarkar said, and outside these times no Indian citizen is allowed to work land on the Bangladesh side. The problem is that "farming cannot be done within a fixed timeframe," Sarkar said. In particular, the fixed crossing hours "create a lot of problems for the farmers, as the farmer needs to reach his field very early in the morning," he said. In addition, he said, people living on the Bangladeshi side of the border sometimes damage Indian-owned crops or harvest them, leaving Indian growers with no produce to show for their labour. Farmers and civil society groups have long urged India's government to purchase their land on the other side of the fence. Members of Nagarik Unnayan Mancha, a civil society group, say they plan to file a petition on the issue at the Gauhati high court. "Our demands have been ignored for years, and now we are planning to send a delegation to (explain) our situation before the Assam chief minister and the country's prime minister," said Sarkar. The state government, however, says that it cannot act alone on a matter affecting the country's border. "This is an international issue and Bangladesh must also be involved, and this could be done only through the Ministry of External Affairs," said Bhumidhar Barman, Assam's revenue minister. He said he would take up the issue with the central government. — Reuters

EUROPE'S YEAR FROM HELL MAY PRESAGE WORSE

By Paul Taylor

By any measure, it has been a year from hell for the European Union. And if Britons vote to leave the bloc, next year could be worse. Not since 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell and communism crumbled across eastern Europe, has the continent's geopolitical kaleidoscope been shaken so vigorously. But unlike that year of joyous turmoil, which paved the way for a leap forward in European integration, the crises of 2015 have threatened to tear the Union apart and left it battered, bruised, despondent and littered with new barriers.

The collapse of the Iron Curtain led within two years to the agreement to create a single European currency and, over the following 15 years, to the eastward enlargement of the EU and NATO up to the borders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. That appeared to confirm founding father Jean Monnet's prediction that a united Europe would be built out of crises. In contrast, this year's political and economic shocks over an influx of migrants, Greek debt, Islamist violence and Russian military action have led to the return of border controls in many places, the rise of populist anti-EU political forces and recrimination among EU governments.

Jean-Claude Juncker, who describes his EU executive as the "last chance Commission", warned that the EU's open-border Schengen area of passport-free travel was in danger and the euro itself would be unlikely to survive if internal borders were shut. Juncker resorted to gallows humour after the last of 12 EU summits this year, most devoted to last-gasp crisis management: "The crises that are with us will remain and others will come."

His gloomy tone was a reality check on the "we can do it" spirit that German Chancellor Angela Merkel - Europe's pre-eminent leader - has sought to apply to the absorption of hundreds of thousands of mostly Syrian refugees. Merkel has received little support from her EU partners in sharing the migrant burden. Most have insisted the priority is sealing Europe's external borders rather than welcoming more than a token number of refugees in their own countries.

This is partly due to latent resentment of German dominance of the EU and payback for its reluctance to share more financial risks in the euro zone. Some partners also accuse Berlin of hypocrisy over its energy ties with Russia, while friends such as France, the Netherlands and Denmark are simply petrified by the rise of rightwing anti-immigration populists at home. One of the sharpest rebuffs to sharing more of the refugee burden came from close ally Paris. Prime Minister Manuel Valls said of Merkel's open door policy towards Syrian refugees: "It was not France that said 'Come!'"

Merkel's critics rounded on her at an end-of-year EU summit. Italy's Matteo Renzi, backed by Portugal and Greece, attacked her refusal to accept a euro zone bank deposit guarantee scheme. The Baltic states, Bulgaria and Italy denounced her support for a direct gas pipeline from Russia to Germany at a time when the EU is sanctioning Moscow over its military action in Ukraine and has forced the cancellation of a pipeline



Afghan migrants camp out on the Place de la Republique in Paris yesterday. — AP

to southern Europe. "It was pretty much everyone against Merkel in the room," a diplomat who heard the exchanges said. One problem likely to worsen in 2016 is that Europe's main leaders are politically weak and so preoccupied by domestic challenges that they are unable to take the necessary collective action. The conservative Merkel's survival in the chancellery hinges on her ability to bring down the number of refugees flooding into Germany next year and show she has migration under control. Without "Mutti" (Mummy), as she is affectionately known back home, the EU would be in even more dire straits.

French President Francois Hollande's year has been bracketed by militant attacks on the streets of Paris in January and November that caused Europe-wide shock over the Islamist threat from within and over failures in European police and intelligence cooperation. France's influence in Europe is diminished by its economic weakness as Hollande struggles for re-election in 2017 against rising far-right populist Marine Le Pen and conservative predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy.

British Prime Minister David Cameron cares only about finding a face-saving deal on changes in Britain's EU membership terms in February to win a knife-edge referendum which he has hinted he hopes to hold sometime next year. Cameron has effectively mortgaged Britain's future to an attempt to deprive immigrants from eastern EU countries of the same in-work benefits that low-paid British workers get, which many EU partners say would be illegal.

Given British public alarm over immigration, an anti-elite mood and age-old suspicion of Europe fanned by sceptical media, the referendum is an accident waiting to happen. If Europe's second-biggest economy and one of its two main military powers became the first member state ever to vote to leave the EU, it would be a shattering blow to the bloc's confidence and international standing. Diehard European federalists like to believe a "Brexit" would unshackle the remaining members to move ahead in a much closer union built on the euro zone. But that is to ignore the myriad east versus west, north versus south, free-market versus protectionist, socialist versus conservative and sovereignty versus integrationist divisions among the other 27 member states.

More likely, a Brexit vote would prompt demands for referendums elsewhere, from Poland to Denmark, amid acrimonious negotiations between London and Brussels over the terms of Britain's departure and future relationship with the bloc. Denmark has just shown the political risk when governments anywhere in Europe ask voters whether they want even a tiny bit closer EU cooperation. The answer was "Nej tak" - no thanks.

If Cameron wins and Britain stays in on improved terms, some fear political contagion, with other national leaders tempted to emulate his tactic of taking Brussels hostage for domestic ends. "Unfortunately, we need a victory for Cameron," one senior EU official said. "But it is full of risk for Europe as a whole." — Reuters

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People move around under a canopy of light emanating from 650 hanging lanterns called "Luminaries" at the Winter Garden at Brookfield Place in Lower Manhattan yesterday in New York. The choreographed light shows are titled "Snowfall", "Christmas Tree", "Ribbons", "Firecracker" and "Northern Lights". — AFP

IRAN CASUALTIES RISE AS GUARDS RAMP UP ROLE

BEIRUT: The vehicle carrying Iranian Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani was passing through the outskirts of Aleppo on the afternoon of Oct 8 when it was shot up by Islamic State fighters. Hamedani was hit in the left eye by a bullet and died after the driver lost control of the vehicle. He was the most senior Revolutionary Guard commander to be killed in Syria to date and also one of a growing number of Iranian military personnel to lose their lives there.

The death of Hamedani, who played a vital role in Iranian military efforts in Syria, was described by a representative of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the Revolutionary Guards and published by the Entekhab news site in mid-October. It was an event that marked the start of a new development in Iran's military involvement in Syria, where experts believe Tehran may have as many as 3,000 troops.

Since early October, nearly 100 Revolutionary Guard fighters or military advisers, including at least four senior commanders, have been killed there, according to a tally from Iranian websites. That is only slightly less than half of all the casualties suf-

fered by the Guard in Syria since the beginning of 2012, when death notices began to appear. Syria's war has drawn in diverse powers: Iran has allied with Russia in supporting president Bashar Al-Assad while Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar have been backing the opposition.

The United States, France and Britain have been carrying out attacks in Syria primarily targeting Islamic State, which controls broad swathes of territory in both Syria and Iraq. The conflict has heightened sectarian tension across the region as Iran has rallied Shiite fighters from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight a mostly Sunni opposition. An Israeli air strike was reported to have killed a Hezbollah leader in Damascus on Saturday in the latest attack on the Iranian-backed group in Syria by Israeli forces. And while the United Nations Security Council on Friday approved a resolution backing plans for a Syria peace process, obstacles to ending the war remain daunting, with no side able to secure a clear military victory.

The death of the Revolutionary Guard members is an indication of Iran's increased involvement in fighting in Syria - and the

heavy price its soldiers are paying - as it props up a Syrian army hit hard by nearly five years of conflict. "The Iranians have increased the extent of their direct military involvement in the conflict mostly in order to make up for the heavy attrition among Syrian army units," said Hilal Khassan, a political science professor at the American University of Beirut.

The Syrian army has recently had to take a back seat as Iran and its allied militias take the lead in the fight against the opposition. "The SAA (Syrian Arab Army) is a gutted institution," said a Western diplomat in Beirut who asked not to be identified. "There's defections, there's fleeing." The timing of Iran's increased involvement in the conflict, particularly in the fight for control of Aleppo, was coordinated with the start of Russia's air campaign in late September.

The Iranians have shown their commitment to the new effort and coordinated operations on the ground by sending in senior commanders like Hamedani, who played a key role in suppressing protests following the disputed 2009 presidential election in Iran. The influx of Iranian troops, along with Russian

air support, allowed the Syrian army to break the siege of the Kweiris airbase in Aleppo province in early November but otherwise the new coalition has made only incremental gains around Aleppo.

And while Hamedani may have been individually targeted by Islamic State, the bulk of the Guard commanders who have been killed recently died in combat. "They were killed in clashes," said Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war via contacts on the ground. That is not a new development for Iran: Guard commanders regularly visited frontline troops during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. It was a way to boost morale and show camaraderie with ordinary soldiers.

"At the time of the Iran-Iraq war it was the same: high-ranking officers from the Revolutionary Guards would go to the front lines and sometimes they would get killed," said Mohsen Sazegara, a founding member of the Revolutionary Guards who is now a US-based dissident. "It's a tactic. They see it as a kind of sacrifice so they don't sit in the back and let others fight." — Reuters

GROWING IRAN CLOUD SPURS SAUDI ACTION

Continued from Page 1

The kingdom's concerns deepened following an international agreement in July that, perhaps as early as January, will ease sanctions on Iran in return for a reduction in its nuclear capabilities. Before Iran can increase its power as the economic embargo eases, Saudi "wants to gather its friends and allies," the foreign diplomat said. The nuclear deal accentuated concerns in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf that Washington has not paid enough attention to what they see as Iran's destabilising acts.

"The general recognition seems to be that if you want something done you can no longer rely on others," said a second diplomat, from a Western country. Regional competition with Iran plays "a huge role" in Saudi opposition to Assad, he added. Tehran's foreign ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari said Monday that efforts were under way to prepare for "direct dialogue" to resolve Iran-Saudi differences and regional issues. Saudi Arabia is "very much active because the Syrian conflict is approaching what seems like a conclusion and the kingdom is needed at this particular moment," said Khashoggi, expressing his personal view.

HRW OFFERS GUIDELINES FOR BUILDERS...

Continued from Page 1

laborers to their employer and makes it difficult for workers to change jobs without getting their boss' approval. Activists say the system leaves workers open to abuse.

It is common for workers to pay hefty fees to recruiters back home to secure employment, which for many turns out to be different than what was promised once they arrive. Human Rights Watch says recruiting costs can run as high as \$3,000 and that it can take laborers up to three years to pay those fees back. Many laborers in the Gulf

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly denounced international "terrorism" and has itself suffered attacks by IS, also known as ISIS, over the past year. The Islamic coalition and support for Syrian opposition groups reflect a more assertive Saudi foreign policy under King Salman. He took power in January and named his powerful son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as defence minister. Months ago, Saudi Arabia began trying to unite Syria's various political and armed factions opposed to Assad. Finally they came together in Riyadh to prepare for potential negotiations early next year with the Assad regime, part a process endorsed last Friday by the UN Security Council.

Diplomatic pressure to end the war has intensified in the past few weeks, led by the 17-nation International Syria Support Group which includes Saudi Arabia as well as Iran and Russia. Saudi Arabia is among the most vociferous in insisting that Assad can have no role in Syria's future and must go at the start of the political transition process. Asked why Syria is so important for the kingdom, the Western diplomat described it as "a cesspit" destabilizing the region. "Arguably if you had no Syria (war) there might be no ISIS," he said. — AFP

construction industry come from South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Gulf states have taken some steps to improve working conditions. Saudi Arabia, the region's biggest economy, this year implemented a number of amendments to its labor law that imposed or increased penalties for violations. The Emirates is putting in place reforms starting Jan. 1 aimed at tightening oversight of employment agreements. Qatar has made changes to its labor policies too. Its government communications office acknowledged this week that labor reform "is still a work in progress". Activists say more needs to be done. — AP

MP NABIL AL-FADHL DIES DURING ASSEMBLY...

Continued from Page 1

Following the announcement of his death, some MPs broke down in tears and put a Kuwaiti flag on his seat. Before joining politics in 2012, when he was elected to the Assembly for the first time, Fadhl was a writer and a journalist at Al-Watan newspaper for several years. He continued to write his column in the newspaper even after becoming a member of parliament.

He was first elected as MP in Feb 2012 and had to live in a parliament dominated by an overwhelming opposition majority. He was a strong government supporter. But that Assembly was scrapped by the constitutional court for constitutional flaws. He contested the next election in December that year and won again. That Assembly did not last long as the court scrapped the Assembly again on technical issues. In the July 2013 elections, he was initially declared a loser, but when he challenged the result and following a recount, he was adjudged to be a member of parliament.

Fadhl was a strong critic of Islamist political parties, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. He had repeatedly called for declaring some Islamic groups as terrorist organizations. He was also a vocal supporter of social liberalization, once calling for considering lifting the total ban on alcohol, and was a strong supporter of ending the ban on coeducation. Fadhl was also a strong foe of opposition groups which boycotted the last two elections after changes to the electoral law. Commenting of the demise of Fadhl, former MP Musallam Al-Barrak said that he forgave him and expressed grief on his death. "May the Almighty have mercy on Nabil...I forgive him despite what he said against me," he said.

Under the Kuwaiti constitution, if a parliamentary seat falls vacant, a by-election must be held in the same district within two months to elect a new lawmaker. The Assembly issued a statement mourning Fadhl, describing him an active member despite his health conditions. The government also paid tribute to the lawmaker.

SPACEX ROCKET NAILS SAFE LANDING IN PIVOTAL...

Continued from Page 1

The stakes were high for SpaceX, which has a \$1.6 billion contract with NASA to supply the astronauts living at the International Space Station over numerous back-and-forth trips with its Dragon cargo ship. Just six months ago, a devastating explosion - caused by a faulty strut - destroyed the Falcon 9 about two minutes after launch, along with hundreds of millions of dollars in cargo and equipment bound for the ISS. The company fixed that problem and also made the newest version of the Falcon 9 about 30 percent more powerful than previous iterations, Musk said.

Adding to the competitive nature of the commercial space industry, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's rocket company Blue Origin announced last month it had successfully landed its New Shepard rocket after a suborbital flight.

"Congrats @SpaceX on landing Falcon's suborbital booster stage. Welcome to the club," Bezos said on Twitter Monday night. Analysts have pointed out that although New Shepard was first, that SpaceX's feat would be harder to accomplish because the Falcon 9 flies higher in altitude. "Because SpaceX's vehicle was designed to place a constellation of satellites in orbit, the Falcon 9's first stage flew at significantly greater speeds and more than double the altitude of what New Shepherd reached last month," the Commercial Spaceflight Federation said in a statement.

It called the landing an "incredible achievement" in an industry that is seeking to drive down costs and make spaceflight cheaper and more accessible to tourists and adventurers. Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield added his congratulations. "That was a hard landing to stick. Opens a brand new door to space travel. I look forward to the details," he wrote on Twitter. — AFP

KUWAIT, IRAQ OVERCOME OBSTACLES

Continued from Page 1

The Kuwaiti FM added that the joint committee discussed various issues that would cement bilateral relations as well as achievements made last year, such as opening two new Kuwaiti consulates in Basra and Irbil, cementing commercial relations and facilitating transport. In 2014, more than 142,000 Iraqis entered Kuwait, while 50,000 Kuwaitis crossed into the opposite direction, the minister added. "We signed four agreements today on inspection, control, youth and sports and activating intercommunications through fiber optic cables," he explained.

Responding to a question about commercial exchanges and the possibility that Iraq supplies Kuwait with gas, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said that an agreement had already been signed in this regard and that officials would soon meet to put final touches to the agreement. He also noted that commercial exchanges had grown by 22 percent since last year.

Jaafari stressed that Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations would always be strong and that this had already been proved. He seconded Sheikh Sabah's views on terrorism, noting that Iraq was currently fighting terrorism on behalf of the entire world as Islamic State members flocking to Iraq have come from over 100 countries. "Today, terrorists are being defeated and routed out of many cities and places thanks to Iraqi military forces strikes and operations," he said, denying the presence of foreign troops fighting IS on the ground in Iraq. "We only coordinate with coalition forces to provide air coverage, some advisors and trainers," he said, noting that Iraq does not want any foreigners fighting on behalf of Iraqis.

Responding to a question about taking part in the Islamic military coalition formed by Saudi Arabia, Jaafari said Iraq only came to know about the coalition from TV reports and should have been properly contacted. He noted that Iraq was at war against terrorism and not with Sunnis or Shiites, who he claimed coexist peacefully in Iraq. Jaafari also denied yesterday any link between his government and the kidnappers of 26 Qatari hunters, allegedly people linked to Shiite militiamen on whom Baghdad relies heavily against the Islamic State group. During a press conference, a reporter asked Jaafari to comment on "accusa-

tions that the kidnappers are members of Hashad al-Shaabi (Shiite paramilitary force), which is linked to the Iraqi government." "I categorically deny that the Iraqi government has any link to the (kidnapping) case," Jaafari said. "I hope some would not become suspicious that the government colluded" with the kidnappers.

Wealthy citizens of Sunni Gulf states venture to countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq to hunt with falcons without the bag limits and conservation measures they face at home. The Qataris, which include members of the small country's royal family, were kidnapped in southern Iraq last week. There is significant hostility in Iraq, especially in the Shiite-majority south, over the Gulf countries' policies on the Syrian civil war and perceived complicity in the rise of IS.

Jaafari acknowledged that security problems in his war-torn country could have led to the kidnapping. He also insisted that the Iraqi government has been working to resolve the issue and secure the release of the Qataris. His remarks came after the Gulf Cooperation Council condemned yesterday the kidnapping as a "breach of international law" and warned it could "hurt relations between Arab brothers".

A statement called on Baghdad to shoulder "its international legal commitments and to take immediate and decisive measures to ensure the safety of those abducted and secure their release". The hunters entered Iraq with an "official permit" from the interior ministry, Qatari has said. Kuwaiti media reported at the weekend that at least seven of the Qataris had managed to flee from their captors and travel home through Kuwait. There has been no official Qatari confirmation.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said Jaafari and himself met HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and listened to his wise views on bolstering bilateral ties, pushing them to higher prospects. He reiterated Sheikh Nawaf's blessings to efforts that seek to promote cooperation for realizing expectations of people in the two countries. He also referred to a similar meeting with HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, who was briefed on the details of the fifth session of the joint higher committee.

WILLIAMS AND DJOKOVIC NAMED 'WORLD CHAMPIONS'

LONDON: Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic were named the women's and men's players of the year by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) yesterday. Both won three of the four Grand Slams in 2015 and are well clear in the world rankings. Williams, who was named 'ITF World Champion' for the sixth time,

won five titles throughout the year, finishing with a 53-3 win-loss record. After winning Wimbledon in July she also held all four Grand Slam titles at the same time for the second time in her career, which she previously dubbed a 'Serena Slam' in contrast to a calendar Grand Slam. "It means a lot to me to be named the ITF

World Champion for the sixth time. I am proud to have achieved my second Serena Slam, in what has been an amazing year for me," she said in an ITF statement. Djokovic, who finished the year as men's number one for the fourth time, won the award for a fifth time. He managed a career-best 11 titles and finished

with an 82-6 record. He got even closer to the Grand Slam than Williams, who was beaten in the US Open semi-finals, as he only missed out on a first Roland Garros crown in the final against Stan Wawrinka.

"My season was the best of my career with many highlights. It inspires me even

more to keep on going, and I hope to continue to play at this level in 2016," he said. India's Sania Mirza and Martina Hingis of Switzerland were named the women's doubles champions with Dutchman Jean-Julien Rojer and Horia Tecau of Romania picking up the men's award. — AFP



TOKYO: This artist rendering provided by the Japan Sports Council shows the original design by British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid of the new stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics selected on Nov 16, 2012 but was later scrapped due to controversy over its cost and scale. Japan has selected a new design for the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics after scrapping an earlier plan as too costly. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced yesterday, that the winner is a design by renowned Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, construction company Taisei Corp. and Azusa design office. — AP

JAPAN PICKS NEW DESIGN FOR TOKYO 2020 OLYMPIC STADIUM

TOKYO: Japan chose a scaled-down design yesterday for the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, five months after scrapping the initial design and construction plan for being too costly.

The new design, by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, will still cost 153 billion yen (\$1.26 billion) to design, build and maintain. The initial stadium proposal would have cost 252 billion yen (\$2.1 billion), making it the most expensive stadium ever built.

Kuma's combined steel and wood structure, with a relatively flat roof with shrubbery along its outer concourses, echoes traditional temple designs. It stands 50 meters (164 feet) tall, with the track and field below ground level.

"This is a wonderful plan which meets the basic vision in the new construction plan and requirements for construction period and the budget," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in announcing the choice. Tuesday's announcement was a major step

for organizers, who were forced to start over on a new design less than five years before the 2020 Games. The scrapping of the initial stadium plan forced the 2019 Rugby World Cup to change venues, and the late change had raised concerns about whether it could even be completed in time for the Olympics.

Organizers also had to deal with a plagiarism scandal over the logo for the event, and an investigation last month found backroom dealings in the selection process.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters that the design selection process was more transparent than that for the previous stadium plan, and also addressed the main problems: cost and post-Olympic use. The winning project will be led by major construction company Taisei Corp. Lead architect Kuma, known for his Japanese aesthetic, has also designed Tokyo's kabuki theater

that was renewed in 2013. Officials said the design won by a small margin over the alternative plan led by architect Toyo Ito and three construction companies Takenaka, Shimizu and Obayashi. Suga said Kuma's plan was superior because of its ample environmental consideration and a possibility of shrinking the construction period.

The original plan by British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid was criticized for its massive cost and scale. Hadid said Japan's scrapping of her plan was "shocking" and that she said it was not about design or budget.

"In fact much of our two years of detailed design work and the cost savings we recommended have been validated by the remarkable similarities of our original detailed stadium layout and our seating bowl configuration with those of the design announced today," she said in a statement to The Associated Press. — AP

IAAF UNDER FIRE AGAIN OVER RUSSIAN DOPING

LONDON: The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) was again forced to defend its actions over Russian doping on Monday after a leaked email showed how officials planned a damage-limitation strategy before the 2013 Moscow world championships. The email suggesting a "special dossier" on Russian drugs cheats was from IAAF deputy general secretary Nick Davies to Papa Massata Diack, the son of former president Lamine Diack, who then worked for the sport's governing body as a marketing consultant.

Both Diacks are under investigation over corruption offences, while Russian athletes are currently banned from the sport following revelations of widespread, state-sponsored doping.

The report also criticised the governing body for its "laissez-faire" attitude to the problem. Though the extent of Russian doping is now out in the open, the IAAF were seemingly fighting to keep a lid on it two years ago. Extracts from the "very secret" email published by French newspaper Le Monde, but not verified by Reuters, said: "I need to be able to sit down with the anti-doping department and understand exactly what Russian 'skeletons' we have still in the cupboard regarding doping."

"I think that the time to have unveiled the various athletes was a long time ago and that now we need to be smart. "We can prepare a special dossier on IAAF testing which will show that one of the reasons why these Russian athletes come up positive is that they get tested a lot." The email, which was sent in July 2013, a month before the Moscow world championships, also suggested that CSM, the sports marketing firm chaired by IAAF president Sebastian Coe (then a vice-president) could be used as part of an "unofficial PR campaign" to fend off

negative stories in the British media. It also said the IAAF could benefit from Coe's political influence in Britain to minimise the damage any revelations might cause.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Davies, who now works as Coe's chief of staff, issued a statement on Monday denying any wrongdoing. "As Director of IAAF Communications it was



BEIJING: File photo taken on August 21, 2015 shows outgoing International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) president Lamine Diack gesturing during a press conference in Beijing, ahead of the 2015 IAAF World Championships. — AFP

one of my responsibilities to manage and promote the reputation of the IAAF," he said. "My email to Papa Massata Diack was brain storming around media handling strategies to deal with the serious

challenges we were facing around the image of the event. "No plan was implemented following that email and there is no possibility any media strategy could ever interfere with the conduct of the anti-doping process."

"I did not discuss these ideas with CSM and there has never been any agreement between the IAAF and CSM for any PR campaigns. CSM has never worked for the IAAF in any capacity since Sebastian Coe joined the company," Davies said. Last week Le Monde published allegations that Lamine Diack had sought money from Russia to be used to fund a political campaign in his native Senegal. Davies denied any knowledge of such dealings, which Diack has also denied, or any other criminal wrongdoing within the organization.

Diack is being investigated on charges that he asked for payment from Russian athletes to cover up positive dope tests. "I had no knowledge in 2013 that IAAF officials might be involved in alleged criminal conduct in relation to doping cases, nor am I aware of any doping case that was not brought that should have been brought, or of any doping ban that was not published when it should have been published under the IAAF rules," Davies said.

"When information concerning alleged corruption was brought to my attention in early 2014, I was one of a number of IAAF staff members who referred the matter to the IAAF Ethics Commission and who have assisted in the resulting investigation by the Commission. "I was also one of those staff members who voluntarily offered full assistance to investigators of the WADA Independent Commission as well as to the French and Monegasque Police Authorities and will continue to do so." — Reuters



VAL GARDENA: Aksel Lund Svindal of Norway (C) with French Guillaume Fayed, 2nd, and Kjetil Jansrud of Norway (R), third, celebrate on the podium of the FIS Alpine Skiing World Cup Men's Downhill on Monday in Val Gardena, northern Italy. — AFP

JANSRUD EDGES OUT SVINDAL FOR GS WIN

ALTA BADIA: Norway's Kjetil Jansrud won Monday's inaugural men's parallel giant slalom in the alpine skiing World Cup at Alta Badia, denying compatriot Aksel Lund Svindal a sixth victory of the season.

Jansrud and Svindal advanced from an initial 32-man field to set up an all-Norwegian showdown at the Italian resort, with Jansrud earning his first victory since March.

"I've tried to beat him all year. I've been close a few times, but never really gotten there, but it's a little absurd to finally beat him now in a new parallel discipline," Jansrud told fis-ski.com.

Sweden's Andre Myhrer clinched a first podium finish in almost two years after edging out Germany's Dominik Schwaiger for third place. However,

defending four-time overall champion Marcel Hirscher suffered an early elimination after missing a gate on his opening run. Henrik Kristoffersen, Felix Neureuther and Ted Ligety also failed to advance from the first knock-out round, which featured two timed runs, before the competition adopted a one-run winner-takes-all format.

Svindal reclaimed the overall lead from Hirscher, just a day after the Austrian became the first skier to win the challenging Alta Badia giant slalom three years in a row. Having missed the entire 2015 World Cup season with a ruptured Achilles, Svindal goes into today's slalom at Madonna di Campiglio with a 57-point lead over Hirscher with Jansrud third, 193 points behind his countryman. — AFP

BATTERED BRAZIL VOWS 2016 OLYMPICS WILL BE 'SPECTACULAR'

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil may not know who its president will be in eight months' time, and Olympic athletes won't have TVs in their rooms because of the country's recession, but Rio de Janeiro is still promising a "spectacular" 2016 Games.

With its budget in tatters because of the economic crisis and the nation shamed by not cleaning pathogenic sewage from Guanabara Bay—the Rio venue for Olympic regattas—criticism has been rife.

Organizers have preferred to stress that the work to host the August 5-21 Olympic Games and 10,000 athletes from 206 coun-

tries has been without delays, and improvements to Rio's public transport network will be a lasting legacy. "Rio today is 80 percent ready, in April it will be 100 percent, and during the Games it will be 120 percent," boasted the communications director for the Rio-2016 organizing committee, Mario Andrada, in an interview with AFP. "The Olympics are going to be spectacular," he pledged. Unsaid is the organizers' hope that the political chaos in South America's biggest country, wrought by the threat of impeachment for deeply unpopular President Dilma Rousseff over allegedly fiddled public accounts, will be settled by

then. Or that at least anti-government discontent won't spill out into the streets as it did in 2013, a year before Brazil hosted the football World Cup.

SLASHED BUDGET

Faced with its worst recession in decades, double-digit inflation, swelling unemployment, and a corruption scandal sinking the state oil company Petrobras, the Rio 2016 committee has pledged to spend only "the money we have," Andrada said.

That means slashing five to 20 percent from the \$5-billion budget, for example by

not installing televisions in athletes' rooms, getting by with fewer computer printers, and offering Brazilian meat-beans-and-rice dishes to invited VIPs instead of fancy meals.

"The country is going through an enormous crisis. We can't be sending out a different message, (or) leaving debts to be paid by the government or, worse, by society," Andrada said.

However, Rio 2016 will cut back "nothing from the tracks, nothing from the sports, nothing from the ceremony, nothing from the legacy." After the Paris attacks in which Islamist gunmen killed 130 people, Brazil is to

oversee the biggest integrated security operation in its history: 85,000 police, soldiers and agents, in coordination with 80 countries. "We are constantly working as if a threat were imminent," the head of the Brazilian intelligence service, Wilson Trezza, told AFP. The Rio-2016 committee also assured that "Rio will be the safest city in the world during the Games." But there have been some unsettling security issues of late, such as the breaking up of a ring producing falsified birth certificates that allowed dozens of Syrians to obtain Brazilian passports between 2012 and 2014. Several of the Syrians are still fugitives. — AFP

BOLAND REPLACES INJURED COULTER-NILE IN AUSTRALIA SQUAD

SYDNEY: Uncapped pace bowler Scott Boland has been called up to the Australia squad for the second test against West Indies after Nathan Coulter-Nile dislocated his shoulder in a domestic Twenty20 match, Cricket Australia said yesterday.

Boland joins Josh Hazlewood, Peter Siddle and James Pattinson as the pace

options for the Boxing Day match, which begins on Saturday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

Coulter-Nile dislocated his right shoulder when he fell awkwardly while fielding for the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League on Monday, dashing his hopes of making his test debut at the MCG.

"Although the extent of the injury and rehabilitation period will not be fully known until we receive the results of scans later today, we can confirm that Nathan will not be available for the Boxing Day test," team physio David Beakley said in a news release.

Boland has taken 72 wickets in 27 first class matches and took 7-31 in the

second innings to bowl Victoria to victory over Western Australia in a Sheffield Shield match in Perth last month.

Australia have also lost left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc and Mitchell Johnson, to ankle surgery and retirement respectively, since the start of the season.

The hosts won the first test against

West Indies by an innings and 212 runs in Hobart to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Australia squad: Steve Smith (captain), David Warner, Joe Burns, Usman Khawaja, Adam Voges, Shaun Marsh, Mitchell Marsh, Peter Nevill, Peter Siddle, James Pattinson, Josh Hazlewood, Scott Boland, Nathan Lyon. — Reuters

MOEEN ALI SPINS ENGLAND TO VICTORY

PIETERMARITZBURG: Moeen Ali took two crucial wickets in successive overs as the touring England team romped to an innings and 91 runs victory over South Africa A at the City Oval yesterday. Off-spinner Ali took six for 77 as South Africa A were bowled out for 187 on the third and final day to complete an impressive performance by the tourists ahead of the first Test against South Africa, starting in Durban on Saturday.

Left-arm fast bowler Mark Footitt had nightwatchman Marchant de Lange caught at short leg off the first ball of the day to reduce the South African second string to 35 for three. Left-handers Rilee Rossouw and Quinton de Kock put on 67 for the fourth wicket before Ali trapped De Kock

leg before wicket for 53, made off 64 balls with ten fours.

In his next over, Ali dismissed Rossouw in the same manner for 32. The rest of the batting crumbled, with Steven Finn dismissing Omphile Ramela and Khaya Zondo without scoring in the following over.

The match concluded a highly satisfactory build-up for England. All of their probable top six batsmen made at least one half-century during the team's two three-day matches, while four went on to make centuries.

With the exception of James Anderson, who was given a light workload and rested from the second match, all the bowlers had good workouts in match situations and enjoyed some success. —AFP

SCOREBOARD

PIETERMARITZBURG, South Africa: Final scores on the third day of a three-day first-class match between South Africa A and the touring England team at City Oval yesterday.

South Africa A, first innings, 136

England XI, first innings, 414-6 dec

South Africa A, second innings (overnight 35-2)

S. Cook lbw b Broad 1
R. Hendricks lbw b Ali 19
R. Rossouw lbw b Ali 32
M. de Lange c Taylor b Footitt 0
Q. de Kock lbw b Ali 53
O. Ramela lbw b Finn 0
K. Zondo c Stokes b Finn 0
D. Vilas not out 30
C. Morris lbw b Ali 5
K. Maharaj b Ali 31

D. Paterson c Hales b Ali 12

Extras (b2, lb1, w1) 4

Total (2 wks, 42.5 overs) 187

Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Cook), 2-34 (Hendricks), 3-

35 (De Lange), 4-102 (De Kock), 5-107

(Rossouw), 6-107 (Ramela), 7-110 (Zondo), 8-

129 (Morris), 9-175

Bowling: Broad 6-1-20-1, Footitt 8-1-38-1,

Stokes 6-2-18-0 (1w), Finn 7-1-30-2, Ali 14.5-4-

77-6, Root 1-0-1-0

Result: England XI won by an innings and 91

runs.

MAJOR MOMENTS AND MAJOR SHOTS FOR 2015

LONDON: Major championships produce shots that can be more memorable than the winner holding the trophy. Zach Johnson with a claret jug? The more lasting image from the British Open was Johnson holding his crouch and slowly clenching his fist on the 18th green at St. Andrews. And then there are shots that stand out only to the player. The three major champions were asked what they thought was the signature shot from their victory, along with a shot that was particularly pleasing to them because of the circumstances or the quality of the shot.

MASTERS

In a wire-to-wire win, the biggest moment for Spieth was on the 18th hole in the third round. A seven-shot lead only 20 minutes earlier was down to four shots, and it looked certain to shrink even more when he missed the 18th green well to the right behind the bunker. In a risky move, Spieth hit a flop shot that helped him save par and set the tone for the final round.

"That was the key shot," he said. "You could pitch it 15 feet in front and hit it hard enough to at least be on the green. But given the severity of that slope, it's going to roll out. A good shot would be 15 feet. I decided to hit a higher one and spin it. That shot is certainly one I don't want over again. It was 1 in 5 getting it up and down."

Not so obvious was the 5-iron on the par-5 13th. He had about 190 yards to the front from the left side of the fairway, but the ball was nearly knee-high because of the slope. He was coming off a three-putt bogey on No. 12. The danger comes from ball above his feet because the swing is flatter with less speed, and the ball won't go as far.

Spieth provided his own commentary: "Go hard! GO HARD! GO HARD! GO!" It narrowly cleared the creek and set up a two-putt birdie. Asked how many times he barked instructions to his golf ball, Spieth said, "Less out loud than what was in my head. But still enough."

US OPEN

The winning shot for Spieth turned out to be a 3-wood on the par-5 18th at Chambers Bay, and he felt he couldn't miss. "I had 281 (yards), but I only had 238 to cover the front," he said. "The only other option was this 3-iron I was carrying, but it was off an up slope. I hit 3-wood and cut it. As long as I hit a fade, nothing could go wrong, so ultimately I ended up in a perfect yardage. I could miss it really bad and carry the front."

It bounded to the back of the green and rolled back to about 10 feet for a two-putt birdie. Lost in a wild final hour was a simple par that really wasn't that simple. Spieth's tee shot on the par-3 15th rolled back off the front, and the slope was much like the elevation at Augusta National - you have to see it to believe it.

"That slope was taller than me," he

said. "You had to judge the speed the right way. I had to cast it out to the right, but if I hit it too hard it goes 12 feet by. I can't be short or I'm re-hitting. It was perfect speed and went to 4 or 5 feet for a manageable second putt."

Only after he made that putt did Spieth look at a leaderboard on the back nine and see that he was tied for the lead.

BRITISH OPEN

Johnson figured he had to make birdie on the 18th at St. Andrews to reach 15 under and have a chance. Known for his wedge game, this wasn't his best - some 30 feet behind the hole - "but I at least gave myself a look at it."

Give an assist to Danny Willett. "Fortunately, I had a good read," Johnson said. "He was 3 to 5 feet from me, so I had a good look at it. I know the putt is left to right, and I know the putt at the end flattens out and potentially goes left, especially after seeing Danny."

Two thoughts crept into his mind. Johnson lipped out on the final hole a week earlier at the John Deere Classic that kept him out of a playoff. "It's not a good thought, but it went through my head."

And he considered the speed. That was a good thought. "That green is not that fast," he said. "I hit a solid putt, and I hit it perfect. It straightened out at the end, the last 3 feet it went left, and the rest is history." Not quite.

It got him into a playoff with Marc Leishman and Louis Oosthuizen. Just as meaningful to Johnson was the 10-foot birdie putt he made on No. 1 in the four-hole playoff. Oosthuizen made birdie from about 15 feet. Johnson felt it was critical not to fall behind. "The biggest of the week was the first putt in a playoff," Johnson said. "It was huge."

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

It's hard to find that one signature moment for Day, which speaks to the clinic he put on at Whistling Straits in winning at a record 20-under par. It was after his worst shot that Day was at his best.

He had a two-shot lead going to No. 9, drilled a drive down the middle and Spieth was in trouble in the rough. A model of perfection all week, Day inexplicably chucked his wedge. With momentum at stake, he followed with another wedge to 8 feet and saved his par. Spieth made bogey and Day was on his way. "To hit such a terrible shot and then come back and get up and down, it was a good momentum change," Day said. "To be able to hit a good pitch ... that's probably the biggest shot I've had to hit." It was a full, powerful swing that brought him just as much satisfaction, particularly the 382-yard shot on the par-5 11th that left him no more than a wedge to the green. "Under those circumstances, it was the best drive I hit all year," Day said. "If I had an off week with my driver, no way I would have won." —AP



DUNEDIN: In this file picture taken on December 10, 2015, Brendon McCullum of New Zealand plays a shot during day one of the first international Test cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Dunedin. McCullum said yesterday he will retire from all international cricket after the Test series against Australia in February. — AFP

NZ'S MCCULLUM ANNOUNCES INTERNATIONAL RETIREMENT

WELLINGTON: Blockbusting New Zealand batsman Brendon McCullum announced yesterday he will bow out of international cricket after the Test series against Australia in February, saying "all good things must come to an end."

The New Zealand captain's 101st and last Test will be the second Test against Australia which starts in his home town, Christchurch, on February 20.

"I've loved my opportunity to play for and captain the Black Caps," the 34-year-old said. McCullum said there was "something romantic" about finishing in front of his home crowd and he made the announcement now because his name would be missing when the New Zealand team is named soon for the World Twenty20 in India from March 8 to April 3.

"Ideally, I would have preferred to wait until after the Test in Christchurch to make this news public," he said. "However, the schedule for naming the ICC World T20 squads means I couldn't have managed this

without causing a lot of confusion and speculation, something I was keen to avoid."

The big-hitter, with a Test best 302 and co-holder of the world record of 100 Test sixes with Australian Adam Gilchrist, said now was not the time for him to dwell on his achievements.

"There's a time and place for reflection and that's at the end of your career," he said. "For now, I'll be giving all my attention to helping the team focus on what's coming up over the next few weeks and making sure we're in the best possible shape for what's going to be a very challenging summer."

He added that giving testimony in the Chris Cairns match-fixing perjury trial in London last month had no impact on his decision to quit internationals.

Former teammate Cairns, who was cleared, has demanded McCullum explain why he chose to appear as a prosecution witness. Kane Williamson, whose unbeaten century steered New Zealand to victory

over Sri Lanka in the second Test in Hamilton on Monday, was immediately confirmed by New Zealand officials as captain for the World Twenty20.

McCullum has forged the best record of any New Zealand captain since taking over the leadership from Ross Taylor in December 2012. Under his stewardship the Black Caps have won 11 and drawn 11 of 31 Tests. His record as an one-day captain is a New Zealand best at 59.43 percent, which included leading his side the World Cup final this year.

McCullum made his international debut against Australia in 2002 and played his first Test against South Africa two years later. In his 99 Tests, he has scored 11 centuries and is one of only 24 players and the only New Zealander to make a triple century.

His 6,172 Test run total is second best for a New Zealander behind Stephen Fleming. In addition to sharing the record for the most Test sixes he holds the record for the most Twenty20 sixes with 91. — AFP



KARACHI: Pakistani cricketers practice during a camp for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) in Lahore yesterday. The first edition of the PSL Twenty20 league will be held in Dubai and Sharjah from February 4. Five teams from Karachi, Islamabad, Quetta, Lahore and Peshawar will compete in the league, designed on the lines of the Indian Premier League and Australia's Big Bash. — AFP

WORLD CUP VOTES SPARKED PROBES WHICH DOWNED BLATTER, PLATINI

LONDON: After five years of tumult, the far-reaching fallout from FIFA's decision to send the World Cup to Russia and Qatar has brought down another two voters - Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini - but not the hosts themselves.

No FIFA executive has been directly punished over how and why they voted in December 2010. And investigators have failed to unearth anything that warrants stripping Russia and Qatar of soccer's showcase tournaments in 2018 and 2022 respectively.

But the vote had a big part to play in the eight-year bans handed out Monday to FIFA president Blatter and Platini, a FIFA vice president and head of European soccer's ruling body, UEFA. The punishments given by FIFA's ethics committee stemmed from financial inquiries that were sparked by suspicions about the 2010 vote, when two host countries were selected concurrently for the first time.

For Blatter, Monday's verdicts also contained a bitter irony. Blatter himself had initiated the phase in the investigation that ultimately led to him being

exiled by FIFA's ethics judge from the organization he had run for 17 years. Facing a fresh wave of pressure and suspicion around FIFA in November 2014, Blatter lodged a criminal complaint with Swiss authorities, authorizing them to receive the full secret World Cup bidding investigation he claims to have never seen.

"If we had anything to hide, we would hardly be taking this matter to the Office of the Attorney General ... (it) shows that FIFA is not opposed to transparency," Blatter said at the time with typical bravado. It's a decision Blatter will be regretting, even if he had little control over a move requested by FIFA judge Hans-Joachim Eckert. As federal prosecutors started to trawl through some 900 pages of FIFA evidence amassed by American attorney Michael Garcia they switched their focus to bank accounts linked to the 2010 voters.

In May, on the day Zurich police arrested FIFA officials on behalf of their American counterparts investigating soccer corruption, Swiss authorities also

seized data from the governing body's headquarters across town. By that point, Swiss financial institutions had already handed over bank documents to the attorney general, who was building a case against FIFA officials.

SUSPICIOUS A PAYMENT

As bank accounts were frozen, forensic software flagged up as suspicious a payment of 2 million Swiss francs (\$2 million) Platini received from Blatter in early 2011.

"How they found out? This is not a secret because Swiss banks are obliged to notify the Swiss authorities for six years now since all these financial controls through a Swiss organization called FINMA," was Blatter's assessment on Monday about the discovery of the payment that remained a public secret until recently.

"They are obliged if they feel a payment is something high in a personal account they have to (inform). So in 2011, Michel Platini received in his personal account by FIFA this 2 million Swiss francs

and then they have given this information to the Swiss authorities."

As an executive committee was concluding in September, prosecutors pounced on FIFA HQ and immediately questioned Blatter and Platini about the payment. Blatter was declared a suspect while Platini was considered "between a witness and an accused person."

The seriousness of the allegations meant FIFA had to suspend two of its most powerful officials - Platini serves as a vice president, alongside his UEFA presidency - as a full ethics investigation was conducted in parallel to the criminal case.

FIFA's ethics process concluded on Monday when Blatter and Platini received eight-year soccer bans for the payment. The judge described as "not convincing" their claim that the transaction was settling salary owed to the former France captain for work carried out as Blatter's adviser up to 2002.

As Blatter stepped up his fight against his humiliating removal from FIFA, the 79-year-old Swiss was left to rue how dif-

ferently the last five years would have unfolded had the World Cup vote go his way.

ACCEPTED

According to Blatter: No Qatar; no investigations delving into FIFA. Blatter's vision of delivering the 2018 World Cup to Russia for the first time was accepted by the now-tainted executive committee, but then - rather than going to a more familiar powerhouse in the United States as he wanted - the 2022 vote was astonishingly won by Qatar. Platini was among those who voted for the tiny desert nation. "Can you imagine if this (Russia-U.S.) had worked out? We wouldn't be here today," Blatter said Monday as he digested being banned by the institution he helped to grow into a commercial giant. "But it didn't work for different reasons." And the domino effect is not over. Being banished from soccer is the immediate humiliation, but Blatter and Platini could yet face criminal prosecutions with the attorney general in no hurry to rush the case. —AP

INJURIES TO KEY PLAYERS HAVE DERAILED WEST HAM

LONDON: West Ham United's attack has suffered due to injuries to their strikers but the club are confident they will end their winless streak soon, defender James Collins has said.

The Hammers have gone off the boil having failed to win their last seven league games which has seen them slide down the table to eighth place after 17 games.

With Dimitri Payet, Manuel Lanzini, Victor Moses, Diafra Sakho and Andy Carroll all on the sidelines, West Ham have clearly missed the cutting edge in attack, having found the back of the net only three times during their winless run. "We're defending well-but a bit too desperate at times! Last-ditch tackles and chucking yourself in front of things, it looks good, but we don't really want to be defending that hard," Collins told the club's website (www.whufc.com). "We'd rather be a bit more solid and a bit more organised. We certainly need to be scoring more goals. I don't want to make excuses, but our flair players, our goalscorers, we are missing them.

"It's one of them things. You get injuries. Before, we were flying. Dimi was flying. Lanzini was flying. (Diafra) Sakho's out as well. So it has derailed us a bit.

"We've got a massive squad, full of international players that have come in and performed. So it's not doom and gloom by any stretch of the imagination.

"But we are picking points up, we're still confident and we've got a busy Christmas period with games we feel we can win."

West Ham played out a goalless draw with Swansea City last weekend and the former Cardiff City man Collins has backed the Welsh club, who are currently third-from-bottom in the league, to avoid relegation. "It's massively surprised me to see them in the bottom three - they didn't play like a bottom three side against us. "They've not had too much luck and been unfortunate a few times but, for me, they're certainly not a bottom three side and they won't be there at the end of the season that's for sure." The Hammers travel to take on bottom side Aston Villa in the league on Saturday. — Reuters



OLD TRAFFORD: Manchester United's manager Louis van Gaal, centre, makes his way from the pitch after his team's 2-1 loss to Norwich City in the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Norwich City at Old Trafford Stadium, Manchester. — AP

LACK OF UNITY PUSHES VAN GAAL TO THE BRINK

LONDON: Just days after Jose Mourinho's abrupt departure from Chelsea, Louis van Gaal is teetering on the brink of becoming the next high-profile victim of the Premier League sack race. The pressure is mounting on the embattled Manchester United manager, who was hunkered down at United's Carrington training base on Monday amid speculation he will be axed if his side lose either of their next two matches at Stoke City on Saturday or at home against Chelsea next Monday.

The 64-year-old cut a forlorn figure in the aftermath of Saturday's shock 2-1 defeat against Norwich City and his downbeat mood was instructive given the reports of dressing room unrest and boardroom doubts that have emerged since. Elimination from the Champions League group stage foreshadowed a chilling December for van Gaal and subsequent losses against strugglers Bournemouth and Norwich, which knocked United out of the Premier League's top four and left them nine points behind leaders Leicester City, were even more damaging.

Until now, van Gaal has haughtily dismissed any criticism from fans and the media, but United's tame capitulation against Norwich left them without a win in their last six matches in all competitions and even the aloof Dutchman couldn't hide signs of strain as he talked in hushed tones about his predicament.

Being lambasted by a host of United greats and jeered by disgruntled supporters, a section of whom chanted for Mourinho to replace van Gaal at the weekend, has worn him down.

And while publicly United's players have insisted van Gaal retains their support, as with Mourinho's sacking last week, the truth is somewhat different. Mourinho was done in by mutinous Chelsea players who effectively downed tools after growing weary of his acerbic tongue and intense management style.

AUTOCRATIC MANNER

Similarly, van Gaal is reported to have lost the backing of several senior United stars because of his autocratic manner.

Their principle complaint is said to be the Dutchman's approach, both his overly cautious tactics and a perceived obsession with critical post-match analysis sessions with performance analyst Max Reckers. Tellingly, Spanish winger Juan Mata struggled to find an upbeat note when he talked on Monday of the complicated and tough situation United find themselves in. "We all feel frustrated, same as last week, and we need to win a game as quickly as possible because it will change our mood and give us confidence," Mata wrote in his weekly blog.

"We are in a complicated situation and in order to get out of it we have to stick together and believe in ourselves.

"Our next chance to do it will be on Boxing Day at Stoke and that's not an easy game. "No matter how tough the situation can be, I'm not even thinking about giving up. "I believe that's the only way to get out of this bad streak." Losing the dressing room would be damaging enough to van Gaal's future on its own, but to make matters worse, United's owners, the Glazer family, and executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward are beginning to consider whether they should ditch the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich coach halfway through his three-year contract.

Shocked by the level of vitriol directed at van Gaal and the apathetic manner of United's recent performances, a further flop over Christmas could signal the end.

And unfortunately for van Gaal, circumstances have conspired to make two of the most desirable managers in the world available at the exact moment he is at his lowest ebb.

Mourinho has made it known he would be happy to take over at United if a vacancy arises because he has no intention of taking a post-Chelsea sabbatical. As well as the Mourinho option, Pep Guardiola will be available in the close-season as he is leaving Bayern Munich-making it a safe bet there will be little festive cheer when van Gaal sits down for his Christmas dinner on Friday. —AFP

PLATINI CALLS FIFA BAN A 'KICK IN THE TEETH'

PARIS: Michel Platini called FIFA's eight-year ban a "kick in the teeth" but vowed in an interview with AFP yesterday to fight on for the presidency of world football's governing body. The FIFA vice president and UEFA leader condemned the ethics committee that banned him on Monday but said he would "fight to clear my name." Platini's ban from all football activities prevents him from standing in the February 26 election to find a replacement for FIFA president Sepp Blatter and working as UEFA president.

Blatter and Platini were suspended for eight years over a 2 million Swiss franc (\$2 million/1.8 million euro) payment made to Platini in 2011 for work carried out between 1999 and 2002.

Platini is determined to plough on in his quest to become the most powerful man in football. "I will fight. But then I'll take my responsibilities according to what happens," he told AFP in the exclusive interview. However, Platini acknowledges that he may run out of time if the issue is not resolved quickly in his favour.

"What is troubling is that I have no certainty about the timetable ahead. As long as I have not had the reasons for the suspension I cannot appeal before the CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport)."

Platini insisted there was nothing illegal in the oral contract he said was agreed with Blatter. The salary agreement was however never disclosed in FIFA documentation until the payment was made in 2011. "I'm struggling to understand. Why? How did we get to this? I did some work, I asked to be paid, I sent an invoice, I was paid, I paid my taxes on that. That was in 2011," he said.

"There was a debt that was settled, full stop! Then, in 2015, the Swiss court wanted more information. "Then it took off at FIFA and a lot of people at FIFA are happy that this issue happened. "And here I am, suspended from all football-related activity for

eight years."

INJUSTICE

Platini repeated his suspicions that the timing of the ban was a deliberate attempt to prevent him from standing in February's election. "What was the FIFA ethics committee doing between 2011 when I was paid and 2015? Was it sleeping? Suddenly it wakes up," he scoffed. "Ah yes, it wakes up in a FIFA election year when I'm a candidate. It's amazing!"

Platini insists he should not be bunged into the same bracket as Blatter, who has long been suspected of corrupt practices. "I'm fighting against this injustice, from one court to another," said Platini, referring to the various avenues of appeal he can take within FIFA, to the CAS and even in the Swiss civil court.

"But there you go, in the meantime, my name has been dragged through the mud in the press. "Whatever happens, my reputation has been sullied, I've been kicked in the teeth: I've been put in the same bag as Blatter."

Platini was an ally of the 79-year-old Blatter who turned against him as the FIFA leader refused to give up office. Meanwhile, a source close to FIFA claims Blatter must give up his presidential apartment by February 26, once his successor has been elected. The apartment in an old Zurich house that has been divided is one of the perks Blatter will lose due to his eight-year suspension. He automatically loses his FIFA mobile phone and his professional email address, said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "He is still protected by his labour contract" under Swiss law, said the source.

So Blatter will continue to receive his salary-for which he has refused to reveal the amount-as well as keep his FIFA car and apartment until the contract ends on February 26. — AFP



ZURICH: In this Friday, May 29, 2015 file photo, FIFA president Sepp Blatter is greeted by UEFA President Michel Platini, right, after Blatters re-election as president at the Hallenstadion in Zurich, Switzerland. Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini have been banned for 8 years, the FIFA ethics committee said yesterday. — AP

HERTHA PLAYERS PONDER SECRET OF THEIR SUCCESS

BERLIN: Whether it's their change of coach, better fitness or a new-found camaraderie, something has transformed Hertha Berlin from a team on the brink of relegation seven months ago to one of the leading lights of German soccer.

While success-starved fans celebrate at seeing their team in third place in the Bundesliga, the players themselves are struggling to pinpoint exactly what has changed.

"Soccer's a strange sport sometimes," said midfielder Per Skjeltbred, who is also Norway's captain, after the team concluded their best first half of a season in seven years with three wins in a week.

"Last year we had a lot of big problems and this year most things are going well. It's a great team but we're mostly the same players as last year. Go figure that out."

On course for one of Germany's three spots in the Champions League with 10 wins and 32 points, the capital-city club have won five of their last six matches and have reached the German Cup quarter-finals.

Their success has delighted Pal Dardai, the down-to-earth former player who took over as coach in February and watched the club escape relegation in May only thanks to a better goal difference than their rivals.

"Everyone's talking about Hertha these days-from the rubbish collectors to the hair-

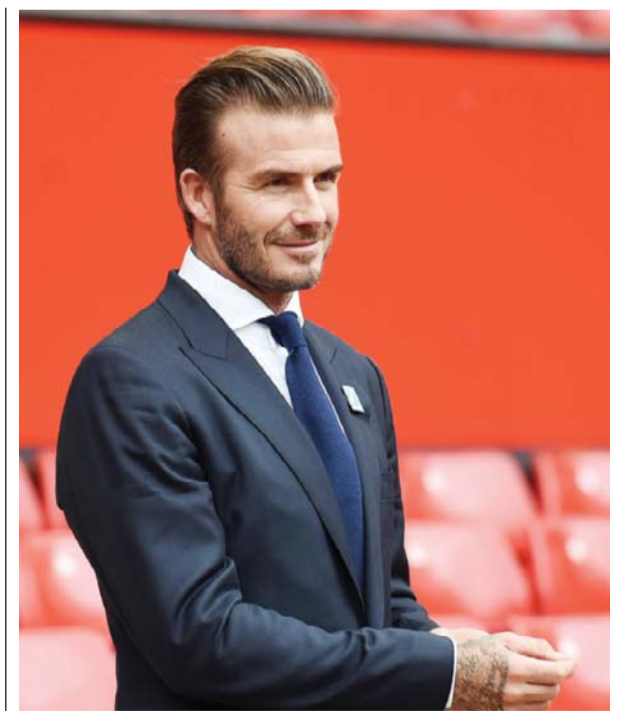
dressers and everyone in between," Dardai said after Hertha beat Mainz 2-0 on Sunday in the final match ahead of the league's five-week winter break.

"That's because of the incredible performance in the first half but we shouldn't be self-satisfied with that," added the 39-year-old Dardai, who became the club's sixth coach in six years. "We've got to keep working hard. If we were to get satisfied with our situation now, then we'd have a problem."

Dardai, who until July was also coaching Hungary, has been given the lion's share of the credit for getting the most out of his available talent but he waves off the accolades, praising instead his players for their hard work and his training staff.

His gruelling pre-season conditioning regime, spearheaded by two fitness trainers, drew complaints from the players at the time but everyone raves about it now.

"Our fitness is superior. It's the most important thing," said Dardai, who was a fearless midfielder and hard-working favourite of Hertha's "Ostkurve" fans. "Being in top shape radiates all the way into your brain." Hertha have been especially strong at home, picking up six of their 10 wins in the Olympia Stadium. They last played in the Champions League in the 1999/2000 season and have never won the Bundesliga. —Reuters



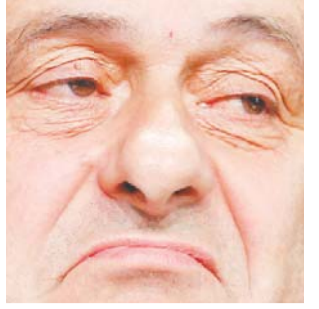
OLD TRAFFORD: This October 6, 2015 file photo shows former Manchester United and England footballer David Beckham as he poses on the pitch at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England ahead of a charity football match in aid of UNICEF. David Beckham has barely found a new stadium site for his Miami-based Major League Soccer expansion team, and he already says he wants to sign Swedish star Zlatan Ibrahimovic. Beckham told Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet that he is interested in the Paris Saint-Germain striker, according to a posting on the MLS website. — AFP

Sports

NZ's McCullum announces international retirement



Platini calls FIFA ban a 'kick in the teeth'



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HAWKS BEAT SHORT-HANDED TRAIL BLAZERS 106-97

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LONDON: Manchester City's Yaya Toure, left attempts to get past Arsenal's Kieran Gibbs during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Manchester City at the Emirates stadium in London, Monday. — AP

WENGER LAUDS SICK OZIL'S AMAZING RECOVERY



LONDON: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger heralded Mesut Ozil after the German playmaker rose from his sickbed to inspire his team to victory over Premier League title rivals Manchester City.

Ozil teed up first-half goals for Theo Walcott and Olivier Giroud at the Emirates Stadium on Monday as Arsenal secured a 2-1 win that left them four points above City and two points below leaders Leicester City.

Ozil, 27, now has 15 assists for the campaign—just three fewer than Cesc Fabregas's league-leading tally from last season—and Wenger revealed afterwards that he had spent most of the previous week in bed.

"He had a chest infection for the week and he was in

bed, basically," Wenger said. "He had only one training session yesterday. So for a guy who could not prepare well, he has done extremely well physically."

Despite Ozil's role in the build-up, Walcott's goal was primarily his own work, the England forward cutting inside his man from the left and curling a glorious right-foot shot inside the right-hand post from 20 yards.

But the assist for Giroud's goal, in first-half stoppage time, was vintage Ozil, the former Real Madrid man sliding a pass into the path of the Arsenal centre-forward, who drilled a low shot between Joe Hart's legs.

"At the end of the day you need one guy who gives the ball to the one who scores the goal," Wenger told his post-game press conference. "In our team, most of the time, Ozil is this player. The guys who make you win. And he is that."

Wenger also revealed that striker Alexis Sanchez has sustained a setback in his recovery from a hamstring injury that is likely to keep him out of action for three weeks.

City threatened to snatch an improbable point when Yaya Toure languidly stroked a left-foot shot into Petr Cech's top-right corner with eight minutes to play, but

by then the damage had already been done.

With captain Vincent Kompany still absent due to a calf injury, City looked vulnerable at centre-back, where Eliaquim Mangala and Nicolas Otamendi once again toiled.

'READY TO FIGHT'

City have kept one clean sheet in the nine league games Kompany has missed, compared to seven in the eight games he has played, and manager Manuel Pellegrini admitted that his side are "conceding too many goals".

There was also tacit acknowledgement that City, who have already lost five times this season, will struggle to mount a sustained title challenge without Kompany in their ranks.

"We hope that Vincent will return back soon," Pellegrini said. "So with Vincent returning to the team, with David (Silva) and Sergio (Aguero) playing normally every week, I suppose we are going to continue being an important team in the fight for the title."

Confirmation that Pep Guardiola is to leave Bayern

Munich has only heightened speculation that Pellegrini's days at the Etihad Stadium are numbered, but he said that he had no trouble dealing with the rumours.

"No, it's no difficult," he said. "It's very easy. You must be concentrated and focused on your work."

"I understand that we must improve, especially in the games that we are playing away. But we'll continue being involved in all the competitions. They're important points, but not decisive points."

While Wenger was wary of declaring his team title favourites, he acknowledged that victory over City will galvanise conviction that Arsenal can end their 12-year wait for the Premier League title.

"It's too early to say to win the league, but it strengthens our belief that we have our word to say," he said.

"You realise that you earn your right to win these games. For us it's important we realise that. We have to be ready to fight like that in every single game."

"What's interesting in my side is there's a real life in the team, a real togetherness and great solidarity. So let's take care of that." — AFP

STAFFORD LEADS LIONS TO WIN IN NEW ORLEANS

NEW ORLEANS: Detroit quarterback Matthew Stafford completed 22 of 25 passes for 254 yards and three first-half touchdowns to lift the Lions to a 35-27 victory over the New Orleans Saints on Monday.

The Lions (5-9) held the Saints without points on five cracks inside the 5-yard line at the end of the first half and built a 28-3 lead early in the second, though they allowed the Saints (5-9) to score 17 consecutive points to close to 28-20. Detroit then iced the game with a 76-yard drive that ended with a 1-yard scoring run by Joique Bell with 5:24 left. Drew Brees' 1-yard pass to tight end Benjamin Watson made it 35-27 with 1:55 remaining, but Detroit's Calvin Johnson recovered the onside kick. Abdullah ripped off a 36-yard run to the New Orleans 9 and the Lions killed most of the clock, but kicker Matt Prater missed a 35-yard chip shot with nine seconds left.

Detroit led 21-3 at halftime and then scored on the first series of the second half on running back Ameer Abdullah's 15-yard run around left end to cap a six-play, 78-yard drive. The Saints responded with 17 points over the next 9:57 on a 27-yard touchdown pass from Brees to Brandin Cooks, a 22-yard field goal by Kai Forbath, and an 11-yard Brees strike to Marques Colston, cutting the deficit to 28-20 with 10:06 left. Colston's score was set up by Abdullah's fumble, which line-backer Hau'oli Kikaha forced and recovered at the Detroit 38.

But the Lions put the game away on Bell's 1-yard run with 5:24 left, making it 35-20. Abdullah made the big play on the drive, converting a third-and-1 with a 21-yard run on a quick pitch around right end to the New Orleans 24. Stafford shredded the Saints' porous secondary in the first half, completing 12 of 13 passes for 142 yards and three touchdowns as Detroit raced to a 21-3 halftime lead. Each of Stafford's scoring passes was a short toss - one and five yards to wide receiver Golden Tate and four yards to fullback Michael Burton.

The Lions' defense also thwarted a late first-half drive by New Orleans, Brees connected with Cooks for an apparent 29-



NEW ORLEANS: Detroit Lions cornerback Darius Slay (23) brake up a pass intended for New Orleans Saints wide receiver Brandin Cooks (10) in the first half of an NFL football game in New Orleans, Monday. — AP

yard touchdown, but Cooks was ruled down at the Detroit 1. The Lions then held the Saints without a score on five consecutive downs inside the Detroit five yard line.

Another apparent New Orleans touchdown by running back Tim Hightower was waved off because tackle Senio Kelemete, inserted for extra goal-line blocking, failed to report as an eligible receiver. — Reuters

NFL SUSPENDS GIANTS WR BECKHAM FOR ONE GAME

NEW YORK: Losing control during Sunday's loss to the Panthers will cost Giants star receiver Odell Beckham Jr one game. The NFL on Monday suspended Beckham for next weekend's match at Minnesota for his conduct against Carolina, when he drew three personal foul penalties. Beckham has the right to appeal the suspension. Without him, the Giants (6-8) would be missing their best offensive weapon as they try to stay alive in the NFC East race.

Beckham and Panthers cornerback Josh Norman tangled from the beginning of the Panthers' 38-35 victory. At one point, Beckham delivered a diving helmet-to-helmet hit on Norman while blocking.

There was plenty of pushing, shoving, swinging,

wrestling, late hits and trash talking between them.

Beckham, the 2014 Offensive Rookie of the Year, has 91 catches for 1,396 yards and 13 touchdowns, tied for the league lead. He has a base salary of \$893,000 and would lose \$55,813 for being suspended for Sunday night's game.

After Sunday's game, Beckham refused to discuss his run-ins with Norman. There was no media availability with Beckham on Monday. Asked about the personal fouls, he said Sunday, "You never want to hurt your team like that. I have learned it all throughout my life you know, always second man gets called, always that it is just unfortunate. You go back and watch the film tomorrow and you learn from it." — AP

NFL result/standings

American Football Conference							National Football Conference								
AFC East							NFC East								
	W	L	T	OTL	PF	PA	PCT								
New England	12	2	0	1	435	269	.857	Washington	7	7	0	1	316	332	.500
NY Jets	9	5	0	0	344	272	.643	Philadelphia	6	8	0	0	318	362	.429
Buffalo	6	8	0	0	341	336	.429	NY Giants	6	8	0	1	373	358	.429
Miami	5	9	0	0	278	361	.357	Dallas	4	10	0	2	246	324	.286
AFC North							NFC North								
Cincinnati	11	3	0	0	378	243	.786	Green Bay	10	4	0	0	347	265	.714
Pittsburgh	9	5	0	1	378	287	.643	Minnesota	9	5	0	0	296	272	.643
Baltimore	4	10	0	1	292	360	.286	Detroit	5	9	0	0	302	363	.357
Cleveland	3	11	0	1	253	387	.214	Chicago	5	9	0	2	289	352	.357
AFC South							NFC South								
Houston	7	7	0	0	275	301	.500	Carolina	14	0	0	0	449	278	1.000
Indianapolis	6	8	0	1	285	372	.429	Atlanta	7	7	0	1	302	312	.500
Jacksonville	5	9	0	1	343	380	.357	Tampa Bay	6	8	0	0	311	353	.429
Tennessee	3	11	0	0	269	359	.214	New Orleans	5	9	0	1	350	432	.357
AFC West							NFC West								
Denver	10	4	0	0	308	259	.714	Arizona	12	2	0	0	445	269	.857
Kansas City	9	5	0	0	365	257	.643	Seattle	9	5	0	2	370	248	.643
Oakland	6	8	0	0	319	356	.429	St. Louis	6	8	0	1	241	294	.429
San Diego	4	10	0	0	280	348	.286	San Francisco	4	10	0	0	202	339	.286

Kuwait Times BUSINESS

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QNB Group reaches agreement
with National Bank of Greece

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Seize the opportunity now with
Chevrolet Alghanim

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Introducing the
new CBR600RR

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SPANISH STOCK MARKET STEADIES AFTER SLUMP

Page 24



LONDON: Shoppers are reflected in a shop window as they walk along Oxford Street, one of the main shopping streets in central London yesterday. Britain's retail sales rebounded sharply in November, helped by buying on 'Black Friday' when items are heavily discounted in the run-up to Christmas, official data showed last week. — AFP

US Q3 GROWTH ESTIMATE CUT TO 2.0%

EXISTING HOME SALES TANK IN NOVEMBER

NEW YORK: The US economy grew at an annual rate of 2.0 percent in the third quarter, according to Commerce Department data yesterday, slightly below a previous estimate of 2.1 percent. The July to September growth of gross domestic product—the broad measure of the economy's output of goods and services—was in line with analyst estimates and marked a slowdown from the 3.9 percent growth in the second quarter. Personal consumption expenditure, which drives about two-thirds of the activity in the US economy, rose by an estimated 3.0 percent, as previously estimated.

The data show the strong dollar continues to be a drag on US trade. Exports grew by just 0.7 percent, down from a previous estimate of 0.9 percent, while imports rose 2.3 percent. Analysts at Barclays rated the 3.0 percent rise in consumption spending as "solid" and said the report overall "does little to change the picture

of solid domestic activity offset by weakness abroad." "Soft global growth and the lagged effects of lower energy prices and a stronger dollar continue to weigh on trade and manufacturing, the latter of which we see as reflected in the slower pace of inventory accumulation as production is adjusted to meet the slower pace of sales," Barclays said.

Tuesday's data came on the heels of the Federal Reserve's decision last week to lift US interest rates for the first time in nearly a decade, amid growing confidence in the US economic recovery. However, Fed policy makers emphasized that the US economy still needs the support of loose monetary policy and signaled they would take a gradual approach to further interest rate increases.

A key factor in the slightly lower growth compared with the prior estimate was a downward revision to inventory investment.

Home sales drop

US home sales plunged sharply in November, as rising prices are creating affordability pressures and new regulations have delayed finalizing purchases. The National Association of Realtors said yesterday that sales of existing homes collapsed 10.5 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.76 million. It was the weakest pace in 19 months. The setback follows solid gains in real estate for much of 2015. Sales of existing homes are on track to rise roughly 5 percent for the entire year. But the introduction of a new disclosure form in October likely prevented many homebuyers from closing on sales in November. Home values are also rising at more than double the pace of wages.

The median home sales price was \$220,300 in November, a 6.3 percent annual increase from a year ago. The new rules introduced by

the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to inform homebuyers about interest rates and fees may have delayed the completion of sales last month. It took 41 days to close a sale in November, compared to 36 days a year ago. The extended timeframe means that some sales may have been pushed back into December. Sales fell in all major geographic regions, including the Northeast, Midwest, South and West. Still, an improving job market and relatively low mortgage rates have encouraged home-buying for this year. Unemployment at a healthy 5 percent has endowed more people with a sense of financial certainty. But tight inventories and rising prices have curbed further gains. Sales have cooled after accelerating to a rate of 5.58 million in July. Relatively few properties are on the market as the economic expansion has crossed the six-year mark, with many homeowners still recovering equity lost

during the Great Recession and the bursting of the housing bubble.

The number of listings on the market has dropped 1.9 percent from a year ago, a shortage that has restricted options for buyers and fueled escalating prices. As a result, more people have no choice but to rent. The share of homeowners has slipped to 63.7 percent from a high of 69.2 percent in 2004.

Low mortgage rates have minimized some of the financial pressure. Still, rates are higher than a year ago. The Federal Reserve hiked a key short-term rate last week, the first increase of its kind in nearly a decade as the economy appears solid enough to manage higher borrowing costs.

The average, 30-year fixed mortgage rate has risen to 3.97 percent from 3.8 percent a year ago, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac. — Agencies



MARSEILLE: A prices board indicating the price of diesel (bottom) under one euro at a petrol station in Marseille, southern France. The price for a litre of diesel in France is at its lowest since March 2009 and the price for a litre of SP95 is the lowest since December 2009. — AFP

IRAN TRIMS NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET PLAN BY 2.6%

DUBAI: Iran has drafted a state budget for next fiscal year that is 2.6 percent smaller than the plan for this year, as low oil prices put pressure on the country's finances. The budget for the year starting on March 20 has been tentatively set at 2.670 trillion rials, government spokesman Mohammad Baqer Nobakht was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA yesterday.

That compares with an original plan for this year of 2.740 trillion rials, not including state-owned enterprises. The budget must be approved by parliament, and figures could

change in the three months before it is due to come into effect. Nobakht said the budget was based on an official exchange rate of 29,970 rials to the dollar, giving it a value of \$89.1 billion.

Brent oil's fall to an 11-year low of just above \$36 a barrel this week threatens new damage to Iran's export revenues, which have been hit for decades by international sanctions imposed over its nuclear program. IRNA did not report projections for total state revenues and the deficit in next year's budget, but said oil revenues were estimated at \$22 billion.

MARKETS JUMP; BLUE-CHIP BANKS BOOST ABU DHABI

MIDEAST STOCK MARKETS

DUBAI: Middle Eastern stocks rose yesterday as oil prices and global equities firmed slightly, and because of expectations that Saudi Arabia's state budget would be announced next Monday. Investors had been expecting the Saudi budget release this week but Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television reported late on Monday, quoting sources, that it would come on Dec. 28.

Without the threat of an imminent announcement—the budget is expected to include substantial spending cuts as Riyadh works to shrink its deficit—short-term investors in Saudi Arabia and the wider region felt more comfortable buying on dips.

"Now that traders expect the news next week, today's trading resumed as per usual with investors picking up stocks to turn a quick profit," said Tarek Al-Mady, a Riyadh-based independent financial analyst.

The Saudi index rose 1.7 percent. Alinma Bank gained 2.4 percent and was the most heavily traded stock after it announced a dividend cash payout of 0.5 riyal per share for 2015, in line with its 2014 dividend.

It is the second Saudi bank to announce an annual dividend. Saudi Hollandi Bank

last week proposed a cash payout which was 75 percent lower, but also announced a large bonus share issue. The oldest lender in the kingdom was 4.4 percent higher yesterday.

Dubai's index rose 1.5 percent, adding to Monday's gains. Builder Arabtec, often volatile, surged 14.2 percent, easing pressure from the decline of heavyweight Emaar Properties, which retreated 1.5 percent. Abu Dhabi's bourse added 0.4 percent, buffered by blue chip banks; it posted its fifth straight session of gains. Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank and National Bank of Abu Dhabi rose 3.3 and 0.8 percent respectively.

"Abu Dhabi's banks have remained relatively resilient because the US interest rate hike on Wednesday, with the UAE central bank following suit, will help the profitability of those banks," said a Dubai-based banking sector analyst. The outlook for credit growth in the short term may not be as rosy as in prior years owing to pressure on macroeconomic growth, but the medium-term outlook is resilient because of improved asset quality and lower provisioning for bad loans, said a note by Emirati research firm Alramz. Qatar's index

rebounded 2.7 percent to 10,175 points, recouping all of Monday's losses and exceeding the 10,000-point level for the first time since Dec. 9. "Today's session was a pure buy-on-dips play," said a Doha-based trader. Vodafone Qatar was the top gainer, surging 9.9 percent.

EGYPT

Egypt's benchmark edged up 0.1 percent, closing higher for a seventh straight session, with Orascom Telecom and EFG Hermes carrying the market higher. Combined, the stocks accounted for about one-third of the market's total value traded. EFG Hermes rose 3.5 percent and Orascom advanced 1.6 percent, adding to gains it has enjoyed since Thursday's close, when it agreed to buy Commercial International Bank's (CIB) investment banking subsidiary CI Capital for 1 billion pounds (\$128 million).

CIB ended down 2.0 percent yesterday but rose in early trade. "We think CIB's risk-reward profile is now more attractive in the context of regional banks and believe Egypt's fundamental economic outlook is far more robust than in 2011-2013," said a note by HSBC Global Research. — Reuters

MOHAMED NASER AL-SAYER TOYOTA CERTIFIED CARS ANNOUNCES WINNER OF CERTIFIED PROMOTIONS



KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer, one of the Al-Sayer Group Holding Companies held an awarding ceremony for the certified promotions, to hand-over Yaris Hatch Back TRD, grand prize of the raffle draw that was organized by Ministry of Commerce & Industry - for consumer protection affairs. The lucky winner of the draw Najeeb Nazir also won a 250 liters fuel card apart from - 2015 Yaris TRD Hatchback from the promotion which was valid from 1 August to 31 October, 2015.

The car delivery ceremony was attended by Hesham Hamed Manager Certified car sales, Bader Faisal Al-Sayer Deputy Marketing Manager and Badawi Mohamed Hassan Senior Supervisor Certified car sales.

According to Hesham Hamed Manager Certified car sales "Certified Promotion has received excellent response reflecting the faith customers have entrusted in Al-Sayer Toyota Certified cars over the years. Every Certified Vehicle at Al-Sayer is put through comprehensive 60 points check by our highly skilled and trained technicians. All vehicles must pass the thorough inspection and recon-

ditioning procedure in order to match the Dealer standards in terms of overall quality and appearance of interior and exterior. Relatively newer and low-mileage models in excellent overall condition will finally qualify to be a certified vehicle."

Bader Faisal Al-Sayer Deputy Marketing Manager handed over keys of the 2015 Yaris TRD said "I am excited to receive this grand raffle draw prize. Buying a Certified car from Al-Sayer Toyota was a great decision and receiving this grand prize through a raffle draw is a best value deal, I thank Al-Sayer for this fantastic opportunity." Toyota Certified pre-owned vehicle ensures total peace of mind for customers together with years of satisfaction. Some of benefits and added advantages customers receive are comprehensive 12 month warranty covering practically all major mechanical and electrical components, 12 month road side assistance and free inspection after 1500 km.

COMMODITY INDICES INFLICT MORE LOSSES ON PENSION FUNDS

LONDON: Commodity indices have proved disastrous investments for pension funds and other institutions in the last decade and disappointed again in 2015.

Back in 2005, Gary Gorton and Geert Rouwenhorst published a paper on "Facts and Fantasies about Commodity Futures" which helped popularize commodities as a new "asset class" for institutional investors. Gorton and Rouwenhorst claimed the risk-adjusted returns from an index of commodity futures were similar to equities while also offering useful portfolio diversification and protection from inflation.

"Facts and Fantasies," coupled with the bull market in oil, metals and agricultural products between 2004 and 2008, convinced investors to allocate several hundred billion dollars to commodity index products. Index investments were especially attractive for conservative investors because they promised inherent long-term returns independent of market timing or the skill of the fund manager. Commodity indices were attractive in the same way an equity index fund is attractive and were meant to be a different sort of investment from an actively managed portfolio or a hedge fund.

But since 2008, returns on commodity indices have far under-performed equities, creating a crisis of confidence in the idea of commodity indexing and commodities as a distinct asset class. Frustrated commodity investors have watched as their own investments have fallen in value even as equity investments have rebounded from the financial crisis and continued to perform well. Many pension funds have finally given up and scaled back or exited from their commodity programs altogether.

INDEX PRODUCTS

Gorton and Rouwenhorst based their paper on an examination of returns from a fully collateralised equally-weighted index of commodity futures between 1959 and 2004 (NBER Working Paper No. 10595). In practice, it has never been possible to invest in an equally-weighted commodity futures index on any sort of scale because some of the futures contracts are simply too small and illiquid.

Most investors allocated money to an exchange-traded fund or an over-the-counter swap that tracked one of two families of commodity indices, the Standard and Poor's Goldman Sachs Commodity Index (S&P GSCI) or the Bloomberg Commodity Index (BCI).

The S&P GSCI has always had a much higher weighting towards crude oil than the Bloomberg Commodity Index which has more exposure to metals and agricultural contracts.

The BCI is closer to the idealised Gorton and Rouwenhorst index though it is still far from being equally weighted. But the S&P GSCI also offers a family of modified indices with names like Reduced Energy, Light Energy and Ultra Light Energy, with trimmed weightings towards oil and more exposure to other commodities. None of these indices has performed well in the post-2008 period.

Spot prices for most commodities have fallen, especially since 2014, in many cases reaching their lowest level in over a decade. Low interest rates have cut the returns on the bonds posted as collateral to back the commodity futures position. And the contango structure in most commodity futures markets means that long futures positions are being rolled forward at a loss.

(In a contango market, short futures positions can be rolled forward at a profit, while long futures positions incur a loss every time they are extended).

The combination of falling spot prices, low interest rates and contango markets has had a disastrous effect on risk-adjusted returns for commodity indices compared with equities.

UNDER-PERFORMANCE

In 2005, when Gorton and Rouwenhorst were publishing their paper, the long-term returns on a real world commodity index like the S&P GSCI appeared similar to an equity index like the S&P 500. The equivalent between commodity and equity returns held up until commodity prices peaked and the financial crisis erupted in 2008. Arguably, the equivalence persisted in the early stages of the recovery in 2009 and 2010.

Since 2011, however, equity markets have continued to offer consistent positive returns, while the returns on commodity indices stalled and then turned negative. The poor performance of commodity indices in the long term has not been significantly affected by the choice of weighting scheme. The Reduced Energy, Light Energy and Ultra Light Energy variants of the S&P GSCI actually show lower returns since 1989. In 2015, Gorton and Rouwenhorst together with Geetesh Bhardwaj published an update of the earlier paper "Facts and Fantasies about Commodity Futures Ten Years Later" (Yale Working Paper No. 15-18). In it they examined the performance of their equally weighted commodity index between 2005 and 2014 and compared it with the earlier 1959-2004 period. Gorton, Rouwenhorst and Bhardwaj concluded the performance of commodity futures prices had not changed significantly compared with the earlier period. — Reuters

QNB GROUP REACHES AGREEMENT WITH NATIONAL BANK OF GREECE BANK TO ACQUIRE ITS 99.81% STAKE IN FINANSBANK

DOHA: QNB Group, the largest financial institution in Qatar and the Middle East and North Africa Region, announces that it has entered into a definitive agreement with National Bank of Greece for the acquisition of its entire stake comprising 99.81 percent in Finansbank A.S (Finansbank) in Turkey for a total consideration of A2.7 billion (\$2.94 billion).

QNB Group has been a trusted financial institution for over fifty years. Through controlled growth, the bank aspires to become an Icon in the Middle East and Africa by 2017. To achieve this, QNB Group is pursuing inorganic growth in large, high growth markets. Turkey, with its significant market size, population, growth track record, strong economic and banking sector prospects and strategic location as a gateway between Europe and Asia represents such a market and is therefore of strategic importance for QNB Group. Turkey's ties with the rest of the region have increased in recent years, as trade with the Middle East and North Africa region has risen nearly ten-fold from \$5.6 billion in 2000 to \$52.2 billion in 2014.

Finansbank is the fifth largest privately owned uni-

versal bank by total assets, customer deposits and loans in the Turkish market. The bank was incorporated in 1987 and acquired by National Bank of Greece, which currently has a shareholding of 99.81 percent. Finansbank has grown organically into a full service financial institution with an independent and experienced management, nationwide distribution network of 647 branches and over 5.3 million customers. As of 30 June 2015, Finansbank has \$29.0 billion of assets, \$19.5 billion in loans and \$14.6 billion in deposits and total equity amounted to \$3.6 billion as per International Financial Reporting Standards. Finansbank has a strong capital base with a capital adequacy ratio of 15.9 percent, which is among the highest in the Turkish banking sector, together with solid long-term foreign currency ratings of Ba2 and BBB- by Moody's and Fitch, which are a testament to Finansbank's successful business, operating model and risk management.

QNB intends to fund the purchase through its own funds and will remain strongly capitalized after the acquisition in line with its Group targets.

Commenting on the announcement, QNB Group's Chief Executive Officer Ali Ahmed Al-Kuwari said:

"This transaction is a significant milestone in QNB's Vision to becoming a MEA Icon by 2017 and a leading global bank by 2030. Finansbank is a highly regarded financial institution with an impressive track record of success in Turkey, and we look forward to welcoming the personnel and management of Finansbank to QNB Group. We also look forward to contributing towards Turkey's future economic development and further enhancing its overall connectivity with international markets as an integral part of QNB Group's global network." QNB Capital and JP Morgan are acting as joint financial advisors, while Clifford Chance is acting as lead legal counsel and Yegin «ifAi» Attorney Partnership is acting as local legal counsel for the transaction.

The transaction has been approved by the board of directors of both banks and the General Council of the Hellenic Financial Stability Fund. The closing of the transaction is subject to regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions. The transaction is expected to close in the first half of 2016.



KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian food vendor (R) prepares tea at her stall in downtown Kuala Lumpur yesterday. —AFP

JAPAN FINES ERNST & YOUNG ARM \$17.4M OVER TOSHIBA AUDIT

TOKYO: Japan's financial regulator has fined an Ernst & Young affiliate 2.1 billion yen (\$17.4 million) after the firm's audit of Toshiba Corp's accounts failed to spot irregularities in the country's worst accounting scandal in years. The Financial Services Agency (FSA) said yesterday it would also suspend Ernst & Young ShinNihon LLC from taking on new business contracts for three months.

Toshiba disclosed earlier this year that it had overstated profits from around 2008 and on Monday said it would cut thousands of jobs and book a record net loss this year.

Toshiba said yesterday that Ernst & Young ShinNihon would not renew its contract to audit Toshiba's books from the fiscal year starting next April. The FSA said the fine was equivalent to two years' of auditing fees paid to ShinNihon by Toshiba.

"There was a grave breach of duty," an FSA senior official said at a news briefing. "The accountants were in charge of Toshiba for many years and they had built a misplaced sense of confidence that Toshiba would not do such things," the official, who declined to be named, said.

ShinNihon is the biggest accounting firm in Japan, with about 3,500 certified accountants and more than 4,000 clients. Koichi Hanabusa, chairman and CEO of ShinNihon said in a statement he would take responsibility for the affair and step down at the end of January, when the accounting firm is expected to compile a business improvement plan demanded by the FSA.

"It is very regrettable that we have come to this situation," he said. Earlier this month, Japan's securities watchdog recommended Toshiba be fined a record 7.37 billion yen for its violation of accounting rules.

Moody's cuts rating

Meanwhile, crisis-hit Toshiba's woes deepened yesterday when Moody's cut its credit rating to junk, casting doubt on a turnaround plan unveiled in response to



TOKYO: Shoppers watch air conditioners displayed at an electronics store in Tokyo. Scandal-plagued Japanese manufacturer Toshiba Corp is cutting 6,800 jobs after projecting a net loss of 550 billion yen (\$4.5 billion) for the fiscal year through March 2016. — AP

an embarrassing profit-padding scandal.

On Monday Toshiba rolled out a wide-ranging restructuring which included thousands of job cuts, as it warned it would book a record \$4.5 billion annual loss.

Investors dumped its Tokyo-listed shares, which have plummeted by nearly one quarter in the last two days of trading. Moody's said its two notch-downgrade to Ba2 was in response to Toshiba's overhaul and its weak prospects and warned of more possible cuts.

"The announcement indicated that earnings and cash flow generation will be significantly below our

previous expectations," said Moody's analyst Masako Kuwahara. She added that "our expectation of improvement in earnings, if any, for each business segment will be very gradual even after the restructuring."

A company-hired panel earlier this year found executives at one of Japan's best-known companies had systematically pressured underlings to inflate profits to hide poor results.

The case forced Toshiba's incumbent president and seven other top executives to resign. The company has admitted it had inflated profits by about \$1.2 billion since the 2008 global financial crisis. — Agencies

'DAS AUTO' NO MORE: VW PLANS IMAGE OFFENSIVE

BERLIN: Scarred by a public relations thrashing over its "Dieselgate" scandal, Volkswagen is planning an image offensive, and its "Das Auto" global advertising slogan is an early casualty.

Launched in 2007 under ousted boss Martin Winterkorn, the slogan has had the advantage of simplicity, merely meaning "The Car". However, the German carmaker's leaders, anxious to proclaim a reformed corporate culture, have criticized it as out of step with a company trying to show new-found humility. A Volkswagen spokesman would not pronounce "Das Auto" dead quite yet, but said it would no longer accompany the famous VW badge in the coming advertising campaign.

Its replacement is hardly radical. "Wherever our logo appears in future, it will be backed by the new brand slogan 'Volkswagen'," the spokesman said. "The slogan will be rolled out in stages across the world."

VW has been largely on the defensive since US authorities revealed in September it had admitted rigging exhaust emission tests on some diesel-powered models. For weeks, it volunteered little information about the extent of the cheating, instead reacting guardedly to a flood of revelations and allegations.

The new campaign, discussed last week at a closed-door meeting of 2,000 group managers, is VW's latest attempt to regain the initiative in rebuilding its reputation following a sharp drop in sales in some markets, including the United States and Britain.

While the group produces everything from Bugatti supercars and Ducati motorbikes to heavy-duty Scania trucks, the meeting in the eastern German city of Dresden focused on the main VW brand.

According to a manager who was there,

Volkswagen brand chief Herbert Diess described the Winterkorn-era slogan - which could suggest that VW alone can define the modern motor car - as absolutist. Such an image of regal arrogance ill fits the reality of VW today: a company facing huge costs from recalling and modifying cars to meet emissions regulations, plus likely regulatory fines and a welter of lawsuits.

Volkswagen needed to show humility, the manager said, and the slogan "Das Auto" was pretentious. The old slogan also failed to convey VW's technological ambitions in areas such as electrically-powered vehicles, the manager said, requesting anonymity.

VW said the Dresden meeting discussed the task of leading the company through the crisis and its future strategy. Diess is a relative newcomer to VW, arriving from Bavarian rival BMW only in July. Since Winterkorn's forced resignation on Sept. 23, the group has reshuffled its management through internal promotions and external hires. New chief executive Matthias Mueller formerly ran the group's Porsche sports-car unit, while the compliance chief was hired from rival Daimler.

VW tried to engender a new atmosphere at the annual pre-Christmas conference in Dresden last Thursday. For instance, male staff were encouraged to remove their ties - an unheard of suggestion in the buttoned-up Winterkorn era - and managers even folded shirts in a team-building exercise.

All this, along with VW's first news conference on the scandal earlier this month, suggests it is finally becoming a little less defensive and trying to shape events from a public relations perspective rather than merely reacting to them. — Reuters



INTRODUCING THE NEW CBR600RR

Honda's CBR600RR boasts improved racetrack performance but also ideal capabilities to be enjoyed on twisty roads or city streets by riders of all experience levels

INTRODUCTION

A POLISHED PACKAGE

Honda's CBR600RR represented a big step forward for the 600cc Supersport class when it was launched in 2003. Constant development over the last decade has seen the CBR600RR evolve into one of the most polished packages ever produced in the Supersports arena.

Taking inspiration from Honda's ultimate RC213V race machine, the CBR600RR offers a perfect balance of high-revving power, precise handling, light weight, and a compact overall size.

HIGH-REVVING POWER

The CBR600RR's extremely compact 599cc, liquid-cooled DOHC 16-valve inline four-cylinder power plant makes a great contribution to the motorcycle's superb handling.

The DAIS (Direct Air Induction System) smoothly chan-

nels a large volume of air directly through the intake situated in the middle of the front fairing (the area subjected to the greatest air pressure) and into the airbox via the steering head duct.

The CBR600RR has HESD (Honda Electronic Steering Damper) with optimal damping force constantly maintained by the ECU.

CHASSIS & SUSPENSION

Improved damping function was key for the CBR600RR, so a fully adjustable Showa Big Piston inverted front fork, with an exceptionally rigid 41mm diameter inner tube, has been used.

The CBR600RR's Unit Pro-Link rear suspension uses no shock top mount on the frame, and is a system unique to Honda. The shock mounts to the upper part of the swingarm and the lower link, effectively operating independently of swingarm movement. This stabilises behaviour under hard cornering and delivers superb traction and turning ability, plus improved shock absorption and much more consistent damping.

Continued development of the Unit Pro-Link system

has resulted in much better low speed performance and greater feedback in the initial phase of operation, giving superb stability and controllability.

Receiving constant input from Honda's race expertise, the CBR600RR's frame is constructed from twin tubes of diecast aluminium.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Both lightweight cast aluminium wheels feature the same 12-spoke design used on the CBR1000RR.

The CBR600RR's powerful braking setup uses the well-proven setup of twin 310mm discs with radially mounted opposed-piston four-pot calipers, and a lightweight single-piston caliper and 220mm disc at the rear.

The styling of the new CBR600RR has a functional beauty that mirrors that of the race machine that inspired it - Honda's RC213V.

The sleek, flowing fairing houses twin line-beam headlights. The screen, as on the RC213V is small and the tail unit mirrors that of the MotoGP machine.

The fuel tank cover is shaped to allow the rider to move freely and grip it with arms and knees.

Specifications

ENGINE

ENGINE TYPE: 599cc Liquid-cooled 4-stroke 16-valve DOHC inline-4
BORE AND STROKE: 67 x 42.5mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 12.2:1
CARBURATION: PGM-FI electronic fuel injection
IGNITION: Computer controlled digital transistorised with electronic advance
STARTER: Electric
TRANSMISSION: 6-speed

FRAME

DIMENSIONS (LXWXH): 2,030mm x 685mm x 1,115mm
WHEEL BASE: 1,375mm
SEAT HEIGHT: 820mm
GROUND CLEARANCE: 135mm
FUEL CAPACITY: 18 litres (including 3.5 litres LCD indicator reserve)
KERB WEIGHT: 186kg

TYRES

FRONT: 120/70 - 17 inch
REAR: 180/55 - 17 inch

SUSPENSION

FRONT: 41mm fully adjustable inverted HMAS cartridge-type telescopic fork, 110mm axle travel
REAR: Unit Pro-Link with gas-charged remote reservoir damper, adjustable spring preload and compression and rebound damping, 129mm axle travel

BRAKES

FRONT: 310 x 4.5mm dual disc with radial-mount 4-piston hydraulic callipers, floating rotors and sintered metal pads
REAR: 220 x 5mm disc with single-piston hydraulic calliper and sintered metal pads

WARRANTY

WARRANTY PERIOD: 6 months

COLOURS

Victory Red and Graphite Black.



ROME: People take part in a protest against the collapse of four Italian banks in central Rome yesterday. The four regional Italian banks — Banca delle Marche, Banca Popolare dell'Etruria e del Lazio, Cassa di Risparmio di Ferrara and Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Chieti — had all been put under special administration over the past two years. — AFP

ITALIAN BANK RESCUE LEAVES BITTER FAMILIES MAROONED

MONTECATINI TERME: Whenever retired tailor Meri Giannoni spoke to the director of her bank branch about how to invest her savings, she said to him: "Please treat me as if I were your mum."

So when in June 2013 he recommended she buy 30,000 euros (\$32,500) of junior bonds sold by the bank, she said she signed the papers even though she did not understand them and never read prospectuses warning the investment could be risky.

"There was a good atmosphere at the bank, it was friendly," the 67-year old told Reuters at her family house in Montecatini Terme, a small Tuscan town known for its spa. "The director told me: this is good stuff, it's the bank's own bonds, relax."

Last month, the value of the bonds was wiped out overnight as the government saved Giannoni's bank, Banca Etruria, and three other small lenders from bankruptcy under tougher European Union rules that require shareholders and holders of junior or subordinated debt to shoulder some of the pain in a bank rescue. A spokeswoman for Banca Etruria, which is now a new legal entity after the rescue scheme, said it was not responsible for actions carried out under its previous management. The bank's former top executives and board members were removed when it was placed under special administration in February.

When contacted by Reuters, former Chairman Lorenzo Rosi denied any wrongdoing, without elaborating. Banca Etruria and the three other banks operate in central Italy, a stronghold of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's centre-left Democratic Party, and the opposition has accused him and the market regulators of failing to protect the 12,500 small savers who bought 430 million euros in junior debt.

Company subordinated bonds can appear attractive to investors because they usually offer higher interest rates than other bonds, however they are also more risky because, in the event of bankruptcy, they get repaid only after senior debt holders and other creditors have been reimbursed.

One pensioner hanged himself after his life savings were wiped out, while retail investors like Giannoni have staged vocal protests to ensure their battle remains in the public eye.

The governor of the Bank of Italy, which is responsible for overseeing Italian banks, said on Sunday it had done all it could to expose the financial weakness of the four lenders over several years. Market watchdog Consob, which has to make sure investors are properly informed when they buy financial products, said sale prospectuses for junior bonds always detailed the risks.

Renzi has said some of the bonds might have been mis-sold, and has set up a 100-million-euro compensation fund. Regulators are now calling for a ban on the sale of junior bank debt to retail investors. Swelling public anger against the government and regulators reflects the political risk faced by Europe after it decided to alter the rules governing bank rescues. In previous bank bailouts - such as in Ireland in 2010 - the brunt of the cost was born by taxpayers. Since then European policymakers have gradually made investors and creditors share the cost of a financial crisis that has exposed the deep problems of some smaller European lenders.

From Jan. 1, more of the new EU rules aimed at shielding taxpayers will be phased in, meaning even senior bondholders and holders of current accounts above 100,000 euros will be hit if a bank fails, before public money can be used.

'I DON'T GET IT'

Italy shows the public backlash can be severe. Many of those hit were not sophisticated investors and say they did not fully understand what they were buying.

"I've only had a primary school education, so either someone tells me 'if something happens to this bank you're not going to get your money back' or I don't get it," said Giannoni, clutching a plastic folder full of bank documents packed with technical jargon. "That subordinated word meant nothing to me." The director of her bank branch, who has since moved to a different city, declined to comment when contacted by Reuters, only saying: "The situation is very delicate."

The losses suffered by small investors are also shaking one of the deepest foundations of Italy's economic system: a network of tiny banks that for decades have served not only as financiers but as advisers for families around the country.

Despite some industry consolidation, Italy has about 650 lenders - one of the highest number in Europe - according to European Central Bank data. Several people, some of them in their late 80s, who saw their savings vanish in the bank rescue told Reuters of bank directors calling them at home to suggest new investments, and of being on first-name terms with staff at their local branch.

When Banca Etruria was placed under special administration after a Bank of Italy audit found 2.8 billion euros of bad loans and capital levels below regulatory requirements, 45-year-old housewife Sonia Rigatti grew worried. "I asked if the bank could go bust. They said my position wasn't risky and that no one here has ever seen a bank fail," said Rigatti, who lost 27,000 euros in junior bonds she had inherited from her father.

CRUCIAL FUNDING

Authorities have said the rescue of the four banks - Banca Etruria, Banca Marche, Carichietti and Carife - drawing 3.6 billion euros from a fund financed by the country's healthy lenders, averted even bigger losses for their retail customers.

The government rushed through the rescue package on Nov. 22, before the extra regulation takes effect, because it feared that a full bail-in of the banks would have triggered a bank run. But it was still forced to impose losses on some retail investors after the European Union rejected an alternative scheme that would have spared them, saying it violated EU state aid rules.

Italian banks have long tapped the huge private wealth of domestic retail investors to sell them their own debt. During the eurozone crisis, when most Italian banks were shut out of international funding markets, retail bonds became an even more crucial source of financing.

In 2012, Italian households held more than 370 billion euros of these notes, Bank of Italy data shows. According to financial advisory firm Consulique, some 60 billion euros of junior bank bonds are currently outstanding. Banca Etruria has become the focus of the mounting furor as it is the only one of the four banks to be listed on the stock market - so in theory should have been subject to more stringent controls. It also sold the highest amount of retail bonds. — Reuters

INVESTORS WARY AS RUSSIAN PIPELINE PROJECT SPLITS EU

EU FIRMS, GAZPROM ALL SEEK LEVERAGE

BRUSSELS: Investors are wary of pouring money into a planned doubling of Gazprom's Nord Stream gas link to Germany, analysts said, amid doubts about regulatory approvals and deep political divisions.

Since taps opened five years ago on the first pipeline from Russia's Baltic coast to Germany, bypassing Ukraine, the gulf has widened between EU countries angered by Russia's military actions there and those worried about security of gas supply. At an emotional summit last week, national leaders said Nord Stream-2 undercuts EU unity against Russia. Only Germany and the Netherlands backed the project, ministers said.

EU officials have warned investors would be wise to wait for regulators to rule on Nord Stream-2, and analysts say lenders might be cautious. "The European Commission is certainly raising far more issues than for the original Nord Stream," said Richard Sarsfield-Hall, senior principal at consultancy Poyry, which advises energy firms. "The financial community may take some persuading that the project is viable."

Even backers of Nord Stream-1 are more skeptical this time around. Laszlo Varro, head of gas, coal and power markets at the International Energy Agency in Paris, said it was a "huge question" whether Gazprom's investment in Nord Stream-2 could be recovered, due to stagnating demand in Europe and an expected surge in liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply.

He added that Kiev had "even in extremely unfavourable circumstances" delivered all transit deliveries in the last 18 months.

Politics vs economics vs regulation

Already Nord Stream-1 is under-used because EU regulatory concerns have never been fully resolved. But backers of the project say there is no legitimate legal reason to block Nord Stream-2, and German, French, Austrian and Anglo-Dutch firms partnering Gazprom want access to reliable, competitive-

ly-priced gas supplies to compensate for declining European production. Russia supplies around a third of the EU's gas, roughly half of which is shipped via Ukraine.

"The energy community takes the view that 'listen I have had it with these (Ukrainian) guys; we are the people who suffer when there are problems, not the politicians,'" said Jonathan Stern, chairman of the Natural Gas Research Programme at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. Industry sources say the firms involved - E.ON and Wintershall, Shell, OMV and Engie - also see side benefits as they negotiate new contracts with Gazprom and push for spot pricing, rather than long-term contracts pegged to higher oil prices.

Wintershall and Shell said in emails that Nord Stream-2 would increase flexibility and security of supply. For Russia's Gazprom, the pipeline is part of a quest to cut some \$2 billion in transit fees it pays Ukraine annually and to maintain its grip on the European market. Tim Boersma, a fellow at Washington's Brookings Institution, saw an economic rationale. "Nord Stream-2 inevitably lowers the transit costs on the current routes," he said.

Russian Economy Minister Alexei Ulyukayev put it more bluntly, telling reporters in Brussels that blocking Nord Stream-2 would be "a shot in the foot" especially for Gazprom's European clients.

Russia says it wants the pipeline by 2019, when its transit contract with Ukraine expires, although industry sources say that is optimistic. One Gazprom source predicted Germany would make the project happen: "Things will be as the Germans decide," the source said on condition of anonymity.

But German government sources said Chancellor Angela Merkel might not be ready to fight for the pipeline expansion and it would not be the first project to be only a pipe dream.

Russia last year announced it was scrapping the South Stream pipeline, also planned to bypass Ukraine through a route into southern Europe, over EU rules. — Reuters

MARKETS DOWNBEAT ON BRAZIL'S NEW FM

SAO PAULO: Brazil's new finance minister sought to reassure investors yesterday as he took the reins of the recession-hit economy, but the Sao Paulo stock market and the Brazilian real both fell.

In his first full business day on the job, Finance Minister Nelson Barbosa held a teleconference with international investors, promising to practice the same fiscal discipline as his predecessor, Joaquim Levy.

"I want to underline that our economic policy is the same. Our focus remains on fiscal adjustment and reducing inflation," said the 46-year-old ally of embattled leftist President Dilma Rousseff.

The comments failed to reassure the markets, however. The Sao Paulo stock market fell 1.62 percent, and the real currency broke through the barrier of four to the dollar for the first time in two and a half months, falling 1.44 percent.

The world's seventh-largest economy is stuck in a deep rut, facing runaway prices, budget woes and forecasts that its current recession will last two years.

The malaise has been exacerbated by a massive corruption scandal at state oil giant Petrobras and the opening of impeachment proceedings against Rousseff.

Levy, who took on the finance portfolio in November 2014, was supposed to be the pro-market saviour whose steely budget cuts would get the government's books in order and the economy back on track.

But he failed to achieve his goal of rebalancing the public finances in a poor country with a big welfare spending bill. As the political and economic woes mounted, he found himself increasingly isolated in an administration more inclined to ramp up spending than cut it.

Barbosa, who was previously planning minister, is seen as less market-friendly. Economic analysts warned he faced an uphill battle to establish his credibility in the business world. "Either Barbosa does what needs to be done, or we turn out the lights and leave. The market doesn't believe in Brazil anymore, period," said Andre Ferreira of Corretora Futura in Sao Paulo.

Barbosa vowed to hew to Congress's primary surplus target of 0.5 percent of GDP next year. Levy had insisted on a target of 0.7 percent of GDP. Brazilian media reports cited disagreement with his colleagues over the goal as a reason for his departure. — AFP

TATA STEEL IN TALKS TO SELL UK UNIT TO GREYBULL CAPITAL

MUMBAI/LONDON: Tata Steel is in talks to sell its struggling British-based unit to investment firm Greybull Capital, the two firms said in a statement yesterday.

Britain's largest steelmaker has been trying to sell its long products unit, which makes steel for use in construction, since last year - with increasing urgency as a global steel crisis intensified and prices hit decade lows.

"This is an extremely critical time for the whole industry, and we have been working hard to explore all options that could provide a future for the Long Products Europe business," said Karl Koehler, Chief Executive of Tata Steel's European operations. Reuters reported on Monday that Greybull had emerged as the favourite in the sale process. One source said the deal was probably worth less than 500 million pounds, and that the buyer was not likely to take on any debt.

"Greybull Capital confirms that it has signed a letter of intent with Tata Steel... Whilst this is an important milestone, much work remains to be done to reach a successful outcome," the investment firm said.

In October Tata Steel said it could axe about 1,200 jobs at its long products unit, which is based in Scunthorpe, northeast England and employs some 4,700 people across Europe.

The news came as a huge blow to Britain's embattled steel sector. Including the Tata cuts, the sector lost some 4,000 jobs in October alone, equivalent to about a fifth of its workforce.

British steelmakers pay some of the highest energy costs and green taxes in the world and are also struggling to compete with record Chinese steel imports, which they say have been unfairly subsidized by the government. Tata Steel has been forced to slash costs and cut thousands of jobs since 2007 when it bought Anglo-Dutch producer Corus for \$13 billion, making its Europe's second largest steelmaker. The company employs about 30,000 people across Europe, including about 17,000 in Britain. — Reuters

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY NOW WITH CHEVROLET ALGHANIM

THE 2015 CAMARO... STARTING FROM KD 8499

KUWAIT: The Camaro has long been a favorite amongst the youth due to its thrilling speed, sporty design and bright, attractive colors. That is why Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim & Sons Automotive, the exclusive distributor of Chevrolet cars in Kuwait, provides every thrill-seeking youth the chance to own a brand new Camaro at a starting price of only KD 8,499.

With a powerful V6 engine that generates 323 hp, the Camaro has a higher and more rigorous performance on the road. Camaro's standard engine is not just any V6. It is a dual overhead cam 3.6L V6 engine that combines Direct Injection and Variable Valve Timing to deliver the power drivers hunger for without all the thirst. And the result? Drivers get the rush of 323 horsepower with the freedom of a

7.841 per 100 kilometer highway fuel consumption rating. Apart from the modernized, powerful and fuel efficient engine, the Camaro also allures passersby with its superb, 20-inch LT or SS wheels, MyLink infotainment system, remote engine starter as well as powerful LED and HID headlamps. The Camaro's beauty is completed with Pirelli PZero tires that are known for their excellent performance that is further enriched with the Camaro's splendor and raw power.

If unbridled power is what you are after, the aluminum Camaro SS 6.2L V8 engine offers 428 horsepower and 569 Nm of torque befitting the aggressive reputation. At only KD 12,999, The SS Performance-tuned suspension has a load of upgraded features including

reengineered stabilizer bars, shock absorbers and completely redeveloped dampers for an outstanding ride, balanced transitions, and excellent steering and handling. Pair it with the standard 20" wheels with Pirelli PZero ultra-high performance tires and Brembo brakes for the ultimate in performance and control. The MyLink infotainment system, remote engine starter, powerful LED and HID headlamps and head up display further the Camaro SS's value and leading market presence.

All customers who purchase a Camaro from Alghanim will receive the benefits of the Chevrolet Care that entails new levels of post-sale support and trust. Chevrolet Care is an exceptional customer service program that is based on four main pil-

lars: Competitive and transparent service costs (especially for four-wheel drive vehicles), scheduled service appointment booking with same day delivery, quality service by certified technicians and 3 years/100,000km warranty with 24x7 roadside assistance.

If you are a Camaro fan, drop by the nearest Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim & Sons Automotive's showroom today to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime offer that brings you the car of your dreams at the price you want. The Camaro is available in all of Yusuf Ahmed Alghanim & Sons Automotive's showrooms with a variety that suits everyone's taste ranging from astonishing V6 engines to powerful V8 engines. Yusuf A. Alghanim & Sons Automotive adds the finishing touch to

the ownership experience with high-quality after-sales services. With the world's largest and most advanced automotive service center, customers will never worry about their car's service and maintenance needs.

All customers who purchase a Chevrolet from Alghanim will receive the benefits of the Chevrolet Care, which entails new levels of post-sale support and trust. The Chevrolet Care is an exceptional customer service that is based on four main pillars: competitive and transparent service costs (especially for four-wheel drive vehicles), scheduled service appointment booking with same day delivery, quality service by certified technicians and 3yr/100,000km warranty with 24x7 roadside assistance.



INTELLIGENT MYFORD DOCK ADDS REFINED DIMENSION AND FEEL IN NEW FORD FIGO

DUBAI: The all-new Ford FigO has an interior usually associated with higher trim specification models and central to that is MyFord Dock.

Bringing the FigO to a whole new level of connectivity, MyFord Dock is multifaceted, affording the opportunity to safely store, mount, and charge your smartphone from the clean, stylish, and discreet casing on the dashboard, meaning it's also perfectly positioned to incorporate the handset's satellite navigation system, and to stream stored music through FigO's sound system.

"First time buyers require the same levels of connectivity as other drivers and that makes the Ford FigO the perfect vehicle for their needs," said Trevor Hale, Ford Middle East and Africa Director of Communications.

"The MyFord Dock, in an easy-to-access position on the dashboard, allows drivers to immerse themselves in a modern day cabin, packed with smart technology, bringing a greater level of thoughtful features designed to help you get the most out of the time drivers spend in their vehicles."

The sub-compact FigO is Ford's smallest offering in the Middle East, and comes in a choice of 1.2-litre engine with a manual transmission, or a 1.5-litre offering both manual and automatic versions.

Ford Motor Company, a global automotive industry leader based in Dearborn, Mich., manufactures or distributes automobiles across six continents. With about 197,000 employees and 67 plants worldwide, the company's automotive brands include Ford and Lincoln.

BANK OF SPAIN HIKES GROWTH FORECASTS DESPITE POLL CRISIS

MADRID: The Bank of Spain hiked its growth forecasts for the Spanish economy this year and next yesterday, though it warned in the wake of an inconclusive general election of potentially damaging uncertainty over reforms and budget policies. The vote on Dec. 20 delivered a highly fragmented result, making it hard for any party to form a government and heralding weeks of tough negotiations as the centre-right People's Party (PP) seeks allies to stay in power.

The Bank of Spain said that potential headwinds for the economy included doubts over policy in Spain, as well as a potentially harsher-than-expected slowdown in emerging markets.

"Internally, the main source of uncertainty is associated with the evolution of economic policies, given how much the reform agenda and budget policies in particular affect confidence," the Bank of Spain said in a monthly report. Spain's economy has recovered from a deep recession to become one of the fastest-growing in the euro zone this year, as high unemployment starts falling off, feeding a pick-up in household spending.

On a quarterly basis, the pace of growth slowed slightly in the July to September period, reaching 0.8 percent. The Bank of Spain said yesterday it expected the economy to expand by 0.8 percent once again in the

fourth quarter. It also raised its annual growth forecast for 2015 to 3.2 percent from 3.1 percent, and for 2016 to 2.8 percent from 2.7 percent. Official preliminary data is due on Jan. 29. "The slight slowdown observed in the second half of the year ... does not alter the central scenario of sustained growth in gross domestic product in the coming quarters," the Bank of Spain said.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's PP had pinned its hopes of securing another term in office on the economic rebound, but it has also been hit hard by corruption scandals and many Spaniards are still worse off than they were before the downturn.

The PP imposed deep spending cuts at the height of the recession and pushed through a labor reform that makes it easier for companies to fire staff - policies that were praised by some economists and European Union partners but which have been unpopular with voters.

Rajoy's party fell far short of a majority in parliament, and left-wing opponents have already signaled they will not support a government led by the party. An alliance of left-wing parties, including anti-austerity newcomer Podemos ("We Can"), is another option, but even by clubbing together they may still struggle to reach a sufficient number of seats or form a stable government. — Reuters

SABBAGH TO LEAD FUTURE GROWTH STRATEGY OF FORD MIDDLE EAST

DUBAI: Ford's regional office yesterday announced the appointment of Thierry Sabbagh to the role of Managing Director, Ford Middle East. Sabbagh makes the internal switch from his position as Ford's Regional Sales Director, which he held since 2012, where he was responsible for supporting Ford and Lincoln dealers across the GCC markets as well as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen.

In his new role, Sabbagh aims to grow share profitability, while also creating a leading customer experience for the brand. And, in constructing the best distributor network in the region, Sabbagh's vision to understand and develop the Middle East market is in line with the One Ford Plan.

"For the continued success of Ford in our region, certain priorities including customer satisfaction will help us reach our goals," said Sabbagh. "An improved dealer network and level of capability, along with making the customer sales



Thierry Sabbagh, new Managing Director for Ford Middle East.

and service experiences second-to-none, can ensure the growth of Ford in this region moving forward."

Sabbagh also intends to improve distributor marketing efforts, while also getting serious about the fleet and commercial vehicle business.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN DIMAH CAPITAL AND LOWE ENTERPRISE INVESTORS

KUWAIT: Dimah Capital is proud to announce the joint venture formation between Lowe Enterprise Investors a full integrated US based real estate and Dimah Capital at a participation ratio of 10 percent and 90 percent respectively. The joint venture partnership is structured to leverage Dimah capital with real estate opportunity flow and the possibility to partnership with LEI across the 52 states in North America.

Hosam Al-Muzaiel, Chairman of the board at Dimah capital emphasized that the joint venture as part of Dimah real estate investment expansion to North American. Hosam went on saying that we will utilize our partners experience to enhance and sustain our real estate investment quality, diversification, investment risks and provide Dimah with an unlimited supply of market information and knowledge. The joint venture is also structure to complement our existing portfolio and expansion strategy, which shall entail with its value on Dimah overall portfolio performance and subsequently adding value to our shareholders capital.

Hosam also added that Dimah is currently in the process of finalizing a second joint venture in the US within the hospitality sector and looking at further joint ventures in Europe and specifically in the UK to embrace our existing portfolio and real estate expansion internationally. Lowe Enterprise investors "LEI" is a diversified national real estate company active in commercial, hospitality and residential property investment, management and development.



Headquartered in Los Angeles, the firm maintains regional offices in Denver, Washington, DC, San Diego, San Mateo, Irvine and Philadelphia, with projects throughout the US.

Founded in 1972 by Chairman and CEO Robert J. Lowe, the firm has an executive staff of 175 and a total employment of over 10,000. Lowe is owned by a group of employee and

retired employee shareholders, 28 of which are active in the firm. Over the past 41 years, Lowe Enterprises has developed, acquired or managed more than \$17.5 billion of real estate assets. Lowe's goal is to create value in real estate for institutional, corporate and private clients and partners through investment, asset management and development.

MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS LAUNCHES ITS 143RD OUTLET AT SHARJAH AIRPORT

SHARJAH: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the leading jewellery retailer launched its 143rd outlet globally and third outlet in Sharjah. Ali Salim Al-Midfa, Chairman - Sharjah Airport Authority inaugurated the showroom on 17th December 2015 in the presence of Sheikh Faisal Saoud Al-Qassimi, Director - Sharjah Airport Authority, Dr PA Ibrahim Haji, Co-chairman - Malabar Group; Shamlal Ahamed M P, Managing Director-International Operations of Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Abdul Salam K P, Group Executive Director - Malabar Gold & Diamonds and Abdul Basheer -Zonal Head - Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Sharjah. Members of Sharjah Airport Authority, DUFRY Sharjah and well-wishers also attended the inauguration.

This elegant showroom conveniently located at Sharjah Airport, Transit Area, Opposite the Duty Free will be the 1st showroom of its kind inside an Airport. It opens up a new business arena targeting global travellers and transit passengers. This outlet will be the first of its kind operating 24/7 and throughout 365 days. 'Such an outlet offers customers an opportunity to buy their favorite jewellery while transiting or leaving for their home country. Truly a last minute opportunity to buy a gift for a loved one or for self-gifting,' said Shamlal Ahamed M P, Managing Director - International Operations of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Like all other Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets, this showroom displays a significant collection of traditional as well as contemporary jewellery in gold, certified diamonds, platinum and



precious stone jewellery from across the world that can hold you spell-bound with their awe-inspiring beauty. The leap from a single store to 143 outlets globally did not happen overnight. It was achieved through consistent effort & an insistence on setting exceptionally high standards to meet the aspiration of customers over a period of 22 years. Their dedicated and highly skilled employees invest heart and soul in striving to achieve maximum perfection. Absolute customer satisfaction is the overriding promise in everything they do.

The group is in the forefront when it comes to CSR activities as well. The group sets apart a fixed percentage of its net profit to the benefit of needy and the charity projects of Malabar Gold & Diamonds have touched the lives of thousands of people across the world. They focus primarily in five priority areas such as health, education, environment, housing and women empowerment. In Sharjah, Malabar Gold & Diamonds operates showrooms at Lulu Hypermarket - Al-Nahda, Rolla Square & Sharjah Airport.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS OFFERS FINEST TRAVEL PACKAGES WITH TOURISM MALAYSIA

ABU DHABI: Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, presents a fantastic opportunity for travelers from Kuwait to have the best travel experience in Malaysia through a global partnership agreement with Tourism Malaysia.

The agreement between Etihad Airways and Tourism Malaysia was signed during the Expo Milano 2015 exhibition. It is aimed at boosting inbound tourism to Malaysia by leveraging the airline's global passenger network, Etihad Airways and Tourism Malaysia will put into effect a range of joint marketing activities targeting Malaysia's leading inbound visitor markets - the UK, US, Europe (Germany, France and Italy), and the Middle East region (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait). Research by Tourism Malaysia revealed in 2014 there were more than 1.2 million visits from these key markets, a 10 per cent increase compared to 2013.

Malaysia is one of the top destinations of Etihad Airways. Since 2007, the airline has carried more than one million passengers to and from the country, offering travellers from all around the world the chance to enjoy the many attractions of the country.

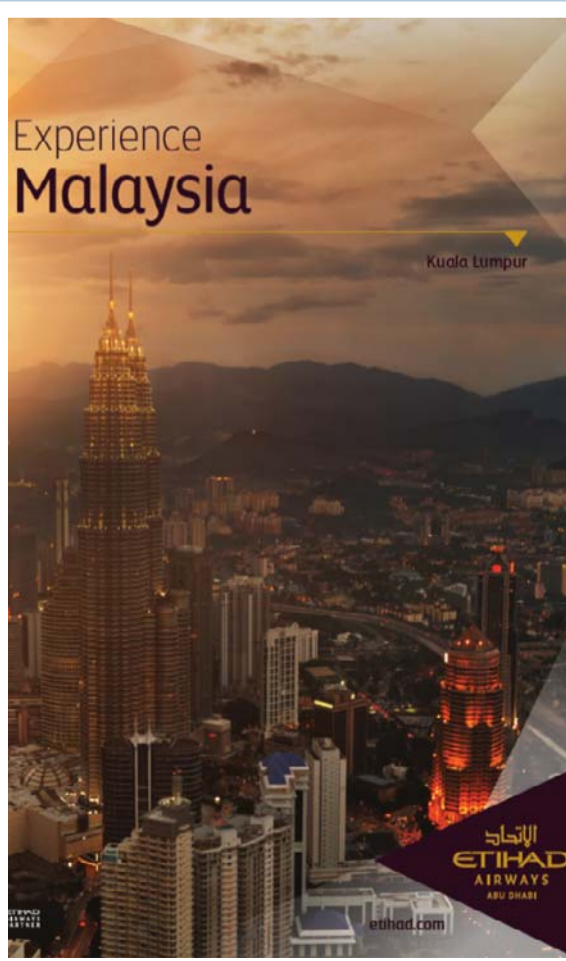
This partnership underscores the long-standing relationship between Etihad Airways and Malaysia, provides further opportunities for our customers in Kuwait to see and experience all the wonderful things that Malaysia has to

offer. From the cosmopolitan capital of Kuala Lumpur to the exotic islands of Langkawi and Penang to the stunning Johor Bahru and island of Borneo - Sabah, travelers flying in from Kuwait will be truly amazed by the unique culture and tradition of Malaysia."

Etihad Airways offers five daily flights from Kuwait to Abu Dhabi. It then flies twice daily between Abu Dhabi and Kuala Lumpur, and offers flights to other regions in Malaysia through its codeshare partner Malaysia Airlines.

Etihad Airways began operations in 2003, and in 2014 carried 14.8 million passengers. From its Abu Dhabi base, Etihad Airways flies to or has announced plans to serve 113 passenger and cargo destinations in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas. The airline has a fleet of 120 Airbus and Boeing aircraft, and more than 200 aircraft on firm order, including 66 Boeing 787s, 25 Boeing 777Xs, 62 Airbus A350s and five Airbus A380s.

Etihad Airways holds equity investments in airberlin, Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Alitalia, Jet Airways, Virgin Australia, and Swiss-based Darwin Airline, trading as Etihad Regional. Etihad Airways, along with airberlin, Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Alitalia, Etihad Regional, Jet Airways and NIKI, also participate in Etihad Airways Partners, a new brand that brings together like-minded airlines to offer customers more choice through improved networks and schedules and enhanced frequent flyer benefits.



X-RAY VISION? NEW TECH MAKING IT A REALITY FOR \$300



CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts: In this Nov 19, 2015 photo, MIT researchers Emad Farag (left) and Fadel Adib walk through a room with chairs as a screen displays how RF-Capture is tracking their movements through the wall behind them on the MIT campus. — AP

CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts: X-ray vision, a comic book fantasy for decades, is becoming a reality in a lab at MIT. A group of researchers led by Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Dina Katabi has developed software that uses variations in radio signals to recognize human silhouettes through walls and track their movements. Researchers say the technology will be able to help health care providers and families keep closer tabs on toddlers and the elderly, and it could be a new strategic tool for law enforcement and the military.

"Think of it just like cameras, except that it's not a camera," said Fadel Adib, a researcher on the MIT team developing the device. "It's a sensor that can monitor people and allow you to control devices just by pointing at them," he said. Work began in 2012 to determine how wireless signals could be used to "see" what's happening in another room, said Katabi, who directs the MIT Wireless Center. "At first we were just interested ... can you at all use wireless signals to detect what's happening in occluded

spaces, behind a wall, couch, something like that," Katabi said.

"It turned out that we were able to detect that. And when we figured out we could detect that, we started asking more advanced questions: Could we use it to detect exactly how people are moving in a space if they are behind a wall?" The device displays the signal on a screen, where the person's movements can be tracked in real time. It depicts the target as a red dot moving around the room, occupying a chair and speeding up or slowing down.

The wireless signals used to track a person's motions also can measure the individual's breathing and heart rate - and potentially identify the person based on the shape of his or her skeleton, said researcher Zach Kabelac. "The person won't be wearing anything on them, and the person it's tracking doesn't even need to know the device is there," Kabelac said. "If something unfortunate happens to them, like a fall, the device will contact the caregiver that they chose to alert" by generating a text message or an

email, he added. That makes health care applications especially interesting, Katabi said. But she also sees military and law enforcement possibilities - particularly in hostage situations. "You don't want to send the police inside without knowing where the people are standing or where the hostages are," she said. "If there is someone with a gun, where they are standing?"

A company set up to market the technology, now dubbed Emerald, will spin out of the MIT lab next year, with a goal of marketing the device early in 2017, and it's expected to sell for \$250 to \$300, Adib said. The team is working to make the device smaller and to develop an interface that will let users configure it through a smartphone app, Katabi added. The technology raises questions about privacy rights and intrusion, and Adib said the team gave serious thought to those implications. "The user interface will be friendly for setting it up and using it at home, but it will be very hard to use it to track someone just by pointing it at their wall," he said. —AP

BT HELPS ADS SECURITIES EXTEND OPERATIONS INTO NORTH AMERICA

ABU DHABI: BT today announced that it is making it easier for institutions with a presence in North America to access foreign exchange, metals and commodities markets via the OREX trading platform of leading financial services company, ADS Securities. Abu Dhabi-based ADS Securities is the largest brokerage by volume in the Middle East and one of the fastest growing forex and investment companies globally. The company will use BT Radianz Services to allow its growing international investor client base to access its new trading hub in New York, which opened in October this year.

BT Radianz Services are designed specifically for the global financial markets industry. They include connectivity and hosting services between and within trading venues, as well as the BT Radianz Cloud - the world's largest secure networked financial community consisting of thousands of banks, brokers, investors and application providers. As part of its international growth plans, ADS Securities will leverage a range of Radianz Services and BT's global partnership agreement with Equinix, the world's largest colocation provider, to create a new trading hub in Equinix's Secaucus (New York) data centre campus.

BT will host ADS Securities' OREX trading system - the first proprietary, multi-asset online trading platform to be commissioned and developed from the Middle East - in the Equinix Secaucus campus. In addition to co-location services, BT will also provide hosted infrastructure such as high performance servers and switches, as well as managed connectivity to the platform on ADS Securities' behalf.

Philippe Ghanem, vice chairman & CEO of ADS Securities, said: "New York is recognised as one of the most important financial markets in the world. So extending our trading opportunities to

this major financial district is a natural extension of our firm's strategy to bridge flows from Asia, to Europe and North America."

This new agreement between BT and ADS Securities builds on an existing relationship between the two firms. In 2012, BT was selected by the brokerage firm to host its trading platform in London. The latest contract is another example of BT's 'Cloud of Clouds' vision, which allows large organisations around the world to connect easily and securely to the customers, applications and data they need, independently of where they are hosted. Reflecting the Cloud of Clouds approach, BT will manage third party performance delivery and security on ADS Securities' behalf, all under a single service level agreement.

"With its Cloud of Clouds vision, BT is helping us to make our OREX trading platform accessible to thousands of customers in the BT Radianz Cloud, link-up with third party data centres, and provide connectivity to investors via the internet and headquarters in the United Arab Emirates. We look upon BT as a trusted, reliable and experienced partner that can help us achieve our growth strategies," said Ghanem.

Ashish Gupta, president, global banking & financial markets, BT Global Services said: "BT Radianz hosting and connectivity services are helping ADS Securities to grow its business and expand its global reach. By working with BT, the trading firm can now extend its client base and increase liquidity by leveraging an existing community of customers, both within the Equinix data centre ecosystem and in the BT Radianz Cloud. We are delighted to once again work with ADS Securities, combining talent, technology and tools with sector expertise to help the brokerage firm to realise its international ambitions."

RADIO REBELS: GROUP MAKES TINY TRANSMITTERS FOR SYRIA

DEVICES COVERTLY BROADCASTING IN NINE LOCATIONS

BERLIN: On the top floor of an old brick building in the heart of Berlin, a group of journalists and tech enthusiasts are working to spur the Syrian media revolution. Their weapon is an unassuming black case the size of a shoebox that allows opposition radio stations in Syria to transmit inside hostile territory. Dubbed PocketFM, the device is basically a low-powered radio transmitter. Coupled with a satellite dish to receive new programs, a car battery for power and a one-meter antenna, it can broadcast FM radio within a 5-km radius.

That's enough to cover a town or a city district, said Philipp Hochleichter, who oversees development of the device for the Berlin-based nonprofit organization Media in Cooperation and Transition. The group has been training journalists in conflict zones for more than a decade and often relies on FM radio to reach populations in far-flung areas that don't have access to the Internet or smartphones. But when the group realized that shifting front lines and the brutal treatment of journalists meant operating large broadcast antenna could become too cumbersome or risky, it developed PocketFM.

It's now being used to covertly broadcast in nine locations, including two that are controlled by the Islamic State group, said Hochleichter. Connected to a solar panel, a PocketFM transmitter can theoretically work autonomously for long periods of time. The project, which also includes compiling a daily best-of from nine cooperating radio stations that is beamed down by satellite, is financed by the German Foreign Ministry. It cooperates only with moderate opposition groups who have to abide by a code of conduct.

"Of course it's necessary for us to make sure they don't fall into propaganda scheme, which is very tough in Syria at the moment," said Najat



BERLIN: Philipp Hochleichter of the MICT (Media in Cooperation and Transition) organization talks behind Pocket FM Radio Transmitters on Monday. — AP

Abdulhaq, a Palestinian journalist who manages the project. Listeners might be surprised to find that aside from urgently needed information - which borders are open, what are the prices in the market, how are refugees abroad faring - there's a fair amount of light entertainment. "People have a day-to-day life despite conflict," said Abdulhaq. "Despite the sadness and the war, people like to listen to music and even comedy."

Hochleichter said Monday the group is currently working on its third version of PocketFM, which it hopes to complete by the middle of next year. As with previous versions, the tech-

nology is decidedly low key, with a \$40 Raspberry Pi computer at the heart of the device. "We're not a hardware company that's got \$100,000 to develop new technology," Hochleichter said. The next version will be slightly more powerful and boast a new security feature that allows users to remotely switch off the device by text message to prevent it being traced.

With the war in Syria running for almost five years, the third version is almost certain to see use. "I wish, but I would be very naive if I would believe, that the conflict would be over next year," said Abdulhaq. — AP

'HELLO KITTY' FAN SITE EXPOSED

SINGAPORE: More than three million accounts of Hello Kitty fans were left vulnerable to theft by hackers, but there is no evidence any data has been stolen, the Hong Kong-based company hosting the data said yesterday. A spokesman for Sanrio Digital, part-owned by Sanrio Co Ltd, the Japanese owner of the Hello Kitty brand, said it had fixed the hole after being notified by security researcher Chris Vickery that personal information of its users was accessible.

Vickery told Reuters by e-mail that the company had plugged the holes he had found in three servers. But he said the database had been exposed for nearly a month, meaning that anyone who knew its internet address could have accessed it. "It would have been extremely easy for a bad guy to take the data," he said. "Extremely easy. Almost as easy as downloading a web page."

Sanrio Digital said in a statement that "at this time we have no indication that any personal information was stolen." The spokesman said 3.3 million

accounts had been vulnerable, including the names, ages and gender of fans. He said that the accounts all belonged to users of the SanrioTown.com website, a community for fans of Hello Kitty. No credit card or other payment information was included in the vulnerable data, and passwords "were securely encrypted," according to the statement.

The spokesman said while the company technically doesn't allow minors to sign up, this was implemented through an honour system, meaning that those younger than 13 could register by lying about their age. News of the hole in the Sanrio Digital-hosted site follows last month's breach of another Hong Kong company, electronic toymaker VTech Holdings Ltd. Millions of records of parents and children were compromised.

In that case the hacker who found the vulnerability stole the data but shared some of it with a researcher and was reported as saying he had no plans to sell it. UK police arrested a 21-year old man

last week in connection with the hack. US-based Vickery, who explores security vulnerabilities in his spare time and reports them to the affected companies, said the hole in the Hello Kitty site was the result of a simple misconfiguration of a database, leaving it open to public access without a password or authentication. He said he had found thousands of similar vulnerabilities simply by searching an online database of connected devices.

Sanrio Co is best known for its Hello Kitty character which emblazons items ranging from stationery to clothing. Sanrio Digital is 70 percent owned by Hong Kong games company Typhoon Games Ltd, with the rest held by Sanrio Wave Hong Kong Co, a unit of Sanrio Co. A spokesman for Sanrio in Tokyo said that the Hong Kong website had no connection to a Sanrio shareholder database, which leaked data earlier this year through a security hole in a system managed by a shareholder service company. — Reuters



HANOI: Google CEO Sundar Pichai speaks at a Vietnamese startup community yesterday. — AP

GOOGLE CEO'S VIETNAM VISIT GIVES HOPE TO LOCAL STARTUPS

HANOI: Google CEO Sundar Pichai's visit to Vietnam gives hope to people in the local startup community that they could succeed globally. Speaking to about 200 people in a cafe in central Hanoi on Tuesday, Pichai said he did not see any reason why Vietnam would not be successful globally, given the size of the local market, high Internet usage and the strong entrepreneurial culture. "I think it's just a matter of time, and I think many of you are already working on something like that," he said.

Pichai said Vietnamese startups can learn from the experiences of those in India that started locally, and "once they get the strength they can take it outside." He added Vietnamese startups may not reach a global scale at once, but they can team with entrepreneurs from other countries in the region and "can use that strength to launch something global." Pichai said Vietnam is growing into a big market and the people who serve it will gain the confidence to think bigger, which helps them achieve global success.

Pham Huu Ngon, owner of a local transportation startup using technology, says

Pichai's visit will inspire others. "His visit inspires the startup community and engineers in Vietnam," Ngon said. "Given Vietnam's high Internet and mobile phone usage, we can do good locally and then expand to the countries in the region." Government figures show 52 percent of Vietnam's 93 million people use the Internet and the country has 128 million mobile phone subscribers.

Ngon said Pichai's position as CEO of Google "gives hope to the Vietnamese community that a Vietnamese can lead a major company in the world." Pichai, born in India, was appointed Google CEO in August. Earlier Pichai met with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, the government said. Dung told Pichai that as Vietnam deepens its international integration, the communist government creates favorable conditions for international technology and information corporations including Google to expand business in Vietnam, the government said on its website. It quoted Pichai as saying Google will help train about 1,400 IT engineers in Vietnam to develop the industry and Vietnam's society and economy. — AP

APPLE SLAMS BRITISH PLANS TO EXTEND ONLINE SURVEILLANCE

LONDON: Apple has warned that a British plan to give intelligence agencies extra online surveillance powers could weaken the security of personal data for millions of people and paralyse the tech sector. Britain unveiled proposals for new online powers last month that it said were needed to keep the country safe from criminals, fraudsters and militants, including the right to find out which websites people visit.

Critics however say the Investigatory Powers Bill gives British spies authority beyond those available in other Western countries, including the United States, and that it constitutes an assault on personal freedom. "We believe it is wrong to weaken security for hundreds of millions of law-abiding customers so that it will also be weaker for the very few who pose a threat," the iPhone maker said.

Apple submitted its response to a British parliamentary committee that is scrutinising the new bill in the latest clash between Western governments seeking to monitor the threat from Islamist militants and online companies working to maintain security. Apple said the draft laws could weaken

data encryption, sanction interference with its products, force non-UK companies to break the laws of their home countries, and spark similar legislation in other countries that could paralyse firms under the weight of dozens of contradictory laws.

Lending support to Apple's view, Microsoft also said an international approach would keep people more secure than competing measures from different countries. "The legislation must avoid conflicts with the laws of other nations and contribute to a system where likeminded governments work together, not in competition, to keep people more secure," a spokeswoman said.

Apple said in its submission an attempt to force non-UK companies to take action that violated the laws of their own countries "would immobilize substantial portions of the tech sector and spark international conflicts". The British government, which failed with a previous attempt to increase online surveillance dubbed the "snoopers' charter", has said the proposals will not ban encryption or do anything to undermine the security of people's data.

But Apple said proposals in the new bill would weaken encryption, such as the explicit obligation on service providers to help intercept data and hack suspects' devices. The California-based company, which uses end-to-end encryption on its FaceTime and iMessage services, said the best way to protect against increasingly sophisticated hacking schemes and cyber attacks was by putting into place increasingly stronger - not weaker - encryption. "In this rapidly evolving cyber-threat environment, companies should remain free to implement strong encryption to protect customers," it said.

As well as being able to carry out bulk interception of communications data, the bill would also allow the security services to perform "equipment interference", whereby spies take over computers or smartphones to access their data. In its submission to the draft bill, Apple criticised any such requirement to create "backdoors" that could weaken the protections built into Apple products. "A key left under the doormat would not just be there for the good guys," it said. "The bad guys would find it too." — Reuters



GARENO: Photo shows trees in Garenó, 175 km southeast of Quito, Ecuador. Three Amazonian ethnic groups of Ecuador, Brazil and Peru have changed their practices in defense of the biodiversity on the year of the climate agreement in Paris. (Right) A Waorani indigenous woman eats a cacao fruit next to a friend in Garenó, 175 km southeast of Quito. — AFP photos



AMAZON PEOPLES CHANGE ANCESTRAL WAYS TO SAVE FOREST

GARENO: The indigenous peoples of the Amazon are far removed from the Paris conference rooms where politicians and technocrats in dark suits hashed out a historic deal on curbing climate change to close out the year. But they are taking bold action of a different kind to save the rich biodiversity of the planet's largest rainforest, whose survival is essential to limit global warming.

In Ecuador, one tribe has swapped hunting for growing cocoa. Another in Brazil has started managing its fish stocks. And one in Peru set up an indigenous local government to protect its environment from oil, mining and logging companies. The Waorani barely seem to notice the stifling tropical heat in Garenó, a hamlet of wooden huts in the middle of the Ecuadorian jungle. Every morning, they chant a ritual work song in their native language, Waotodedo, before heading out to their fields for the day. Keen to preserve their environment, in 2010 they gave up hunting, their traditional livelihood, and replaced it with farming

cocoa. The Waorani had noticed the game they hunted was increasingly hard to find. To combat the problem, an indigenous women's group, the Association of Waorani Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon (AMWAE), created a program that gives cocoa trees to local women if their husbands stop hunting.

"They gave up hunting wild animals, and we took up farming without cutting down the forest," said AMWAE president Patricia Nenquihui. Ten indigenous communities are participating in the project - 70 families who farm 25 hectares (60 acres) in the eastern provinces of Pastaza and Napo. The association buys their crop from them for \$1.25 a pound - 45 cents above the market price-and sends it to the capital, Quito, to be made into chocolate.

At first, the men were "upset" over the program, said Nenquihui. But the older generations admitted that hunters had to walk up to one full day through the jungle to hunt the animals they

sold to provide for their families. "We opened our eyes," said Ligia Enomenga, a 26-year-old widow who is raising her six children thanks to the money she earns growing cocoa. "Before, (the men) hunted a lot. Now they have joined the cocoa project and stopped killing animals," she said. "We hunted a lot... Wild pigs, monkeys, toucans. Sometimes we brought out five or six quintals (500 to 600 pounds, 230 to 275 kilograms)," said Moises Enomenga, whose wife now farms cocoa instead.

Saving the pirarucu

In Brazil, home to most of the region's six million square kilometers (2.4 million square miles) of forest, the Paumari people are taking a similar approach to save the pirarucu, an enormous fish that can reach up to 4.5 meters long. Pirarucu fishing was banned when the enormous gray and hot-pink river monsters began to disappear. But after seven years of work with a conservation

group called the Native Amazon Operation (Opan), the Paumari successfully lobbied to legalize sustainable fishing practices.

"It goes far beyond marketing the fish. It's about strengthening community groups, strengthening fish stocks and generating income. Those are the main sources of revenue for this community," said Gustavo Silveira, a coordinator at Opan. "The management and control they have over their territory is a fantastic thing." Under the program, pirarucu that measure less than a meter and a half must be released. Brazilian environmental authorities do a population count every year, and the Paumari are in charge of guarding the area's lakes from poachers.

'Protect our ancestral lands'

Meanwhile, the Wampis nation in Peru has set up its own government in a bid to stop deforestation and the destructive presence of oil and mining companies on its lands. "We're not asking for

independence, simply to protect our ancestral lands and give us title to 1.3 million hectares where more than 100 Wampis communities live," said Wrays Perez Ramirez, the president of the newly formed indigenous government, which is not officially recognized by the Peruvian authorities. "The next generations are going to need natural resources to survive."

In southwestern Colombia, the Inga people are likewise fighting to protect the biodiversity of their lands-threatened, in this case, by the guerrilla war that has wracked the country for the past 50 years. They have won government funding to eradicate more than 22,000 hectares of poppy fields, the raw ingredient for heroin.

The fields were threatening the local ecosystem and fueling violent clashes between armed groups in the region. "The Earth was crying... and asking us to take care of her," said Hernando Chindoy, the governor of the Inga de Aponte indigenous reserve. — AFP

INDONESIA PUNISHES FIRMS OVER DEADLY FOREST FIRES

JAKARTA: Indonesia is punishing more than 20 companies in an unprecedented move for starting deadly forest fires that killed 19 people, a government official said yesterday. Three companies have been shut down permanently after having their licenses revoked over their role in the blazes that choked vast expanses of southeast Asia with acrid haze and cost Indonesia \$16 billion. It is the first time the government has revoked company licenses over forest fires, an annual occurrence caused by slash-and-burn land clearance. The environment ministry also froze the operations of 14 companies and said they face closure if they do not meet the government's demands over fire prevention.

Several other companies have been given a strong warning and will be put under close supervision. "We have sanctioned 23 companies in total, ranging from administrative sanctions to license revocation, while 33 others are still in the process, they could have their licenses revoked too if they are found guilty," environment ministry official Kemal Amas said. The ministry has

been investigating 276 companies in total since the fires broke out in September. "We need firmer law enforcement so that this catastrophe does not repeat itself, it's been going on for 18 years but nobody has learnt their lesson," Amas said. Amas said the ministry was also working hard to restore the forests and farmland destroyed in the fires.

Activists welcomed the government's new commitment to punish firms. The Indonesian Forum for Environment said it was unheard of for the government to revoke licences, as many companies previously avoided facing trial. "The minister has the courage to not only freeze the companies' operation but also chase the owners in a civil case, this is great and this must be guarded carefully," Kurniawan said. "In the past some people were named suspects, but for them to actually lose their licenses, this is the first time," he said. More than half a million people suffered acute respiratory infections in Indonesia because of the haze, while many in neighboring Singapore and Malaysia also fell ill. — AFP



Photo shows an aerial view of the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of the Whitsunday Islands, along the central coast of Queensland. — AFP

AUSTRALIA APPROVES COAL PORT EXPANSION NEAR BARRIER REEF

CARMICHAEL PROJECT ATTRACTS FIERCE CRITICISM

SYDNEY: Australia yesterday approved a controversial port expansion to support mining projects and the dredging of 1.1 million cubic meters of spoil despite fears it threatens the Great Barrier Reef. The decision, creating a huge port capable of handling up to 120 million tons of coal per annum, comes two months after the government green-lighted an Indian-backed plan to build one of the world's biggest mines in the same area of Queensland state.

The Aus\$16.5 billion (US\$12.1 billion) Carmichael project by Adani Enterprises in the Galilee Basin, home to vast coal reserves, has attracted fierce criticism, requiring the fossil fuel to be shipped through the deepwater Abbot Point Coal Terminal which is currently at capacity. Environmentalists have argued that any expansion at Abbot Point risked the World Heritage-listed reef's health and would destroy local habitats. "The Queensland state Labor government's Abbot Point Growth Gateway project has been approved in accordance with national environment law subject to 30 strict conditions," a spokeswoman for Environment Minister Greg Hunt said.

Earlier plans were for at least three million cubic meters of material to be dredged and dumped into waters around the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, but this was later abandoned after an outcry. The approval now permits 1.1 million cubic meters to be dredged, allowing more freighters to dock at Abbot Point, near the town of Bowen, but spoil must be disposed of on existing industrial land. "No dredge material will be placed in the World Heritage Area or the Caley Valley Wetlands," said Hunt's spokeswoman. "The port area is at least 20 kilometers from any coral reef and no coral reef will be impacted."

The decision comes barely a week after 195 nations, including Australia, agreed in Paris to try and limit global warming to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-industrial levels. Hunt said he was comfortable that good-quality Australian coal would feed Indian electricity consumption.

"If they didn't have Australian participation... they would be using lower quality fuel," he told ABC radio. "So lower quality fuel and lower effi-

ciency (power) stations-so the net global impact of not using Australian fuels would be for emissions to go up, not down."

'Illogical, irresponsible'

Adani, which has previously accused environmental activists of exploiting legal loopholes to stall its massive open-cut and underground mine which is forecast to produce 60 million tons of thermal coal a year for export, welcomed the decision. "The expansion of Abbot Point, the lifeblood of Bowen, is key to Adani's plans to deliver 10,000 direct and indirect jobs and Aus\$22 billion in taxes and royalties to Queensland," it said in a statement. Critics argue that plunging coal prices make the development financially unviable, while major European and

US banks have refused funding due to environmental concerns. Greenpeace said the Abbot Point go-ahead was "irresponsible for the reef, illogical and unnecessary."

"Adani hasn't got the Aus\$16 billion, no-one's lending it to them, and coal prices are tanking. Even the International Energy Agency is questioning the project," said Greenpeace reef campaigner Shani Tager. WWF-Australia said the waters around Abbot Point were home to dugongs, sea turtles and snubfin dolphins while the dredge spoil would be dumped on land adjacent to wetlands used by migratory birds. "It's disappointing that the minister has approved this project within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, despite the damage it will do," spokeswoman Louise Matthiesson said. — AFP

SNAKES ALIVE! MISSING SPECIES FOUND OFF AUSTRALIAN COAST

SYDNEY: Australian scientists yesterday hailed the discovery of two sea snake species feared to have become extinct years ago off the Western Australia coast. The short-nose sea snake and the leaf-scaled sea snake had not been seen since disappearing from their only known habitat on Ashmore Reef in the Timor Sea more than 15 years ago, James Cook University researchers wrote in the Biological Conservation journal.

But they have since been "spotted alive and healthy" at Ningaloo Reef (short-nose sea snake) and Shark Bay (leaf-scaled sea snake), thousands of kilometers south. "This discovery is really exciting, we get another chance to protect these two endemic Western Australian sea snake species," the study's lead author Blanche D'Anastasi said

in a statement about the two species, listed by Australian authorities as critically endangered. "But in order to succeed in protecting them, we will need to monitor populations as well as undertake research into understanding their biology and the threats they face." The university said the short-nose sea snake was identified after a wildlife officer sent a photo of two of them to D'Anastasi in April 2013.

"What is even more exciting is that they were courting, suggesting that they are members of a breeding population," D'Anastasi added. The scientists said it was a "real surprise" when they also discovered a "new and significant" population of the leaf-scaled sea snake in the seagrass beds of Shark Bay. —AFP

AMID SMOG CRISIS, CHINA VOWS MORE LIVABLE CITIES

BEIJING: China vowed yesterday that it would make "livable" cities a central goal of China's urban planning, amid persistent problems over choking smog that frequently blankets the populous east and north. Under a plan released after what leaders dubbed the Central Urban Work Conference and overseen by President Xi Jinping, urban development should be focused on "creating environments where people can live in harmony with each other and nature."

"The government will take a more sophisticated approach to its urban planning and encourage enterprises and citizens to participate in creating the cities of the future," according to a statement released by the official Xinhua news agency.

Nature and tradition should be respected in city planning and a low-carbon concept prioritized, the report added. "Urban construction should take nature as beauty," it said. Green belts and bodies of water should be established around cities and sprawl controlled, Xinhua added.

China has vowed repeatedly over the years to tackle pollution and yet none of its plans have had a lasting effect. Capital city Beijing has already issued two "red alerts" for smog this winter, which see cars taken off roads and schools and factories closed. A red alert is triggered when the government believes air quality will surpass a level of 200 on an index that measures various pollutants for at least three days. —Reuters



BEIJING: Pedestrians wear masks on a heavily polluted day in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

NY LAYS OUT TRANSGENDER PROTECTION ON DRESS CODES AND BATHROOM USE

NEW YORK: New York City has warned landlords, employers and businesses they could be running afoul of the law by purposely calling a transgender woman "him" or "Mr" when she prefers a female title and pronoun, or by barring her from using a women's restroom. New guidelines detail the legal protections of transgender and gender-nonconforming New Yorkers and what constitutes discrimination under the city's Human Rights Law, the New York City Commission on Human Rights said on Monday. Some 25,000 transgender and gender non-conforming people live in New York City, where discrimination based on gender identity and expression has been illegal since 2002.

"Today's new guidelines strengthen those laws by ensuring that every transgender and gender non-conforming person in New York receives the dignity and respect they deserve," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

The guidelines said dress codes requiring men to wear ties or women to wear skirts are discriminatory. Failing to provide employee health benefits for gender-affirming care or failing to accommodate people undergoing gender transition, such as medical appointments, could violate the law as well, they said. "It's a huge step forward and really catapults New York City to the forefront of the struggle

for transgender rights," said Michael Silverman, executive director of the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, a non-profit law office based in New York.

"This is an extremely positive development for transgender New Yorkers who face enormous rates of discrimination, unemployment and difficulty accessing things like health care that people take for granted." Three-quarters of transgender New Yorkers have reported harassment and mistreatment in the workplace, and more than half said they had been verbally harassed or disrespected in public, according to a survey cited by the Commission on Human Rights.

One in five said they had been refused a home because of their gender identity, the 2011 survey said. New York City provides stronger protections than most local laws in the United States and goes beyond federal law as well, said Silverman and other advocates. "By issuing some of the strongest and most comprehensive legal guidance in the country, New York City has taken a major step toward ensuring that transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers can enjoy dignity, respect and access to opportunity in our city," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. — Reuters



MOBERLY: Mike McKeown sits in his kitchen during an interview in Moberly, Mo. McKeown is opposed to a proposed high-voltage line that would carry renewable energy across the farm where his family has raised soybeans and corn for nearly 70 years. (Right) Power lines cross farm land belonging to Wayne Wilcox in Moberly, Mo. — AP photos

RENEWABLE ENERGY EFFORTS STYMIED BY TRANSMISSION ROADBLOCKS

MISSOURI REGULATORS BLOCK GRAIN BELT EXPRESS POWER LINE

MOBERLY: Mike McKeown opens the back door of his Missouri farm house and is met with a chilly gust. "Stupid wind," he mutters. Today, the winds that blow through his corn and soybean farm have become more than just an irritant. The homestead in northern Missouri, which his family has owned for nearly 70 years, sits smack in the path of a proposed high-voltage line that would carry renewable energy from the wind-whipped plains of western Kansas to power-thirsty cities farther east. And McKeown doesn't like that.

Due partly to the intense opposition from local property owners, Missouri regulators have blocked the 780-mile-long Grain Belt Express power line from being built. In doing so, they have highlighted one of the toughest challenges facing the nation as it tries to shift toward a greater reliance on renewable energy. Converting the wind and sun into electricity is increasingly affordable, but it can be difficult to get that electricity from distant plains and deserts to the places where it's needed. The reasons range from technical to regulatory.

"Transmission is the biggest long-term barrier for wind energy development," said Rob Gramlich, senior vice president of government and public affairs for the American Wind Energy Association. "That's because the best wind resources are often in remote areas on farms and ranches that are far from population centers." To get the power from one point to another means crossing not only through hundreds of farm fields and backyards but also through multiple states with different regulatory requirements. Public lands that are subject to numerous environmental restrictions offer yet another obstacle.

Further complicating the transmission puzzle: The nation's electric grid was designed primarily to serve particular states and regions, not necessarily to move electricity from one part of the US to an entirely different area. There also are technical challenges. To ensure a steady supply of electricity, there often must be some way to store excess energy generated from strong winds and prolonged sunshine and to supplement the downtimes with other sources such as gas-fired generators. While wind power is the fastest-growing source of new energy in the US, it still accounted for just 4.4 percent of the nation's electricity in 2014, according to the US Energy Information Administration. Solar power contributed just 0.4 percent.

President Barack Obama's administration has encouraged the development of more wind and solar energy while imposing stricter limits on pollution from coal-fired power plants, part of his strategy to reduce the amount of heat-trapping carbon in the atmosphere. An international climate agreement announced earlier this month calls for nearly 200 countries to collectively slash carbon emissions in the decades ahead to slow the pace of global warming.

States also have been pressing utilities to generate power from cleaner sources. California is among 29 states that have adopted renewable energy requirements. In the nation's most populous state, with the world's eighth-largest economy, utilities must get half their energy from renewable sources by 2030. Vermont has set a 75 percent renewable energy standard by 2032. Yet government regulations also have impeded the development of large-scale renewable energy projects.

Delays and denials

Clean Line Energy Partners, the Houston-based firm behind the Grain Belt Express, had a route rejected in Arkansas. Twice, Iowa denied its requests to decide upfront - before it begins acquiring easements - whether a proposed line leading to the outskirts of Chicago is in the public interest. Other transmission lines for renewable energy also have experienced delays and denials: Arizona utility regulators rejected a request by Southern California Edison in 2007 to build a 270-mile line carrying power from a site west of Phoenix to Palm Springs, California. Utility company officials said it could have prompted development of new solar power in the desert, but Arizona regulators cited concerns that California's increased power draw could have led to higher rates for Arizonans.

In January, after a more than six-year review, the US Bureau of Land Management approved a right of way across federal land for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, a 515-mile line carrying wind power and solar power from central New Mexico to Arizona. But New Mexico's land commissioner has since slowed down the review for another permit needed for the \$2 billion project. SunZia also has a permit request pending in Arizona. Eight years after filing a right of way application with the Bureau of Land Management, organizers of the TransWest Express power line still are awaiting a decision on a 730-mile route that would carry electricity to the southwestern US from a proposed 1,000-turbine wind farm in Wyoming.

TransWest Express president and chief executive Bill Miller originally hoped construction would begin in 2012. That goal already had been pushed back when the Obama administration in

October 2011 picked the project as one of seven electrical lines nationally for review under a new "Rapid Response Team for Transmission." But the federal approval process has been far from rapid. "It's glacial in its pace," Miller said. Lucas Lucero, the acting chief of the renewable energy office in the Bureau of Land Management, said federal officials have "been making steady progress" and could decide on the TransWest Express in early 2016. But he acknowledged such projects "definitely take time" to review and "have a number of challenges." Chief among them is coordinating efforts among dozens of federal, state, county and tribal entities that have a stake in the power lines. Federal officials also have analyzed numerous alternate routes - considering the potential effect on wildlife habitat, culturally significant areas and the concerns of private landowners. The nation's renewable energy goals potentially could be achieved more quickly if a single federal agency were given jurisdiction over interstate transmission lines. But Lucero said it's important that local officials have a say. Many state laws were drafted to ensure consumers get the best possible service and rates from local electric monopolies. As Clean Line discovered, it can be difficult to prove the benefit for local residents of a commercial line carrying power primarily to other places.

'Public utility'

The Arkansas Public Service Commission ruled in 2011 that Clean Line didn't qualify as a "public utility" under state law and thus could not build its Plains & Eastern transmission line carrying wind power from the Oklahoma Panhandle to Tennessee to be fed to the southeastern US. Clean Line hasn't given up. It's now seeking approval for its Arkansas route from the US Department of

Energy, which has authority to approve new transmission lines in certain states where it already sells hydroelectric power from federally run dams. Arkansas' two US senators are fighting back by holding up the confirmation of an Obama appointee to the Energy Department.

While rejecting Clean Line's Grain Belt Express earlier this year, the Missouri Public Service Commission looked primarily at whether the power line would benefit its home state, rather than the nation as a whole. The line would end near the Illinois-Indiana border, connecting to an existing grid extending all the way to the East Coast. Although Clean Line pledged to make a portion of its power available to Missouri, state regulators determined it was not needed to meet local demand nor the state's renewable energy requirements. Regulators also cited the burden on Missouri landowners, noting that most of the 7,200 comments it received were opposed to the project.

Now Clean Line is regrouping for another try in Missouri. The project has placed McKeown in opposition to his friend and neighbor Wayne Wilcox, a county official who views power lines crossing his cornfields as important to both the local and national economy. "We sit at a critical place," Wilcox said, pointing out that the Clean Line poles would cross his property near an existing transmission line from a coal-fired power plant, two oil pipelines and a natural gas pipeline. But McKeown hasn't been persuaded by the six-figure contract he could sign with Clean Line, nor the potential benefit to residents several states to the east. "I think (wind energy) is fine," he said. But "it doesn't make sense to me to have to transport it halfway across the United States. We're smarter than that." — AP

FAKE MEDICINE WORTH \$7M SEIZED ACROSS ASIA

LYON: Interpol seized counterfeit drugs worth \$7 million in September in an operation encompassing 13 Asian countries, the international police organization said Monday. Medication including antibiotics, anti-hypertension pills and even rabies vaccines were taken from hundreds of pharmacies and markets, including dozens of online pharmacies, as Interpol attempts to curb the widespread sale of fake drugs being produced in the region. Interpol said in a statement they had arrested 87 individuals in the course of the crackdown, which "brought together law enforcement and drug regulatory agencies to target the organized criminal networks behind pharmaceutical crime in Asia".

"Operation Storm VI demonstrated the sophistication and determination of criminal groups engaged in pharmaceutical crime, creating dangers to public health and the safety of the population," said Aline Plancon, Head of Interpol's Global Health and Safety unit.

Participating countries included Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The World Health Organization has said the traffic of fake medication mostly affects Asia, Latin America and especially Africa, where "systems of pharmaceutical regulation and of checks on their application are the weakest". — AFP

THE INDIGENOUS BOLIVIAN WOMEN SCALE MOUNTAINS OUTSIDE LA PAZ

LA PAZ: At first glance, the indigenous Bolivian women don't look much like mountain climbers, with their colorful, multilayered skirts and fringed shawls. But their helmets, polarized goggles and crampons attached to their shoes give them away as mountaineers who accompany their husbands, often as cooks and porters, as they guide tourists scaling the local peaks. Eleven of these Aymara women, ranging in age from 20 to 50 years old, earlier this month made the two-day climb up the 19,974-foot (6,099-meter) high Huayna Potosi, located near La Paz, with Lake Titicaca to the back and surrounded by snowy Andean peaks. They started their climbing careers working for tourist agencies, carrying food and other equipment for the foreign mountaineers to the

base camp, located at 1,116 feet (5,130 meters).

"First, I was a porter, then a cook," said 41-year-old Domitila Alana Llusco. "But the tourists asked me what it was like up on Huayna Potosi and I had to climb up so I could find out and tell them." Alana said she had a hard time finding appropriate gear she could afford when she started 15 years ago. "My feet are small, there are no boots," she said.

"But nothing stopped me and I have reached the peak of three mountains." Though they cling to their traditional clothing, these mountaineers aren't typical indigenous women. "Women also have the right to climb mountains," said Adrian Quispe, one of the mountain guides. "It's not just men who are allowed. Women of all ages can go."

And the money is good. While the minimum wage for a housekeeper is around \$175 a month, guides can earn \$35 a day and the female cooks about \$20 a day. As they climb, the women wear thermal sweat suits under their traditional clothing. Only in the last part of the climb up to the top do the women remove their skirts, to prevent accidents.

They start the last piece of their ascent after midnight to take advantage of the hardness of the snow, hoping to reach the top by dawn. Some of the youngest in the group now dream of climbing even higher someday, to the top of Aconagua, which at 22,834 feet (6,960 meters) is not only the highest peak in the Andes, but also the highest mountain outside Asia. — AP

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Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM



Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368



GUST SIGNS MOU WITH KUWAIT FLIGHT ACADEMY

Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) and Kuwait Flight Academy (KFA) signed a memorandum of understanding today to launch Kuwait's first ever Private Pilot Ground Training (PPL) at GUST. The program will include several aviation courses, available to the public, at all levels of experience and will grant the trainees who meet all requirements with accredited graduation certificates.

Kuwait Flight Academy, founded in 2014 as a subsidiary of Kuwait Aerospace Technologies, to offer a myriad of different aviation courses; including the Private Pilot Training, FAA Commercial Pilot Training, FAA Airline Transport Pilot Certificates, and FAA Flight Instructor Training. Almost all ground courses and simulator trainings are held in Kuwait, while final flying courses and certifications are held in the United States. GUST will be hosting all the local training programs on its campus.

Sheikh Nasser Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Founder and CEO, said, "We are proud to collaborate with a world-class university such as GUST to maintain the high standards and quality of these courses. Our instructors are highly trained and certified experts in the art and disciplines of flying and

training. We are also proud to invest in high-tech simulators, which will be housed under the roof of this great university." KFA instructors provide participants with the tools needed to successfully complete each level of training required for any certification levels. Specialized training can also be tailored to each person's individual requirements and goals.

Dr Salah Al-Sharhan, GUST Vice President for Academic Affairs and A. Vice President for Planning and Development, said, "As a university, we pride ourselves in not only ensuring the best quality education for our students, but also working together with esteemed institutions such as KFA, to provide unique educational and training opportunities to our community in order to help them develop, and fulfill their goals."

GUST Professional Advancement and Continuing Education Center (PACE) provides over 25 different programs, open to the public, and covers different career segments, including: CFA, CMA, CPA, Project Management Professional, IELTS and GMAT exam preparation courses, General English courses, Healthcare Quality Management program, Microsoft Official Courses, and many more.



YATHRA KUWAIT TO CELEBRATE FIRST ANNIVERSARY ON DECEMBER 31

By Sajeev K Peter

Yathra Kuwait, Kerala Taxi Drivers' Welfare Organization in Kuwait is all set to celebrate its first anniversary with a spectacular event titled 'Shifa Al-Jazeera Yathrotsavam' on December 31 from 4pm onwards at the American International School auditorium, Maidan Hawally. Indian Ambassador Sunil Jain will inaugurate the event in which a mega cultural show will be presented.

The highlight of the cultural program will be a mimicry-orchestra-cum-comedy show led by popular theatre personality from India Kottayam Nazir and playback singer Samad. In addition, S K Event Kuwait will also present a colorful show before the audience. Yathra Kuwait is an Indian embassy-registered association with nearly 600 taxi drivers from Kerala as its members.

Announcing the anniversary celebration at a press conference, Yathra Kuwait office-bearers said the organization, during the last two years of its activities, was able to do several humanitarian and charitable services to its members who were in dire need. Yathra Kuwait provided financial aid to the relatives of the members who lost their lives in tragic circumstances and helped members who needed medical assistance after they sustained major accidents.



During the anniversary celebration, Yathra Kuwait will present Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Awards to the children of its members who score the highest percentage of marks in 10th and 12th standards. The children who achieve first, second and third positions will be given INR 10001, INR 5001 and INR2501 respectively in addition to trophies and memorial shields. Yathra Kuwait will also award

Yathra Football Tournament winners and recognize the teams for their excellence in sports.

Yathra Kuwait President Anil Anadu, General Secretary Nissar Punalur, Program Convenor Nissar Ahmad, Treasurer Manoj Mattathil, Vice president Sreekant Sreelam and Secretary Anil Alex were present during the press conference.



X-CITE ANNOUNCES FOURTH WEEK WINNERS IN 'WIN MORE THAN \$500,000 CASH' PROMOTION

X-cite by Alghanim Electronics is pleased to announce the names of the fourth week's winners of the biggest shopping festival in Kuwait, which offers customers the opportunity to win more than \$500,000 Cash in 5 weekly draws with a weekly grand prize of KD 25,000. This one-of-a-kind promotion was launched on November 19th and will last until December 26th.

- The fourth week's winners are:**
 1st place winner of KD 25,000: Sheikh Imam
 2nd place winner of KD 5,000: Sameet Khan
 3rd place winner of KD 2,500: Rauf Abbas
 4th place winner of KD 1,000: Levy Gorospe
 5th place winner of KD 1,000: Thaar Thlaab Al-Mutairi
 6th place winner of KD 500: Laila Hussein Al-Kandari
 7th place winner of KD 500: Ghassan Qamheih

You too can be a lucky winner with X-cite! There will be one last draw on Sunday 27th of December, so hurry up and buy until Saturday the 26th of December to be one of the last 7 weekly winners. In order to participate and get the chance to win any of the remaining cash prizes, all you need to do is visit any of X-cite's 18 showrooms spread across the country, www.xcite.com, or X-cite's smartphone app, and for every KD 25 you will get one chance to win great cash prizes.

The weekly draws are open to the public and take place at Al-Rai showroom in Safat Alghanim at 11 am supervised by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce. The name of the winners are announced on www.xcite.com/whatsyouexcuse, their social media channels: (Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat @xcitealghanim) (Facebook: #xcitealghanim) or via the hashtag, #WhatsYourExcuse.



MAVELIKARA ASSOCIATION KUWAIT MEETS

Mavelikara Association Kuwait, Annual General Body meeting was conducted on 18th December 2015 at Empire Auditorium in Abbasiya. The New General body comprised of Binoy Chandran. R (President) Philip C.V Thomas (Vice President), Biju Kandiyoor (General Secretary), Mathew Chennithala (Jt.

Secretary), Pramod Chellapan (Treasurer), Jyothish Krishnan Kutty (Jt. Treasurer) and Subal (Auditor). Advisory Board member P.S Ullas Kumar conducted the election Procedure. The association from the capital of Central Travancore will give priority to Welfare, Arts, Social and Cultural activities says newly elected president Binoy Chandran.

SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY CLOSURE

On the occasion of the Prophet's Birthday, the South African Embassy will be closed on Thursday, 24 December 2015. The Embassy will resume its normal working hours on Sunday, 27 December 2015, from Sunday to Thursday. Please note that the working hours will be from 8:00 to 16:00 and the Consular Section operation hours will be from 8:30 to 12:30. For Emergency calls please contact: 94924895.

WHAT'S ON - SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All photos submitted for What's On should be minimum 200dpi. Articles must be in plain text and should include name and phone numbers. Articles and photos that fail to meet these requirements will not be published.

Please send them to news@kuwaittimes.net



IDAK'S GENERAL MEETING, CDE

Indian Dentist Alliance Kuwait (IDAK-affiliated to Kuwait Dental Association) held the Annual General Meeting at the Symphony Hotel Kuwait. The event marked the end of a successful tenure by the 2014-2015 IDAK council. The outgoing president Dr Roy Francis thanked all members for their support. He welcomed the

new president, Dr Jitendra Ariga and his team and wished them all success for the 2 year term.

The AGM was followed by a CDE programme organized by IDAK scientific committee. The topic for the event was "A stitch in time saves nine": Management of anomalies in the developing occlusion - A pediatric and ortho-

dontic perspective, which was presented by Dr Nino John and Dr Sreekrishnan Nair. IDAK was honored to have Dr Sami Al Mane President - Kuwait Dental Association as the chief guest for the event. The event was sponsored by Sandoz-Novartis. Dr Marwa Ahmad and Dr Mohammed Yacoub represented the sponsors for the event.



Ambassador of Canada Martine Moreau



CBC President Ishtiaq Malik

CANADIAN EMBASSY, BUSINESS COUNCIL CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS



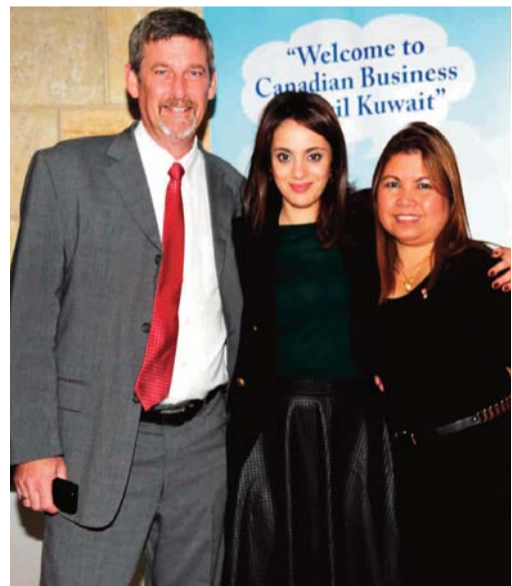
Embassy of Canada and Canadian Business Council (CBC) celebrated Christmas at the official residence of the Ambassador of Canada on December 15.

Addressing the gathering, Canadian Ambassador Martine Moreau offered thanks and gratitude to fellow local business community members for joining this evening, offered appreciation for the role played by the CBC in promoting trade relations between Kuwait and Canada.

Ishtiaq Malik, President of the CBC, welcomed the gathering and thanked Canadians, Kuwaitis and others for attending this event. CBC President also thanked the Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait, Her Excellency Martine Moreau for hosting this event and for the support and cooperation extended by the Canadian Embassy to CBC.

Malik thanked CBC board members Dr Christian Awaraji, Basil Toutoungi, Dr David McHardy, Dr Andrew Gillam, Nadia Hammouda, and Dr Jacinthe Lemay for keeping Canadian Business Council connected and active in Kuwait.

Special thanks were extended to Tammy Ames, Counsellor (Commercial) at the Embassy of Canada for her support to CBC. The attendees discussed business matters of their mutual interest and enjoyed the evening.



The higher committee for Kuwait's carnival hosted a meeting and dinner for small and medium enterprises' owners to introduce them to the festival's activities which takes place between December 22, 2015 and March 19, 2016.

Discovery Channel HD

00:20 Fast N' Loud
01:10 Dual Survival
02:50 River Monsters
03:40 Auction Hunters
04:05 Property Wars
04:30 Storage Wars Canada
05:00 How It's Made
06:00 Ice Cold Gold
06:50 Kindig Customs
07:40 Fast N' Loud
08:30 Auction Hunters
08:55 Property Wars
09:20 Storage Wars Canada
09:45 Americana
10:10 How It's Made
10:35 Auction Hunters
11:00 Man vs Expert
15:10 So You Think You'd Survive?
19:20 Sean Conway - Running Britain
20:10 Property Wars
20:35 Storage Wars Canada
21:00 Mythbusters
21:50 The Carbonaro Effect
22:40 You Have Been Warned
23:30 Kindig Customs

Disney Junior

00:05 Henry Hugglemonster
00:20 Calimero
00:35 Zou
00:50 Loopidoo
01:05 Art Attack
01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
01:45 Calimero
02:00 Zou
02:15 Loopidoo
02:30 Art Attack
02:55 Henry Hugglemonster
03:05 Calimero
03:20 Zou
03:30 Loopidoo
03:45 Art Attack
04:10 Henry Hugglemonster
04:20 Calimero
04:35 Zou
04:45 Loopidoo
05:00 Art Attack
05:25 Henry Hugglemonster
05:35 Calimero
05:50 Zou
06:00 Loopidoo
06:15 Art Attack
06:35 Henry Hugglemonster
06:50 Calimero
07:00 Zou
07:20 Loopidoo
07:35 Art Attack
08:00 Calimero
08:10 Zou
08:25 Loopidoo
08:40 Henry Hugglemonster
08:55 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
09:20 Sofia The First
09:45 Miles From Tomorrow
10:10 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
10:35 Doc McStuffins
11:00 Sofia The First
11:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
11:55 Miles From Tomorrow
12:20 Henry Hugglemonster
12:45 Limon And Oli
12:55 Loopidoo
13:10 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
13:35 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
14:00 Sofia The First
14:50 Miles From Tomorrow
15:15 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
16:05 The Adventures Of Disney Fairies
16:35 Miles From Tomorrow
17:00 Sofia The First
17:25 Aladdin
17:50 Adventures Of The Gummi Bears
18:15 Chip n Dale Rescue Rangers
18:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
19:05 Miles From Tomorrow
19:30 Sofia The First
19:55 Doc McStuffins
20:15 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
20:45 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
21:05 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
21:35 Sofia The First
22:00 The Adventures Of Disney Fairies
22:25 The Adventures Of Disney Fairies

itv HD CHOICE

00:10 Come Date With Me Australia
00:35 Come Date With Me Australia
01:05 Seven Days With A Friend
02:00 Emmerdale
02:25 Coach Trip
02:55 Coronation Street
03:25 Midsomer Murders Christmas Special
05:15 Come Date With Me Australia
05:40 Come Date With Me Australia
06:10 Seven Days With A Friend
07:05 Coronation Street
07:30 Midsomer Murders Christmas Special
09:20 Peter Andre's 60 Minute Makeover
10:10 Seven Days With A Friend
11:05 Coach Trip
11:35 Four Weddings UK
12:30 Come Date With Me Australia
12:55 Come Date With Me Australia
13:25 Emmerdale
13:50 Coach Trip
14:20 Coronation Street
14:45 Peter Andre's 60 Minute Makeover
15:35 The Jonathan Ross Show
16:30 The Syndicate
17:25 Seven Days With A Friend
18:20 Come Date With Me Australia
18:45 Come Date With Me Australia
19:10 Coronation Street
19:35 The Jonathan Ross Show
20:30 The Syndicate
21:25 Seven Days With A Friend
22:20 Coronation Street
22:50 Emmerdale
23:15 Four Weddings UK

NAT GEO WILD HD

00:20 Africa's Creative Killers
01:10 Man V. Monster
02:00 Ultimate Animal Countdown
02:50 World's Deadliest Animals
03:45 Animal Fight Club
04:40 72 Dangerous Animals Australia
05:35 Ultimate Animal Countdown
06:30 World's Deadliest Animals
07:25 Animal Fight Club
08:20 How Big Can It Get
09:15 Built For The Kill
10:10 World's Deadliest Animals
11:05 72 Dangerous Animals Australia
12:00 Manta Mystery
12:55 Built For The Kill
13:50 World's Deadliest Animals
14:45 Animal Fight Club
15:40 Croc Labyrinth
16:35 Built For The Kill
17:30 World's Deadliest Animals
18:25 72 Dangerous Animals Australia
19:20 Animal Fight Club
20:10 Croc Labyrinth
21:00 Built For The Kill
21:50 World's Deadliest Animals
22:40 72 Dangerous Animals Australia

Discovery Science

00:35 Mythbusters
01:20 How It's Made
02:08 Food Factory
02:55 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
03:42 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
04:29 Mythbusters
05:16 Food Factory
06:03 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
06:50 X-Machines
07:37 How It's Made
08:23 Mythbusters
09:08 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
09:53 X-Machines
10:38 How It's Made
11:23 How Do They Do It?
12:08 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
12:53 X-Machines
13:38 Mythbusters
14:23 How It's Made
15:10 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
15:57 How Do They Do It?
16:44 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
17:31 X-Machines
18:18 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
19:05 Mythbusters
19:50 Strip The Cosmos
20:40 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
21:25 How It's Made
22:15 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
23:00 Strip The Cosmos
23:45 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Disney Channel

00:00 Violetta
00:45 The Hive
00:50 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:40 Wolfblood
02:30 Violetta
03:15 The Hive
03:20 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:10 Wolfblood
05:00 Violetta
05:45 The Hive
05:50 Mouk
06:00 Lollipop
06:25 Hank Zipzer
06:50 Girl Meets World
07:15 H2O: Just Add Water
08:05 Austin & Ally
08:30 Austin & Ally
08:55 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
09:45 Jessie
10:10 Jessie
11:25 The Naughty List
12:20 Hank Zipzer
12:45 Didn't Do It
13:10 Didn't Do It
13:35 Liv And Maddie
14:00 Liv And Maddie
14:30 H2O: Just Add Water
14:55 H2O: Just Add Water
15:20 Didn't Do It
15:45 Mako Mermaids
16:10 Jessie
16:35 Austin & Ally
17:00 Bad Hair Day
18:40 Gravity Falls
19:05 H2O: Just Add Water
19:30 H2O: Just Add Water
19:55 Liv And Maddie
20:20 Liv And Maddie
20:45 Good Luck Charlie
21:10 Good Luck Charlie
21:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
22:00 Binny And The Ghost
22:25 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
22:50 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:10 Wolfblood
23:35 Wolfblood

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL HD

00:10 The Border
01:00 Air Crash Investigation
02:00 Wicked Tuna: North vs. South
02:20 Giuliana & Bill
03:15 Christina Milian Turned Up
04:10 E! Entertainment Special
05:05 E! Entertainment Special
06:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
06:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
07:50 Style Star
08:20 New Money
09:15 Giuliana & Bill
10:15 Giuliana & Bill
11:10 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
11:35 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
12:05 The Grace Helbig Show
12:35 The Grace Helbig Show
13:05 House Of DVF
14:05 House Of DVF
15:00 House Of DVF
16:00 House Of DVF
17:00 House Of DVF
18:00 E! News
19:00 House Of DVF
20:00 House Of DVF
21:00 House Of DVF
22:00 E! News

OSN FIRST HD COMEDY

00:30 Hot In Cleveland
01:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
03:30 2 Broke Girls
04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
06:30 My Name Is Earl
07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
10:30 My Name Is Earl
11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
12:30 \$#! My Dad Says
13:00 Suburgatory
13:30 My Name Is Earl
14:00 2 Broke Girls
15:30 Hot In Cleveland
16:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
18:00 Mary Me
20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
21:00 Hot In Cleveland
21:30 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
22:00 The League

Disney Channel

00:00 Violetta
00:45 The Hive
00:50 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:40 Wolfblood
02:30 Violetta
03:15 The Hive
03:20 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:10 Wolfblood
05:00 Violetta
05:45 The Hive
05:50 Mouk
06:00 Lollipop
06:25 Hank Zipzer
06:50 Girl Meets World
07:15 H2O: Just Add Water
08:05 Austin & Ally
08:30 Austin & Ally
08:55 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
09:45 Jessie
10:10 Jessie
11:25 The Naughty List
12:20 Hank Zipzer
12:45 Didn't Do It
13:10 Didn't Do It
13:35 Liv And Maddie
14:00 Liv And Maddie
14:30 H2O: Just Add Water
14:55 H2O: Just Add Water
15:20 Didn't Do It
15:45 Mako Mermaids
16:10 Jessie
16:35 Austin & Ally
17:00 Bad Hair Day
18:40 Gravity Falls
19:05 H2O: Just Add Water
19:30 H2O: Just Add Water
19:55 Liv And Maddie
20:20 Liv And Maddie
20:45 Good Luck Charlie
21:10 Good Luck Charlie
21:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
22:00 Binny And The Ghost
22:25 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
22:50 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:10 Wolfblood
23:35 Wolfblood

food network

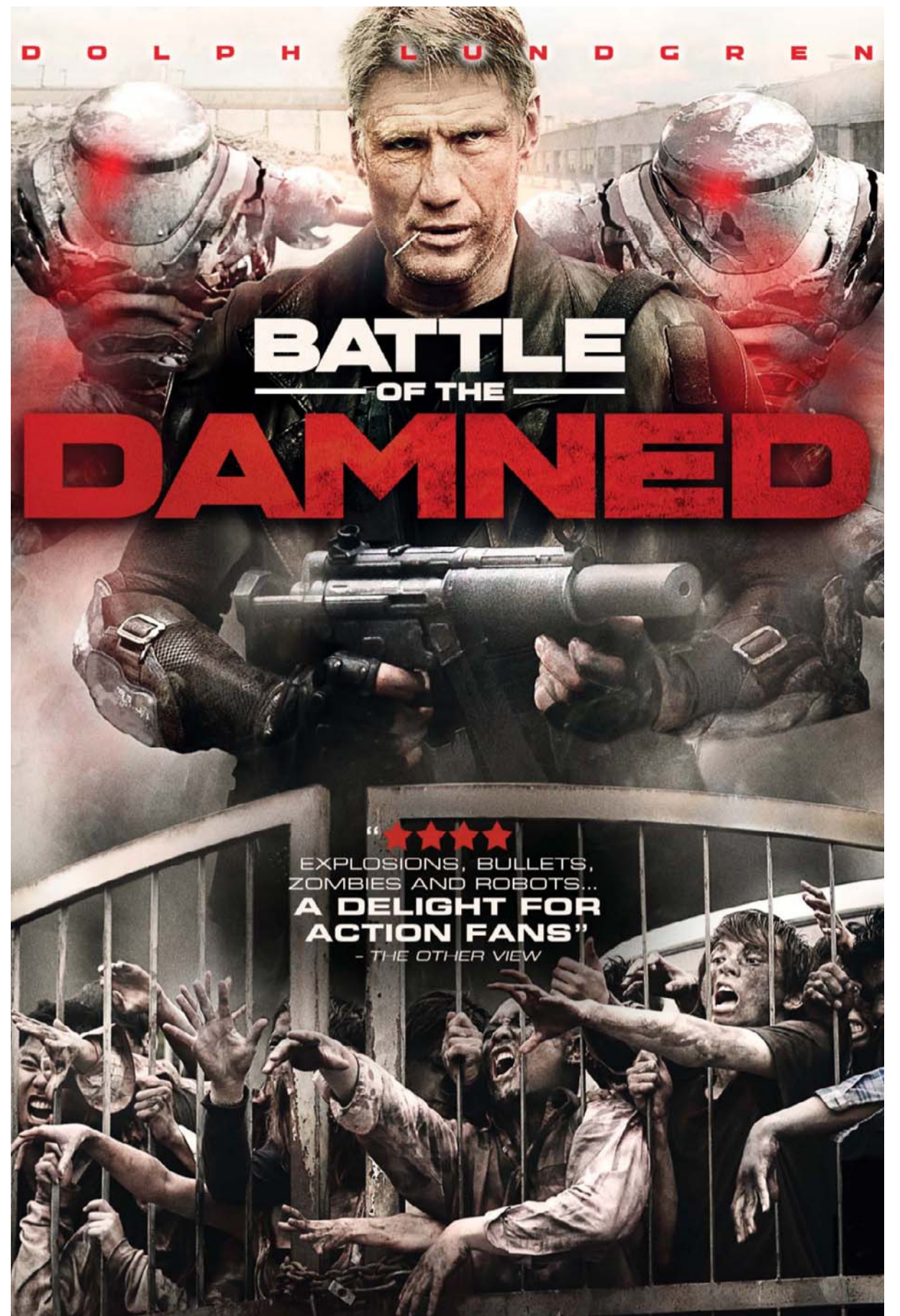
00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
00:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
02:00 Man Finds Food
02:30 Man Finds Food
03:00 Man Finds Food
04:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
04:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
05:00 Holiday Baking Championship

NAT GEO people HD

00:10 American Food Battle
00:35 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
01:00 Chefs Run Wild
01:25 Tales From The Bush Larder
01:50 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
02:15 American Food Battle
02:40 Eat Street
03:05 The Best Job In The World
03:30 The Great Food Revolution
04:20 David Rocco's Dolce India

OSN FIRST HD COMEDY

00:00 Better Call Saul
02:00 Supergirl
03:00 Scream Queens
04:00 Complications
05:00 The Night Shift
06:00 Castle
07:00 Bones
08:00 Resurrection
09:00 Complications
10:00 The Night Shift
12:00 Emmerdale
12:30 Coronation Street
13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
14:00 Resurrection
15:00 Castle
16:00 Emmerdale
16:30 Coronation Street
17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
18:00 Resurrection
19:00 The Fosters
20:00 Supergirl
21:00 Marvel's Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.
22:00 The Flash
23:00 American Horror Story: Hotel



BATTLE OF THE DAMNED ON OSN MOVIES ACTION

OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

00:00 Heatstroke-PG15
02:00 Assassin's Bullet-PG15
04:00 The Aggression Scale-PG15
06:00 The Courier-PG15
08:00 Rush Hour 2-PG15
10:00 Assassin's Bullet-PG15
12:00 Superfast-PG15
14:00 The Courier-PG15
15:45 The Core-PG15
18:00 Rush Hour 2-PG15
20:00 Dying Of The Light-PG15
22:45 The Dogs Of War-PG15
23:00 v For Vendetta-18

OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

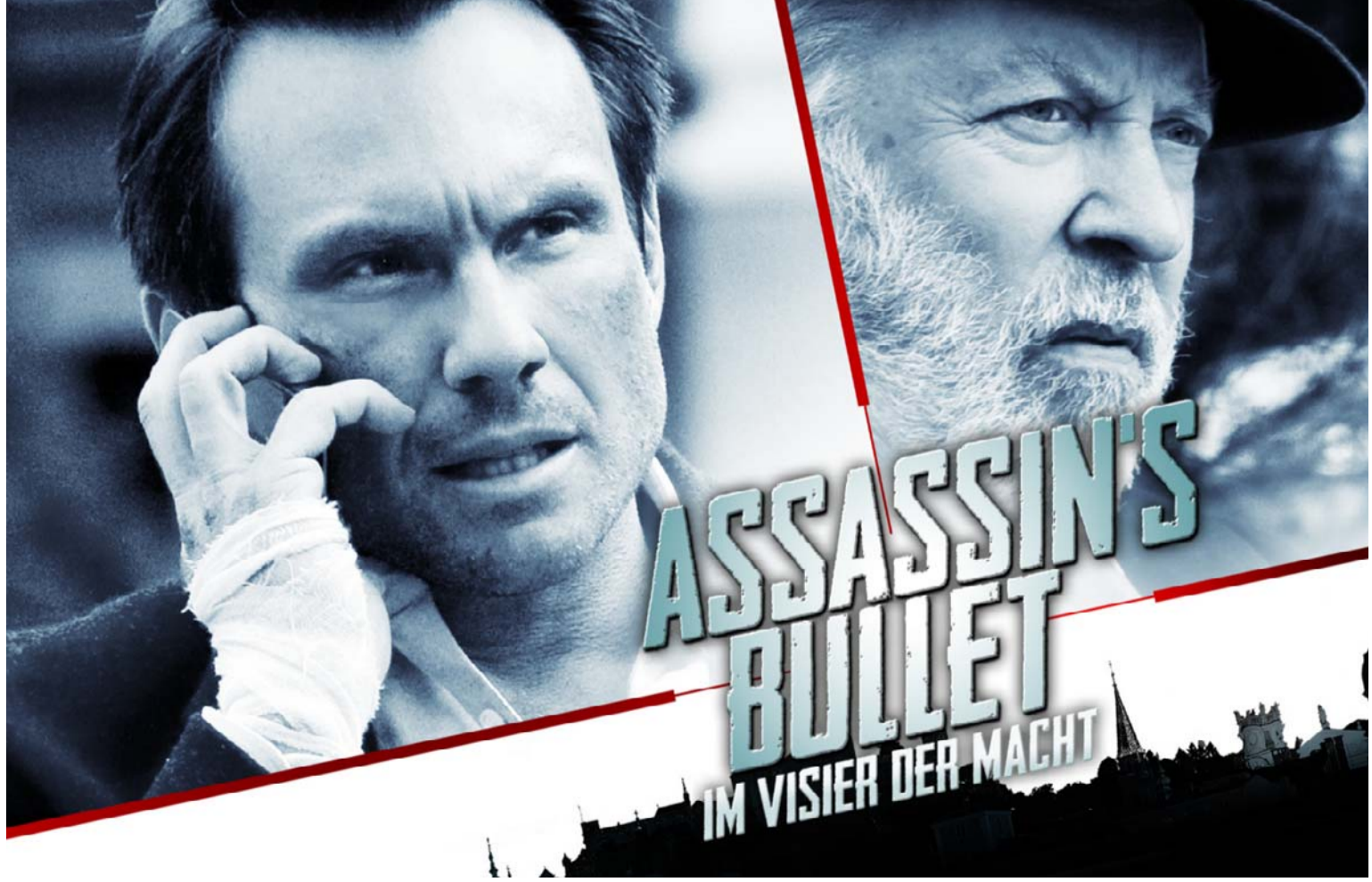
00:00 Date And Switch
02:00 Roommates
04:00 UHF
06:00 Streetdance: All Stars
10:00 Chef
12:00 Roommates
14:00 Christmas At Castlebury Hall
16:00 Streetdance: All Stars
18:00 Shanghai Calling
20:00 Delivery Man
22:00 Without A Paddle

OSN MOVIES HD DRAMA

01:00 Chalet Girl-PG15
02:45 Out Of The Furnace-PG15
04:45 Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom-PG15
07:15 The Dependables-PG15
09:00 Breath In-PG15
11:00 Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom-PG15
13:30 Romeo & Juliet-PG15
15:30 Stash House-PG15
17:15 Breathe In-PG15
19:00 Very Good Girls-PG15
21:00 Reasonable Doubt-PG15
23:00 Two Mothers-18

AMC

03:50 Once Upon A Time In Queens
05:30 Waking Up In Reno
07:05 The Beautiful Country
09:05 Hercules
12:15 Adventures Of Hercules
14:05 Big Screen
14:20 Impromptu
16:05 Rich Kids
17:40 The Tender
19:10 Brannigan
21:00 The Heavenly Kid
22:30 The Basketball Diaries
00:10 Winners Take All
01:50 Stay Hungry



ASSASSIN'S BULLET ON OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

OSN MOVIES HD FESTIVAL

02:30 Grace Of Monaco
04:30 Frank
06:30 The Butler
09:00 Se Puder... Dirija!
11:00 See Girl Run
13:00 To The Wonder
15:00 The Magic Of Belle Isle
17:00 Se Puder... Dirija!
19:00 The English Teacher
21:00 Siberian Education
23:00 Donnie Brasco

OSN NEWS

01:00 Live MSNBC Mtp Daily
02:00 Live MSNBC News
03:00 Live NBC Nightly News
03:30 ABC World News With David Muir
04:00 Live MSNBC All In With Chris Hayes
05:00 Live MSNBC The Rachel Maddow Show
06:00 Live MSNBC The Last Word W/Lawrence O'Donnell
07:00 NBC Nightly News
07:30 ABC World News With David Muir
07:57 NBC Nightly News
08:18 ABC World News With David Muir
08:39 Live ABC Nightline
09:06 MSNBC The Rachel Maddow Show
10:00 MSNBC The Last Word W/Lawrence O'Donnell
11:00 Live ABC World News Now
11:30 Live ABC World News Now
12:00 Live NBC Early Today
12:30 Live ABC America This Morning
13:00 Live ABC America This Morning
13:30 Live ABC America This Morning
14:00 Live ABC America This Morning
14:30 MSNBC First Look
15:00 Live NBC Today Show
18:57 MSNBC Hardball W/ Chris Matthews
19:38 MSNBC The Rachel Maddow Show
20:19 MSNBC The Last Word W/Lawrence O'Donnell

BBC entertainment

03:45 Lapland: Christmas 2011
05:00 Teletubbies
05:25 The Green Balloon Club
05:50 Charlie And Lola
06:00 Teletubbies
06:25 The Green Balloon Club
06:50 Charlie And Lola
07:00 Charlie And Lola
07:15 My Family: Christmas 2008
07:45 My Family: Christmas 2008
08:15 Doctor Who: The Snowmen
09:15 Doctors
09:45 Eastenders
10:10 David Copperfield
11:00 David Copperfield
11:45 Doctor Who: The Snowmen
12:45 My Family: Christmas 2008
13:15 My Family: Christmas 2008
13:45 David Copperfield
14:30 David Copperfield
15:20 My Family: Christmas 2008
15:50 My Family: Christmas 2008
16:20 Doctors
16:50 Eastenders
17:15 Doctor Who: The Snowmen
18:15 Blackadder's Christmas Carol
19:00 Doctors
19:30 Eastenders
20:00 David Copperfield
20:45 David Copperfield
21:30 Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow: Xmas 2011

CLASSIFIEDS

Kuwait Times
 Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (17/12/2015 TO 23/12/2015)

SHARQIA-1 IN THE HEART OF THE SEA DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	12:30 PM 3:00 PM 6:00 PM 9:00 PM 12:05 AM
SHARQIA-2 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS THE GOOD DINOSAUR STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	12:30 PM 1:30 PM 3:30 PM 6:30 PM 9:30 PM 12:30 AM
SHARQIA-3 THE GOOD DINOSAUR DARK MOUNTAIN THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN	12:00 PM 2:15 PM 4:15 PM 6:30 PM 8:45 PM 10:45 PM 12:45 AM
MUHALAB-1 THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi	12:30 PM 2:45 PM 5:00 PM 8:00 PM 11:00 PM
MUHALAB-2 DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN LOAFER - Telugu LOAFER - Telugu STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS LOAFER - Telugu DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN	11:45 AM 1:45 PM 3:30 PM 5:15 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM 10:00 PM 12:05 AM 1:00 AM
MUHALAB-3 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	12:00 PM 3:00 PM 6:00 PM 9:00 PM 12:05 AM
FANAR-1 STRIKE ONE THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR STRIKE ONE STRIKE ONE	1:15 PM 3:15 PM 5:30 PM 7:45 PM 10:00 PM 12:05 AM
FANAR-2 DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN	12:00 PM 2:00 PM 4:00 PM 6:00 PM 8:15 PM 10:15 PM 12:15 AM
FANAR-3 IN THE HEART OF THE SEA	1:00 PM

STRIKE ONE DILWALE - Hindi STRIKE ONE IN THE HEART OF THE SEA LOAFER - Telugu LOAFER - Telugu LOAFER - Telugu IN THE HEART OF THE SEA	1:30 PM 3:45 PM 6:45 PM 9:45 PM 3:45 PM 6:45 PM 9:45 PM 12:45 AM
FANAR-4 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D THE GOOD DINOSAUR - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D	12:30 PM 1:30 PM 3:30 PM 6:30 PM 9:30 PM 12:30 AM
FANAR-5 DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi	11:30 AM 2:30 PM 5:30 PM 8:30 PM 11:30 PM
MARINA-1 DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN	12:15 PM 3:30 PM 6:45 PM 8:45 PM 10:45 PM 12:45 AM
MARINA-2 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	11:45 AM 2:45 PM 5:45 PM 8:45 PM 11:45 PM
MARINA-3 THE GOOD DINOSAUR STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	11:30 AM 1:45 PM 4:45 PM 7:00 PM 9:15 PM 12:15 AM
AVENUES-1 DILWALE - Hindi STRIKE ONE DILWALE - Hindi LOAFER - Telugu DILWALE - Hindi LOAFER - Telugu DILWALE - Hindi LOAFER - Telugu STRIKE ONE	12:45 PM 2:00 PM 4:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM 10:00 PM 1:00 AM
AVENUES-2 DARK MOUNTAIN DILWALE - Hindi STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS DILWALE - Hindi STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	11:30 AM 1:30 PM 4:45 PM 7:45 PM 11:00 PM
AVENUES-3 THE GOOD DINOSAUR - 3D THE GOOD DINOSAUR THE GOOD DINOSAUR - 3D THE GOOD DINOSAUR	12:00 PM 2:15 PM 4:30 PM 6:45 PM

THE GOOD DINOSAUR DILWALE - Hindi	9:00 PM 11:15 PM
AVENUES-4 THE GOOD DINOSAUR DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi Special Show "DILWALE - Hindi" DILWALE - Hindi STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	11:45 AM 2:00 PM 5:15 PM 5:15 PM 8:30 PM 11:45 PM
AVENUES-5 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS THE GOOD DINOSAUR - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D Special Show "STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS" STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS Special Show "STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS" STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D DARK MOUNTAIN	1:15 PM 1:45 PM 4:15 PM 4:15 PM 7:15 PM 7:15 PM 10:15 PM 1:15 AM
AVENUES-6 DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi DILWALE - Hindi	11:30 AM 2:30 PM 5:45 PM 9:00 PM 12:15 AM
AVENUES-7 IN THE HEART OF THE SEA IN THE HEART OF THE SEA IN THE HEART OF THE SEA IN THE HEART OF THE SEA IN THE HEART OF THE SEA	1:45 PM 4:30 PM 7:15 PM 10:00 PM 12:45 AM
AVENUES-8 STRIKE ONE STRIKE ONE ZINZANA (Emirati Film) STRIKE ONE STRIKE ONE STRIKE ONE	1:15 PM 3:30 PM 6:00 PM 8:00 PM 10:15 PM 12:30 PM
AVENUES-9 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS	11:30 AM 2:30 PM 5:30 PM 8:30 PM 11:30 PM
AVENUES-10 DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN DARK MOUNTAIN	12:45 PM 2:45 PM 4:45 PM 6:45 PM 8:45 PM 10:45 PM 12:45 AM
AVENUES-11 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - DOLBY ATMOS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - DOLBY ATMOS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - DOLBY ATMOS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - DOLBY ATMOS STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - DOLBY ATMOS	12:30 PM 3:30 PM 6:30 PM 9:30 PM 12:30 PM
360*1 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS - 3D	12:00 PM 3:00 PM 6:00 PM

SITUATION VACANT

Professional cook for house, good experience all kinds of food, especially Arabic food, good salary, part time. Call: 23901053, 60064934. (C 5102) **21-12-2015**

A single American-Lebanese male living in Salmiya needs a lady worker to help in cooking and cleaning. She must understand and speak English and her timing and salary are negotiable. Call 6641-7504. (C 5100) **19-12-2015**

CHANGE OF NAME

I Dheemu Sudeep holder of Indian Passport No. F6768269 resident of Pulapathur (V & P) Rajampet (M), YSR Kadapa Dist, A.P., India. Now I have changed my name as Bheemu Sudeep Kumar Reddy instead of Dheemu Sudeep in future all transaction will be made in Bheemu Sudeep Kumar Reddy only. (C 5101) **21-12-2015**

LOST

Original document policy No. 633003315 of Muhammad Mali by the State Life Insurance Corporation Pakistan, Gulf Zone is reported to have been lost. Anyone finding the same or claiming any interest in it should communicate with State Life office Kuwait. Tel: 22452208. (C 5099) **16-12-2015**

EMERGENCY

112

REQUIRED

A reputable private clinic is looking to hire:

Lady Secretary

Qualification Graduate

- Must have experience 3-4 years in a secretarial position
- Have basic knowledge of Arabic and good English.
- Knowledge of Computer applications like MS office etc.
- Job Timings 2pm - 10pm
- Salary will be commensurate to experience
- Presentable in appearance

Send CV to email id hrclinicjabriya@gmail.com

Aluminum Manufacturing Co.

looking for:

- Designers / draftsman
- Site supervisors
- Aluminum technicians

Send CV to bassam - jamal@hotmail.com

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FOR RENT

For companies and families

Programs: competitions for kids and games.
 Programs: competitions for grownups.
 Playgrounds: football, volleyball, Horses & camel
Fenced camp + security.

Tel: 96003089 / @The_Gold_Camp

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr:	05:13	Asr:	14:36
Shorook	06:38	Maghrib:	16:54
Duhr:	11:46	Isha:	18:17

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

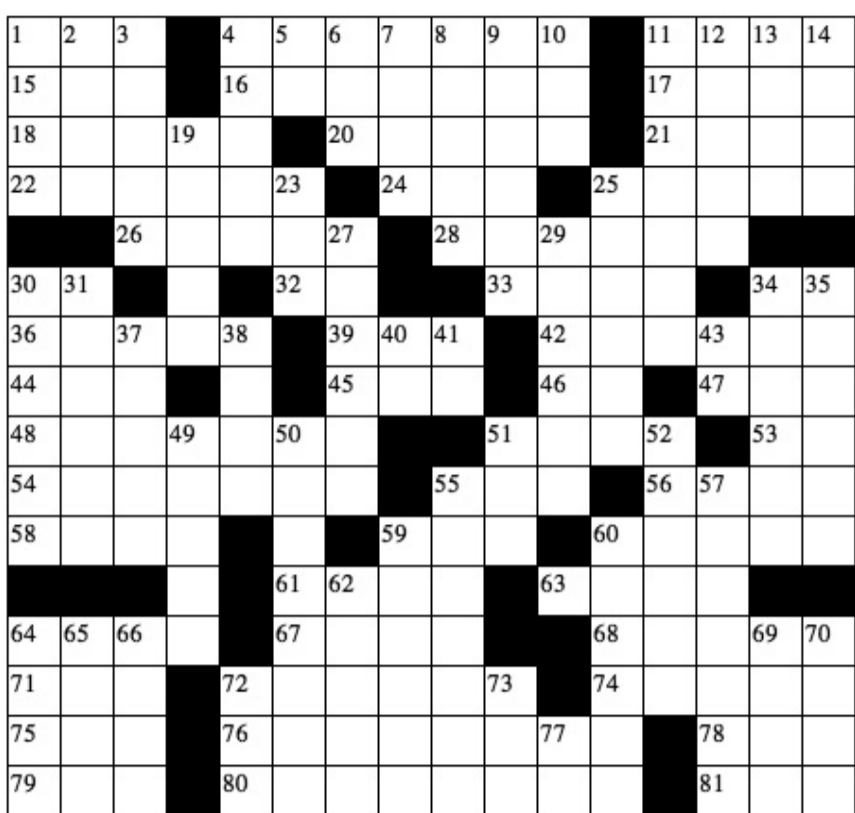
Flight Schedule

In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation of bookings will help other passengers to use seats

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 23/12/2015				Departure Flights on Wednesday 23/12/2015			
Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	Airlines	Fit	Route	Time
MSC	415	Sohag	00:05	IRC	6522	Lamerd	13:55
SYR	343	Damascus/KAC	00:10	MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40	Dubai	00:40	Hanoi	14:30
DHX	172	Bahrain	00:40	IYE	827	Mukalla/Sanaa	14:30
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	IZG	4168	Mashhad	14:30
MEA	406	Beirut	01:00	KNE	481	Taif	14:50
THY	772	Istanbul	01:05	MSR	01:10	Sharm el-Sheikh	14:55
DLH	635	Doha	01:35	IRC	527	Mashhad	14:55
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	01:45	KAC	02:00	Dubai	15:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00	KAC	02:10	Madinah	15:10
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30	FDB	058	Dubai	15:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	QTR	1079	Doha	15:10
KKK	6507	Istanbul	02:50	IRM	1187	Tehran	15:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	617	Doha	15:45
FDB	067	Dubai	03:05	SVB	503	Madinah/Jeddah	15:45
RJA	644	Amman	03:05	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:45
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10	KAC	773	Riyadh	15:50
QTR	1076	Doha	03:15	KNE	463	Madinah	16:00
CEB	7694	Manila	03:15	KAC	473	Jeddah	16:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:25	JZR	554	Alexandria	16:10
AGY	680	Alexandria	04:30	MRJ	4814	Mashhad	16:15
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:40	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:25
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55	OMA	646	Muscat	16:30
FDB	5061	Dubai	06:30	KAC	563	Amman	16:45
BAW	157	London	06:40	JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
KAC	412	Manila/Bangkok	07:20	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	17:30
QTR	1086	Doha	07:40	JZR	338	Amman	17:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:45	FDB	052	Dubai	17:35
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
OMA	641	Muscat	07:55	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
KAC	206	Islamabad	08:25	JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
KAC	352	Kochi	08:30	RJA	641	Amman	17:55
KAC	344	Chennai	08:30	SVB	342	Damascus	18:00
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	08:30	IRC	511	Riyadh	18:15
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40	ABD	6512	ABD	18:20
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:50	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	362	Colombo	08:50	JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	MSR	615	Cairo	18:50
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:20	JZR	124	Bahrain	19:10
QTR	1070	Doha	09:25	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	AGY	124	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
IRA	665	Shiraz	10:40	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
IAW	157	Al Najaf	10:50	KAC	361	Colombo	20:45
UAE	873	Dubai	11:05	QTR	1081	Doha	20:50
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:15	KAC	351	Kochi	20:50
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30	KAC	343	Chennai	21:00
AGY	684	Sohag	11:35	KNE	461	Riyadh	21:10
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	KAC	331	Trivandrum	21:10
SAW	701	Damascus	12:20	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
KAC	204	Lahore	12:25	FDB	062	Dubai	21:20
IRM	1188	Mashhad	12:25	MSR	619	Alexandria	21:45
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30	DLH	634	Doha	21:45
JZR	561	Sohag	12:45	FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
IRC	6511	ABD	13:00	JAI	571	Mumbai	21:55
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	JZR	502	Luxor	22:00
CLX	792	Luxembourg	13:15	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
FDB	4167	Mashhad	13:30	KAC	301	Mumbai	22:10
IYE	826	Sanaa/Mukalla	13:30	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
KNE	460	Riyadh	13:50	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
KAC	382	Delhi	13:50	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
IRC	526	Mashhad	13:55	ETD	920	Dubai	22:35
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	13:55	UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10	KAC	345	Ahmedabad	23:00
FDB	057	Dubai	14:10	QTR	1083	Doha	23:05
IRM	1186	Tehran	14:15	KAC	205	Islamabad	23:10
SVB	500	Jeddah	14:30	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:15
				FDB	060	Dubai	23:35
				KAC	415	Kuala Lumpur/Jakarta	23:40

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

CROSSWORD 1118



ACROSS

1. An emergency procedure consisting of external cardiac massage and artificial respiration.
4. Having unattractive thinness.
11. Tropical woody herb with showy yellow flowers and flat pods.
15. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
16. Get by special effort.
17. A member of an extinct North American Indian people who lived in the Pit river valley in northern California.
18. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
20. The capital of Lombardy in northern Italy.
21. A visual representation of an object or scene or person produced on a surface.
22. The basic unit of money in Macao.
24. The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
26. Naked freshwater or marine or parasitic protozoa that form temporary pseudopods for feeding and locomotion.
28. A member of an agricultural people in southeastern India.
30. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
32. Being ten more than one hundred forty.
33. God of death.
36. (Greek mythology) One of the mountain nymphs.
39. Devoid of warmth and cordiality.
42. Large Indian antelope.
44. A benevolent aspect of Devi.
45. A light touch or stroke.
46. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
47. Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
48. Type genus of the Cariamidae comprising only the crested cariamia.
53. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
54. Any of various insects that feed and form galls on conifers.
56. Type genus of the family Arcidae.
58. A quantity of no importance.
61. A translucent mineral consisting of hydrated silica of variable color.
63. Material used to daub walls.
64. A small cake leavened with yeast.
67. A one-piece cloak worn by men in ancient Rome.
68. Give a benediction to.
71. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
74. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
75. A bachelor's degree in theology.
76. Relating to or existing on or affecting the skin.
78. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
79. Grass mowed and cured for use as fodder.
80. Capable of being graded (for quality or rank or size etc.).
81. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. A sudden very loud noise.
2. Having nine hinged bands of bony plates.
3. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
4. The unlimited 3-dimensional expanse in

5. A hard brittle blue-white multivalent metallic element.
6. (computer science) Memory whose contents can be accessed and read but cannot be changed.
7. Harsh or corrosive in tone.
8. A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
9. United States evangelical preacher famous as a mass evangelist (born in 1918).
10. A yearning for something or to do something.
11. A language of Australian aborigines.
12. Australian shrubs and small trees with evergreen usually spiny leaves and dense clusters of showy flowers.
13. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
14. Long and thin and often limp.
19. (folklore) A corpse that rises at night to drink the blood of the living.
23. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
25. Type genus of the Caricaceae.
27. Surveying instrument consisting of the upper movable part of a theodolite including the telescope and its attachments.
29. Fairly small terrestrial ferns of tropical America.
31. A large fleet.
34. A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
35. In the Arabian Nights a hero who tells of the fantastic adventures he had in his voyages.
37. Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
38. The phenomenon of resistance to motion through a fluid.
40. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
41. A soft silvery metallic element.
43. A brittle gray crystalline element that is a semiconducting metalloid (resembling silicon) used in transistors.
49. Tropical American tree grown in southern United States having a whitish pink-tinged fruit.
50. (Greek mythology) A mythical monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man.
51. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
52. Type genus of the Parulidae.
55. Type genus of the Balaenidae.
57. (Old Testament) Wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau.
59. Capital and largest city of Iraq.
60. Glibberish resembling the sounds of a baby.
62. An aperture or hole opening into a bodily cavity.
65. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
66. Being or befitting or characteristic of an infant.
69. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
70. A island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
72. Hormone produced early in pregnancy by the placenta.
73. A long projecting or anterior elongation of an animal's head.
77. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your friends, associates or family may see your humorous side today, as well as something of an eccentric nature. By allowing yourself the freedom of creativity and intuitiveness, you may find new insights or breakthroughs regarding your living situation or life conditions. Others value you for your independent traits. You could feel the importance of caring for others or in having them care for you—this could be on a public rather than a private level. You have needs and you sense the needs of others. If you can figure out how to fit the two elements together, that is what will make life work for you. A powerful need for nurturing is a bigger-than-usual aspect in your life. It may be your turn to volunteer for a favorite charity tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Luck shines on you today. Communications are highlighted. This is an ideal day for you to get many things accomplished. Partners or superiors stand strong in favor of more research to your ideas. Supervisors work closely with you. Stop and re-examine your approach. Don't be afraid to offer your point of view. Kindness wins and a compromise may be in order. You feel more secure in your work situation than ever before. This afternoon you may find that important news comes by mail. Put all of your energy into completing a personal project later today. Your friends are in a mystical mood. Laugh, enjoy your friends and be of good cheer; a celebration or reunion brings lots of laughter as well as remember-when conversations.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Some of the things that take on emotional significance for you now are being able to obtain and exchange information. You may find more involvement with neighbors or family, appeasing a deep emotional need. Of great importance is the way that you communicate your feelings just now. You may feel like being different at this time or trying out something new and unusual. It should be an almost perfect time for new ideas; there is a breakthrough in thinking. Your mood may be somewhat unrealistic in the eyes of others: a more dreamy side that could put you a bit at odds with your more pragmatic duties. Friends may not appreciate or agree with your dreaminess just now. You too may find a bit of difficulty in losing yourself in your imaginings.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Come to terms with career demands. There could be opportunities to invest if you look closely. You gain some good business ideas from co-workers. Remember, however, the information is not professional and they are not in business for themselves yet. Close relationships take on more emotional depth, influence and importance. You may find appreciation in your distinctive situation and enjoy assistance or interaction from those around you. Wonderful feelings and a sense of support and rapport make this a very pleasant time. Tonight is a great time for surrounding yourself with friends and young people, and for having a good time. It may be the night by the time of the business social. If so, you should outshine everyone with your smile.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Some happy medium needs to be found today—you may be a bit restless. This may all be caused from the season of the year, or it could be some tight schedule through which you have been trying to dance. Make a list and guide yourself by this list for the day. You can complete the work that you have set out for yourself now—whether it is in the workplace or at home. Patience is your key word for now. You may find yourself counting to ten several times during the day, just to remain focused. Surprisingly enough, you may be the one that completes your work while others in your office cannot seem to get projects started. A loved one steals your heart today with a kind favor, effort or service for someone less fortunate.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Be clear in your communications today and pay close attention to someone that you admire when it comes to getting work done in prompt order. You will learn new ways to handle everyday matters. Co-workers touch a soft spot in your heart; everyone works together to finally complete a slow-moving project. You are lucky to have them around. Plan a special celebration of your unified accomplishments. Enjoyment comes from feeling a certain sense of support and good will from those around you; you will be able to return the favor. This afternoon you may find yourself shopping for holiday gifts. Keep notes on the holiday requests and the purchases you make and you will be organized. Review the books or games before deciding for a young person.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Someone in authority recognizes your talent. Don't be so quick to celebrate your success, however. Take the time to fine-tune your craft. Listening is one of the ways you have of being a good helper. At the noon break you might decide to take your lunch with a co-worker that just needs to talk. Your wit and your originality may help others accept their problems in a better light. After all, if you were to ask someone to trade problems with you, nine times out of ten they would say no, just because their own problems are familiar to them. You handle some of your own problems this way, quick and to the point and with a bit of levity. This afternoon someone pays you back on a long-overdue loan. This evening it is time to encourage a loved one.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

There is plenty of support from others today. It is a time when you could hear some encouraging words or gain some extra support or recognition from those around you. You should feel very much in touch and in harmony with others and the lines of communication should be wide open. It is a super time to work as a team. Because of your reputation to manage and direct others, someone could be looking to have you take the reins of a very special project. Good news—a bank or credit union is willing to help you out of a financial jam. Put in double effort to pay back this loan for this next year and you will do well. A friend takes you to a music concert this evening. Having a special time with someone you enjoy being around creates a fun evening.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 18)

There is no time to relax today—too many projects as well as last-minute personal chores. One thing at a time and everything will be complete. Your career is more in focus now and you may be able to determine which direction you want to take your interests in the future. A firm foundation is forming in front of you as your management and directional abilities are in high focus. Stay away from speculative situations. You really don't have time for this activity. Take every precaution necessary when handling other people's money—play it safe. Include your partner in social activities. It is a great time to be in a relationship. Rediscover romance. Be generous and openhearted. The ballet may be the social event this evening.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You feel a great deal of confidence in what you do today. Your original ideas could well assist the routine in the home or on the job. You create a true mental image that could well reward your personal progress. You are detail conscious, practical and managerial. If you are working, this can be a personal high cycle in the workplace. You have the green light to proceed with a special project. Apply your own stamp of approval to someone's work or hobby today. You show a great deal of possibilities when it comes to job advancement—perhaps it is time to put in your request. You may be entertained this evening by friends and family. There may be some marvelous, energetic techno or salsa music to enjoy as well.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Interruptions are steady this morning and it could be difficult for you to keep a steady train of thought. This could finally result in a lack of interest in what you are doing. You may want to take some breaks and stretch a little. Big changes affecting your career, status and reputation are possible just now. Daring to be different and having a good sense of humor get you noticed and could get you ahead in ways you never expected. They could even land you in hot water if you are not discreet. A high-tech or idealistic approach sets you apart from others. This is a highly active day for you, mentally. Associates make heavy demands on your time. Steer clear of philosophical discussions. Let your brain have a much-needed rest this evening.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You want very much to be admired and appreciated for what you do and who you are. You may find yourself enjoying some form of financial gain—perhaps a raise. Some of the issues that you feel instinctively at this time are a need for emotional security, a feeling of belonging and nurturing. You crave a sense of intimate connection and you want roots. If you do not have a home, you may soon decide that it is your turn to be a homeowner. Success is being able to live your dream. Acknowledge your progress—you are almost there. A lover or child becomes a focal point in your life. Romance and such creative pursuits as hobbies are outlets for much of your energy. Later today, you may decide to bathe an animal before company arrives.

WORD SEARCH

Types of Music 1

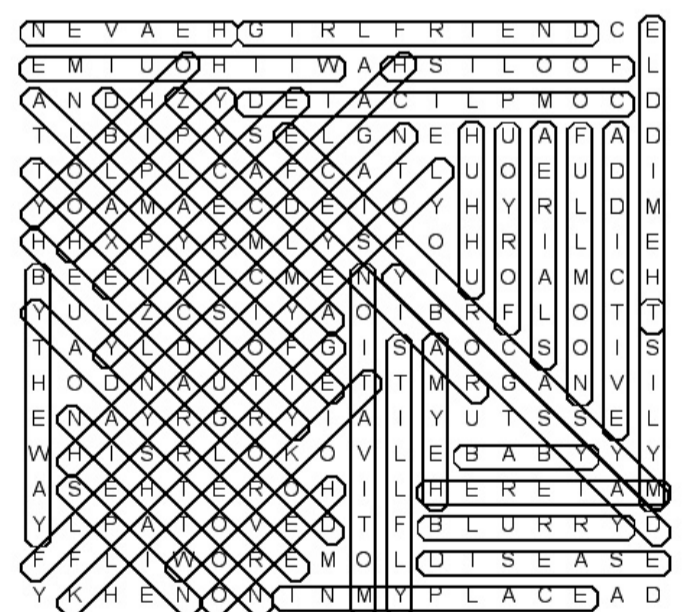
Find and circle all of the different types of music that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 14 letters spell an additional type of music.



- ACAPPELLA
- ACID ROCK
- ACOUSTIC
- AMBIENT
- AVANT-GARDE
- BIG BAND
- BLUEGRASS
- BROADWAY
- CABARET
- CHORAL
- CHRISTMAS
- CLASSIC ROCK
- DANCE
- DISCO
- ELECTRONICA
- FLAMENCO
- FOLK
- GANGSTA RAP
- GOthic
- HEAVY METAL
- HIP HOP
- INDIAN
- INDIE
- JAZZ
- LATIN MUSIC
- LOUNGE
- MERENGUE
- MEXICAN
- NEW WAVE
- PSYCHEDELIC
- PUNK
- ROCKABILLY
- SAMBA
- SOUL
- TANGO
- WALTZ
- WORLD
- POLKA

Yesterday Solution

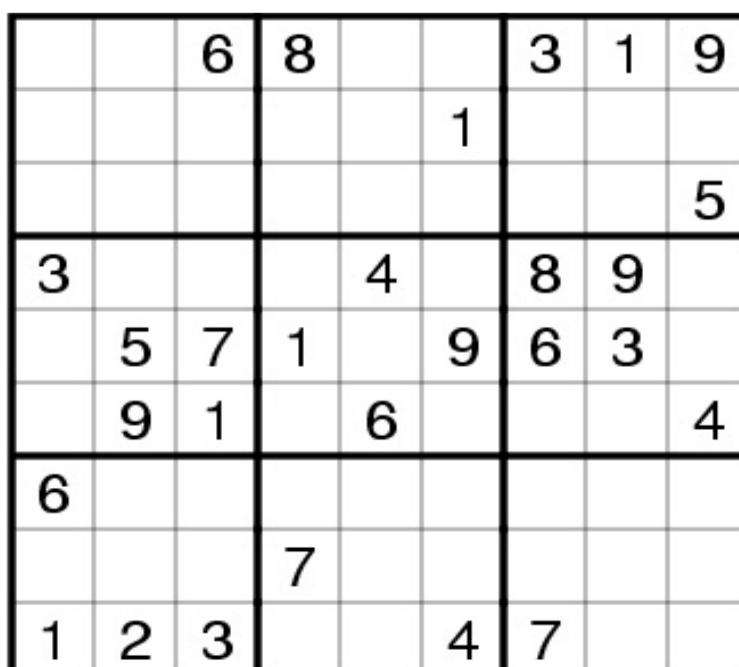
Songs From the Year 2002



- ADDICTIVE
- AERIALS
- ALL MY LIFE
- BABY
- BLURRY
- BY THE WAY
- COMPLICATED
- DAYS GO BY
- DILEMMA
- DISEASE
- ESCAPE
- EVERYDAY
- FOOLISH
- FULL MOON
- GIRL TALK
- GIRLFRIEND
- HALFCRAZY
- HANDS CLEAN
- HAPPY
- HEAVEN
- HELLA GOOD
- HERE I AM
- HERO
- HEY MA
- IN MY PLACE
- LOSE YOURSELF
- MOTIVATION
- MY LIST
- MY SACRIFICE
- NOTHIN'
- OH BOY
- RAINY DAYZ
- SPIN
- STILL FLY
- THE MIDDLE
- TOXICITY
- UH HUH
- WITHOUT ME
- WORK IT

The hidden song title is: CAN'T GET YOU OUT OF MY HEAD

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Gossip

ANISTON'S flawless skin regime



Jennifer Aniston says the secret to her flawless complexion is plenty of "sleep and hydration". The former 'Friends' star doesn't rely on harsh potions or expensive beauty treatments to maintain her incredible skin as she believes drinking lots of water, hitting the pillow and "weird facials" is enough to keep her face looking fresh. She said: "I have said this before but it's the truth-I really think hydration is so important. And sleep! All sorts of weird facials-chances are I've tried them all." And, as for keeping fit, the 46-year-old actress likes to vary her

workouts, switching between yoga, running and weights. In an interview on Gwyneth Paltrow's website Goop, she said: "I like to mix it up with some Power Yoga, treadmill, elliptical machine and low weight training." Meanwhile, the blonde beauty recently revealed her husband Justin Theroux, 44, - who she tied the knot with in August - has been tempted to join her for yoga-style exercise Budokon, which she has been doing for years and hopes will improve their upper body strength and cardio. An insider said: "They've become great

sparring partners." Jen's been into Budokon for years, and she and Courteney (Cox) used to do classes with well-respected martial arts teacher Cameron Shayne. Jen swears by it for upper body strength and cardio - and Justin's really into it now, too. It's fast becoming an obsession for them."

Tom Hanks collects old typewriters

The 'Saving Mr Banks' actor has over 50 devices which were made in the 1940s and loves to use them for his correspondence. Asked what he wants for Christmas, he told the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column: "Antique WWII typewriters. Takes a repair guy a month to get them working, and I write my letters on them. I own over 50." While he loves the old-fashioned way of writing his letters, Tom is also an avid user of social media and recently used Twitter to thank a man who had found and returned his lost credit card. He posted: "A guy

named Tony found my credit card on the street in NYC and returned it! Tony! You make this city even greater! Thanx. HANX (sic)" And in October, the 58-year-old actor turned to the site again in a bid to help reunite a female college student with her ID card. He posted a picture of the card - with the young woman's details concealed - and wrote: "Lauren! I found your Student ID in the park. If you still need it my office will get to you. Hanx."



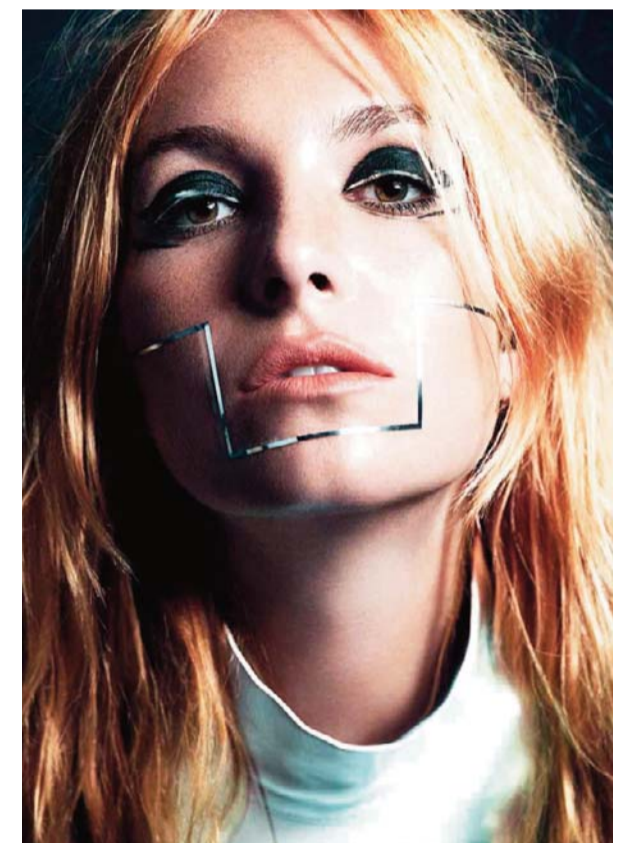
Lil' Wayne sued by ex-lawyer for \$375,000

Lil' Wayne is reportedly being sued by his former lawyer for \$375,000 (£251,000). According to XXL, the 'Lollipop' hitmaker's ex-attorney Michael Kramer - who represented the US rapper in his attempts to be released from his Cash Money contract - filed a lawsuit against Wayne in the Manhattan federal court on Monday. In the lawsuit, Kramer says that Wayne failed to pay \$375,239 in legal fees after agreeing to fork out an initial \$20,000 in July 2013 and then monthly bills. The attorney claims he "made numerous attempts to resolve the dispute amicably. These attempts were ultimately unsuccessful." The lawyer's company is

alleged to have billed the 33-year-old rapper from November 2014 to October 2015 before eventually dropping him in September because of the reported debt. Earlier this year, Wayne - whose real name is Dwayne Michael Carter - was sued by another law firm, Garbett, Allen and Roza for \$80,000 in unpaid legal fees. What's more, the rapper's former bus driver Mark Jones filed a lawsuit against him earlier this year. He alleged that Wayne threatened to pistol whip him, "whip his ass" and then kill him on a trip to Buffalo, New York.

Josephine de la Baume wants to raid Bowie's wardrobe

Josephine de la Baume wants to raid David Bowie's wardrobe. The 31-year-old model, who is married to record producer Mark Ronson, is desperate to rummage through the bedroom cupboards of the 'Let's Dance' hitmaker, 68, because she thinks he has a fascinating sense of style. Speaking to Vogue magazine, she said: "David Bowie would definitely be the wardrobe I'd like to raid. "Every record [he makes] has a different style but each single, every one of them were pretty incredible." And the flame-haired beauty is certainly used to raiding through other people's belongings as she recently admitted she first wore makeup at three years old after she rummaged through her mother's dressing table and applied a mixture of colorful products over her face. She said recently: "My earliest memory of beauty is from when I was three years old and put on all of my mother's make-up. I remember thinking I had done a fantastic job, when in reality I'd used every single product and applied all of them on top of each other - all over my face. "My mother would wear dark red lipstick and a lot of eyeshadow - and it was the '80s, so it was all super- colorful. There were various eyeshadow palettes, which I had mixed up all over my face because I had no concept of what should go where. "She would try to hide everything from me but I kept finding it and doing it again. I was a good hustler."



Tomlinson and Campbell spotted getting close

Louis Tomlinson was spotted getting close to actress Danielle Campbell in Chicago over the weekend. The 23-year-old singer fuelled romance rumors after he was seen at Oberweis ice cream parlor in the city "holding" onto the 20-year-old brunette beauty. An eyewitness confirmed to E! News: "He was behind her and had his arms around her. It was really sweet! "They seemed cuddly - he was holding her for a little while." And a fan also shared a photo of the pair cuddling at the cafe on Twitter alongside a caption, which read: "Louis in Chicago at Oberweis ice cream with Danielle! (sic)" And that's not all, later on, the One Direction hunk and 'The Originals' star crashed a 21st birthday party where Louis is believed to have left his pass-

port, coat and mobile phone. Alongside a group picture of partygoers including Louis, a fan confirmed: "Louis attending a birthday (@Guacamohle) last night in Chicago (sic)." And a friend of the birthday girl later posted an update that the 1D star had left his belongings at the house. They wrote: "@clairedontcare he went to my friend's 21st birthday party and left his coat with his passport and dead phone lol!! (sic)" The 'History' singer - who is expecting his first child with stylist Briana Jungwirth - first sparked rumors of a possible romance between himself and stunning actress after the pair were seen enjoying a milkshake together earlier this month.



Kourtney Kardashian shares party details

Kourtney Kardashian's sons' birthday party was "out of this world". The 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star's eldest child Mason turned six on December 14, the same day her youngest, Reign, turned one and they marked the double celebration with an alien-themed bash in the garden of their Californian home. Kourtney shared on her website: "Since Mason and Reign were born on the same day, I asked Mason if he wanted to have his birthday party with Reign this year and he said yes! "When it got dark outside, everyone put on their glow-in-the-dark sunglasses and alien beanies. "We screened the movie 'Home' outside on a big blow-up screen and set up comfy outdoor lounge chairs and lots of blankets for people to

watch. It was truly out of this world!" And Kourtney - who also has three-year-old daughter Penelope with ex-partner Scott Disick - shared some easy decorating tips for fans wanting an alien party of their own. She explained: "We made black alien eye stickers for the green lanterns that we hung in all of the trees. They lit up so the whole backyard glowed at night." Guests at the bash - which was organized by Mindy Weiss - tucked into food from restaurant chain Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill, while hot chocolate, coffee and chai lattes kept the revelers warm during the evening. While the birthday boys shared a party, they each got their own alien-shaped cakes, with Mason's also boasting bright green space creatures on top.



Carell loves holiday lights

Steve Carell enjoys it when people go "nuts" with Christmas decorations. The 'Big Short' actor loves driving around his neighborhood with wife Nancy and their children Elisabeth, 14, and John, 11, to look at festive light displays and loves the over-the-top sights. He said: "I appreciate when people go nuts. I don't go nuts, but we actually, my wife, Nancy and our kids, get into the car once around Christmas time and we get a big box of donuts and hot chocolate, and we drive around looking at Christmas lights in our neighborhood...It's pretty wonderful. "It's fun, and actually the bigger, the bolder the better. We love it." And the 53-year-old actor joked he and his spouse enjoys some unusual Christmas traditions. He quipped to talk show host Ellen DeGeneres: "We put lights [up]. We fill the toilets with mulled wine. Nancy makes a frankencens mer-loaf that is delicious." Steve's neighbors clearly embrace the holidays as he revealed earlier this year they have extravagant displays for Halloween. He said: "There's one house that builds half a pirate ship that's sunken into the ground. A huge 20-foot thing - with real pirates and smoke machines." And the 'Despicable Me' actor admitted he had also "got into it" and hid a set of motion-censored cats and dogs in his bushes so they would growl and jump out at passersby. He said: "People go crazy."

Affleck to spend Christmas with Garner

Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner are to spend Christmas together. The 'Batman V Superman' actor may have split from his 43-year-old actress wife in June but they are planning to celebrate with one another on December 25 for the sake of their three children, Violet, 10, Seraphina, six, and Samuel, three. A source told E! News: "They will be together as a family. They continue to put the kids first and spend time with each other for the sake of their children." And the former couple - who are said to be "in a good place right now" - are planning to leave Los Angeles for a festive

break in snowy Montana. It was previously claimed Ben, 43, and Jennifer are "committed" to parenting together and putting their differences aside for the sake of their kids. A source said: "They are a unit. They are all about the kids and making sure they are OK. They are committed to parenting together." Even while Ben has been shooting the upcoming film 'Live By Night' in Boston, he ensured he made regular trips back to Los Angeles to see the children. The source said: "[He] has spent every possible hour of the day working. He's the first to arrive and the last to leave."



Zellweger ignored appearance speculation

Renee Zellweger "succeeded" in avoiding widespread speculation about her appearance. The 46-year-old actress caused a stir when she walked the red carpet in October 2014 for the first time in years but insists she had no idea people were concerned she looked radically different until she was inundated with messages of support. She told Entertainment Weekly magazine: "All that I know about is what friends and associates would send in texts and emails. They were sending support, which

means that I must have needed it, and I prefer it that way. "So when people come up to me to ask 'How did that feel?' I don't know, and I like it like that. I don't know. "I know it sounds pretty unlikely that a person might be able to make herself, I guess, keep clear of those words or of that experience, but I have and it takes effort. But I have succeeded." Despite not reading any of the coverage, the 'Bridget Jones's Baby' actress now has "less fear" because of the experience. She added: "What good comes from knowing that

something like that happened? Less fear. Sure." At the time of the speculation, Renee insisted she was "glad" people thought she looked different because it reflected the fact she was happier. She said: "I'm glad folks think I look different! I'm living a different, happy, more fulfilling life, and I'm thrilled that perhaps it shows."



The Spice Girls reunion tour in crisis!

The Spice Girls reunion tour is reportedly in crisis because Mel C won't agree to it without Victoria Beckham. While fashion designer Victoria says she is too busy with her fashion label to reunite with her former bandmates, Mel reportedly told the other three members - Mel B, Geri Horner and Emma Bunton - that she will only take part if all elements are in place. A source told The Sun newspaper: "This means good management, good tour promoters and good sponsorship to maximize revenue. To fulfill this Mel believes the band has to be the original five-piece and Victoria needs to be involved." Mel B previously admitted the group are keen to "make sure something happens" for their 20th anniversary next year but nothing

is set in stone yet. Asked about the chance of a reunion, she said: "Potentially, yeah. Once we sort everything out we make an announcement, but right now we're just figuring it all out. Next year is your 20 anniversary so we're really just trying to make sure something happens. "We're figuring stuff out. As soon as we figure it out we'll tell every detail, but until then there's not much to say. It's like when you're dating somebody and everyone is forcing you to get married. It's like, 'We're getting married! Just give us a second to figure it out!'"

Geri Horner is considering adoption

The former Spice Girls singer is mother to nine-year-old Bluebell, while her new husband Christian Horner has a two-year-old daughter, Olivia, but the pair haven't ruled out having a child together in the future. She said: "If it happens it happens and that will be amazing. But we are already blessed with two girls. "We might think about adoption but to be honest, we know we are so lucky and so happy with things as they are, you have to realize when not to push your luck." The 43-year-old star couldn't be happier with her new family unit. She told HELLO! magazine: "I've been single, I've been a single mother and now I'm a married mother with Bluebell. "Together with my husband Christian and his little girl, we're a family, a blended family. "It's lovely because we talk everything through, we are proud of each other and we support each other." Bluebell adores her new stepfather and even calls him Daddy. Speaking about their Christmas plans, the youngster said: "Daddy always wants to race through the present opening as fast as possible. "He literally rips something open and moves onto the next thing. "Mum and me like to take our time so we moan at him but he doesn't care, he just carries on ripping."



James Corden thinks his life is 'insane'

The 37-year-old TV host is currently presenting 'The Late Late Show' in the US, and admits he struggles to believe some of the things he's done as part of his new role. Reflecting on the popular Carpool Karaoke skits, in which he harmonizes with various musicians, James said: "It is ridiculous to find yourself in a car singing along with Stevie Wonder. It is insane that this could be my life. "No one wanted to do Carpool Karaoke until I played a tape of me singing in a car with George Michael to someone from Mariah Carey's label. Mariah is a huge fan of his, so she agreed to do it. I feel very lucky." James said he simply feels fortunate to be in the presence of such talented people. He told The Big Issue magazine: "Rehearsing the bits where we recount a person's film career, spending an afternoon with Tom Hanks or Matt Damon, is also incredible. "Doing an original sketch with Mel Brooks was a highlight. These things are very, very lovely. You don't ever think that you would be in the presence of those people."

Sheeran buys parents home opposite him

Ed Sheeran has bought his parents a flat opposite his lavish £9 million pad in North London. The 24-year-old singer, who already owns a property near his mother and father in Framlingham, Suffolk, has splashed out an estimated £750,000 to ensure John and Imogen have a place to stay when they visit him in the British capital. Speaking to The Sun newspaper, he said: "I bought them a flat. They already have a house. I got them a flat and a car in London so they can stay there. It's opposite me as well. "My thing is, I bought a house about a mile away from them where we live in a countryside, and I bought a flat and a house pretty much opposite each other in London. So when I have kids, when they start getting a little bit irritating, I've got the grandparents there." But if the house wasn't enough, Ed - who passed his driving test in October - has also gifted his supportive parents with a Mini Cooper so they can get around when they're in London. He said: "I thought instead of them having to drive their car up every time they're in the country, they can have the Mini and just use that when they are there." And John and Imogen will no doubt be spending more time in London now that Ed has announced he's taking a break from the music industry for 10 months to travel, relax and spend time with his girlfriend Cherry Seaborn.



Carey sleeps in on Christmas Day

Mariah Carey "upsets" people on Christmas Day because she insists on sleeping in. The 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' singer - who has children Moroccan and Monroe, four, with ex-husband Nick Cannon and is dating billionaire James Packer - always has an elaborate celebration but admits her loved ones are less than impressed when she insists on starting her festivities late. She said: "I love Christmas, but I am a late sleeper. I sleep in and that can make people a little upset on Christmas morning. "So I have my friend - the real Santa Claus - come to the house in Aspen with real reindeer. This is true. "He fills a stocking and sometimes he leaves a bag with gifts in it on Christmas Eve. "Then, the next day the kids get the gifts. It's fun and it's festive. "Before I had my babies I used to do this for my friends and their kids. I would invite Santa and the reindeer and he would take a video of them." While 'All I Want For Christmas Is You' has become an essential festive song, Mariah had no idea how big the track would be when she released it in 1994. She told HELLO! magazine: "It's so funny that people ask me about this song. I remember writing it in a little room on a little keyboard. "I was by myself thinking, 'What are all of the things that remind me of Christmas and the holidays?' "Of course, I wanted it to work and be a hit Christmas song but I never knew how big it would be."

Adele doesn't consider social media to be 'real'

The Grammy Award-winning singer has revealed she consciously disengaged herself from social networks while she was writing her latest album '25', claiming it kept her free from distractions during the creative process. She shared: "Privacy is key to being able to write a real record, whether people like it or not. "My life has changed so much, but I've made the realest record I can make, and it's the real part of me. How am I supposed to write a real record if I'm waiting for half a million likes on a photo? That ain't real." Adele also claimed some artists are overexposed and are therefore, diluting the impact of their music. She told Time magazine: "I'm not throwing shade at anybody, but when you have a six-month build up, don't expect me to be there the day your album comes out, because I'm bored. "It doesn't matter how amazing it is. You put seven songs out. I've heard the album. I've heard everything you want to say about it. I've heard it all over radio. Don't expect me to not lose interest before it's even happened."



Beckham documentary idea was laughed at by TV

David Beckham was laughed at by TV bosses when he suggested making a documentary. The 40-year-old retired soccer star recently filmed a program for the BBC in which he played seven games on seven continents on behalf of the children's charity Unicef, but Beckham has revealed how hard it was to get the concept off the ground. Of the moment he pitched the idea of playing soccer in the Antarctic, he told the BBC: "People sat down with us and actually laughed at the things we wanted to achieve. And to be honest, rightly so!" David - whose journey also saw him travel to places such as Nepal and Buenos Aires, Argentina - said the TV show allowed him to combine his passions of travel and soccer. He shared: "I love to dive in to different cultures and see different things and see places I've never been to before. "The first three places [we visited] are Unicef centers that we help support and fund. That was personally important to me. The other places, it was about showcasing how the power of the game affects families in life." David has been a Unicef UK ambassador since 2005, and earlier this year, he launched 7: The David Beckham Unicef Fund, which helps to protect children in danger around the world. — BangShowbiz

Morrissey salutes Peru with Andean folk tune

British music icon Morrissey delighted an audience in Peru with a cover of Andean folk tune "El Condor Pasa" as he closed an extensive tour of Latin America. The former Smiths frontman, whose biting commentary on the human condition has won him a global fan base, played before 5,000 fans in the Park of the Exposition in downtown Lima on Saturday night. Early in the set, Morrissey performed "El Condor Pasa" ("The Condor Passes"), which was written in 1913 by the Peruvian composer Daniel Alomía Robles based on a traditional instrumental melody in Peru.

Morrissey's rendition came from Simon and Garfunkel's version, "El Condor Pasa (If I Could)", which includes lyrics in English and appeared on the duo's final album, 1970's "Bridge Over Troubled Water." The song's inclusion could be taken by fans as a mark of reconciliation by the famously moody Morrissey, who in 2013 called off two shows in Lima amid a series of cancellations due to health concerns. Morrissey's

show on Saturday capped a 14-date tour of Latin America, where the singer has found an especially avid fan base. In an online posting on Monday Morrissey described the tour as "our highest triumph" and ranked the Lima show at the top of his list.

"Thank you, South America! Your love is gratefully accepted and returned tenfold," he said. Known for his strident defense of animal rights, Morrissey used the Lima show to campaign against bullfighting in Peru, where the bloody sport has been inherited from the Spanish. Morrissey showed the crowd grotesque photos of animals' deaths as he performed "The Bullfighter Dies," a song off his latest album, as well as the Smiths classic "Meat is Murder." "It is termed bullfighting even though no fight is possible: the bull has no defense against a large parade of miserably gleeful 'bullfighters'; their superiority complex so full of airs and graces, yet unable to face the bull without a slew of weaponry and support," Morrissey wrote

ahead of the concert on True to You, a website where he often makes statements.

"In 2015! In civil Peru! Such an ancient ache shreds Peruvian society, and drops any civilization low on the totem pole," he wrote. Morrissey also performed "I'm Throwing My Hands Around Paris," which appeared on his 2009 album "Years of Refusal" but which he transformed into a song of solidarity with the French capital after the November 13 attacks. — AFP



This June 19, 2015 file photo shows Morrissey as he performs at the Firefly Music Festival in Dover, Delaware. — AFP



Snow Patrol

Snow Patrol to perform and be honored at Oscar Wilde Awards

Snow Patrol will perform and be honored at the Oscar Wilde Awards. The band, which originated in Northern Ireland, will perform Feb. 25 at the event held at J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot production company in Santa Monica. The Irish singer Roisin O will also perform. Snow Patrol is the winner of the Ivor Novello award and responsible for many hit singles including "Run," "Chocolate" and "Chasing Cars." The band's albums have been nominated for the Mercury Music Prize, Brits,

Grammys and MTV Europe Music Awards. The band also provides mentoring for music businesses and bands from Northern Ireland.

It was previously announced that James Corden would be the recipient of the Honorary Irishman award. "We are hoping for a strong Irish presence in L.A. this year," said Trina Vargo, founder and president of the US-Ireland Alliance. "There is a lot of Oscar buzz around 'Room' and 'Brooklyn.'" "Room," starring Brie Larson and Jacob Tremblay, is based

on the book written by Emma Donoghue and was directed by Lenny Abrahamson. "Brooklyn," based on the novel by Colm Toibin, is directed by John Crowley and stars Domhnall Gleeson, Emory Cohen and Saoirse Ronan, a previous recipient of an Oscar Wilde Award. And Paddy Breathnach's "Viva" is one of nine films shortlisted for the foreign-language Oscar. — Reuters

Adele spends 4th week atop Billboard chart

British singer Adele extended her reign atop the weekly US Billboard 200 album chart for a fourth consecutive week on Monday, and saw a resurgence in sales for her previous album as well. Adele's record-setting "25" album sold another 728,000 copies, 297,000 songs and was streamed 8.4 million times in the past week, totaling 825,000 units according to figures from Nielsen SoundScan. Adele's 2011 album "21," with which the singer swept six Grammy awards, climbed four spots to No. 10 this week with sales of 49,000 units.

The soaring popularity for the 27-year-old singer's music comes as tickets for her 56-date North America tour, her first in five years, sold out in minutes when they went on sale last week. No new entries cracked into the top 10 of the Billboard 200 albums chart this week, as Adele's "25" outlasted other artists including Justin Bieber's "Purpose," which climbed one spot to No. 2, and Coldplay's "A Head Full of Dreams," which dropped from No. 2 to No. 7.

On the Digital Songs chart, which measures online sales of singles, "Mary Did You Know" by Jordan Smith, the winner of NBC's reality singing show "The Voice," topped the chart with 161,000 downloads, pushing Adele's ballad "Hello" to No. 2. — Reuters



Adele



Fox's 'Grease: Live' musical to air in front of studio audience

"Grease: Live" will not only air live, but will be staged in front of a live studio audience. Fox made the announcement Monday with a cast video, along with new promo shots for the Jan 31 musical event. "Grease" is the first foray into live musicals for Fox, and it will be the first televised musical event of recent times to incorporate a studio audience, differing from NBC's "Sound of Music," "Peter Pan" and most recently, "The Wiz." Insiders say the live studio audience will add a much-needed element for the cast and crew, in hopes that the audience-fueled energy will come across on screen.

Julianne Hough, who will star as Sandy, alongside Vanessa Hudgens who plays Rizzo, makes the announcement in the video (below), in which cast members jokes they hope they don't mess up. Aaron Tveit will co-star opposite Hough as Danny, the heartthrob made famous by John Travolta in the original flick. The cast is rounded out by Keke Palmer, Carlos PenaVega, Carly Rae Jepsen, David Del Rio, Jordan Fisher, Andrew Call, Kether Donohue and Mario Lopez. — Reuters



French singer Benabar performs during a concert to thank the anonymous "heroes" who assisted victims of the November 13 Paris attacks, on December 21, 2015 at the Bercy AccorHotels Arena in Paris. — AFP photos



(From second right) French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, French Minister for Social Affairs, Health and Women's Rights Marisol Touraine and the director of the state-run Paris hospitals (AP-HP) Martin Hirsch take part a minute of silence during a concert to thank the anonymous "heroes".

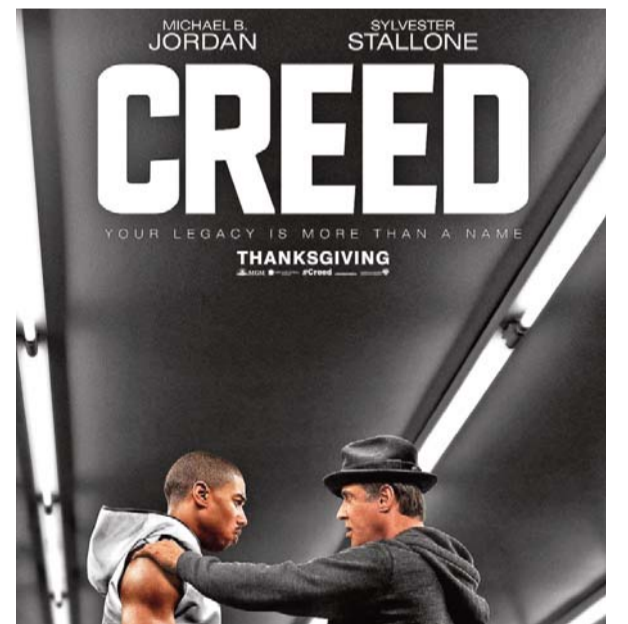
Black Film Critics Circle name 'Creed' top film of the year

The Black Film Critics Circle (BFCC) has voted "Creed" as the best film of 2015. BFCC co-president Mike Sargent announced Monday. "Rocky's" seventh installment, which follows the son of late boxing champion Apollo Creed as he seeks guidance from the famed Rocky Balboa, also won BFCC's best actor award for Michael B. Jordan's portrayal of Adonis Johnson Creed. Best supporting actor and actress honors were awarded to Sylvester Stallone and Tess Thompson for their performances as Rocky Balboa and Creed's love interest, respectively.

Universal's "Straight Outta Compton," a biographical drama that centers around the origins of rap group N.W.A., picked up the awards for best screenwriting in an original screenplay and best ensemble performance. Brie Larson won BFCC's best actress award for her performance in A24's "Room" as a mother forced to raise her son in confinement. The best directing award was given to George Miller for post-apocalyptic epic "Mad Max: Fury Road."

"Creed" led group's top 10 films list, followed by "Mad Max: Fury Road," "Straight Outta Compton," "Spotlight," "The Martian," "Room," "Beasts of No Nation," "The Hateful Eight," "The Big Short" and "Ex Machina." Additional BFCC winners include Ice Cube for the pioneer award and Abraham Attah for the rising star award. Special mention went to Netflix's "Beasts of No Nation." "This has been a very interesting and unique year for black film," said Sargent, adding that the future outlook for the genre "looks brighter than it ever been." Here's the complete list of BFCC's 2015 award winners:

- Best Picture: "Creed"
- Best Directing: George Miller "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best Actor: Michael B. Jordan "Creed"
- Best Actress: Brie Larson "Room"
- Best Supporting Actor: Sylvester Stallone "Creed"
- Best Supporting Actress: Tessa Thompson "Creed"
- Best Screenwriting (Original Screenplay): "Straight Outta Compton"
- Best Screenwriting (Adapted Screenplay): "The Martian"
- Best Cinematography: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best Foreign Language Film: "Son of Saul"
- Best Documentary Feature: "What Happened, Miss Simone?"
- Best Animated Feature: "Inside Out"



Best Ensemble Performance: "Straight Outta Compton" BFCC's Top 10 Films of 2015 are as follows in order of distinction:

1. "Creed"
2. "Mad Max: Fury Road"
3. "Straight Outta Compton"
4. "Spotlight"
5. "The Martian"
6. "Room"
7. "Beasts of No Nation"
8. "The Hateful Eight"
9. "The Big Short"
10. "Ex Machina" — Reuters



People wave lighted fiber optic wands as they attend a concert to thank the anonymous "heroes" who assisted victims of the November 13 Paris attacks.

Unsung heroes of Paris attacks honored at concert

Some 12,000 emergency and health workers, security officials and others who jumped in to respond to the November 13 terror attacks in France were honored at a concert Monday in Paris. "Firefighters of Paris, doctors, surgeons, police forces, soldiers, rescue workers," entertainer Nikos Aliagas addressed the crowd, adding several other categories of workers such as bomb experts to the list, calling them the "humble heroes of our country." "We are proud of you and we express our gratitude," he said.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo told the gathering: "On the cusp of this new year, I want to share with you my confidence and tell you the pride I feel working alongside you. Paris is very

lucky to be able to count on you. We will never forget it." The coordinated series of gun and bomb attacks at several sites in Paris, including the Bataclan concert hall, left 130 dead.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve and Health Minister Marisol Touraine also attended the event, as well as the head of Paris hospitals, Martin Hirsch. The stage then was given

over to singers including Zaz, Benabar and Jane, before the hall burst into an improvised rendition of "La Marseillaise" a cappella. The broadcast was viewed by some three million people nationwide. — AFP

'Jihad', the tale of three radicals, draws crowds in Belgium

"We've been tricked, my brother," says Reda in the final terrifying minutes of "Jihad", a short play ripped from the headlines about the odyssey of three young Muslims from the streets of Brussels to the horrors of IS-inspired martyrdom in Syria. The playwright is 39-year-old Ismael Saidi, a former police officer born in the EU capital of Brussels to a family of Moroccan origin. He is much like at least four of the 10 attackers that killed 130 people in Paris on November 13, including the only survivor, Salah Abdeslam, who is still on the run.

In his no-frills play that runs a brisk two hours, Saidi tells the darkly humorous tale of three Brussels losers who are all too easily lured down the dark road of radicalization and jihad under the wing of the Islamic State group in Syria. Radical Islam is a sensitive issue in Brussels with some of the biggest terror plots in Europe of the last 25 years linked to the city and the troubled neighborhood of Molenbeek in particular.

"This play is obviously a critique of my community. Who are these young people who sign up for jihad?" Saidi said one cool autumn morning, addressing journalists at a small theatre just a short walk from EU headquarters. In the show, Saidi goes by his first name Ismael and plays a hapless version of himself, along with the two other marginals, Reda and Ben, played by friends also using their actual first names. "I criticize any excessive tendency towards victimization.

Especially the hypocrisy of those who claim they are not tolerated when they are not tolerant themselves," Saidi said.

'Artists go to hell'

In the play, Ismael turns to radicalization after a teacher forbids his true passion, drawing. "It was a Saturday at Arabic school," Ismael begins in one of the plays early moments. "The teacher discovered my drawings and hit me while shouting a quote of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that said all artists go to hell." Ismael abandons the pencil, commits to religion, which then quickly hardens into extremism. His friend Reda, in another scene, talks of a longtime crush for Valerie, a native Belgian who is not a Muslim. "Mom told me Valerie was fine to have some fun, but real life required a Muslim woman... so I left her," he laments to the audience, a diverse crowd from all ages and walks of Brussels life. The third character, Ben, is a huge Elvis fan but on a trip to Memphis sees Aaron, a Jewish name, carved into the King's tombstone at Graceland. "Even my favorite music was part of the great Zionist conspiracy," the character says as he takes the jihad road for Syria.

Social 'schizophrenia'

"Djihad", the French spelling for Jihad, was first performed a year ago and was only supposed to run for five performances, but word-of-

mouth quickly spread and the play has been seen by 45,000 people. It heads to France next year. The other performers, Reda Chebchoubi and Ben Hamidou, are also of Moroccan origin and grew up in Brussels, the latter in Molenbeek.

Each performance is followed by a debate, where the temptations of radicalism are discussed freely to an audience often made up of high school students. "I wrote this play for my mother and children," said Saidi, who believes the play is appropriate for anyone 12-years-old or above. Saidi said some of his own childhood friends turned to radicalism. He only avoided the trap through "the luck of key encounters". He said young Muslims in Europe are pushed into a social "schizophrenia" living in ghettos that become their only identity, cutting them off from rest of the city and the world. For actor Chebchoubi, the indignities of everyday racism make the siren call of radicalism all too attractive for the Muslims of Europe.

"We are victims of both a system that denigrates us but also of our own people that take advantage of our ignorance," his character says at the end of the show. Saidi decried an "illness" fuelled by an Islam that all too often embraces anti-semitism, sexism and the refusal to recognize marriages outside the faith. "The problem in Europe dates from the 1970s when we gave the keys to the Islamic faith to Saudi Arabia," he said. Many who left for Syria, including non-Muslims,



Belgian filmmaker, playwright and stage director Ismael Saidi presents the book adapted from his play "Djihad" during a press conference in Brussels on December 4, 2015

did seek out to help a population clearly in need, Saidi added. "But those that returned to Paris weren't exactly Buddhists"—AFP



Fans dressed as Star Wars characters parade outside a movie theater showing 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' Saturday in Taipei, Taiwan. — AP

'Star Wars' overtakes 'Jurassic World' for biggest global debut

The new "Star Wars" movie has set a global opening weekend record, smashing past the previous record holder "Jurassic World" to rake in \$529 million, Disney said on Monday. "With final numbers now in, 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' rose above estimates to post an all-time industry-high \$248 million domestically plus \$281 million internationally for an all-time record global debut of \$529 million since opening December 16," the company said in a statement.

It said the figure does not include box office receipts from India and Greece, where the movie opens this week or from China, the world's second biggest film market where it opens on January 9. "Jurassic World" previously held the record for global launch with \$524.9 million. "Our sole focus has been creating a film that delivers that one-of-a-kind Star Wars experience, and director J.J. Abrams, Lucasfilm President Kathleen Kennedy and the Lucasfilm team have outdone themselves," Disney chairman Alan Horn said at the weekend.

The highly anticipated seventh installment of the space saga has blazed a record-setting trail since its domestic debut last Thursday, taking the prize for highest-grossing domestic opening night with \$57 million and biggest domestic single-day sales Friday with \$120.5 million.

'Power of the force'

"Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2," previously held both records at \$43.5 million for an opening night and \$91 million for a first day. As far as all-time box office sales, two films by James Cameron hold the record—"Avatar" (\$2.78 billion) and "Titanic" (\$2.18 billion), and it is expected that "The Force Awakens" might unseat both. "Star Wars" is officially the biggest thing to happen in the known box office universe now that it has taken the best debuts records-domestic and worldwide—from "Jurassic World," said Jeff Bock, box office analyst at Exhibitor Relations.

"The industry is expecting amazing holds this upcoming weekend and through the holidays, and if that happens, 'Avatar'

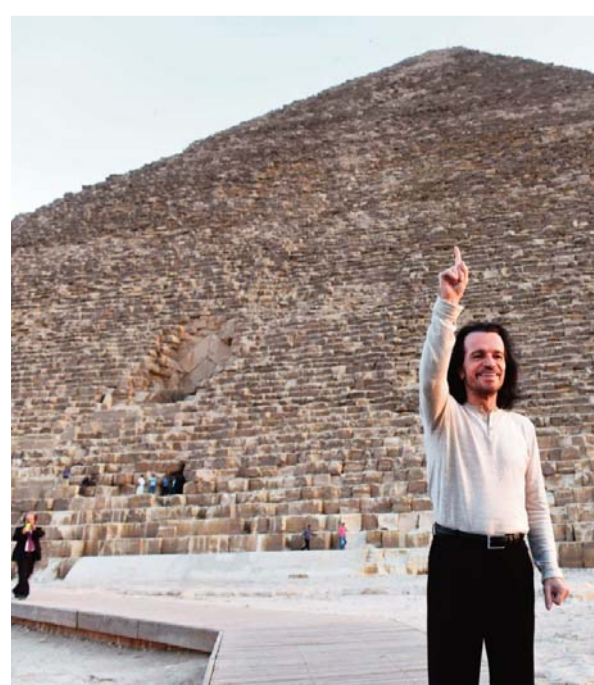
and its records may be the next thing to fall in the face of the power of the force." Disney said the galactic success of the movie has already enabled the company to cross the \$5 billion mark in global box office receipts in a calendar year for the first time ever, surpassing the previous record of \$4.73 billion set in 2013. "The Force Awakens" picks up the intergalactic story of good versus evil 30 years on from "The Return of the Jedi," the last episode of the original trilogy.

The trio of heroes who appeared in the first of the blockbusters in 1977 — smuggler Han Solo (Harrison Ford), Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), leader of the rebel alliance, and her twin brother Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) — are all back and played by the actors that "Star Wars" first made famous. Also debuting at the box office in the top 10 this weekend were four other films, whose numbers seemed minuscule compared to the "Star Wars" haul. The animated "Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip," came in second place in its first weekend, with \$14.3 million, according to box office tracker Exhibitor Relations.

In third and also in its debut weekend was "Sisters," starring Tina Fey and Amy Poehler as two siblings throwing one last party in their childhood home before it is sold. It earned only \$14 million. "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay-Part 2," the fourth and last movie in the blockbuster franchise that turned Jennifer Lawrence into a Hollywood megastar, earned \$5.7 million, falling to fourth place in its fifth week in theaters. Meanwhile "Creed," a next-generation version of the "Rocky" series earned \$5 million in its fourth week on the big screen.

Box office receipts for the rest of the top 10 were as follows:

6. "The Good Dinosaur" (\$4.3 million)
7. "Krampus" (\$4.1 million)
8. "In the Heart of the Sea" (\$3.5 million)
9. "Dilwale" (\$1.9 million-debut weekend)
10. "Bajirao Mastani" (\$1.7 million-debut weekend) —AFP



This October 28, 2015 file photo shows Greek-American contemporary composer Yiannis Chrysomallis, who goes by the stage name Yanni, posing for a picture during a visit to the Giza pyramids south of the Egyptian capital Cairo. — AFP

Yanni to broadcast concert from Pyramids

Yanni, the prolific New Age composer known for extravagant live performances, plans a busy 2016 that includes broadcast of a concert at the Pyramids. The Greek-born, US-based keyboardist announced that "Yanni: The Dream Concert-Live from the Great Pyramids of Egypt," will air on US public broadcaster PBS in March. The concert will be a recording of Yanni's first appearance in Egypt from October, in which he brought an orchestra and an accompanying light show to the Pyramids.

The showcase of the ancient wonder could offer a publicity boon for Egypt as it struggles to ease overseas tourists' safety concerns. At the same time, a number of Egyptians complained on social media that Yanni's two shows were too expensive for them. The concert film will be Yanni's 12th for PBS. The first, and most famous, was a concert by Yanni at the Acropolis in his native Greece recorded in 1993. He released his last such concert in 2012 which was taped in Puerto Rico at the 16th-century Morro Castle.

Yanni on January 29 will also release a new album, "Sensuous Chill," which his label said would include a track with a touch of bhangra, the energetic dance music with roots in Punjab. Yanni plans a tour across North America for the album, starting on February 2 in Sarasota, Florida. Yanni, whose real name is Yiannis Chrysomallis, is one of the defining artists of New Age, the genre that brings a spiritual dimension to instrumental electronic music that often has classical form as well as global influences. — AFP

Tarantino gets star on Hollywood Walk of Fame

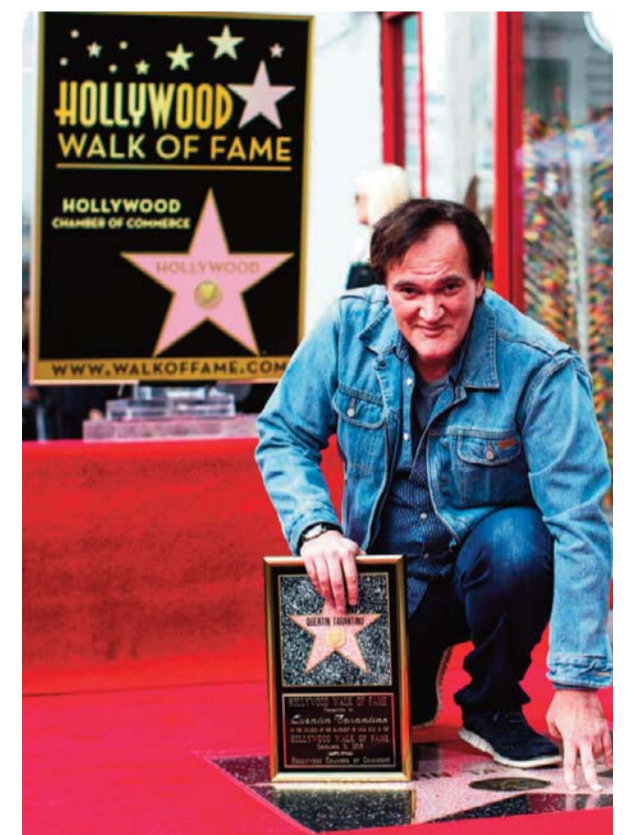
Oscar-winning filmmaker Quentin Tarantino got his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Monday, just days before the release of his latest movie "The Hateful Eight." Tarantino recalled to a crowd that had gathered for the event outside the Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard how his parents used to take him to see films at the famed theatre, including "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" or his first James Bond movie, "Diamonds are Forever."

"The line went all the way down the block. And we stayed in that line, and at one point of that line, I stood right there," he said, pointing to his star. "So, I have called Hollywood my home even before I lived in this ZIP code for a very, very long

time." The filmmaker, who dropped out of high school insisting he could learn more on his own, won Oscars for the black comedy western "Django Unchained" in 2013 and the black comedy crime film "Pulp Fiction" in 1995. But his latest movie "The Hateful Eight" has received lukewarm reviews and was recently snubbed by the Golden Globes and the Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations, considered a bellwether for the Oscars. — AFP



Filmmaker and Director Quentin Tarantino and actor Samuel L Jackson pose at the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



Filmmaker and Director Quentin Tarantino poses with his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.—AFP photos

Harrison Ford was paid over 50x more than 'Star Wars' co-stars

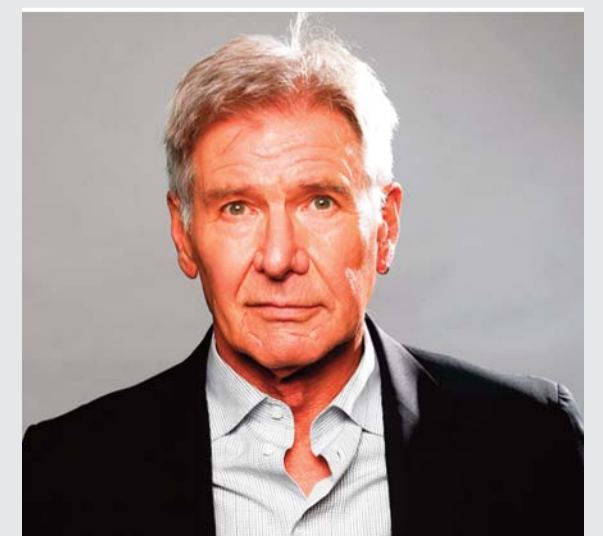
With its global bow now at a record \$529 million, "Star Wars" box office success will undoubtedly afford its cast members hefty pay cuts on their next projects. But just how much money did "The Force Awakens" actors earn to join a galaxy far, far away? Sources tell Variety Harrison Ford came away the big winner on Disney and Lucasfilm's sequel with a paycheck in the 8 figure range (\$15 million to \$20 million) to reprise his role of Han Solo.

On Monday, the Daily Mail issued a report saying that Ford earned a staggering \$25 million to return to the "Star Wars" franchise and while insiders stress that number is too high, they did confirm that the 73 year-old actor earned a substantially larger cut than his co-stars. Mark Hamill and Carrie Fisher took home salaries in the low-seven figure range, according to sources. Newcomers John Boyega and Daisy Ridley were paid in the low-six figure range (\$100k-\$300k). Actors Adam Driver and Oscar Isaac, meanwhile, received offers of mid to high six-figures. Because Driver and Isaac had fixed quotes from previous film and TV work, sources say their deals were negotiated higher compared to Boyega and Ridley, who, for the most part, had never appeared in a large-scale film before.

Insiders tell Variety that Disney made a decision in 2014 prior to casting the new roles to create a "legacy pay scale" intended for talent like Ford, Fisher and Hamill, who had previously been a part of the "Star Wars" universe, and general pay scale for actors that would be appearing for the first time. Hamill and Fisher's salaries are expected to rise in upcoming installments as their parts grow with each film. The salaries don't include back-end bonuses from the pic's box office haul, which in a rare case doesn't even kick in till the film crosses \$1 billion worldwide, and following the success of "The Force Awakens," deals are expected to

be renegotiated before the next films get underway.

While Ford is considered the biggest star in the ensemble, the no. 1 reason the actor walked away with the most money had to do with the fact that this would be a one-off situation for the actor since his character dies in "The Force Awakens." As for the younger talent receiving lower salaries—it's a fairly common practice in today's market for newer actors, especially with so many negotiations involving back-end box office bonuses. For the first "Fifty Shades of Grey," stars Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan received offers in the six-figure range and have since renegotiated multi-million dollar deals for future installments. — Reuters



Harrison Ford



A Christian Palestinian man dressed up as Santa Claus rings a bell as he sits on a camel at Mt Olives back-dropped by Jerusalem's Old City skyline, as Christians around the world prepare to celebrate Christmas. — AFP

'Silent Night': From village ditty to global Christmas hit

When "Silent Night" was born in Austria almost 200 years ago, those present had little idea that the Christmas carol would one day be sung the world over, including this year by Miley Cyrus and some Swedish goats. Such though was the destiny of "Stille Nacht", premiered to a modest church congregation of ship laborers and their families in this small town in Austria on Christmas Eve, 1818. The words, since translated into more than 300 languages and dialects-including Japanese, Welsh and Farsi-had been written as a poem by a priest, Joseph Mohr, in 1816, a time of great suffering in the wake of Europe's Napoleonic wars.

Two years later, Mohr asked his friend stationed in a nearby village, the organist, choirmaster and schoolteacher Franz Xaver Gruber, to compose a tune. When Gruber duly obliged on December 24, the two men decided to sing it together that very evening at mass in Oberndorf church. The organ was broken, according to legend because of nibbling mice, so Mohr

played guitar. Many years later in his 1854 "Authentic Account of the Origin of the Christmas Carol, 'Silent Night, Holy Night,'" Gruber recalled there was "general approval by all".

'Pop stars'

This approval would snowball, although it is a bit of a mystery how exactly the song then spread. It is thought that a key role was played by one Carl Mauracher, a master organ builder and repair man, who took the song back home to the Zillertal valley in the Tyrol region. There it was adopted by two travelling singing groups, the Rainer Singers and the Strasser Siblings, who performed around Europe and beyond-including in the Rainers' case in the United States. "They were the pop stars of the time," said Anna Holzner from the Silent Night museum-home today to Mohr's guitar-in Hallein, where Gruber lived until his death in 1863.

An English version of the German original soon followed,

and by the end of the 19th century it was being sung on all continents, its spread helped by Christian missionaries. During World War I, legend has it that German and British soldiers in opposing trenches sang it at Christmas 1914, its call for peace sounding out over no man's land during a famous truce. Since then the song has been recorded many hundreds of times by the likes of Bing Crosby-to huge success-and Elvis Presley, without forgetting John Denver with the Muppets and gravel-voiced satanic German rockers Erlöschung. This year, along with Cyrus, comes a new version bleated by goats released by the Swedish branch of charity Action Aid-part of an album entitled "All I want for Christmas is a Goat".

Fame at last

Today, Mohr and Gruber are honored in around a dozen sites locally, including in Oberndorf and in Hochburg-Ach, Gruber's birthplace where for the past 10 years locals have per-

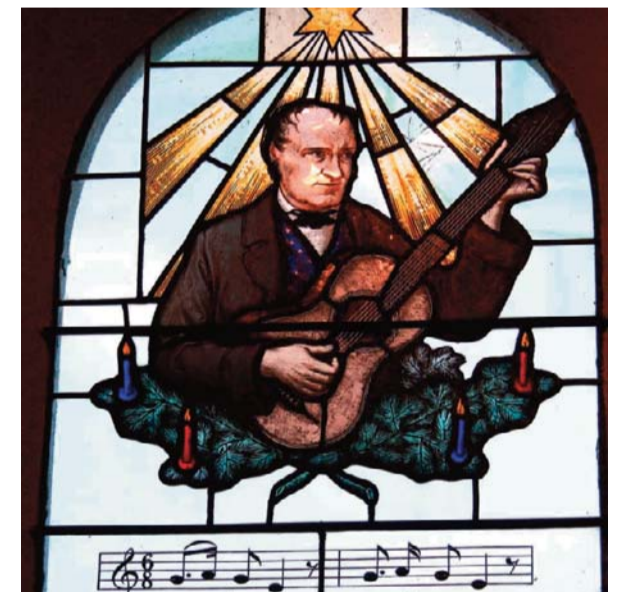
formed a special play every Christmas. "In my country this song is sung in 20 or 30 different languages," Sally, 45, a bus driver in Salzburg originally from Ghana, told AFP, one of several people performing the song in different languages in the play. The original Oberndorf church-along with its pesky mice-was demolished at the beginning of the 20th century after being damaged by floods. Today in its place stands a small chapel. With stained glass windows depicting Mohr and Gruber, every December 24 thousands of people gather outside for a Christmas ceremony, including of course a rendition of "Silent Night". — AFP



The Silent-Night-Memorial-Chapel in Austrian village of Oberndorf.



Markus Gigmayer (left) singing a Silent night carol with his brother Christian to visitors at The Silent-Night-Memorial-Chapel, in the Austrian village of Oberndorf.



This file photo taken on December 10, 2003 shows a stained glass window with a portrait of composer Franz Xaver Gruber at the Silent-Night-Memorial-Chapel in the Austrian village of Oberndorf.— AFP photos

Fun and festive holiday gift paper

Why settle for run-of-the-mill holiday gift wrapping when there are dozens of wonderful papers available? This year's designs reflect what's going on in decor, with metallic of all kinds, and masculine and feminine motifs playing off each other, says Krissa Rossbund, senior style editor at Traditional Home magazine. And as with home décor, there's also room for adding your own touch.

Yin and Yang

"There's wonderful visual tension right now in design that has a masculine slant," Rossbund says. For instance, The Container Store's got a repeating deer print on a blue background, and a handsome gold antler print on black; both have a menswear vibe, great for wrapping guy gifts.

Rifle Paper Company's got some designs that aren't overly Christmas-y yet evoke the season. Graphite Lace puts a feminine print on a chic gray background. Holiday Greens renders flowers and greenery in rich, earthy hues. Blush, mint, charcoal, gold and cream in a similar print make for a Winter Wonderland. Pier 1 has a realistic, birch-bark printed paper, and a homespun plaid that reverses to poinsettias and holly.

Having fun

Yummy, photo-printed gingerbread cooks up a luscious paper at Zazzle. Black may not seem like a seasonal color, but with brightly colored ornaments, holiday lights or reindeer in the foreground, you have a paper that pops. The retailer also has some personalized options that let you add a family photo or name to a design of your choice.

Royal-blue paper studded with glitter creates an elegant wrap at Paper Source. And for fun, there's a Hanukkah paper populated with herds of llamas. A page of hand-drawn Hanukkah wishes in white on blue would be just as pretty framed as it would be as wrapping paper.

Class act

At Paper Mojo, find some art papers perfect for small and special gifts. One refined, color-saturated paper is hand-marbled by Brazilian artist Renato Crepaldi. "We were originally attracted to Renato's work because of his vibrant colors and crisp lines," says company co-founder Shelly Gardner-Alley. "He's exhibited his work in art galleries around the world."

The retailer also has Japanese prints known as "chiyogami" silkscreened onto papers made with kozo plant fibers, available on special order. And an Indian paper is embossed with myriad metallic pebbles, giving the impression that you're wrapping something in hammered gold. Also, there are Snow & Graham's striking yet simple papers: Designs include ribbon candy and holiday lights. Recycled cotton fiber is used to make eco-friendly papers at Luxe Paperie. On one, silvery reindeer strut across a rich yellow background; on another, a gold, French, damask-inspired design on deep red looks like luxe linen. Mod Moroccan and ikat patterns are rendered in soy inks on recycled content paper.

Personal touch

Rossbund suggests making gift wrap your own by opting for a solid "signature" color. Opt for a couple of big rolls in col-

ors you love, and then customize them with add-ons like contrasting ribbon bows or even yarn. "A skein of yarn is a cost-friendly solution and adds a welcoming warm texture to packages that's reminiscent of a cozy sweater," she says.

"Get creative using knots instead of bows for a simple, graphic appearance." Think beyond the gift-wrap roll, if you want. Foreign-language newspapers, and pages from children's books or coffee-table art books make interesting wrapping paper. — AP



This photo provide by Pier 1 Imports shows a versatile wrap that has season-ready poinsettias on one side, and holiday wishes rendered in chalkboard-style typography on the other.



In this photo provided by Zazzle, large, colorful ornaments tumble across an eye-catching, almost 3-D wrap paper from Zazzle designer Unique Christmas Gifts.



In this photo provided by Zazzle, English artist Louis Wain's (1860-1939) Christmas party full of festive cats makes a fun and fitting wrapping paper for a feline lover by Zazzle designer Anthro Animals.—AP photos