

Empower women by abolishing outdated laws



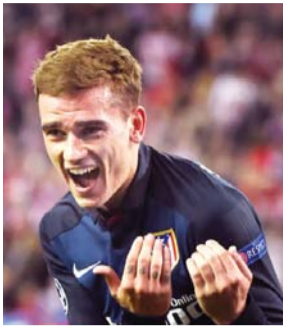
Jordan security services shut Brotherhood headquarters



Bill Gates predicts end of polio soon



Atletico in semis as Griezmann double knocks out Barcelona



NOD TO HIGHER POWER TARIFFS FOR EXPATRIATES, BUSINESSES

LAWMAKERS EXEMPT CITIZENS FROM PROPOSED RAISES



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conspiracy theories

THIS IS APARTHEID



By Badrya Darwish

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After many sessions since the government started suggesting increasing the prices of petrol and water for the nation and took it to the parliament for debate of course due to the drop in the price of oil - this is what the great parliament came out with yesterday.

The question of lifting subsidies was justified due to collapsing oil prices, with Kuwaiti crude hitting a low of around \$20, but very recently we've seen prices rise as high as \$36, and there is lots of optimism that oil prices will recover. On the other hand, Kuwait does not have a deficit if you include all of its revenue streams. So the big drama that the government is making by increasing prices, cutting budgets, tightening belts, or whatever you call it, is not totally based on real numbers.

These are the government's justification which was to be considered by the parliament. Unfortunately it was sad to see the parliament's verdict on the issue yesterday. It approved increased electricity and water charges for businesses and expats.

This is impossible for businesses. It's illogical to increase any price more than 100 percent. As you can see, it used to be 2 fils per kilowatt and now it will be 25 fils per kilowatt for businesses. And for flats rented by expats, tariffs will jump from 2 fils per kilowatt to 15 fils per kilowatt. Kuwaitis living in apartments and in residential areas will be exempted.

Why the discrimination in the nation? We are all living under the same roof. I'm lucky I'm Kuwaiti and this will not affect me, but in all fairness, it's not just and not Islamic at all to treat people who are living with us in the same country in the same conditions in this apartheid manner.

This is completely wrong and I hope the honorable gentlemen in the parliament will reconsider. I know they plan to have one more reading in two weeks to finalize this harsh verdict on businesses and expats. Kuwait has always been known as the freest and fairest nation in the Middle East. Don't ruin its reputation. Hopefully, in two weeks' time, we will hear more fair and reasonable ideas that abide by the laws of our religion and our humanity.



KUWAIT: Finance Minister and acting oil minister Anas Al-Saleh gestures as Electricity and Water Minister Ahmad Al-Jassar looks on during a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly yesterday voted in the first round to allow the government to raise electricity and water charges on apartment buildings - mostly used by expatriates - and businesses, but exempted citizens. Thirty-one MPs voted in favor and 17 members against the bill. The second and final round of voting will take place after two weeks, and MPs said they will introduce amendments to the bill. If given the final clearance, it will be the first time in 50 years that Kuwait will raise power charges.

According to the bill, those living in apartments will pay 5 fils per kilowatt for the first 1,000 kilowatts, 10 fils per kilowatt for between 1,000 and 2,000 kW and as much as 15 fils a kilowatt for consumption above 2,000 kW. Water prices will also be more than doubled. Citizens and those staying in private houses have been exempted and will continue to pay just 2 fils per kilowatt regardless of consumption. MPs are expected to also exempt tens of thousands of Kuwaiti families living in apartments while waiting for their turn to receive a government house.

It was not immediately clear when the new charges will be applied, but indications are that it will be applied only after installing smart power meters and could take up to one year. Initially, MPs rejected the draft law for including private houses, but then passed it when private houses were excluded.

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NATIONAL GUARD TO BE DEPLOYED AT OIL SITES

MOI: NO 'AMNESTY' FOR VISA VIOLATORS

CRACKDOWN TO CONTINUE

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Kuwait has no plans to give an amnesty to visa violators because lawbreakers in recent years have used the amnesty period to exit the country without paying fines, a senior government official said yesterday.

"It has become a habit that every now and then, visa violators look forward for an amnesty period so that they can travel and escape without paying their fines," Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said during a parliament session yesterday. "We at the interior ministry saw that there is no need for an amnesty, as we continue

to pursue every lawbreaker everywhere," he added.

The minister confirmed that his ministry's new strategy aims to conduct full and comprehensive security inspection tours in all governorates due to its effectiveness in apprehending wanted suspects in the country. About 42,000 expats living illegally in Kuwait had benefited from a four-month amnesty period which ended on June 30, 2011 - the last time an amnesty was given. In January, the ministry allowed residency violators to pay their fines and either legalize their status or leave the country without being blacklisted. This will mean they can return on a new visa in the future.

KUWAIT: Kuwait was to deploy national guard units yesterday to run and protect some oil facilities after workers announced a major strike for this weekend, a newspaper said. The units would start working at facilities in the state's oil-rich southern region, Al-Rai said, citing unnamed sources. The report could not be confirmed. Kuwait's oil workers' union decided to begin an open-ended strike from Sunday after a dispute with the government over proposed pay cuts.

Hit by the sharp drop in crude prices, Kuwait is introducing a new payroll scheme for all public employees and wants to include the country's 20,000 oil workers, which would mean an automatic cut in wages and incentives. The union decision for the strike at all production units and other facilities was taken on Monday, a day after talks with acting oil minister Anas Al-Saleh broke down. Saleh told parliament yesterday that negotiations with unions were still ongoing.

National oil conglomerate Kuwait Petroleum Corp said it had accepted a request by the ministry of social affairs and labor for negotiations with the work-

ers. KPC spokesman Sheikh Talal Khaled Al-Sabah said the ministry had scheduled negotiations with the oil workers for today, and that the KPC would attend. Sheikh Talal said that under Kuwaiti laws, no strike can take place while negotiations are under way, urging workers and KPC and its subsidiaries not to "heed calls to obstruct work". A spokesman for the workers told AFP that the union was meeting to study the ministry request and whether to attend new negotiations.

However, a labor union leader said plans for the strike by thousands of workers at state-owned oil, gas and petrochemical companies were in place, denying reports that negotiations were under way. "There are no negotiations between the unions and the government over the strike," Farhan Al-Ajmi, head of the Petrochemicals Industries Company workers union, told Reuters. He said the door for negotiations had been closed since the last meeting with Saleh earlier this week. "The strike will not be cancelled or suspended until all the demands are met," he said.

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RIYADH: A Saudi municipal worker cleans a flooded street after heavy rainfall across the Saudi capital yesterday. — AFP

TRAFFIC CHAOS, SCHOOLS SHUT IN RIYADH FLOODS

RIYADH: Traffic backed up and schools were shut in the Saudi capital Riyadh yesterday after the desert city was struck by a rare severe storm that sparked flooding. The storm, which struck during Tuesday evening's rush hour, had subsided by daybreak yesterday but some roads were still inundated. Riyadh implemented its emergency plan to deal with the flooding, the spokesman for the municipal council, Mohammed Al-Shwayman, was quoted by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) as saying. Residents were urged not to gather in affected areas "for the sake of taking pictures and videos, putting their lives at risk", he said. Traffic backed up

for kilometres along at least one major thoroughfare and many vehicles broke down as the deluge flooded city streets. Riyadh, an inland desert city of 5.7 million, is famed for its searing temperatures and sees only occasional bursts of rain.

The Arab News daily cited the education department as saying all schools in the capital region would be shut yesterday. SPA reported that at least one university, the Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, had also suspended classes. In the kingdom's southwest, classes were suspended in the Asir region "due to weather conditions," an official cited by SPA said. — AFP

SAUDI CABINET CURBS POWERS OF VICE POLICE

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has stripped its frequently criticized religious police of their powers to arrest, urging them to act "kindly and gently" in enforcing Islamic rules. Some Saudis called the move long overdue. Under changes approved by the cabinet, religious officers will no longer be allowed to detain people and instead must report violators to police or drug squad officers, the official Saudi Press Agency said late Tuesday. Officers of the Haia force, also known as the Mutawaa, must "carry out the duties of encouraging virtue and forbidding vice by advising kindly and gently" under the new rules, SPA reported.

"Neither the heads nor members of the Haia are to stop or arrest or chase people or ask for their IDs or follow them - that is considered the jurisdiction of the police or the drug unit," the regulations say. Saudi Arabia's religious police enforce the country's strict interpretation of Islam including segregation of the sexes and ensuring that women cover themselves from head-to-toe when in public.

Formally known as the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, its members also patrol shops to make sure they are shuttered during prayers five times daily. Their tactics have regularly been the subject of controversy, most recently in February when members were arrested for allegedly assaulting a young woman outside a Riyadh shopping mall, local media said at the time.

Continued on Page 13

SISI ON DEFENSIVE OVER ISLES, STUDENT'S KILLING

CAIRO: Egypt's president yesterday sought to defuse a storm stirred up by his government's declared intention to hand over control of two strategic Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia, arguing that he did not surrender Egyptian territory. President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi also reiterated Cairo's position that Egyptian security forces had nothing to do with the torture and killing of an Italian doctoral student abducted in Cairo, an incident that has poisoned ties with Italy. Rome recalled its ambassador to Cairo in protest of what it called a lack of cooperation by Egyptian authorities in the investigation.

Addressing both issues in a speech to a group of officials and journalists, Sisi suggested conspirators were working against the country. "The conspiracy by the people of evil, they have been at work, and are still working," Sisi said, adding that he would not identify them. "Trust the man you entrusted with your country, with your honor. Your land is your honor. I'm saying, guys, there's a lot of chaos," he said in the speech, broadcast live on state television.

The impromptu, two-hour address lasted so long one MP had to excuse himself to use the bathroom. At the end, he tried to ask a question and was silenced by Sisi, who retorted: "I did not give permission for anyone to speak."



CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi speaks during a live broadcast yesterday. — AP

State television severed live transmission immediately after the outburst, which stunned viewers and set off a social media frenzy over the encroachment on free expression in Sisi's Egypt.

The hashtag "speech does not need permission" trended on Twitter, with Egyptians mocking the fact that Sisi had invited people to a debate in which only he aired his views.

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



ISTANBUL: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by Turkish Minister of Economy Mustafa Elitas after arriving at Turkey's Ataturk Airport.

'KUWAIT TOP CONTRIBUTOR TO ISLAMIC LABOR'

ISTANBUL: Director General of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) Musa Kulaklikaya hailed the efforts of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to develop joint Islamic labor. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad has made numerous prominent contributions, aiming to boost economic cooperation among Islamic states, Kulaklikaya said in an interview yesterday.

Meanwhile, he noted Kuwait's chain of contributions to support development, including a financial aid to establish SESRIC's new headquarters in Ankara, Turkey, as well as donations by Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) to launch projects in 45 Islamic states. The official also mentioned Kuwait's contributions to the Islamic Development Bank as a founding member, for boosting trade and achieve development.

As for the Islamic Summit Conference to be held in Turkey today, Kulaklikaya pointed out the OIC important achievement, completing the OIC-2025 Program of Action, for developing joint-Islamic labor in different fields for the next ten years.

The summit will address several vital issues including religious extremism, terrorism, the Syrian crisis, the Palestinian cause and the current situation in Yemen, Iraq, Libya and other conflict-stricken Muslim countries, said the official.

SESRIC, established under the OIC, collates, processes and disseminates socio-economic statistics and information on and for utilization by the member countries, he said. The center also studies and evaluates economic and social development in the member countries to help generate proposals that will initiate and enhance co-operation among them. It also organizes training programs in selected fields, geared to the needs of the member countries as well as to the general objectives of the OIC. — KUNA

AMIR ARRIVES IN TURKEY FOR ISLAMIC SUMMIT

ISTANBUL/KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his accompanying delegation arrived at Turkey's Ataturk Airport yesterday to lead Kuwait's delegation to the 13th session of the Islamic Summit Conference 'Unity and Solidarity for Justice and Peace' due in Istanbul today.

His Highness the Amir was welcomed at the airport by Turkish Minister of Economy Mustafa Elitas, Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Istanbul Deputy Governor Ismail Gultekin, Kuwaiti Ambassador in Turkey Abdullah Al-Thuweikh and Kuwaiti Consul General in Istanbul Mohammad Fahad Al-Mohammad and several other Kuwaiti diplomats.

His Highness the Amir was seen off upon departing Kuwait by His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, top sheikhs, security officials and ministers.

His Highness' delegation includes First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister,

Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Oil Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane, chairman of the office of His Highness the Amir Ahmad Al-Fahad, Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Abu Al-Hasan, head of the Amiri protocol department Sheikh Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Advisor Abdullah Al-Matouq, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah, head of media and cultural affairs at the Amiri Diwan Yousif Al-Roumi, head of economic and political affairs at the Diwan Sheikh Fawaz Saud Nasser Saud Al-Sabah and senior Amiri Diwan and foreign ministry officials. — KUNA

JOINT STRATEGY FOR JUDICIARY IN GCC'S HIGH, CASSATION COURTS

RIYADH: Setting a joint strategy for judiciary in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) high and cassation courts was the major issue on the agenda of a judicial meeting held in Riyadh yesterday. The topic was discussed by the heads of high courts and courts in the GCC, said Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council Judge Yousef Al-Mutaw'aa, who is also President of Court of Cassation.

The gathering discussed all aspects of the strategy, identifying its vision, goals, programs and operational plan, Judge Mutaw'aa said. He noted that a draft project was approved by deputy heads of high and cassation courts last month.

During the meeting, Kuwait proposed that the GCC high and cassation courts would be committed to submit reports on what they achieve of the plan in each member state, he added. The operational programs of the plan comprise exchange of visits between GCC judges and judicial staffs.

In addition, the meeting approved yesterday a Kuwaiti paper on qualifying judges of cassation courts, Mutaw'aa said. The Kuwaiti Court of Cassation was also entrusted with designing the litigation system likely to help realize convergence, or similarity, among the judicial and administrative bodies in the GCC courts of cassation. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Acting Premier Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled (center), Justice Minister Yaqoub Al-Sane (right) and Awqaf Ministry's Undersecretary Fared Emadi attend the Holy Quran International Prize. — KUNA

KUWAIT INT'L PRIZE FOR HOLY QURAN KICKS OFF

KUWAIT: The 7th Kuwait International Prize of the Holy Quran, patronized by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was opened yesterday. The opening ceremony, held by the Ministry of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, was attended by Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Addressing the event, Minister of Justice and Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane referred to the enormous hazards, intellectual and security, facing the Muslim nation, which makes it inevitable to stick to sources of power, and nothing is greater than the Holy Quran, "the strong rope of Allah." The Prize should not only focus on recitation and memorization of the Quran, but has to proceed to the components of "such genuine identity" included in the Holy Book, the minister said.

For Sane, the worst plight of a nation is to lose its cultural

identity, the most valuable thing it owns. The identity, built through the Quran, preserves national unity, boosts co-existence and counters extremism, exclusion and exaggeration in religion, the minister stressed.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fared Emadi, stressed Kuwait's great interest in Quran and His Highness the Amir's keenness to patronize the Prize. Emadi, who is also head of the higher committee of the Prize, referred to Kuwait being chosen as Capital of Islamic Culture 2016. Up to 100 people, from 50 countries, are taking part in the 7th Kuwait International Prize for the Holy Quran. An exhibition is held as part of the Prize, under the theme of "scientific miracles in the Holy Quran." It includes the biggest copy of the Quran, nominated to enter the Guinness World Records. The exhibition runs up till April 20. — KUNA



NSB CHIEF MEETS BRITISH OFFICIAL

KUWAIT: The President of National Security Bureau (NSB) Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah met yesterday with British Duke of Westminster Major-General Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor to discuss several issues of common concern. In a statement, Sheikh Thamer said the meeting also highlighted ways of boosting joint cooperation between the two countries. The statement noted that both sides also tackled an initiative for establishing a rehabilitation center for the UK and its allies in Bahrain, which also aims at serving British veterans and victims of conflicts through a creative process and clinical rehabilitation. — KUNA



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In my view

'ABOLISH ARTICLE 153'



By Alanoud Al-Sharekh

There has been increased interest in the importance of empowering women in Kuwait. This has included designating a national day to celebrate the achievements of Kuwaiti women (May 16), and greater visibility for programs concerned with ensuring that women are better represented in the labor market, with the long-awaited SME Fund also focusing on aspects of female entrepreneurship.

While this momentum is both welcome and necessary to continue the development of Kuwait on both the economic and social fronts, what is equally, or even more important, is to tackle the issues that disempower Kuwaiti women on a daily basis. There is an entrenched tradition of ignoring many of the damaging legal and social practices that exist on the institutional, and the more insidious personal level, which make it difficult to implement any serious measures to change the gender inequality status in Kuwait.

Many of these practices are defended in the name of tradition, and many of them threaten the very fabric of this society and its inherent humane values. These practices exist within a vacuum of legal assistance, medical aid and the support infrastructure necessary to protect the most vulnerable women and children, a vacuum that has enabled those who would physically and emotionally harm them in the name of guardianship. Domestic abuse and the psychological scars that women and children bear as a result of it is not a pleasant subject; it is difficult, divisive and highly charged because it cannot be eradicated without real political will to punish those who would use violence to control others.

Sadly, there are laws that exist within our penal code that encourage this type of physical tyranny, laws that violate our constitution, our Islamic values and the basic tenets of human rights. In late 2014, a small group of dedicated women decided to take a stand against this conspiracy of silence around violent legalization and around the taboo nature of opposing "disciplinary violence" against women and children as the traditional right of a male guardian.

These women formed a campaign to 'Abolish Article 153' from Kuwait's penal code, an "honor" killing law that would treat these murders as a misdemeanor and punish them with a maximum of a 3-year prison sentence or a 3,000 rupee (KD 225) fine. There are other laws that encourage violence by not punishing perpetrators, such as allowing kidnappers who rape their victims to marry them as an alternative to jail time.

The consequences of the continued existence of these legislations, and the lack of government backed networks to enable, protect and ultimately empower the most vulnerable demographic in Kuwait (such as shelters, helplines and a trained police force that treats the male aggressor as a criminal rather than a "disciplinary"), means that we will continue to see violence escalate in our community, and little progress in terms of female economic and political integration. The fact that there are no women MPs in National Assembly eleven years after Kuwaiti women gained full political rights is a testament to that.

We need to rediscover our national pride, and within that the respect for ourselves that would not allow such shameful and inhuman actions to continue unchecked for fear of transgressing on the public/private divide. The state has an obligation to protect its citizens, and to provide the basic needs for them in terms of trauma care in hospitals, and trained and sympathetic police officers who will side with the victims first and foremost.

Kuwait's government has taken some small steps in that direction, with the inauguration of the so-called "Social Police" and a weekday helpline that aims to arbitrate more than resolve the issue or provide safe passage for victims of domestic violence from their abusers. We as a civil society need to do our part as well, and lobby our representatives to make this issue a priority, and to raise awareness around these harmful practices without fearing the backlash, because it is this culture of fear, and of social embarrassment, that has allowed this unnecessary evil to flourish.

Dr Alanoud Al Sharekh is an academic, activist and researcher on Arab youth and women's issues. She is a Research Associate at the London Middle East Institute at the School for Oriental and African Studies and a published author.



Shuwaikh Port

KPA SEEKS TO COPE WITH DIRECTIVES TO TURN COUNTRY INTO INT'L FINANCIAL HUB

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA), in its 2015-2019 plan, is planning to cope with directives aiming to turn the country into an international financial and commercial hub, as logistic transport is an optimal use of Kuwait's strategic location. The authority seeks to benefit from pioneering experiments in this regard, particularly that of the UAE. It has recently sent a team to Dubai's ports to be briefed on this successful move.

The State of Kuwait is building Mubarak Al-Kabeer Seaport in line with its policy aiming to enhance its regional location in the area of maritime transport, in addition to developing the current seaports through a plan including ambitious projects to increase their capacities and capabilities.

A review of KPA's projects in the upcoming five years shows that the authority has four sectors; the two main ones are ports and employees, the two others are logistic land and marine berths. The development plan includes the three ports; Shuwaikh, Shuaiba and Doha. The plan has short,

medium, and long-term projects.

Shuwaikh port

Shuwaikh port is the main commercial port in the State of Kuwait. It is located to the immediate North and East of Kuwait City. Shuwaikh navigation channel is about 8 kilometers long. The port has 21 berths including 2 container berths.

Development plan at Shuwaikh includes many projects like maritime system and CCTV system, developing infrastructure, widening and deepening the waterway leading to the port, and evolving and rebuilding berths.

The project of building a container terminal at Shuwaikh Port is also among the development plan that includes berths with 14 meters depth and 1,250 meters length. Deepening the port's navigational channel is included in the plan to increase depth to 12.5 meters to facilitate navigation of ships with 12 meters draft.

Shuaiba Port

The development plan of Shuaiba Port includes installing

CCTV system and maritime system, and building customs areas, a unified housing of all maritime operations' employees and a modern watchtower, as well as deepening some pavements, and others.

Shuaiba Port is located 54 kilometers south of Kuwait City and bounded by the Southern Pier of Ahmadi Port from the North side and by Mina Abdullah from the South side. The port has 20 commercial and container berths, while oil pier berths operated by KNPC has 4 berths. Shuaiba Port works on direct delivery basis.

Among projects at Doha Port are installing CCTV system and maritime system, and developing infrastructure as well as building a modern watchtower, deepening berths and others. As for the KPA's employees, the five-year plan seeks to rehabilitate and train all workers in the upcoming five years at the best international maritime colleges and academies specialized in ports management, and recruit new workers. The authority has announced that it eyes revenues of about KD 100 million annually. —KUNA

EXPATS CANNOT JOIN COOPERATIVES' FUNDS

KUWAIT: There is no plan to allow expatriates to join cooperative societies' shareholding funds, a senior official of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Work said yesterday. Dismissing relevant reports, the Ministry's Undersecretary Matar Al-Muteiri said in a press release: "Such media reports are inaccurate and there is not any move by the ministry in this regard." He added that cooperative societies do not need to take such a step, mostly because they already post growth in sales and profits. —KUNA



SCIENTIFIC CENTER TAKES CLEAR PICTURES OF SATURN

KUWAIT: Kuwait Scientific Center (KSC) has succeeded in taking clear photos of the planet Saturn. Bader Al-Emairah, in charge of the space sciences department at the center, said in a statement yesterday that Saturn is one of the most beautiful planets, distinguished with surrounding circles, formed from rocks of various sizes. Saturn is the sixth planet from the Sun and the second-largest in the Solar System, after Jupiter. It is a gas giant with an average radius about nine times that of Earth. —KUNA

GULF BANK SPONSORS KU'S ACCOUNTING CLUB ACTIVITIES

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has sponsored Kuwait University's (KU) College of Business Administration's Accounting Club's activities during Accounting Week, which was held between 3 and 7 April 2016. The club's activities were conducted on the university's campus under the patronage of Sheikh Al-Zain Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs.

The activities, which were designed to raise students' knowledge of accountancy, included seminars and workshops presented by selected leading professionals from the banking and financial sector, who shared their professional experience and answered questions and queries.

Youth development is a key long term element of Gulf Bank's corporate social responsibility program and the commitment to

reach out to young people has always been a priority. The bank frequently partners with organizations with similar goals to provide the support students need during their education.

Gulf Bank has a dedicated 'red' bank account which is designed to meet the needs of university and college students aged from 15 to 25. Opening the account requires no minimum deposit and it can be used as an interest earning savings account. Red customers are also entitled to number of other benefits, including monthly cash draws and quarterly car draws.

To learn more about Gulf Bank's products and services, visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches; call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or log on to www.e-gulf-bank.com, Gulf Bank's bilingual website.



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A white-eared bulbul catches a bait. KUFPEC's Kuwait Birds' encyclopedia says that the white-eared bulbul is "one of the more common species in Kuwait and typically found in pairs and small flocks in most urban areas with gardens and trees." Trapping for illegal bird trade and loss of habitat are considered the most common threats for the white-eared bulbul, according to the encyclopedia. —Photo by KUNA



Sheikh Mubarak Fahed Salem Al-Sabah



Dr Labiba Tammim



Sheikha Souad Jaber Al-Sabah



Gina Tadros

PANEL OF JUDGES ANNOUNCED FOR ARAB WOMAN AWARDS KUWAIT 2016

KUWAIT: The Arab Woman Awards board of judges were announced yesterday ahead of the winners' presentation ceremony taking place at a royal residence on Sunday 17th April.

Launched in 2009, the Arab Woman Awards was established by ITP with the aim of providing a culturally accepted platform to raise awareness on the significant achievements of Arab women in areas including business, finance, legal, media and the humanitarian field. The awards run annually in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait and to-date over 250 women have been presented with the prestigious trophies.

Judging for the Kuwait awards commenced 3 months ago with the panel nominating and analyzing potential candidates following a strict criteria per award as supplied by ITP. This year there will be twenty-two winners presented as selected by the board of judges:

- Honorary Chairperson Sheikh Mubarak Fahad Al-Salem Al-Sabah; Undersecretary of Department of Protocol Affairs at the Amiri Diwan;
- Arab Woman Awards Kuwait co-founder and Executive

Director of Hayat, Dr Labiba Tammim.

- Modern kaftan designer and previous award winner, Sheikha Souad Jaber Al-Sabah.
- Editor in Chief of Hello! Arabia, Gina Tadros.

Arab Woman Awards Founder and Executive Director of ITP Consumer Sue Holt said, "We are very proud of the quality of the Judging Board for the 2016 Kuwait awards. The strength of the bench ensures that the highest calibre of winners are selected. This year, in particular, we were encouraged to see a large number of women in the non-traditional female sectors being nominated for their achievements. I know the benchmark is high so we look forward to seeing next week the final list of winners that they have chosen."

The private winners' ceremony will be attended by the board of judges, this year's winners and their families plus VIP guests. This year's event is supported by Tory Burch, Gulf Bank of Kuwait, The Flower Box and the Sheraton Kuwait. A commemorative publication is created which highlights each of the winners' stories and is distributed to all guests after the event.

MIT ENTERPRISE FORUM KICKS OFF TODAY IN SAUDI ARABIA

EVENT HELD IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY JAMEEL, ZAIN

JEDDAH/KUWAIT/BEIRUT: The MIT Enterprise Forum (MITEF) Pan Arab will host the award ceremony rewarding the winning Ideas, Startups and Social Entrepreneurs of the MIT EF Arab Startup Competition today at the Bay La Sun Hotel and Marina in King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia. This event is in partnership with founding partner Community Jameel and for the second consecutive year, with the Zain Group. This year's event is supported by government partner the Economic Cities Authority and hosting partner the King Abdullah Economic City along with global technology provider Huawei.

The Award Ceremony is preceded by a conference entitled Time to Invest in Arab Youth and Their Innovations organized by MIT Technology Review Arab Edition. The conference will address the tremendous opportunities for regional and global players to invest in an increasingly innovative Arab youth. The event will also announce MIT Technology Review Arab Edition's five Innovators under 35 in the Arab World, which were selected by a solid lineup of judges.

Several high-profile entrepreneurs, investors and government officials from Saudi Arabia, the region and beyond will be sharing insight during the conference and judging the competition. These include HRH Saud K Al-Faisal, Executive Director for Investment Policy at SAGIA, HH Reema Bint Bandar, founder and CEO of Alf Khair, Fady Jameel, President of Community Jameel International, Hassan Kabbani, CEO of Zain Saudi Arabia, Fahd Al Rasheed, Group CEO and Managing Director of Emaar Economic City and Wassim Khashoggi, vice secretary general operations of the Economic Cities Authority. Speakers and judges from several leading organizations in the finance and technology space such as Google, Facebook, Oak Investment Partners, 500 Startups and MBC Group will also be sharing insight during the event.



KUWAIT: A picture from last year's event, held in Kuwait, showing the competition winners.

76 teams
A total of 76 teams from 15 countries have qualified for the advanced rounds of the MIT EF Arab Startup Competition, which received a record 5,967 applications (comprising over 16,500 entrepreneurs) from 21 countries across the Arab world. The three tracks that entrants applied for are: Ideas, Startups, and

Social Entrepreneurship, with a total of \$130,000 to be awarded amongst the winners.

Ahead of the training sessions held in Saudi Arabia on the 11th and 12th of April, pre-bootcamps were held in four different countries: Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. During these pre-bootcamps,

the 76 semi-finalists underwent design-thinking sessions and practiced their pitching to mentors from different institutions in order to perfect their deliverables which they will present to judges on the 13th and 14th of April. Previous winners of the MIT EF Arab Startup Competition shared their experience with the semi-finalists and held inspirational talks.

The national origins of the groups and the corresponding number of semi-finalists who made it to the second round include: Egypt (19), Jordan (8), Lebanon (7), Tunisia (7), Saudi Arabia (6), United Arab Emirates (6), Palestine (6), Morocco (4), Kuwait (3), Bahrain (2), Qatar (2), Sudan (2), Syria (2), Algeria (1), Yemen (1).

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HCA NHS Ventures is a subsidiary of HCA International which was set up in 2006, the HCA NHS Ventures division leads on private partnerships with NHS Trusts across the country.

Harley Street at UCH is a joint partnership with top teaching hospital University College London Hospital, formed in 2006. Based on level 15 in the tower at UCLH, the 18 bed acute facility is a specialist cancer centre for complex and rare conditions. Patient rooms are private and en-suite offering panoramic views across London. We offer medical and surgical care including day case chemotherapy and a comprehensive JACIE accredited bone marrow and stem cell transplant service one of only a few in the UK. The centre offers the pioneering cord blood transplant; this treatment significantly widens the opportunity to find a suitable unrelated donor particularly beneficial for international patients.

The Young Person's Unit at Harley Street at UCH is the only private teenage cancer unit in Europe, treating any form of cancer in 13-19 year olds and further establishes the relationship with UCLH. The 6 bedded Unit treats all kinds of cancers and provides high quality care. All rooms are private and en-suite with views across central London. There are facilities in each room for a parent or guardian to stay with patients throughout their treatment and international entertainment packages, including internet access to keep in touch with friends and family abroad. Patients also have access to educational facilities and an entertainment lounge. 5* catering is provided with specially adapted menus to suit international patient requirements.

State-of-the-art technology includes the revolutionary TrueBeam STxTM, the latest radiotherapy and radiosurgical equipment which the most advanced linear accelerator in the world and is the first of its kind to be installed in the UK.

Harley Street at Queen's is a joint partnership with Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust, based at Queen's Hospital Romford, offering advanced cancer, neurosurgical and general surgery treatment. It is the only centre of its kind in Essex and includes a dedicated High Dependency Unit, Chemotherapy Day Care Unit and advanced radiotherapy through a dedicated linear accelerator including

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The Christie Clinic is the latest HCA NHS Venture and a partnership with The Christie NHS Foundation Trust in Manchester. The £35million development houses a state-of-the-art cancer clinic with 34 inpatient rooms, 10 chemotherapy chairs, advanced radiotherapy, sophisticated operating theatres and private patient pharmacy. This impressive facility takes the HCA standard of care outside of London to Manchester and the North of England. Located in the heart of Manchester The Christie Clinic offers light and airy private en-suite rooms, with international entertainment packages and is in close proximity to the city centre.



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FOOD FROM IRAQ COULD CARRY CHOLERA: MINISTRY OFFICIAL

BIDDING TO DEMOLISH SAWABER COMPLEX NEXT WEEK

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs Dr Majeda Al-Qattan said that the ministry has been taking all needed precautions against cholera. Speaking on the sidelines of the international conference on developments in breast, liver and pancreas cancer yesterday, Qattan said that the contagious diseases prevention committee at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) met last month and recommended the continuation of precautionary measures followed in fighting cholera arriving from some neighboring countries, namely Iraq.

"We have contacted the civil aviation and the

customs department reconfirming the use of those measures and the need to ban the entry of any food items from Iraq lest they might be carrying the disease," she stressed, pointing out that five patients had been diagnosed with cholera and were cured since it struck Iraq and that they all came from Iraq.

Speaking about vaccinations, including that of chickenpox, Qattan said that all needed measures had been taken while others, concerning medical warehouses and importing companies, still need to be taken including awareness campaigns and medical staffs' training.

Dr Ahmed Al-Awadi, Director of the Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC) said that according to Kuwait's cancer records, over 400 women

had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013 and that the number is growing. He added that early detection helps increase the success of remedies used by 80 percent. Awadi added that the construction of the new cancer center was going according to schedule and would be finished within three to four years.

Sawaber Complex

The Ministry of Finance announced that bidding would be held to demolish Al-Sawaber Complex in downtown Kuwait City next week. The ministry added that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare had already disconnected the complex's electricity at the end of March pending demolition.



RECKLESS DRIVERS, LAWBREAKERS ARRESTED IN AHMADI CRACKDOWN

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Ahmadi security department carried out a security campaign in Fintas, Jaber Al-Ali, Sabahiya, Mahboula, Dhahr, Riqqa, Egaila, Abu Halifa, Mahboula, Mangaf, Kabd and Khairan to stop reckless drivers and violators of the law. The campaign, led by Acting Director of Ahmadi Security Brig Abdullah Saffah Al-Mulla, resulted in the arrest of 78 persons, 14 of whom were reported absconding, 21 wanted for civil cases and three over suspicion of drugs possession, while 31 traffic citations were issued and six vehicles impounded.

1,020 kg of meat destroyed

Kuwait Municipality's Ahmadi food and meat department destroyed 1,020 kilograms of meat unfit for human consumption during the period between February 22 and March 7. The public relations department said 577 Australian sheep were slaughtered in the governorate's slaughterhouse for companies and stores, while 272 sheep were slaughtered for private citizens. The report said that the number of Arab sheep slaughtered for companies was 134. Meanwhile, five goats were slaughtered for companies and 1,164 for private citizens.



ABDALI CELL CASE ADJOURNED TO APRIL 20

KUWAIT: The court of appeals adjourned yesterday the terrorist cell case number 302/2016, in which 26 defendants are involved, to April 20 for further questioning of the accused. The court asked the Public Prosecution to address some government bodies to send reports concerning some defendants involved in the case. The court yesterday heard from the defense, before postponing the session to April 20.

Last January 12, the criminal court sentenced two of the defendants, the first and the 23rd one on the list of defendants in the terrorist cell, to death, while one of the accused in the 26 member cell was given a sentence of life imprisonment. Other accused defendants in the case received sentences from five to ten to 15 years in prison. One of them was fined about KD 5,000 while another was acquitted of all charges against him. Furthermore, the court ordered the confiscation of all weapons that were possessed by the terrorist cell. Last September, the public prosecutor lodged criminal charges against the terrorist cell known as 'Al-Abdali Cell', in which 26 defendants were put on trial over possession of huge caches of weapons and ammunition, as well as espionage for Iran and Hezbollah. — KUNA

MENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT DETERMINES OFFENDER SANE

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The criminal court set a hearing to be held on April 21 to review the state security case filed against Kuwaiti citizen Salem Al-Doussary, also known as 'Bu Refaa' over charges of slandering His Highness the Amir. Notably, following receiving a medical report from the psychological diseases hospital stating that the suspect is completely sane and responsible for his actions, the public prosecutor, Chancellor Dherar Al-Assoussi, referred Bu Refaa to the criminal court, otherwise the case would have been shelved.

Blogger acquitted

The criminal court yesterday acquitted blogger Sara Al-Drais of showing religious contempt through her Twitter account. Notably, Drais had voluntarily given herself in to security on arrival to Kuwait at Kuwait airport. Separately, the court of misdemeanor yesterday decided re-hearing a case filed by Chancellor Mohammed Al-Duajj against former MP Khaled Al-Sultan on May 4.

Suspect remanded

The public prosecution yesterday remanded Saudi national Mohammed

Hathal for 10 days at the central prison over charges of fraud and cases filed by various citizens of a total value of KD 15 million. Notably, Hathal was arrested by Interpol in Egypt and was extradited to Kuwait.

Environmental activities

The Green Line Environmental Group (GLEG) urged Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Omair, as the minister concerned with and responsible for environmental issues, to intervene and regulate environmental activities among various governmental bodies as stipulated by article 7 of the environment protection law number 42/ 2014. A statement issued by GLEG explained that since the law's executive charter had not been set yet, the citations filed by the Environment Public Authority (EPA) were legally void. The statement added that environmental citations filed by the environment police were also void according to article 113 of the law because a decision on authorizing the environment police to file such citations had not been published in the official gazette so far, which might legally result in nullifying the measures taken by the environment police and refunding the sums collected in fines from violators.



KUWAIT: Fawzy Al-Thunayan, General Manager Board Affairs receives an award on behalf of ABK from Sheikha Sheikhah Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.

ABK CONCLUDES SPONSORSHIP OF IDEAL MOTHER AWARD FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently concluded its strategic sponsorship of the 4th Annual Ideal Mother Award for Special Needs, organized by Al-Kharafi Activity Kids Center. The honoring ceremony was held on 11th April, 2016 at The Regency Hotel, where a total of 15 mothers were honored of which ten were from Kuwait and five from across the GCC.

Fawzy Al-Thunayan, General Manager Board Affairs was present at the ceremony on behalf of ABK, where he joined in the honoring of mothers with their awards.

The 4th Annual Ideal Mother Award for Special Needs has been organized with the aim

to recognize the tremendous efforts of mothers of children with special needs and honor their commitment to making a substantial difference in the lives of their children.

'Special Needs' is ABK's primary CSR focus for 2016, where the Bank works towards creating nationwide awareness of this important segment in society and the importance of helping individuals with special needs to develop a sense of belonging in a community they are a part of. For more information on Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait please visit www.eahli.com or contact a customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

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Al-Anbaa

UNPRECEDENTED SIEGE

By Sami Al-Nisf

Besieging the Iraqi city of Fallujah by the Iraqi Army coincides with besieging many cities and villages in Syria, of which, according to a BBC report, 93 percent is done by the official Syrian army. In fact, history has never witnessed armies besieging their own people in cities or villages. What usually happens is that armies may besiege cities of other countries as a means to conquer them the way the Nazi German army did with the Russian Stalingrad city.

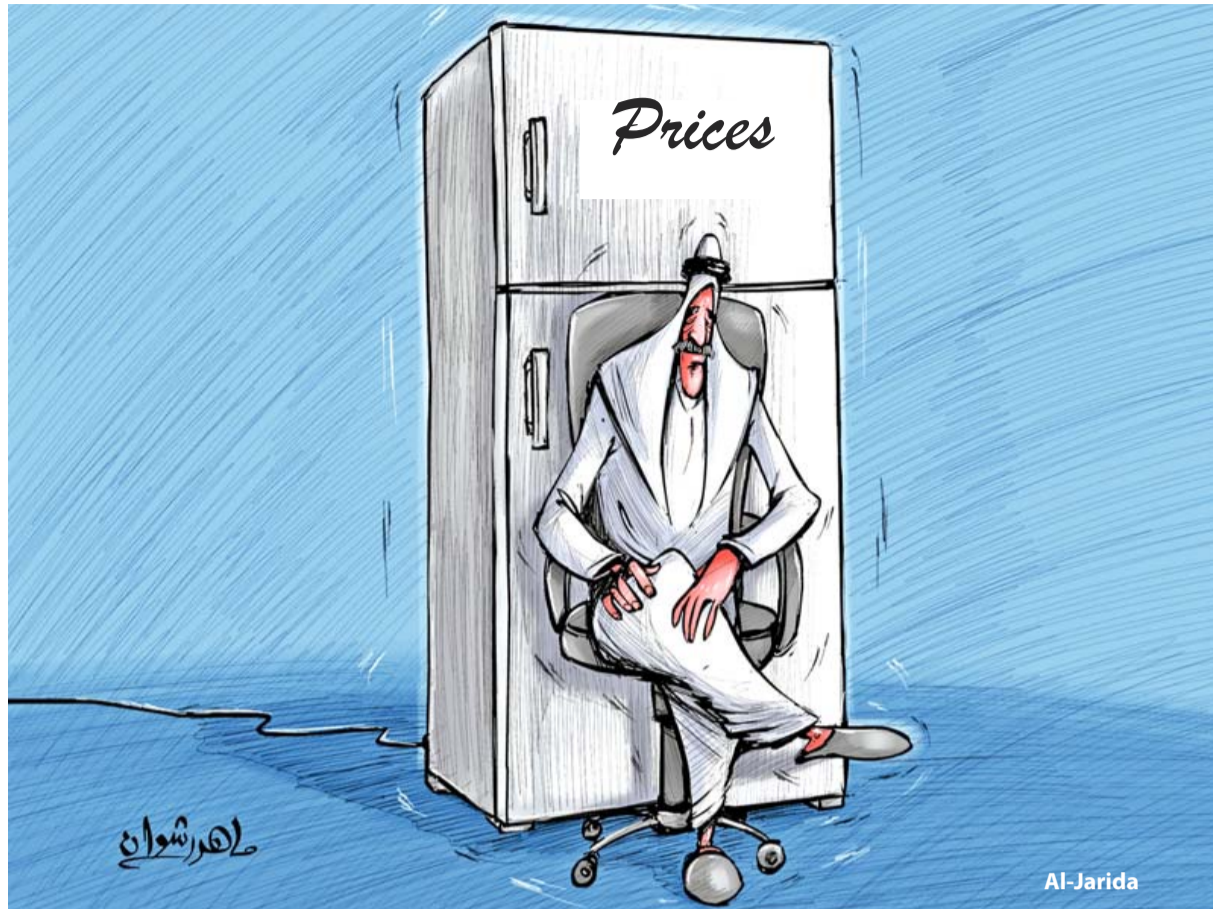
Besieging cities and own people by their own armies only started with the arrival of some Arab revolutionists to power in afflicted countries. For instance, the Syrian city of Hama was besieged by the Syrian army in 1983 and was completely destroyed, with 30,000 of its inhabitants killed and 3,000 others taken to the terrible prison in Palmyra where they were killed by Ref'at Assad's forces. All historic monuments in the historic city of Hama were destroyed then.

In 1989, when General Michel Oun was on top of a military government in Lebanon, and upon direct orders from Saddam Hussein who funded and armed him, he besieged and bombed eastern Beirut with the excuse of unifying Christian troops before waging a liberation war against the Syrian troops. This was done in retaliation of Syria for supporting Iran. The general did not even spare western or southern Beirut from his bombs that poured like rain, killing hundreds.

In 1991, the first 'Arab Spring' started in 14 out of the 18 Iraqi governorates only two years after the spring in Eastern Europe started, against Saddam and the Republican Guards led by Hussein Kamel, then struck cities, villages and mosques in northern and southern governorates including Karbala and Najaf, killing thousands and displacing millions. Saddam's army also destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages and killed hundreds of thousands of them by chemical weapons in 1988-1989.

Finally, IS, which was only created to annihilate regional peoples, is showing false images about the availability of enough supplies in Fallujah as a means to keep the city besieged despite the starvation of thousands of its people. So, does anyone still suspect IS' devilish intentions?!

— Translated by Kuwait Times



SCHOLARSHIPS TO ISU SUSPENDED AFTER KUWAITI STUDENTS HARASSED

KUWAIT: Education Minister Bader Al-Essa said the ministry has decided to stop sending scholarship students to Idaho State University (ISU) due to the harassment Kuwaiti students there are subjected to. He said that nearly 400 students are facing racist discrimination in the state. Essa said there have been communications at the highest level to "protect our students from any harm or discrimination", adding that he contacted Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah as well as Kuwait's ambassador, in addition to the cultural attach to take the necessary action to transfer the students to other universities.



Education Minister Bader Al-Essa

Essa said canceling scholarships for Idaho University will affect the state's economy, because it is small and its econ-

omy depends on the university and its students, adding it will suffer losses in the millions of dollars. He condemned the unprecedented and hostile statements against Kuwaiti students in the state, adding that the ministry will spare no effort to take all the necessary steps to safeguard the well-being of Kuwaiti students abroad.

Essa said that the malicious campaigns increased when the university learned that scholarships have been stopped, and published false information over the media. When asked about the reason why such attacks are taking place, all of a sudden, he said what is happening is the result of the racist election rhetoric by presidential candidate Donald Trump. — Al-Qabas

Al-Qabas

PRIVATIZATION OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES

By Abdelrazaq Abdullah

The cooperative society is an independent group of persons who share electively to meet their economic, social and cultural needs as well as their joint ambitions through collective ownership of a project with administrative democracy. Cooperatives are established on noble values, including self-dependence, democracy, equality, justice and solidarity. According to the traditions instilled by cooperative founders, its members believe in ethical values such as honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Also, among the cooperative principles is the open optional membership, members' administrative and supervisory democracy, economic contribution of members and self-independent personality, and among its characters is self-help, members' supervision, educating and training members, elected representatives, managers and employees to effectively contribute to the development of their cooperative and care for society affairs.

There is no doubt that Kuwait is a pioneer in cooperative activity, and cooperative societies in Kuwait proved their worth, and their continued support of social development serving various areas and residents, and those societies present various services for families and individuals.

We see cooperative societies in Kuwait as a unique model of its kind worldwide, as they really play a distinguished and effective role serving citizens and expatriates. The cooperative movement in Kuwait began in 1979 with the issuance of law 24/1979 with regards to cooperative societies, in which the legislator confirmed the role of cooperatives, as it mentioned in article one that "it is meant by the cooperative society a society established by natural or judicial persons according to the rules of this law for a limited or unlimited period, with the aim of elevating the economic and social level of its members by following the cooperative principles mentioned in the executive rules of this law."

And in the second article of the executive list of this law is "the society aims at elevating the social, economic and productive levels, and presents the necessary services for its members. It also works on qualifying and training them on the cooperative work within its geographic or quality domain as decided by the ministry."

The third article of the same list says, "for a society to be established, the cooperative principles must be followed, and particularly the following principles:

- a) Membership is optional and open for all who meet the conditions mentioned in the law and society statutes.
- b) Administrative democracy.
- c) Cooperation between societies.
- d) Spreading education and cooperative culture among societies.
- e) Returns on transactions.
- f) Limited profit on capital.
- g) Cash transactions.

These conditions represent the basic international cooperative principles, and from all of this, the difference between cooperative societies from establishments, companies and business in general becomes clear, and really far away from them, as it is enough that the latter aims at making profit, rather this is its main goal, while cooperatives aim at serving the society only, and does not aim at making profits.

Cooperatives are supervised by the social affairs ministry, while businesses and companies that aim to make profits are under the ministry of commerce, business and company laws. The minister of social affairs and labor has the right to dissolve a society or remove one of its members, unlike commercial companies, over which the minister does not have this right, so we see that privatizing cooperative societies removes them from their basic nature and makes them deviate from their social principles, most important of which is serving the citizen and residential areas as well as making goods available at competitive prices; rather it drops the noble principles that forms the essence of cooperatives, as the privatization of cooperative societies will enable investors to control the assets of those societies, and for sure the investor who takes over the society will think about profits only, and the society, in this case, will only be a commercial project that seeks profits.

Al-Qabas published in its Mar 23, 2016 issue a column by Mohammad Ramadan titled "no to privatization... yes to private administration contracts of public facilities," and I agree with what the columnist suggested with regards to not privatizing cooperative societies, because it will turn them into establishments and companies that aim for profit only without regard to the social dimension and without regard to the noble principles societies adopt, especially since the experience of privatizing cooperative units failed in many of world countries, including the United States of America.

As for the excuse of the social affairs and labor minister, which is that privatizing cooperative societies will eradicate corruption that is in those societies, it is not enough to do away with the society and cancel its role in the society, because eradicating corruption can be through activating punishments mentioned in cooperative societies law 24/1979, and drying up the sources of corruption and stop bribes and influence, and use of connections that is rampant inside those societies, and not through privatization, as it is not possible and it is not right to call for canceling traffic to eradicate road accidents.

So, we see that privatizing cooperative societies as a step in the wrong direction; rather it is a step backwards and may lead to unwanted repercussions.

— Translated by Kuwait Times

CITIZEN'S KIDNAPPERS IN IRAQ DEMAND \$1M RANSOM

KUWAIT: The kidnapers of citizen Khaled Abdul Razzaq Sarhan in Iraq have demanded a \$1 million ransom to release him, said Sarhan's wife, noting that the kidnapers only gave the family a three-day period to pay the ransom, then extended it for a further two days that are already over.

The wife added that the family received threats that unless they pay the ransom, her husband would be killed. "The information we have so far is that an official Iraqi vehicle stopped him between Nasiriya and Basra and that one of the three people in it got off and rode with my husband, before we lost contact," she explained. — Al-Anbaa

Crime

Report

KD 1.2 MILLION IN ELECTRICITY BILLS

KUWAIT: Ministry of Electricity and Water inspectors with judicial power uncovered a citizen's manipulation of water lines connected to six of his buildings in Farwaniya in a bid to reduce the bills. Sources said the citizen aimed at reducing the value of the bill by having one meter for every two buildings, and the water connections are behind the meter, so if the meter malfunctions, then an estimation will be made for one building, so the value of water used in the second building will not be calculated. The sources said that calculated estimates of the total value of the bills for this citizen's real estate reached KD 1.2 million.

Drug user arrested

A woman was arrested while under the influence of drugs and had two envelopes of shabu (methamphetamine), syringes and paraphernalia, and she was sent along with the drugs to Drugs Control General Department. The woman was arrested in Mangaf area.

Cafe waiters fight

Two staff in a Jahra cafe exchanged blows following a short argument over the work. A security source said a customer went to the cafe and asked for some drinks, then when his order was delayed he became angry and started shouting at the staff. This led to one of the Egyptian waiters to accuse his colleague of failing to do his job properly. Then the argument evolved into a fist fight. When their colleagues failed to control the two men, police were called and came to arrest both of the waiters. Investigations are underway.

Car broken into

A citizen in Sabahiya told police that his car was broken into when it was parked in front of his house and KD 920 was stolen from it. Criminal evidence went to the scene and lifted fingerprints, as detectives are working on the case.

Car stolen by fake detectives

An Asian man told Ardhiya police that two unknown persons claiming to be detectives, asked him to stay away from his car, as they wanted to search it for drugs, then one of them drove off while the other followed him in their car.

Woman accuses brother of sorcery

A citizen said that her house had been subject to sorcery by her brother and his friend. She said that there are disputes over inheritance and the house after the death of the father, and that the brother wants her to leave the house. — Al-Rai



Former MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari

FORMER MP KANDARI TO CONTEST IN '17 ELECTIONS

KUWAIT: Former MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari said all current indicators and popular discontent point to the presence of a 50 percent change in the next National Assembly, with a large participation of patriotic elements among former MPs and competent candidates to run for parliament and tackle reform affairs. Kandari said coordination began at the highest level between independents and factions, and many have begun getting ready to run in the 2017 National Assembly elections. He said the government making decisions alone will bring a different reality by the people to avoid being harmed more than now, in addition to the determination to face the government and its decisions regardless of the results. — Al-Anbaa

108 VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN CASES IN 2015



KUWAIT: Chairperson of the Pediatrics Department Council Dr Muna Al-Khawari said 108 cases of violence against children were registered in 2015, which is a 60 percent increase from previous years. She said that the number of cases registered from 2010 to 2015 were 299, 154 of which were of physical abuse, 111 negligence and 25 cases of sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs at the Health Ministry Dr Mahmoud Al-Abdelhadi said the Fourth Regional Conference against violence against children will be held from April 18 to 20 under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Ali Al-Obaidi. He said the conference is unique and will discuss social and health topics that are of interest to all Kuwaiti society groups, be they doctors, psychologists as well as education and Interior Ministry officials and others due to the importance of the topic, as the child is considered the "nucleus" of the society. — Al-Rai



KUWAIT: A delegation from Kuwait Army and Kuwait National Guard visited the Sabah Al-Ahmad Navy Base in Fintas yesterday, and were given a demonstration of the tasks carried out by the Interior Ministry's Coastguards General Department.





Syrians vote for parliament denounced by Assad's enemies Page 8

RUSSIANS WORRIED ABOUT ECONOMY BEFORE PUTIN CALL-IN SHOW



ROME, NEW YORK: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump tosses his coat during a rally at Griffiss International Airport on Tuesday. —AP

TRUMP AMASSING DELEGATES WHO MIGHT NOT BE LOYAL TO HIM

'ARE WE CONCERNED? YES, DEFINITELY'

DES MOINES, IOWA: Already behind the curve in organizing for the Republican convention, Donald Trump has missed crucial deadlines in a number of states to lock up delegates who would stay loyal beyond the first ballot.

Trump's shortcomings in this behind-the-scenes campaign, which hasn't played much of a role in selecting the GOP nominee in decades, could doom his presidential candidacy if he is unable to win the nomination in the initial voting at this summer's national convention in Cleveland.

The delegates

After that first ballot, most delegates are no longer bound to support the winner of their state's party primary or caucuses - they're free agents who can support the candidate of their choosing.

Most of the actual delegates are elected at state and congressional district conventions run by party insiders, members of the Republican establishment that Trump has run against from the outset of his campaign.

And while Trump's team has had little contact with these loyal party activists, his chief rival for the Republican nomination, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, has been actively courting them for months. Trump has spent the past three days hammering at his party's delegate selection process as "unfair." At a rally in Rome, New York, Tuesday evening, Trump angrily denounced Saturday's final allocation of all of Colorado's delegates to Cruz, blasting the party's system as "rigged" and "corrupt."

Trump's team is only now starting to engage in the delegate selection process, the choosing of the actual people who will attend and vote at the convention. Republicans have already selected delegates in at least nine states. And in others, such as Virginia and Arizona, the deadline to apply to be a delegate has passed.

Indiana's primary, for example, won't take

place until next month. But the deadline to become a national convention delegate was in mid-March. "Are we concerned? Yes, definitely," said Tony Samuel, vice chairman of Trump's Indiana campaign. The Cruz team feels the opposite. "Even if (Trump) jumped into high gear, he can't do it," said Shak Hill, a Cruz campaign leader in Virginia. "That's where he's been shut out of the game."

Trump's delegates must vote for him on the first ballot at the convention. But if no one gets a majority, most of the delegates can then bolt if they choose.

Trump is the only candidate with a realistic path to the 1,237 delegates needed to clinch the nomination before the convention. But the path is narrow, and Cruz is working to block him.

Cruz has built an organization of volunteers who are working in state after state to get his supporters selected as delegates, even those who must vote for Trump at first.

Trump is just ramping up his operation, but in some states he's too late. In Virginia - a state where Trump won the primary - he has missed the deadlines to assemble lists of potential delegates. Cruz, however, has delegate candidates in 10 of Virginia's 11 congressional districts.

The application deadline was last month

Indiana's primary is May 3, but 27 of the state's 57 delegates - the actual people - have already been selected at congressional district caucuses. The deadline to register as a candidate for delegate was March 15. In all, at least nine states have picked some or all of their delegates: Colorado, Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, North Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Trump has won a total of 100 delegates in primaries and caucuses in these states. In most, however, the candidates had no formal role in selecting the people who will fill those slots. To help manage the process, Trump's campaign hired a convention man-

ager, Paul Manafort, last week. Manafort helped lead the fight against Ronald Reagan's challenge of then-President Gerald Ford at the 1976 Republican convention in Kansas City.

Manafort has accused Cruz's campaign of strong-arming would-be delegates and said in an interview with Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity airing Tuesday night that he shared concerns with his boss.

"The point that Donald Trump was making is that the process in Colorado was being abused and it's not that the rules themselves were unknown, it's the way the rules were applied," Manafort said, according to a transcript provided by the network. "We're seeing the same mistakes in Colorado, Missouri and Louisiana. And so the mistakes are not really mistakes - it's a pattern." However, he said Trump was successful in selecting delegates in Michigan, and predicted the same in Nevada.

"In fact, we wiped him out," Manafort said in an NBC interview Sunday. "And we're going to see Ted Cruz get skunked in Nevada." Former South Carolina Republican Chairman Katon Dawson, who has been publicly neutral in the race, said he's seen no difference in Trump's delegate strategy since Manafort's hire.

Said Dawson, a veteran national GOP strategist, "He's not a household name or miracle worker by any stretch." Trump won all 50 of South Carolina's delegates. But in order to be a delegate at the national convention, you had to be a delegate at last year's state convention.

"The people that are going to fill those slots were already selected anyway," said Republican political consultant Tony Denny, who has been a delegate to three previous GOP national conventions. Cruz has already done a lot of groundwork to get supporters selected as delegates in South Carolina. "The delegate selection process is in their DNA," Denny said of Cruz's ground operation. —AP

US APPEALS COURT RULES FOR ARGENTINA ON DEBT INJUNCTIONS

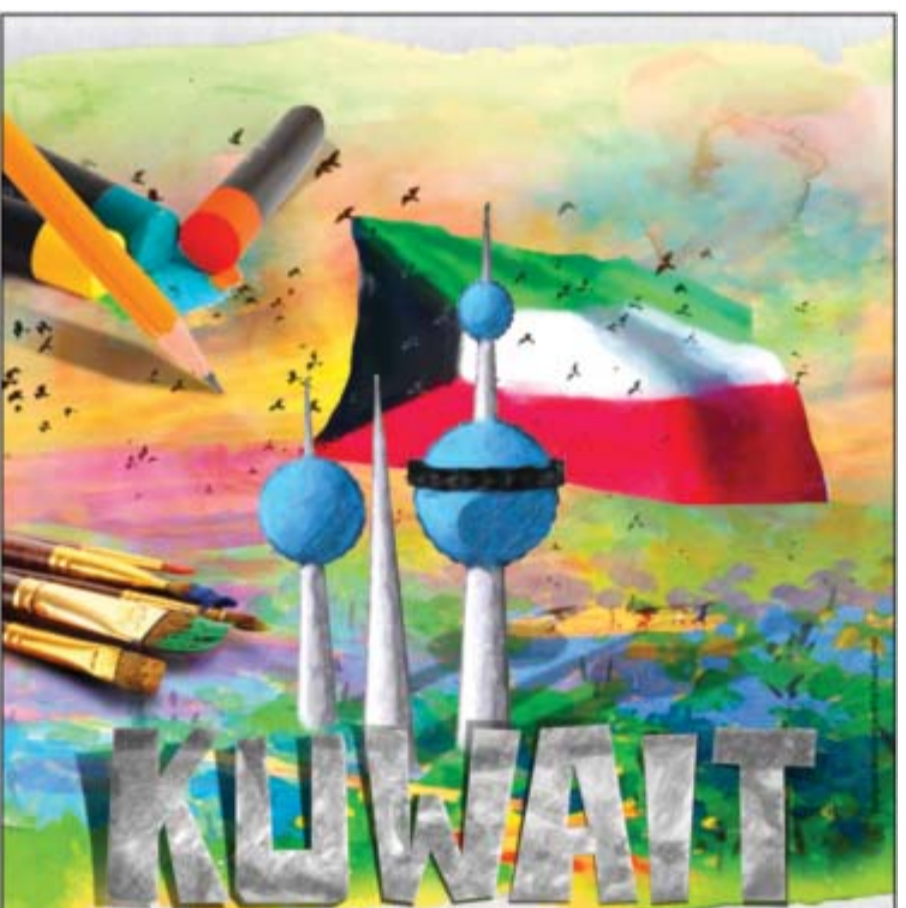
NEW YORK: A US appeals court yesterday cleared the way for the lifting of injunctions that prevented Argentina from paying off some debts, a ruling the country sought after agreeing to settle litigation by creditors suing over defaulted bonds.

The 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in New York ruled after hearing arguments from bondholders opposed to giving any relief to Argentina, which contends that vacating the injunctions is a crucial step in settling the litigation. Argentina, which under newly elected President Mauricio Macri has sought to resolve litigation spilling out of its \$100 billion default in 2002, had pushed for a swift ruling as it tried to raise funds to pay for over \$8 billion in settlements.

Argentina also faces a deadline today to pay its four biggest creditors, including Elliott Management's NML Capital Ltd and Aurelius

Capital Management, which can terminate \$4.65 billion in settlements if no payment occurs by then. Lawyers for NML and Aurelius said their clients would not terminate the agreements on Thursday and could wait a little longer. But they urged the 2nd Circuit to not lift injunctions that had given them leverage against Argentina.

"Argentina's feet need to be held to the fire," said Matthew McGill, NML's lawyer. Argentina offered to settle the litigation in February and soon after asked US District Judge Thomas Griesa to vacate injunctions that prevented it from servicing its restructured debt until it paid the suing bondholders. Those creditors spurned its 2005 and 2010 debt restructurings, which resulted in 92 percent of its defaulted debt being swapped and investors being paid less than 30 cents on the dollar. — Reuters



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- The competition is open for all schools in Kuwait (Government and Private)
- The competition will start on March 10th and will continue till April 21, 2016.
- 10 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
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- the competition will receive an appreciation plaque.
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MISSING UGANDAN MAID FUELS FEARS OF ABUSE IN SAUDI ARABIA

KAMPALA: Jannat Mubiru has heard nothing from her daughter since the 27-year-old called to say she had arrived safely in Riyadh, where she was due to start work as a maid five months ago. Mubiru has repeatedly phoned the Saudi number her daughter, Shamim Nakitende, used but her calls went unanswered at first, and then were blocked. "There are so many stories of Ugandans being mistreated in Saudi Arabia. I am so worried," Mubiru told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Shamim left behind a daughter and son and it's difficult to answer their daily questions about their mother without knowing if she is still alive or not," she added.

Since Nakitende left, the company which had offered her work in Saudi Arabia has closed its external recruitment department and severed links with the unit's director over violations of recruitment guidelines, Mubiru said. More than 10,000 Ugandans are estimated to be working in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait as security guards, domestic workers, drivers and cashiers in supermarkets and fast food restaurants.

In January, the Ugandan government announced a ban with immediate effect on the recruitment of Ugandans as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, after the local media reported cases of abuse and mistreatment. Despite the ban, the recruitment of Ugandans to work in the oil-rich Gulf states is still flourishing as agents prey on jobless youths in the east African country eager for adventure, overseas travel and the promise of a good salary.

Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Welfare Muruli Mukasa said the government had received many complaints of exploitation from workers in the Gulf - including having their passports confiscated on arrival and being made to work 12 hours a day or more, sometimes without enough to eat. Some also reported having their salaries withheld and being subjected to verbal abuse, physical assault, threats and intimidation by their employers. Thomson Reuters Foundation asked Saudi embassy officials to respond but they declined to comment.

Some Ugandans said they were deceived as to

the nature and income of their promised jobs by recruitment companies, though these were licensed and vetted by the authorities. The same agencies sometimes took money from both the prospective employer and the migrant worker to cover recruitment fees, the cost of a visa and the air fare, workers said. "An Arab employer who has paid these exorbitant fees, believes he or she just bought you. In other words you are his slave with no rights whatsoever," said Ramla Nakazibwe, who returned from the UAE in January, her dream in tatters.

Nakazibwe used a licensed recruitment agency to find her a job in the UAE, spending 6 million shillings (\$1,800) on fees. Instead of working in a supermarket as she was promised, she was given a cleaner's job which paid only 600 dirhams (\$160) a month. President Yoweri Museveni's government is trying to raise awareness of the risks of being trafficked abroad, using a TV campaign urging Ugandans to be careful about overseas job offers, said Moses Binoga, national coordinator for the interior ministry's anti-trafficking task force. — Reuters

ROUHANI HEADS TO TURKEY FOR KEY ISLAMIC SUMMIT

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani headed to Istanbul yesterday for a summit of Islamic countries which Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Turkey's burgeoning ally, is also attending.

Rouhani and Salman, whose countries' ties plummeted in January when Riyadh cut diplomatic relations, are to take part in an Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit today and Friday. The 80-year-old Sunni king arrived Monday in Ankara with Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan greeting him at the airport in a rare break of protocol.

Saudi Arabia cut its diplomatic relations with Iran after a rampaging mob set fire to its missions in Tehran and Mashhad, Iran's second city, in protest at the execution by Riyadh of a prominent Shiite cleric. The regional rivals have since accused each other of funding terrorism and destabilizing the Middle East. Rouhani will make a speech at the Istanbul summit and hold bilateral meet-

ings with some of the dozens of leaders attending, according to Parviz Esmaeili, a spokesman in the presidency's office.

He will also focus on bilateral economic issues with Turkey, Telecom Minister Mahmoud Vaezi said, according to state television service IRI.

Iran has moved to improve its relations with Turkey in recent months. Tehran and Ankara announced earlier this year plans to increase annual trade to \$30 billion, IRI said. Trade for 2014 stood at

\$13.71 billion but dropped to \$9.76 billion in 2015. However the red carpet treatment for Salman symbolized an emerging Riyadh-Ankara alliance against Shiite Iran's rising influence following Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers that lifted sanctions.

Iran is also the main regional ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whose stepping down is necessary, according to Salman and Erdogan, to end the five-year Syrian war. Iran and Saudi Arabia also

remain at odds over a deadly stampede at the annual hajj pilgrimage in the kingdom last year which killed more than 2,000 worshippers including 464 Iranians.

An Iranian delegation on Tuesday went to Saudi Arabia to discuss this year's hajj ceremonies in Mecca and nearby cities. It will be the first meeting between officials of the two rival powers since protesters ransacked the Saudi missions in January after the execution of Shiite cleric and activist Nimr al-Nimr. — AFP

SHOOTING PROBE PUTS ISRAEL'S MILITARY COURTS IN SPOTLIGHT

JERUSALEM: Israel's military justice system is in the spotlight as it investigates a soldier caught on tape shooting to death a subdued Palestinian attacker, a case that has polarized the nation.

While the military has stressed that its courts are independent, critics say the system has a poor record of punishing errant soldiers, perpetuating a culture of impunity. They say the same result is likely for the soldier, who is expected to be formally charged in the coming days.

The shooting took place last month in Hebron, the volatile West Bank city that has been a focal point of the latest, 7-month wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence. The military initially said two Palestinians stabbed and wounded an Israeli soldier before troops shot and killed the pair. In a video later released by the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, one of the attackers was shown still alive after the initial shooting. The video, taken by a Palestinian volunteer for the group, shows the wounded attacker lying on the ground, slowly moving his head. About a minute later, a soldier raises his rifle, cocks the weapon and fires. Blood is then seen streaming from the Palestinian's head.

Autopsy results

An autopsy determined the bullet to the head was the cause of death. During the current wave of violence, the Palestinians have accused Israeli security forces of using excessive force against attackers who have already been stopped or wounded. Of the 188 Palestinians killed during the outbreak, Israel says 142 were attacking or trying to attack Israelis, with the rest killed in clashes. A handful of amateur videos supporting the Palestinian claims have emerged, but the Hebron killing was perhaps the clearest so far. The incident triggered an uproar in Israel,

with the country's defense minister, military officials and many Israelis calling it contrary to the army's values. That outcry in turn kicked up a counter-torrent of support for the soldier, with many calling his actions appropriate for a country reeling from months of Palestinian attacks, mostly stabbings, that have killed 28 Israelis and two Americans.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, initially critical of the soldier, later softened his position in a nod to his nationalist constituents. Critics say only accountability can promise deterrence and prevent excessive force from being used against Palestinians, even if they are attacking Israelis. Few soldiers have been punished for their alleged roles in crimes against Palestinians, prompting criticism of the system.

"An investigation has to be independent, effective, could lead to actual measures, has to be timely, transparent and has to be fair and unbiased," said B'Tselem spokeswoman Sarit Michaeli. Israel's military justice system "simply does not adhere to these standards," she said. Citing official army figures, the Israeli rights group Yesh Din said that of the more than 2,600 investigations opened by the military into alleged crimes committed by soldiers against Palestinians between 2000 and 2014, only 136, or 5 percent, resulted in indictments, leading to 193 convictions. More than one soldier can be listed in a single indictment.

Wary of Israeli self-investigation, the Palestinians have turned to the International Criminal Court. One of the criteria for the ICC to intervene would be if Israel's justice system were deemed insufficient. Israel says its system is fair and independent, but B'Tselem and the Palestinians say Israeli investigations are merely a front to thwart an external inquiry. — AP



DAMASCUS: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (C) and his wife Asma (L) casting their votes at a polling station during the parliamentary elections. — AFP

SYRIANS VOTE FOR PARLIAMENT DENOUNCED BY ASSAD'S ENEMIES

'SYRIAN PEOPLE IS THE ONE THAT DECIDES ITS FATE?'

DAMASCUS: Syrians voted in a parliamentary election in government-held areas of the country on yesterday in what they called a show of support for President Bashar al-Assad, while his opponents and Western powers denounced the poll as illegitimate.

The election is going ahead independently of a UN-led peace process aimed at ending the five-year-long war. Peace talks are due to resume in Geneva on Wednesday as an upsurge in fighting darkens the already bleak outlook for diplomacy. The government says the vote is being held on time in line with the constitution, a view echoed by its Russian allies. The opposition says the election is meaningless, while Britain and France dismissed it as "flimsy facade" and a "sham". Voters are to elect 250 MPs to parliament, which has no real power in Syria's presidential system. The state is rallying them around the slogan "Your vote strengthens your steadfastness". "We are voting for the sake of the Syrian people and for the sake of Assad. Assad is already strong but these elections show that the people support him and bolster him," said Hadi Jumaa, a 19-year-old student, as he cast his ballot at his university halls of residence in Damascus. Dozens queued to vote at one polling station where a portrait of Assad hung on the wall. Outside, some danced.

With his wife Asma at his side as he went to vote in Damascus, a smiling Assad told state TV that terrorism had been able to destroy much of Syria's infrastructure but not Syria's "social structure, the national identity". Assad said it was the first time a president had taken part in parliamentary polls. "These elections do not mean anything," said Asaad al-Zoubi, chief negotiator

for the main opposition body, the High Negotiations Council. "They are illegitimate - theatre for the sake of procrastination, theatre through which the regime is trying to give itself a little legitimacy."

The conflict has killed more than 250,000 and created millions of refugees, splintering Syria into a patchwork of areas controlled by the government, an array of rebels, a powerful Kurdish militia, and the Islamic State group. The government views all the groups fighting it as terrorists.

The government controls around one third of Syria, including the main cities of western Syria, home to the bulk of Syrians who have not fled the country. The United Nations puts the number of refugees at 4.8 million. With parliament elected every four years, it is the second parliamentary election held by the government in wartime. Assad was reelected head of state in a presidential election in 2014.

Opposition sees vote as "theatre"

The election coincides with the start of a second round of UN-led peace talks in Geneva. The opposition delegation is due to meet UN envoy Staffan de Mistura on Wednesday. The government has said it will be ready to participate from Friday. De Mistura wants this round to make progress on the question of a political transition. The government had ruled out any discussion of the presidency ahead of the first round of talks last month. Spiralling violence meanwhile threatens to unravel the entire political track by wrecking a partial truce that had helped bring the sides to Geneva.

Foreign states opposed to Assad have said the vote is out of line with a UN Security Council

resolution that calls for elections at the end of an 18-month transition. His allies, notably Russia, say it is in line with the constitution.

"The decision of the regime to hold elections is a measure of how divorced it is from reality. They cannot buy back legitimacy by putting up a flimsy facade of democracy," said a spokesperson for the British government. France said the elections were a "sham" organized by "an oppressive regime". Russia, one of Assad's main foreign allies, said however that the election was necessary to avoid a power vacuum.

"There is understanding already, that a new constitution should emerge as a result of this political process, on the basis of which new, early elections are to be held," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told a news briefing. "But before this happens, one should avoid any legal vacuum or any vacuum in the sphere of executive power."

'Syrian people is the one that decides its fate'

Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said the election showed that "the Syrian people is the one that decides its fate". But Syrians living in opposition-held areas dismissed it. "We used to be forced to cast our vote in sham elections.

Now, we are no longer obliged to. After all this killing they want to make a play called elections," said Yousef Doumani, speaking from the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area near Damascus. Shereen Sirmami, who fled to Damascus from the Islamic State-besieged city of Deir al-Zor four months ago, said the election was good for Syria. "We hope they bring people together," she said. "We support Assad and these elections are a boost for him." — Reuters



ASHKELON, ISRAEL: Israeli right wing protesters wave flags outside of Castina Military Court. — AP

JORDANIAN POLICE SHUT MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD HEADQUARTERS

AMMAN: Police in Jordan sealed the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Amman yesterday, a senior figure in the Islamist movement said, as the authorities clamp down further on the kingdom's most vocal opposition group. The Brotherhood, which is close in ideology to its Egyptian namesake and has strong ties with the Palestinian movement Hamas, wants sweeping political reforms but stops short of calling for the overthrow of the monarchy. Jordan's authorities suppressed Arab Spring pro-democracy protests, and human rights groups say that since then the kingdom has strongly curbed dissent.

Police acting on orders of the Amman governor evacuated staff and closed off the building, giving no reason for their actions, said the Brotherhood senior member, Jamil Abu Bakr. Government spokespeople and police were not immediately available for comment.

The Brotherhood has operated legally in Jordan for decades and has substantial grassroots support in major urban centers. Its political arm, the Islamic Action Front, is the kingdom's largest opposition party and represents many disenfranchised Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who are in the majority in the population of seven million. Grossly

underrepresented in parliament and government posts that are dominated by native Jordanians, many of the Brotherhood's poor Palestinian supporters in the major cities see them as defending their interests.

"We are not a group that is rebellious or operating outside the law. This is not an appropriate means to deal with us ... deploying heavy-handed security measures against us rather than reaching understandings," Abu Bakr told Reuters.

In keeping with a regional crackdown on political Islam and public freedoms, Jordan has been tightening restrictions on the Brotherhood in the last two years, forbidding their public rallies and arresting vocal government dissenters. The authorities have also encouraged a splinter group to legally challenge the main movement's license to operate, which goes back to 1946 when Jordan's monarchy had in Muslim Brotherhood leaders a strong political ally. Earlier this year, the movement's deputy leader Zaki Bani Rusheid was released after serving an 18-month jail sentence for criticizing on social media the United Arab Emirates for its crackdown on Islamists. — Reuters



Amman: Jordanians check the main entrance of the Muslim Brotherhood's office in the Jordanian capital, which was sealed with wax after it was shut by police acting on orders of the Amman governor yesterday. — AFP

LEBANON SHOCKED OVER SEX TRAFFICKING OF SYRIAN WOMEN

BEIRUT: Back in Syria, the young women were told they would get well-paid jobs at restaurants and hotels in Lebanon. But when they arrived, their belongings and mobile phones were taken away, and the women were locked up in two hotels north of Beirut and forced into prostitution.

What followed was an ordeal of beatings, torture and abuse - until Lebanese security forces raided the hotels and dismantled the operation in late March. The discovery of the sex trafficking ring and the rescue of the women deeply shocked tiny Lebanon, a Mediterranean Arab nation already overwhelmed by the influx of more than a million Syrian refugees who have fled the civil war, and prompted calls for investigation.

The gruesome details

The case, which involves 75 female victims, is considered the worst sex trafficking scandal in Lebanon in decades and has raised questions about who might have shielded and enabled such a vast network. When they were found in the Chez Maurice and Silver Hotel in the town of Maamelteine, 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of the Lebanese capital, the women were said to have been in miserable condition. The three-story Chez Maurice looked more like a jail than a hotel when it was recently visited by an Associated Press crew, with bars on balconies and windows.

A whip was seen lying on one of the guard tables. The premises have been sealed off and official documents were stamped on the gates, barring entry. The Syrian women were brought to Lebanon in stages over the past several months. Those who refused to work as prostitutes were repeatedly raped and tortured until they submit-



MAAMELTEINE, LEBANON: This picture taken on Thursday shows a whip that remains on the table of the guard's room of the Chez Maurice Hotel. — AP

ted, according to Lebanese women's rights activists. "Some reported that they were forced to have sex with 20 clients per day," said Maya Al-Ammar, an official with women's rights group Kafa, which is Arabic for "Enough."

After the women were freed, the Health Ministry sealed a clinic belonging to gynecologist Riad al-Alam, who authorities say was involved in performing abortions for trafficked Syrian women who got pregnant. Lebanese Health Minister Wael Abu Faour said the doctor "should be in prison where he should rot." Al-Alam's license has been revoked by a medical workers' union.

Al-Ammar, the women's rights activist, said some 200 abortions were carried out at the clinic, though she did not provide the source for the data. The case of the trafficked Syrians went public after police raided the two hotels and freed the women. Lebanese police spokesman Col. Joseph Msalem said several guards, both male and female, were detained but the two ringleaders remain at large.

According to Msalem, police got the first lead on March 25, the Good Friday holiday in Lebanon, when four Syrian women managed to flee from one of the hotels when the guards briefly became lax in monitoring them. — AP

HASTERT ACCUSER TO SPEAK AT SENTENCING

CHICAGO: The judge in Dennis Hastert's hush-money case signaled yesterday that he will consider the former US House Speaker's lies to investigators that he was being extorted on a false claim of sexual abuse at his sentencing hearing, where prosecutors say one person who says he was abused will speak.

Someone identified in court papers as "Individual D," one of at least four former students who prosecutors say Hastert sexually abused, would be one of two witnesses who want to make statements at the April 27 sentencing, prosecutors said at a hearing in Chicago. The other is a sis-

ter of a now-deceased accuser.

Hastert has pleaded guilty to breaking banking law to pay \$3.5 million to ensure someone called "Individual A" in court papers stayed silent about being abused when he was 14 at a high school where Hastert coached wrestling until 1981. Hastert's couldn't be charged with sex abuse because the statute of limitations long since ran out.

Judge Thomas M. Durkin made clear he is disturbed by prosecutors' accounts that Hastert lied to federal agents investigating about why he was withdrawing large sums of cash by falsely accusing

"Individual A" of extorting him on what Hastert said was a bogus accusation of sexual abuse.

Hastert, the judge said, was accusing someone he victimized of "holding him up." And he said that behavior, unlike the abuse allegations, wasn't distant history. "That's not conduct that's 40 years old," Durkin said. "That conduct is ... a year old." About Hastert's false allegations against Individual A he added: "That's a big one."

Prosecutors say Hastert sexually abused at least four members of the wrestling team when he taught and coached at Yorkville High from 1965 until

1981. They cite Individual A as saying the abuse occurred in a motel room when he was 14 and on the way home from wrestling camp. Hastert allegedly touched others in a locker room after saying he would give them massages. Two wrestlers said Hastert performed sex acts on them. Prosecutors also described a recliner where Hastert often sat in the locker room with a direct view of the stalls where the boys showered.

The prosecutors have said they would have preferred sex-abuse charges, but the statute of limitation on sexual abuse ran out decades ago. Still, prosecutors consid-

ered Hastert's conduct with the victims, all boys 14 to 17 years old, so egregious that they chose to pursue the banking charge to ensure he faced some punishment.

Defense lawyers have asked for the judge to spare Hastert prison time and give him probation instead, citing his health and the steep price they say he's already paid in public shame. The statutory maximum for the banking violation is five years in prison, but sentencing guidelines suggest no more than a matter of months. Federal judges have enormous leeway, so Durkin will not be bound by the guidelines. — AP

PUBLIC WANTS SENATE ACTION ON COURT, BUT INTEREST IS MODEST

WASHINGTON: Nearly 2 in 3 Americans back Democrats' demands that the Republican-run Senate hold hearings and a vote on President Barack Obama's pick for the Supreme Court. But an Associated Press-GfK poll also suggests that GOP defiance against considering the nominee may not hurt the party much because too many people, the election-year fight is simply not a big deal.

Just 1 in 5 in the survey released yesterday said they've been following the battle over Obama's nomination of federal judge Merrick Garland extremely or very closely.

That included just 26 percent of Democrats and 22 percent of Republicans expressing intense interest, along with a scant 8 percent of independents. That aligns with the political reading of the issue by many Republicans that while it motivates each side's most committed partisans, people in the middle consider it a yawner - making the fight essentially a wash.

Another clue that voters not dedicated to either party find the court fight tiresome: While just over half of Democrats and Republicans said the issue is extremely or very important, only around a third of independents said so.

What the people are saying

Among people overall, half said the nomination battle is of top-tier importance. But 8 in 10 said that about the economy, and 7 in 10 said so about health care and the threat posed by the Islamic State group. Immigration and the US role in world affairs both attracted slightly more intensity of interest than the court battle.

"It gets me irritated, the bickering and all that kind of stuff," Julie Christopher, 49, a Republican and flight attendant from Fort Worth, Texas, said in a follow-up interview, describing her modest attention to the issue. Christopher said that while she agrees with the GOP's refusal to hold hearings on Garland,

when it comes to backing candidates in November, "That's not going to be my only thing, like boom, I'm not going to vote for them." Garland, who has made courtesy calls on a fourth of the Senate so far, was scheduled to meet with additional senators Wednesday including Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., who has a competitive re-election this fall and has opposed considering his nomination.

Hours after Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said his chamber would not consider an Obama nominee and would instead wait until the president elected this November makes a pick. With the remaining justices split 4-4 between those leaning conservative or liberal, most GOP senators have lined up behind McConnell.

Democrats have been spewing outrage ever since. Along with liberal groups, they've been using television ads, news conferences, public demonstrations and Senate speeches to ratchet up pressure on GOP senators, especially those facing re-election this fall in swing and Democratic-leaning states like Illinois, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Democrats' theory is that the public wants Republicans to end their obstruction and let the Senate do its job, forcing GOP senators to relent on Garland or risk defeat in November. The AP-GfK poll has some data backing that up.

The 64 percent who favor hearings and a vote this year on Garland include an overwhelming proportion of Democrats and a sizable minority of Republicans, 40 percent. Independents, who can be pivotal in closely divided states, back action this year, 52 percent to 36 percent.

"I'd rather see at least deliberations, and see Congress do its job," said Marc Frigon, 33, a high-tech worker from Beverly, Massachusetts, who leans Republican and wants the Senate to reject Garland's confirmation. — AP



NEW ORLEANS: Tony Kirsch, right, an auto body technician, works with Montrel Stiebling, a former inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary Angola, and graduate of their work release training program, in the body shop of Toyota. — AP

MURDERERS ARE MENTORS IN PRISON ONCE NOTORIOUS FOR VIOLENCE

'THIS PLACE IS OPPOSITE FROM WHAT I EXPECTED'

ANGOLA, LA: A maximum-security prison in Louisiana once notorious for its violence is experimenting with a novel way to keep criminals out of trouble: Murderers and other "lifers" are now mentors, teaching job skills and morals to non-violent offenders, preparing them for another shot at freedom.

Since 2010, the pilot program at Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola has authorized several state judges to sentence dozens of low-level offenders to at least two years at the prison - typically sparing them much longer terms behind bars. Roughly 130 of these "short-timers" are learning such trades as automotive repair, welding, horticulture and plumbing from inmates serving life sentences. Each is assigned a social mentor responsible for their moral rehabilitation, amid hopes they won't return to a life of crime once freed.

Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the nation, yet some experts say its six-year-old re-entry court program could be a model for other states trying to reduce recidivism rates - a measure of how many prisoners relapse into criminal activity after they're released.

Nearly 100 inmates already have graduated and left Angola. Most needed a job lined up outside prison walls to qualify for release. Thomas Bush, 30, said he was wary when he was sentenced to the program for drug and firearm offenses. Save for the razor wire surrounding this prison beside the Mississippi River, the auto repair shop looks like any other. Instructors and students in grease-stained overalls work on prison employees' cars using donated equipment. "I've been locked up other places," Bush said. "This place is completely, 180 degrees opposite from what I expected. It's almost like a college campus." The shop is run by John Sheehan, a convicted murderer at Angola since 1988. Sheehan said one recent graduate is earning \$20 per hour at a New Orleans area car dealership.

How the prisoners feel

"It makes me feel good to know that I've helped him," he said. "I may be in prison, but I don't want to think like a prisoner or act like a prisoner." The judges already see evidence the program is breaking a cycle of crime. And they give mentors much credit. "Lifers have value," said Judge Laurie White, one of two New Orleans judges who created the program. Justin Singleton, 13 years into a life sentence for a murder conviction, said he feels like a father figure or big brother.

"And even though I'm not able to be there, these guys are able to go out there and do something positive with their lives," said Singleton, 36. "That's more rewarding than anything that I've accomplished in my own life."

Assistant warden Perry Stagg said prison officials from Mississippi, Texas and other states have visited Angola to see the program. In January, Attorney General Loretta Lynch attended a round-table discussion on it in New Orleans.

"She was very interested in how we do things," Stagg said. Angola's short-timers share dormitories with their mentors but aren't isolated from some 6,300 other inmates. "I want them to be exposed to the pressures and the temptations of prison," Stagg said. "They need to be able to learn how to fight those temptations off."

Short-timers get drug treatment and have to

have a GED diploma. Stagg said lessons about morals and values are crucial to the program. "Their main job is to teach them to refocus their life, to change their heart and mind," he said.

Most states employ re-entry programs, drug courts and other specialty courts to reduce recidivism rates. What makes the Angola program unique, experts said, is the mentoring by lifers and the courts' role in selecting and monitoring participants from the beginning to the end of their sentences. "I haven't seen it operate in the US in this way at all," said David Khey, a criminal justice professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Who is authorized to participate

Only nine court jurisdictions, including in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, are currently authorized to participate in Angola's program and a smaller companion program at a women's prison. But the state Supreme Court appointed a participating judge to examine how the program could be expanded elsewhere, with Khey's input.

So far, only one of 27 program graduates from one court jurisdiction alone has returned to

prison since the first was released in 2013 - what Khey calls a "very promising" rate. Statewide, approximately 36 percent of Louisiana offenders return to prison within 3 years, state corrections figures show.

Defendants charged with sex offenses or facing sentences longer than 10 years aren't eligible. Program graduates get five years of court-supervised probation once released.

"This is not a free pass for anybody," said Judge Scott Schlegel in greater New Orleans' Jefferson Parish. "If you want to change, we are here to help you succeed." Montrel Stiebling entered Angola without a high-school degree or a trade after pleading guilty to an attempted firearm possession charge that could have meant a decade behind bars.

The 25-year-old earned his GED diploma and passed two Automotive Service Excellence certification tests in prison. Six months ago, he landed a job at a New Orleans car dealership's body shop. "I don't think anybody should spend a day up there, but I don't regret it because it helped me out a lot," said Stiebling, who was freed in 2012 but remains on probation. — AP

REPUBLICANS BEFRIEND AIR PASSENGERS - UP TO A POINT

WASHINGTON: Republican leaders are lauding an aviation policy bill before the Senate as the most passenger friendly in years, but there are limits to friendship. In an election year that has thus far been defined by populist rage, Republicans are walking a fine line as they seek to respond to passengers angered at their treatment by airlines without violating conservative tenets by imposing potentially costly regulations on a major industry.

"I know there are some who think we should go further and re-regulate the airline industry, but we know deregulation has helped make air travel more accessible and more affordable for families and business travelers," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. He defended the GOP position in favor of some consumer reforms in the bill but against proposals by Democrats to add more teeth to them.

Public complaints to the Transportation Department about airlines jumped 34 percent last year to the highest level since 2000, even though consumer advocates say many passengers don't know where to turn when they think they've been treated unfairly. Among the adopted pro-consumer provisions, part of a larger aviation bill to extend the Federal Aviation Administration's programs and powers, are these:

- Standardizing how airlines disclose fees for basic services like checked bags, ticket changes or cancellations, and seat assignments so that consumers can more easily compare both fare and fee prices as they shop for tickets.

- Requiring that airlines refund fees for checked bags that are delivered more than six hours after a domestic flight has landed, and more than 12 hours after an international flight.

- Requiring airlines to refund any fees for services not delivered, such as advance seat assignments that turn out to be unavailable or early boarding that isn't provided.

- Making airlines inform passengers traveling with children at the time of ticketing if they are unable to seat them together.

The provisions were included at the behest of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee's senior Democrat, Sen Bill Nelson of Florida, in negotiations with the chairman, Sen John Thune. Thune has repeatedly touted the consumer provisions as a reason for senators to support the bill. In a video shot at Washington Reagan National Airport to promote the bill, he calls the measure "one of the most passenger-friendly aviation bills in a generation."

But when Sen Edward Markey, tried to go a step further by proposing to prohibit airlines from setting unreasonable fees and to direct the Transportation Department to establish what is reasonable, his amendment was defeated in committee last month on a party-line tie vote. And last week, Sen Chuck Schumer, tried to prohibit airlines from further shrinking the size of seats and to direct the FAA to determine a minimum seat size. The Senate defeated his amendment with all but three Democrats voting in favor and all but one Republican voting against.

At least one Republican had second thoughts. The day after the vote, Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona tweeted a photo of himself jammed into an airline seat, laptop on his lap. On the screen: a news website with the headline, "The Senate just voted against airplane legroom standards." "OK, so perhaps my vote against this bill was a tad impetuous," tweeted the 6-foot-11 Flake. — AP

Poll: Hold hearings on court nominee

According to a new AP-GfK poll, most Americans believe the U.S. Senate should hold confirmation hearings for Judge Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee.

Americans say they are following news of the Supreme Court vacancy after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia...



...And that when it comes to confirmation hearings for Garland, they say the Senate should...



Results based on a survey of 1,076 U.S. adults conducted March 31-April 4. Margin of sampling error is ±3.3 percentage points.

Graphic shows results of AP-GfK poll on attitudes toward the current Supreme Court vacancy. — AP

MELANIA TRUMP SAYS HUSBAND KNOWS THE PERILS OF TWITTER

NEW YORK: Melania Trump controls what her 10-year-old son can do on social media - but her husband, Donald, is another matter. The wife of the Republican presidential front-runner says he is "an adult and he knows the consequences" of his prolific and sometimes inflammatory Twitter use. She said Tuesday at a CNN town hall in New York City that she has tried and failed to get

Trump to put his phone away and rein in his social media activity.

Donald Trump, who has 7.5 million Twitter followers and nearly as many on Facebook, boasted about his social media prowess. But he acknowledged that it sometimes got him in trouble. He also revealed that he either writes or dictates nearly all of his own tweets. — AP



CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA: This file photo taken on January 14, 2016 shows Donald Trump's wife Melania Trump (R), daughter Ivanka Trump (2R), and son's Eric Trump (2ndL), and Donald Trump Jr. as they look on during the Republican Presidential debate at the North Charleston Coliseum and Performing Arts Center. — AFP

EU PRIVACY WATCHDOGS RAISE CONCERNS OVER US DATA PACT

BRUSSELS: European privacy regulators said yesterday a new commercial data transfer pact between the European Union and the United States needed to provide more reassurance over US surveillance practices and the independence of a new US privacy ombudsman. The EU-US Privacy Shield, agreed in February after two years of talks, is designed to help firms on both sides of the Atlantic to move Europeans' data to the United States without falling foul of strict EU data transfer rules. It will replace Safe Harbor, struck down last year by the top EU court follow-

ing a challenge spurred by revelations of mass US government surveillance programs. European data protection authorities on yesterday urged the European Commission - which negotiated the framework - to address their concerns in order for them to be able to establish that data transferred to the United States is afforded the same standard of protection as in Europe.

Isabelle Falque-Pierrotin, chair of the group of 28 data protection authorities, said an area of concern was "the possibility that is left in the Shield for bulk collection

which if massive and indiscriminate is not acceptable." She also said the regulators had doubts about the effective powers and independence of the US ombudsman who will deal with EU complaints about US surveillance practices.

"We don't have enough security guarantees in the status of the ombudsman," Falque-Pierrotin said. While non-binding, the opinion from the regulators is important because they enforce data protection law across the EU and can suspend specific data transfers. However, companies can still transfer data to the United States using

contracts establishing privacy protections between groups, so-called standard contractual clauses and binding corporate rules.

EU data protection law bars companies from transferring personal data to countries deemed to have insufficient privacy safeguards, of which the United States is one, unless they set up such contracts or use a framework like the Privacy Shield. Cross-border data transfers are used in many industries for sharing employee information, and consumer data is shared to complete credit card, travel or e-commerce transactions, or to target advertising based on customer preferences. Falque-Pierrotin welcomed improvements in the Privacy Shield compared with Safe Harbor, such as a clearer explanation of EU citizens' rights and means for redress.

The data protection authorities urged the European Commission to review the Shield in two years when a stricter European data protection law comes into force. Member state representatives have to approve the framework before it is formally adopted, something the Commission hopes to do by June. — Reuters

merce transactions, or to target advertising based on customer preferences. Falque-Pierrotin welcomed improvements in the Privacy Shield compared with Safe Harbor, such as a clearer explanation of EU citizens' rights and means for redress.



MUNICH, GERMANY: Firefighters and emergency doctors working at the scene of a train accident near Bad Aibling. — AFP

GERMAN TRAIN CRASH CLAIMS 12TH VICTIM

BERLIN: The death toll from a German train crash rose to 12 yesterday, a day after a rail dispatcher was arrested, accused of having been distracted by a mobile phone game shortly before the accident.

Two commuter trains crashed head-on at high speed near the southern spa town of Bad Aibling early on February 9 in one of Germany's deadliest accidents in years, which also left several dozen passengers injured. The latest victim was a 46-year-old man who died of his injuries in a Munich hospital more than two months after the disaster, said Bavarian police.

A day earlier, a court ordered the arrest of the 39-year-old railway signaling worker on involuntary manslaughter and other charges. Prosecutors said the man had "turned on his mobile phone while on duty on the morning of the disaster, launched an online computer game and actively

played it for a long period until shortly before the train collision."

"Apparently because of this distraction, the accused made... false assumptions, sent the wrong signals to the trains and pressed the wrong radio key combinations in both emergency calls so that the drivers could not receive them." This meant his error was not just a "momentary lapse" but represented a "serious breach of duty," said the chief prosecutor in the southern town of Traunstein in a statement.

The worker, who has several years of experience, had allowed two trains from opposite directions, carrying about 150 passengers in total, to travel on a single track. They collided in a forest area about 60 kilometers southeast of Munich, the Bavarian capital. The accused had admitted to playing the game but denied being distracted by it, said the prosecutor's statement. — AFP



PIRAEUS, GREECE: Two boys place a fish in a plastic bag at the port of yesterday. — AP

MIGRANTS CLASH AGAIN WITH MACEDONIAN POLICE ON GREEK BORDER

IDOMENI: More than 100 migrants engaged in running battles yesterday with Macedonian police on the other side of a fence on Greece's border with the country, in clashes that sent clouds of tear gas wafting over a crowded tent city of stranded refugees and other migrants.

The violence stopped a planned tour of the border fence in Macedonia by the visiting presidents of Croatia and Slovenia. No injuries were reported from the clashes at the closed Idomeni crossing, while Greek riot police monitoring the stone-throwing migrants on their side of the fence made no arrests, did little to intervene and retreated during the tear-gas barrage. Macedonian police fired scores of tear gas canisters, stun grenades and rubber bullets at the protesters, who had earlier tried to scale the border fence using blankets issued by humanitarian groups to get over coils of razor wire. Many of the canisters were neutralized by blankets and earth thrown over them by the protesters.

What triggered this

About 11,000 people have been living in the informal camp for weeks, since Macedonia closed its border to transient refugees and other migrants hoping to move north towards Europe's prosperous heartland. Before the shutdown, which was triggered by a similar move in Austria, further north on the migration corridor, about 850,000 people who had arrived in Greece on smugglers' boats from Turkey had entered Macedonia from Idomeni.

The camp residents - mostly Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees - have ignored repeated calls from Greek authorities to relocate to organized camps, and attempted several

mass incursions into Macedonia in recent weeks, trying to bypass the fence or break through it. Alaeddin Mohamad, a 26-year-old law student from Aleppo, Syria, who has lived in the camp for a month, told The Associated Press that the protest started with a peaceful sit-down in front of the fence, and Macedonian police responded with tear gas.

"We don't want to clash. We want the borders to open and get on with our lives," Mohamad said. "I want to continue my studies in Europe. I will stay here until the border opens. Otherwise, I will die here."

On Sunday, severe clashes between stone-throwing migrants and Macedonian police using tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets and a water cannon left scores injured. The violence increased friction between the two Balkan neighbors - at odds for a quarter-century over Macedonia's official name - with Macedonia accusing Greece of doing nothing to stop the rioters and Athens denouncing Skopje's heavy-handed response.

On the Macedonian side of the border, the presidents of Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia - whose countries have sent police to help Macedonia guard its border - met in the town of Gevgelija, a few kilometers from Idomeni.

Croatia's Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic said the European Union should clarify its immigration policy and send a clear message to migrants stranded in Balkan countries who are hoping the old route will reopen.

In comments to the press, she said that the wave of immigration will not stop "until (migrants) got a clear message" on who is eligible for asylum. The clashes prevented a planned visit to the closed border crossing. — AP

RUSSIANS WORRIED ABOUT ECONOMY BEFORE PUTIN CALL-IN SHOW

'DIRECT LINE' WITH PUTIN NOW IN ITS 14TH YEAR

MOSCOW: Before President Vladimir Putin's annual call-in show today, the Kremlin has been sifting through more than 1 million questions from Russians across the country.

Chief among concerns this year are the rising cost of utilities - a perennial issue - and the state of Russia's roads, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, adding that photographs of pock-marked highways have come flooding in. Other major concerns include price increases and withheld salaries, the spokesman told journalists.

This "Direct Line" with Putin, now in its 14th year, provides a way for the president to assess the country's mood, listen to direct appeals from his constituency, and explain policies, both foreign and domestic.

The program's plan

This year, more than in the past, the president is likely to devote a good amount of time to world politics, said Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center. "Russia has been at war in the Middle East for a time now. It has been so far successful, but people are worried. People are also worried about what happens in Ukraine next," he said.

Trenin said the message will be clear: "It's a difficult world, it's a complicated situation - the West is against us, oil has gone down to the level where we have not seen it for the past 12 years - so it's tough, but we need to rally around the Kremlin." The call-in show also gives Russians a chance to feel like their concerns are being heard, playing on a tradition dating back to imperial Russia when peasants would appeal



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin, listens during last year's annual call-in show on Russian television "Conversation With Vladimir Putin". — AP

directly to the czar to intervene to solve their problems. "In order not to be surprised, Mr. Putin is watching the popular mood very intently and these press conferences are very important in that sense, so he gets a lot of first-hand information about the people of the country," Trenin told The Associated Press.

The president has called this event one of the most telling social surveys in the country. During the week ahead of the show, Russians can submit questions via an online portal or through social networking sites. The day of the show,

people can phone in, and Putin also takes questions from Russians speaking over video links that have been set up at selected spots around the country. The highly choreographed event often pushes four hours.

According to a recent survey from the independent Levada Center, nearly half of Russians would ask Putin about bread-and-butter economic issues such as income levels and price increases. Only 12 percent of Russians said they would ask the president about corruption, according to the poll. Despite the release of leaked financial documents called the Panama Papers, Russians have largely remained nonplussed about accusations that Putin's friends, particularly leading cellist Sergei Rodulgin, were engaged in an offshore scheme. Putin has publicly defended Rodulgin. The survey, which was conducted March 25-28 among 1,600 people across Russia, highlights the economic challenges Russia has been facing in the past several years.

The Russian economy, which was already facing stagnation, has been hard hit by falling oil prices and Western sanctions, levied in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. A sharp depreciation in the rouble has contributed to high inflation and a rise in the cost of living, while employment opportunities have narrowed. Vladislav Zheleznev, a 20-year-old car mechanic, said if he had a chance he would ask Putin to do more for Russia's students. "I really want young people to have a job after they finish studying," Zheleznev said. "I want them not to have the problem of searching for a job and I want for this job to be fairly paid." — AP

RICH NATIONS PROBE PANAMA PAPERS TAX REVELATIONS

PARIS: Tax authorities from the world's richest nations yesterday probed a mass of murky offshore dealings revealed in the huge Panama Papers data leak, just hours after police raided the law firm at the center of the scandal.

The leak of 11.5 million confidential offshore financial documents from Panamanian law office Mossack Fonseca offered international tax officials meeting in Paris an unprecedented trove of data to delve into alleged wrongdoing, officials said. "We are basically trying to get the bigger picture," Australian Tax Commissioner Chris Jordan, who proposed a joint investigation, told the Australian Financial Review business daily ahead of the gathering. "It has never been tried on this scale before," Jordan added.

"A number of countries have got slices or pieces of the data and that's been very useful, but really, the start of the conversation is to work out who's got what, how we can pool that information and start to work together." Australia convened the closed-door meeting in the French capital as chair of the Joint International Tax Shelter Information and Collaboration Network, which seeks to crack down on cross-border tax cheats.

'First opportunity to act'

The global network looking into tax havens is an initiative of the Paris-headquartered 38-nation advanced economies club, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

"The meeting at the OECD presents tax administrations with a first opportunity to act on the considerable body of information revealed by the Panama Papers release," the OECD said in a statement in the run-up to the one-day gathering. The tax officials gathered behind closed doors in Paris just hours after the Panamanian police's organized crime police raided the headquarters of Mossack Fonseca, which says its confidential documents were stolen in a computer hack. Prosecutors said the raids at Mossack Fonseca's headquarters in Panama City and other branches had taken place "with no incident or interference," but gave no details on the results of the searches. The world's business, political and even sports elite have been thrown onto the defensive by the findings of a year-long probe by a consortium of investigative journalists into leaked documents covering almost 40 years from around 214,000 offshore entities.

'US plot' claim

Although not illegal in themselves, offshore financial transactions may be used to hide assets from tax authorities, launder the proceeds of criminal activities or conceal misappropriated or politically inconvenient wealth.

Iceland's prime minister was forced to resign after it emerged he owned shares in the country's banks through an offshore company during the financial crisis. Leaders in Britain and Ukraine have faced questions over their taxes, while Russian President Vladimir Putin has sought to divert attention from his entourage by claiming it is all a US plot against him.

China has been censoring online forums and media to stifle discussion of the papers, which showed relatives of eight of its political top brass



PANAMA CITY: Police stand guard outside the Mossack Fonseca law firm offices during a raid on Tuesday. — AFP

also owned offshore companies. And wealthy citizens in Australia, France, India, Mexico, Peru, Spain and elsewhere face probes over suspected tax avoidance after their names figured in some of the documents.

Panama has hit back at the apparent blemish on its image. It has warned France of unspecified diplomatic measures if France does not remove it from a blacklist of tax havens.

Paris put Panama back on its national list of uncooperative jurisdictions, after removing it in 2012, in the wake of the leaks. France is also urging the European Union and all OECD member states to follow suit. Such an international designation would deal a heavy blow to Panama's vital financial services sector, which the government has been trying to make more transparent. — AFP

CALL TO INVESTIGATE NIGERIAN MILITARY KILLINGS OF SHIITES

LAGOS: Nigeria's Kaduna state government has said it secretly buried hundreds of minority Shiite Muslims in a mass grave, after the victims were killed in army raids that underline ongoing impunity despite President Muhammadu Buhari's promises to end military abuses.

Amnesty International is calling for an investigation following what it called "horrific revelations of the slaughter and secret burial." Kaduna state government secretary Balarabe Lawal told a commission of inquiry on Monday that dozens of soldiers and state officials transported 347 bodies from a mortuary and an army base to a bush site where they were buried after the Dec. 12-14 military raids on Shiite compounds in northern Zaria town. The Shiites say those killed number closer to 1,000.

The military said it ordered the mid-December raids after Shiites attempted to assassinate Nigeria's army chief - charges the Shiite Islamic Movement in Nigeria denies. The killing only stopped when the military captured and then shot several times Shiite leader Ibraheem Zakzaky, leaving him near-blind, human rights lawyer Femi Falana said this week after finally being allowed to see his client.

Nearly 1,000 Shiites are missing, including scores held in illegal detention along with

Zakzaky, said Shiite spokesman Ibrahim Musa. None has been brought to court though the law requires that those arrested be charged within 48 hours. Some wounded Shiites have died in detention for lack of medical care, according to Musa, who is in hiding, saying he is fearful he will be killed if caught.

"The horrific revelation by the Kaduna state government that hundreds of Shiites were gunned down and dumped in mass graves is an important first step to bringing all those suspected of criminal responsibility for this atrocity to trial," the Nigeria director of London-based Amnesty International, M.K. Ibrahim, said in a statement on Tuesday. Iran, considered the international protector of Shiites, has protested the killings and demanded compensation for victims and for bulldozed properties including Zakzaky's home and a school.

"Kill Boko Haram! Stop killing Shia!" says graffiti on a hospital wall in northern Kano city, referring to the northeastern Islamic extremist insurgency that has killed some 20,000 people. Amnesty has charged that the military are responsible for the deaths of about 8,000 of the deaths, all detainees killed extra-judicially or through torture, starvation and asphyxiation in overcrowded cells. — AP

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 Qatar Airways - Qatar

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ISLAMISTS BEHEAD TWO HOSTAGES IN THE PHILIPPINES

MANILA: Philippine militants that want to ally with Islamic State jihadists have beheaded two local hostages, police said yesterday. Police on the southern island of Mindanao recovered the decapitated corpses of the two men on Tuesday, nine days after they were taken, said the police chief of Lanao del Sur province.

"Salvador Hanobas and Jemark Hanobas were beheaded by their abductors," Senior Superintendent Rustom Duran told reporters by telephone. "Locals brought the heads and the torsos to the mayor's office." It was unclear if the two victims were related. Duran said the kidnapers

belonged to an Islamic militant group that battled government forces for a week in February, leaving three soldiers dead and forcing 20,000 people to flee their homes.

Police found black flags identical to those flown by Islamic State jihadists in Iraq and Syria in the fighters' hideout in the remote Mindanao town of Butig. Duran said the group had also abducted six workers at a local sawmill on April 4, accusing them of being military informers. Four were freed unharmed on Monday.

A Muslim separatist insurgency has raged for more than four decades in the southern Philippines,

leaving more than 120,000 people dead. Efforts to secure a peace deal with the largest rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), collapsed after parliament failed to pass a law to create an autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao.

MILF leaders have warned the collapse of the peace deal could embolden hard line militants who want to resume a violent separatist uprising. News of the beheadings came after the Abu Sayyaf, another Islamic militant group, released a retired Italian priest held hostage for six months last week.

A major firefight broke out afterwards on the remote southern island of Basilan on Friday, leaving

18 soldiers and more than two dozen Abu Sayyaf gunmen dead. The military said skirmishes were still continuing with Abu Sayyaf fighters on yesterday, and the toll of dead rebels had risen to 28.

Among those killed were a Moroccan bomb expert called Mohammad Khattab, who the military said had been sent to build ties between local Muslim rebel groups and an international jihadist network.

"Khattab planned to speak to all of them to unite and link them to the entire international terrorist network," military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla told reporters. — AFP



CHANGSHA, CHINA: Sun Wenlin, left, and his partner Hu Mingliang hold hands as they arrive at the Furong District Court to argue in China's first gay marriage case yesterday. — AP

DESPITE COURT RULING, CHINA GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT MAKES GAINS

'ENTERING THE STRUGGLE'

CHANGSHA, CHINA: For years, Chen Tianian could only read about the gay rights movement in faraway places. She knew that there were activists in Beijing and a vibrant community in Shanghai, and that in San Francisco, a distant Mecca, gay pride parades took up entire streets.

But on Wednesday, the 20-year-old English major sat on the steps of a courthouse and spoke fervently about how the struggle for equality had arrived in her central Chinese hometown - and how she planned to take part. "It's hard to believe, but we're right in the middle of this," said Chen, who came with several friends to support a local couple who had challenged the city's civil affairs bureau after they were denied a marriage certificate. "It's like I'm finally entering the struggle myself."

Though it was dismissed by the court in Changsha, China's first legal challenge to a law limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples has galvanized many of the hundreds of young Chinese gay rights supporters who gathered at the courthouse, some of them waving small rainbow flags. The hearing's sizable public turnout and coverage by usually conservative Chinese media appeared to reflect early signs of shifting social attitudes in China on the topic of sexual orientation.

The lawsuit

The lawsuit that was dismissed was brought by 26-year-old Sun Wenlin against the civil affairs bureau for refusing to issue him and his partner, Hu Mingliang, a marriage registration certificate. The judge's ruling against the couple came down after a three-hour hearing - but that didn't dampen the mood of many of the hundreds of young Chinese who gathered outside the courthouse hoping for a chance to "witness history," in the words of one supporter.

Some supporters, who had traveled overnight from neighboring provinces to line up at 5 a.m. to attend the hearing, said they felt energized because having a gay marriage lawsuit argued in a Chinese court for the first time was a small but significant victory in itself. Unlike in most politically sensitive legal cases, security outside the courthouse was light and the atmosphere was relaxed.

More seasoned activists said they too had reason to be optimistic given a pickup in legal challenges, even if successes in court remained few and far between. Chinese society and the government have generally frowned on nontraditional expressions of

gender and sexuality, but awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues is rising.

China doesn't legally recognize same-sex marriage, and officials with the central government have said they do not see the law changing soon. It also remains unclear how far gay rights activism will be allowed to go under the current political climate in China, where lawyers groups and feminist activists have been jailed in recent months. But many gay rights activists in China say they feel public attitudes are shifting substantially given the growing mainstream media coverage of LGBT issues.

In 2014, a Chinese court ruled that gay conversion treatments were illegal. Earlier this week, a labor arbitration panel in the southern province of Guizhou heard China's first transgender job discrimination case and is expected to make a ruling in the coming weeks.

Ying Xin, the director of the Beijing LGBT Center, said there was a sharp uptick in awareness of gay issues compared to 2009, when the group started doing street performance art in Beijing. "This is a moment because of all the news coverage, and people are gaining exposure," Ying said, pointing out recent coverage of LGBT issues and lawsuits in domestic online and broadcast news outlets.

The television

Central China Television, the state broadcaster, has covered gay issues on several occasions and sent a reporter yesterday to interview Sun after the court decision. As he left the courthouse amid applause and cries of "Hero," Sun, the plaintiff, told reporters and scores of supporters that he would continue to appeal until all of his legal options were exhausted.

"The bigger significance of this case is that it will let more people know about their rights," said Gou Gou, a Beijing-based lawyer from an informal group of legal professionals called the Rainbow Lawyers network. "But young people are the most passionate. This will hopefully direct them to become more involved with the right training."

For Chen, the English student, yesterday's hearing seemed like an awakening. She attributed the Internet to her knowledge of LGBT issues, saying she had read voraciously about everything from the battle over same-sex marriage in the United States winding its way to the Supreme Court to news of homophobic attacks in Russia. — AP

BEFORE DEFECTING, NORTH KOREAN WAITRESSES SHOPPED FOR BACKPACKS

NINGBO: Two days before they sought asylum in South Korea, the North Korean waitresses in the Chinese coastal city of Ningbo shopped for backpacks at a nearby store and paid relatively expensive full prices. "I asked them 'Are you going on a trip?', and they said yes," said one of the workers at the shop, who declined to give his name. "They seemed happy." Another shop worker, surnamed Gong, confirmed the story.

Four waitresses from the Ryugyong Korean Restaurant visited the nearby store on April 5 and bought three backpacks, each for the listed 199 yuan (about \$31), even though they were often known to bargain, the workers said.

Two days later, 12 of the restaurant's waitresses and one manager arrived in Seoul, the South Korean capital, in the biggest mass defection case involving North Koreans in several years. How they planned and executed their trip remains a mystery, but more details have quickly emerged of this defection than most others.

South Korea has said it has admitted 13 defectors, North Korean restaurant workers who arrived on April 7, on humanitarian grounds. The North has called it a "hideous" abduction of its workers by the South. The South Korean government's public

acknowledgement of defections is unusual. It also said this week that two senior officials from the North had defected, but that they came over last year. The government denied the announcements were aimed at influencing voters in Wednesday's parliamentary election. China has said a group of 13 North Koreans used valid passports to leave the country normally on April 6, but did not say where they went. China is North Korea's main ally and is known for sending defectors back to the North. About 29,000 people have fled North Korea and arrived in the South since the 1950-53 Korean War, including 1,276 last year, with numbers declining since a 2009 peak.

Secretive and a curiosity

In Ningbo, shopkeepers nearby considered the North Korean restaurant and its pretty but secretive waitresses a curiosity. The restaurant, now closed, sits on a newly developed pedestrian street for tourists that opened for business in late September last year. Across the lane at a cosmetics shop, Jiang Jiang recalled the noisy, patriotic North Korean music sung by the waitresses, a routine deployed at many of the around 130 North Korean restaurants around the world. — Reuters

BONE FRAGMENTS FROM WWII CRASHES RETURNING FROM INDIA

'THIS IS A SAD DUTY, BUT IT MEANS A GREAT DEAL'

NEW DELHI: The tiny bone fragments formally turned over to the US Wednesday carry a world of significance and perhaps closure for possibly a few American families who lost a loved one over the mountains of India in World War II.

During a solemn ceremony Wednesday, US military members paid final respects to what they believe may be the remains of crew members from a B-24 bomber and a military transport plane that crashed on supply runs from India to China over the Himalayan Mountains.

Finally returning home

Eight people were killed in the B-24 crash, and a four-man Army Air Force crew was killed in a C-109 crash. It marks the first time the Defense Department's POW/MIA Accounting Agency is bringing home remains of missing military members from India. "This is a sad duty, but it means a great deal," said Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who watched the ceremony. "Those guys whose remains are in those coffins would have wanted that, and would be proud and happy to be home, and their families too."

Speaking to reporters flying with him to the Philippines, Carter said it also sends a message to those currently serving in warzone because it shows them "what we would go through for somebody who perished serving their country today." Two bone fragments - small enough to fit inside a sandwich bag - along with some other artifacts from the B-24 flight were found during a US excavation in the rugged mountain. Their discovery and return gives hope to families that the remains of the estimated 350 US service members still classified as missing in India may someday find their way home.

According to Gary Stark, the India desk officer for the POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the B-24 - known as Hot As Hell - went missing with its crew of eight in January 1944. The aircraft was one of many that ran supplies from China to India, flying people and parts back and forth over what they called the Hump.

The second set of remains was turned over to the POW/MIA agency by a third party and was from the same region.

The Pentagon said the remains are "possibly" related to a C-109 that crashed on July 17, 1945, traveling from India to China. After yesterday's ceremony at the airport in New Delhi, the remains, which were put in ceremonial boxes and then into flag-draped caskets, will be sent to



NEW DELHI: US military members pay final respects to what they believe may be the remains of one to two crew members from a B-24 bomber that crashed during World War II at a ceremony at the Palam airport yesterday. — AP

a lab in Hawaii for DNA testing. Only then will officials know if the fragments belong to one or two crew members.

The B-24 crash site is one of many in the mountains where US aircraft went down as they tried to negotiate the harsh and jagged terrain. Teams have tried to excavate sites before, but in 2008-2009 they found no remains.

This time, experts aided by mountaineering adventurers identified four areas to search. Two were in terrain that was too dangerous for crews to work in because of possible landslides. High on the steep mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, along India's northeast border, the recovery team climbed more than 9,000 feet.

According to Marine Capt. Greg Lynch, the team hiked for three days to set up a base camp, then climbed to the crash site every day, carefully sifting through dirt to find remains. "It was very physically grueling to go to this particular area and to conduct this recovery," said Lynch, a team leader who was not on this project. He said the team included 12 mainly military members, along with another dozen or so contractors.

What else did they find?

Along with the bone fragments, the team

found other items associated with the crash but no personal effects, such as dog tags or watches, that could identify the crew. US Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who has been traveling in India, watched as tags was played and the remains were placed in the caskets and loaded onto a C-17 aircraft for the flight home.

The Pentagon has restated its commitment to families of the thousands of servicemen still unaccounted for from World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. Many of those families have, over the years, complained bitterly of delay and even neglect from the Pentagon agencies charged with finding, recovering and identifying remains from overseas wars.

Carter's predecessor at the Pentagon, Chuck Hagel, ordered the MIA accounting bureaucracy to reorganize and consolidate as part of an effort to improve its performance, which also has come under criticism in Congress.

Under increased scrutiny, the POW/MIA office has increased the number of remains that were identified last year, to nearly 100, and expects to exceed that number this year. No more excavations in India are planned for the fiscal year that ends on Sept. 30, and officials said they didn't know the schedule for next year. — AP



KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, INDIA: Britain's Prince William (C), Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, feed baby elephants as a rhino calf looks on at the Center for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) at Panbari reserve forest yesterday. — AFP

BRITISH ROYALS WILL AND KATE TOUR RHINO SANCTUARY IN INDIA

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, INDIA: Britain's Duke and Duchess of Cambridge took a jeep safari on Wednesday through an Indian national park that is home to two-thirds of the world's dwindling population of one-horned rhinos.

Prince William and wife Kate, on a week-long tour of India and Bhutan, rode in an open-topped jeep through the Kaziranga National Park in the northeastern state of Assam, spotting a pair of rhinos in a lagoon, as well as water buffalo and swamp deer.

The royal couple was keen to learn about efforts to combat poachers and how the wildlife affects villagers living near the park, spread across an area of 430 square km. "We felt good when the prince came to the park. We are lucky to interact with the prince," said forest ranger Salim Ahmad, adding that William had asked

about the problems faced in the park and anti-poaching efforts.

The thick-skinned, one-horned Indian rhinoceros is one of five species in the world. Global conservation group WWF estimates that fewer than 3,000 of the animals survive today. They are found mostly in northeastern India, with a few hundred in neighboring Nepal.

The rhinos in Kaziranga live in swamps, forests and tall thickets of elephant grass, where poachers hide before trapping them with poison, or just shooting them dead. William and Kate have already visited the Indian capital, New Delhi and the financial hub, Mumbai. They travel to the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan on Thursday, before returning on Saturday to India's Taj Mahal - famously visited alone by his late mother, Princess Diana, in 1992. — Reuters

CHINA SUMMONS G7 DIPLOMATS TO PROTEST S. CHINA SEA STATEMENT

BEIJING: Beijing summoned diplomats from the Group of 7 industrialized countries to protest a statement from their foreign ministers criticizing China's island-building activities in the disputed South China Sea, the Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said China "solemnly clarified" to the diplomats its position on the issue. In an earlier statement, Lu defended China's land reclamation work in the Spratly islands as within its territorial rights and accused the G-7 of diverging from its mission of safeguarding the global economy.

"After this (G-7) statement was issued, we indeed found some things were correct and some were incorrect," Lu told reporters at a regularly scheduled news conference. "As part of the ritual of the exchanges among countries, when we find something wrong, we will definitely clarify to the relevant country our opinion and stance."

Unconfirmed reports said China summoned the Japanese ambassador and the No. 2 ranking diplomat from the other six on Tuesday. The statement issued by the G-7 foreign ministers on Monday expressed strong opposition to any "intimidating, coercive or provocative unilateral actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions."

China's massive project to create islands by piling sand on coral reefs and topping them with airfields and ports has been criticized by the US and others as militarizing the region, an accusation China flatly rejects. The statement, which didn't mention China by name, also expressed concern about the East China Sea, where Japan and China both claim a string of uninhabited islands.

Lu's statement issued Tuesday and posted on the ministry's website said the G-7 countries should have focused on global economy instead of "hyping up maritime issues and fueling tensions in the region." Yesterday, Lu complained that some media have not fully reported on China's position and said China would not be pressured into altering its policies on the South China Sea. China claims almost the entire strategically vital waterway and its island groups as its own territory. — AP



A Yemeni man looks at his mobile phone while riding a motorcycle in floodwaters on a rainy day in Sanaa yesterday. — AP

SAUDI CABINET CURBS POWERS OF VICE POLICE

Continued from Page 1

In 2013, religious policemen were arrested after their patrol car crashed into another vehicle during a chase that left two men dead. Mutawaa members must be of "good conduct and reputation" and must clearly display their identity cards, the new rules say. A five-member advisory committee will provide suggestions to the Mutawaa president - appointed by King Salman - on holding officers to account for any violations or abuses.

Eman Al-Nafjan, a well-known blogger on Saudi society, culture and women's issues, praised the changes. "It's great. Finally!" she told AFP, adding that cabinet acted "because there have been so many cases" of Mutawaa wrongdoing. Despite their controversial reputation, the officers do not have a particularly noticeable

presence in many parts of the Saudi capital.

This is the latest effort to curb the excesses of an agency which, according to Saudi columnist Sajdi Al-Rouqi, did not in the past hesitate to flog in public young men who did not know the time of prayer. In an article published in local media last month, Rouqi called on the agency's members to improve its public image and explain the "noble objectives of their job".

Other commentators have called for the Mutawaa's abolition. In 2013, cabinet removed from religious officers the power to interrogate and press charges. But it maintained their right to arrest people using alcohol or drugs and committing certain other offences including witchcraft. Abuses allegedly continued, but Nafjan said it felt like this time would be different. "I'm very confident

because there are so many people that are for these changes," she said, expressing hope that any rogue officers would be held to account.

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Ghamdi, a former head of the holy city of Makkah's religious police, welcomed the new regulations but said they perhaps could have come sooner. "I believe it's a very good change" for the roughly 5,000 Haia members, Ghamdi told AFP. The agency has an "important message for the people" but some of its members have misunderstood Islam which is a "very kind" religion, he said. There was no immediate comment from the Mutawaa and its website could not be accessed yesterday. In February, Haia chief Abdul Rahman Al-Sanad was quoted as denying his agency harasses or punishes people. He said it seeks simply to improve behavior, Arab News reported. — AFP

NOD TO HIGHER POWER TARIFFS FOR EXPATRIATES...

Continued from Page 1

Electricity and Water Minister Ahmad Al-Jassar said at Kuwait's current consumption of 15,000 megawatts, the government pays KD 2.660 billion in subsidies for electricity and water annually. He said that in 2035, consumption would triple and subsidies would hit KD. 7.6 billion if nothing is done to cut overconsumption and stop squandering of electricity and water. The aim of the government bill, which proposed higher tariffs, is to cut consumption by 30 percent and save billions of dinars that could be used to build houses, the minister said.

According to official statistics, Kuwaiti citizens account for 40 percent of power and 43 percent of water consumption, with expatriates consuming 20 percent of power and 22 percent of water, the minister said. The rest goes to other activities. Jassar said that 68 percent of citizens consume under 12,000 kW of electricity monthly and 57 percent of expats consume under 2,000 kW per month.

A majority of lawmakers expressed total opposition to the government's plan to increase charges on citizens, others called for smaller raises while a few MPs also called to exempt expatriates from the raise. MP Saleh Ashour described the proposed raise as "the biggest crime against citizens and expatriates".

Islamist MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said he is totally

opposed to any increase in charges because it will eventually lead to raising prices of other commodities and goods, thus impacting the population. "Whenever the government fails, it goes directly to the pockets of the people. We are a rich country with a small population ... the principle of hikes is rejected because there is no justification," Azemi said. MP Jamal Al-Omar admitted the country is facing a crisis but insisted that it was caused not by the drop in oil prices alone, but also because of the government's failure, describing the government as "incapable" of managing the country.

The session included several clashes between MPs for various reasons, including between Azemi and Saadoun Hammad, who exchanged harsh words accusing each other of robbery and bribery. MP Adel Al-Khorafi said the country will still face a crisis even if oil price rises to \$50 a barrel, blaming the highly inflated civil servants' salaries as part of the problem. He said he supports raising electricity charges but only after solving structural disorders in the economy.

MP Yusef Al-Zalzal warned of the serious economic situation and cautioned it could impact the value of the Kuwaiti dinar. "A day might come when we can't pay salaries," Zalzal warned. MP Mohammad Tana said he totally rejects any measure to tax citizens in any way. "Apply these measures on merchants and spare citizens," he said. MPs said they will submit several amendments for the second round of voting.

NATIONAL GUARD TO BE DEPLOYED AT OIL SITES

Continued from Page 1

The union did not say how long the walkout would last. Independent MP Mohammad Tana defended the employees' demands and rejected any plan to cut their pay, saying that "benefits and incentives of the oil workers should not be touched". "We are faced with a strike that could paralyse the country and may result in huge losses," Tana told parliament. Sources cited by Al-Rai said Kuwait's oil production of three million barrels per day would drop by between 500,000 bpd and one million bpd if the workers carry out their threat.

But the sources said exports and domestic sales would not be affected since reserves could cover any

drop in production. A spokesman for Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) had said production and exports would not be affected by the strike, and a strategy was in place to deal with this kind of action where extra staff will be used to run operations.

Union chief Saif Al-Qahtani said Monday that workers presented alternatives during the meeting with the minister but they had been rejected. The union is also protesting plans to privatize parts of the oil sector. The other firms where workers plan to join the strike are Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait Oil Tanker company, Equate Petrochemical Industries Company and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company. — Agencies

GATES PREDICTS END OF POLIO

DOHA: Bill Gates said yesterday that "with any luck" polio will be eradicated by 2017 in the last two countries where it remains active, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Microsoft founder, who has donated billions to fight global diseases, was speaking in Doha at the official announcement of a \$50 million donation from Qatar to "The Lives and Livelihood Fund". This is a partnership fund between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), who together have been working to try to eradicate diseases, including polio, since 2012.

"There's very few cases left, just two countries at this point, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and with any luck either this year or next year we will have the last cases of those," Gates said. Pakistan has already made it an official target to rid the country of polio - an infectious viral disease resulting in muscle damage - in 2016 though there have already been eight recorded cases so far this year.

Although these are the two countries where the disease remains endemic, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative calculates eight countries are "vulnerable" to the virus, including Cameroon, South Sudan and Syria. The billionaire, who is the world's richest man according to Forbes, is also well-known for his work in trying to combat malaria. Earlier this year he announced the



DOHA: Bill Gates (right), Microsoft founder and co-chairman of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Khalifa bin Jassim Al-Kuwari, Director General of the Qatar Development Fund, sign documents during a ceremony yesterday. — AFP

launch of a \$4 billion fund to help eradicate malaria, which he called the "world's biggest killer".

The donation he received in Doha will go towards a fund seeking to provide affordable financing for the 30 least-wealthy countries among IDB members. It aims to ease the burden for some of the world's poorest people through grants and sharia-compliant loans. Gates said the injection of cash from Qatar will enable the fund to begin its work. "This is a great milestone for helping the poorest," he said. "Qatar has always been very generous as a donor."

In total, the fund is trying to raise \$2.5 billion. The money has been

donated to Doha through the Qatar Development Fund (QDF), a public body which distributes foreign aid. The head of the QDF, Khalifa bin Jassim Al-Kuwari, said Qatar was "very interested in poverty reduction". "We aim at launching several projects in the health sector, which will improve the quality of life for millions of people across the Muslim world," he said.

IDB president Ahmad Mohamed Ali Al Madani said help would go to those in war-torn regions, where possible. "We try as much as we can to help the countries that suffer from conflicts depending on conditions," he said. "If the conditions allow us to work, the Bank works." — AFP

SISI ON DEFENSIVE OVER ISLES, STUDENT'S...

Continued from Page 1

"This is a country, not a school and those are two islands not two cheese sandwiches," tweeted one commentator, reflecting what some Egyptians see as the government's casual handling of a sovereignty issue. Though he appeared calm and adopted an avuncular tone, Sisi's choice of words suggested criticism had stung a leader once so popular bakeries sold cakes emblazoned with his face. Egypt's government maintains that the islands of Tiran and Sanafir at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba belong to Saudi Arabia, which asked Egypt in 1950 to protect them from Israel. Israel captured the islands in the 1967 Middle East war, but handed them back to Egypt under their 1979 peace treaty. "We did not surrender our rights, but we restored the rights of others," Sisi said in comments broadcast live. "Egypt did not relinquish even a grain of sand. All the data and documents say nothing except that this particular right is theirs. Please let us not talk about this subject again," he added. "There is a parliament that you elected which will debate the accord. It will either ratify or reject it."

But the agreement to hand them over caused consternation among many Egyptians, who were taught in school that the islands were theirs. Cartoons on social media showed the Sphinx in a traditional Gulf Arab headdress while the front page of Al Maqal newspaper asked: "Are we living the years of the Saudi Republic of Egypt?" Even the chairman of state-owned mass-circulation Al Ahram newspaper condemned the government's handling of the issue.

"Tiran and Sanafir... Egyptian forever," wrote Ahmed Al-Naggar on his Facebook page on Tuesday night, adding that he would publish a column on the topic the next day. The column did not appear in yesterday's newspaper.

On Twitter, the hashtag "I feel like selling what to Saudi Arabia" trended on Tuesday, with commentators suggesting Egypt flog everything from self-serving lawmakers to Sisi himself. Egypt needs Gulf Arab money to keep itself afloat and the controversial decision to hand back the islands should be seen in that context, said Amr Adly, non-resident scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Center. "We can expect things that are very desperate. And giving up the islands is already very desperate," he told Reuters.

But even Egyptians who were willing to accept the islands as Saudi property were upset that Israel was consulted in advance - the islands are entangled in Egypt's 1979 peace deal with Israel - but the Egyptian people and parliament were not. The announcement was buried at the bottom of a cabinet statement issued late on Saturday, giving the impression that the government had hoped no one would notice. "What hurts most is the phone call to Tel Aviv that came before everything, and these massive headlines in the most important newspaper in Egypt reassuring Israel before explaining anything to the Egyptian people," prominent journalist Yosri Fouda wrote on his Facebook page.

Sisi went on to complain over what he termed as the

Egyptians' chronic distrust of their leaders, saying it was pushing the country to "national suicide". "You don't believe that there is a single patriotic man in the foreign ministry, the army or the intelligence agency? They are all bad people who are ready to sell off their country?" he said in a rhetorical question.

Cairo's decision to transfer custody of the islands to Saudi Arabia was announced when Saudi King Salman visited Egypt earlier this week. During his stay, Salman pledged billions of dollars in aid and investment to Egypt, tempting critics to link the generous Saudi aid to the transfer of the islands. About two dozen activists staged a noisy protest over the islands' case outside the journalists' union in downtown Cairo, carrying banners that asserted Egyptian ownership of the islands. Others took to social media networks to dismiss the president's comments as unconvincing.

Some of the criticism in recent days has focused on Sisi, who acknowledged yesterday that negotiations with the Saudis over the fate of the islands were conducted in secrecy to avoid unwanted media attention. Critics are calling for a referendum on the transfer, arguing that a legislature packed with Sisi's supporters - who gave Salman a tumultuous welcome when he addressed the chamber on Sunday, complete with standing ovations, chants of adulation and poems of praise - can hardly be expected to give the agreement serious consideration, let alone reject it. Al Masry Al Youm newspaper counted the times lawmakers clapped in the 15 minutes the king was in the house - 23.

Sisi yesterday also denied that Egypt's security agencies were behind the killing of Giulio Regeni, the Italian scholar who disappeared on Jan 25. The day was the five-year anniversary of the uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak and police were out in force to prevent demonstrations. Regeni's body was found nine days later with signs of torture. "As soon as the death of that young man was announced, people among us said it was the work of Egyptian security agencies ... what happened is that evil folks in our midst did this," he said. The president also blamed the Egyptian media's handling of the case for the crisis in Egypt's "very distinguished" relations with Italy.

Sisi has in the past accused unidentified parties of seeking to isolate Egypt and undermine its government by engineering Regeni's death. Italy is Egypt's biggest trading partner in the European Union and the two countries have been coordinating on their handling of the rise of Islamic militants in Libya, Egypt's western neighbor and Italy's former colony. Sisi said Egypt, whose economy has suffered from years of unrest, could have taken advantage of the chaos in oil-rich Libya and invaded it to avenge the killing there last year of 21 Egyptian Christians by Islamic State militants. "We cannot invade our friends there and usurp their land. It could have happened, but we said 'no,'" added Sisi. "That's what my late mother had taught me: never covet what belongs to others." — Agencies

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Focus

CLOSURES, COURT CASES
LEAVE TURKEY MEDIA
INCREASINGLY MUZZLED

By Humeyra Pamuk and Daren Butler

Metin Yilmaz, editor-in-chief of the Sozcu newspaper, one of the most outspoken critics of the government in the Turkish media, says he is weighing his words more carefully these days. Framed front pages adorn Sozcu's office walls in testament to its status as a bastion of opposition to President Tayyip Erdogan and the Islamist-rooted AK Party. Red Turkish flags and pictures of the modern republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk celebrate its secularist roots.

But with the seizure or closure in recent months of several newspapers, broadcasters taken off air and a German TV comedian facing a Turkish legal complaint for insulting Erdogan, journalists like Yilmaz say they are having to think twice about the consequences of their work. "You wonder, 'will a court case be opened if we say that?'" Yilmaz told Reuters in his office in an Istanbul suburb. "Unfortunately we have reached the stage where if you write the 'p' of president, an investigation and court case is opened against you," he said, looking over the shoulder of a colleague working on the layout of the paper.

Erdogan rejects such claims. He says journalists are free to criticise him - pointing to headlines that called him a "murderer" or "thief". Government officials also say no journalists are prosecuted for their work and that some are detained on suspicion of membership of militant groups. "Neither myself nor my government have ever done anything to stop freedom of expression or freedom of the press," Erdogan told CNN International on March 31 during a trip to Washington. "On the contrary, the press in Turkey had been very critical of me and my government."

But he warned if journalists strayed into insults, they would face prosecution in a country where insulting the president is a crime punishable by jail - though neither Erdogan nor the law has defined what constitutes such an insult. Turkey's record on press freedom has raised such concern among some European Union politicians that they question whether it is a suitable candidate for membership of the bloc. Ankara has requested that German authorities prosecute comedian Jan Boehmermann for the crime of "offending foreign states' organs and representatives" after he recited a sexually crude satirical poem about Erdogan on TV. It comes at a sensitive time for Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has enlisted Erdogan's help in tackling Europe's migrant crisis.

Beyond headline-grabbing newspaper closures in Turkey, some journalists, rights groups and Western allies worry that the space to express dissent appears to be shrinking rapidly. Mainstream outlets such as the Hurriyet newspaper or broadcaster CNN Turk, both owned by the country's leading media group Dogan, are increasingly pressured to toe the government line in their coverage, government critics say.

'Compromise'

Hurriyet said last week it had added Abdulkadir Selvi, a prominent pro-government columnist, to its staff, while the Dogan Group last month closed the liberal leftist news website Radikal for what its editor said were financial reasons. "The group has taken certain steps to make a compromise with Erdogan ... it has made changes in content," said Mirgun Cabas, a former CNN Turk presenter critical of the government. His show was terminated for what the company said were financial reasons.

The Dogan Group, Hurriyet and CNN Turk declined to comment on staff changes. Government officials have denied putting pressure on media bosses. Dogan, whose interests range from media to real estate and energy, was slapped with a 3.8 billion lira (\$1.3 billion) tax fine in 2009 while last month an Istanbul prosecutor submitted a case against its founder, Aydin Dogan, on charges of running a fuel-smuggling ring - which he denies. The government has repeatedly said neither case was politically motivated.

Since Erdogan became president in Aug 2014, 1,845 court cases have been filed against individuals for insulting him. "I believe this time will be remembered as a nightmare era," Baris Ince, editor of the left-wing Birgun newspaper, told Reuters. He was sentenced last month to 21 months in jail for insulting Erdogan in an article about a 2013 investigation by prosecutors into corruption in government. Erdogan said the investigation, which centred on ministers and business people close to him, was orchestrated by US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen. He said followers of the cleric - who denied the allegations - had infiltrated the police and judiciary and were plotting a coup. The graft investigation was dropped after a year. "Nobody has done a proper corruption story since ... Has bribery come to an end in Turkey? Obviously not," said Ince, who has appealed his sentence. — Reuters

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IN LIBYA, IS STRUGGLES TO GAIN SUPPORT

By Aidan Lewis and Ahmed Elumami

Packed into a battered car, a family of nine joined the steady flow of residents fleeing Islamic State's Libyan stronghold of Sirte. They were heading to a nearby town to pick up essentials: cash, medicine and food. A few kilometres beyond the militant group's zone of control, the family gave an account of life in the city: young men murdered for refusing to pledge allegiance to Islamic State, public beatings for dress violations, property seizures and growing food shortages. "They're there to occupy the city," said the wife from behind her black veil, as her children glanced nervously from the rear of the vehicle one afternoon in late February. "They're killing, kidnapping and torturing." Sirte is a city upended. Once given favored treatment by former leader Muammar Gaddafi, who was born there, it now serves as a Mediterranean base for the most important Islamic State branch outside Syria and Iraq. That has left Western intelligence agencies struggling to figure out how far Islamic State can extend its influence across Libya - and how to stop the group.

Some Libyan and Western officials see Sirte as a foothold for further Islamic State expansion. From there the ultra-hardline Sunni group has ventured east along the coast, edging closer to major oil fields. It now controls a thin strip along about 250 km of Libya's central coastline.

Though Islamic State's manpower in Libya is uncertain, membership has been growing. Western intelligence agencies and the UN estimate its fighting force, which includes a growing number of foreigners, at between 3,000 and 6,000. "Their dream is to control the oil fields in the east and expand to the west to Tripoli and Misrata," said Mahmoud Zagal, head of the Misrata military operations room for local forces opposed to Islamic State. But much still hangs in the balance, and ISIS may struggle to control large swathes of the country. General David M Rodriguez, head of US Africa Command, told a news briefing in Washington on April 8 that it will be difficult for Islamic State to seize huge swathes of Libya "because they don't have the home-grown people that know as much about Libya like they did in Iraq and Syria." Libyans,

he said, "don't like ... external influences."

Islamic State entrenched itself in Sirte by early 2015. The city had been neglected by Libya's main factions since Gaddafi was dragged from a drainpipe and shot there in 2011. Sirte mayor Mukhtar Khalifa al-Maadani, who left the city in August last year as Islamic State escalated its crackdowns, said the group cleverly exploited the city's existing rifts. "Sirte is a mix of many tribes, and they took advantage of this ... They have individuals from every tribe in Sirte supporting them and they used this to tear apart its social structure." The group has built the trappings of a rudimentary state in the city. It collects taxes, directs religious education, broadcasts its messages on radio, and enforces its rule with increasing brutality, Libyan officials say. It also makes money by kidnapping, selling stolen property, smuggling drugs and possibly trafficking migrants.

One woman who left the city in January, five months after her husband was abducted by Islamic State fighters, described how men accused of espionage have been crucified, with their bodies strung to poles for days; how suspected thieves have their hands chopped off in public; and how women are whipped when caught flouting dress regulations by female members of Islamic State police. "People do not fight back because they are afraid," said the woman, who fled when her teenage son was asked to report on people smoking or drinking alcohol.

While teenage girls are made to wear full-face veils and black robes, boys have been conscripted as Islamic State "cubs." A recent UN report cited the cases of two recruits, aged 10 and 14, who said they had been seized from their families by Islamic State then subjected to weeks of religious and military training, forced to watch videos of beheadings and sexually abused. In Sirte and beyond, recruits, including some migrants, have been offered salaries many times greater than the average wage, as well as enticements such as cars and brides, Libyan officials and residents say. In Iraq the group drew heavily on former members of Saddam Hussein's regime. In Libya it has used former Gaddafi-era operatives, but to a lesser extent.

"The organization has its own presence," said Abdullaouf Kara,

the head of Tripoli's Special Deterrence Force, a brigade of more than 600 men whose focus has shifted from anti-vice operations to rooting out Islamic State militants. "Some individuals who support Gaddafi joined to take revenge. But we can't say it's an organization based on Gaddafi's followers."

Foreign Fighters?

Islamic State's advance in Libya has been far from smooth. The group has to compete with a complex web of established armed factions, in a country without the Sunni-Shiite divide that Islamic State has exploited in Iraq and Syria. It has suffered military setbacks. In the eastern city of Benghazi, it recently lost territory to the army, and in western Sabratha, it was chased out by local brigades in the wake of a US air strike in February.

Sirte residents and Libyan officials say Islamic State is increasingly dominated by foreign fighters, a possible sign of a lack of traction amongst locals. In a rare admission of weakness, Abdul Qadr Al-Najdi, the Islamic State leader in Libya, said last month that the group had found it hard to replicate its conquest of Sirte. "The number of factions and their disputes are one of the reasons of failure and the rest of the cities in Libya are a living example of this," he said in an interview with Islamic State newspaper Al-Naba. Below the surface in Sirte, opposition festered. Last August, residents took up arms after an imam was killed for refusing to pledge allegiance to Islamic State. Dozens were killed and the revolt was crushed. "Everyone left in Sirte is opposed to Islamic State but they can't do anything to resist them," said one resident who had travelled to Misrata to get medical treatment for his father.

Libya's ability to fight Islamic State has depended largely on the country's two main loose military alliances, which are aligned with rival power bases, one in the west and one in the east. The groups occasionally announce plans to tackle Islamic State, but action is haphazard. In Libya's "oil crescent" east of Sirte, the Petroleum Facilities Guard has fended off attacks while complaining that the eastern army, to which it was allied in the past, was providing no support. — Reuters

BRUTAL WORK ABROAD BETTER THAN LIFE IN N KOREA

By Hyung-Jin Kim

One North Korean who worked abroad says that as a waitress in China, she was forced to put up with male customers who groped her and tried to get her drunk. Two others recall the frozen bodies of their countrymen stored in Russian logging camps. Another says he toiled for up to 16 hours a day at a Kuwaiti construction site surrounded by wire fences. As difficult as those lives were, the four workers told AP, it beat staying in the North. The jobs actually conveyed status back home, and were so coveted that people used bribes and family connections to get them.

"I beat the odds of 1 in 12 to become a waitress ... People's views of jobs in North Korea are totally different from here," said Lee Soung Hee, 42, who worked at a North Korean-run restaurant in the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian in the early 2000s and now lives in South Korea. "Women in North Korea have a fantasy about an overseas waitress job."

The stories of Lee and the other three workers, all of whom have also defected to rival South Korea, speak volumes about how different life appears when viewed through a North Korean lens. The country has sent tens of thousands of workers abroad with a mission to bring in foreign currency. Human-rights organizations have called those workers modern-day slaves, while also decrying human-rights abuses North Koreans face back home. To the workers themselves, there is little debate about which plight is more favorable.

The defectors, who worked overseas from the 1990s until the early 2000s, said they had to submit much of their salaries to Pyongyang authorities and never received some of their promised wages. But they said the money they did receive, sometimes earned through moonlighting, still greatly exceeded what they had earned at home. They said they were also fed relatively well, placed under less strict surveillance and given a rare chance to see the world and learn truths about their homeland. Lee had expected her overseas experience to elevate her social standing so that she could have a husband with a better job. The other three workers, all men, wanted to buy televisions, cassette players and refrigerators after their typical three years of service. "I had seen people who had returned home after foreign service smoking good cigarettes and going out for a beer," said Lim Il, who worked at a Kuwait City construction site in the late 1990s. "For ordinary people, things like those were 'rice cake in a picture,' a Korean expression equivalent to 'pie in the sky.'"

North Koreans working overseas more recently hold similar views, according to South Korean experts and activists who have interviewed current workers or defectors with recent foreign service experience. The average monthly wage for ordinary North Korean workers is less than \$1, according to defectors. Many North Korean families now make money via businesses in unauthorized markets. "From our viewpoint, it's labor exploitation. But for them, going abroad is a special benefit.



In this Dec 9, 2014 photo, North Korean defector Lim Il, who worked at a Kuwait City construction site in the late 1990s, speaks during an interview in Seoul. — AP

They view it as a chance to get away from abysmal lives at home," said Go Myong-Hyun of the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy Studies, co-author of a 2014 research paper on North Korean workers. "The problem is that North Korea is making bad use of this."

North Korea denies its workers suffer abuses, calling international criticism a plot to undermine its system. South Korea's spy agency says 50,000 to 60,000 North Korean workers are in about 50 countries, mostly Russia and China; some experts believe the number of foreign workers is much higher. The Seoul-based North Korea Strategy Center said in a 2012 paper that the country's foreign workers earned the North between \$150 million and \$230 million annually.

Labor Exports

There is consensus among outside experts that North Korea is pushing to expand labor exports because long-running international sanctions have left the country with few legitimate sources of foreign currency. They are employed in factories and restaurants in China; and logging camps and construction sites

in Russia. Others work construction in the Middle East, or are in Africa building giant political statues, teaching taekwondo or providing health care. Their monthly average income was estimated at \$120 to \$150, according to the Asan Institute.

The North usually sends relatively affluent, loyal citizens who it believes can be less affected by foreign cultures. The vast majority are married men whose families must stay home, discouraging would-be defectors, analysts and activists specializing in North Korea said. Defections of North Korean workers abroad appear to be relatively uncommon, though statistics are not available. An exception occurred last week, when South Korea announced the defections of 13 North Koreans who had worked abroad together at a restaurant.

Lee was teaching literature to North Korean middle- and high-school students when she jumped at the chance to be a waitress abroad. Lee said her father gave local officials up to 15,000 won (about \$70) to help her land the waitress job. Others chosen were fellow teachers, doctors and new college graduates. Lim used 20 bottles of high-quality liquor and 30 packs of cigarettes as bribes. Kim Sae-gil, a truck driver at a Siberian logging camp, said a relative pulled some strings. "When I was informed I would go abroad, I felt really, really happy," said Kim, 49, who worked in Siberia from 1995 to 1998. "It was a feeling that I've never experienced since then. It's still probably the best moment in my life."

Much of the workers' actual experiences overseas, however, was grim. Lee Soung Hee said she was given only one day off per month and had to work even when she learned her mother had died. She said secret police agents monitored waitresses and beat them for hiding tips. "There were customers who were touching our bodies, but we must not refuse that because our mission was to curry favor with them as much as possible to make them spend all their money," she said.

"When customers poured drinks for us, we had to drink them all. But we could not get intoxicated or we would have been criticized for failing to be loyal to the party." She said colleagues who failed to earn target incomes had to go to motels to have sex with customers who would pay about 650 yuan (\$100). Lee found some positives. She said she enjoyed fruits she had never eaten before, including pineapples, prickly pears and longans.

Lim, a novelist, was a carpenter during his several months in Kuwait. He said he never received his promised \$120-a-month salary, though he worked from dawn to midnight at a site surrounded by wire fences. He said he was frustrated when he learned Bangladesh and Indonesian workers nearby earned at least \$450 per month. Lim said he was allowed to moonlight at other construction sites after promising North Korean officials a cut of the extra income. Lee Yong-ho, a defector who was a truck driver at a Russian logging camp, said he often worked 12 to 14 hours per day but never thought about his working conditions. — AP

LEICESTER TRIO ON PFA SHORTLIST

LONDON: Leicester City's extraordinary rise to the top of the Premier League has been recognised with the inclusion of three Foxes stars—Jamie Vardy, Riyad Mahrez and N'Golo Kante—on the shortlist for the Professional Footballers' Association Players' Player of the Year award. The Leicester trio make up 50 per cent of a six-strong panel that also includes Tottenham Hotspur's 22-goal striker Harry Kane, West Ham's France star Dimitri Payet and Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil. They are all in the running to succeed 2015 winner Eden Hazard, in an award which is voted for by their peers. Kane is also a candidate to retain the Young Player of the Year award he won last year, with Spurs teammate Dele Alli, Everton's Romelu Lukaku and Ross Barkley, Stoke's Jack Butland and Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho also vying for the honour. Vardy is just one goal behind Kane in the race to be the Premier League's top-scorer this season, while Algeria's Mahrez has scored 16 goals, as well as providing 11 assists. Meanwhile Kante, recently capped by France, has won plaudits for his role as a defensive midfielder. —AFP

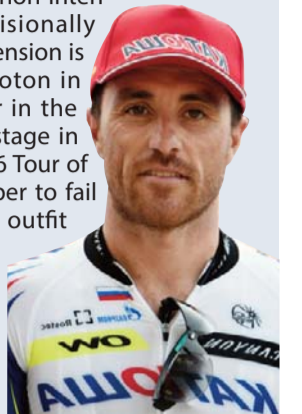


ASTON VILLA SCRAP PLAYER AWARDS

LONDON: Aston Villa have decided to scrap their player of the season awards for the 2015/16 campaign, with the club on the cusp of relegation from the Premier League. The Birmingham club, bottom of the table and 15 points adrift of safety, will be relegated on Saturday if Norwich avoid defeat against Sunderland or if they themselves lose at Manchester United. Villa, currently without a manager, have won just three league games out of 33 this season and a club spokesman said Wednesday: "The club will not be holding its annual Player of the Year Awards at the conclusion of this season. In the current circumstances, we are sure our supporters will understand." Villa have lost their last eight games and former manager Remi Garde left last month, with Eric Black currently in caretaker charge. Last weekend's 2-1 loss at home to Bournemouth sent Villa to the brink of dropping down into the second-tier Championship. Villa, whose US-based owner Randy Lerner has been trying to sell the club, have been ever-present in the Premier League since its creation in 1992 and the former European champions were last relegated from the top flight in 1987. —AFP

PAOLINI HIT WITH COCAINE BAN

LAUSANNE: Italian cyclist Luca Paolini was yesterday banned for 18 months after testing positive for cocaine at last year's Tour de France, cycling's ruling body the UCI announced. The suspension relates to the 39-year-old's failed dope test for the recreational drug on July 7 2015 which triggered his sacking by Katusha. The UCI said Paolini was "guilty of a non-intentional" anti-doping rule violation. He was provisionally banned three days after his failed test, so if the suspension is applied from that date he can return to the peloton in January 2017. The cyclist, who started his career in the peloton in 2000 with Mapei-QuickStep, won one stage in the 2013 Tour of Italy and another stage in the 2006 Tour of Spain. Paolini was the second Katusha team member to fail drug tests within a year. In February the Russian outfit suspended Eduard Vorganov after he tested positive for meldonium, which boosts oxygen supply to the blood and tissues in the body. Despite those cases the UCI said on February 8 that Katusha would not have their licence suspended. —AFP



WADA OPENS WAY FOR ATHLETES TO AVOID SANCTIONS FOR MELDONIUM

LONDON: In a dramatic change that could lead to numerous doping cases being thrown out, athletes who tested positive for meldonium may be able to avoid sanctions because of a lack of scientific evidence on how long the recently banned drug stays in the system.

The World Anti-Doping Agency said Wednesday provisional suspensions can be lifted if it is determined that an athlete took meldonium before it was placed on the list of banned substances on Jan. 1.

"It's not an amnesty as such," WADA President Craig Reddie told The Associated Press. WADA said 172 positive tests for meldonium have been recorded so far in various sports and countries - many in Russia - since the drug was prohibited. The highest profile case involves Maria Sharapova, who announced last month that she tested positive during the Australian Open in January. Some athletes who have tested positive have claimed meldonium remained in their systems for months even though they stopped using it last year. Sharapova did not specify when she had last used meldonium.

The Latvian-made drug, which is typically prescribed for heart conditions, was widely used as a supplement by athletes in Eastern European countries. The drug increases blood flow, which improves exercise capacity by carrying more oxygen to the muscles.

In a notice to national anti-doping agencies, WADA acknowledged that "there is a lack of clear scientific information" on how long it takes for meldonium to clear the system. While several studies are currently being carried out by WADA-accredited laboratories, preliminary results show that long-term excretion of meldonium can take weeks or months, it said.

As a result, it is possible that athletes who took meldonium before Jan. 1 "could not reasonably have known or suspected" that the drug would still be present in their bodies after that date, WADA said.

"In these circumstances WADA considers that there may be grounds for no fault or negligence on the part of the athlete," the statement said. Reddie said the notice was sent out to all national anti-doping bodies on Tuesday. It was released first publicly by Russia's anti-doping agency yesterday before being posted on WADA's website.

"It is designed to explain the science that we know," Reddie told the AP in a telephone interview. "The issue that it deals with is the time this drug takes to come out of the system. It's an attempt to clarify the many questions that we've been asked."

ANTI-DOPING RULE VIOLATION

In a separate statement, WADA stressed that meldonium remains a banned substance and athletes face the rule of strict liability whereby they are responsible for any prohibited drug found in their body.

"Meldonium is a particular substance, which has created an unprecedented situation and therefore warranted additional guidance for the anti-doping community," Reddie said.

The Russian sports ministry and national



LOS ANGELES: This is a Monday, March 7, 2016 file photo showing tennis star Maria Sharapova speaking about her failed drug test at the Australia Open during a news conference in Los Angeles. The president of the Russian tennis federation says Maria Sharapova could have her disciplinary hearing for doping in June. Sharapova has been provisionally suspended and faces a possible ban of up to four years after testing positive for meldonium at the Australian Open in January, though a reduced punishment is possible if she can show she did not intend to cheat. —AP

Olympic committee welcomed the WADA statement, and the country's officials suggested there could be a mass amnesty of Russian athletes. Russian tennis federation head Shamil Tarpišchev told the R-Sport agency he hoped that Sharapova would be able to play at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in August, while the head of the Russian swimming federation suggested there could be a swift return to competition for suspended world champion Yulia Efimova.

"In no way does this serve as an 'amnesty' for athletes that are asserted to have committed an anti-doping rule violation," WADA spokesman Ben Nichols told the AP in an email. "Rather, it serves as guidance for how anti-doping organizations should assess the particular circumstances of each individual case under their jurisdiction."

The meldonium cases have no bearing on the ongoing suspension of Russia's track and field team following a WADA commission report into what it called state-sponsored doping. Sharapova, a winner of five Grand Slam titles, said she had been taking meldonium for medical reasons over a 10-year period and had not seen a WADA notice last year that the drug would be banned starting in 2016.

Sharapova was provisionally suspended by the International Tennis Federation pending a disciplinary hearing. "We can confirm that the case is ongoing and that there will be a hearing,"

ITF spokesman Nick Imison told the AP yesterday. "I have seen the statement from WADA and obviously any ongoing cases will take that information from WADA, but it won't affect the fact that there is an ongoing case."

Sharapova's lawyer said WADA's statement was "proof of how poorly" the agency handled meldonium issues in 2015.

"The notice underscores why so many legitimate questions have been raised concerning WADA's process in banning meldonium as well as the manner in which they notified players," attorney John Haggerty said in a statement. "This notice should have been widely distributed in 2015, when it would have made a difference in the lives of many athletes."

WADA said prosecution of meldonium cases can be "stayed" and provisional suspensions lifted if the concentration of the drug in the system is between 1 and 15 micrograms per milliliter and the test was carried out before March 1, or if the level is below 1 microgram per milliliter and the doping control was conducted after March 1. In both cases, the drug could still be in the athletes' system from before Jan. 1.

The agency said doping cases should be pursued, however, in the case of athletes who admit having taken meldonium on or after Jan. 1. The same applies to cases where the concentration of the drug is above 15 micrograms per milliliter and where the level is between 1 and 15 and the drug test was after March 1. —AP



BODYBUILDING COMPETITION BEGINS TOMORROW

KUWAIT: Mr Olympia bodybuilding and physique competition will start Friday at the Mangaf Hilton resort with 350 participants who will go through the weighing process today at the Oxygen Institute in Adailiya. The preliminaries of the competition will take place in the morning, while the finals will be in the afternoon.

The bodybuilding weights will be 75, 80, 85, 90 and 95 kg, besides the open weight, meanwhile in the physique category participating heights will start from 170, 174, 178, 182 besides the open height. Competitions will be supervised by foreign referees approved by the international federations, which gives great interest in the current Mr Olympia, specially that four professional cards will be granted to participants and it is a serious test for Kuwait's ability to host professional World Championship which will be held next September.

President of the International

Federation Raphael Sentega will be on hand besides the president of Arab and Federations Dr Adel Faheem.

Meanwhile Rapporteur of Kuwait Body Building Committee Abdallah Al-Otaibi said Kuwait is ready to host the most important Mr Olympia contest due to the granting of four professional cards. He said that the Higher Organization Committee chaired by Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Bodybuilding Committee Bader Bodai exerts tremendous efforts to bring out the championship in a fitting fashion for Kuwait and show its ability to organize such events. Kuwait National Team coach Ahmad Askar said the championship is a great opportunity to prepare the physique team which is formed for the first time and world champions will be available.

Askar promised Kuwait fans to make good results that will qualify Kuwaitis to participate in the professional events.

ANOTHER PAYDAY FOR GOLDEN GIRL KOSTOVA

FORDE: Bulgarian-born Boyanka Kostova won a gold medal for Azerbaijan at the European championships in Norway on Tuesday and is set to reap the financial rewards offered by her adopted nation.

Kostova, 22, won her third European gold when she retained her women's 58kg title, after comfortably beating her nearest rival, Irina Lepsa, of Romania. Poland's Joanna Lochowska was third. "My training and preparation for this championships went well and I was pleased today," said Kostova, who was named female athlete of the year by the International Weightlifting Federation after the world championships in November.

"If all goes well, and I am in my best form at the Olympics, maybe I will try for another world record." Kostova said she did not know how big her state-funded reward would be, but Azerbaijan often pays huge sums to medallists at major competitions. Two wrestlers who won gold at London 2012 were paid \$510,000 each. Azerbaijan offers fast-track nationalisation to athletes in a range of sports, among them Russian gymnasts, American and Canadian ice skaters and the Bulgarian weightlifters. After Kostova won gold at the 2010 Youth Olympic Games for her native Bulgaria, at the age of 17, she was offered the chance to

switch allegiance to Azerbaijan, along with another top teenager, Valentin Hristov.

The Azerbaijanis paid \$550,000 to the Bulgarian federation. Hristov became Azerbaijan's first Olympic medallist in the sport when he won a bronze at London 2012, at the age of 18, but he has since twice failed dope tests and faces a lifetime ban.

Kostova will go to Brazil as favourite. At the world championships in Houston, she broke the world record in the snatch (112kg) and total (252kg), but she lifted well within her capabilities in Forde.

Her first snatch attempt at 95kg, which she made look ridiculously easy, was 2kg better than any of her nine rivals but 14kg lower than her opening effort in Houston.

Another Olympic hopeful, the improving Daniyar Ismayilov, made it three golds in three days for Turkey when he won the men's 69kg.

Ismayilov was well clear of silver medallist Sergei Petrov, of Russia. Because of so many failed lifts by medal contenders, the bronze went to a B Group lifter, David Sanchez Lopez, of Spain. Hungary's Noel Nagy set a record when he made his international debut in the Men's 77kg C Group. At 46, he is the oldest competitor in the history of the championships. — Reuters

HAMILTON LOOKS TO STOP ROT WITH CHINA TREBLE

SHANGHAI: Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton faces a severe test of his mental strength in China this weekend as he tries to halt Nico Rosberg's blistering start to the season.

The Briton, who is chasing a third successive victory in Shanghai, denies his Mercedes teammate has struck a psychological blow by winning the first two races, insisting the early skirmishes count for little with 19 grands prix left in

a championship with more rounds than ever.

But Hamilton has failed to win since securing his third world championship in Texas last October, while German rival Rosberg, who has opened up a 17-point lead over his fierce rival, has now won the past five races dating back to last year. "I couldn't care less if he's won the last five," sniffed Hamilton, who was rammed by the Williams of Valtteri Bottas at the first corner

before finishing third behind Kimi Raikkonen's Ferrari in Bahrain two weeks ago, despite starting on pole for the second race in a row. "Anything can happen."

The 31-year-old knows, however, that failure to stop the rot in China could add weight to suggestions that he has lost a little of his edge since winning his third world title, a success he celebrated by partying long and hard.

Hamilton is still searching for the swashbuckling form that swept him to victory last year when he dominated in Shanghai, prompting a tantrum from Rosberg. Worryingly also, Mercedes boss Toto Wolff has warned that the clutch problems that have sabotaged Hamilton's starts, setting him back in the first two races, might not be fixed in time for China.

CHINA CRISIS?

Despite his problems, Hamilton is unlikely to suffer a crisis of confidence nor will he be enlisting the help of sports psychologists as he attempts a fifth win in China, after recently dismissing the practice of hiring driver coaches as a "bunch of crap".

However, he will be anxious to avoid the kind of controversy he courted in Shanghai last year when he sprayed champagne in the face of a Formula One hostess, triggering outrage on social media. Rosberg will be buzzing after a superb drive at Bahrain's desert circuit, and the German will know that victory in Shanghai could put real pressure on Hamilton.

Raikkonen showed genuine pace in Bahrain but Ferrari will be concerned about reliability after Sebastian Vettel's engine blew on the warm-up lap, the second successive race they have suffered mechanical failure. —AFP



SHANGHAI: This file photo taken on April 20, 2014 shows Mercedes AMG Petronas driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain lifting the trophy after winning the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton faces a severe test of his mental strength in China on April 17, 2016 as he tries to halt Nico Rosberg's blistering start to the season. — AFP

FIJI ARE 'TEAM TO BEAT' IN RIO, SAYS COACH

SINGAPORE: Fiji are the "team to beat" at the Rio Olympics, coach Ben Ryan said yesterday as he eyed sealing back-to-back victories in Singapore. Ryan said the reigning world series champions had been buoyed by last week's Hong Kong Sevens win, but he also warned against overconfidence. Singapore is returning to the world series this week as the eighth of 10 stops this year-and with rugby's return to the Olympics looming in August. "We did want to go to the Olympic Games as

number one seeds... and we're happy with that favourites tag," Ryan told AFP.

"I know the history of Olympic team sports often means that the number one team in the world going into that Olympic sport often doesn't win but we still think we're better off being number one than number two. "We'll put it out there that we will be the team to beat. Anyone that beats us will probably win the gold medal."

Ryan said Fiji also took heart from their

record in three-day tournaments-the Rio format-after winning four out four in the past two years. "If another team suddenly smashes the next three tournaments then that might change things," the Englishman said.

"But we've had four three-day tournaments, the same as Rio, in the last two years and Fiji has won every single one of them." Fiji beat rivals New Zealand 21-7 in Sunday's Hong Kong final as they sent out a message before the Olympics and

stretched their championship lead to five points. "Confidence is high but we have to make sure we don't get over-confident... I'm keeping the pressure on the boys this week," Ryan said. For Ryan and his men, an Olympic gold medal will have added significance given this year's cyclone disaster in the nation of 900,000 people. Fiji is still reeling from super cyclone Winston in February, which left 44 dead, 60,000 homeless and crippled infrastructure. "We've had players that have lost their

houses, families that have lost their businesses. It's been a tough time, we now have food shortages and the cost of food has doubled," he said.

"It's tough and the boys will go back and do their bit and give their winnings to their families," he added. "An Olympic win will go beyond rugby. That will boost all our younger athletes to think that if those 12 players from their villages can go to the Olympic Games, then why can't they do it in other sports?" —AFP

JAPAN'S ITO TO FACE DING FOR OLYMPIC BID

HONG KONG: Japanese teenager Ito Mima will face world number two Ding Ning in her bid for an Olympic spot after narrowly beating North Korea's Kim Song I at Asia qualifiers yesterday.

At just 15 years old, Ito is the youngest female participant at the Rio 2016 qualifying tournament, and despite her young age she beat her North Korean opponent four games to three.

She brushed off nerves ahead of her match against one of China's biggest names, who is also 10 years her senior. "I am not nervous," she told AFP.

"I will try to do my best," Ito added, saying her goal was to win at least two games. Coming up against some tough opponents is nothing new to Ito, who in 2015 eliminated Germany's Petrisa Solja to win the women's singles title at the German Open and became the youngest ever winner in the history of the ITTF World Tour.

In the same tournament she also overcame Singapore's Feng Tianwei, who was number two seed at the time and is now ranked world number seven.

Ito said beating top players previously has given her confidence and that age doesn't matter when it comes to playing the game. Eleven men and 11 women will be selected at the Asia Olympic Qualifier in Hong Kong, with 23 teams taking part, including a star-studded line-up from China. Five men and five women will gain places in the first stage as winners of their respective regional zones-Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia-with the qualifiers to be announced Thursday. A second stage will see six more places created.

Also beating expectations at the event was Hong Kong's Doo Hoi-kem, 19, who stunned China's world number one Liu Shiwen four games to two. —AFP

NHL'S 'IRONMEN' READY TO CARRY HEAVY LOAD IN PLAYOFFS

WASHINGTON: The real test of Kris Letang's relentless stamina doesn't come in the Pittsburgh Penguins dressing room after a long game. When he logs the kind of ice time that looks like a typo on the stat sheet, the big challenge comes the next morning, when his young son Alex hops into bed ready for dad to get up and play.

Try explaining to a 3-year-old that, sorry, but daddy played 35 minutes against the Sabres. So Letang doesn't even bother "That doesn't cut it," Letang says, laughing.

Besides, the truth is Letang's not really that tired. Really. If he's being honest, this is kind of where he always expected to be: playing the best hockey of his career (not to mention the most) for a team that heads into the post-season with its swagger and confidence restored thanks in large part to the smooth skating defenseman that plays with the engine of a Ferrari while getting the mileage of a Tesla.

Barely two years removed from a stroke that threatened to blunt the arc of his blossoming career, Letang is one of several ironmen whose tireless legs serve as part of the building blocks on which Stanley Cup dreams are made. The 28-year-old Letang averaged 26:57 minutes of ice time, fourth in the league and nearly 7 minutes more than teammate Sidney Crosby, the biggest gap between first and second on any club in the NHL. Ryan Suter in Minnesota, Drew Doughty in Los Angeles, Roman Josi and Shea Weber in Nashville and Brent Burns in San Jose also finished in the top 10 in minutes, pillars at the blue line who have grown accustomed to carrying the heaviest burden. It's the same up front for Crosby, Patrick Kane in Chicago and Washington's Alexander Ovechkin. The offensive powerhouses all average more than 20 minutes a night in a sport that plays as a marathon disguised in a series of sprints.

While their respective coaches monitor their workload, they don't get too caught up in watching the clock. "Those guys who skate that way, that have those types of engines don't wear down, it's not an issue," San Jose coach Peter DeBoer said. "And I think (Burns) actually thrives on it."

It's much the same for Letang, whose health scares over the years (including a series of concussions) left him wondering at times if he would ever reach the apex of his immense potential. It finally happened over the last four months, his breathtaking quickness combined with coach Mike Sullivan's arrival in mid-December propelling Letang into the league's elite.

DIFFICULT STYLE

"I mean, it was a way for me to step up and show what I'm capable of," said Letang, who finished with 16 goals and 51 assists in 71 games. "The coaching change was a big way to improve myself and prove what kind of player I'm capable of being."

Unlike some of the more defensive-minded players around Letang on the time-on-ice

rankings, the Penguins defender does more than hover near the blue line on offense, directing traffic and throwing the occasional puck at net. Letang plays a full 200 feet, emboldened by Sullivan to use his creativity to take responsible chances. "A lot of D-men that play big minutes play an efficient game," Penguins defenseman Ben Lovejoy said. "They're out there not playing a difficult style of hockey. They're being efficient. Kris Letang's game is not efficient. He's out there skating up and down the ice as fast as he possibly can." It's that speed that gives Letang a bit more leeway than his brethren. He can afford to take risks because his No. 58 jersey instantly becomes a blur when forced to race back toward the Pittsburgh net.

"He's kind of a freak, athletically," said Rangers forward Tanner Glass, who played with Letang in Pittsburgh from 2012-14. "And you pair that with his kind of got a bit of a fire to him. So that helps him defensively. I think he's got that bite. He's really proud. He doesn't want to be scored on. He drives the team in a lot of ways." Ditto Keith in Chicago, who is more concerned with hearing Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville bark his name over and over during the course of the game than the minutes it adds up to at the end of the night. "If you tell yourself you're tired, you're probably going to play tired with less energy, so it comes down to the mental aspect of it," Keith said.

POWER PLAY

And not all shifts are created equal. While Letang admits he will peek at the box score occasionally, going for 35 minutes during an overtime game where the Penguins spend plenty of time quarterbacking the power play against one team can be less draining than 25 minutes of regulation time against another.

There are ways to save energy, particularly on the power play. Washington coach Barry Trotz has no problem double-shifting Ovechkin when the Capitals have the man advantage, knowing the league's top goal scorer can set up in the left circle and wait for the puck to come to him for a one-timer - the NHL's answer to Stephen Curry letting fly from the top of the key. Trotz is more concerned about how much Ovechkin plays at even strength.

Given the very real chance of games extending well beyond regulation over the next two months, coaches will emphasize the "optional" in optional skates for weary legs. There's also the army of nutritionists and athletic trainers whose job is to keep the best going. Not that Letang or the rest of the NHL's workaholics are concerned about getting worn out. If there's one thing worse than playing too much, it's playing too little. "I mean the more you play, the more you're into the game and you want to make a difference," he said. "It's kind of like that. I want to be part of the play and be whoever scores that big goal and make that big play. I want to be that guy." —AP



MONACO: Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns to Czech Republic's Jiri Vesely during their Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series tournament tennis match, yesterday in Monaco. — AFP

VESELY STUNS DJOKOVIC IN OPENING-ROUND CLAY UPSET

MONTE CARLO: Novak Djokovic lost only his second match of the season as he fell to Czech Jiri Vesely 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 to exit the Monte Carlo Masters yesterday.

"This is a proof that nobody's unbeatable. It happens so many times in my career that I lose a match. It's not a first time," Djokovic said. "It's not easy to lose the match and accept it right after exiting the court."

"But I have to congratulate my opponent. I think he played very solid. "He was serving very big. He was playing tactically good and aggressive. "There are a very few things I could take out from today's match as a positive-I was playing really, really bad."

The second round loss in just over two hours, Djokovic's opening match of the tournament, nonetheless left the Serbian with an impressive 28-2 win-loss record in 2016. He was also beaten when he had to quit a Dubai quarter-final two months ago with an eye infection.

The reigning champion had not lost in 22 Masters 1000 matches since going down in the 2015 Cincinnati final and had won his last 14 matches on the ATP circuit heading into this week. He last went out in an opening match two years ago in Madrid when he was beaten in the second round by Grigor Dimitrov. "It's disappointing to lose the first match playing at home in a way," Djokovic said. "I practise here in these courts."

"I've lived here for the last eight, nine years. It's definitely not something that I wished and not something that I wanted. But in sport you've got to accept it. "Time off will serve me well-mentally mostly. It's been a tough four or five months. I need time to kind of recharge."

Vesely was stunned by his first success in nine attempts against a top 10 player. "I fought for every point," said the Czech. Djokovic saved a match point in the final game but it was not enough as Vesely earned two more and converted on the first of those when the seed fired wide.

CONTRASTING FORM

Stan Wawrinka and Rafael Nadal both booked spots in the third round with the pair starting their spring seasons in contrasting form to Djokovic.

French Open champion Wawrinka began perhaps the most important clay seasons of his career with a 7-6 (7/2) 7-5 defeat of Philipp Kohlschreiber. Nadal, the fifth-seeded Roland Garros king, emerged a 6-3, 6-3 winner over Briton Aljaz Bedene.

Nadal will next play Austrian 12th seed Dominic Thiem, who beat him in a February clay semi-final in Buenos Aires. Thiem advanced in Monte Carlo over Japan's Taro Daniel 4-6, 6-2, 6-0. "I'm happy for the victory, but I know I have to improve for tomorrow. But I have confidence because I have been practising very well these weeks," Nadal said. "Let's see if I am able to play the way that I was practising."

"Tomorrow is going to be a tough match against a difficult opponent." Fourth seed Wawrinka, who won the Monaco title in 2014, will line up in the third round against 15th seed Gilles Simon.

"He's a really tough player," Wawrinka said of the Frenchman. "It's going to be a good test for me to see where is my level." Bosnian Damir Dzumhur, ranked 99 in the world, pulled off an upset over sixth seed Tomas Berdych 6-4, 6-7 (1/7), 6-3.

Canadian 10th seed Milos Raonic struggled past Pablo Cuevas 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7/5) with 11 aces and three breaks of serve. —AFP



TRELAZE: The Netherlands' Arantxa Rus returns the ball during a training session for the Federation Cup World Group second round semi final tennis match between France and the Netherlands in Trelaze, northwestern France, yesterday. — AFP

FEAR FACTOR BOOST FOR KHAN AHEAD OF ALVAREZ SHOWDOWN

LOS ANGELES: British boxer Amir Khan believes the fear factor could help him score a shock victory next month when he steps up in class to face Mexico's World Boxing Council middleweight champion Canelo Alvarez in Las Vegas. Khan, 29, raised eyebrows across the boxing world earlier this year after announcing his May 7 fight at the T-Mobile Arena against Alvarez, the hard-hitting 25-year-old from Guadalajara.

It represents a risky move for Khan, who has never previously fought above the welterweight limit of 147 pounds (66.7 kilograms). Alvarez is the overwhelming favorite with most oddsmakers.

Khan, however, who is now based in San Francisco with trainer Virgil Hunter, believes facing an opponent as challenging as Alvarez can bring out the best in him.

"Obviously we don't want to walk into a fight and get hurt," said Khan, who is 31-3 since turning professional after winning a silver medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics at the age of 17. "By me taking this fight, I will

be more focused. I know I can't make mistakes against this guy," Khan said in a conference call. "I've made mistakes in the past at other weights because I thought I was more gifted than them, I knew I was more skilled and a better fighter than them guys. They can be my worse opponents because I don't really have that fear element."

"But when you're fighting someone who is tough, dangerous it is going to be a tough fight and that is what brings my 'A' game out." Khan is unbeaten in five fights, with the last of his three defeats a fourth round technical knockout by Danny Garcia in 2012. The Briton boxer said that being an underdog against Alvarez will suit him, confident that his hand speed and elusiveness can help against a naturally stronger opponent.

"I know I'm not going to be stronger than him," Khan said. "It's the first fight I'm walking into as the underdog and that's good. Because I can prove to people that this is where I belong." Khan's trainer Hunter meanwhile confessed he was reluctant to accept the bout when it was first made. —AFP



DALLAS: Marcus Johansson #90 of the Washington Capitals at American Airlines Center yesterday in Dallas, Texas. — AFP



JOHANNESBURG: A combination of picture created on April 13, 2016 shows the Wisden Almanack's Five Cricketers of the Year 2016, (L-R) England's Jonathan Bairstow at Lord's cricket ground in London on May 17, 2013, Kane Williamson of New Zealand at Westpac Stadium on January 22, 2016, England's bowler Ben Stokes at Wanderers cricket ground in Johannesburg on January 14, 2016, Australia's Steven Smith at The Swalec Stadium in Cardiff, south Wales, on August 31, 2015 and Brendon McCullum captain of New Zealand in Christchurch on February 22, 2016. — AFP

WISDEN HONOUR FOR MCCULLUM, WILLIAMSON

LONDON: New Zealand's Brendon McCullum and Kane Williamson, as well as Australia captain Steven Smith, have been chosen among the Wisden Almanack's Five Cricketers of the Year announced yesterday. The quintet is completed by the England duo of all-rounder Ben Stokes and Jonathan Bairstow. In the personal gift of the editor of cricket's 'bible', which has been published annually since 1864, a player can only be named as a 'Cricketer of the Year' once in his career.

Generally, the award is decided on players' performances in the previous English season and Australia's Smith was included

when, despite his side being beaten 3-2 in the Ashes, he emerged as the series' leading run-scorer with a double century at Lord's and 143 at The Oval in the visitors' two wins. The 2016 edition also saw New Zealand batsman Williamson named as the Leading Cricketer in the World after his 2,692 international runs across the formats in 2015 - the third-highest annual aggregate ever. McCullum, who retired this year, was included as much for his bold captaincy as his aggressive batting, with New Zealand's dynamic approach widely reckoned to have helped transform England's play in both Test

and one-day cricket as well. Williamson and McCullum were not the only New Zealanders honoured by Wisden, with compatriot Suzie Bates chosen as the women's Leading Cricketer. Stokes was one of the stars of England's Ashes success, while wicketkeeper/batsman Bairstow also played his part as well as helping Yorkshire win the County Championship.

During England's recent tour of South Africa, the pair shared a monumental stand of 399 which featured Stokes's blistering 258 and Bairstow's maiden Test century. Wisden editor Lawrence Booth praised

England for their revival after their embarrassingly early exit at the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. "There would be rapids down river, but the players were now approaching them head on, not paddling round the edge, quoting the percentage chance of falling in," he wrote.

"Records fell like confetti. England passed 400 for the first time in a one-day international, and knocked off 350 in another. They made their highest one-day score overseas, in Dubai (355 for five), then smashed it a few weeks later, in Bloemfontein (399 for nine). Jos Buttler scored a hundred off 66 balls,

then-as if to make up for his tardiness-off 46. "Stuart Broad took eight for 15 as Australia were demolished for 60 at Trent Bridge, then six for 17 to skittle South Africa for 83 at Johannesburg.

The two most resonant national records fell one after the other: in Antigua, Jimmy Anderson overtook Ian Botham's Test-wickets haul, and went on past 400; at Leeds, Alastair Cook surpassed Graham Gooch's Test-runs tally, and approached 10,000...It was the most uplifting story in international cricket all year, the more so for being utterly unexpected."—AFP



KAPOLEI: (L-R) Hyo Joo Kim of South Korea, Lydia Ko of New Zealand, Michelle Wie, Inbee Park of South Korea and Brooke Henderson of Canada pose together following a press conference ahead of the LPGA LOTTE Championship Presented By Hershey at Ko Olina Golf Club on Tuesday in Kapolei, Hawaii. —AFP

DANNY WILLETT: DEDICATED GOLFER, FAMILY MAN, MASTERS WINNER

MANCHESTER: Danny Willett's journey to the green jacket began 16 years ago when he signed up with some of his friends to an inner-city golf scheme, designed to get kids off the street and give them something constructive to do. Four thousand miles from the perfectly manicured greens of Augusta National, these sessions took place amid a gritty housing development in Sheffield, northern England, with run-down homes all around. It was a rough part of a city weighed down by the decline of its steel industry.

Willett, about 12 at the time, had just been introduced to golf through his father on a family trip to Wales. But it was on the municipal course at Birley Wood where he would put in the hours to really learn his future trade.

Peter Ball, Willett's first coach, told The Associated Press that the future Masters champion became devoted to the sport from a young age. "The most noticeable thing was in the winter when he was getting better, he'd stay there until it was absolutely pitch black, chipping and putting under the lights of the club," Ball said. "I'd said to him, 'It's pitch black, freezing cold, you should really be going home.'"

"His ability to work was incredible." Willett was one of hundreds of local kids to come under the stewardship of Ball, but this youngster clearly had something special. Some four years later, Willett quit college after just a month and headed to Jacksonville State University in the United States, where he dedicated his life to golf.

On Tuesday, he was returning to Britain as the country's latest sporting superstar, having won the Masters for his first major championship title. "He's a nice, lively young man," said Ball, who spoke to Willett soon after he'd donned the green jacket in Butler Cabin on Sunday. "I'm very proud of what he achieved."

Ball remembers Willett having a "nice family around him," and that family has been thrust into the limelight in Britain since Sunday. Willett's father, Stephen, is a vicar and his mother, Elisabet, is a Swedish-born mathematics teacher. They have recalled allowing Danny to

miss school and taking him to the golf course to let him play until late evening as a teenager.

"He used to write the most appalling excuses for school," Elisabet told the BBC. The down-to-earth Willett remains close to his parents. As recently as last year, when he was contending at the British Open, he told reporters eager to know more about him that he liked nothing better than walking his dog and having dinner at his parents' house.

While Willett was putting together the round of his life on Sunday at the Masters, his brother, Paul, was becoming an unlikely star on Twitter and occasionally giving some insight into his relationship with his sibling.

"3 putt this & you might as well stay in Augusta," Paul tweeted, as Danny finished off his round. He had earlier posted: "If the boy does what he should, I will be able to say 'I've shared a bath with a Masters winner' - brilliant."

The tweets were shared widely, and Paul Willett briefly became something of a celebrity. But it's nothing on the scale of his brother's fame. Danny Willett is not just a major winner but also a new dad. His son, Zachariah, was born shortly before the Masters started. Speaking to reporters at Manchester airport on Tuesday after flying in from New York, Willett - still in the green jacket - said he is looking forward to some family time. "Get home, put the kettle on, and change some nappies," Willett explained of his immediate plans. "I'm looking forward to spending time with (wife) Nicole and the little man. It's been a tough week, obviously, leaving him when he was only just born."

The Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Talib Hussain, said the city will hold a civic reception in Willett's honor and will award him a star on Sheffield's "Legends" walk of fame, on the pavement outside the Town Hall. It will take pride of place alongside other famous names from the city, including 2012 Olympic heptathlon gold medalist Jessica Ennis-Hill.

"We are incredibly proud of Danny's achievements, especially considering he started his golfing career on one of our council golf courses," Hussain said. — AP

GOLDSCHMIDT HOMERS TO HELP D-BACKS BEAT DODGERS 4-2

LOS ANGELES: Paul Goldschmidt hit a go-ahead homer in the eighth inning and drove in another run, and the Arizona Diamondbacks beat Los Angeles 4-2 to spoil the Dodgers' home opener Tuesday in Vin Scully's final season. Goldschmidt gave the D-backs a 2-1 lead with his second homer of the season off Chris Hatcher (1-1), who then gave up a two-out double to Wellington Castillo before issuing consecutive walks to Jake Lamb (intentional) and Yasmany Tomas that loaded the bases. Hatcher departed to boos. Arizona added two more runs in the ninth on Socrates Brito's triple and Goldschmidt's groundout to shortstop. Kenta Maeda allowed five hits over six scoreless innings, struck out four and walked one in becoming the second Japanese pitcher to start a Dodgers home opener since Hideo Nomo in 1996 and 2004. Tyler Clippard (2-0) gave up one hit in one inning and striking out one. Brad Ziegler pitched the ninth to earn his first save. The Los Angeles bullpen gave up three runs and Arizona rallied at Dodger Stadium. Nick Ahmed hit a solo home run off Pedro Baez to tie the score at 1 in the top of the seventh inning and Paul Goldschmidt put the Diamondbacks ahead for good in the eighth with a home run to left-center field off Chris Hatcher.

RAYS 5, INDIANS 1

When it comes to winning strategies, the Tampa Bay Rays are getting good at go-ahead eighth-inning home runs. Both their wins this season had come that way, and on Tuesday night, it was second baseman Logan Forsythe who ripped a two-out, full-count, two-run home run to left field off starter Corey Kluber to spark the Rays to a 5-1 win over the Cleveland Indians at Tropicana Field.

TIGERS 8, PIRATES 2

Justin Upton blasted his first home run for Detroit as a four-hit afternoon, lifting the Tigers to an 8-2 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Tuesday. Upton, who signed a six-year, \$132.75 million contract as a free agent in January, scored three runs and drove in two. His first-inning homer traveled an estimated 451 feet and landed in the camera well in straight-away center at Comerica Park.

NATIONALS 2, BRAVES 1

Bryce Harper had a two-run double down the left field line off Eric O'Flaherty with two outs in the eighth as the Washington Nationals beat the Atlanta Braves 2-1 on Tuesday. The hit by Harper bounced off the glove of a diving Jeff Francoeur, who almost made a brilliant catch near the stands. The Braves are now 0-7 this season and have lost their last 12 games at Nationals Park. Washington improved to 5-1 and is 25-9 against Atlanta since June 21, 2014.

PHILLIES 3, PADRES 0

Charlie Morton combined with three relievers on a four-hit shutout as the Philadelphia Phillies beat the San Diego Padres 3-0 Tuesday night. Odubel Herrera and Maikel Franco drove in runs for Philadelphia, which won for the third time in four games. The other Phillies run came home on an eighth-inning error. San Diego (3-5) lost for the second time in three games, while Philadelphia (3-5) won for the third time in four games.

YANKEES 3, BLUE JAYS 2

Brian McCann tied the score with a sixth-inning homer, Jacoby Ellsbury singled in the go-ahead run in the seventh and the New York Yankees defeated the Toronto Blue Jays 3-2 on Tuesday night. Jose Bautista hit a two-run double in the third inning to give the Blue Jays (3-5) a 2-1 lead in the opener of the three-game series against the Yankees (4-2).

MARLINS 2, METS 1

Dee Gordon singled to cap an epic 16-pitch



LOS ANGELES: Paul Goldschmidt #44 of the Arizona Diamondbacks hits a solo homerun in the eighth inning against relief pitcher Chris Hatcher #41 of the Los Angeles Dodgers (not in photo) during the MLB game at Dodger Stadium on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. The Diamondbacks defeated the Dodgers 4-2. — AFP

at-bat in the eighth inning Tuesday night and eventually trotted home with the tie-breaking run on a sacrifice fly by pinch-hitter Martin Prado as the Miami Marlins beat the New York Mets, 2-1, at Citi Field. The Marlins (3-3) have won the first two games of the three-game series. The Mets (2-5) have dropped four straight.

ORIOLES 9, RED SOX 5

J.J. Hardy hit a pair of two-run homer and drove in five runs and Mark Trumbo finished a triple shy of the cycle as the Baltimore Orioles claimed their seventh straight win to start the season with a 9-5 rout of the Boston Red Sox on Tuesday night at Fenway Park. Hardy's blasts came in the fourth and seventh innings, marking his 12th career multi-homer game, and Trumbo followed Monday's three-run bomb with a two-run shot in the sixth.

GIANTS 7, ROCKIES 2

The Giants continued their slugging ways, and Jeff Samardzija gave his new team a strong start Tuesday night in San Francisco's 7-2 win over the Colorado Rockies. Rookie Trevor Brown hit a pair of two-run homers and Hunter Pence also hit a two-run shot as the Giants extended a franchise record by homering in their first eight games to start a season. In that span, the Giants have 17 homers, tied with Colorado for the major league lead.

ROYALS 3, ASTROS 2

Kris Medlen turned early run support and his own resilient performance into a successful season debut, pitching the Kansas City Royals to a 3-2 win over the Houston Astros on Tuesday night at Minute Maid Park. Medlen (1-0) made a 3-0 first-inning lead stick by stranding five base runners over five innings. He was effective enough to deliver a lead to the Royals' vaunted bullpen, which followed with four scoreless innings.

RANGERS 8, MARINERS 0

Texas slugger Adrian Beltre had a home run and five RBIs and Derek Holland shut down the Seattle bats, as the Rangers hammered the Mariners 8-0 on Tuesday night. Beltre's three-run homer in the third inning gave Texas (5-4) a 5-0 lead, then he added a two-run double in the seventh to put the Rangers ahead 8-0.

ANGELS 5, ATHLETICS 4

Catcher Geovany Soto hit a two-run homer in the top of the ninth inning off closer Sean Doolittle, lifting the Los Angeles Angels to a 5-4 comeback victory against the Oakland A's at the Coliseum on Tuesday night. Oakland led 4-1 through seven innings, but the Angels scored two runs in the eighth off reliever Ryan Madson. Yunel Escobar and Daniel Nava had back-to-back singles with one out. Albert Pujols lined a two-run, two-out double down the left field line.— Reuters

MLB results/standings

Detroit 8, Pittsburgh 2; Arizona 4, La Dodgers 2; Washington 2, Atlanta 1; Philadelphia 3, San Diego 0; NY Yankees 3, Toronto 2; Baltimore 9, Boston 5; Tampa Bay 5, Cleveland 1; Miami 2, NY Mets 1; San Francisco 7, Colorado 2.

American League Eastern Division				National League Eastern Division				
W	L	PCT	GB	W	L	PCT	GB	
Baltimore	7	0	1.000	-	Washington	5	1	.833
NY Yankees	4	2	.667	2.5	Miami	3	3	.500
Boston	3	4	.429	4	Philadelphia	3	5	.375
Tampa Bay	3	4	.429	4	NY Mets	2	5	.286
Toronto	3	5	.375	4.5	Atlanta	0	7	0
Central Division				Central Division				
Chicago White Sox	5	2	.714	-	Chicago Cubs	6	1	.857
Kansas City	5	2	.714	-	Cincinnati	5	2	.714
Detroit	4	2	.667	0.5	Pittsburgh	5	3	.625
Cleveland	2	3	.400	2	St. Louis	4	3	.571
Minnesota	0	7	0	5	Milwaukee	3	4	.429
Western Division				Western Division				
Texas	5	4	.556	-	San Francisco	6	2	.750
LA Angels	4	4	.500	0.5	LA Dodgers	4	4	.500
Oakland	4	5	.444	1	Colorado	3	4	.429
Houston	3	5	.375	1.5	Arizona	3	5	.375
Seattle	2	6	.250	2.5	San Diego	3	5	.375

US JUDGE TO RULE IN DAYS ON FIFA TRIAL DATE

NEW YORK: The US federal judge overseeing the sweeping FIFA corruption scandal said yesterday that he would rule within days whether to set a date for trial while evidence still pours in.

US government prosecutors have proposed what they call an "aggressive but achievable" schedule that would work towards jury selection beginning on February 27, 2017 in New York.

But underscoring the enormity of the case, in which eight defendants in the

United States have pleaded not guilty and extradition requests are pending for another nine, Judge Raymond Dearie heard objections from defense lawyers during a 25-minute hearing Wednesday.

Lawyers for one defendant said the February date was "just not workable," while another called for an accelerated schedule. The legal team of Costa Rica's Eduardo Li proposed at least a one-month delay, estimating that the amount of data in the case ranged from 700 million to 900

million pages. Under the government's proposed schedule, evidence in the case would be submitted to the court by June 30. But prosecutors admitted Wednesday that while they expected to turn over evidence currently in their possession by then, they expected more data to come in before and after June 30.

Dearie said he had an obligation to move ahead when the eight defendants, who are under house arrest in the United States, were under "considerable restraint"

away from home and presumed innocent. "I will have an order out before the end of the week," he said, with reference to setting a trial date. Six of the eight defendants attended the hearing, sitting in the jury box with other seats in court taken up by the large number of lawyers.

US marketing executive Aaron Davidson and Paraguay's Juan Angel Napout were absent. In court were Brazil's Jose Maria Marin, Li, Hector Trujillo and Brayan Jimenez from Guatemala, Rafael

Esquivel from Venezuela and Costas Takkas, a dual British-Greek citizen.

The court scheduled the next hearing for August 3. In all, 40 officials and marketing executives accused of soliciting and receiving tens of millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks in a case that has sparked an unprecedented crisis at FIFA.

Fifteen individuals have pleaded guilty and agreed to cooperate with US prosecutors in exchange for a possible reduction in sentence. —AFP

ITALY TO PLAY FINLAND IN PRE-EURO 2016 FRIENDLY

MILAN: Italy will play Finland in a last-minute friendly before this summer's Euro 2016, the Italian football federation (FIGC) announced yesterday.

Italy, trounced 4-0 by Spain the final four years ago, travel to France this summer looking for big improvements after finishing out of the 2014 World Cup at the first round for the second successive edition.

The Azzurri, led by future Chelsea manager Antonio Conte, recently held 2010 world champions Spain to a 1-1 draw in Udine only to suffer a 4-1 thumping at the hands of current world champions Germany in Munich four days later.

Italy, who will face Belgium, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden in Group E,

will face Scotland in a friendly in Malta on May 29. Two days later, on May 31, Conte will confirm his 23-man Euro 2016 squad to European football's ruling body UEFA.

A week before their opening match of Euro 2016, away to Belgium in Lyon, Italy will host Finland at the Marcantonio Bentegodi stadium.

The return to the venue, the home of Serie A club Verona, comes 27 years after Italy were held 1-1 by Uruguay in an April, 1989 friendly.

In previous games against Finland, Italy have come out largely on top, claiming 10 wins, one draw and losing just once, although that defeat came at the 1912 Olympic Games. —AFP

FANS 'WITH MIHAJLOVIC' AS BERLUSCONI COPS MILAN FLAK

MILAN: Angry fans of seven-time European champions AC Milan have turned on club president Silvio Berlusconi for sacking Sinisa Mihajlovic and appointing yet another coach with no top level experience.

"Mihajlovic is just the latest innocent (coach) to pay for the mismanagement of the club, all with the complicit approval of President Berlusconi," a prominent supporters group said on Wednesday.

Mihajlovic, Milan's fourth handler in two seasons, was sacked on Tuesday and replaced by youth team coach Cristian Brocchi after admitting he had failed in his mission to secure qualification to Europe's premier club competition.

The Champions League continues Wednesday-but with no Italian teams in the competition, the pubs and cafes of the football-mad peninsula are conspicuously empty.

Milan, once the toast of Europe, last appeared in the competition in 2014 but are now battling to even qualify for the Europa League. To do so directly, they need to finish fifth in Serie A or clinch their ticket by beating Juventus in the final of the Italian Cup on May 21.

If Brocchi fails in either quest, Milan will have to secure sixth place in Serie A which will award the final Europa League spot because Juventus have already qualified for next season's Champions League. Meanwhile, Berlusconi's shock decision to install Brocchi two days after a credible 2-1 home defeat to Juventus has blown up a storm.

A snap poll on the website of Gazzetta dello Sport revealed 92% of the 13,000 fans who voted were against Berlusconi's decision. The hashtag #IoStoConMiha (I'm with Mihajlovic) has been launched on the micro-blogging site Twitter.

Berlusconi his gratitude for "making the dreams of Milan's fans come true".

But he was referring to the past, and hit out yesterday: "The problem isn't the coach. With all the respect I have for president Berlusconi... we can't go on like this.

"ENOUGH, give the real Milan back to the fans." In retrospect, Milan are paying the price for the decision to sack Massimiliano Allegri in January 2014, days after league minnows Sassuolo overcame a three-goal deficit to stun the Serie A giants 4-3.

Milan brazenly appointed former Milan favourite Clarence Seedorf as his successor, despite him having no top level coaching experience. When the dapper Dutchman failed to make the grade, he was replaced by former Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi six months later.

With no top level experience either, the enthusiasm shown by Inzaghi-the club's former youth team coach-proved insufficient. When Milan failed to qualify for the Champions League in June 2015, he was shown the door.

Mihajlovic was appointed on the back of a solid campaign as coach of Sampdoria. But for the man whose sublime free kick skills were the bane of rivals across Europe, failure to secure Champions League football for next season proved decisive.

Milan's loss, ultimately, has been Juventus's gain. Allegri, in his first season in charge of the Turin giants following his sacking, won the club's fourth consecutive scudetto, secured their first league and Cup double in 20 years and steered them to the Champions League final, and a subsequent 3-1 defeat to Barcelona.

Brocchi, a former defensive midfielder with Milan who made his most appearances with league rivals Lazio, also has no top level experience.

He will take charge ahead of this weekend's trip to Sampdoria with Milan in sixth place, seven points behind fifth-placed Fiorentina and just one ahead of Sassuolo. —AFP

NO TOP LEVEL EXPERIENCE

Controversial right-wing politician Matteo Salvini, a fervent Milan supporter and the leader of the Lega Nord party, has also stuck the boot in. He offered



MILAN: This file photo taken on August 29, 2015 shows AC Milan's coach from Serbia Sinisa Mihajlovic leaving the pitch during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Empoli at San Siro Stadium in Milan on August 29, 2015. —AFP



SAN ANTONIO: San Antonio Spurs forward Kawhi Leonard (2) drives between Oklahoma City Thunder defenders Cameron Payne (22) and Steven Adams (12) during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, in San Antonio. San Antonio won 102-98 in overtime. — AP

LEONARD SCORES 26, HELPS SPURS BEAT THUNDER IN OT

SAN ANTONIO: Kawhi Leonard had 26 points as the San Antonio Spurs had to rally to beat the short-handed Oklahoma City Thunder 102-98 in overtime Tuesday to finish 40-1 at home this season, matching an NBA record. The Boston Celtics had the same record in 1985-86. San Antonio was lethargic coming off its first home loss of the season to the Golden State Warriors on Sunday. The Spurs never led in the final quarter in that loss and trailed throughout much of their home finale. Thunder coach Billy Donovan rested stars Kevin Durant, Russell Westbrook and Serge Ibaka in their regular-season finale while San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich started his regular lineup. The Thunder were still able to force the first overtime in San Antonio this season. Four players finished with 17 points apiece for the Thunder.

CLIPPERS 110, GRIZZLIES 84

Chris Paul had 12 points and 13 assists as the Clippers extended Memphis' freefall to the final night of the NBA's regular season, defeating the Grizzlies. Losing for the ninth time in 10 games, Memphis dropped into a tie with the Dallas Mavericks for sixth place in the Western Conference. The Grizzlies finish the season Wednesday at Golden State, where the Warriors will be going for their NBA-record 73rd victory. Dallas hosts San Antonio. Austin Rivers scored 14 points for the Clippers, who shot 55 percent and outscored Memphis 22-6 in fast-break points as they posted their 10th win in 11 games. Jeff Green scored 13 points and Blake Griffin added 12. DeAndre Jordan grabbed 12 rebounds. Zach Randolph scored 14 points and Jarrell Martin added 12 for the Grizzlies, who've lost three in a row.

HEAT 99, PISTONS 93

Dwyane Wade got off to his slowest start offensively in a decade but finished with 14 points to help the Miami Heat beat the Detroit Pistons 99-93. Miami will win the Southeast Division and earn home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs if it closes the regular season Wednesday night by beating Boston on the road. The Pistons' loss sealed their spot as the eighth-seeded team in the Eastern Conference, setting up a matchup with top-seeded Cleveland. Wade didn't score until there was 4:14 left in the first half. He had not been scoreless that long at the start of a game since March 17, 2006, against Charlotte, according to STATS. Wade broke his scoreless start with a three-point play and had seven points in a 50-second stretch.

RAPTORS 122, 76ERS 98

Rookie Norman Powell had 18 points while Jonas Valanciunas had 17 and 11 rebounds as Toronto beat Philadelphia for the 12th straight time. It gave Valanciunas a team-leading 22nd double-double of the season. Philadelphia last beat Toronto Jan. 18, 2013. With the Indiana Pacers' win over New York and the Detroit Pistons' loss to the Miami Heat, second-seeded Toronto is now locked into a playoff matchup with the seventh-seeded Pacers. Robert Covington had 24 points for Philadelphia on 6-

for-10 shooting from 3-point range.

PACERS 102, KNICKS 90

Paul George and George Hill each scored 19 points as Indiana beat New York to win its final home game of the regular season. Trailing 64-62, the Pacers (44-37) finished the final seven min-

utes of the third quarter with a 17-6 run that gave Indiana a 79-70 lead heading into the final period. New York (32-50) led at the end of the first and second quarters before the Pacers rallied in the third quarter. Derrick Williams scored 21 points for New York and Jerian Grant finished with 18. —AP

NBA Results/Standings

Indiana 102, NY Knicks 90; Miami 99, Detroit 93; Toronto 122, Philadelphia 98; San Antonio 102, Oklahoma City 98 (OT); LA Clippers 110, Memphis 84.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference			
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division			
	W	L	PCT	GB			
Toronto	55	26	.679	-	Oklahoma City	55	.27
Boston	47	34	.580	8	Portland	43	.38
NY Knicks	32	50	.390	23.5	Utah	40	.41
Brooklyn	21	60	.259	34	Denver	33	.48
Philadelphia	10	71	.123	45	Phoenix	28	.53
Central Division				Pacific Division			
Cleveland	57	24	.704	-	Golden State	72	.9
Indiana	44	37	.543	13	LA Clippers	53	.28
Detroit	43	38	.531	14	Sacramento	33	.48
Chicago	41	40	.506	16	Phoenix	22	.59
Milwaukee	33	48	.407	24	LA Lakers	16	.65
Southeast Division				Southwest Division			
Miami	48	33	.593	-	San Antonio	66	.15
Atlanta	48	33	.593	-	Dallas	42	.39
Charlotte	47	34	.580	1	Memphis	42	.39
Washington	40	41	.494	8	Houston	40	.41
Orlando	35	46	.432	13	New Orleans	30	.51



ISTANBUL: Galatasaray's Semih Kaya heads the ball during the Turkish Spor Toto Super league football match between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce at TT arena stadium yesterday in Istanbul. — AFP

PSG LEFT HAUNTED BY FAMILIAR FEELING OF FAILURE

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain have some serious soul-searching to do after once again coming up short in the Champions League as they exited the competition at the hands of Manchester City on Tuesday.

A 1-0 defeat in England saw PSG lose 3-2 on aggregate as they became the first team to lose in the quarter-finals of the Champions League in four consecutive seasons. After losing twice to Barcelona and once on away goals to Chelsea in the previous three campaigns, this was supposed to be the year Paris went one further and reached the semi-finals for the first time since being taken over by Qatar Sports Investments in 2011.

Before last week's first leg against City, PSG coach Laurent Blanc had spoken of his relief at avoiding "the two ogres of European football at the

moment", in Bayern Munich and Barcelona, as well as Real Madrid.

Those three have become regulars in the last four of Europe's elite club competition in recent seasons and PSG aspire to join them, but they came up short against a City side enduring a disappointing season in England and appearing in their first ever Champions League quarter-final.

Having already wrapped up a fourth successive French title, PSG are still on course to complete a clean sweep of the domestic honours for the second season running, but it is in Europe where they are to be judged these days given the enormous sums of money invested by their owners.

"What a fiasco" screamed the front page headline on sports daily L'Equipe on Wednesday, as the search for someone to blame began.

Blanc was in the firing line after abandoning his usual 4-3-3 formation to play with three central defenders at kick-off against City.

It was a gamble that backfired and one that followed a disappointing performance in the first leg at the Parc des Princes. "In the two matches they were incapable of imposing the rhythm required. It was not enough to try to win a match in the quarter-finals of the Champions League," Jerome Rothen, a former PSG player who featured in the 2004 final for Monaco and now working as a pundit, said on beIN Sports.

SQUAD CLEAR-OUT?

From a French viewpoint it is a familiar failing — 12 times in the last 13 seasons a French side has appeared in the quarter-finals, and only twice have they gone further.

One of those was Monaco in 2004 while the other was Lyon, semi-finalists in 2010. But while those two surprised many by getting so far, there is pressure on PSG to reach the last four and even win the Champions League.

The question now is, what does the future hold? "The future? We have a season to finish. We have a French Cup semi-final to try to win and a League Cup final to win," Blanc said.

"I know that doesn't have the same flavour, the same excitement as the Champions League but we owe it to ourselves to win them for the club. We are very disappointed but we will have to get over it."

Once they have done that, the club may be tempted to clear the decks and freshen up the squad. Now is perhaps the time, with several leading players soon out of contract.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic is the superstar of this PSG project, but the Swede is now 34 and has always been associated with failure in the Champions League, never having won it in his otherwise glittering career.

Ibrahimovic's deal expires in the summer, while Maxwell and Gregory van der Wiel are out of contract at the end of the season too. The club have the means and the desire to sign a new superstar, with Neymar apparently on their wish-list, and Al-Khelaifi will surely be tempted to add new faces while keeping the likes of Angel di Maria, Thiago Silva and Marco Verratti.

The other question mark surrounds Blanc, who has done a fine job overall and has a contract until 2018 but has now been to four Champions League quarter-finals as a coach and lost them all. —AFP

MAN CITY BREAKTHROUGH SHOWS PELLEGRINI STILL PUNCHING

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Champions League quarter-final success over Paris Saint-Germain demonstrated that reports of the team's demise under Manuel Pellegrini have been greatly exaggerated.

Pellegrini has been cast as a dead man walking ever since the announcement on February 1 that Pep Guardiola will succeed him as manager at the season's end and City's dwindling league form of three wins in eight games was held up as proof that his players had downed tools.

Instead they pulled off the most eye-catching European result since the club's acquisition by super-rich Emirati owner Sheikh Mansour in 2008, giving Pellegrini a moment of sweet personal vindication. "I came to City because I had good performances in Europe, so to leave this club without taking them to a new state would have been a bad thing for me," said the Chilean, who succeeded Roberto Mancini in 2013. "It is very important to me to be in the semi-finals because that is my job."

It is the third time Pellegrini, 62, has broken new ground for a club in the Champions League, having led Villarreal to the semi-finals in 2006 and steered Malaga to the last eight in 2013.

An urbane, understated figure, Pellegrini has already brought one Premier League title and two League Cups to the Etihad Stadium, but although it took the might of Barcelona to oust City from the Champions League in his first two seasons, he has been seen as something of a tactical ingenue. Pellegrini, it was said, was too closely wedded to attacking football to achieve success in Europe, but the manner of the triumph over PSG showed that City could play on the front foot in the Champions League, and prosper. City were sloppily defensively in the first leg, but scored opportunistic away goals through Kevin De Bruyne and Fernando, and their reward for refusing to sit on their advantage in Tuesday's return leg was the 76th-minute De Bruyne strike that sealed a 3-2 aggregate win. That PSG were their last-eight victims was rich in

symbolism—the other club buoyed by vast Middle Eastern wealth, already French champions and supposedly several developmental stages ahead of City, sent back to Paris with their tails between their legs.

KOMPANY, TOURE NOT MISSED

In passing, City's victory served to debunk several commonly held truths about their side. City, supposedly, were a one-man team, but Sergio Aguero fluffed his lines by missing a first-half penalty and it was left to De Bruyne to apply the coup de grace with his 15th goal of an impressive debut season. City were said to be too dependent on a spine that has been largely unchanged since 2011, but injured captain Vincent Kompany was, for once, not missed and nor was midfield colossus Yaya Toure, who Pellegrini left on the bench despite his return to fitness after a knee problem. Centre-backs Nicolas Otamendi and Eliaquim Mangala have both been described as expensive failures, but even without Kompany's steady influence they left Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani feeding on scraps. Goalkeeper Joe Hart, meanwhile, produced a faultless display, which included an alert late stop that prevented Cavani from giving PSG hope. "We criticised the back four, but they were solid, as were Fernandinho and Fernando," said former England winger Chris Waddle, who was analysing the second leg for BBC radio.

"The Champions League suits Nicolas Otamendi and Eliaquim Mangala. The Premier League is a hard league, it is end-to-end and tough. They played a European game (against PSG) and ground out a result." Friday's semi-final draw will be the latest staging post in a journey that has seen City emerge from the shadow of cross-town rivals Manchester United to become a major European player.

The strength of the opposition is formidable, but whatever comes to pass in the next round, Pellegrini will walk away at the end of the season knowing that he has done his bit. —AFP



PARIS: A picture taken yesterday shows the official Twitter account of Karim Benzema reading "unfortunately for me and for those who have always backed me and supported me, I will not be selected for our Euro in France". Embroiled in the Mathieu Valbuena sex-tape scandal, France forward Karim Benzema will not be selected for Euro 2016, the player and the French Football Federation (FFF) confirmed yesterday. — AFP

BENZEMA RULED OUT OF EURO 2016

PARIS: Karim Benzema will not play for France at this year's European Championship after his national federation ruled against his return due to an ongoing legal case. Benzema is facing preliminary charges of conspiracy to blackmail, relating to an extortion scam over a sex tape involving France teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

Benzema was suspended indefinitely in December pending the ongoing case, and the FFF said yesterday in a statement that "the federation president) Noel Graet and (coach) Didier Deschamps have decided that Benzema will not be able to play at Euro 2016."

Leading politicians, such as Prime Minister Manuel Valls, said Benzema should not be selected for the national team. Benzema, who has scored 27 goals in 81 matches, misses a second major tournament after being left out of the 2010 World Cup squad.

"Unfortunately for me and for those who have always supported me ... I will not be selected for our Euro in France," Benzema said on his Twitter page. Deschamps will be without his leading scorer when Euro 2016 host France takes on Romania on June 10 in the tournament opener at Stade de France. Investigators charging him believed he was approached by a childhood friend to act as an intermediary and convince Valbuena to deal directly with blackmailers in possession of a sex tape featuring the Lyon winger.

Although Benzema denies any wrongdoing, his arguments were undermined when Valbuena spoke about Benzema's attempts to pressure him, telling a French newspaper he was particularly shocked by the way Benzema spoke about him over the phone with one of the suspected blackmailers, joking that Valbuena would get "eaten by the piranhas."

Benzema acknowledged that the tone of his conversation - after his phone had been tapped by police investigators - was uncalled for and apologized to Valbuena and his family. In 2010, Benzema was handed preliminary charges for soliciting an underage prostitute but was acquitted in a case that lasted more than three years. Former France coach Raymond Domenech left him out of the 2010 World Cup squad.

A few hours before Wednesday's verdict, Benzema reaffirmed his commitment to Les Bleus - the nickname for the national team - with a tweet saying "Quoi qu'il arrive, Bleu un jour, Bleu toujours" (Whatever happens, once a Blue, always a Blue).

The 28-year-old Benzema has been in the best club form of his career this season, scoring 21 league goals in 22 games and four in seven Champions League games for Real Madrid. Although Deschamps is a big fan of Benzema, his importance to the national squad has been increasingly debated in recent weeks after some impressive attacking performances without him.

France won 3-2 away to Netherlands and beat Russia 4-2 at home, having also beaten World Cup winner Germany 2-0 back in November. Earlier this week, Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery said he would consider coming out of international retirement in time for the Euro, but first wants to speak with Deschamps.

Benzema's No. 9 jersey with likely go to either Arsenal striker Olivier Giroud or Andre-Pierre Gignac, who plays for Mexican side Tigres. — AP

DORTMUND BLUEPRINT SERVES KLOPP IN LIVERPOOL REBUILD

LONDON: It was perhaps inevitable that Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool would produce their most Borussia Dortmund-like performance at the home of his former club.

In last week's Europa League quarter-final first leg at the Westfalenstadion, Klopp watched his Liverpool players press and harry like the Dortmund team he steered to the highest echelon of the European game. If historical precedents are to be believed, the 1-1 final score gives Liverpool a 74 percent chance of progressing, and the nature of their display revealed the extent to which Klopp's methods have taken hold. "I'm pretty sure a lot of people thought we would lose 2-0, 3-0 or 4-0," said Klopp, whose side tackle Dortmund at Anfield in Thursday's return leg. "But at some moments we had Dortmund, and around our goal we were brilliant." The sight of Klopp on the touchline-squawking at his players, pumping his fist in celebration of Divock Origi's first-half goal-will have been immediately familiar to Dortmund's fans, who granted him a touching send-off at the final whistle. So too the tactics employed by his team, whose aggressive, front-foot approach prevented the home side from settling into any kind of rhythm and whose counter-attacks kept the Dortmund rearguard on constant alert. While Dortmund have become more of a possession-based team under Klopp's successor, Thomas Tuchel-the legacy of the new status his seven-year tenure left them with-Liverpool are exhibiting the same underdog mentality upon which he built his success in the Ruhr valley.

Speaking earlier this season, former Liverpool defender Mark Lawrenson said the team's best performances were "reminiscent of Borussia Dortmund at their best under Jurgen Klopp". Klopp readily bestowed trust upon the players he inherited at Dortmund, with seven of the 18 players he called up for his first game, a 3-2 win

at Bayer Leverkusen in August 2008, featuring in the squad that faced Bayern Munich in the Champions League final five years later.

'High-intensity games'

He seems similarly determined to extract every ounce of quality from the Liverpool players at his disposal. The occasionally maligned centre-back pairing of Mamadou Sakho and Dejan Lovren performed with sturdy resolve in the first leg, while Origi is flourishing after a difficult start to his time at the club. "He always believed in me and he believes in the group also," said the 20-year-old Belgian striker, who followed up his goal at Dortmund with a brace in Sunday's 4-1 defeat of Stoke City.

"The fact that I'm on the pitch gives me confidence and I just try to play my game and enjoy it." Hard-working players like Adam Lallana, Emre Can and James Milner have also earned Klopp's trust and are striving to show that they can become to him what hardy perennials like Mats Hummels, Marcel Schmelzer and Jakub Blaszykowski were at Dortmund.

Milner, captain in the absence of the injured Jordan Henderson, is relishing the challenge of playing teams like Dortmund and Tottenham Hotspur, held 1-1 at Anfield recently, who play with a similar high-tempo approach. "It's nice to keep getting the games," Milner said of Liverpool's busy schedule. "They have been high-intensity games as well-Dortmund and Spurs play at a high tempo. That's good for us as it keeps us at that intensity we want to play at. We know if we play at that intensity, that's when we have our best matches." If Dortmund are to prove themselves worthy favourites for the trophy, Tuchel must find a way to withstand the red tide when the teams resume hostilities today. Dortmund's supporters will know exactly what is coming their way. —AFP



LVIV: SC Braga players take part in a training session at the Arena Lviv Stadium in Lviv yesterday on the eve of the UEFA Europa League quarter final second leg football match between FC Shakhtar Donetsk and SC Braga. — AFP

MID-TABLE CHELSEA WILL FIGHT FOR TROPHIES AGAIN

LONDON: Chelsea will be fighting on all fronts next season and will look to win their remaining Premier League games as a disappointing campaign for the champions nears its end, defender Cesar Azpilicueta has said. Despite losing just once in their last 16 league games, Chelsea's early season form under former manager Jose Mourinho, which saw them lose nine games and dwell dangerously close to relegation has cost them dearly.

The Blues, who have already exited both European and domestic tournaments, are 10th in the table with just six games left, and Azpilicueta felt a club of Chelsea's stature should not be languishing in such a position.

"We have Premier League games to win and our motivation is to finish as high up the table as possible because for Chelsea it's not enough to be fighting in mid-table," the Spain international told the club's website (www.chelseafc.com).

"We haven't won any trophies this season but we want to win as many games as we can and prepare to lift trophies again

next season. "I think we will improve and for Chelsea the only target is to win. For the big clubs, if you have one bad season where you don't win trophies, you have to bounce back. We are in a big club here and we have to fight again for trophies next season." Chelsea host fourth-placed Manchester City at Stamford Bridge in the league on Saturday. — Reuters

Live Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE

- Shakhtar Donetsk v Sporting Braga 22:05
beIN SPORTS 5 HD
- AC Sparta v Villarreal CF 22:05
beIN SPORTS 4 HD
- Sevilla FC v Athletic de Bilbao 22:05
beIN SPORTS 3 HD
- Liverpool v Borussia Dortmund 22:05
beIN SPORTS 2 HD



PRAGUE: Villarreal's players take part in a training session at the Generali Arena on the eve of the UEFA Europa League quarter-final second leg football match AC Sparta Praha vs Villarreal yesterday in Prague. — AFP

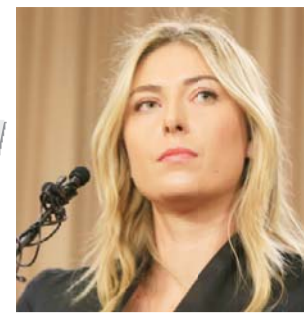
Sports

WADA opens way for athletes to avoid sanctions for meldonium

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Benzema ruled out of Euro 2016

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GOLDSCHMIDT HOMERS TO HELP D-BACKS BEAT DODGERS 4-2 Page 17



MADRID: Barcelona's midfielder Sergio Busquets (L) heads a ball next to Atletico Madrid's Argentinian midfielder Augusto Fernandez (C) and Atletico Madrid's French forward Antoine Griezmann (R) during the Champions League quarter-final second leg football match Club Atletico de Madrid VS FC Barcelona at the Vicente Calderon stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

GRIEZMANN DOUBLE KNOCKS OUT BARCA

MADRID: Atletico Madrid dumped holders Barcelona out of the Champions League at the quarter-final stage for the second time in three seasons as Antoine Griezmann's double sealed a 2-0 win yesterday to progress 3-2 on aggregate. Griezmann put the hosts ahead on away goals with a fine first-half header before converting from the penalty spot two minutes from time after Andres Iniesta had handled inside the area.

Barca, meanwhile, were left to rue referee Nicola Rizzoli's decision to give a free-kick on the edge of the box in injury time instead of a penalty when Gabi appeared to be inside the area as he was penalised for handball.

Defeat is Barca's third in four games after a 39-match unbeaten run stretching back six months and sees their quest to become the first side to retain the competition in the Champions League era come to an end.

Roared on by a vociferous 55,000-strong crowd at the Vicente Calderon, Atletico were worthy winners as Barca's star front three of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar were limited to precious few clear-cut chances. Atletico will be joined by local rivals Real Madrid, Manchester City and Bayern Munich in tomorrow's semi-final draw.

The home side were far the better team

before the break as captain Gabi fired over before Griezmann placed his first big headed chance from Filipe Luis's cross too close to Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

Messi's most significant involvement in the first 45 minutes saw him scurrying deep into his own half to dispossess Yannick Carrasco in a sign of the five-time World Player of the Year's desperation to get into the game.

Atletico made the all-important breakthrough nine minutes before half-time when Griezmann's header was this time precise and powerful enough to beat Ter Stegen from Saul Niguez's brilliant cross.

The goal awoke Barca sufficiently to force Jan Oblak into his first save of the evening from Neymar's curling effort.

LATE CONTROVERSY

Ter Stegen ensured Barca went in at the break just one goal down as he held a Carrasco drive at the second attempt before Niguez could follow in for the rebound. Atletico had two more chances to extend their advantage early in the second period as Koke's cut-back was cut out by Gerard Pique with Griezmann waiting for a tap in.

And then as Barca struggled to clear a corner, Niguez's looping header came back off

the crossbar with Ter Stegen stranded.

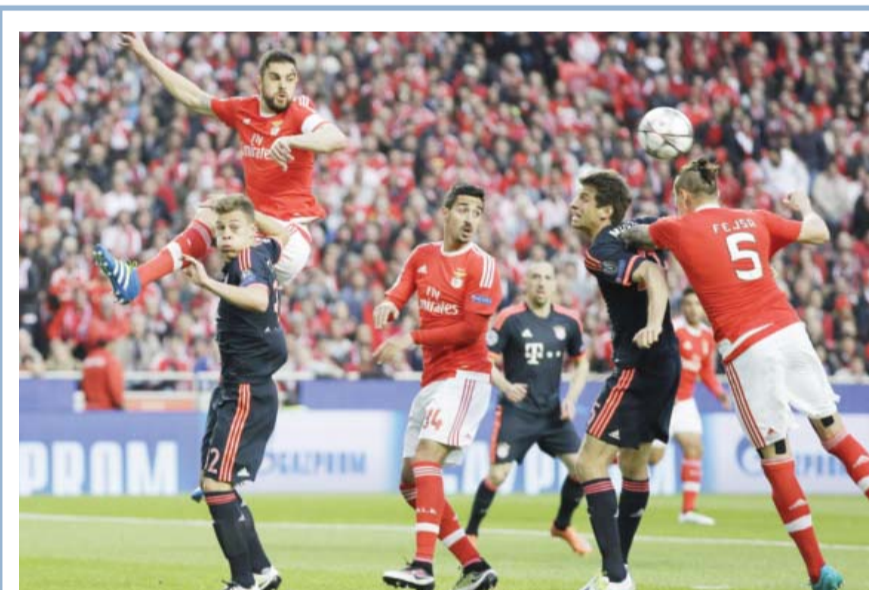
Griezmann had another chance to give Atletico a cushion but fired straight at Ter Stegen on his weaker right foot at the end of a lightning counter-attack.

However, Barca began to impose themselves in the final half hour as Atletico tired and Suarez tested Oblak with a fierce effort from inside the area that the Slovenian handled impressively.

Suarez was lucky to escape a red card in the first leg after clashing with Juanfran and Filipe Luis and got off lightly once more when he was just shown a yellow card for elbowing Uruguayan international teammate Diego Godin. Neymar was also booked for kicking out at Juanfran moments later as Barca began to lose their cool.

Iniesta was also lucky not to be sent-off for denying a clear goalscoring opportunity as he blocked Luis's pass into Griezmann's path for the penalty. The French international kept his head to slot home the resulting spot-kick. However, there was still time for late controversy as Rizzoli only awarded Barca a free-kick on the edge of the box as Gabi handled.

Messi's free-kick drifted inches over and with it Barca's chances of a second consecutive treble were gone. — AFP



LISBON: Benfica and Munich players watch the ball during the Champions League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between SL Benfica and Bayern Munich at the Luz stadium in Lisbon yesterday. — AP

BAYERN SEE OFF BENFICA TO REACH SEMI-FINALS

LISBON: Bayern Munich came out on top in an entertaining Champions League last-eight clash with Benfica, reaching the semi-finals with a 3-2 aggregate victory, after a second-leg 2-2 draw in Lisbon yesterday.

Pep Guardiola took his German champions to the Estadio Da Luz with a 1-0 first-leg lead thanks to Aruto Vidal's early strike at the Allianz Arena last week. After a slow start to the game, Benfica drew back onto level terms in the tie in the 27th minute, as Raul Jimenez escaped the Bayern defence to nod past Manuel Neuer. But Vidal smashed home his second goal of the quarter-final tie seven minutes before half-time to leave Rui Vitoria's Benfica needing two unanswered goals to progress.

The tie appeared all but over shortly after the restart when Thomas Mueller pounced in trademark fashion. Benfica did manage to create a grandstand finale of sorts through Talisca's set-piece, but it could have been more exciting had Bayern's Javi Martinez been sent off for the cynical foul that led to the free-kick.

Five-time winners Bayern progress to the last four for the sixth time in the last seven seasons, leaving their opponents without a semi-final appearance

in Europe's premier club competition since 1990.

Benfica were undisputed underdogs, and they started this match not just with a deficit to overturn, but without three key forwards. Top scorer Jonas, who has scored 32 goals this season, was ruled out through suspension, while Nicolas Gaitan and Greek Kostas Mitroglou failed to recover from injuries.

Roared on by the home crowd, the hosts started quickly and Bayern centre-back Joshua Kimmich did well to deflect a free-kick behind. After Vidal headed tamely at Ederson Moraes, in the side with regular goalkeeper Julio Cesar still sidelined, Benfica struck almost from nowhere.

Eliseu skipped forward from left-back, before chipping in a delicious cross which was headed home by Jimenez for his third Champions League goal of the campaign.

Bayern were rocked and Jimenez should have put Benfica in front on aggregate just a couple of minutes after opening the scoring. The former Atletico Madrid man was given far too much room inside the visitors' penalty area, but he stabbed a weak effort straight at Neuer. — AFP



LONDON: Manchester United's English striker Marcus Rashford scores past West Ham United's Irish goalkeeper Darren Randolph during the FA cup quarter final replay football match between West Ham United and Manchester United at the Boleyn ground in London yesterday. — AFP

MAN UNITED SPOIL WEST HAM PARTY TO REACH FA CUP SEMIS

LONDON: Manchester United gate-crashed West Ham United's FA Cup farewell party at Upton Park with an invigorating 2-1 victory yesterday to book a semi-final berth against Everton. A sensational goal from teenager Marcus Rashford and Marouane Fellaini's close-range effort, both in the second half, settled the quarter-final replay after the sides drew the first game 1-1 at Old Trafford.

The scene was set for a momentous 155th and final FA Cup tie at the Boleyn Stadium which West Ham will soon swap for the Olympic Stadium but after a promising start it was the visitors who rose to the occasion.

Rashford deservedly put United in front after 54 minutes with a pinpoint curler from the edge of the area and Fellaini bundled in Anthony Martial's cross 13 minutes later.

James Tomkins's header set up a tumultuous climax in which Andy Carroll headed narrowly over and David de Gea made a sensational save from Emmanuel Emenike as United hung on to keep alive their hopes of ending a disappointing season with a trophy. — Reuters

Kuwait Times BUSINESS

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WB set to provide Egypt
with \$1 bn of \$3 bn loan

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China's steel glut - years in
the making, years to resolve

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In homelessness
crisis, Hawaii eyes
thatched 'hale' homes

Page 23

ASIA SHARES EXTEND RALLY ON CHINA TRADE RELIEF

Page 24



LONDON: The "Back Heathrow" campaign group pose with a man wearing a mask of British Prime Minister David Cameron as they stand outside the Houses of Parliament in central London yesterday. The group, made up of residents of the Heathrow area, believe that a decision to expand Heathrow airport would create more jobs in the area. — AFP

LUXURY OR BUST FOR FOREIGN AUTOMAKERS IN JAPAN

MID-RANGE FOREIGN VEHICLES - A RARE SIGHT ON JAPANESE STREETS

TOKYO: Tokyo businessman Randal Furudera isn't about to swap his German-made BMW M5 for a "boring" Japanese car, although he'll give them some grudging respect for their ho-hum dependability. Deep-pocketed buyers like Furudera are driving sales in Japan of high-end foreign brands, which dominate the niche sector in a car market long seen as all but shuttered to overseas automakers. "Most Japanese cars these days are sort of becoming moving appliances," the 54-year-old said. "They're very reliable, they're good quality, they never break and all that, but they're not very interesting to drive."

Mid-range foreign vehicles are a rare sight on Japanese streets, but it isn't hard to spot a Porsche zipping around the capital or a nouveau riche billionaire behind the wheel of a half-a-million dollar Lamborghini. Sales of the Italian sports car in Japan doubled to about 300 vehicles in 2015 from a year earlier. The jump comes as US car giant Ford announced in January it was quitting the country, blaming the "closed" market, after it sold fewer than 5,000 cars in 2015. Less than six percent of the more than five million vehicles sold last year in Japan—the world's number three car market—were made by for-

ign automakers.

US auto unions have blasted what they say are non-tariff barriers that shut the door on a sector already dominated by eight domestic carmakers, including Toyota, Nissan and Honda. In 2013, former Ford boss Alan Mulally accused Tokyo of manipulating the yen's sharp decline to gain a trade advantage for domestic firms, which sell millions of vehicles overseas, including top markets China and the United States.

'No Chevrolets in Tokyo'

The imbalance hasn't gone unnoticed by bombastic US Republican party frontrunner Donald Trump. "When did we beat Japan at anything?" Trump said in a speech last summer to announce his run for the presidency. "They send their cars over by the millions, and what do we do? When was the last time you saw a Chevrolet in Tokyo? It doesn't exist, folks." Trump is not far off—Chevrolet and Cadillac maker General Motors sold a puny 1,600 vehicles in Japan last year.

But it's a different story for prestige foreign brands, whose success didn't come without a fight. They had to "overcome stereotypes like Western cars break down easily or they're expensive to repair," said

Miki Kurosu, communications director for BMW Japan, which sold about 46,000 vehicles last year, along with 21,000 Minis. Japan's luxury car market has remained frothy despite a years-long downturn in the economy, while a stock market rally in recent years has also helped buoy sales. Nissan considered selling its high-end Infiniti brand at home, as Honda did with Acura. But those plans were scrapped owing to foreign automakers' dominance in the market.

Meanwhile, rival Toyota has struggled to score big with its Lexus in Japan, although sales have been on an upswing lately. "Lexus is a bit behind. They had great ambitions when they launched the brand (at home) in 2005, but have not achieved their goals," said Yoshiaki Kawano, an auto analyst at IHS Automotive. German brands have slick marketing campaigns and a top-notch image in Japan, and rich drivers rarely switch brands so domestic automakers were late to the party. "There is quite a bit of prestige attached to certainly the three main German brands," said Furudera.

Foreign brands tend to focus on the driving experience, rather than just passenger comfort, added the car enthusiast. In Japanese cars, "(passengers) are probably



TOKYO: Tokyo businessman Randal Furudera poses in his BMW M5 at his home in Tokyo. — AFP

enjoying it more than the drivers-watching DVDs, getting a massage from their chairs—but the driver is not enjoying it that much", Furudera said. "In a German car, the driver gains the most—that's kind of the big differ-

ence." While he may consider buying a Lexus down the road, it's not likely to happen any time soon. "I wouldn't say never, but for now I think BMW still has the edge in terms of driving experience." — AFP

BREXIT VOTE WOULD DAMAGE UK ECONOMY; BOE MAY CUT RATES

LONDON: A British vote to leave the European Union on June 23 would hurt the economy, an overwhelming majority of economists said in a Reuters poll, and could push the Bank of England to cut interest rates for the first time since the financial crisis. Conversely, if the outcome was to remain a member of the EU, those saying there would be a net positive economic boost and those saying neutral were roughly split. "Both the UK and Europe risk a fall into recession in the following quarters due to the increased uncertainty. One has to take into account that the UK is the second largest economy in the EU so this is a big deal," said Mikel Milhoj at Danske Bank.

Britain's economy could be one of the fastest growing among developed nations, expanding 1.9 percent this year and 2.1 percent next, the poll of economists based in the UK and across Europe found - but that would be under threat from Brexit, as leaving the EU is known. "Recessionary in the short-term," said Phillip Rush, UK economist at Nomura based in London, adding that "longer term effects (are) less clear-cut." BayernLB economist Manuel Andersch, based in Munich, was more emphatic: "Short-term disaster, long-term damage."

Thirty-one of the 35 economists polled said the economic impact from Britain leaving the EU would be negative and four said it would have no effect. None said a Brexit would be positive for the economy. Roughly two-thirds of those who answered questions on Brexit were UK-based, but there were no differences in answers provided based on geography. The sample was the monthly panel of forecasters on the British economy, at banks, fund management companies and independent research firms, who quite often disagree with each other.

On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund cut its 2016

growth forecast for Britain to 1.9 percent from 2.2 percent and said the country could deal a damaging blow to the fragile world economy if it votes to leave the EU. The findings of the latest poll were nearly identical to a Reuters poll of mainly UK-based economists taken about two months ago that showed an overwhelming view remaining in the UK would be best for the economy.

If the vote does go in favor of the "In" campaign, Britain's beaten-down pound would rally 4 percent against the dollar in the immediate aftermath, a separate Reuters poll of foreign exchange strategists found last week. While opinion polls on the referendum suggest the result could be very close, most have come marginally in favor of an "In" win and betting firms are also pricing that in. One poll published Tuesday, however, showed the Leave campaign three points ahead. After public opinion polls failed to predict a Conservative Party victory in Britain's 2015 parliamentary election there is a great deal of uncertainty around their accuracy.

What's more certain is inflation won't reach the Bank of England's 2 percent target anytime soon. The latest Reuters survey suggested it would be the second half of 2017 at least before it even gets close. Low oil prices have meant most central banks have struggled to get inflation to rise and the BoE won't be lifting interest rates from a record low until early next year, a separate Reuters poll found earlier this month. But a move from 0.5 percent, which would be the first change in over seven years, could also be swung by a Brexit vote. Seventeen of 26 economists in the poll said if Britain decides to leave the Bank's next move would likely be a cut. "If the UK votes to leave the EU, then the BoE is likely to cut interest rates to 0.25 percent, but also restart quantitative easing," said Azad Zangana, London-based senior economist at asset management firm Schroders. — Reuters

COOLING STARTUP FUNDING CHILLS THE 'UNICORN' HERD

WASHINGTON: Venture capital flows to startups globally cooled further in the first quarter of 2016, in a fresh sign of caution over the so-called tech "unicorns," a survey showed yesterday. The report by CB Insights and KPMG found venture funding dropped to \$25.5 billion in the first three months of the year, from \$27.2 billion in the fourth quarter of 2015. It marked the second consecutive quarterly decline, following an investment frenzy that fueled unprecedented growth in startups with a valuation of over \$1 billion, known in the tech industry as "unicorns."

"Caution defined the (venture capital) market globally during the first quarter," the report said. "With numerous factors fostering uncertainty in the market and an ongoing skepticism of high valuations, VC activity pulled back even further following a late fourth quarter dropoff in 2015." The survey found only five new unicorn "births" in early 2016, lower than any quarter last year. The report underscored concerns about a bubble in tech startups, with investors scrambling to find fast-growing companies that could compete with the likes of Uber or Facebook.

"With high-profile companies failing to live up to their private valuations, existing and potential unicorns are coming under more scrutiny than ever before," the report said. "Especially in the US, investors are coming to believe that the high valua-

tions in the market may not be warranted and are stepping back from making any significant mega-deals. Over the next few quarters, there will likely also be more scrutiny of existing unicorns." The report said the emerging companies will need to show a path to profitability and improved control of expenses in order to attract fresh funding.

"Unicorns and late-stage companies will likely be challenged the most by current market realities," the report said. "That's because they've been able to raise previous funding rounds without the same level of scrutiny." "With new investor pressures, companies will need to focus on the fundamentals. This will require many companies to make hard choices about how to achieve profitability, such as conducting layoffs or making cuts to discretionary spending." Some unicorns have seen their value slashed by investors aiming to put a fair market evaluation on their holdings. Mutual fund company Fidelity last year marked down the value of its Snapchat holdings by 25 percent.

The new report showed North America garnered the largest share of venture investment with \$15.2 billion, up from \$14.3 billion in the prior quarter. The biggest drop came in Asia, with \$6.5 billion compared to \$9.8 billion. Funding in Europe rose slightly to \$3.5 billion from \$3.2 billion. The overall number of investment deals fell to 1,829 in a third consecutive decline.

WOMEN-ONLY CAR SERVICES FILL A NICHE, BUT ARE THEY LEGAL?

BOSTON: Ride-hailing companies catering exclusively to women are cropping up and raising thorny legal questions, namely: Are they discriminatory? In Massachusetts, Chariot for Women is promising to launch a service featuring female drivers picking up only women and children. Drivers will even have to say a "safe word" before a ride starts. Michael Pelletz, a former Uber driver, said he started the company with his wife, Kelly, in response to instances of drivers for ride-hailing services charged with assaulting female passengers. Pelletz believes his business plan is legal, and he's prepared to make his case in court, if it comes to that.

SheRides

"We believe that giving women and their loved ones peace of mind is not only a public policy imperative, but serves an essential social interest," Pelletz said. "Our service is intended to protect these fundamental liberties." In New York City, the owners of SheRides are also promising a reboot this summer.

SheHails

When the company re-launches as SheHails, men will be permitted as drivers and passengers. It will be left to female drivers to accept male passengers, and for female passengers to accept rides from male drivers. While taxis driven by and for women are common in Dubai and India, such businesses would likely run afoul of anti-discrimination laws in the US, industry and legal experts said. Major ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft don't give users the option of requesting a driver based on gender. The Taxicab, Limousine & Paratransit Association, a trade group,

says companies vary on whether women may request a female taxi driver.

"The safety issue is a really big deal," said Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at the Harvard Business School. "But you just can't discriminate. You can't turn people away." On the employment side, the federal Civil Rights Act bans gender-based hiring except when deemed essential. Courts have interpreted that "bona fide occupational qualification" clause very narrowly, said Elizabeth Brown, a business law professor at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

Prisons, for example, have been permitted to hire female guards in select situations, but the airline industry was famously ordered to end the practice of hiring only women as flight attendants in a 1971 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Whether the 1964 civil rights law applies is also an open question. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces the law, declined to comment on the legality of women-only ride-hailing services.

But spokeswoman Justine Lisser noted employers whose workers are independent contractors, as is the case with Mateo and Pelletz's companies, are generally outside the agency's purview. On the consumer side, Massachusetts and many other states have anti-gender discrimination laws governing "public accommodations" like transportation services. But those too, have exceptions. In Massachusetts, for example, women's-only gyms won a special legislative carve-out in 1998. Michelle Sicard, a Granby, Massachusetts, resident who recently signed up as a Chariot for Women driver, said she isn't concerned about the legal debate.

Women feel safe

"I don't think it's discriminating against anyone. It's another way to make women feel safe," said the 33-year-old postal worker. "I just think people over-think things and everything becomes a battle of the sexes." But Harry Campbell, an Uber and Lyft driver in Los Angeles who runs The Rideshare Guy, a blog and

podcast, fears the idea could be a "slippery slope" to other forms of discrimination. Stronger background checks on drivers and regular monitoring of current ones might be a better approach, he suggested. "There are likely passengers who would feel more comfortable with drivers who are the same race or same ethnicity, so where do we draw the line?" Campbell said.

Female ride-hailing users in the Boston area interviewed by The Associated Press had mixed feelings.

Ashley Barnett, a 24-year-old from Somerville, said it's "well intended" but avoids a larger societal problem - people's attitudes toward women. "It's a solution to a problem that's way bigger than transportation," she said. Carolina Quintanilla, a 22-year-old from Boston, said she'd consider using the service at night. But even then, she said, there's no guarantee of safety. "There are crazy women out there, too," Quintanilla said. "You never really know nobody's intentions. You have to trust your instincts." —AP

IN HOMELESSNESS CRISIS, HAWAII EYES THE THATCHED 'HALE' HOMES

HONOLULU: When Daniel Anthony spent the night sleeping in a traditional Hawaiian structure known as a "hale," the sound of rain falling on the thatched roof made him feel like he was sleeping in the forest. "This is the sound of aloha," he said, recalling the experience. The haies, he said, are also a solution to a crisis of homelessness in Hawaii, which has the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the nation. Anthony, lawmakers and community members are pushing to revive the Hawaiian tradition of living in hale (pronounced hah-lay), thatched homes made from local trees and plants as a way to provide more affordable housing.

Though a bill to ease restrictions on building hale died after critics brought up safety concerns, advocates are trying to bring attention to a type of housing that celebrates culture and uses environmentally sustainable techniques to house the homeless. "If we can use invasive species, which we're saying is out of control, to construct housing in an area where they say we're in a housing crisis, how is this not a solution?" Anthony said. Homes based on indigenous architecture are found from Austin, Texas - where tipi style homes are part of an affordable housing community - to Tahiti, where thatched homes lure honeymooners.

\$325 per square foot

In Hawaii, a revival of hale building led to dozens of the structures throughout the islands, used for gatherings, canoe storage and teaching about cultural traditions. Building a hale can cost from \$30,000 for a 180-square-foot structure to \$95,000 for 600-square-foot, including labor and materials, depending on size and location, according to rough estimates from Holani Hana, a non-profit that builds non-residential hale to promote Hawaiian cultural values. Anthony believes he could build a hale for less - about \$1,000 to buy parachute cord to secure the frame and thatching - using invasive species harvested from nature.

By comparison, the converted shipping

containers Honolulu recently deployed to shelter homeless people on Sand Island cost \$9,117 per unit for a 72-square-foot room for a couple, or \$7,717 for a 49-square-foot room for singles, and each shipping container holds two couple units or three singles units, according to the city. An apartment can cost more than \$325 per square foot to build, according to the Hawaii Public Housing Authority, or \$195,000 for a 600-square-foot apartment. Maui County was the first to include hale in its building code, giving the structures a sense of parity with western buildings.

Hale builders gather ironwood, eucalyptus or other trees for the frame and pili grass, sugar cane or ti leaves for the thatched roofs and walls. But while sleeping in hale is allowed in some Hawaii counties, no cooking, open flames, electricity, extension cords or generators are permitted, and obtaining building a permit can be difficult. Sen J Kalani English, who pushed Maui County to adopt its hale building code, envisions updating those standards to a modern interpretation of indigenous Hawaiian architecture. He's stayed in thatched homes in Tahiti and throughout French Polynesia, some with sliding glass windows and air conditioning, he said.

Wi-Fi and internet

"I've always envisioned a traditional style structure - indigenous architecture - with Wi-Fi and internet and TV and wall plugs and all of that stuff plugged into it," English said. English is hoping to encourage more people in Hawaii to be trained in the art of hale building, incorporating indigenous architecture traditions from Samoa, Marshall Islands and other Pacific Islands. Francis Palani Sinenci, a master hale builder who has constructed more than 160 non-residential hale in Hawaii, was hesitant to support widespread development of the structures to address homelessness. "I cannot see hale everywhere, under the bridges," Sinenci said. "One of them catches fire, they're going to ban all haies." —AP



DAKAR: Cuts of shark meat are washed and arranged on the beach of Mballing, South West of Dakar. Shark meat is sold and eaten locally as well as exported to Ghana. —AFP

IRAN LOOKS TO SHIFT FUNDING NEEDS TO CAPITAL MARKETS

DRAFT BUDGET INCLUDES MAJOR SUKUK ISSUANCE

TEHRAN: Iran's government plans to shift part of its borrowing from local corporate investors to the capital markets, a move that could stimulate trading in debt securities and help the economy recover from years of economic sanctions. The sanctions, imposed over Iran's disputed nuclear program, hurt the government's finances and prompted it to borrow heavily from local firms and debt-laden banks, many of which are linked to the state through shareholdings and managerial influence.

In the wake of the lifting of sanctions in January, the government is laying plans to offer a range of debt instruments in the markets, where they could be bought by institutional and individual investors, rather than placing debt directly with banks and corporations. At present, Iran's banking sector provides around 95 percent of all financing, with only a tiny portion sourced from the debt capital markets, said Navid Kalhor, equity research analyst at Agah Group, a Tehran-based investment firm.

"The banking sector is out of money and out of capital, so the government is looking to reduce its

reliance on the sector. It now needs to seek the capital markets." Several efforts are under way: the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) has approved the use by the government of lease-based Islamic bonds, known as ijara sukuk, which can be underpinned by creditor assets to help settle state debts owed to local firms. "This is aimed at diversification of available instruments for the government and introduction of new tools for investors," said Majid Pireh, senior expert in Islamic finance at the SEO's research department.

A draft budget being discussed by parliament calls for issuance of 150 trillion rials (\$4.4 billion at the free market exchange rate) of ijara sukuk, part of a proposed 275 trillion rials of debt issuance for the financial year which started in March. The draft budget also includes issuance of 75 trillion rials of Islamic treasury bills and 50 trillion rials of musharaka sukuk, a form of investment partnership which until now has been the main sukuk structure used in Iran.

The treasury bills and ijara sukuk could spur activity in Iran's

dormant debt markets because they will be tradeable in the country's over-the-counter securities market, known as Fara Bourse. "You will be hearing a lot more of these issuances, especially the ijara sukuk type," said Payam Afzali, vice-president at Kardan Investment Bank, which is advising several local companies on their sukuk issuance plans. "The mechanism is that the papers are issued and the ownership is transferred to the creditors - the secondary market is simultaneously created."

New debt tools

The government is barred by law from transferring sovereign assets to the private sector, a common practice in sukuk issues by governments elsewhere in the world. One way around this is to use private sector creditors' assets to underpin sovereign sukuk; the creditors accept this arrangement because the government guarantees it will pay the principal and returns on the instruments.

The government is also exploring additional debt tools. The SEO is working with the government to introduce a new format known as

manfa'a, or usufruct sukuk, which is based on the rights or future benefits of an asset, said Pireh. For example, while the state would be unable to transfer assets of a highway project for use in ijara sukuk, it could securitize future toll revenue with manfa'a sukuk. "Within two to three months, the structure could be finalized," said Pireh. As government issuance expands, it will deepen the debt market and create pricing benchmarks, making it easier for Iranian companies to issue their own sukuk.

Larger firms in the oil and mining sectors could be the first to benefit but smaller ones may be left out as the issuance process remains costly and time-consuming, said Kalhor. The market also needs to develop a wider range of maturities, since few debt sales exceed six-month tenors, said Kalhor, whose firm is advising a local company on plans to raise the equivalent of \$50 million through five-year ijara sukuk. Fara Bourse is studying the creation of a debt market specifically for use by the country's 700,000 small and medium-sized businesses, he added, although there is no timeframe for the initiative. —Reuters



HONOLULU: A restored hale that was originally on Kauai and used for sleeping, stands in the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. —AP



HONOLULU: A canoe is stored inside a hale which stands at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in Honolulu. —AP

WARBA BANK LAUNCHES KASEB: A UNIQUE CAR FINANCING PROGRAM

KUWAIT: In line with its commitment to distinguish customers with topnotch promotions designed in accordance to Islamic Shariah, while catering to their needs to unprecedented banking products marked with flexibility and easiness, Warba, the fastest growing bank offering a wide spectrum of banking and investment products and services compatible with Shariah and matching international levels, joined hands with Mohamed Nasser Al Sayer Institution/ Toyota dealers and launched a unique cars' financing program: Kaseb.

The new program endures for 5 years offering a new system to finance cars according to bargain contracts with flexible credits. Introducing the new program, Warba resources said: "Warba bank is committed to provide continuously the best banking products and services to its customers which

goes perfectly in line with its strategic plan to diversify its offerings while catering to customers' needs and demands."

By using Kaseb, Warba's customers will be enabled to own a Toyota car of their choice. The contract from Warba bank includes complementary maintenance services, a full 2 years insurance up to 40 K Kilometers. In addition, Al Sayer will provide Kaseb customers the possibility to rebuy their cars after two years versus a fair value reaching 75% of their initial value. Toyota cars available for Kaseb customers are: Yars, Camri, Corolla, Rav 4, Fortuner, Prado and Prius. Kaseb program is the second collaboration between Warba bank and Mohamed Nasser Al Sayer Institution. Both institutions teamed up in 2015 upon signing an agreement to provide Warba's customers with special discount promotion

on selected Toyota cars including new models.

Through this new partnership, Warba bank seeks to expand customers' options in owning their preferred Toyota cars. The bank continues to exert all needed efforts to provide unparalleled services and finance solutions. Warba's prime aim revolves around maintaining customers' satisfaction while offering them flexible promotions designed to ease down their financial burdens. It's worth mentioning that the partnership between Warba bank and Mohamed Nasser Al Sayer institution is yet another milestone achieved and to be added to other partnerships being sealed recently by Warba bank with leading international cars dealers in Kuwait through which the bank aims at offering customers a wide choice of new cars matching their expectations.

CHINESE 'MOONLIGHT' GENERATION PUTS TOMORROW'S GROWTH ON CREDIT BEIJING HAS URGED LENDERS TO OPEN TAPS FOR SHOPPERS

BEIJING: China's hopes that consumer spending can become its new growth engine have taken a few dents in 2016, but a new generation of overspenders might give the economy a shot in the arm, even as they stretch their own resources to breaking point. A young, middle-class and tech-savvy cohort dubbed the 'moonlight generation' - because their banks accounts are light at the end of the month - are turning their backs on the cautious ways of their hard-saving parents and embracing credit.

That is welcome news to Beijing policymakers, who last month urged lenders to open the taps for shoppers after economic growth slipped to its slowest pace in 25 years, retailers reported signs of stress and bloated industries prepared for a wave of redundancies. It's also good news for Simon Loong, founder and chief executive of online lending platform WeLab, which he said has 3.2 million users in China. "The consumption behavior of millennials is quite different; they more are looking for instant gratification," he said, adding that longer-term financial planning took a back seat.

Policymakers are trying to deepen the level of access to credit similar to what took place in the United States 100 years ago, said China-focused investment strategist Andy Rothman, referring to a US credit-driven consumption boom in the 1900s. "These things are great, but need to be done in a careful and deliberate way, because we've seen in the US if you

don't do that then these things can be abused and create problems." Relative to income levels, household debt has already reached nearly 60 percent, up from 35 percent in 2007, according to the Institute of International Finance.

Tian Xue, 27, who works at a state-owned firm in Shanghai and considers herself part of the moonlight demographic, can see problems building up for some of her peers. "I think a lot of people end up spending more than they can really afford, just without thinking about it," she said. Tian, who lives with her parents, keeps her money online in digital "wallets", which typically have sister platforms offering credit. She said she often spends around 20-30,000 yuan (\$3,100-4,600) in a month, well above her income of around 6,000 yuan.

Lax regulation

A widening array of funding options are available to young shoppers like Tian - traditional credit cards, peer-to-peer loans and credit platforms offered by e-commerce companies such as Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and JD.com Inc. "When I use (Alibaba's) Taobao, it just pops up, telling me that I can pay with Ant Check Later," said Pang Yu, a 25-year-old railway ticket inspector in Beijing.

She uses the Alibaba-linked platform, which allows shoppers to pay for purchases the following month, along with her credit cards, to run up sometimes as much as 20,000

yuan a month in debt, more than she and her partner earn. Alibaba declined to comment for this story, while JD.com said it used big data to target consumers who have the ability to repay money quickly. The Chinese still spend and borrow only about half the levels of US consumers relative to GDP, and the most recent World Bank figures show it is still the world's third-most prolific nation of savers, but things are changing fast.

Consumer borrowing hit nearly 20 trillion yuan in February, a threefold rise since 2010, and household debt relative to the economy has doubled since 2008 to nearly 40 percent. Such rapid growth in a system where regulation is lax might pose risks that credit quality will suffer. Officials have already vowed to crack down on unregulated lending into the property market, for example, which is raising household debt and the risk of a property bubble. The China Banking Regulatory Commission, which is responsible for financial regulation, did not return requests for comment on potential risks.

The levels of consumer debt still pale in comparison with total debt in the economy, which hit 250 percent of GDP in 2015, dominated by government and corporate debt. Economists say China's high savings rate - around 46 percent of GDP last year, according to the central bank governor - acts as a natural buffer to systemic shocks from consumer credit. Which is an indirect way of say-

ing that the moonlight generation's long-suffering parents will probably bail them out when things go wrong, as they did for 26-year-old Ms Gong, a car saleswoman in Beijing. She couldn't pay back the 20,000

yuan she ran up on plastic last year to fund what she called "a necessary expenditure" - cosmetic surgery on her nose - so mum and dad stepped in. She has no regrets. "It was all worth it, and I look great." —Reuters



SHANGHAI: A man repairs a water pipe at a residential building in Shanghai yesterday. —AFP

News

in brief

Dubai's Emirates orders two more Airbus A380s

DUBAI: Dubai's Emirates airline said yesterday it had ordered two more Airbus A380 planes, raising the carrier's total orders for the superjumbo aircraft to 142. The two new planes will be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2017, said a statement by Emirates, which already has 75 A380s in service. "From now until the end of 2017, Emirates will retire 30 older aircraft from our fleet," the carrier's president Tim Clark said in a statement. "To meet our growth expectations, we will receive delivery of 24 new Boeing 777, and 33 new A380 aircraft including these two additional A380 aircraft just ordered," he said. Emirates is the largest operator of both the A380 and the Boeing 777. Clark called the A380 "a big success for Emirates" and the statement said the airline would soon be adding Prague, Taipei and Vienna to destinations served by the superjumbo.

IMF is 'encouraged' by Pakistan airline reform

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund is encouraged that Pakistan will convert its cash-strapped national airline into a limited company but said yesterday it will see if the reforms go far enough in restructuring the company. Parliament adopted a law on Monday to convert Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) into a limited company but it prevents the government from giving up its management control. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had made the privatization of the company a top goal when he came to power in 2013. The privatization of it and 67 other state-owned companies is also a major element of a \$6.7 billion IMF package that helped Pakistan stave off default in 2013. The IMF has continued to release loan installments despite missed targets. "We are encouraged that a consensus has been reached on corporatization of PIA," Harald Finger, IMF mission chief for Pakistan, told Reuters in an email.

Tesco rebounds into slender annual profit

LONDON: British supermarket giant Tesco said yesterday that it has rebounded into slender annual net profits, after a vast property writedown and challenging home trade sparked a record loss the previous year. Earnings after taxation stood at £138 million (\$197 million, 172 million euros) in the 52 weeks to the end of February, Tesco said in a results statement. That contrasted with a loss of £5.7 billion in the group's prior 2014/2015 financial year. Pre-tax profits meanwhile stood at £162 million after a loss of £6.3 billion a year earlier. Tesco hailed the "significant progress" as it returned to full-year profits, and also revealed the first quarter of sales growth for three years. Like-for-like sales, which strips out the impact of new floor space, grew 0.9 percent in the group's fourth quarter. That was the first quarterly sales expansion since 2013.

JPMorgan earnings dip; trading slumps

NEW YORK: JPMorgan Chase reported a dip in first-quarter earnings yesterday as revenues in key trading categories fell and it set aside additional reserves for loans in the slumping energy sector. Net income for the first quarter was \$5.5 billion, down 6.7 percent from the year-ago period. Revenues dipped 3.0 percent to \$24.1 billion. Earnings from corporate and investment banking retreated on lower fees in some key investment banking categories and lower revenue from fixed income trading and other categories. Revenues in markets and investor services dropped 13 percent to \$5.7 billion. Consumer and community banking earnings rose on higher deposit balances and increases in credit card and auto lending revenues. JPMorgan lifted its reserves set aside for bad loans by \$713 million due to downgrades of \$529 million in oil and gas and natural gas pipelines and \$162 million in metals and mining.

CHINA'S STEEL GLUT - YEARS IN THE MAKING, YEARS TO RESOLVE

EXPORTS RUNNING AT RECORD PACE; DOMESTIC DEMAND WEAKENS

BEIJING: China is facing increasing international pressure to tackle a steel supply glut that has flooded global markets and left beleaguered overseas producers at risk of closure. China produces half the world's steel but those hoping it will tackle its surplus capacity quickly will be disappointed, despite rhetoric from Beijing. A steel production glut that has taken years in the making, will equally take years to resolve. The economy is growing at its slowest pace in 25 years and labor unrest is on the rise, a worry for the ruling Communist Party that fears the social unrest that millions of laid off steel workers could bring. "Closures cannot be completed overnight," said a person with ties to China's leadership. "Stability is the top priority." China's fading economic growth has exposed the huge surplus capacity in steel making, leaving many producers with heavy losses that are adding to already high debts. Many see the solution in exports, which rose to a record in 2015, a major factor dragging global prices down to decade lows.

India's Tata Steel has blamed a flood of cheap steel imports, including from China, for a decision to pull out of Britain, putting 15,000 jobs at risk. On Monday, more than 40,000 German steel workers took to the streets to protest against dumping from China, among other issues such as industry consolidation that they fear will cost them their jobs. Hillary Clinton, widely expected to be the Democrat candidate in US presidential elections this year, added her voice to the criticism, saying on Monday she would "impose consequences when China breaks the rules by dumping its cheap products in our markets."

Vicious circle

Official data shows China's production capacity is just over 1.1 billion tons a year although analysts estimate another 100 million tons are produced illegally. Underlining the scale of problem facing Beijing, official figures suggest surplus capacity is some 300-400 million tons a year and exports in 2015 reached a record 110 million tons - about 10 times the annual steel output of Britain.

Much of China's production glut was sparked by the country's debt-fueled stimulus in 2009, when a government-directed 4 trillion yuan (\$625 billion) was injected into the economy to ward off the global financial crisis. The stimulus drove up steel demand by as much as 100 million tons in 2009 and encouraged producers to embark on a rapid capacity expansion using cheap credit. "The steel mills were delighted - they didn't need to die, breathed a sigh of relief and also relaxed their vigilance towards overcapacity," said Liu Zhenjiang, the vice secretary-general of the China Iron and Steel Association (CISA). "Those years created ingrained bad habits when it came to overcapacity."

China raised hope of a solution in February when it pledged to shut 100-150 million tons of old production capacity in five years, but actual production is expected to stay high as Beijing tries to minimize job losses and social disruption. New plants have continued to come on line, and CISA

has warned that capacity would increase further this year. "The government is understandably very nervous about how exactly they're going to do this," said Geoffrey Crothall, communications director at China Labor Bulletin. "I think eventually pressure will build and they will have to go ahead. But you really shouldn't expect it to happen overnight."

Ingrained bad habits

CISA's Liu said existing mills are doing little to curb supply,



QINGDAO: Trucks transport containers at a port in Qingdao, east China's Shandong province. China's exports surged 11.5 percent year-on-year in March to \$160.8 billion, authorities said yesterday, in a positive sign for the world's second-largest economy. —AFP

noting they were trapped in a "vicious circle" in which they ramp up production at the first sign of price improvements. Many firms engage in "hostile competition", raising production and slashing prices in a bid to outlast rivals, he said. Government policy initiatives have not always helped either. One target to consolidate 60 percent of capacity in the hands of the 10 biggest steel enterprises helped spur a fevered round of expansions at mid-sized mills desperate to avoid being swallowed up.

Premier Li Keqiang reiterated on Monday Beijing intended

China's bankruptcy mechanisms also present massive challenges. Zhang Wuzong, chairman of Shiheng Special Steel Group, said China's bankruptcy laws offer little protection for executives, who could find their personal assets get frozen. Xia Nong, head of the industry department of the National Development and Reform Commission, the state planner, said China's "survival of the fittest" mechanism remained inadequate. "The fit are not strong and the unfit are not eliminated, and bad currency is still driving out good in the steel sector," he said. —Reuters

KFH OFFERS GOLD ACCOUNT ONLINE

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched a new EService that allows clients to open Gold Account through KFH online application. This service also allows KFH clients to conduct gold selling and purchasing transactions online in an easy and secure manner, which confirms KFH's keenness to optimally avail the technological development for the sake of best serving clients as per international standards. Innovating this, gold trading has become more streamlined and easier than ever before.

This service that copes with the latest technological development in the banking sector reiterates KFH pioneering role in offering unique EServices, which constitutes a competitive advantage and meets clients' aspirations. The accelerating pace of the demand of electronic banking transactions has become explicit and concrete which calls on going further in availing technology for the best interest of

customer service. The "Gold Account" from KFH reflects KFH's ceaseless efforts in innovating sharia-compliant financial services and products in a bid to offer clients the opportunity to diversify their investments since it is a low-risk and a store of value product. Gold account is a good investment vessel as it combines both saving and investment purposes.

It is worth noting that each gold biscuit weighs 100 grams and has a purity value of 999.9, the purest form of gold. Each gold biscuit is issued and certified by KFH and the Ministry of Commerce. KFH offer clients the gold in competitive pricing and in a flexible purchasing process. Gold is viewed as one of the most important investments in the world. It is an important commodity for clients wishing to diversify their saving and investment portfolios, yet achieving good returns when gold prices surge.



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MEZZAN SHAREHOLDERS APPROVE DISTRIBUTION OF 5% BONUS SHARES

KUWAIT: Mezzan Holding KSCC, one of the largest manufacturers and distributors of food, beverage, FMCG and pharmaceutical products in the Gulf, held its 15th Annual General Meeting of Shareholders today. The AGM approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute 27.5 fils per share for a total dividend payout of KD8.15 million (27.5% of capital) for the year, plus 5% bonus shares.

The Extraordinary General Meeting approved a 5% increase in the company's authorized, issued and paid-up capital by KD1,482,500, from KD29,650,000 to KD31,132,500 by issuing 14,825,000 bonus shares. Shareholders also voted in Mezzan's new board members for a three-year term including Mohammad Jassim Mohammad Al Wazzan, Abdel Rahman Jassim Mohammad Al Wazzan, Motasem Jassim Mohammad Al Wazzan, Jamal Abdulhameed Al Mutawa and Abdulwahab Ahmad Al Marzouq. Suleiman Khaled Jassim Al Wazzan was voted in as a reserve member.

Mezzan Vice Chairman, Mohammad Jassim Mohammad Al Wazzan said: "The board of directors is currently considering new expansionary projects for the company's core activities and those of its subsidiaries that will generate strong revenues and achieve company goals. I would like to thank the management and staff for their effort and to thank the shareholders for their trust as we continue to seek new lucrative opportunities for the the medium and long term for all stakeholders."

HTC'S NEW FLAGSHIP: SCULPTED TO PERFECTION

DUBAI: HTC yesterday unveiled what it has been working on behind closed doors for the last 12 months, with the launch of its latest smartphone. With customer feedback an integral part of the development process, combined with an obsessive attention to detail, the HTC 10 delivers everything that you would want from a flagship device. Playing to the Power of 10 - symbolizing greatness and independence but also that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - this newest addition to the HTC phone family combines a world class camera with gold standard audio, bold new metal unibody design and unparalleled performance.

Designed to Perfection

Inspired by light and sculpted to perfection, the HTC 10 employs a new approach to design where bold contours are carved out of solid metal. Capturing the light beautifully, the chamfered edges boast a slimmer, more slender look with its full glass front merging seamlessly into the metal body. Passionate about the small details, it's not just the materials that come under scrutiny when we create a new handset. With the HTC 10, our design teams worked tirelessly to build a phone where the power button has been beautifully crafted, where the speakers deliver a sleeker look and better sound quality and where the fingerprint sensor recognizes your finger from almost any angle. It is also important that we got the build absolutely right. Mercilessly engineered to handle everyday knocks, bumps and scratches, the HTC 10 was subjected to over 168 hours of extreme temperature tests, ranging from a freezing -20°C to a scorching 60°C, plus over 10,000 drop, bend, scratch and corrosion tests.

World-class camera!

With HTC 10 we've delivered what we believe to be the best smartphone camera available on the market today. With the world's first optically stabilized, larger aperture f/1.8 lenses on both the front and rear cameras, new larger sensors, 12 million of our new generation UltraPixels (1.55um per pixel), faster laser autofocus powering the main camera and a wide angle lens and screen flash on the front UltraSelfieTM cam-

era, this smartphone delivers brilliantly sharp, low light and high-resolution photos whether behind or in front of the lens.

With the camera designed to launch in as little as 0.6 seconds, and a 2nd generation laser autofocus that gives you focused shots faster, it's quick enough to even work in burst mode. All the settings are also conveniently located at your fingertips with Pro Mode still offering advanced options for more experienced photographers, including RAW format functionality. Boasting a DxOMark score of 88, this is one of the highest camera quality scores of any smartphone to date and is the result of tens of thousands of hours spent fine tuning each element to deliver world-class photos and videos.

Best in sight, best in sound

But it's not just the imaging that puts this smartphone at the top of its game - the HTC 10 combines vivid 4K video with the world's first stereo 24-bitHi-Res audio recording, capturing 256 times more detail than standard recordings, across twice the frequency range and enabling you to bring



to life your recorded content as if you were actually there in person. Built for audiophiles, the HTC 10 is certified for Hi-Res audio and has been designed to make music sound the way that the artist intended. A headphone amp that delivers two times the power of a conventional headphone amp, the ability to upscale from 16-bit to 24-bit audio and high performance digital to analogue conversion combine beautifully to produce ten times lower dis-



ortion than other devices on the market, delivering an all round audio performance that cannot be beaten. Everyone hears things differently, which is why the HTC 10's all-new Personal Audio Profile system enhances your audio experience even further. By creating a unique profile that is tuned to your individual hearing, it dynamically adjusts specific sound frequencies to each ear, allowing you to hear music the way that the artist intended.

Re-engineered HTC BoomSound Hi-Fi edition speakers feature the same separated tweeter and woofer design as leading acoustic systems and combine with a dedicated amplifier on each speaker, adding to the experience and delivering sound clarity unprecedented on a smartphone. Great audio deserves great earphones so we have made sure that our flagship phone comes with the best Hi-Res audio certified in-box earphones yet. Featuring an 8mm thin aerospace polymer diaphragm and 70% oversized drivers, the listener is treated to richer sound and twice the frequency range, enabling you to enjoy the best audio experience right from the get go.

Performance at its Best

Whilst the HTC 10 nails it on the hardware, we have also delivered what we believe to be best in class software by focusing on getting the fundamentals

right. With apps that launch twice as fast and that perform to the highest standard and a next generation quad HD display that is 30% more colourful, creating a true cinematic feel, and that is 50% more responsive to touch than its predecessor, even the smallest and fastest of finger movements track perfectly. This attention to detail doesn't stop there! With security high on people's agendas, we have created a fingerprint scanner, which unlocks in a lightening fast 0.2 seconds and which has been algorithmically designed to recognise you faster and more accurately over time.

Engineered from the inside out to last longer, the HTC 10 boasts the latest Qualcomm Snapdragon processor with enhanced 4G LTE. Each device also comes with Boost+ which is designed to make your phone faster, to consume less power and to provide effective security and applications management features. This includes smart boost, which automatically optimizes your memory, a game battery booster, which uses less battery during gameplay, and a new PowerBotics system, which auto detects and shuts down apps that use excessive power, improving battery life by 30% and delivering up to two days charge.

Not only does Boost+ optimize performance, making it easier to launch apps, but its App Lock function also adds a new layer of security by enabling you to lock

any app you choose, whilst App Manager provides an instant fix for when an app isn't behaving. The HTC 10 also includes the latest in-box quick charge 3.0 Rapid Charger with improved thermal management, so the battery can be charged by up to 50% in just 30 minutes - ideal for people who find their phone running low on juice before the end of the working day.

Controlled by You!

By reducing the number of duplicative and pre-loaded apps and bloatware, and integrating the best of both HTC and Google, we have created a more streamlined phone that enables you to decide what you want on your handset. With HTC's specially created new Freestyle Layout, you no longer have an on-screen grid that dictates the layout. Instead you can get creative by dragging icons, stickers and widgets anywhere you like. Layer them, group them, link stickers to apps or get rid of screen icons altogether, the choice is yours. The latest version of HTC Themes also provides you with access to thousands of professional looking themes that each come with their own icons, backgrounds and sounds so you can customize your phone based on your own personal style.

Accessories and availability

To further streamline your experience, the HTC 10 offers an all-new Ice View case with a semi-transparent and highly versatile single front-cover case. So when that next call or message comes in, or when you need to skip a track, or snap that perfect shot, you can do it without even opening your smartphone's case. It's simplicity, without sacrificing protection. The HTC 10 will come in two variants with different Qualcomm Snapdragon processors to cater for different market needs. They will both offer the same design, audio, camera and display, with a similar software experience and battery life. The HTC 10 comes in four stunning color combinations: Carbon Grey, Glacier Silver, Topaz Gold and Camellia Red. This much-awaited flagship smartphone is now officially launched in the Middle East, and will be available at leading retailers from early May 2016. The HTC 10 will have initial operator exclusivity with Etisalat in the UAE and STC(Saudi Telecom Company) in KSA.

AL MAZAYA HOLDING ACHIEVES AN 80% OCCUPANCY RATE IN LOGISTICS PROJECT

KUWAIT: Al Mazaya Holding Company has announced that it has achieved an 80% occupancy rate in its Mazaya Logistics project in Bahrain Investment Wharf, which consists of industrial units ready for lease with contemporary, flexible designs at competitive prices. The project is designed to serve multiple purposes including warehouses, offices, industry and workshops.

Eng. Abdulla Al Sultan, Chief of Real Estate Project Management said: "The Mazaya Logistics project, which is a result of Al Mazaya Holding's entrance into one of the most important investment sectors, namely the logistics sector, comes in line with its extensive experience in real estate development, including the residential, commercial, and medical sectors. Al Sultan pointed out that Al Mazaya Holding chose Bahrain to be the first destination for its Logistics project, with additional local, regional and international markets to follow, reflecting the company's vision to introduce superior projects that build on its value in the real estate market."

He added that the company's success in attaining such a high occupancy rate on this project has not come out of the blue. The feasibility studies carried out by Al Mazaya Holding prior to starting the construction of the project revealed that there is a great need in the Bahraini market for this type of project, guaranteeing its success. He emphasized that the Logistics project has become one of the most important income generating assets, promising attractive and long-term returns to the company. He pointed out that Al Mazaya Holding initiated the development of the project in May 2014 and systematically completed it seven months later in December 2014 - a significant accomplishment considering the scale and aspirations of the project. This helped to



Abdallah Sultan

outdo several rival projects due to fast completion and accurate execution. Al Sultan said that many major international and local firms have raced to book their lease units in the project. These companies are known for their years-long commercial activity, which boosts the value of the project.

In the same context, Al Sultan indicated that Al Mazaya Holding's success in achieving this high occupancy rate is the result of the company's high potential, well-studied marketing plans and quality product. This is in spite of the decline in oil prices, for logistics, transport and storage services. The company's projects are usually managed by its property management team in a professional manner by providing infrastructure and security services, a modern communications network, maintenance, and cleaning, which is an added value of the company's projects in general.

Al Sultan also pointed out that the Al Mazaya Logistics Project is one of the company's latest projects within the Logistics Sector, specifically located in the Al Hadd area near Bahrain Airport on the highway leading to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Al Mazaya Holding developed a piece of 27,505 square-metre land and divided it into industrial units with leasing spaces that exceed 15,250 square metres in the Bahrain Investment Warf-an integrated system divided into various sectors aimed at serving industrialists and investors alike. He also said that the project, characterized by flexible, secure, and well-maintained design concepts and quality infrastructure, consists of 42 industrial units divided into different areas ranging from 250 - 500 ms, and includes areas that are suitable for a range of uses such as workshops, industrial activities and company offices.

HIGH-STAKES OIL AND GAS VOTE HAS ITALY IN A TIZZ

DEBATE PITS ENVIRONMENTALISTS AGAINST, GOVT AND BIG BUSINESS

RAVENNA: An offshore platform a stone's throw from Dante's beach on Italy's Adriatic coast has become the focus of a politically charged national referendum on the country's oil and gas drilling concessions. The debate pits environmentalists against the government and big business, and revolves around a change in the law in January that ruled existing concessions within 12 miles of the coast should last until the fields are depleted. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's centre-left party, keen to be seen as pro-business, has called on Italians not to vote on April 17. That has infuriated ecologists who insist platforms near the shore present health risks and devastate protected habitats, and should not be given an extra lease of life.

From the threat to a prized mussels industry to fears coastal erosion will eventually see an encroaching tide swallow up nearby Ravenna, with its Byzantine mosaics and the revered poet Dante Alighieri's grave, the row has Italians in a tizz. A "yes" vote to reverse the law "would send a clear signal that Italy wants to embrace renewable energy," Giulio Kerschbaumer, 34, head of environmentalist lobby Legambiente in the Emilia-Romagna region said. Pointing to a recent scandal in Italy that saw a top minister resign over alleged favors to French oil giant Total, Kerschbaumer said Legambiente believed the law had been changed "as a present to the oil companies".

Split deepens

The vote, called by regions largely led by Renzi's

Democratic Party, has deepened a split within the centre-left and is being seen as a key test for the PM ahead of a constitutional reforms referendum in October. The 41-year-old has bet his political career on the reforms and many see this vote as a pretext to attack his leadership.

Nine regions asked for and are affected by the referendum, from Basilicata, to Calabria, Sardinia and the Veneto. Most observers say the result will have little effect on the government's coffers either way: concessions within the 12-mile band brought in a relatively modest 38 million euros (\$43 million) in royalties in 2015, according to official data. At the heart of the drama lies Ravenna, once the capital city of the Western Roman Empire, and now the hub for oil and gas across the country's centre and north. Some 47 of the 92 platforms in question lie here in the Emilia-Romagna region and the local economy is inextricably tied to the sector's fate.

According to the Filctem Cgil union, closing rigs when the concessions expire would put at least 2,500 jobs on platforms and in services at risk. A report this year by the Nomisma research foundation found there were some 140,000 people in the region whose jobs depend on oil and gas. Gianluigi Bambini, who runs a maritime transport company, said business had already been hit by stagnating output.

"We had 264 employees 18 months ago, now we have 180, most of those let go are young," he said as one of his crew boats pulled up next to an

Eni rig, shrouded in mist, with hundreds of gleaming mussels clinging to its red tubular legs.

Rising seas

Plucked from the platform by divers and steamed in vats with tomatoes, onions and parsley, freshly gathered molluscs are served up by supporters of the "No" camp in the port area of Marina di Ravenna to raise support. Giovanni Fucci, president of a local mussels farming association, is fighting to restore the sector's name after a Greenpeace report last month asserted molluscs from Eni platforms contained traces of heavy metals and hydrocarbons. "Every 15 days health inspectors come out to sea and take samples, they analyse them and rule them fit for human consumption. These mussels are sought by the best Italian chefs for their taste and quality," he said, adding that the market is worth 126 million euros a year in Emilia-Romagna alone.

Back on Dante beach, local campaigners rejoice that the referendum is drawing attention to coastal erosion they claim is caused by nearby rigs, the closest of which lies just 1.5 kilometers offshore. Pine trees in a national nature reserve set back from the beach are dying, according to 74-year old Pasquale Minichini, because "rising sea water is killing them at the roots"-aggravating a phenomenon caused by global warming. He cites research that says Ravenna could return to its Roman-era state-small islands in a lagoon, like Venice-by 2100. — AFP

GULF BANK'S SPEND MORE, WIN MORE CAMPAIGN - WITH EVEN BIGGER PRIZES

KUWAIT: Following the success of its first campaign in February 2016, Gulf Bank has announced the launch of a new 'Spend More, Win More with Gulf Rewards' campaign for its credit card holders, with even bigger and more exciting prizes. The campaign started on 10 April and will last until 10 May 2016. All Gulf Bank credit cards holders are automatically enrolled in the Gulf Rewards program and have a chance of winning.

This latest campaign is part of the Gulf Rewards program, the fastest and most generous loyalty points program in Kuwait. With Gulf Rewards customers can collect Gulf Points for free flights and hotels accommodation, as well as accessing "Gulf Bank Entertainer", Kuwait's first geo-locator mobile application, which offers exclusive deals in Kuwait, UAE, and United Kingdom.

There will be 32 lucky winners in total - 31 daily winners, who will each receive 200,000 Gulf Points, and one person will win the grand prize of 2 Million Gulf Points at a special draw on 25 May 2016. Chances to the lucky draw are gained by customers paying for goods or services with a Gulf Bank credit card. For each 10 KD spent in Kuwait, one chance will be earned, and for each 10 KD spent internationally, three chances will be earned. Gulf Points can be redeemed in a multitude of ways. For example, 200,000 points can be exchanged for ten return flights to Dubai, or six return flights to Beirut, or four return flights to Europe, or even two roundtrip flights to the USA. In addition to flights, customers can also use Gulf Points to pay for hotel stays in one of 300,000



hotels worldwide. Gulf Bank has created a dedicated webpage on its website at www.e-gulfbank.com/gulfpoinst-en to ensure the redemption procedure is as straight forward as possible. Here, customers can view their points, check their balance, instantly redeem points online for flights and hotel stays, or benefit from frequent special offers.

Customers can also earn additional chances to win the Gulf Points draw by using the "Gulf Bank Entertainer" app. This exclusive app offers instant deals through mobile phones which can be used at restaurants, hotels, spas, as well as on children's activities and interests at participating merchants in Kuwait, UAE, and the United Kingdom. Customers can use their Gulf Bank credit card to

pay for any Entertainer 'Buy One, Get One Free' offer, and save up to 10,000 KD annually and also earn Gulf Points on each of those transactions and get more chances to win in the "Spend More, Win More" campaign.

The "Gulf Bank Entertainer" app is available FREE of charge for existing Gulf Bank credit card holders to download from App Store for iOS/iPhone and the Google Play Store for Android. Customers can also visit www.e-gulfbank.com/entertainer-en to receive an activation code. To find out more about the Bank's latest Gulf Rewards campaign, customers can visit the bank's bilingual website at www.e-gulfbank.com, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches in Kuwait.



ESSAR, SNN BUILDERS INK REAL ESTATE DEAL

MUMBAI: Essar and SNN Builders, Bangalore, announced that they have signed an agreement whereby SNN will take over the upscale Water's Edge residential project from Equinox Realty, Essar's real estate arm. Water's Edge is located in Hebbal, Bangalore which has emerged as the new heart of North Bangalore with its easy access to schools, malls, hospitals, IT parks and the airport. Adorned with lawns, landscaped greens and water bodies, Water's Edge project is located on the Outer Ring Road and overlooks the picturesque Nagawara Lake in Bangalore.

The 8-acre project is being built in three phases and will comprise five 40-storey towers amongst the tallest in Bangalore and house over 400 plus 3, 4 and 5 BHK apartments. The project entails construction of 2 million sq ft and is likely to generate potential revenues of Rs 1200 Crores. Ramesh Agarwal, Managing Director, SNN Builders said "This transaction provided us a much awaited entry into North Bangalore and fits in to our strategy of launching an Ultra-

Luxury residential project". Mr. Agarwal added "We are one of the few real estate companies who are rated high for our finance capabilities and in house engineering team which plays a crucial role in helping us deliver projects on time to the satisfaction of our stake holders, investors and end-users".

Shah Sanjay, Managing Director of SNN Builders added that "We are extremely happy to acquire this project. With eight on-going projects and 5.5 million sq. ft. area already under development in our portfolio and with the acquisition of Water's Edge project, we now have a variety of assets to offer to our customer base". Sanjay Mehta, CEO of Equinox Realty said "Project Delivery and Customers are our main focus. In SNN, we have found someone with an excellent project delivery track record with high level of customer focus. We are thankful to all our customers for all their support and are confident that SNN will be taking this project forward and meet our customers' expectations."

HASHTAG FAIL? #BRINGBACKOURGIRLS TWO YEARS ON

LAGOS: More than a week after 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from the remote northeast Nigerian town of Chibok by Boko Haram on April 14, 2014, a lawyer posted the first #BringBackOurGirls tweet. Ibrahim Abdullahi's hashtag would go on to become one of Africa's most popular online campaigns and was shared more than four million times over the next month on Twitter. Social media heavyweights such as Kim Kardashian and Chris Brown endorsed it, while US First Lady Michelle Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron both held up signs of the slogan.

#BringBackOurGirls undoubtedly brought global attention to a brutal but largely ignored conflict that since 2009 has claimed at least 20,000 lives and made more than 2.6 million others homeless. It also galvanised international support against Boko Haram at a time when Nigeria's military was floundering badly in the face of the better-armed rebels, losing territory and vital public support. But two years on, #BringBackOurGirls risks becoming another example of the limited influence of online protest, according to Ufuoma Akpojivi, a media researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

On the ground, 219 of the 276 girls are still missing, their Government Girls Secondary School is a

broken ruin and Chibok is desperate for development. "There's nothing to show for it," said Yana Galang, whose daughter Rifkatu is one of the 219 girls who haven't been seen since they appeared in a Boko Haram video message released in May 2014. Galang, who doesn't have a Twitter account, said the online outrage hasn't helped her. "The only thing that matters now is for my daughter to be back," she said, as fellow parents prepared to meet at the stricken school in Chibok on Thursday for a prayer vigil. "This has been going on too long."

Complex Issues

Translating social media success into tangible change on the ground has always been a challenge to online campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter and #OccupyWallStreet. #BringBackOurGirls was an initial success, bringing protesters out to the streets in a country where mass public demonstrations are rare. But domestic politics in Nigeria trumped global outrage, as the online protest became entangled in the complicated web of identity politics and partisanship, said Akpojivi.

Supporters of Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian who was Nigeria's president at the time of the kidnapping, dismissed it as a fabrication by his political

enemies in the Muslim-majority north to derail his re-election campaign. Outspoken government critics such as the former education minister turned anti-corruption activist Oby Ezekwesili and the popular televangelist Tunde Bakare meanwhile promoted #BringBackOurGirls. "They (Jonathan's government and supporters) thought the movement was fuelled by the opposition to discredit them, so the government criminalised the movement," said Akpojivi.

One woman was arrested after meeting Jonathan's wife, Patience, while the police moved to ban daily protests by Ezekwesili and other #BringBackOurGirls activists in Abuja. The Jonathan administration's alienation from the campaign - and an apparent reluctance or inability to find the girls - highlighted the limits of well-meaning online protesters. "There is the misconception that embracing social media or using new media technologies will bring about the needed change," Akpojivi said. "Retweeting doesn't mean that the government will take action. We need to understand that there are other political and economic issues at play."

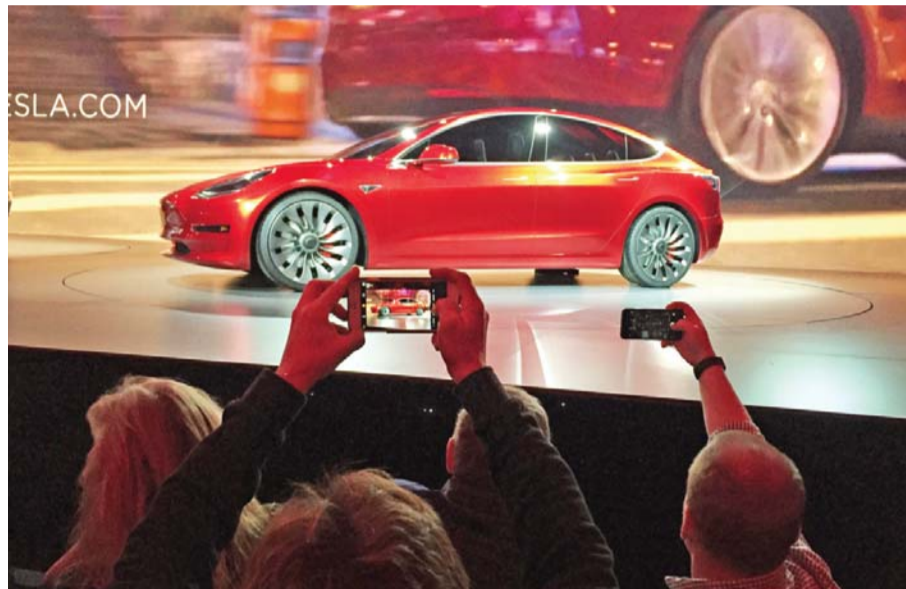
Limited Advocacy

Despite the original #BringBackOurGirls tweet originating in Nigeria itself, US Twitter users posted

the majority of the tweets. Yet even here, the world's superpower has been unable to secure the girls' release, despite Boko Haram-related counter-terrorism assistance totalling more than \$400 million to date. A month after the kidnapping, US President Barack Obama sent some 80 military personnel to neighboring Chad to help locate and "support the safe return" of the schoolgirls.

US and British surveillance experts reportedly located some of the missing girls and passed on their findings to the Nigerians but they failed to follow up. A Pentagon spokesman said the personnel were redeployed because the Nigerian military had stopped requesting their services. More direct Western military assistance for the counter-insurgency and finding the girls has been limited by concerns about human rights abuses by Nigeria's armed forces.

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, who leads the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in Washington, said she has struggled to get more funding for security assistance in Nigeria. "Too many people think it's okay to limit their advocacy for this cause to tweeting," Wilson said, adding she is worried for the girls. "I pray they are still alive but the reality is that we don't know where they are or what they are doing." — AFP



HAWTHORNE, California: In this March 31, 2016 photo, Tesla Motors unveils the new lower-priced Model 3 sedan at the Tesla Motors design studio. — AP

WILD DEMAND FOR TESLA, BUT LIMITED TO TECH FANS

DETROIT: Demand for Tesla's new Model 3 has been eye-popping, with consumers pre-ordering about \$13.7 billion worth of the electric sedans nearly two years before they go on sale. Yet experts aren't yet ready to proclaim it's a tipping point with mainstream America moving from burning gasoline to charging batteries. The reason? Most of the 325,000 people worldwide who put down \$1,000 deposits are tech-savvy, environmentally conscious early adopters who see Tesla as an innovative brand that meets their needs. The \$35,000 price tag and the Model 3's 215-mile range are important, but the brand's tech image and CEO Elon Musk's success in cars, rockets and solar panels are the main drivers.

"We're tech people. I want integration with my phone," says Charles Butler, a 40-year-old manager with a cloud computing company in Austin, Texas, who was among the first to make an order. "Musk and Tesla, that's what they do with their customer experience." Researchers say other automakers' electric cars haven't caught on because their range is limited to around 100 miles. And even General Motors' Chevrolet Bolt, which will go more than 200 miles per charge and is priced similarly to the Model 3, won't attract a frenzy of buyers because Chevy doesn't have Tesla's tech image, they say.

Surveys by the University of California Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and by Carnegie Mellon University show that Butler is a pretty typical Tesla buyer. The brand is well-known in the US, even among those who don't plan to buy electric. Tesla buyers always have rated cutting-edge features - huge touch screens, freeway autopilot and over-the-air software updates - as paramount, said Tom Turrentine, director of electric and hybrid vehicle research at UC Davis.

Early electric cars didn't have those features, although the new Bolt will have some of them. "There's a big overlap in people who think about the future and green technology," Turrentine said. "Tesla is really sitting right on that." Surveys by Carnegie Mellon show that getting from the tech savvy to regular folks will take a lot. Most US consumers don't even know what an electric car does, said Jeremy Michalek, a professor of engineering and public policy. Electric cars currently are only 1 percent of US sales.

"Winning over the enthusiast is just fundamentally different from winning over mainstream consumers," he said. Turrentine doesn't

expect similar demand for the Bolt, which is due to hit showrooms late this year. Chevy won't comment on the Tesla orders, and it isn't taking advance orders for the Bolt. Instead, it will rely on GM's vast dealer network, high owner satisfaction with the Volt plug-in hybrid, and Internet connectivity to drum up Bolt sales, a spokeswoman said.

That may not work well, however. UC Davis research shows that when asked to name rechargeable cars, "hardly anybody can name a Volt, but they can name a Tesla," Turrentine said. Surveys also show that GM and other automakers don't have the tech panache of Tesla. "I just do not believe when you're a large automaker, you're necessarily going to solve for that," says Butler.

Competition

Yet Tesla is about to face more competition. Sam Abuelsamid, senior analyst for the Navigant research firm, said other automakers are scrambling to unveil 200-mile electric cars in the same price range. More established automakers likely will have a reliability advantage over Tesla, which has struggled with quality problems on its current models, he said. Still, all automakers face a "chasm" that must be bridged between early adopters and the public for electric cars to be in every driveway, Turrentine said. It will take years of influence from early buyers to change a country in which gas-powered pickup trucks are the top-selling vehicles, he said. Also needed will be more battery breakthroughs for lower costs, and continued government incentives, he said.

There are other problems that could make it hard for Musk to satisfy his orders. The volume - which surprised even Musk - will be difficult for Tesla to produce. The company has been a niche manufacturer, selling just 110,000 cars since it started manufacturing at a California plant in 2008. Even Musk seems to be wondering. On Twitter, he said he may have to rethink production plans and open a factory in Europe.

Tesla also has a history of missing deadlines for previous models, and delays could turn away some buyers. Last week, the company blamed parts shortages from a supply company for production shortfalls with the new Model X SUV and pledged to make sure the same thing doesn't happen with the Model S. "After a while you have a pattern that things get delayed," said Standard & Poor's analyst Efraim Levy. — AP

UBER STARTS MOTORBIKE TAXI SERVICE IN JAKARTA

JAKARTA: Ride-hailing app Uber yesterday launched a motorbike taxi service in the Indonesian capital where Southeast Asian rivals Go-Jek and Grab are already battling for dominance. Jakarta is one of the world's most congested cities and motorbike taxis ordered from a smartphone app have exploded in popularity in the past 18 months as a way to beat snarled traffic. Uber said that its "UberMotor" service would provide cheap and reliable transportation for hundreds of thousands of people.

The company used a local social media and YouTube star Arief Muhammad to launch its service, saying he was the first person in Jakarta to use an Uber motorcycle taxi. Both Go-Jek, an Indonesian start-up, and Grab, which operates in several Southeast Asian countries, claim to be the

biggest provider of motorbike taxi rides in Indonesia. The popularity of motorbikes and regular taxis ordered from a smartphone has provoked a backlash in the taxi industry.

Thousands of taxi drivers caused traffic chaos in Jakarta last month in a violent protest against what they believe is unfair competition. Drivers say the apps, which are using funding from venture capitalists to offer heavily discounted fares, have severely reduced their income. The app companies say the transport industry should adapt to new technology. The Indonesian government is drawing up new regulations to govern transport apps but has so far resisted calls to ban Uber and similar services. Officials estimate Jakarta's traffic jams cause economic losses of about \$3 billion a year. — AP

FACEBOOK: NEW WAYS TO CHAT, STREAM VIDEO

TECH GIANT BRINGS 'CHATBOTS' TO MESSENGER

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Tuesday extended its reach beyond online socializing by building artificial-intelligence powered "bots" into its Messenger application to allow businesses to have software engage in lifelike text exchanges. The move announced at the leading online social network's annual developers conference in San Francisco came as the number of monthly users of Messenger topped 900 million and the Silicon Valley company works to stay in tune with mobile Internet lifestyles.

"We think you should be able to text message a business like you would a friend, and get a quick response," Facebook co-founder and chief Mark Zuckerberg said as he announced that developers can build bots that could even be better than real people at natural language text conversations. Bots are software infused with the ability to "learn" from conversations, getting better at figuring out what people are telling them and how best to respond.

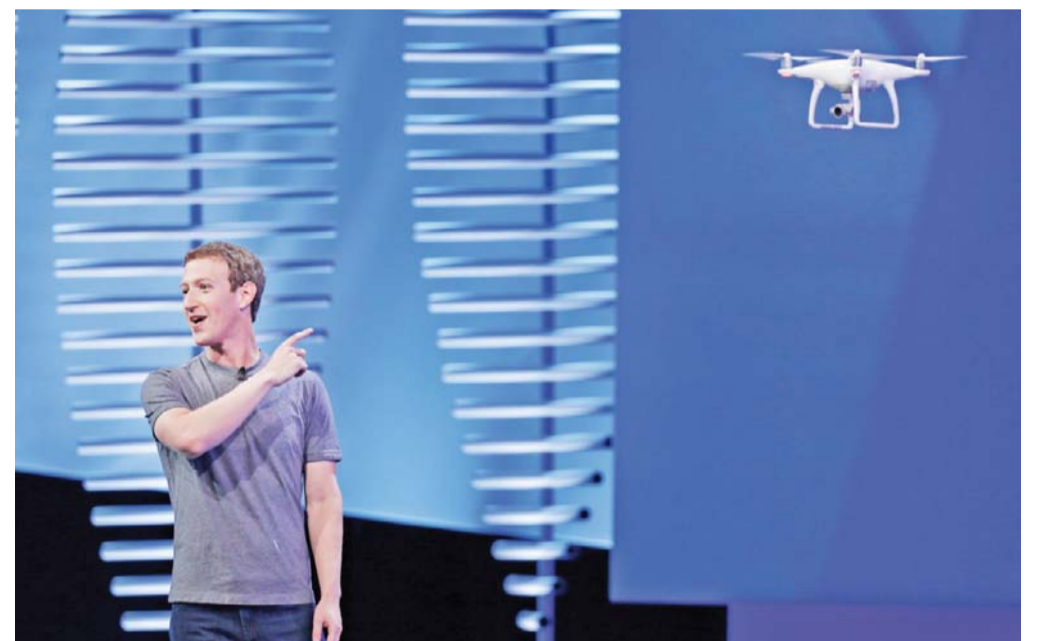
The bots could help Facebook over time monetize its messaging applications and get a start on what some see as a new way of interacting with the digital world, potentially shortcutting mobile applications and sidestepping search. "Our goal with artificial intelligence is to build systems that are better than people at perception - seeing, hearing, language and so on," Zuckerberg said while laying out a long-term vision for Facebook.

A look at the number and types of services that titans such as Facebook, Google and Apple have rolled out in the last couple of years, it appears the companies are "trying to dominate the customers' mobile moments," Forrester analyst Julie Ask told AFP.

Getting Smarter

Artificial intelligence is already used in Messenger to recognize faces in pictures, suggesting recipients for messages and for filtering out spam texts. "Soon, we are going to be able to do even more," Zuckerberg said. He promised a future in which Facebook AI would be able to understand what is in pictures, video or news articles and use insights to recommend content members of the social network might like.

Bot-building capabilities will be in a test mode with Facebook approving creations before they are released, according to vice president of messaging products David Marcus. Some of the latest tools include one for the creation of "high-end,



SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg points to a drone flying behind him during his keynote address at the F8 Facebook Developer Conference on Tuesday. — AP

self-learning bots," along with ways for them to be brought to people's attention at Messenger, Marcus said. "If you want to build more complex bots, you can now use our bot engine," Marcus told a packed audience of developers. "You feed it samples of conversation, and it's better over time. You can build your bot today."

The list of partners launching Messenger bots included Business Insider, which said it will use the technology to deliver news stories to people in real-time. "We are excited about this new offering because we know that messaging apps are exploding in popularity," Business Insider said in a story at its website announcing the move. Cloud computing star Salesforce planned to use the platform to help businesses have "deeper, more personalized and one-to-one customer journeys within the chat experience," said Salesforce president and chief product officer Alex Dayon.

Bridges, Not Walls

Zuckerberg laid out a future for Facebook that, aside from Messenger, included ramping up live video streaming and diving into virtual reality. "We think we are at the edge of the gold-

en age of video," Zuckerberg said. Facebook opened its Live platform to allow developers to stream video content from their applications to audiences at the social network. Zuckerberg demonstrated with a drone that flew over those seated, streaming live video to Facebook while he spoke.

Messenger and Live will be built out further in coming years, along with virtual reality technology at Facebook-owned Oculus, according to Zuckerberg. When his daughter takes her first steps, Zuckerberg said he planned to record it in 360-degree video so family and friends can experience it in virtual reality as if they were there for the moment. At one point, Zuckerberg's comments took on a political tone, with the Facebook chief maintaining that the mission to connect the world is more important than ever given rhetoric about building walls and fearing those who are different.

"If the world starts to turn inward, then our community will have to work even harder to bring people together," Zuckerberg said. "Instead of building walls, we can build bridges," he added, in an apparent reference to the fiery rhetoric of Donald Trump. — AFP

LATEST KINDLE MOSTLY WANTS TO DISAPPEAR

NEW YORK: Will loyal fans of e-books be willing to pay tablet prices for dedicated e-readers? Amazon is about to find out. The e-commerce giant's latest Kindle is its smallest and lightest yet. But it's also the most expensive, at \$290 - almost a hundred bucks more than the current champ, the \$200 Kindle Voyage. Now the company is betting that its sleek frame and a cover that doubles as a rechargeable battery will attract dedicated e-book users to its eighth generation device, called the Kindle Oasis.

Amazon says the new Kindle is 30 percent thinner and 20 percent lighter than previous Kindles. It's also asymmetrical, with a grip on one side for one-handed reading. (Lefties can just flip the device over.) The company's goal? "To make the device disappear," said Neal Lindsay, vice president of Amazon Devices, so that people can read without distraction.

The e-reader landscape has experienced a few plot twists since Amazon introduced the first Kindle in 2007. Sales surged for a few years, but started leveling off around 2012 as e-readers grew more commonplace. They even dipped slightly in 2013 but then rose 3.8 percent to \$3.37 billion dollars in 2014, according to the most recent stats available from the Association of American Publishers.

Although the market has matured, it's still a growing category for Amazon year-over-year, the company says. (It doesn't, though, release sales figures.) Meanwhile, Amazon has launched several other

devices, including its Kindle Fire tablets, Fire TV streaming stick and set top box, and the Echo smart speaker. But dedicated e-readers help drive e-book sales at Amazon, which publishes many itself via

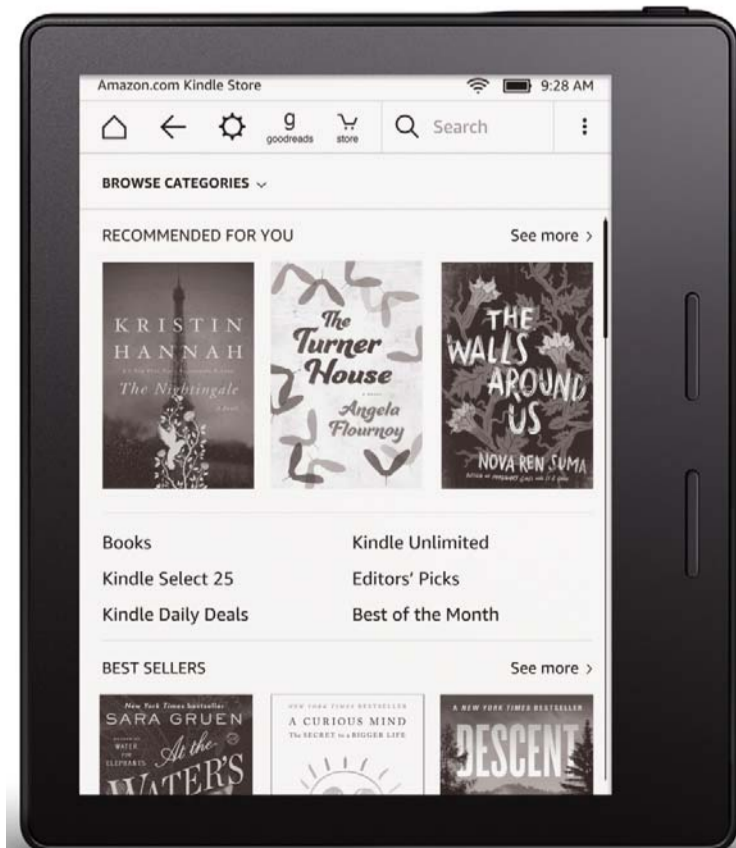
Kindle Direct Publishing. They can also serve as a gateway drug that helps draw people to other goods and deals on Amazon, including its Prime membership program. "If you pick up a Kindle and read

a book, eventually that may translate into watching Prime instant videos, joining Prime, or buying a physical book," said RW Baird analyst Colin Sebastian. Like previous Kindles, the Oasis features a black-and-white screen designed to make reading easier. It features two batteries - one in the e-reader and another in its cover - which together stretch the battery life to 9 weeks of "regular" reading (30 minutes a day by Amazon's definition) or months on standby. The Oasis and its cover charge simultaneously via one port.

You might wonder why Amazon keeps making more expensive Kindles, given that they do a lot less than the average tablet. In essence, they're intended to keep a demanding bunch happy. E-reader users are on their devices 4 to 5 hours a week on average, said Peter Hildrick-Smith, president of the consulting firm Codex. They're far more dedicated than tablet readers, who only manage about an hour a week.

With e-readers like the Oasis, Amazon is "looking to keep their e-reading on the cutting edge," Hildrick-Smith said.

"What it's not doing is appealing to people who aren't already reading e-books." Global preorders for the Oasis started yesterday; the device will ship on April 27. Amazon is still selling its basic Kindle for \$80, the Kindle Paperwhite with a high resolution display and adjustable front light for \$120, and the Kindle Voyage with page press buttons for \$200. — AP



Amazon says the new Kindle is 30 percent thinner and 20 percent lighter than previous Kindles. It's also asymmetrical, with a grip on one side for one-handed reading. — AP

HUMAN GENETIC RESEARCH WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

BEIJING: Chinese genetic scientists must not be put off sensitive research by ethical concerns, the team behind a controversial study on modified human embryos said yesterday as debate erupted over the paper. Researchers from Guangzhou Medical University said they used a gene-editing technique known as CRISPR to artificially induce a mutation in human cells and make them resistant to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Their paper, which appeared last week in the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics*, is only the world's second published account of gene editing in human embryos.

Critics said the study-intended as a proof-of-principle exercise-was unnecessary and lacked medical justification, and strongly cautioned against the broader ethical implications of the slippery slope of human genome modification. "This paper doesn't look like it offers much

more than anecdotal evidence that (CRISPR) works in human embryos, which we already knew," George Daley, a stem-cell biologist at Children's Hospital Boston, told the prominent science journal *Nature*.

It demonstrated that "the science is going forward before there's been the general consensus after deliberation that such an approach is medically warranted," he added. Tetsuya Ishii, a bioethicist at Japan's Hokkaido University, denounced the research as "just playing with human embryos", *Nature* said. In a statement issued by the hospital where they carried out their research, the Guangzhou team brushed aside such concerns, focusing instead on the "incalculable" size of the future market for disease treatments.

"The assessments of those outside the field are not authoritative, and the research environment will continue to evolve," they said. "For us what is most

important is that we diligently complete our research and stick to the path we believe in, acquiring independent intellectual property rights... so that we do not have to defer to others." Such perseverance, they said will ensure "our own position in the international community", adding: "The future market for the treatment of diseases through gene editing is incalculable."

Speaking to China's state-run *Global Times* newspaper, the paper's lead author Fan Yong said: "It is the pioneers that will make the rules in this field." Han Bin, the director of China's National Center for Gene Research, told the paper-which often takes a nationalistic tone-that the technology's potential therapeutic benefits for all diseases caused by inherited variation, including cancer, should outweigh any qualms. Instead of following other countries' ethical stances, China should formulate its

own standards and regulations, the *Global Times* cited him as saying.

Ethics committee

China is quickly cementing a reputation as a leader in the fields of genetic research and cloning, showing a willingness to forge ahead even as others hesitate over ethical issues. The world's biggest cloning factory is under construction in the northern port of Tianjin, with plans to churn out everything from pets to premium beef cattle. The chief executive of Boyalife Group, the Chinese firm behind it, told AFP his company had technology advanced enough to replicate humans.

The head of its South Korean partner has been quoted as saying it preferred mainland locations to avoid bioethics laws elsewhere that would ban the use of human eggs. The Guangzhou Medical University study used flawed embryos

not viable for fertility treatment, and had been approved by the university's ethics committee. Four out of the 26 embryos were successfully modified, while a number exhibited unexpected mutations. All of them were destroyed three days later.

"The purpose of this study was to evaluate the technology and establish principles for the introduction of precise genetic modifications in early human embryos," the *Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics* paper read. The legality of human embryo research varies by country, and there is no international consensus on what ought to be allowed. In the US, the influential National Institutes of Health are banned from funding such studies, while Britain's independent fertility regulator only issued its first licence for human embryo modification research in February, for a study on infertility and miscarriages.—AFP

VEGETABLE FAT NOT THE ROUTE TO HEALTHY HEART, STUDY SAYS

RESEARCHERS POKING HOLES IN 'FAT IS BAD' HYPOTHESIS

PARIS: Replacing animal fat in the human diet with vegetable oil seems not to lower heart disease risk, and might even boost it, according to a study published yesterday that challenges a cornerstone of dietary advice. Switching from saturated to unsaturated Omega-6 fats did result in lower blood cholesterol in a trial with nearly 10,000 participants, it said, but not the expected reduction in heart disease deaths.

In fact, those with a greater reduction in cholesterol "had a higher rather than a lower risk of death," according to the research published by *The Medical Journal BMJ*. For 50-odd years, animal fat in meat, butter, cheese and cream has been the bad boy of the diet world-blamed for boosting artery-clogging cholesterol linked to heart disease and stroke. In 1961, the American Heart Association recommended vegetable oils replace saturated fats—a position it still holds even as some research has started to challenge that hypothesis. The World Health Organization also advises that saturated fats should comprise less than 10 percent of total energy intake.

For decades now, the world has viewed full-fat milk and bacon with suspicion and replaced pork with chicken, and butter with plant-based mar-

garines and cooking oils. But in the past few years, researchers have started poking holes in the "fat is bad" hypothesis. The new study, led by Christopher Ramsden at the National Institutes of Health, re-analysed data from a randomized controlled trial conducted 45 years ago with 9,423 residents of state mental hospitals and nursing home in Minnesota. This is a type of experiment-generally considered highly reliable-in which people are randomly divided into groups to receive, or not, the treatment being studied.

'Less certain than we thought'

Part of the Minnesota group had their intake of saturated fat replaced with corn oil, while the rest ate a diet high in animal fat. "As expected, the diet enriched with linoleic acid (a fatty acid found in plant oils) lowered cholesterol levels," said a statement by *The BMJ*. But "this did not translate to improved survival. In fact, participants who had greater reduction in blood cholesterol had higher, rather than lower, risk of death."

The team also looked at other randomized controlled trials, and found no evidence anywhere to support the hypothesis that vegetable oils curb heart disease. "The benefits of choosing

polyunsaturated fat over saturated fat seem a little less certain than we thought," Lennert Veerman, a lecturer at the University of Queensland School of Public Health commented on the study. Further research is needed, he added, to determine whether all Omega-6 type fats provide similar results. "While we wait for further clarification, we should continue to eat more fish, fruits, vegetables and whole grains," Veerman wrote.

In January, updated US dietary guidelines reiterated that saturated fats should make up less than 10 percent of a day's food intake—a recommendation that now "will be under increased scrutiny," according to Veerman. "If blood cholesterol values are not a reliable indicator of risk of cardiovascular disease, then a careful review of the evidence that underpins dietary recommendations is warranted," he wrote in *The BMJ*. Other experts stressed there was an established link between high cholesterol and the risk of heart attack or stroke. "More research and longer studies are needed to assesses whether or not eating less saturated fat can reduce your risk of cardiovascular death," said Jeremy Pearson of the British Heart Foundation.—AFP

US CONGRESS APPROVES BILL ON ZIKA DRUG DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers on Tuesday approved a bill to provide financial incentives to companies developing treatments for the Zika virus, and the White House said President Barack Obama was expected to sign the legislation although it is insufficient to meet the challenge. The measure allows the Food and Drug Administration to include Zika drug developers in the agency's priority review voucher program. The program encourages manufacturers to study treatments for diseases that might not be profitable by expediting the regulatory review of a more lucrative drug in their research pipeline.

The House of Representatives passed the bill on a voice vote, without a roll call, weeks after the same measure was approved by the Senate. White House spokeswoman Katie Hill said Obama was expected to sign the bill, which she called a "small step" that could encourage the private sector to tackle Zika. "But it contains no funding and is ultimately insufficient on its own, since it doesn't provide the \$1.9 billion in funding that our public health experts have said is needed right now to prepare Americans for the imminent local transmission of Zika in this country," she said in a statement.

Democrats and administration officials are urging the Republican-controlled Congress to grant nearly \$1.9 billion in emergency funds to combat the spread of Zika. In a temporary fix, the White House said last week that it would redirect \$589 million in allocated funds to prepare for the mosquito that carries the disease to emerge in the continental United States. According to the World Health Organization, there is a strong scientific consensus that the Zika virus can cause the rare birth defect microcephaly in newborns. But the link between the virus and the birth defects has not been scientifically established.

On Tuesday, Brazil confirmed 1,113 cases of microcephaly and considers most to be related to Zika infections in



WASHINGTON: Dr Anne Schuchat, principal deputy director of the Center for Disease Control, left, and Dr Anthony Fauci, Director of NIH/NIAID, answers questions about the Zika virus during a news briefing at the White House in Washington.—AP

the mother. Drugmakers who are working on Zika-related drugs, or considering such research, include Sanofi SA, GlaxoSmithKline Plc, Inovio Pharmaceuticals Inc and Takeda Pharmaceutical Co Ltd. Zika was first detected in Brazil last year and is spreading through the Americas. The World Health Organization had declared a global health emergency due to the virus's possible link to microcephaly in babies and Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare neurological disorder, in adults.

On Monday, top health officials said the mosquito that spreads the virus is now present in about 30 US states, making local outbreaks a possibility. They have also predicted hundreds of thousands of people would be infected in Puerto Rico when the mosquito season kicks in this sum-

mer. A pharmaceutical company may be given a priority review voucher to develop a drug for an infectious disease, in this case Zika, which may not generate much profit for the manufacturer. The voucher gives the company the right to an accelerated review by the FDA of any other, more lucrative, drug in its pipeline.

Developing a new drug can take years and cost millions of dollars. A standard FDA review takes at least 10 months to complete - longer if the agency requires additional information. Being able to shave time off that process and get a profitable drug onto the market faster can be worth millions of dollars to a manufacturer. Under the agency's priority review program, companies who submit a drug for review that is intended to treat serious conditions or whose drug

shows a significant improvement in safety or effectiveness over existing treatments is eligible to be reviewed in six months, at least four months faster than usual.

A priority review voucher gives a company the right to a six-month review on any product, regardless of whether it meets the conditions normally required to receive an accelerated review. It also gives the company the right to sell the voucher to another company. The law currently makes any company eligible for a priority review voucher that is developing a drug for one of more than 20 tropical diseases listed under the voucher program. These include malaria, cholera, leprosy, dengue, tuberculosis, and Ebola. The FDA has the authority to add other infectious diseases to the list which primarily affects poor countries.—Reuters



CAMPINA GRANDE: Photo shows two-week-old Sophia, born with microcephaly, during a physical therapy session at the Pedro I hospital in Campina Grande, Brazil.—AP

RIO'S ZIKA OUTBREAK MATCHES ASIAN VIRUS

MIAMI: The mosquito-borne Zika virus behind last year's outbreak in Rio de Janeiro closely resembles another strain from Asia and may have been introduced by Pacific Island athletes, researchers said Tuesday. Their report in the journal *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* offers the first detailed analysis of the outbreak in a Latin American city, and gives further weight to the hypothesis that Zika may have been brought to Brazil by foreign visitors who came to compete in a canoeing championship in late 2014. The researchers also raised new concerns about the potential for an even worse Zika outbreak during this summer's Olympic Games in Rio, saying many of those studied did not remember being bitten by mosquitoes and that transmission of Zika infection in clusters of people appeared to be commonplace.

"At this point, health services must be alerted to the potential for an even larger epidemic during the summer of 2015-2016 spreading to additional locations and affecting the susceptible proportion of the population that was not exposed during the last transmission season," the study warned. Zika virus is strongly suspected to be behind a surge in microcephaly, a birth defect in which babies are born with unusually small heads, although a definitive link between microcephaly and Zika has not yet been proven. Brazil has seen thousands of suspected cases.

'Northeast' theory

While still "speculative," 10 randomly selected samples were "clustered within the Asian genotype," suggesting the virus "was possibly introduced to Rio de Janeiro during the VI World Sprint Championship canoe race in August 2014," the study said. The race included teams from the Pacific countries of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Cook Islands and Easter Island, where the virus was present in 2014. Researchers have yet to confirm the exact route and timeline for Zika's entry into Latin America. A separate study published last month in the *Journal Science* sequenced the genomes of seven Brazilian Zika samples, taken from March to November 2015, and suggested that Zika may have arrived even earlier, perhaps between May and December 2013, on an inbound flight from French Polynesia or Southeast Asia.

Another key finding from the PLOS

study was evidence of cases in Rio de Janeiro—the first city with a high proportion of cases confirmed by molecular diagnosis-as early as January 2015. Brazilian officials first notified the public of the Zika virus in May 2015. "Our findings have demonstrated that Zika virus was circulating in Rio de Janeiro at least five months before its detection was announced by the health authorities," said the study, led by Patricia Brasil of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation in Rio de Janeiro.

The study is based on a total of 364 patients who suffered an acute skin rash from January through July 2015. Since Zika is related to viruses that cause dengue fever and chikungunya, and some symptoms can be similar, researchers relied on blood samples available from 262 of the patients to test for the virus. They confirmed Zika in 119 of the samples. None of those tested had traveled recently, confirming that the infections had been caught locally. Eleven percent of the cases were diagnosed prior to May 2015, when the virus was first reported in northeast Brazil. That challenges the theory that the virus entered Brazil from the northeast before spreading to the rest of the country, researchers said.

Itchy symptoms

Itchy skin was the second most commonly reported symptom-present in 79 percent of patients with a confirmed Zika infection-and the problem lasted for several days. Currently, itchiness is not listed among the official symptoms of Zika, but it should be added by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), researchers urged. While fever and rash are formally considered symptoms of Zika, only about one third of confirmed patients recalled experiencing a brief fever at the start of their infection.

Nearly all the patients had a rash. Other frequent symptoms were exhaustion, headache and joint pain. Although experts say Zika is primarily transmitted by mosquitoes, just 38 percent of patients remembered having been bitten. One quarter of confirmed cases came from households where more than one person was infected, suggesting that either mosquito density was very high, or that the virus was passing from person to person, perhaps via sexual contact.—AFP



CALI: Photo shows an Aedes Aegypti mosquito photographed on human skin in a laboratory of the International Training and Medical Research Training Center (CIDEIM) in Cali, Colombia. The mosquito-borne Zika virus behind last year's outbreak in Rio de Janeiro closely resembles another strain from Asia and may have been introduced by Pacific Island athletes, researchers said.—AFP

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTORS WARN AGAINST ANTIBIOTICS IN MEAT

LONDON: A group of institutional investors managing a combined \$1 trillion on Tuesday called on restaurant chains to end the systematic use of antibiotics in their meat and poultry supply chains. The companies targeted by the group of 54 investors include J D Wetherspoon, McDonald's and Domino's Pizza. The investors said the use of antibiotics in livestock causes resistant bacteria to develop, which in turn can spread to humans.

"The investors are responding to warnings from the World Health Organization (WHO) that

irresponsible antibiotics practices are leading the world towards a 'post-antibiotic era' where routine operations will no longer be possible and many infections no longer treatable," they said in a statement. The investors, brought together by the Farm Animal Investment Risk & Return (FAIRR) initiative, said none of the companies targeted had any comprehensive policy of tackling the overuse of antibiotics and this posed "a significant risk to their investment," they said.

"These large food companies are key ingredi-

ents in the portfolios of most of our pensions and savings - thus it is a case of proper risk management to ask them to work out how they will meet this challenge," Jeremy Coller of Coller Capital, one of the signatories, said in the statement. Investors fear the cost of expected tighter regulation from governments in the face of antibiotics overuse, but also warned that the reputation of restaurant chains stands to suffer as they are "contributing to a global threat to human health which currently kills an estimated 700,000 people per year".—AFP

THE COST OF SAVING LIVES? UNDER \$5 PER PERSON

PARIS: The lives of millions of women and children can be saved every year with an investment of under \$5 per person on basic healthcare and contraception, a study into pregnancy-related deaths showed. Nearly six million children younger than five and 300,000 women died in 2015, according to research in The Lancet medical journal. Ninety-five percent of maternal and child deaths occur in 74 low- and middle-income countries.

"Many of these deaths could be prevented if high-impact and affordable solutions reached the populations that needed them most," study leader Robert Black of John Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health said in a statement. "Our analysis shows that expanding access to care to keep more mothers and children alive and healthy is feasible, and a highly cost-effective investment." Four million lives could be saved each

year by reaching 90 percent of those in need with basic services such as pregnancy and delivery care, childhood nutrition, and treatment for infectious diseases like pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria, said the team.

This was broken down into 1.5 million newborn deaths, 1.5 million child deaths, 149,000 newborn deaths and almost 850,000 stillbirths. Access to contraception on its own, could reduce 67,000 maternal

deaths, 440,000 newborn deaths, 473,000 child deaths and 564,000 stillbirths, they estimated. The cost would be \$6.2 billion (5.4 billion euros) in low-income countries, or \$6.7 per person who needs it. In lower middle-income countries, the required amount is \$12.4 billion or \$4.70 per person, and in middle-income countries \$8 billion or \$3.90 per person. Overall, the cost per head would be \$4.70, the team said. —AFP



NEW YORK: A Weed World Candies truck sits parked on lower Broadway in New York City. The truck, which is covered in close-ups of marijuana plants and lollipops with funky names, sells what they purport to be "edible marijuana candy" that contain some amount of THC and claim to taste like marijuana. Weed World Candies operates trucks in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. With amounts of THC so small or negligible, authorities have generally ignored the operation. —AFP

LEGALIZED POT SPOTS

PARIS: The debate over legalizing marijuana fired back up in France on Tuesday after a minister said cannabis should be decriminalized. Here are places where marijuana is already allowed for recreational or medical reasons.

Uruguay

The South American nation became in 2013 the first country in the world to legalize marijuana, with a plan to distribute it through pharmacies for \$1.40 (1.20 euros) a gram. Under Uruguayan law, citizens and residents can buy up to 40 grams (1.4 ounces) of pot a month from the pharmacies, grow it themselves at home, or join cannabis clubs where members jointly tend to the plants. The government has licensed two private companies to produce and distribute marijuana.

The Netherlands

Long the historic destination for those looking to score some weed, the Netherlands in general, and Amsterdam in particular have tolerated the sale and use

of marijuana in iconic coffee shops since 1976. Cultivation and bulk sale of the drug remain illegal however, and are still controlled by criminal organizations.

Spain

Spanish law allows for the private production and consumption of cannabis by adults, though its sale is still illegal.

United States

Four western US states—Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington—along with the nation's capital Washington DC have legalized marijuana for recreational use. Colorado and Washington led the way in 2012, but cannabis is still illegal under federal law. Another 19 states have legalized marijuana for medical use. In 2015, Colorado earned \$135 million in taxes and licensing fees on nearly \$1 billion in pot sales, according to The Denver Post. The state of Washington took in \$70 million on statewide pot revenue totaling \$257 million, a number that fell below expectations owing to a supply shortage. —AFP



LAKWOOD: Fifteen-year-old son, Jack Linn wears a medical marijuana patch on his arm in Lakewood, Colo. Jack, who has cerebral palsy, is not allowed to wear a skin patch delivering a cannabis-derived treatment to school. A new Colorado law allowing medical marijuana use at public schools will be looked at by state lawmakers because no school districts are allowing it even though the law says they can. —AP

GERMS, NOT TRUE LOVE, MAKE HUMANS MATE FOR LIFE: STUDY

WHY DID HUMANS BECOME MONOGAMOUS?

PARIS: Why did humans become monogamous, apparently rejecting the promiscuity that is natural to most animals? Was it morality? Religion? Maybe love? The answer is germs, researchers said Tuesday, arguing that the havoc caused by sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) convinced our ancestors it would be better to mate for life. A research duo from Canada and Germany observed that STIs flourished among large groups of people living in the villages, towns and cities that arose after prehistoric hunter-gatherers settled down to farm.

Left unchecked, spreading diseases can affect individual fertility and a group's overall reproduction rate. Falling population numbers would force a rethink of sexual behavior—which in turn gives rise to social mores. The researchers developed a mathematical model of hunter-gatherer demographics and likely STI spread among them. They used it "to show

how growing STI disease burden in larger residential group sizes can foster the emergence of socially imposed monogamy in human mating." In small groups of no more than 30 individuals, with no chance for epidemic spread, STI outbreaks are generally short-lived, the team said. The reduced risk may explain why small groups, both among early humans and today, are often polygynous (when men have more than one partner).

'Evolutionary puzzle'

Socially-imposed human monogamy has long been considered an "evolutionary puzzle," according to the research duo. It requires societies to put in place checks and structures—a police and court system, for example—to uphold societal mores. "Yet, many larger human societies transitioned from polygyny to socially imposed monogamy beginning

with the advent of agriculture and larger residential groups," said the paper. That riddle may now be solved. The research showed that our natural environment, with factors such as disease spread, "can strongly influence the development of social norms, and in particular our group-oriented judgments," study author Chris Bauch of the University of Waterloo in Canada said.

But this did not necessarily mean that humans would become wildly promiscuous if drugs were to make STIs a thing of the past, he added. "Modern societies are more complicated... and there is probably more than one reason that explains socially imposed monogamy," Bauch said by email. "I think it is premature to speculate that marriage will disappear, or that polygyny will return, if we solve the problem of STIs." The research was published in the journal Nature Communications. —AFP

BRAIN INJURY IN 43 PERCENT OF US EX-FOOTBALL PLAYERS

MIAMI: Some 43 percent of retired American football players studied show signs of traumatic brain injury, raising new concerns about the long-term effects of hitting and tackling, researchers said. The study involved 40 retired National Football League (NFL) players, who underwent thinking and memory tests as well as brain scans. "This is one of the largest studies to date in living retired NFL players and one of the first to demonstrate significant objective evidence for traumatic brain injury in these former players," said study author Francis Conidi of the Florida State University College of Medicine. "The rate of traumatic brain injury was significantly higher in the players than that found in the general population."

The players ranged in age from 27 to 56 and played an average of seven years in the league. Most had been out of the NFL for fewer than five years. They reported an average of eight concussions. Around a third of the players said they had sustained several hits that were not strong enough to be diagnosed as concussions. The findings, based on sensitive MRI scans called diffusion tensor imaging, were released ahead of a presentation at the American Academy of Neurology's 68th Annual Meeting in Vancouver, Canada.

The advanced MRI scans measured the movement of water molecules in the brain's white matter—which controls how the brain functions—to determine the amount of damage. "Seventeen players, or 43 percent, had levels of movement 2.5 standard deviations below those of healthy people of the same age, which is considered evidence of traumatic brain injury with a less than one percent error rate," the study said. "On the tests of thinking skills, about 50 percent had significant problems on executive function, 45 percent on learning or memory, 42 percent on attention and concentration."

Longer careers tended to put players at higher risk of TBI, but researchers established no link between higher concussion numbers and brain injury. The findings could help scientists better understand the brain condition known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy, which is associated with aggression, dementia, depression and suicide. "This research in living players sheds light on the possible pathological changes consistent with chronic traumatic encephalopathy that may be taking place," Conidi said. The latest evidence of widespread brain injury among football players, the findings may increase pressure on the NFL, which has long been under fire for downplaying the effects of concussions in the most popular US sport. —AFP

IRANIAN DRINK DRIVER NUMBERS 'ALARMING'

TEHRAN: Police in Tehran arrested 2,900 drink drivers last year, a top official said Tuesday, describing the figures, which come despite the Islamic republic's official prohibition of alcohol, as "alarming." The offenders were detained in the 12 months up to March 2016, the Iranian capital's prosecutor general Abbas Jafarabadi said, according to the judiciary's official news service. Alcohol has been banned in Iran since the revolution in 1979 and those who break the law can be fined, lashed or serve prison time. Only the country's Christian minority has the right to produce wine for religious purposes.

However, demand for all types of drink fuels smuggling from neighboring Iraq and Turkey. The inflated prices charged by illegal networks has also spurred cheaper locally produced beer, wine and spirits. According to official figures, there are 200,000 alcoholics in Iran among the 79 million population. Some experts believe that more than one million Iranians regularly consume alcohol. In recent years police have used breath tests in roadside checks, recognising the magnitude of the problem. The fine for offenders has also been doubled from 2,000,000 rials (around \$60) to 4,000,000 rials. The report that quoted Jafarabadi did not detail any nationwide drink driving arrest statistics. —AFP

ASPIRIN PREVENTS HEART DISEASE, COLON CANCER

WASHINGTON: A panel of US experts has recommended taking a daily aspirin as a strategy for preventing heart disease and colorectal cancer in certain people in their 50s and 60s. The guidelines issued by the US Preventive Services Task Force are specifically aimed at people who face an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, but who do not have elevated risks of bleeding, which can be a dangerous side effect of aspirin.

This group of people, aged 50-69, should "consider tak-

ing aspirin for primary prevention of cardiovascular disease and colorectal cancer," said the guidelines published in the Annals of Internal Medicine. The decision should be made with a doctor, they said. Low-dose aspirin might be a helpful therapy for people beginning in their 50s "who have a 10 percent or greater 10-year cardiovascular disease risk, are not at increased risk for bleeding, have a life expectancy of at least 10 years, and are willing to take low-dose aspirin daily for at least 10 years."

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

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Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
د. فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

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'AL-MULLA EXCHANGE CHAMPIONS TROPHY 2016' HAS A TRAIL BLAZING FINISH

The first edition of 'Al-Mulla Exchange Champions Trophy 2016' ended on Thursday with Team Abbasiya lifting the coveted winner's trophy. The tournament spanning over a period of 2 and half months had 32 teams participating to take away the top prize money of KD 750 besides the coveted trophy and medals to each player. This is one of the biggest prize money ever given for a cricket tournament in Kuwait. In a nail biting final at TACK Entertainment City Cricket Ground in Doha, Team Abbasiya defeated tournament favorites Friends Kuwait by 6 wickets to clinch the 1st Edition of Al-Mulla Exchange Champions Trophy. Rajesh Gairola, Divisional General Manager, Al-Mulla Exchanges handed over the trophies to the winners and runners up team in the presence of high number of spectators and other Al-Mulla Exchange officials. Speaking at the event, Rajesh Gairola said "Cricket epitomizes the dreams and aspirations especially of the Indian sub-continent at large. Al-Mulla Exchange by conducting this tournament has provided a good platform for players to exhibit their skills and take the game to the next level. We wish the winners and all who participated in this tournament the very best". The tournament was organized by Al-Mulla International Exchange Kuwait without any participation amount being paid by any team. Al-Mulla International Exchange Kuwait has always believed in giving back to the society at large and organization of a sport event has only added one more to the long list of such activities that are carried out by the company as a part of its Corporate Responsibility.

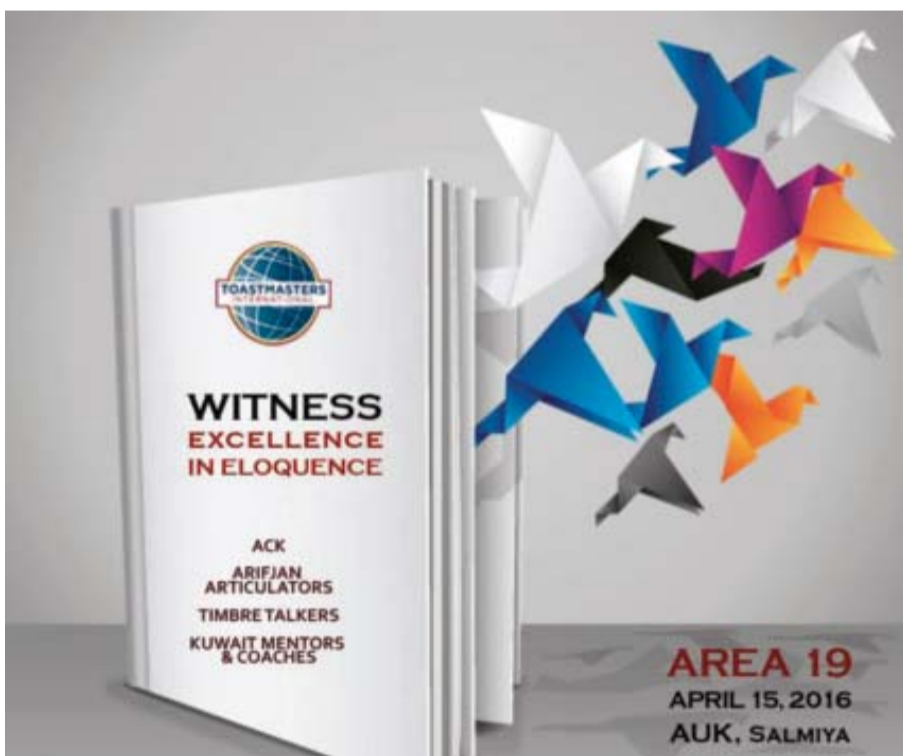


ESF IN LONDON FOR ENGLAND EXPERIENCE

The English School Fahaheel recently took Secondary students on a Cultural trip to England on the 24th - 29th March 2016, where they had an unforgettable experience staying in the West End right next to the Natural History Museum and Victorian Albert Museum. The fun filled trip included a shopping trip to Harrods and a photo stop at Buckingham Palace, a haunting experience beneath London Bridge which required students to put on their brave face as they journeyed through the London Tombs hearing the horrible stories that took place including the fate of William Wallace.

Students also took a leisurely boat cruise along the River Thames, passing London's many famous landmarks. The highlight of the trip was the England Experience. From the moment the students arrive at England's training home (Burton on Trent which is just outside London), they were treated like a professional. A FA Licensed Coach took them to the outstanding full size pitch for an hour's training on the same surface used by the England teams. They were also whisked off for a behind-the-scenes football tour of St. George's Park to complete an unforgettable

England Experience. Don't think the 5 Star treatment stopped here. The students also stayed at the same Hilton Hotel where England's Football Team live temporarily and they had access to the world class facilities at the Hilton hotel. To wrap up the unforgettable experience students watched a professional football match which was televised live. The English School Fahaheel would like to thank teachers, students and parents for making the England trip a great success.



ACK HOSTS 'ELOQUENCE UNPLUGGED' ANNUAL CONTESTS

From 2:00 pm to 7:00 pm at Australian college/ of Kuwait (ACK), Toastmasters who have conquered fear of public speaking will be in action vying for the best speaker title in four different categories in Toastmasters Area 19 annual contests, aptly titled 'Eloquence Unplugged'. Area 19 Toastmasters, comprises of 4 clubs, namely, ACK, Arifjan Articulators, Timbre Talkers and Kuwait Mentors and Coaches have more than 100 members. Two contestants from each of the four clubs will compete in four categories, namely, International, Humorous, Table Topics and Evaluation speeches. Two best speakers from each category will be selected by an eminent panel of judges and will move on to contest in the Division Level which will be held on the 29th of April 2016. Area 19 Director Alfiya Lakdawala making arrangements for the event along with her team of leaders said "Toastmasters contests provide a great opportunity to witness creativity at its best, for all those who want to improve their communication and leadership skills. We extend a warm welcome to one and all to the Eloquence Unplugged event. Toastmasters movement started from

humble beginnings in 1924 at the basement of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in California, USA. Ralph C Smedley held the first meeting of what would eventually become Toastmasters International (TMI) the date was October 22, 1924. TMI has grown to become a world leader in helping people become more competent and comfortable in front of a crowd/ audience. Survey after survey shows that presentation skills are crucial for success in the workplace. Many people pay high fees for seminars to gain the skills and confidence necessary to face an audience. Toastmasters, being a non-profit organization, provides a self-phased learning environment at a very negligible cost, for people to hone their skills through feedbacks and encouragement and without the fear of failure. The qualifications earned at Toastmasters are held in high regard in business circles. There are around 50 English and Arabic speaking clubs in Kuwait. More than 500 people enjoy their journey as a toastmaster in Kuwait. For more information log on to www.toastmasters.org. Membership enquiries can be made to 9955 9684.





Dr Ghalia Al-Mutairi visits Sebamed's booth.



Al-Sanabel Al-Thahabiya and Sebamed representatives explain ways to use proper skincare.



Sebamed is honored by Kuwait University.

'BEAT DIABETES' STOPS BY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

'Beat Diabetes,' a Health Awareness Campaign held in Kuwait in celebration of the World Health Day, continued its activities with an

event held recently at Kuwait University's College of Social Sciences. The event is organized by Health Promotion Department at the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Several Health Ministry departments as well as private establishments and companies were on hand. Health officials gave advice to the public on how to maintain

good health in general and how to deal with diabetes in particular. Head of MOH's Health Media Office Dr Ghalia Al-Mutairi was on hand and followed up with activities.



The Ministry of Health's Media Office's booth.



The booth of the 'Prevention is a Goal' voluntary team.



Kuwait Diabetes Society's mobile clinic was on hand.



PALMS BEACH HOTEL & SPA MAIN SPONSOR OF AUTISM WALKATHON

Believing in the effective role of Autism Awareness, The Palms Beach Hotel and Spa is proud to sponsor the Autism Walkathon, which is recognized as a voluntary act on the World Autism Day, which is organized by Autism Partnership.

The aim of the walkathon was to raise a positive message that expresses the seriousness of Autism and the importance of the social and voluntary activities to increase the awareness of autism.

The Autism walkathon took place from

Kuwait Scientific Center until Marina Crescent under the patronage of management and employees of Palms Beach Hotel and Spa, headed by Managing Director Ghosson Al-Khaled along with General Manager Rabie Al-Sukhon.

The walkathon succeeded in to achieve certain goals started by the great participation for number of civil society institutions and specialists, also the event success in focusing on the importance of promoting voluntary work in society and raised the aware-

ness of autism cause. At the end of the event, the attendees of the hotel team are expressed their satisfaction while participated in the event and being positive part of the event success.



FSI DELEGATES VISIT CENTER OF CONTINUING EDUCATION AT AUK

Delegates from the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) visited the Center of Continuing Education (CCE) at the American University of Kuwait (AUK) to review the progress of the Intensive Arabic Language Program, a language training course created for the US State Department employees in Kuwait. Dr David Red, Director of Near East, Central and South Asian Languages - FSI Washington - USA, and Hani Alam, Arabic Regional Language Training Coordinator - US Embassy Rabat - Morocco, met with Buthaina Al-Khubaizi, Director of CCE and AUK President, Professor Nizar Hamzeh.

CCE began collaborating with FSI in 2012 to create and offer the program,

which is customized to enhance their professional and practical communication, and aims to develop the participants' Arabic language proficiency. The course content includes one-on-one conversations with the instructor, field trips, and presentations, among other dynamic and interactive lessons. "We are pleased to continue offering this intensive program to FSI participants. The training methodology used in the Program offers a highly customized approach, with course content tailored to individual participants. This year, we have a number of participants enrolled in the Program and we are expected to complete the course requirements by June 2016," said Khubaizi.



Lieutenant General Yousef Al-Ansari, Director General of the Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) honored KFSD's sports committee members for winning several trophies during tournaments held recently for teams representing ministries and state departments. Colonel Khalil Al-Amir, Public Relations Director, Brigadier Mohammad Al-Muhaimeed, Acting Director for Firefighting Affairs and other KFSD officials attended the ceremony.

AOU COMMITTED TO APPLY ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS AND QUALITY STANDARDS

Professor Moudi Al-Humoud, President of the Arab Open University (AOU), emphasized AOUs commitment to apply accreditation requirements and quality standards to offer highly qualitative education, which is consistent with laws and regulations applicable in the Arab world and keeps up with all international accelerated technological and scientific developments.

In a press statement on the sidelines of the conclusion of the 1st Coordination Meeting of

the Open and Distant Learning Institutions recently held in Jordan, Humoud pointed out, "AOU takes pride of its achievements and its keenness to be a pioneering in the blended learning approach, which is offered in its eight branches operating in a number of Arab countries, including Kuwait."

The meeting recommended to strive to establish an Arab accreditation and quality body for open and distant learning and emphasize the academic commitment to ways of assess-

ment and examination, and criteria of research papers, projects and assignments in addition to abide by governance systems and requirements of higher education ministries in each country in order to ensure accountability and transparency. The meeting also recommended to strengthen the concept of open and distant learning in Arab communities and disseminate its requirements through available channels.



Professor Moudi Al-Humoud

CLASSIFIEDS



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (14/04/2016 TO 20/04/2016)

Time	Program	Time	Program	Time	Program
12:45 PM	SHARQIA-1 BEFORE I WAKE	2:45 PM	FAN- Hindi	3:30 PM	KUNG FU PANDA 3
3:00 PM	CRIMINAL	5:45 PM	FAN- Hindi	5:45 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)
5:15 PM	BEFORE I WAKE	8:45 PM	FAN- Hindi	8:00 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)
7:30 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)	11:45 PM	FAN- Hindi	10:15 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)
9:45 PM	CRIMINAL			12:30 AM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)
12:05 AM	BEFORE I WAKE	12:45 PM	FANAR-3 CRIMINAL		
		3:15 PM	THE AMERICAN SIDE		
1:00 PM	SHARQIA-2 THE JUNGLE BOOK	5:30 PM	CRIMINAL	11:45 AM	MR. RIGHT
3:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	7:45 PM	OBSERVANCE	2:00 PM	OBSERVANCE
5:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	9:45 PM	THE AMERICAN SIDE	4:30 PM	MR. RIGHT
7:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	12:05 AM	CRIMINAL	6:30 PM	THEIR-TAMIL
10:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK			9:30 PM	JU ON: THE GRUDGE 3
12:15 AM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)			11:30 PM	OBSERVANCE
		1:00 PM	FANAR-4 THE JUNGLE BOOK (3D)	1:15 AM	OBSERVANCE
12:30 PM	SHARQIA-3 FAN- Hindi	3:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK		
1:30 PM	KUNG FU PANDA 3	5:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK (3D)	11:30 AM	AVENUES-4 CRIMINAL
3:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	7:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	2:15 PM	FAN- Hindi
6:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	10:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK (3D)	5:15 PM	FAN- Hindi
9:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	12:15 AM	BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE		
12:30 AM	CRIMINAL			5:15 PM	Special Show "THE JUNGLE BOOK"
		1:15 PM	FANAR-5 FAN- Hindi	8:15 PM	THU+Fri
11:30 AM	MUHALAB-1 BEFORE I WAKE	2:00 PM	TOP CAT BEGINS	11:15 PM	FAN- Hindi
1:30 PM	CRIMINAL	4:00 PM	TOP CAT BEGINS		
3:45 PM	CRIMINAL	6:00 PM	TOP CAT BEGINS		
6:00 PM	BEFORE I WAKE	8:00 PM	FAN- Hindi		
8:00 PM	THE AMERICAN SIDE	11:00 PM	FAN- Hindi	11:45 AM	AVENUES-5 THE JUNGLE BOOK
10:15 PM	CRIMINAL			2:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK -3D
12:30 AM	CRIMINAL			4:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK
		1:00 PM	MARINA-1 BEFORE I WAKE	6:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK -3D
11:30 AM	MUHALAB-2 FAN- Hindi	3:00 PM	KUNG FU PANDA 3	8:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK
2:30 PM	FAN- Hindi				
5:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	3:00 PM	FRI+SAT BEFORE I WAKE	8:45 PM	NO THU+SUN
8:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	5:00 PM	NO FRI+SAT		
11:30 PM	FAN- Hindi	7:00 PM	BEFORE I WAKE	11:00 PM	Special Show "THE JUNGLE BOOK"
		10:00 PM	BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE		
		12:05 AM	BEFORE I WAKE		
11:45 AM	MUHALAB-3 THE JUNGLE BOOK	11:30 AM	MARINA-2 THE JUNGLE BOOK	12:00 PM	AVENUES-6 FAN- Hindi
2:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	1:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	3:00 PM	FAN- Hindi
4:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	4:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	6:00 PM	FAN- Hindi
6:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	6:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	9:00 PM	FAN- Hindi
8:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	8:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK	12:05 AM	FAN- Hindi
11:00 PM	BEFORE I WAKE	10:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK		
1:00 AM	BEFORE I WAKE	1:00 AM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)		
				1:15 PM	360°-1 THE JUNGLE BOOK -3D
12:30 PM	FANAR-1 BEFORE I WAKE	12:00 PM	MARINA-3 FAN- Hindi	3:30 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK
3:00 PM	BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE	3:00 PM	FAN- Hindi	5:45 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK -3D
6:15 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)	6:00 PM	CRIMINAL	8:00 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK
8:15 PM	BEFORE I WAKE	8:15 PM	CRIMINAL	10:15 PM	THE JUNGLE BOOK
10:30 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)	10:30 PM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)	12:30 AM	MA3 AL KHATAR (Kuwaiti Film)
12:45 AM	BEFORE I WAKE	12:45 AM	CRIMINAL		
				12:45 PM	360°-2 BEFORE I WAKE
11:45 AM	FANAR-2 FAN- Hindi	1:15 PM	AVENUES-1 KUNG FU PANDA 3	3:00 PM	BEFORE I WAKE
				5:15 PM	BEFORE I WAKE
				7:30 PM	BEFORE I WAKE
				9:45 PM	BEFORE I WAKE
				12:05 AM	BEFORE I WAKE

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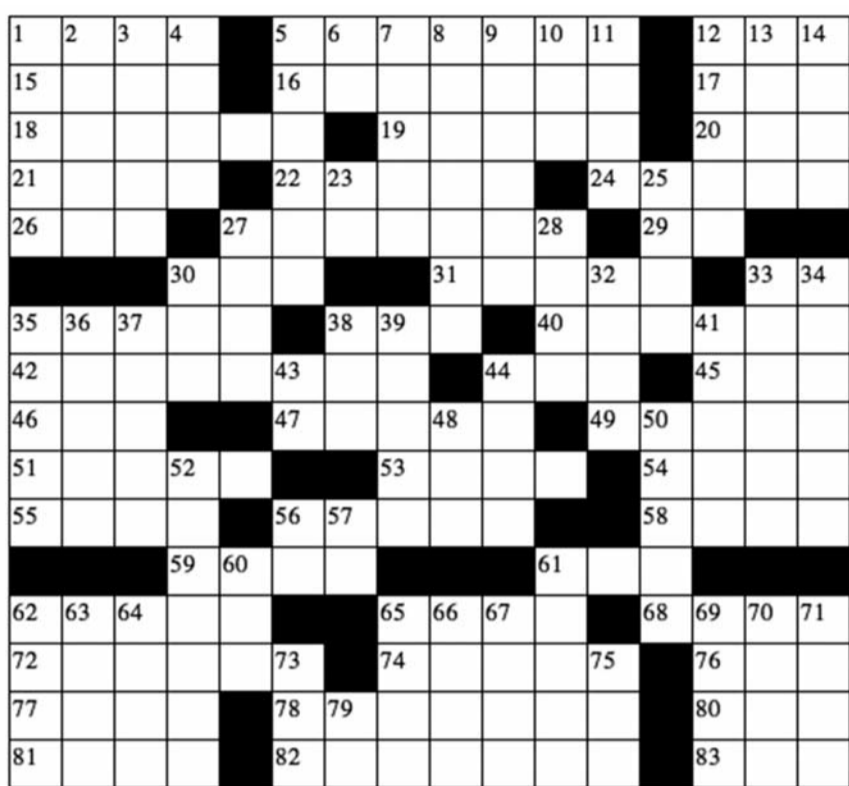


In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation of bookings will help other passengers to use seats

Arrival Flights on Thursday 14/4/2016				Departure Flights on Thursday 14/4/2016			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
THY	772	Istanbul	00:10	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
MSC	415	Sohag	00:10	PAL	669	Dubai/Manila	14:45
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	KAC	773	Riyadh	15:00
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:05
KKK	6506	Istanbul	00:55	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:05
DLH	635	Doha	01:00	FDB	058	Dubai	15:10
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15	AXB	394	Kozhikode	15:10
JZR	539	Cairo	01:20	KNE	381	Taif	15:10
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30	KAC	617	Doha	15:15
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:40	QTR	1079	Doha	15:15
RJA	642	Amman	01:45	JZR	189	Dubai	15:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	01:45	KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
JZR	552	Alexandria	01:50	KAC	613	Bahrain	16:00
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:15	SYR	342	Damascus	16:00
UAE	853	Dubai	02:25	SVA	505	Jeddah	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	03:05	OMA	646	Muscat	16:10
FDB	067	Dubai	03:15	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:15
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:15	JAD	302	Amman	16:35
QTR	1076	Doha	03:25	RJA	641	Amman	16:55
KAC	544	Cairo	03:40	KNE	532	Jeddah	16:55
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
QTR	8511	Doha	04:30	FDB	052	Dubai	17:00
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	266	Beirut	17:10
THY	770	Istanbul	05:15	QTR	1073	Doha	17:25
JZR	529	Asyut	06:00	UAE	858	Dubai	17:40
KAC	412	Bangkok/Manila	06:15	NIA	252	Alexandria	17:50
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	06:25	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
BAW	157	London	06:40	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
IRA	673	Ahwaz	07:15	JZR	184	Dubai	18:20
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15	JZR	538	Cairo	18:30
JZR	503	Luxor	07:25	JZR	554	Alexandria	18:50
KAC	382	Delhi	07:30	KAC	563	Amman	19:00
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	07:35	QTR	1081	Doha	19:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:40	JZR	238	Amman	19:15
KAC	204	Lahore	07:40	JZR	124	Bahrain	19:20
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
SVA	512	Riyadh	07:50	GFA	218	Bahrain	19:50
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	FDB	064	Dubai	19:50
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:15	ABY	124	Sharjah	19:55
KAC	344	Chennai	08:15	FDB	060	Dubai	20:30
KAC	352	Kochi	08:20	KAC	283	Dhaka	20:30
KAC	362	Colombo	08:20	UAE	876	Dubai	20:35
UAE	855	Dubai	08:25	JAI	571	Mumbai	20:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	09:00	KAC	331	Trivandrum	20:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	DLH	634	Doha	20:50
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	ABY	122	Sharjah	20:50
IRA	667	Esfahan	09:05	KAC	351	Kochi	20:50
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	KAC	353	BLR	20:55
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	343	Chennai	20:55
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	543	Cairo	21:00
UAE	873	Dubai	10:40	KNE	234	Riyadh	21:10
MEA	404	Beirut	11:00	MEA	403	Beirut	21:15
JZR	561	Sohag	11:25	OMA	648	Muscat	21:30
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:30	MSR	619	Alexandria	21:30
JZR	165	Dubai	11:50	QTR	1089	Doha	21:45
NIA	151	Cairo	12:20	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
FDB	075	Dubai	12:25	FDB	5054	Dubai	21:55
JZR	241	Amman	12:30	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	21:55
UAE	871	Dubai	12:45	KAC	230	Colombo	22:20
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	UAE	860	Dubai	22:25
KAC	620	Doha	13:10	KLM	417	Dammam/Amsterdam	22:25
QTR	1078	Doha	14:05	KAC	381	Delhi	22:25
JZR	779	Jeddah	14:05	KAC	301	Mumbai	22:30
KAC	672	Dubai	14:05	GFA	220	Bahrain	23:00
KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	KAC	205	Islamabad	23:00
AXB	393	Kozhikode	14:10	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
FDB	057	Dubai	14:20	QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
				KAC	411	Bangkok/Manila	23:25
				MSC	502	Alexandria	23:30

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

CROSSWORD 1226



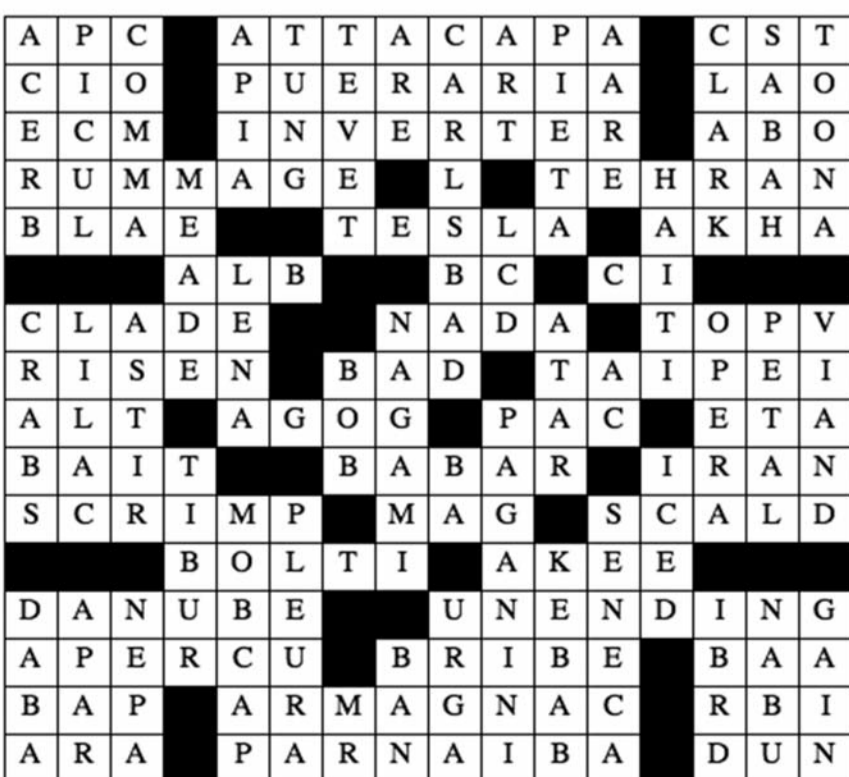
ACROSS

- 1. A fastener for a door or lid.
5. Having six units or components.
12. (of securities) Not quoted on a stock exchange.
15. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
16. Small genus of shrubs and small trees of New Zealand.
17. An enzyme that catalyzes the oxidation of many body compounds (e.g., epinephrine and norepinephrine and serotonin).
18. The wood of the sabicu which resembles mahogany.
19. Advanced in years.
20. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
21. (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.
22. A shot in billiards made by hitting the cue ball with the cue held nearly vertically.
24. A British doctorate.
26. The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
29. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
31. The mission in San Antonio where in 1836 Mexican forces under Santa Anna besieged and massacred American rebels who were fighting to make Texas independent of Mexico.
35. Sluggish tailless Australian arboreal marsupial with gray furry ears and coat.
40. King of England who was renounced by Northumbria in favor of his brother Edgar (died in 959).
42. Hypothetical universal solvent once sought by alchemists.
45. An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
46. A federal agency established to regulate the release of new foods and health-related products.
47. Any of various small plant-sucking insects.
49. A genus of Platalea.
51. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
53. (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
54. Wild sheep of northern Africa.
55. Type genus of the Anatidae.
58. (classical architecture) A molding for a cornice.
59. The second largest city in Tunisia.
62. African mahogany trees.
68. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
72. Not wide.
74. Remote and separate physically or socially.
76. A city in the European part of Russia.
77. (prefix) Opposite or opposing or neutralizing.
78. Put into a proper or systematic order.
80. The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
81. A city in Tuscany.
82. Minute freshwater crustacean having a round body enclosed in a transparent shell.
83. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.

DOWN

- 1. Member of a Jewish sect that observes a form of strict Orthodox Judaism.
2. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
3. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo.
4. Affectively dainty or refined.
5. A shrub or tree of the genus Rhus (usually limited to the non-poisonous members of the genus).
6. (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
7. A Bantu language closely related to Zulu.
8. Any of a group of hard crystalline minerals that consist of aluminum silicates of potassium or sodium or calcium or barium.
9. A severe or trying experience.
10. A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth.
11. Any of a group of Indic languages spoken in Kashmir and eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan.
12. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
13. A sock with a separation for the big toe.
14. Fossil fuel consisting of carbonized vegetable matter deposited in the Carboniferous period.
23. The eleventh month of the civil year.
25. Walk heavily and firmly, as when weary, or through mud.
27. Not only so, but.
28. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
30. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
32. An independent group of closely related Chadic languages spoken in the area between the Biu-Mandara and East Chadic languages.
33. Hairlike projection from the surface of a cell.
34. (Greek mythology) One of the three Graces.
36. Of time long past.
37. Jordan's port.
38. Of southern Europe.
39. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
41. Physically and mentally fatigued.
43. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
44. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
48. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
50. French biochemist who (with Jacques Monod) studied regulatory processes in cells (born in 1920).
52. An ancient kingdom in northern Mesopotamia which is in present-day Iraq.
56. The syllable naming the fourth (subdominant) note of the diatonic scale in solmization.
57. An edge tool with a heavy bladed head mounted across a handle.
60. The United Nations agency concerned with the international organization of food and agriculture.
61. Either of two Welsh breeds of long-bodied short-legged dogs with erect ears and a fox-like head.
63. A Polynesian language.
64. Studies intended to provide general knowledge and intellectual skills (rather than occupational or professional skills).
65. A chordophone that has a triangular frame consisting of a sounding board and a pillar and a curved neck.
66. Large elliptical brightly colored deep-sea fish of Atlantic and Pacific and Mediterranean.
67. United States educator who introduced reforms that significantly altered the system of public education (1796-1859).
69. A sensation (as of a cold breeze or bright light) that precedes the onset of certain disorders such as a migraine attack or epileptic seizure.
70. (old-fashioned) At or from or to a great distance.
71. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
73. (often followed by 'of') A large number or amount or extent.
75. A beverage made with steeping tea leaves in water.
79. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You had few challenges last month. This has been more of a personal growth time. Someone else has the upper hand in the workplace but you will be happy to know that life will be going your way soon.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Full speed ahead is your motto! Your humor and inventiveness pay off as you express your ideas in a group setting! Take plenty of breaks and try to concentrate on the task at hand.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This is a good time, when your efforts really pay off and things seem to run smoothly. You have gained the ability to work for long periods of time without interruptions.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You could feel that you lack depth and feeling when it comes to communication skills. This is temporary of course-your ideas can be most intuitive.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Take time to smell the roses, as there could be pressures in domestic, property or community matters. Financial matters may have your attention as well, but the news is all good and the prospects look good for gain.



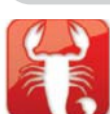
Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your creative self-expression blooms when professional people from your office request your expertise, perhaps regarding a conference, convention or in hosting visitors from afar.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A lack of information could hold you back-educate yourself as to what is happening around you. You may find yourself feeling blocked. One step at a time you are able to accomplish anything.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Think seriously about your work and what you have learned in the business for which you work. Think about how much further you might want to grow.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your financial situation is improving now-continue to invest or save for the future. Avoid high risks or frivolous spending. Willingness to cooperate with higher-ups now will have its rewards.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may not appreciate being corrected today and you really do not feel right in saying anything to the person that is correcting you-perhaps because of status or rank.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You may be especially dynamic and assertive. You have a desire to get things done quickly; however, you should not be impulsive or too quick to act.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Solid, secure and comfortable situations can be expected in most avenues of your life now. This is a great time to be with others and to work together.

WORD SEARCH

USA States

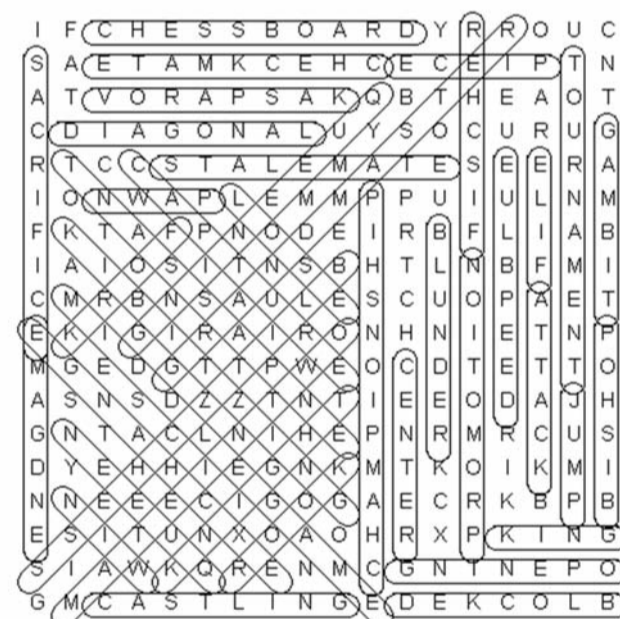
Find and circle all of the USA States that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - an Adlai Stevenson quotation.



- ALABAMA, ALASKA, ARIZONA, ARKANSAS, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, CONNECTICUT, DELAWARE, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, HAWAII, IDAHO, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, IOWA, KANSAS, KENTUCKY, LOUISIANA, MAINE, MARYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA, MISSISSIPPI, MISSOURI, MONTANA, NEBRASKA, NEVADA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW MEXICO, NEW YORK, NORTH CAROLINA, NORTH DAKOTA, OHIO, OKLAHOMA, OREGON, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, SOUTH DAKOTA, TENNESSEE, TEXAS, UTAH, VERMONT, VIRGINIA, WASHINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA, WISCONSIN, WYOMING

Yesterday Solution

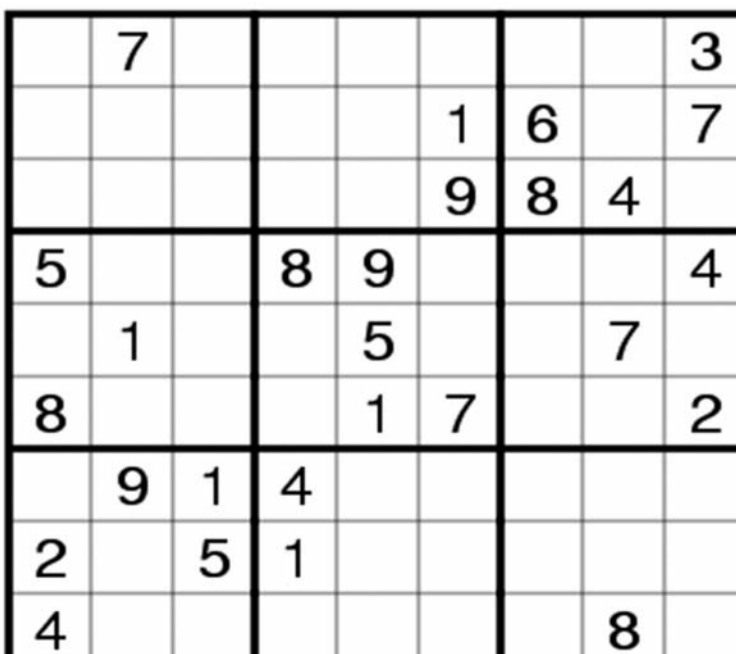
Chess



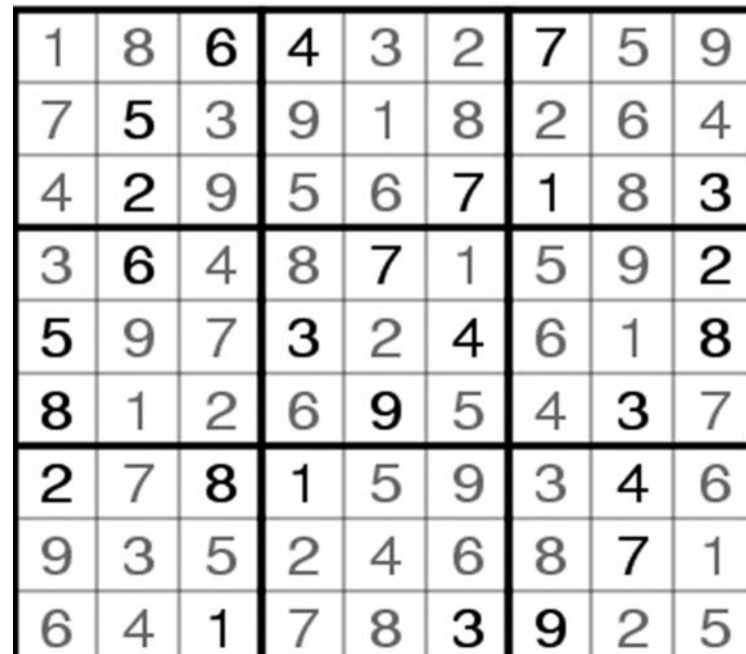
- ATTACK, BISHOP, BLITZ CHESS, BLOCKED, BLUNDER, CAPTURE, CASTLING, CENTER, CHECKMATE, CHESSBOARD, CHAMPIONSHIP, DEEP BLUE, DIAGONAL, EN PASSANT, ENDGAME, EXCHANGE, FILE, FISCHER, FORK, GAMBIT, GRANDMASTER, JUMP, KASPAROV, KIBITZING, KING, KNIGHT, LOSE, MATE IN TWO, MIDDLEGAME, OPENING, PAWN, PIECE, PROMOTION, QUEEN, QUEENING, ROOK, SACRIFICE, STALEMATE, TOURNAMENT, WIN

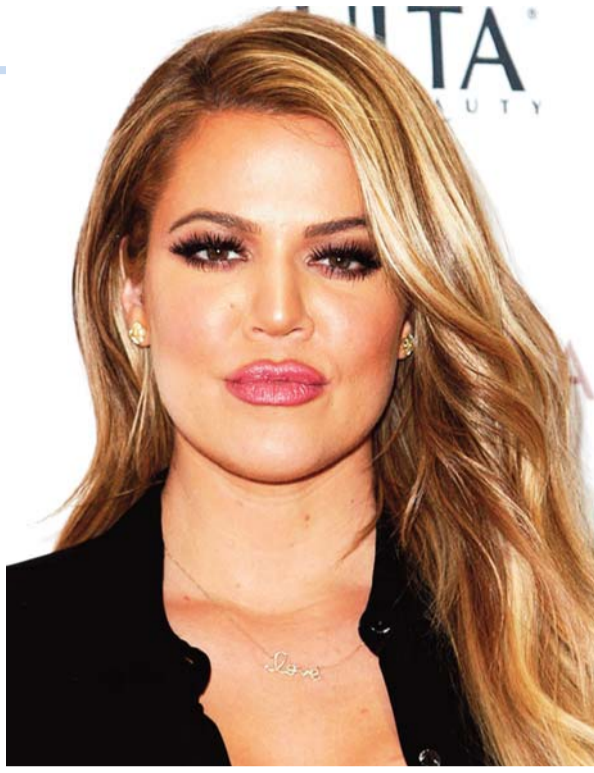
Hidden sentence: IF YOU CAN'T BEAT YOUR COMPUTER AT CHESS, TRY KICKBOXING

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





Khloe on wearing make-up to the gym

Khloe Kardashian "always" wears jewelry and make-up to the gym. The 31-year-old 'Kocktails with Khloe' host has admitted she feels bare without a pair of hoop earrings and a made up face when she exercises, because she likes feeling "cuter" when she dresses up for her work out sessions. Speaking to Shape magazine about her gym attire, the May cover star said: "I always wear hoop earrings; they're like my security blanket. People laugh at me, but why not? They make me feel more dressed up. "I also wear make-up when I work out. I put on a tinted moisturizer, mascara, and cherry lip balm, and fill in my eyebrows. If I feel cuter with a little lip color and mas-

car, why should anybody else care?" However, the 'Strong Looks Better Naked' author has admitted that her estranged husband Lamar Odom was the catalyst to encourage her to train, although he was also the reason she avoided the gym for a brief spell. She explained: "When Lamar and I broke up [in 2013], I had all these emotions that I didn't know what to do with. Some people suggested therapy, but instead I joined my local Equinox gym, where I'd get on an elliptical and watch bad reality TV. As a result, I started losing weight. "When Lamar was in the hospital, I stopped doing the one thing I really needed: exercise. The gym takes all the anxiety away when I'm overwhelmed or stressed

out." The 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' TV personality has returned to her active lifestyle and undergoes weekly workouts with her sister Kourtney, as well as with her personal trainer Gunnar Peterson. Meanwhile, Khloe - who has dropped 35 pounds in recent months - has admitted that regardless of her weight loss she has always been happy with her figure in its varying incarnations. She said: "I love my shape because I've earned every curve. I work hard in the gym to get it. But I also loved my shape before, when I was even curvier."

Victoria Beckham: David is the best partner

Victoria Beckham says her husband David Beckham is the "best partner anybody can have". The Spice Girls singer turned fashion designer says she and her retired soccer superstar spouse like to share every aspect of their lives and she loves the fact that David supports her in her career. Speaking to Hashtaglegend.com, Victoria said: "David comes to my shows and David is my business partner. Everything we do, we do everything together. We really support each other ... He's the best partner anybody can have." Although Victoria is obsessed with making her self-titled fashion label as successful as it can be, the 41-

year-old brunette doesn't bring her work home with her. When relaxing with David, 40, and their four children - Brooklyn, 17, Romeo, 13, Cruz, 11, and Harper, four - Victoria prefers to learn what everyone has done with her day but if she wanted to talk shop then the former England captain would be happy to oblige. She said: "I tend not to talk too much about (work) when I get home because I've been working on it all day and there's so many other things to catch up with regards to the children and what he's doing."



Tyga's Lamborghini is in danger of being repossessed

The 'Rack City' hitmaker reportedly owes Choice Motor Credit \$357,350.77 for not making payments on his 2013 Lamborghini Aventador and the company now want to take back the luxury sports car. TMZ reports. And this isn't the firm's first dealings with the rapper, as CMC also repossessed his 2014 Bentley Mulsanne in February. Though the firm sold the car, Tyga still owes over \$91,000. This isn't the first money problem the star has encountered recently. It was previously revealed he had failed to close on the purchase of his new home three times. The 'Ayo' hitmaker has been in escrow on a \$10 million, eight-bedroom property in the Calabasas home close to where girlfriend Kylie Jenner and various members of her family live, but has reportedly come up with excuses every time the deal has been due to complete. The 26-year-old star had blamed being on the road or not getting paid for not having the cash to finalize the transaction but the news came just a few weeks after Tyga was reprimanded by a judge for not paying a settlement agreed with one of his dancers. Allison Brown sued the rapper for sexual battery as she claimed she was plied with alcohol and coerced to remove her top during a shoot on one of his music videos and alleged a man on the set groped one of her breasts. She and Tyga - who was the target of the action because he was in charge - settled for around \$50,000 but he only paid half so a judge then ordered him to pay the outstanding \$25,000, plus \$16,000 in lawyers fees. In addition, the rapper has an outstanding tax lien of over \$19,000 and owes his landlord \$70,000 in back rent.



Chung's memorable Marks & Spencer range

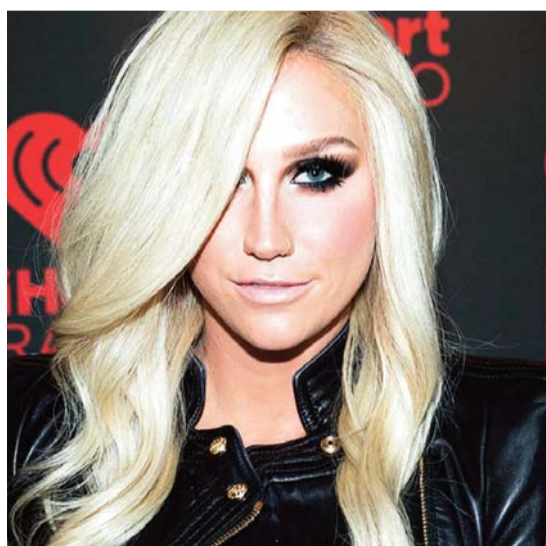
Alexa Chung's Marks & Spencer range is inspired by memories of her dad wearing the high street chain's clothes. The 32-year-old model has launched her Archive by Alexa clothing line for the British retailer, which is available in stores from Wednesday and is comprised of 30 pieces historically associated with the company. When she sat down to create her range, Alexa found her mind wandering back to when her dad Phillip Chung would wrap her up in his woollen jumpers when she was a child and the school uniforms she wore from M&S. Speaking to The Times newspaper about her clothing line, she said: "I'm M&S man! I wanted this collection to reflect my personal interaction with the brand since childhood. My school cardigan and pleated skirt, my thermals, my dad's

jumpers I used to wear to ride my pony. "When I shop I buy the checked shirt, the Breton top. All the things I am drawn to I have come to realize I had a version of as a child. I am looking for things I have had already, but maybe with small tweaks." Alexa - who is a Contributing Editor for British Vogue - has previously admitted to buying her first bra from the store and her motivation to bring a younger audience to the company that began selling clothes in the 1920s. The star - who signed to Storm modeling agency at the age of 16 - explained: "I want to highlight to a new demographic, to younger people who didn't grow up in the 1980s, all the dependable, classic, practical things that first took me to M&S. It's a fresh take on what they are famous for."

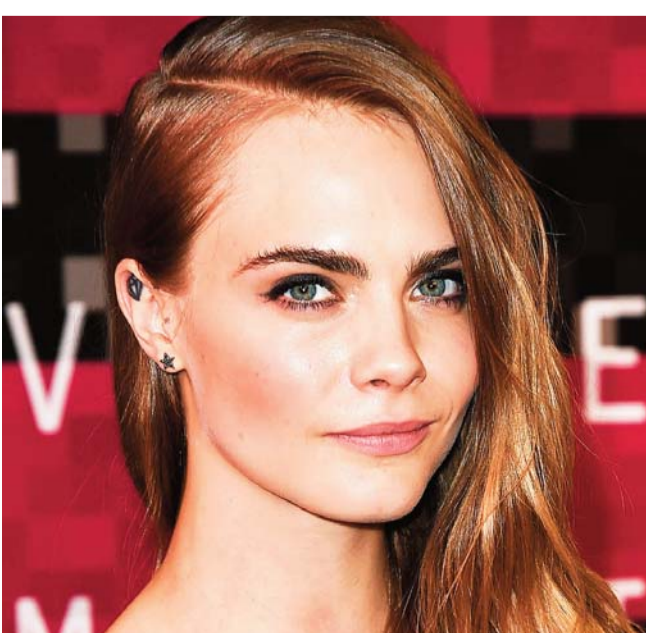
Kesha to sing at Dylan's 75th birthday concert

Kesha will sing at 'Dylan Fest: A Celebration of Bob Dylan's 75th Birthday' in what will be her first performance since her claims of sexual abuse against Dr Luke were dismissed. The 29-year-old star has been booked for the two-night music extravaganza, which is set to pay tribute to the folk icon's diamond jubilee, on May 23-24 at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium. The occasion also marks the 50th anniversary of the release of Dylan's first album 'Just Like a Woman' and Kesha will be joined by 30 stars of the country music and folk world, including 'Biscuits' singer Kacey Musgraves. The star hasn't performed since she filed allegations of unproven serious sexual assault against her former producer and mentor, and recently had her attempts to get out of her Sony contract denied by a judge. But the 'Tik Tok' hitmaker could be returning to the stage sooner than May as she is rumored to be performing at the upcoming Coachella festival in Indio, California,

which takes place from Friday to April 24. A source told X17 Online: "Kesha is beginning to realize that she needs to take her career into her own hands, and this is her way of doing just that." Prior to her court drama, Kesha teased fans that she was working on "weird country" music and was busy making the follow-up to her 2012 album 'Warrior' which was set to include some wacky country tracks. She said: "I've been working on music for like, months now, obsessing in the studio all night, so I've got a lot of new music but it's been so all over the place. Some of it's like weird country, then I have love songs, so it's all over the place so I'm still kind of compiling my record."



Delevingne is the new face of Rimmel London



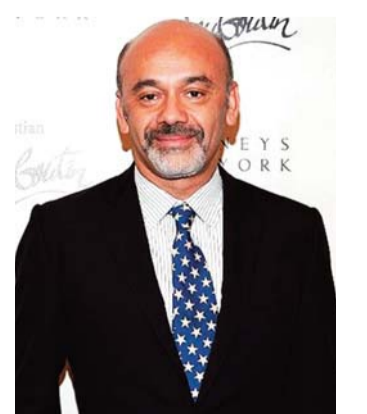
The 23-year-old supermodel - who has returned to the fashion business after a seven-month hiatus - has been announced as the latest ambassador for the beauty brand today. Speaking to WWD.com about her first memory of Rimmel - which is owned by Coty Inc. - the blonde beauty said: "My first memory of Rimmel, was watching the adverts with Kate [Moss]. "I was very much a tomboy growing up so I never really wore makeup but I was always fascinated by how edgy and captivating the brand and its ambassadors were. It's such an iconic cosmetic brand that represents the London girl. It was a natural partnership. The brand philosophy and core brand identity is in line with my own style and attitude. I am proud to be English and jumped at the opportunity to collaborate with such an iconic English brand." The cosmetic brand, which has seen Kate Moss and Georgia May Jagger coin the phrase "Get the London look", will see the British 'Paper Towns' actress feature in her first campaign later this year. Meanwhile, Johanna Businelli - Coty's chief

marketing officer of color cosmetics - said: "I think it's so rare for a beauty brand to find such a natural face as an ambassador. "We are very fortunate to have Kate Moss but Cara is also a fantastic fit. We pick people who don't need any customization and I think that is one of the key points. Cara Delevingne is a true British woman and she has true British style - a classic beauty and she also has this imitable attitude. She has had a very fast rise to stardom, it's been meteoric and she is extremely compelling and loved by the younger generation, which is a key, core target for the brand. She has this quite unique look because it's always bold, very trendsetting and very personal." Cara will be seen in DC Comics film 'Suicide Squad' later this year and is currently shooting science-fiction film 'Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets' alongside Rihanna, Clive Owen and Ethan Hawke, which is set for release next year.

Christian Louboutin has launched new handbag

The 53-year-old French luxury footwear designer - who is recognized for his signature red patent sole footwear - has joined forces with his friend to ValÉrie Schlumberger and the French charity La Maison Rose to launch the "magic" oversized accessory called Africaba, which will see 10 per cent of proceeds go to aid Senegalese women and children. The fashion mogul shared two pop-art styled videos on Instagram to showcase his latest creation. The first post read: "Our latest collaboration is a story of friendship, creativity and reinvention. Meet Africaba, the versatile day bag made in partnership with French charity #LaMaisonRose. With each purchase, a portion of proceeds provide aid relief to Senegalese women and children. (sic)" Whilst his second graphic comic-esque upload read: "True magic! Africaba is the result of a collaboration between Christian Louboutin, his dear friend ValÉrie Schlumberger, and the women of La Maison Rose. A beautiful pink house in Dakar, La Maison Rose is much more than a house; it is a place of hope and safety for vulnerable and marginalized women of Senegal

and their children. Demonstrating inventiveness combined with instinctive artistic flair, the hand-embroidered work of the women of La Maison Rose is fused with the skill of the house of Christian Louboutin to create this vivid and distinctive day bag. (sic)" Christian's soft-bodied shopper features a bold African design, complete with short red leather handles, as well as an extended shoulder strap for a cross-body or over the arm carrier. The envelope tote is decorated with beads and spikes, in keeping with his iconic designs, as well as the designers initials engraved, as well as an large embroidered logo, which retails at £795 online.



In 'Green Room' a punk band faces the truly hardcore

"Play your early stuff" is the advice given to the punk band The Ain't Rights when their dirt-broke, gas-siphoning tour lands a last-minute gig at an Oregon backwoods roadhouse in Jeremy Saulnier's brisk and brutal genre exercise "Green Room." The tip from the spiky-haired 'zine reporter who's set up the show (an excellent David W. Thompson, from "Win Win") isn't because the crowd will be expecting the band's nonexistent "hits," but because he knows the angriest, heaviest tunes will go down best. They'll be playing for skinheads.

The band, a grimy group of punks (Anton Yelchin, Alia Shawkat, Joe Cole, and Callum Turner) from Virginia limping across the country, shrug. They've had Neo-Nazis at their shows before. When they drive along a remote dirt road in their beat-up van, they're still not intimidated by the swastikas and Confederate flags around them. They provocatively open with the Dead Kennedys' "Nazi Punks F--- Off." The trouble doesn't come then, but after the show backstage, where the band returns to the green room to find a girl on the ground with a knife in her head. Things go south quickly, and the band is confronted with something far more hardcore than anything in their record collection.

The road movie that "Green Room" started out to be veers abruptly into a siege film as the head Neo-Nazi (Patrick Stewart, using his refined cordiality for menace) sends waves of "true believers" into the roadhouse to dispatch the witnesses. "Green Room" is Saulnier's follow-up to his self-financed breakthrough "Blue Ruin," a lean and riveting revenge tale also acted out by a novice in violence (Macon Blair, who pops here, too). The writer-director's latest confirms him as a rising film-

maker who can crisply craft John Carpenter-style atmosphere, mete out unnervingly merciless pain for his characters, and assemble robust, earthy thrillers with relatively meager means.

Gruesome and protracted battle

I like the early scenes of "Green Room" best. In brief glimpses, Saulnier fully captures the experience of a struggling band on the road: waking up somewhere different each night, debating favorite music, making fart jokes in the van. It's not very hardcore of me to say this, but I wish it continued on this plane, rather than settle into a gruesome and protracted battle - as well-executed as the carnage is. Once it enters the grindhouse, it stays there.

But you can't have a siege thriller without a siege, and "Green Room" is certainly among the genre's finest examples. Guns are employed, but the most chilling violence comes from teeth and blades on split-open flesh. It's not pleasant, nor is it meant to be. In such moments, the earlier boasts of the band about their lack of social media presence - "When you take it all virtual, you lose the texture" - have come back to haunt them. You want texture? "Green Room" has it. "Green Room," an A24 release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong brutal graphic violence, gory images, language and some drug content." Running time: 95 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP



This image released by A24 Films shows, from left, Callum Turner, Joe Cole, Alia Shawkat and Anton Yelchin in a scene from 'Green Room.' — AP



Ben Affleck, left, and Amy Adams, cast members in the film 'Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice,' address the audience during the Warner Bros presentation at CinemaCon 2016. — AP

Affleck to direct Batman film, Warner Bros chief says

Ben Affleck will direct a stand-alone "Batman" movie, says Warner Bros chairman and CEO Kevin Tsujihara. Affleck portrayed the caped crusader in this year's "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" and had been rumored to be the studio's top choice to helm the film. Tsujihara confirmed they were moving forward with him in the director's seat Tuesday at CinemaCon, an annual gathering of theater owners in Las Vegas. The stand-alone Batman feature is part of Warner Bros. plans for an expanded DC Comics cinematic universe, similar to that of the Disney and Marvel collaboration. Warner Bros. has at least 10 features in the works, including "Suicide Squad," "Wonder Woman" and "Justice League." Unsurprisingly, those films comprised a major portion of Warner Bros' presentation, signaling that the studio is moving forward energetically with its original plans despite reports that perhaps "Batman v Superman" is not performing as well at the box office as the studio would have liked.

Affleck, who is also directing "Live By Night" for the studio, made an appearance with Amy Adams, who plays Lois Lane. He confirmed that both would be joining Zack Snyder's "Justice League," which is currently in production in London. "Suicide Squad" director David Ayer and stars Will Smith and Margot Robbie were on hand as well to hype the supervillains gone straight pic, which launches on Aug 5 with intense footage focusing heavily on Robbie's Harley Quinn.

Warner Bros also trotted out stars and footage from a number of their upcoming films including the Harry Potter spinoff "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them," "The Lego Batman Movie," the Russell Crowe and Ryan Gosling comedy "The Nice Guys," and the Emilia Clarke romantic drama "Me Before You." But beyond the individual films, a big focus was the studio's ongoing commitment to its filmmakers and the specialness of theatrical presentation. The threat of The Screening Room, a proposed at-home viewing experience of first-run movies, has loomed large over the annual conference where theater owners come not just to check out the new studio slates and mingle with stars, but to see the latest technologies that promise to enhance the theatrical experience for audiences. Major filmmakers like Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson have come out in support of the service, but the industry on the whole remains divided.

"I assure you we are not going to let a third party or middle man come between us," Tsujihara told the audience of exhibitors. "When there are new technologies ... we will explore them with each of you. We know the status quo is not an option." Not every studio has taken a hard stand. On Monday, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" director JJ Abrams - a Screening Room backer - urged the conference to be open-minded about innovations.

"Hangover" director Todd Phillips on Tuesday, however, came out strongly against the idea of the Screening Room without mentioning it directly while promoting his new Jonah Hill and Miles Teller comedy "War Dogs." "Why are we in such a rush to turn movies into television? It doesn't make sense to me. Movies are special," Phillips said. "We need to do everything we can to protect that part of the experience." — AP

It's worth stopping into 'Barbershop: The Next Cut'

When you come back to a beloved place after many years, sometimes you find all the faces have changed and the vibe is completely different. Not so with Ice Cube's "Barbershop." Though the third film in the franchise comes a dozen years after part two, "Barbershop: The Next Cut" is as colorful and clever as its predecessors. There are some new faces (including Common and Nicki Minaj) and new elements (an attached beauty shop), but the warm energy, subtle social commentary and big-hearted laughs are the same.

Cube returns as Calvin, proprietor of a barbershop on Chicago's South Side, where he oversees a motley crew of haircutters who spend as much time boasting and bantering as they do snipping and styling. Perpetual scene-stealer Cedric the Entertainer returns as outspoken old-timer Eddie, and Eve is back as sharp-tongued Terri, once the shop's lone female hairdresser. But you don't need any background to be charmed by the chatter at this community hangout, where the staff has grown to include a bunch of new barbers and beauticians and the discussion subjects range from Kim Kardashian to President Obama.

The crew includes Terri's husband and Calvin's friend Rashad (Common), opinionated Raja (Utkarsh Ambudkar), neurotic Jerrod (Lemorne Morris, even funnier here than on TV's "New Girl"), and man-of-many-hustles One-Stop (JB Smoove), who offers haircuts, health exams, fake IDs and other services from his barber chair. They share the shop with a new business partner, Angie (Regina Hall), and her team of stylists, including spandex-clad Draya (Minaj) and unlucky-in-love Bree (Margot Bingham).



In this image released by Warner Bros., Cedric the Entertainer, from left, Nicki Minaj and Ice Cube appear in a scene from 'Barbershop: The Next Cut.' — AP

'The streets are talking'
Director Malcolm D Lee and writers Kenya Barris and Tracy Oliver develop each of these characters enough to deliver a winning ensemble comedy with multiple story lines and just the right dose of realistic drama. Set in present-day Chicago, the film opens with Calvin's voiceover about the explosion of violence in the city. "The streets are talking," he says. "They're tired. They're angry." Chicago had the most homicides of any US city last year, and it's on track to earn that sad distinction again in 2016. More than 140 people

have been killed there so far this year. Calvin worries about how the surge in violence is affecting his 14-year-old son, Jalen (Michael Rainey Jr), who's getting into fights at school and considering joining a gang. Calvin is also concerned about the effects on his business, especially when former barber and now mayoral aide Jimmy (Sean Patrick Thomas) tells him about a proposal to stem South Side violence by building a wall around the neighborhood. The shop responds by sponsoring a 48-hour cease-fire. They convince two rival gang leaders, both customers,

to get on board. But as a tenuous peace takes hold outside, drama continues inside the shop as Draya makes a play for Rashad and Calvin considers moving his family to a safer part of town.

Cube and Cedric

Minaj is a riot as a sassy flirt whose work uniform is a skimpy bra and skin-tight leggings. Common brings the smolder as a modern man who supports his wife's career but feels frustrated at her lack of effort in the relationship. Morris is a comic highlight, as is Deon Cole, who plays Dante, a guy who hangs out at the barbershop dishing one-liners. As in past trips to the "Barbershop," Cube and Cedric the Entertainer are the heart of the story.

"The Next Cut" manages to address racism, sexism, police brutality and gang violence in a thoughtful way without being heavy-handed. It's a call for community activism balanced with plenty of playful laughs. There's also the bonus of seeing Cube bust out some dance moves and Common do an old-fashioned backspin. The two rappers also wrote a song for the film, "Real People," which plays over the closing credits. So whether it's your first trip to Calvin's or you've got a standing appointment, it's worth stopping in for "The Next Cut." "Barbershop: The Next Cut," a Warner Bros release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "sexual material and language." Running time: 111 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP

Doherty kicks off post-attack Bataclan concert schedule

Peter Doherty will headline the first show at the Bataclan, the Paris concert venue which was hit by a terror attack on Nov 13, when it reopens next Fall. Although the Bataclan has not yet announced the day of its official reopening, Peter Doherty's concert has been scheduled for Nov 16, three days after the anniversary of last year's tragedy. Doherty, the Libertines co-frontman, is expected to release his second solo album this year and will kick off his solo tour on May 11. The rebellious British musician previously performed at the Bataclan in 2009 to rave reviews.

The Bataclan's first slate of concerts also include Youssou N'Dour and the Super Etoile de Dakar on Nov 18, Nada Surf on Dec 2 and MZ on Dec 3. The Bataclan said the renovations will not change the set up of the famed concert hall. "We wish to preserve the warmth and conviviality, maintain the popular and festive spirit which has always defined (The Bataclan)," said the venue's management. Further concerts and shows will be unveiled in the coming days.

While announcing their first roster of concerts, Bataclan's management also paid homage to 89 victims who were killed on Nov. 13



Peter Doherty

during a concert by the Eagles of Death Metal. Eagles of Death Metal's Jesse Hughes had said EODM would be the first band to perform at the Bataclan upon its reopening but that plan seemed compromised after he hinted that Bataclan security knew of the attacks in an interview published last month. — Reuters

Music producer David Gest dies in London at 62

David Gest, a music producer, reality TV star and former husband of Liza Minnelli, was found dead Tuesday at a London hotel. He was 62. Gest's friend Imad Handi confirmed his death, remembering Gest as "a natural star and a genuine celebrity." "David was truly larger than life. He was not just a huge talent and a dear friend but a showbiz icon," Handi said. The Metropolitan Police force said officers were called to "reports of an unexplained death of a man in his 60s" at the Four Seasons Hotel in London's Canary Wharf on Tuesday morning.

The force said an autopsy would take place "in due course" to determine the cause of death, but it was not being treated as suspicious. Born in 1953, Gest was raised in southern California, where he became friends with Michael Jackson and his family. He worked as a music promoter and television producer, and was introduced to Minnelli by Jackson when Gest produced the King of Pop's 30th anniversary tribute concert for television in 2001.

The couple married in 2002, at a celebrity-studded ceremony with Jackson as best man and Elizabeth Taylor as maid of honor. They separated in a burst of headline-grabbing acrimony in 2003. Gest sued Minnelli for \$10 million, alleging that she beat him so badly during alcoholic rages that he suffered per-

manent injuries. Minnelli struck back with a \$2 million suit claiming Gest had stolen money from her. The pair ended their dispute in 2007 when their lawyers filed court papers saying they had settled their differences and agreed to divorce without fault.

Gest remained a friend of Jackson and after the singer's death in 2009 produced a documentary, "Michael Jackson: The Life of an Icon." Gest gained a following in Britain with appearances on reality TV shows including "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here" in 2006 and "Celebrity Big Brother" earlier this year. He had to leave that show in January after two weeks on medical grounds. His upbeat personality and frankness endeared him to British viewers. Gest told a British TV show he regretted having plastic surgery in the 1980s, from the same doctor as Michael Jackson. "What an idiot I was. ... It's the stupidest thing in the world," he said.

He settled far from the bright lights of showbiz, buying a house in the northern English city of York. He told the Yorkshire Post newspaper in 2014 that he loved the city's cathedral, cobblestone streets, Viking history and famous York Hog Roast. — AP



File photo shows US music producer David Gest poses with some of his collection of entertainment memorabilia at an auction house in London.



File photo shows Liza Minnelli, right, and her husband David Gest, left, pose for photographers upon their arrival at the musical theatre "Neue Flora" in Hamburg, northern Germany. — AP photos



This file photo shows people walking by employees working to set the letter reading 'Eagles of Death Metal' on the facade of the Olympia concert hall, on February 16, 2016 in Paris, ahead of the band's concert. — AFP

Bataclan announces first concerts since Paris attacks in November

The team running the Paris concert hall where 90 people were killed in last year's jihadist attacks announced yesterday a series of concerts would be held at the venue in November. British singer Pete Doherty and the Senegalese star Youssou N'Dour and his Super Etoile de Dakar band will play the Bataclan on November 16 and 18 respectively, the managers said in a statement. They said work had begun on repairing the interior of the building but "no exact reopening date has as yet been fixed."

The choice of N'Dour, a Muslim, who has often spoken out in support of dialogue between the world's major religions, is likely to be seen highly significant. The US rock

group Nada Surf and the French group MZ have also been booked to play the concert hall in the east of Paris in December, the statement added. "We want to preserve the (Bataclan's) warmth and friendliness and maintain its popular, festive spirit," the management team said. The California group Eagles of Death Metal, who were on stage when jihadist gunmen burst in opening fire on concertgoers on November 13, have repeatedly said they want to return to play the venue. — AFP



File photo shows with the world's tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, in backdrop, a man enjoys an urban zip line attraction in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. — AP photos



File photo shows with the world's tallest tower, Burj Khalifa, in background, a man enjoys an urban zip line attraction in Dubai.

In air travel hub of Dubai, zip line offers new way to fly

In the air travel hub of Dubai, there's a new way to fly: A zip line run by extreme sports company XDubai. XDubai, which began its operations in 2015, is associated with the crown prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, known by millions for his Instagram exploits. The zip line fits into the extreme-sports aesthetic of this city-state, already a popular skydiving destination where parachutes deploy daily among its skyscrapers.

The view from the start of the zip line is just as breathtaking. The Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building at 828 meters (2,716 feet), looms to your left, along with the under-construction, ship-shaped Dubai Opera. Directly ahead lies the massive Dubai Mall and the dancing Dubai Fountain, whose nightly music-and-light shows see water sprayed 140 meters (460 feet) into the air. The Address Downtown Dubai hotel, draped in tarps since catching fire on New Year's Eve, is on your right.

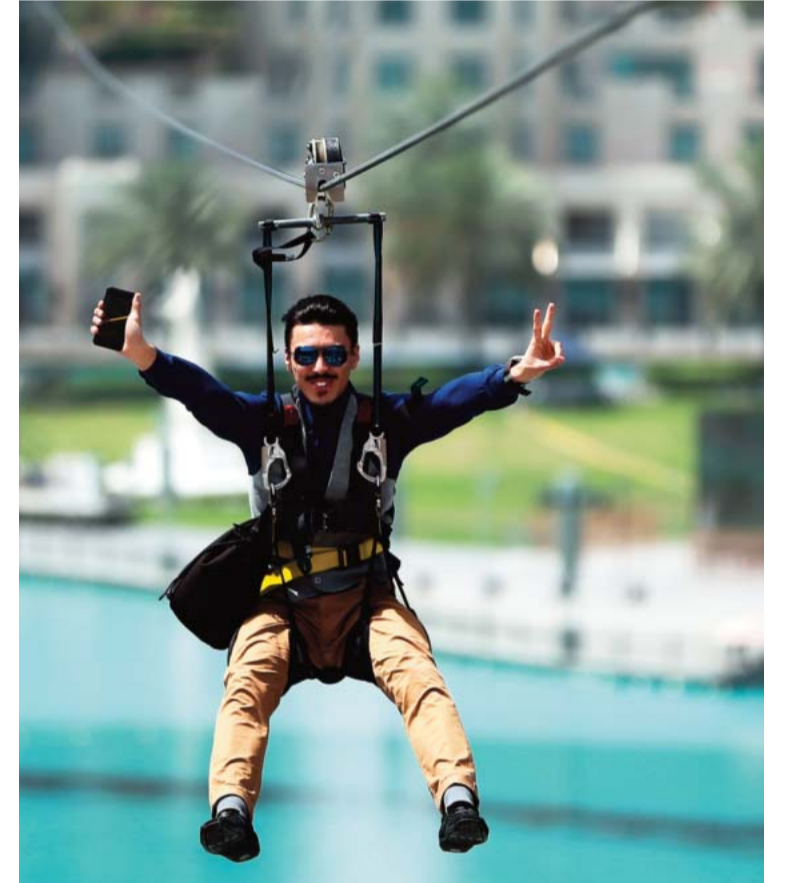
To reach the zip line, I entered one of the

many residential towers surrounding the Burj Khalifa, taking an elevator up to the 25th floor and walking up a utility staircase to the roof. There, XDubai workers helped me into a zip-line harness that has a small satchel attached to hold riders' personal belongings. I waited on a metal staircase, watching those before me screech, squeal and shout as they went over the edge. When my turn came, XDubai staff strapped me in and told me to keep my feet up going over the edge. Other than that, it was a quick one-two-three count before I too got pushed out into the open air.

The air whipped around my face on the 45-second ride 90 meters (300 feet) in the air, the blue waters of the Dubai fountain beneath me as I hollered as well despite myself. Just as my feet reach the mall, the line caught, throwing my feet up in front of me. Halted, hanging in the air, an XDubai worker asked me if I had a good time. I definitely had. —AP



A woman enjoys an urban zip line attraction in Dubai.



A man enjoys an urban zip line attraction in Dubai.

Thai new year festival kicks off despite junta call to water down

Thais and tourists took to the streets yesterday to drench each other in the mass water fight that marks the country's new year festival Songkran, as authorities attempted to crack down on alcohol, topless dancers and other "indecencies". The three-day festival is traditionally celebrated by paying respect to elders and visiting temples to sprinkle water over Buddha figures. But the holiday, which takes place at the peak of Thailand's sweltering dry season, is also known as one of the world's biggest water fights.

Every year massive crowds of revelers descend on the streets to battle each other with water guns and douse passers-by. This time partygoers are bracing not only for the sudden splashes of water that can come from any direction,

but also threats from authorities to arrest scantily clad women and ban alcohol from the raucous street bashes in an effort to return the festival to its traditional roots.

Police in recent days have warned that they will block the trucks carrying topless dancers-female and transgender-that have become a regular feature of Songkran street parties. "It is also essential that we maintain our cultural heritage through genuine traditional activities, such as pouring water on Buddha statues," the country's military leader, Prayut Chan-O-Cha, said in his weekly televised address ahead of the holiday week.

"There are laws governing indecent exposure, which will be enforced. You should celebrate in a polite way as there will

be people of all ages joining in," added the junta chief, whose administration has launched a streak of public morality campaigns since seizing power in a 2014 coup. Authorities have also urged revelers to spray water more sparingly this year, as the country is currently in the grip of the worst drought in decades.

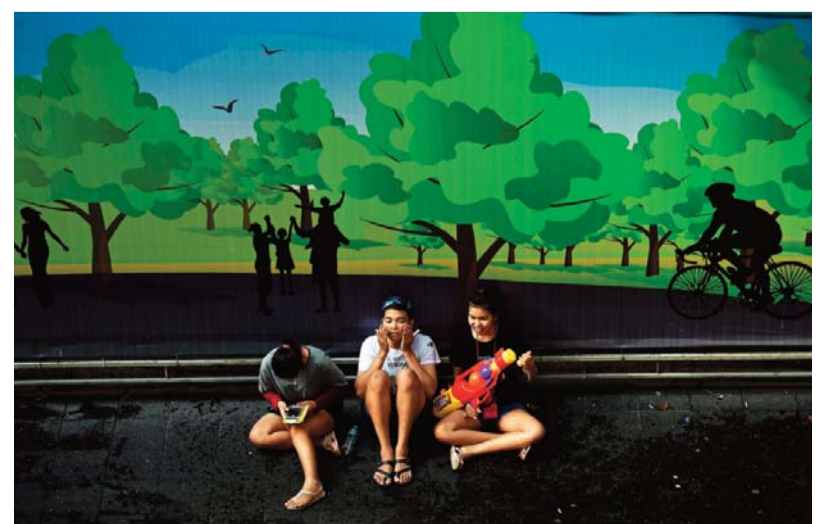
But police efforts to block the deluge appeared fruitless by midday, with water-soaked street parties in full swing across Bangkok with people unleashing brightly-coloured plastic water guns. Hoses and buckets were also out in neighboring Myanmar, one of several other Buddhist countries in the region to celebrate the festival, despite similar calls to curb water waste and return to more traditional celebrations.

Thailand's junta has also ramped up a campaign this year to crack down on drunk driving, which soars during the Songkran week and sees hundreds killed every year.

It is one of two periods dubbed the "Seven Deadly Days" by the Thai government and press-the other being western New Year. The past two days alone have seen 116 people killed and nearly 1,000 injured in road accidents, according to government officials. The junta said yesterday that authorities had arrested more than 20,000 motorists accused of drunk driving since Saturday. — AFP



People take part in water battles.—AFP Photos



People sit by a wall covered by a poster as they rest during water battles.

High hopes for Indonesian author vying for Man Booker glory

Already compared to literary heavyweights Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Haruki Murakami, great expectations weigh on Eka Kurniawan, the first Indonesian ever nominated for a Man Booker International Prize. The 40-year-old is up against revered writers like Orhan Pamuk and Kenzaburo Oe, both past recipients of the Nobel Prize in Literature, but there is a growing buzz about the works of this little known author. At home, titles of Kurniawan's novels splashed across the back of trucks, while newspapers and magazines hail him Indonesia's most exciting writer for a generation.

"My friends sent me pictures of the back of trucks bearing the titles of my books - these (trucks and the lives of the drivers) were an inspiration for one of my novels and the fact my books are emblazoned there brought me to a state of euphoria, I got goosebumps," he tells AFP. Internationally, demand is such that he's already attended the acclaimed Frankfurt and Melbourne Book Fairs. Despite this, Kurniawan says his inclusion on the longlist for the prestigious award, for "Man Tiger" - the story of a young man who gnaws his elderly neighbor to death - came as a "surprise".

He will find out Thursday if he has made the final six. The winning author and translator will also share 50,000 pounds (USD\$71,000) in prizemoney, while all the finalists receive 1,000 pounds. A shortlist nomination - or better still, a victory - will likely provide a much-needed international profile boost not just for Kurniawan, but for the nation's literary scene. "I hope this is the case that Indonesian literature is really on the rise, because in the past 10 years I can feel the excitement," he adds.

'Free from taboos'

Indonesian writers have long struggled for appreciation at

home, let alone on the world stage. Many do not have the means to translate their books into other languages and attract publishers and readers abroad. Yet there is a passionate desire to share their stories and the profession has flourished since Indonesia embraced democracy. Kurniawan, who is now married with a young daughter, participated in the student protests that toppled the authoritarian regime in 1998. He says the wave of openness that followed the end of Suharto's three-decade rule had an "enormous" influence on Indonesia's literary evolution.

"I feel Indonesia is more open," Kurniawan explains. "We can speak practically about many things, including politics, religion and other taboos like sex." Kurniawan's own work is no exception: "Man Tiger" is a grisly, murderous tale, while "Beauty is a Wound" revolves around the communist massacres across Indonesia in the 1960s, a politically-sensitive topic to this day. The vein of magic realism throughout his work has earned Kurniawan comparisons to legendary Colombian novelist Marquez, while others tout him as successor to Pramoedyana Ananta Toer.

Pramoedyana, who died a decade ago this month, is considered Indonesia's greatest-ever writer. His legendary "Buru Quartet" - which he wrote behind bars during the Suharto years - earned him several nominations for a Nobel Prize for Literature, and acclaim overseas.

Fuel global interest

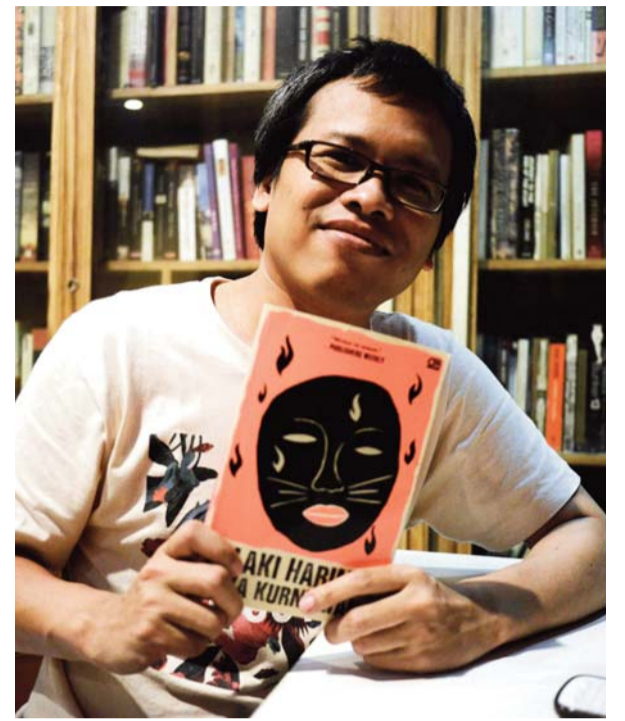
For all the high praise directed at Kurniawan, who is from West Java but now lives in Jakarta, it has been slow crawl from aspiring writer to Booker nominee. He worked as a graphic designer and jobbing writer, but when "Man Tiger" was first published in Indonesia in 2004 - he concedes the readership really only

extended to his circle of close friends. It took a decade before it was translated into English and on bookshelves overseas.

The respected Southeast Asian scholar, Benedict Anderson stumbled on Kurniawan's work and, impressed, urged him to translate his works and meet with a UK publisher later describing him as "Indonesia's most original living writer of novels and short stories". For many writers - language is a challenge. Indonesian is often second choice after local dialects. This limits exposure in a country where only 1 in 1,000 spends time reading, according to research by UNESCO.

Publishing in English is the only avenue for global recognition and readership but for many the cost of quality translation remains too high, ensuring they remain off the radar of major international publishers. But interest is growing - last year Indonesia was guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, an opportunity to showcase the literary culture and traditions at the largest publishing event in the world.

There's a sense Kurniawan could encourage further interest. Barbara Epler, the head of his US publisher New Directions, predicted that if Kurniawan took off overseas he would be a "prime force" in getting more publishers interested in Indonesia, a sentiment echoed in his homeland. "I hope he wins so that authors will rush to translate their books into other languages, promoting them to the world," respected Indonesian poet Sapardi Djoko Damono told AFP. The shortlist for the Man Booker International Prize will be announced Thursday and the winner on May 16. — AFP



This picture shows author Eka Kurniawan showing off his book 'Man Tiger' during an interview with AFP in Jakarta. — AFP



Art student Eliya Nikki Cohen covering gravestones in Camperdown Cemetery in Sydney with custom made white cloth in an installation for the city's 20th Biennale, Australia's largest contemporary arts festival.



Art student Eliya Nikki Cohen covering gravestones in Camperdown Cemetery in Sydney. — AFP photos

No dead end art for graveyard Sydney Biennale

An historic Australian graveyard which includes the final resting place of a one-time harpist to Napoleon and prominent figures from the nation's colonial era has become the site of an art installation with an enduring message. Swedish artist Bo Christian Larsson had never visited Sydney, let alone seen Camperdown Cemetery, when he agreed to work among its weathered graves as part of the city's 20th Biennale, Australia's largest contemporary visual arts festival.

Dog-walkers and visitors make their way through the tree-filled space where some of the graves have been fitted in white cloths for his work "Fade Away, Fade Away, Fade Away". The covers are designed to strip away the hierarchy of social class that dictated life when the cemetery - which dates from 1848 and was considered full within decades - was founded. "What I am interested in is actually to get rid of the history on each stone because I have seen the record of this cemetery - the more money you had, the better stone you could get of course, and the more important place and bigger grave and so on," Larsson says.

"It is about the stones itself as a sort of blank page and that you don't know who is buried underneath." Creating the cloth covers are a group of seamstresses, Sydney artists recruited for the installation, who choose the stones they want to cover and then tailor a piece for each one. The

work must respect the historic nature of the cemetery, meaning some graves are off limits, and the artists are careful not to hasten the deterioration of the memorials, some of which are crumbling or broken. "They are bringing a lot to the work as well," Larsson says. As part of the installation, he has the women work out of a shipping container - a nod to globalization and the often invisible labor of women in garment making.

Larsson, whose often dark works can incorporate drawing, sculpture and performance and reflects his interest in symbols, rituals and social conventions, says the installation is on the theme of fading away, because even in life "you are slowly fading away". "You get buried and you are slowly fading away. The stones are actually fading away. Although as a human you think that stone will last forever but it doesn't obviously," he explains.

'Kind of scary'

Larsson says Camperdown Cemetery - which closed in 1942 - was the right place for the installation given his interest "in the mysterious and the life after death". Among the thousands buried there lie Nicolas-Charles Bochsa, who was forced to leave France where he had once been Napoleon's harpist after being accused of forgery, and explorer and New South Wales Surveyor-General Sir Thomas Mitchell. Bathsheba Ghost, a convict who went on

to become matron of the Sydney Infirmary, has a memorial in the grounds as does Eliza Donithorne, a recluse and eccentric who was jilted at the altar in 1856 and is claimed by some in Australia as the inspiration for Charles Dickens' character Miss Havisham.

Sydney artist Katy Plummer, one of the women working on the installation, said the exhibition has forced her to think about the people who were buried here. "There is a family over there where a 29-year-old woman died and then 21 days later her infant son died and it's just the saddest thing. There's his little name, aged 21 days," she says. "I also think about the individuals whose names you can't read any more, that's really interesting," she adds.

Larsson says wandering the cemetery in the grounds of St Stephen's Anglican Church in a busy pocket of Sydney's inner-west Newtown suburb at night can be "kind of scary actually". He says: "It becomes very much like a playground for the dead people somehow. I like it a lot. Because the stones in the twilight when the sun goes down, the covers become really bright, a little bit like ghosts." The Sydney Biennale runs until early June. — AFP

At Disney, running a race is all about the costume

At Walt Disney World, you might find Darth Vader, Tinker Bell or a classic Disney princess running alongside half-marathon participants. These events are no ordinary races, and the trips that participants take are no ordinary Disney visits. Few care about race times, particularly with opportunities to pose with costumed characters such as Donald Duck and Boba Fett. Racing is mostly about getting to the photo ops before lines get too long.

Disney has races to honor classic Disney and Pixar characters (January and September), princesses (February), Tinker Bell (May) and superheroes from Disney's Marvel comic books (November). There's also one at Disneyland Paris in September. On April 14-17, the Florida theme park hosts its first Star Wars Half Marathon - The Dark Side, following last year's debut of The Light Side race at Disneyland in California. Another Light Side half marathon is scheduled for January 2017, with registration opening this June. The races combine two of the world's biggest franchises, while capitalizing on Disney's \$4 billion purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012.

Minimize disruptions

Many runners come for the weekend or even the week, turning the trip into a "run-cation" as they bring family to ride the rides and, for adults, drink the drinks at Epcot's World Showcase. It becomes less of a test of endurance than a challenge to get up early after full days at the parks - races start before dawn to minimize disruptions. Costumes are a must for many participants. "I have a thing about princesses," said Brooke Laing, who works at an investment bank in New York. "I wanted to dress up and have that all-girls weekend, getting to put on a tiara and have that childish experience."

You can even ride a roller coaster near the halfway point of a full marathon in January - though if you run too fast in an early-morning event, you may find the ride not yet open. "Disney usually puts on a pretty good show for anything you go to," said Misty Hayes, a Fort Worth, Texas, police officer. "How many have the option of jumping on the roller coaster? It was pretty awesome." The Disney races aren't free of gripe, though. They have gotten very popular in recent years, and many sell out within an hour of registration. Spouses and friends have been shut out for waiting too long. And this year, new policies put a cramp on costumes. No more face masks such as Chewbacca. Princess Leia robes and Darth Vader capes also can't be too long.

Darrell Saria, a federal government employee in Winnipeg, Canada, said he understands the need for safety and believes it pushes people to be more creative. He has run as a mashup of Goofy and Darth Vader, and another time combining the Muppets' Animal and Boba Fett. He said the races turn into a social gathering. "I've met a lot of people," he said. "People who do make their own costumes give each other praises, and they intermingle. People will dress up just to have fun with it and make people smile."

Various races

And hey, if you're going to Disney for a race, why not do two, three or even four on consecutive days? Finish multiple races for bonus medals featuring Dopey, Goofy and Dumbo (get it?). Wear them all as you visit the theme parks afterward and take pride as they clink and clank against each other. You also get bonus medals for running Disney races on multiple weekends. Those doing the "Star Wars" races on both coasts this year get a Millennium Falcon medal.

Disney "figured out that if you're going to come down, especially if you're traveling from out of town, you might as well maximize your time out there and maximize your fun," said Mike Czernek, a software engineer who lives about an hour away in Melbourne, Florida, yet stays at a Disney World hotel for the weekend. Mark Wietbrock, a security-technology salesman in Lake St. Louis, Missouri, does a Disney World race - or consecutive races - every other year. His wife and two younger kids, 6 and 8, have done various races with him. He said the trips are also a chance for him and his wife to return to where they started dating in 2000.

"It's the best of both worlds to get to run and get to enjoy the parks," he said. For many runners, vacation time and money are the limiting factors. Disney races tend to be more expensive than hometown races, and multi-race challenges are even more so - pricier than signing up for the races individually. Collecting 11 medals from seven races in January costs more than \$1,000 in registration fees, not to mention airfare and hotels. Though there's no admission fee to run through the parks, the finish is in the parking lot, so you have to pay to re-enter. Rob Biggar, a software programmer in Setauket, New York, said Disney's multi-race challenges become "much more a test of your wallet than your stamina." — AP



This March 14, 1946 file photo shows author Ernest Hemingway with his new wife, Mary Welsh, after their wedding in Havana, Cuba.



Museum visitors examine a 1927 photograph that shows Ernest Hemingway, center, at a bullfight in Pamplona Spain in the exhibit: 'Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars' at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.



A museum visitor, left, walks past a photograph of Ernest Hemingway in the exhibit: 'Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars'. — AP photos

Manuscripts among rare Hemingway items shown at JFK library

Ernest Hemingway penned 47 possible endings to A Farewell to Arms, eight of which are on display at a new exhibition on the famed American writer at the John F. Kennedy presidential library - along with the one that actually concluded the classic World War I novel. "If a person wants to make their mark as a writer they have to work very hard, and this exhibit really shows how hard he worked," said Patrick Hemingway, the author's only surviving child who on Tuesday toured the exhibition that opened Monday in Boston and runs through Dec 31.

"He always felt responsible for being where the action was," said the 87-year-old Hemingway. "A lot of writers just retire to their rooms and describe their childhood. He didn't do that." The Kennedy library, which opened in 1979, is a repository for the world's largest collection of documents, photographs and personal mementos belonging to the literary icon. The

collection is one of the library's "greatest treasures," said curator Stacey Bredhoff.

'Grace under pressure'

"Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars" includes material rarely displayed in public. It enjoyed an earlier run at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York City last fall. Hemingway and Kennedy never met, but the late president was clearly an admirer. Kennedy wrote Hemingway for permission to use his oft-quoted phrase "grace under pressure" in the opening to Kennedy's own Profiles in Courage. Hemingway was too ill to accept an invitation to JFK's January 1961 inauguration, and would commit suicide later that year.

Along with the multiple proposed endings to A Farewell to Arms, highlights of the exhibit include Hemingway's first short story, published in 1917 in a high school literary magazine; a draft of his first Nick

Adams story, written on Red Cross stationery at an Italian hospital where Hemingway was recovering from wounds suffered while serving as an ambulance driver during World War I; correspondence with other literary figures from his time as a member of the so-called "lost generation" in Paris; and ticket stubs from some of the many bullfights he attended.

"I am very pleased that they were able to put together in my lifetime a very comprehensive picture of a person who really represented very well the first half of the 20th century," said Patrick Hemingway. The story of how Hemingway's papers ended up at the Kennedy library carries overtones of modern-day developments in the long and complex relationship between the US and Cuba. — AP



File photo shows runners in a half-marathon at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif.



This undated photo provided by Walt Disney World shows costumed runners participating in a race at the theme park in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. — AP



A Bangladeshi Dhaka University Art Institute student displays masks to sell as a part of Bengali New Year preparations in Dhaka on April 11, 2016. The Bengali calendar is solar, with the year beginning on Pohela Boishakh, which this year falls today, in Bangladesh. — AFP

Syrian actors board 'Love Boat' for Europe

Six Syrian actors with stories to tell are huddled in a small vessel headed for Europe on a "Love Boat" journey to escape the conflict that has ravaged their homeland. The vessel, a prop mounted on a stage in the Jordanian capital, is the centerpiece of a one-act tragicomedy to celebrate life and break what its director calls the "three biggest taboos in Arab society: religion, sex and politics".

It tells of the five-year conflict that has killed more than 270,000 people, forever maimed many others and forced millions to flee their homes, often on perilous trips across the Mediterranean. With their theatre company back home decimated by the bloodshed, the actors who survived are reunited in their flight and by a determination to restart their broken lives. They act under their own names, and some drew from personal experiences. Iman, one of the two women, plays a teenager hit by shrapnel in the southern province of Daraa who had a leg amputated—a role not far from her own real-life trauma of losing her right leg due to shrapnel wounds.

Haya, a 25-year-old, created a character who spent 227 days in regime jails where she was raped daily, rendering homage to the many Syrian women who lived such a nightmare. Among the men are Mohammed who plays a fictional singer who lost a hand in the war and Adnan whose character was jailed for taking part in anti-regime protests—as Adnan was in real life. Mahmud, meanwhile, plays a man trapped in the besieged Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmuk near Damascus—the very camp from which the real-life Mahmud fled to Jordan.

In the play, the actors set off across the Mediterranean first to Greece, then Italy, Spain, France, Britain and Germany, with only a map of Europe and a telescope, hoping one of those countries will take them in. As each country appears on the horizon, the actors perform a scene from classical plays written by Aristophanes, Goldoni, Cervantes, Moliere and Shakespeare. The texts are carefully chosen to mirror life in conflict-plagued Syria, with its slew of armed forces, including the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group, as well as the taboos of Arab society.

"I wanted through this play to pay tribute to those who have died at sea, those forced to flee their country because of the war and the destruction," director Nawar Bulbul said at the Amman



premiere. "These people boarded makeshift boats to undertake a perilous voyage because of their love of life," said Bulbul.

King Lear's Storm

Last year, he directed Syrian refugee children in a version of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and the year before he produced "King Lear", also with child actors from Zaatar camp in northern Jordan. In "Love Boat", Bulbul borrows from the grand masters of European drama to send out his message. Off the Greek coast, the actors deliver lines from Aristophanes's "The Knight", a satire on social and political life, and then from Carlo Goldoni's "Servant of Two Masters" as they near Italy. Spain is

reserved for Cervantes and his masterpiece "Don Quixote", who set out on adventures to defend the helpless and fight evil aided by his servant and companion Sancho Panza.

Bulbul revisited a scene in which Don Quixote comes across a group of shackled prisoners and asks his friend why these "wretched people" are being held in chains.

"Because I am in love," shouts one actor. "Because I listen to music," says another, apparently referring to prohibitions enforced by Sunni Muslim extremists such as IS. As the boat reaches the French coast, the actors deliver lines from Moliere's "Tartuffe" or "The Impostor", the story of a self-declared holy man who uses religion to sate his sexual desires.



In that scene, an actor swiftly changes costume to appear bearded and in a flowing robe like IS's self-styled caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The sea journey ends with a tragedy, Shakespeare's "King Lear", as the raging storm sinks the boat, taking to the depths more victims of Syria's war. More than 110,000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean to Greece and Italy so far this year, and 413 have drowned trying, the International Organisation for Migration said in February. Last year, 3,770 people lost their lives, including many children, trying to reach Europe. — AFP



Syrian refugee actors perform the tragicomedy play 'Love Boat' at a theatre in the Jordanian capital Amman. — AFP photos