

Union chief hails move to shift nurseries under MoE



Pope returns with 12 refugees after visit to Greek island



Surging oil production, low prices to challenge meet



Villa relegated as Aguero treble takes Man City third



OIL UNION REJECTS GOVT APPEAL TO CANCEL STRIKE

SALEH URGES WORKERS TO RENEGOTIATE • FIRMS BEGIN CONTINGENCY PLANS



Min 19°
Max 33°
High Tide 08:12 & 19:33
Low Tide 01:01 & 13:46



40 PAGES

YEMEN TALKS TO BEGIN AMID SHAKY TRUCE

KUWAIT: A concerted United Nations effort aimed at ending nearly 13 months of war in Yemen sees peace talks resuming tomorrow, but with a ceasefire barely holding. Previous attempts have failed to stop the fighting which has killed thousands of people, forced almost 2.8 million from their homes and raised regional tensions. A ceasefire that came into effect last Sunday at midnight to pave the way for the talks in Kuwait has been violated numerous times.

But the Iran-backed rebel Houthis, the government, and the United Nations, which sponsored the ceasefire, have avoided talk of it collapsing, as happened with three earlier truces. The ceasefire does not apply to jihadist groups, which have exploited the chaos to strengthen their hold in the south. The coalition led by Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia early this week described ceasefire violations as "minor". The coalition began air strikes in March last year to support Yemen's government.

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KUWAIT: A general view shows the Shuaiba oil refinery yesterday. Oil workers plan to go on strike today in protest against what they call the government's plan to cut their annual benefits and bonuses. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The oil sector employees' union reiterated its determination to go ahead with its strike today, turning down an appeal from the acting oil minister to call off the total strike in protest at alleged pay cuts and to accept negotiations, adding all preparations had been made. The union explained that all employees would show up as usual wearing their official uniforms to sign in and out. "The strike will start from 7:00 am till 3:00 pm or during official working hours," explained the union, adding employees and workers working morning or afternoon shifts would go on strike according to their working hours.

Minister of Finance and acting oil minister Anas Al-Saleh yesterday urged oil workers' unions to uphold public interests, rationality and wisdom to avoid causing damage to the Kuwaiti oil sector, and consequently pushing the country into disputes that could harm its reputation, both at home and overseas. The critical stage the Kuwaiti economy is experiencing due to the fall in oil prices prompts unity and working according to a joint vision to keep away causing any harm to the oil sector and the development process it is going through, Saleh said in a statement yesterday.

KPC and its affiliate companies reiterate preservation of workers' rights, wages, bonuses and indemnities, and the way the latter is calculated, as well as other advantages they have gained through labor agreements and the arbitration authority, the minister added.

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AGRA: Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge pose at the Taj Mahal yesterday. — AFP

WILL AND KATE END INDIA TRIP WITH TAJ MAHAL VISIT

AGRA, India: Prince William and his wife Kate arrived at the Taj Mahal yesterday, wrapping up their weeklong trip to India and Bhutan with a visit that carries poignant echoes for Britain's royal family. When the late Princess Diana was photographed sitting alone outside the tragic monument to love in 1992, it sparked much media speculation and later became a symbol of her failing marriage.

The Taj Mahal was cleared of tourists minutes before the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge arrived, after flying in earlier to Agra, its streets decked out in fairy lights and flowers to welcome the high-profile visitors.

As temperatures soared, workers sprinkled ice water on the famous "Diana bench" in front of the monument, before the pair posed for a photo, Kate wearing a white-and-blue dress and her husband in a matching blue blazer. "It's a beautiful place, stunning designs in there," Prince

William told reporters after the couple spent about half an hour inside the mausoleum, famous for its pure white marble. The Duchess said it had been "incredible learning about the romance of the building and its really beautiful architecture". Their visit to India's most recognizable landmark follows a whirlwind week that saw the young royals feed baby rhinos in northeastern Assam and trek to a mountain monastery in Bhutan - retracing the footsteps of Prince Charles.

Also waiting for the royal couple in Agra was a 73-year-old fan whose family memories stretch back even further, to the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1961. "I have been dreaming of meeting the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge ever since I got to know they would be coming to the Taj," Surendra Sharma told AFP. Sharma's late uncle Kailash Nath Sharma, a keen photographer whose studio in

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AL-QURAYYAH: An Emirati trainer tries to separate two bulls at the end of a traditional bullfight in the north of Fujairah this emirate yesterday. — AFP

TWO NIGHTS OF JAPAN QUAKE KILL 41

News

in Brief

Saudi factory fire kills 12

RIYADH: A fire at a petrochemicals plant in the eastern Saudi city of Jubail killed 12 workers yesterday, the official SPA news agency reported. The fire broke out during maintenance work at the Jubail United Petrochemical Co, a spokesman for the Jubail and Yanbu industrial zone, Abdel Rahman Al-Abdel Khader, told the agency. The victims suffocated from fumes of burning chemicals, he said. Another 11 employees were injured, six of them left in a "serious state". United is a subsidiary of Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corp (SABIC). Spokesmen for SABIC and United could not immediately be reached for comment.

Petrol bomb kills Bahrain policeman

DUBAI: A petrol bomb attack in a village in Bahrain yesterday killed a policeman and gravely wounded two more, the Gulf state's interior ministry said. "A policeman was martyred in a terrorist Molotov cocktail attack in Kertabad" village, a tweet from the ministry reported. It said an enquiry had begun into the attack which also seriously injured two officers. Locals said a large security presence had gathered around the area. The Gulf kingdom has been rocked by sporadic violence since an uprising in 2011 demanding political reform was suppressed.

KUMAMOTO, Japan: Scores of people were feared buried alive yesterday after two powerful quakes hit southern Japan a day apart, killing at least 41 people, as a forecast storm threatened more devastating landslides. Homes, roads and railway lines were swept away when huge hillsides collapsed as thousands of tonnes of mud were dislodged by the thunderous seismic tremors. Buildings were reduced to rubble, including a university dormitory and apartment complexes, with dozens of people un-

counted for over a wide area.

"We are aware of multiple locations where people have been buried alive," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference. "Police, firefighters and Self Defense Force (military) personnel are doing all they can to rescue them." More than 90,000 people have been evacuated, including 300 from an area near a dam thought to be at risk of collapse. A hospital was left teetering by yesterday morning's 7.0-magnitude

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MIMAMI-ASO, Japan: Rescue workers try to save people from a collapsed house in this town in Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. — AFP

IRAN, TURKEY VOW TO COOPERATE

ANKARA: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed to boost trade between their two countries at talks yesterday following the lifting of most international sanctions on Tehran. They also agreed to cooperate in the fight against terrorism during their meeting at Erdogan's lavish palace near Ankara, just a day after Iran was accused of supporting extremists at a summit of Muslim heads of state in Istanbul.

Rouhani boycotted the closing meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in protest at the rebuke. His meeting with Erdogan focused on the Syrian conflict and trade between the two neighbors. In a joint press conference, Erdogan said he hoped bilateral trade would reach \$30 billion annually. It currently stands at just \$10 billion after years of sanctions.

After being brought in from the cold following last year's nuclear deal with world powers, Iran is being courted by both Europe and Turkey as a potentially lucrative market for trade and investment. Rouhani called for banking and energy ties between the two nations to be enhanced as the two leaders inked several cooperation deals. Energy-hungry Turkey is dependent on Russia and Iran for its oil and natural gas but may turn more to Tehran after Ankara's rela-

tions with Moscow cooled after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane.

Despite their rapprochement, Turkey and Iran remain on opposing sides of the five-year civil war in Syria. Tehran backs Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, while Ankara sees Assad's ouster as key to any resolution of the conflict and supports rebels fighting to overthrow his regime. Rouhani said stability in Syria, Yemen and Iraq would benefit the Islamic world. Erdogan said despite their differences on regional issues, Turkey and Iran agreed on the need to stop the bloodshed in the region.

The war in Syria has pitted Shiite-majority Iran against Turkey's ally, predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia, with both aiming to increase their influence in the region.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been embroiled in a diplomatic crisis since a mob set fire to Riyadh's missions in Tehran and Mashhad in January in protest at the execution by Saudi Arabia of a prominent Shiite cleric. The Turkish and Iranian leaders also agreed to seek to end sectarian divisions in the Islamic world and join forces to fight terror. "What matters is the unity of the Islamic world. We must tell the world: Our identity is Islam, not to be Sunni or Shiite, or from another sect," said Rouhani. — AFP



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) shakes hands with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani during an official welcoming ceremony at the presidential complex yesterday. — AFP

KUWAIT NEVER LET YEMEN DOWN: DELEGATE TO UN

NEW YORK/KUWAIT/RIYADH: The Yemeni Delegate to the United Nations Ambassador Khaled Hussein Al-Yamani lauded Kuwait's supportive role to his country in times of distress and crises. Kuwait as an effective part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which has never let down Yemen even in the most difficult times, Yamani said in speech at a special UN Security Council session to discuss the Yemeni crisis. He noted that Kuwait's hosting of the upcoming talks between different Yemeni parties has 'great implications.'

Yamani said that Kuwait has been hosting Yemeni-Yemeni dialogues during the conflict. He underlined that Yemeni people is looking forwards to the success of the coming round of talks to reach a viable and sustainable peaceful solution based on the Gulf initiative, national dialogue outcome and relevant UNSC resolutions including resolution 2216.

Yamani unveiled that after five days from the Saudi-led coalition's announcement of ceasefire, the Houthi militias and pro-former president Ali Abdullah Salah forces have committed dozens of violations, including several rockets and artillery attacks of residential areas.

Discernable decrease

The UN Envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmad said meanwhile that first days of the cessation of hostilities, which started on April 10, witnessed a discernable decrease in the level of military violence in most parts of the country. "However, there have also been a worrying number of serious violations particularly in Al-Jawf, Amran, Mareb and Taiz. Fighting in Taiz continues to cause civilian casualties and I am concerned that a spiral of escalation could threaten the success of the peace process," he cautioned.

He noted that a number of events over the last weeks at the same time rose hopes for success of peace process. "I would like to acknowledge the courage displayed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Ansarallah by accepting to settle border disputes. Both parties confirmed that these agreements pave the way for the general cessation of hostilities in Yemen," he said.

He also expressed gratitude for Kuwait's hosting for the Yemeni talks. "I am sincerely grateful to the Government of Kuwait, who generously offered to host these talks, and who is providing every kind of support possible for their success," he said.

Comprehensive agreement

He added that the talks will commence tomorrow and aim to reach a comprehensive agreement, which will end the conflict and allow the resumption of inclusive political dialogue in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and other relevant UNSC resolutions.

He argued that these talks build on a negotiating framework which provides a mechanism for return to a peaceful and orderly transition based on the GCC Initiative and National Dialogue Outcomes. "I will encourage the parties in the talks to negotiate a detailed way forward starting with each of the following areas: the creation of interim security arrangements, the withdrawal of militias and armed groups,



MARIB: Mabruk Mughrabi (center), a Yemeni boy injured in his leg as a result of a land mine, stands with friends at a camp for internally displaced on the outskirts of Marib on April 15, 2016.— AFP

the handover of heavy weapons to the State, the restoration of state institutions and the resumption of inclusive political dialogue, the release of prisoners and detainees. With these components, we are building on what has been discussed and agreed upon in principle, in Biel, December 2015 based on the demands of UNSC 2216 (2015)," he said. He went on to say that "this framework provides a strong foundation for developing a new political consensus that will help Yemen achieve the stability and security that its people deserve and that its future requires. "A positive outcome will require difficult compromises from all sides, as well as determination to reach an agreement. I encourage all sides to come to the talks in good faith and flexibility. The path to peace will be difficult but it is in reach and failure is not an option."

Kuwaiti efforts

Charge d'Affaires of Yemen Embassy in Kuwait Mohammad Al-Berri spoke highly of Kuwait's initiative for hosting the intra-Yemeni peace talks, due to start tomorrow. "The State of Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, spares no effort in reaching a peaceful settlement to the Yemeni crisis," he said.

"Kuwait is a long-standing mediator in the problems of many Arab countries," Berri said, recalling Kuwait's role in ending the crisis of civil war in Yemen between 1962 and 1970. He noted that the recent visit to Kuwait by Yemeni President Abd-Rabbuh Mansour Hadi reached positive results which will reflect positively on UN-sponsored Yemeni talks in Kuwait.

The Yemeni government received assurances from the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed that the Houthis agreed to take part in the first round of talks to discuss the

mechanisms of implementing the relevant UN resolutions and reaching permanent peace, he affirmed. He renewed the Yemeni government's determination to find a peaceful end to the protracted conflict, stressing the need to put the national unity above all narrow-minded partisan considerations.

Berri reaffirmed the commitment of his government to the UN resolutions, the GCC initiative for peace in Yemen and the outcomes of the previous rounds of the national dialogue. The planned talks will start one week after the arrival of representative of the Yemeni parties to Kuwait to discuss ways of consolidating the ceasefire in Yemen, addressing the humanitarian crisis and preparing the ground for ending the conflict.

GCC commends Kuwait

GCC Secretary General Dr Abdulateef Al-Zayani praised the State of Kuwait for hosting the political talks between the Yemeni parties. He commended efforts of Kuwait under leadership of His Highness the Amir to stop bloodshed in Yemen and restore peace nationwide. He noted that the government of Kuwait provided all facilities to bring about success for the talks.

Zayani hoped the talks would contribute to completion of the political process in line with the GCC initiative and its implementation mechanism, and UN resolution 2216. The Gulf Cooperation Council, he said, was standing behind the UN envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmad for the success of the talks. Zayani called for the respect of the ceasefire and the facilitation of the delivery of humanitarian aid for the Yemeni people nationwide. He said the violation of the truce would not help providing suitable atmosphere for the forthcoming talks.— KUNA

A BLEND OF ALBANIAN CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

By Kujtim Morina, Albanian Ambassador to the State of Kuwait

On the occasion of activities and events organized in Kuwait as Capital of Islamic Culture for 2016, I would like to thank National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters for their support and cooperation in organizing an Albanian concert of Folks Songs and Dances on 18 April 2016, 19:00 at Abdul Hussain Andulredha Theatre in Salmiya. My high appreciation goes especially to the Minister of Information and State Minister for Youth Affairs, Sheikh Salman Sabah Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and Secretary General of NCCAL, Dr Ali Yohua for their continuous support to the Albanian embassy activities. This concert will be delivered by the Albanian National Ensemble of Folks Songs and Dances under National Theater of Opera and Ballet of Albania which is well-known for many successful performances throughout the years in many countries since its establishment in 1957.

Given that I am in the end of my mission in Kuwait, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to all Kuwaiti authorities and officials under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for their cooperation and support. The bilateral relations between Albania and Kuwait are strengthened more during recent years. I use the opportunity to mention here the exchange of visits from the authorities of the both countries and the official visit recent weeks of the Minister of Public Works and National Assembly Affairs Dr Ali Al-Omar to Tirana, cooperation with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and signing of a loan agreement in the end of last month and the increasing interest from Kuwaiti companies and Kuwaiti citizens to visit Albania. Main priorities for development as set by the Albanian government are



Albanian Ambassador Kujtim Morina

tourism and agriculture. Last year, there were registered 4 million tourists in Albania and we are working to receive more. Mediterranean weather of Albania, sandy and rocky beaches, mountainous resorts and several UNESCO protected sites with Roman, Greek and Ottoman heritage and budget-friendly prices compared to some other countries, makes the country more attractive for the visitors. Since the removal of visas for Kuwaiti citizens from the Albanian government in February last year, more Kuwaitis are visiting the country and we hope that this trend goes on. As I mentioned before, this concert of Albanian folk songs and dances on 18 April will show some blend of Albanian culture and traditions and also the feelings of friendship and fraternity with the people of Kuwait. Director of Albania's Opera House will be visiting the country and this is a good opportunity to meet and exchange ideas of cooperation with Kuwaiti relevant authorities. I would like to conclude this article for Kuwait Times thanking the staff of this newspaper for their support in promoting relations between our countries and with best impressions for being here in Kuwait with my family for three years and willing to maintain these contacts and relations.



CAMBRIDGE: Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Sabah is pictured with the Right Honorable Lord Chris Smith.— KUNA

KUWAITI TEEN WINS SILVER AT GENEVA INVENTIONS EXHIBITION

AMBASSADOR PRAISES ACHIEVEMENTS



GENEVA: Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim is pictured with Kuwaiti inventor Nasser Issa Al-Jimaz.— KUNA

GENEVA: Kuwaiti inventor Nasser Issa Al-Jimaz, 16, won on Friday the silver award of the 44th International Exhibition of Inventions in Geneva (2016) for innovations in the field of environment protection.

He exhibited a new mechanism for reducing the carbon dioxide emissions through absorbing these emissions from air, treating them chemically and turning them into plastic material that could be used in many applications. The arbitration panel appreciated Jimaz's invention, saying it is cost-effective, and will open new job opportunities and have positive impacts on environment besides its economic returns.

Kuwait's permanent representative to the United Nations and international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim said described Jimaz's win as an excellence award for Kuwait as a whole. "This victory shows the success of the government's policy of encouraging scientific research and care for young talent down to participating in such international exhibitions to raise the name of Kuwait high among innovative nations in the field of science and technology," the ambassador said. He added that

the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to this exhibition reflects the credibility of the awards, where getting a certificate from such a prestigious organization constitutes obtaining a birth certificate that the inventor has started an important step in the march of excellence and innovation.

Jimaz is an example for the youth of Kuwait for his early consciousness on the problems of the environment and human and on how can the Kuwaiti contribute to resolving such problems and be part of the international efforts in this regard to save the blue planet from the consequences of environmental pollution, he explained. The Ambassador pointed out that Kuwait with this win also gained international admiration in the applied scientific field that is added to its excellence in humanitarian work around the world.

The world's unique annual exhibition, being sponsored by the Swiss Federal Government and of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), showcases 1,000 new inventions and products; it gathers 752 exhibitors from 48 countries between April 13 and 17.— KUNA

PEMBROKE COLLEGE APPLAUDS SHEIKH MUBARAK ABDULLAH'S SPONSORING

KUWAIT: The British Pembroke College, Cambridge, has expressed deep gratitude to Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Sabah for patronizing research at the renowned university, the Abdullah Mubarak Al-Sabah Foundation said yesterday in a statement.

This came when Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Sabah has recently paid a formal call on Lord Smith of Fisbury, the new Master of Pembroke College. "Developing our understanding of the culture, history and society of the Middle East and Islamic world has never been more important than now; and the generosity of Sheikh Mubarak in sponsoring academic research and discovery here at Pembroke College is especially deeply valued," Lord Smith was quoted by the Foundation as saying.

Sheikh Mubarak was a Pembroke student where he took an MPhil degree as a postgraduate in International Studies. He has kept in close touch with Pembroke, especially in connection with the support given by the family Foundation named for his late father, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mubarak, one of the great figures of the Al-Sabah Ruling Family in the middle of the last century. Also present at the meeting, held on

March 31, was Sir Roger Tomkys, a former Master of the College, who was Sheikh Mubarak's Tutor and who has been closely associated with the Book Prize since its inception.

The foundation, under the aegis of the late Sheikh Abdullah Mubarak's wife, Sheikhha Sou'ad Al-Sabah, is widely recognized for its generous support of academic work. Each year since 1998 the British-Kuwait Friendship Society administers and awards a valuable Prize for the best original academic monograph or monographs published in the English Language in the preceding year.

The Right Honorable Lord (Chris) Smith was Secretary of State in the Labor Government and subsequently Head of the Environment Agency, before being elected Master of the College at which he was himself a student.

The foundation has funded a prestigious Research Fellowship in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the College, enabling outstanding post-doctoral scholars to establish their careers and help spread better understanding of the region in the Western World.— KUNA

KUWAIT HOSTS INT'L FORUM ON HUMANITARIAN WORK

KUWAIT: Kuwait's third international forum for humanitarian work began yesterday with the participation of experts from government, private sector, international agencies and organizations as well as volunteers - all consecrated to the goal of furthering humanitarian work everywhere.

The forum is taking place in Kuwait for the third year because of Kuwait's eagerness to continue on the path it has taken for itself to be a center for humanitarian work, said Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Subaih, in a speech opening the one day forum.

She said Kuwait seeks to derive from the forum expertise on how government, local and international organizations well versed in relief efforts can pool their resources together to help victims of man-made or natural disasters around the world.

The forum is being held under the

motto: The Use of Technology and Innovation in Humanitarian Work, which, the minister said is quite apt as the effect of technology and media are great on humanitarian work, since with fast information and technical know-how relief aid can reach those it is destined for with ease and with successful results.

Coordinator of the forum Abdullah Al-Khubaizi said it was Kuwait who was at the forefront of establishing the forum in 2014 in an effort to solidify Kuwait's position as a center for humanitarian work.

Speaking for the Ministry Of State for Youth Affairs, Hamad Al-Aftan said the forum reflects the government's efforts at bolstering Kuwait's position as a center of humanitarian work, highlighted by the generosity of the government and its leadership in giving donations to local, regional, and international relief aid organizations and holding several donors conferences for the benefit of Syrian refugees.— KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister Hind Al-Subaih attends an exhibition held on the sidelines of the forum.— Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Speakers at the first session held at Kuwait's third international forum for humanitarian work.

KNPC DESCRIBES CLOSURE OF REFINERY UNITS AS 'NORMAL'

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) said yesterday the closure of some units at Al-Ahmadi refinery is a normal procedure owing to regular maintenance or integration into a biofuel venture executed at the refinery as well as Mina Abdullah port.

The company said in a press release that online reports about the closure of operating units at the refiner under the exceptional circumstances experienced by the oil sector are "totally untrue." It added that some units could be closed "if necessary, and as part of an emergency plan." In other news, the 'Latest Advancements in Refining and Petrochemical Industries Conference' is scheduled to kick off in Manama, Bahrain today, under sponsorship of Bahraini Minister of Energy Dr Abdulhusein Bin Ali Mirza, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPC) yesterday.

The conference is co-organized by OAPC, Japan Cooperation Center Petroleum (JCCP) and National Oil and Gas Authority (NOGA) in the Kingdom of

Bahrain, OAPC Secretary General Abbas Naqi confirmed, adding that it would comprise experts in oil and petrochemical industries and refining from OAPC's member states and some Arab companies in the fields.

It will focus on latest advanced technologies and optimization of solutions in the downstream industry. The conference will also include a review of the current and future outlook of the refining and petrochemical industries, as well as case studies of major upgrading projects from across the world.

Naqi added that deliberations during the gathering will address latest technologies and innovations for the petroleum industries' development, current and future challenges, plans for hiking earnings, rationing programs, upgrading installations' capacity, cutting expenditures, environmental safety management, development and expansion of installations. Delegations will be invited for a site visit to Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) refinery and the Gulf Petrochemical Industries (GPIC). — KUNA



The Ahmadi Refinery

Local Spotlight

STATE ADMINISTRATION



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Why does Kuwait look as if the wheel of progress has stopped in it? The most important question is who bears the responsibility for the mistakes made and what is the way out? Starting from Kuwait International Airport, you feel as if time has gone back 20 years, and while all rich and poor countries enjoy new, clean and comfortable airports for passengers, ours often seems a very busy one because it is very small.

Going outside the airport, you will realize that despite the clean streets, restaurants and hotels, that something is absent or missing. Traffic jams are common in the world, but in Kuwait you feel that everyone is angry about something, with a willingness to engage in a fight while driving, both women and men. Ignoring and violating traffic laws are widely common among nearly everyone, especially taxi drivers.

Try to sit with any citizen or expatriate and you can hear a lot of complaints about life here in Kuwait and the spread of nepotism, corruption and lack of serious or new businesses opportunities. In fact, you will end up feeling miserable and concerned about your future in Kuwait. While reading the papers, you will find several wishful news and reports that cannot withstand reality.

On the other hand, many Kuwaiti writers are alarmed by the situation, but they do not fully express their exact feelings to avoid legal accountability, and possibly prison. Political activists are also complaining about the restrictive confinement of freedom of expression and the laws. A visit to a government ministry will make you find indifference and chaos, while nepotism has spread like cancer. People are becoming accustomed to the situation to such a dangerous extent that even when they hear about a million-dinar theft committed by men in power, they digest it like ordinary news, just like the news of a latest movie.

It has become obvious that we have two contrasting teams: The first is the government and its allies in the National Assembly and others, and the second is the opposition and its allies. The problem here is that this team does not have a clear vision of policies because the difference is about people in power and not about substance.

We the people should not be part of the power struggle or have to bear the mistakes of any government party or the opposition. We are just numbers and users of services being offered to us by the government and its bodies. We should use our power as voters to determine who should be our representatives in the National Assembly away from personal interests.

We do not have even a decent entertainment city or a new airport. Plus, Kuwait's parliament passed a bill last week allowing the government to raise power and water charges on foreign residents and on businesses, but exempted citizens. The state administration unfortunately is absent from the reality of the region, its demographics and available resources. Repeated news of thefts by top officials in the government will naturally lead to losing the trust of citizens in the fight against corruption and the spread of nepotism and bribery will make them lose confidence in the government sector. Facts today confirm that we are no longer a productive community.

This article is not supposed to point fingers over who is behind this fragile condition of Kuwait today, but is analyzing and evaluating the real situation in order to save the population and provide new resources, and eventually save the country's reputation, which has reached a place that does not fit with its history and location among the rest of the Gulf countries.

A citizen should not have a feeling that this country was found to serve the interests of his family, relatives and grandsons only through the acquisition of the largest amount of government tenders and that there should be real enforcement of laws. Also, it is time to evaluate the role of the National Assembly after 50 years of parliamentary work.

Kuwait has lost several priorities and lack of achievement is the reality of the Kuwaiti administration. The solution of this is our approach to the adoption of management style results of administration as well as decentralization with the real implementation of technology and e-government for speeding up delivery and effective performance. We need to set new laws to reshape the country with our extended history and not make it a temporary shelter.

CITIZENS IN APARTMENTS TO BE EXEMPTED FROM PAYING HIGHER FEES

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Chairman of the parliamentary financial affairs committee MP Faisal Al-Shaya said that the committee would rephrase the new electricity consumption tariff law to add new amendments to exempt citizens living in investment residential buildings from the new prices as well. This step helps prevent a scenario where



MP Faisal Al-Shaya

Kuwaitis living in apartments would challenge the constitutionality of the law based on the fact that it does not equal them with citizens living in houses, who were exempted from the law. The parliament passed the law in its first hearing last Wednesday.

Holiday delayed

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) is expected to issue a directive within a few days to announce shifting the Esra and Miraj holiday from Wednesday, May 4 to Thursday, May 5.

Meds prices

Starting next week, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states will reduce the prices of 400 medicines by 10 to 60 percent, especially allergy medicines. This comes in implementation of the decisions made by the GCC committee formed by the executive office of the GCC health ministers.

Policeman questioned

An environment police officer is being interrogated for standing by and doing nothing while nine juveniles were fighting in a popular mall, said security sources, noting a video circulated over social media networks showing the officer standing by watching the fight like other civilians did.

Suspects arrested with contrabands

Narcotics detectives separately arrested two citizens and two expats for drug trafficking, said security sources, noting that the two citizens were arrested with 15 grams of heroin, an expat woman was arrested with four grams of marijuana and an expat man was arrested with 500 illicit pills. Meanwhile, an Asian man was arrested with 48 homebrewed liquor bottles, said security sources. Case papers indicate that a police patrol suspected three Asians standing by a vehicle in an open yard in Salmiya and on approaching them, they fled the scene on foot, except for one, who was arrested. On searching the vehicle, policemen found six imported whiskey bottles and 42 home-made liquor bottles.

FORMER PRISONER NARRATES BITTER MEMORIES IN BOOK

KUWAIT: Twenty-five years have passed since the former Iraqi regime launched the 1990 aggression on Kuwait, however bitter memories of the aggression linger on, particularly among former and surviving prisoners. Retired Colonel Nasser Sultan Salmeen shares his experience with the public in his book titled 'Days of a Kuwaiti in Iraqi Prisons - We Will Not Forget', depicting cruelty of languishing behind iron bars of the defunct regime's prisons, experienced by hundreds of other fellow citizens. Colonel Salmeen wrote in his 304-page book that imprisonment was the toughest period of his life and only faithfulness to Kuwait soothed the pain and hardships, aggravated with torture and maltreatment. In his somber narrative, the retired colonel wrote that the Kuwaiti prisoners, in the early period of their imprisonment, were in a state of shock and grief for separation from the homeland. The prisoners, in addition to the suffering behind the bars, were deeply worried about Kuwait's destiny after it had fallen prey to Saddam's regime claws.

The prisoners, in their state of weakness, were subjected to various methods of pressure by the Iraqis, seeking to persuade some of the inmates to cooperate. In addition to the psychological pressure, they had to withstand and survive poor feeding and lack of hygiene and healthy conditions. However, they had managed to cooperate, help and motivate each other's to steadfast and hide identity of some of them who had served in the military or held key posts.

The book mentioned that relevant UN resolutions that urged the regime to pullout, the liberation operation start, comeback of the legitimate leadership, namely the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, "when a new dawn was born for the homeland with the withdrawal of the occupiers, enforcement of the cease-fire and the joyful release of the prisoners." — KUNA

KUWAIT'S REAL ESTATE SALES REBOUND

KUWAIT: Real estate sales in Kuwait rebounded in February, following a slowdown in recent months, with commercial sales outpacing residential for the first time in eight years. According to a report published by the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) in March, total sales reached KD261 million (\$865 million) in February, a 17 percent year-on-year (y-o-y) increase and up 22 percent over January.

Lending is also on the rise as the government moves to accelerate its delivery of 174,000 new residential units for Kuwaiti nationals. The construction of the new units is expected to extend benefits to private construction contractors wishing to bid on the residential projects.

Properties boost recovery

Sales figures indicate the investment and commercial segments performed especially well in February. Investment property sales rose by 5.8 percent y-o-y to KD93.9 million (\$311 million), while sales volumes increased by 65 percent, indicating a move towards smaller-ticket investment apartments, according to the NBK.

Although investors appear more cautious as a result of market volatility, prices in the investment segment are on the rise. Following three months of contraction, the state's investment building index rose by 2.3 percent y-o-y in February to hit 220.8 points.

Commercial sales, meanwhile, surpassed residential sales for the first time in nearly a decade in February to reach KD90 million (\$298 million), more than tripling the KD27.8 million (\$92 million) recorded in January.

Fourteen transactions took place over the month, three of which were in Sabah Al Ahmed Sea City and were worth a total of KD69.7 million (\$231 million), while another large transaction took place in the coastal area of Fahaheel, valued at around KD4 million (\$13 million).

New plots and lending

While activity in the commercial sphere was strong, the residential segment posted weaker results, with sales declining by 28 percent y-o-y in February to KD76.7 million (\$254 million) and the number of transactions down 29 percent to 221. This represented the lowest number of transactions ever recorded for the month of February.

Real estate price indices, however, have reflected more balanced results. The residential home price index lost just 2 percent of its value



y-o-y in February to stand at 180.2 points, an improvement from January's 178.3 points.

The development of government-subsidized greenfield housing projects are thought to be weighing on unit sales in the residential segment, NBK noted, with the government's commitment to distributing 12,000 new plots of land every year seen as discouraging potential homeowners from buying existing residential properties. Although residential unit prices were down, land costs have risen, with the residential land price index increasing by 3.7 percent y-o-y in February to 185.1 points.

National housing benefits

Kuwaiti nationals are legally entitled to government-subsidized housing after marriage, although the state's backlog of housing applications reached more than 100,000 by January 2014, according to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. To address this, in March 2013 the government announced plans to build 174,000 new housing units for Kuwaiti citizens by 2020.

Progress on some developments has been promising. In November the parliamentary housing commission unveiled studies concerning the dispersal of new residential

units in the area, after delivering 12,000 new units in 2015.

According to the commission, there were an additional 11,139 housing receipts for land plots ready for delivery to waitlisted applicants, with the 12,000 citizens who recently received their plots expected to take possession of completed units in 2018.

Construction tenders for the project are set to be released in December of this year, creating new opportunities for private investment. In one recently released request for proposals for houses in South Al-Mutlaa, for example, the prequalification documents specified that companies applying for the work must be international contractors.

Lending at Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB), which provides home-building loans and mortgages to Kuwaiti nationals, has been on the rise as a result. KCB lending jumped by 51 percent y-o-y in February to hit KD23 million (\$76 million), NBK reported. Approved loans for new construction, meanwhile, rose by 39.3 percent month-on-month and 29.7 percent y-o-y in February to reach KD15.2 million (\$50 million), equivalent to close to two-thirds of all loans dispersed that month. — Oxford Business Group

SUBSIDIZED FOOD SOLD ILLEGALLY IN JLEEB

By Meshal Al-Eenezi

KUWAIT: Commercial supervision and consumer protection teams at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) raided an illegal market in a Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh building yesterday. Tons of subsidized supply goods were offered for sale at the building's basement. The raid was led by MoCI's Assistant Undersecretary for Commercial Supervision and Consumer Protection Affairs Eid Al-Rasheedi, who said that the raid resulted in confiscating four tons of rice, 134 milk powder cans, 1,200 tomato paste cans, 76 baby milk cans and 116 oil bottles.

Rasheedi added that the inspection team also found three sewing machines used to sew bags to pack the subsidized goods in different

bags to re-sell them in local markets under other brand names. Rasheedi pointed out that according to law number 10/1979, those trading in subsidized goods by reselling or exporting them can be penalized by the maximum of three months prison and/or the maximum of a KD 225 fine in addition to confiscating the goods and closing down the store for a maximum of six months.

Jleeb's residents

Separately, Municipal Council member Nayef Al-Sour urged the political leadership to consider purchasing the remaining residential plots in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh to end the sufferings of citizens still living there, especially after the area has been 'invaded' by bachelors. Sour added that many citizens had abandoned their houses or rented them.



ONLY 40 PERCENT KUWAITIS EXERCISE REGULARLY: STUDY

KUWAIT: Forty percent of citizens of both sexes in Kuwait practice physical exercise, a Ministry of Health official said, pointing out that the decline in the ratio is attributed to personal, social and environmental obstacles.

Efforts are needed to create an integrated program to promote health including environmental modifications in order to surpass the issue of high temperatures and provide suitable places for physical activity, said Dr Abeer Al-Bahou, Director of Health Promotion Department.

She called for organizing an awareness campaign involving all segments of society to show the importance of physical activity and its positive reverberation on health with a plan to stimulate exercise between the various age groups starting with schools.

She added that the Health Promotion Department defined physical activity as any bodily movement performed by skeletal muscle and requires spending amount

of energy, pointing out that her department has completed its study on the basic obstacles on the lack of exercise by citizens, especially the adult. She pointed out that scientific studies have shown that the performance of regular physical activity has a positive effect in the prevention of many chronic non-communicable diseases and that it reduces the risk of premature death.

She noted that research conducted in the Gulf Arab states and various countries of the world showed a low level of physical activity in most adults, arguing that the environmental model of health promotion is one of the most commonly used models to study the barriers to doing this activity. She said that the study prepared by her department aims to determine the level of physical activity among Kuwaiti adults and the obstacles they face, stressing reliance on the latest census of the State of Kuwait which estimated number of adult citizens at about 530,000. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Officials attend the fourth diabetes conference. — KUNA

DIABETES CHALLENGES NATION'S DEVELOPMENT PLANS: MINISTER

KUWAIT: Diabetes has become a major challenge to successful efforts at sustainable growth and development in the country, Minister of Health Dr Ali Al-Obaidi said yesterday. The Ministry of Health is committed to providing all necessary treatments to diabetic patients in concert with the WHO and other relevant international organizations, said the minister in a speech opening the fourth diabetes conference which is slated to last two days. His speech was read for him by assistant secretary for medical services at the Ministry of Health Dr Mohammad Al-Khishti.

The minister noted in his speech that the conference reviews the latest approaches and methodologies in the treatment of diabetic patients and allows health professionals to compare notes and expertise on this widely occurring disease. He said the conference offers workshops supervised by health pro-



Dr Mohammad Al-Khishti delivers a speech on behalf of Health Minister Dr Ali Al-Obaidi.

fessionals from the medical college at Radcliff University in the United Kingdom, one of the specialized and internationally recognized diabetes treatment centers. — KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah honors young girl Sharifa Mohammed Al-Hagbani. — KUNA

KUWAIT HONORS 'AMBASSADOR OF ANTI-CANCER CAMPAIGNER'

RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday honored Sharifa Mohammed Al-Hagbani, a young girl who was given the title of 'Ambassador of Anti-Cancer Campaigner' in recognition for her voluntary efforts and awareness in the fight against cancer.

During a meeting with the girl and her father at the Kuwaiti embassy, the Ambassador expressed his admiration for her 'high spirit' that enabled her to achieve objectives to restore hope and to engage in normal life stemming from her faith,

patience and positivity, especially during periods of treatment of cancer.

Despite being diagnosed with leukemia, Sharifa was able to overcome the challenges by trusting God and the love of her family and everyone who stood with her, he said. Furthermore, he praised her book, titled 'Despite Pain, Hope Remains' in which she talks about her experience with cancer, expressing finest pictures of defiance and courage. Sheikh Thamer extended an invitation to the young girl to visit 'her second home Kuwait' to review her successful experience and help inspire others. — KUNA



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Special Report

Union chief speaks about decision to shift nurseries under education ministry

CUNK only official union representing nurseries in Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: According to a recently issued law, nurseries will work under the authority of the Ministry of Education instead of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, which was supervising them earlier. But the application of this law was recently deferred for another three months. After the law was passed by the parliament, it was sent to the Fatwa and Legislation Department by the Ministry of Education to complete the organizational structure of nurseries.

The Children's Union of Nurseries in Kuwait (CUNK) was behind this law. Kuwait Times spoke to President of the General Assembly and the Honorary President of CUNK Dr Mohammad Al-Refaei about this issue.

CUNK was founded in 2003 and includes 36 member nurseries. "The union is in charge of the nurseries, staff and children," he told Kuwait Times. "Nurseries that are not our members realized our vital and important role when they encountered problems, such as the closures they faced in 2009 during the swine flu crisis. We supported them and protested in front of the parliament and the Cabinet, and as a result, the decision was cancelled and the nurseries reopened after three months."

CUNK is the only official union or NGO representing nurseries in Kuwait. "The members of the board of the union are elected every four years," Refaei added. "Members pay a symbolic fee, which is the source of the union's expenses. Members of CUNK care about children's benefit

Municipal Council will grant 200 plots of 6,000 sq m to build kindergartens. "An area of 1,000 square meters can be deducted from this land to establish a nursery on it," Refaei noted. "This will help avoid traffic jams and also avoid conflicts with neighbors, which are now happening, as nurseries are located in residential areas. This will also be safer for the kids as they will not have to cross the road. In this way, nurseries will have unified standards. If any mistake happens after applying the new law, I will be responsible and will resolve any problem with the ministry. At the end of the day, we want what is best for the child."

Future plans

Approving this law is the first step in the reform of nurseries. "Our future plan is to set up a national authority for early childhood" he said. "Various ministries will participate in this project. This authority will also include a technical committee which will include members

is fine. Otherwise, mixing or having 3-year-old children play in the same place with 10-year-olds may lead to serious problems and even reach child abuse. The minister of education assured us there won't be merging of nurseries with schools."

Other parties

Kuwait Times also sought to get opinions from nurseries that are not members of the union, as some of these nurseries previously announced in the media that they are against the new law. But none of the 14 nurseries that promised to contact Kuwait Times responded, despite repeated calls.



KUWAIT: Dr Mohammad Al-Refaei, President of the Children's Union of Nurseries in Kuwait (CUNK) speaks to Kuwait Times.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

- Members of CUNK care about children's benefit and not material issues
- We refuse to license a nursery whose owner has rented out the license to somebody else
- From 1974 to 2009, 150 nurseries opened, which is an acceptable figure spanning 35 years
- At the end of the day, we want what is best for the child
- Our future plan is to set up a national authority for early childhood

and not material issues. As we are a legal body, we can act to defend the interests of the nurseries - we filed seven cases against the ministry of social affairs and labor and won all of them. The union is also allowed to receive donations or grants, as we are an NGO."

There are certain conditions for joining the union. "We refuse to license a nursery whose owner has rented out the license to somebody else," he pointed out. "Also, we refuse applicants if the license is issued to somebody who is not a graduate of education or a related field, or at least if the director of the nursery is not a graduate in this specialization. All these conditions are also included in the new law that mainly aims to eliminate the commercial exploitation of children."

Dramatic growth

The number of nurseries has grown rapidly in the past few years. "From 1974 to 2009, 150 nurseries opened, which is an acceptable figure spanning 35 years," Refaei indicated. "What I consider ridiculous is that 170 new nurseries were established within just four years, between 2010 and 2014, many of which are committing violations against the interests of the kids."

According to the new law, the conditions to get a license for establishing a nursery should be stricter. "For instance, an employee is not allowed to get a license to establish a nursery," he explained. "Also, the owner should be a specialist in the field, so he or the director of the nursery should be graduates from the educational field. The law also requires that the nursery should have a curriculum, which can be enforced and inspected by the ministry of education as they already have experience with schools. Also, the ministry of social affairs was issuing licenses for nurseries very easily, as the only condition was to be a 21-year-old citizen."

According to the new law, the

from different institutions such as the university and others."

Nurseries are places of learning and not educating. "I am against having nurseries as part of schools in the same building," he indicated. "If the nursery is placed in a separate building, this



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Al-Qabas

EVERY SUSPECT IS MENTALLY DISTURBED

By Yousuf Shihab

If we accept the 'record of lies,' which is that everyone who commits a crime is mentally disturbed, and that he is a patient of psychiatric medicine, then all those crimes would have been registered against an unknown person although he is known to us, or that the suspect is not guilty as he lost his mind and cannot control his actions and behavior, and this means the closure of criminal courts, because of the non-existent suspects who commit the crime while mentally competent.

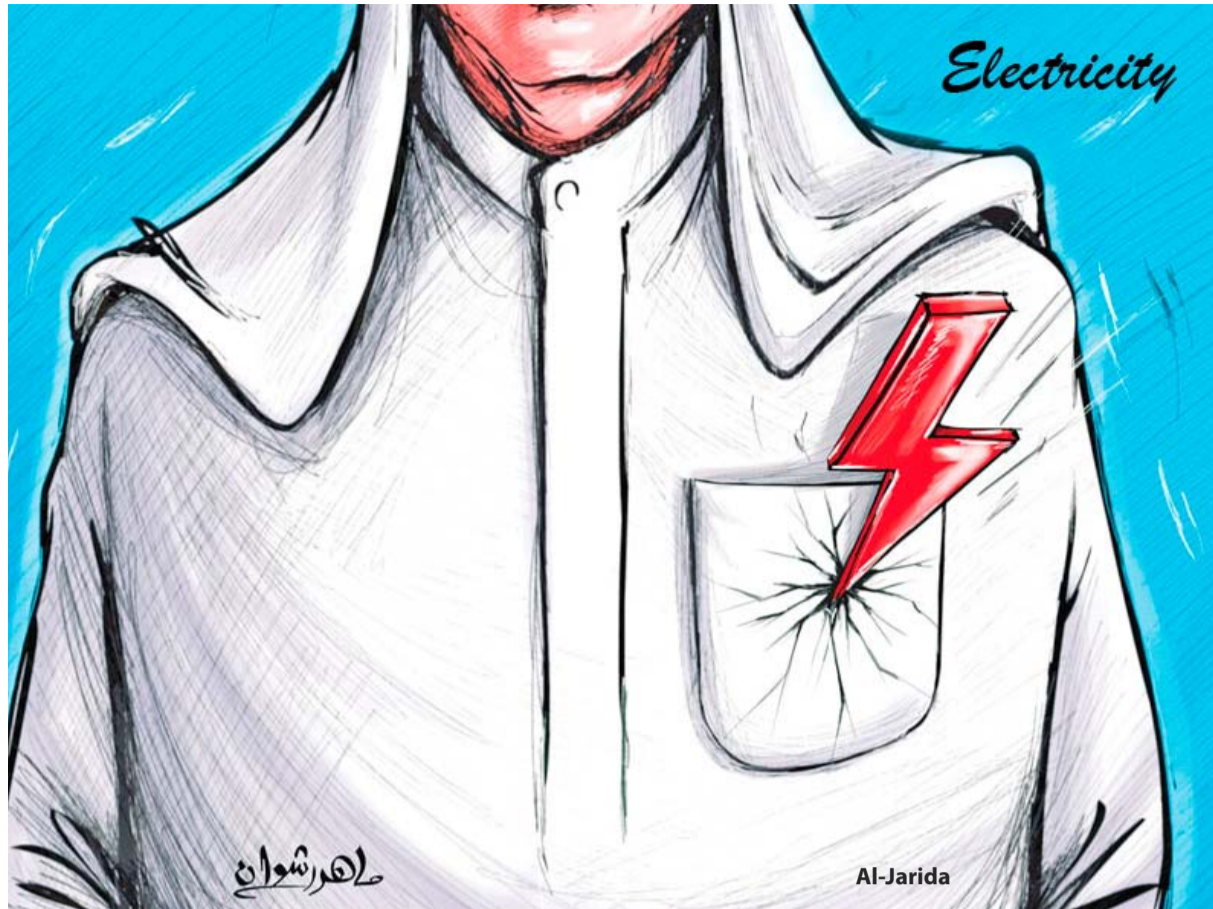
A human being who has lost his mind, or is half-mad, knows what is going on around him, and one who plans a crime, chooses the time and place to commit it and even decides the persons against whom he will commit the crime, cannot be entered in the list of the non-healthy, because he planned and executed it in total sanity. The mentally disturbed cannot commit a crime that because he does not realize what he can do, nor does he realize the place and time during which he could commit his crime.

It is true that the madman is not responsible for his actions, and this cannot be disputed, but the most important matter here is that such people should not fill the streets or markets because their place is the psychiatric hospital, or their homes or under their parents' supervision, but for any person to get out and commit any felony cannot be considered among the crazy - rather he is fully mentally competent and must be held accountable for his crime.

Every criminal, when he commits a crime, stands in court to claim that he is a patient at the psychiatric hospital, and that he has a document proving that, but what is the number of those if their claims are true? Then, does the person who leaves the psychiatric hospital remain sick with his condition or did he leave after recovering from a psychiatric illness? Shooting innocent people or running them over is not done by a psychiatric patient who does not realize his actions, if he prepared the crime tools and chose the time, place and victims he wants to commit the crime against, as the issue has nothing to do with any psychiatric illness, a hospital or a certificate to confirm that - rather is a case of premeditation and selecting the time to commit the crime.

Extremism and not understanding Islam as it is and its forgiveness, as well as the existence of intellectual terrorism elements, are what brought up a stray group that commits crimes in the name of religion, in which it sees as a grand jihad, while it has nothing to do with religion or jihad - rather they are cases of terrorism and rotten intellect that Satan shrouded them with, and such a person adopts and immerses himself in the filth of crime and holds grudges against anyone who does not agree with his ideology and direction. This is the deciding point between he who claims insanity and being a psychiatric hospital patient, and those who went after extremism and terrorism with blind eyes and minds, so he commits the crime and targets innocent victims.

PS: The claim of mental problem with a certificate from the psychiatric hospital is easy, but the question: How can that be taken into account when a person commits a crime very accurately, and chooses the suitable time and even the right place - what kind of mental disturbance is this?! Tell us before we lose our minds. — Translated by Kuwait Times



SUSTAINABLE SERVICE QUALITY KFH'S STRATEGY FOR EXPANSION: CEO NAHEDH



KUWAIT: "Excellent customer service and high customer satisfaction is a major goal for upper management and staff at Kuwait Finance House (KFH). KFH avails the latest technological development for more enhancements in systems and more innovative high-end services and products. KFH works tirelessly to be the first bank among peers in Service Excellence at the local level and the best Islamic bank at the global level" said CEO of KFH Group Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh.

He affirmed, in his speech during the honoring ceremony of 80 KFH staff who were distinguished in their Customer Service Performance for the year 2015, that service quality is a fundamental criterion and a key pillar for growth. In light of the stiff competition in the banking sector and the increasing and developing customers' demands, Service quality has become crucial for excellence and leadership.

Nahedh added that KFH pursues in-depth strategic planning for achieving a quantum leap in customer service, affirming that KFH aims at promoting



KUWAIT: CEO of KFH Group Mazin Al-Nahedh speaks during the ceremony.

the innovation spirit and motivating its human resources to ensure sustainable service quality. He called on employees to fulfill their commitment towards maintaining KFH's pioneering position, indicating that there has been a concrete and considerable change of customer service.

Meanwhile, the Group Chief Strategy Officer at KFH, Fahad Khaled Al-Mukhaizeem, explained that Service Excellence is the major challenge of our

time, due to increasing and developing customers' expectations. "The best advertising can only be created through customers' satisfaction. Attracting new customers certainly cost more than retaining existing customers; thus we should not underestimate the value of customer retention" he added.

Meanwhile, Houssam Al-Khatib Executive Manager Service Quality at the bank said that striving for further development, Service Quality adapted a wide range of performance evaluation programs that fit every department and function in the bank. Service quality mission is not confined to following up and evaluating agents at KFH branches, showrooms and retail departments, but also to other departments in the bank.

It is worth noting that the awardees were the top 3 branches of 'Ladies' and 'Men' for each, the top performing show room, the best performing staff from call center and Tamayoz Relationship Managers, in addition to the Individual Merit scheme staff, and the Golden Club members of 2016.

330 DISABLED STUDENTS SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE

KUWAIT: More than 300 children with disabilities were subjected to violence in schools in Kuwait last year, a recent study shows. Official statistics published by Al-Qabas yesterday indicate that 330 students were subjected to 'verbal and physical abuse' last year at schools for children with special needs, which fall under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, the statistics show that psychiatrists and social work-

ers handled 467 cases of behavioral disorders that resulted from disabled children being subjected to violence and mistreatment, as well as failure to enroll the children in specialized rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, the statistics revealed that students with mental disabilities were subjected to the most number of violence cases with 100, while there were 41 cases of students who 'ran away' from class. — Al-Qabas



GULF BANK GOLD SPONSOR OF 'ARAB WOMAN AWARDS'

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is proud to be a Gold Sponsor of the 'Arab Woman Awards - Kuwait 2016,' which will take place today in Kuwait City under the patronage of Sheikh Mubarak Fahed Salem Al-Sabah. Gulf Bank will be presenting the awards to the winners of the Business and Finance Categories. These will be presented by Laila Al Qatami, Assistant General Manager - Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank.

The 'Arab Woman Awards' event was launched in 2009 with a mission to provide a platform for increasing public awareness of the significant achievements of Arab women in various areas. The nomination process began in March and a group of judges convened to select the winners in each category. There are 20 award categories these include: business, finance, entrepreneurship arts, literature, media, fashion design, young talent, and humanitarian causes. The awards help to raise the profile of women succeeding in these areas and provide role models and inspiration for future female leaders.

The 'Arab Woman Awards' event is held in several GCC coun-

tries, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The intention is to see the launch of the 'Arab Woman Awards GCC' in 2020, which will bring together all participating countries in one large celebration of the achievements of the winners since inception.

Gulf Bank is committed to supporting initiatives related to women's empowerment. The bank along with Alghanim Industries will be holding a conference entitled 'Women in the Corporate World: Beyond the Glass Ceiling' conference on 4 May 2016 at the Jumeriah Messilah Beach Hotel which will bring together key influential international, regional, and local leaders together to discuss the important issue of gender diversity in the workplace. For information on the conference visit the website: www.womeninthecorporateworld or the Instagram account GDC2016.

For more information about Gulf Bank's initiatives, visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or go online at www.e-gulfbank.com.

AFYA ARABIA LAUNCHES HEALTH APP ON SMART PHONES, WINDOWS

KUWAIT: With the aim of benefiting from prepaid smart services, Afya Holding Company recently launched its Afya Arabia integrated health mobile application for doctors, patients and insurance. The new application enables patients to book appointments with doctors registered in the system, get remote doctor advice, request house calls, surf through the medicines prescribed, use lab services and book

radiology test appointments.

In this regard, Afya's executive manager Haya Al-Ghanim said that Afya Arabia was the first system of its kind in Kuwait and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). She added that this application uses modern technology to reduce patients' sufferings and help them get proper medical care more easily through their smart phones, iPads or computers in return for small fees.

Ghanim added that the application was launched last December and that it had been used by over 6,000 patients and 18 doctors so far. She also urged all doctors operating in Kuwait to join the new application.

Further, Ghanim pointed out that Afya Arabia would soon provide new services like the medical lab, e-pharmacies and remote consultation with over 150 interna-

tional doctors, which would save patients the trouble of travelling abroad to get medical care.

Moreover, Ghanim said that the app follows the HIPAA security system; a protocol that provides both doctors and patients with utmost privacy. She noted that the new app was downloadable through Android and Windows App Store at www.afyaarabia.com.



Al-Qabas

JORDAN FORUM

By Moudhi Al-Muftah

At the invitation of the Arab Sports Journalism Union, in coordination with the local organizing committee of the World U17 Women's World Cup and the Jordan Federation for Sports Media, and under the patronage of Prince Ali bin Al-Husseini, I had the honor to participate with an elite group of female sports journalists in the Arab world in the Jordan Forum to shed light on preparations for Jordan's hosting of this international event.

We saw on the first day a video display presented by the executive director of the Women's World Cup Samar Nasser, during which she spoke about the latest preparations such as playgrounds and facilities. She asked journalists to pay more attention to the championship, because its success is success of all Arabs. Deputy Media Director of the World Football Federation Valentine Segolin gave a detailed presentation of means to cover the championship through the FIFA website and through various social media.

President of the International Sports Press Association Gianni Merlo spoke through Skype to participants, and lauded the efforts of female journalists, and activities of the first day were concluded by Ahmad Shubair, who spoke about the importance of media presence in international events and promoting them.

On the second day, Professor of Journalism and Media Manal Mazahreh gave a lecture on new journalism that dominates traditional journalism, then Hussam Barak, Editor-in-Chief of Kooraa website concluded lectures with an address on electronic websites. The Amman municipality organized a tour for participants of downtown Amman, the Roman amphitheater and the castle.

I thank the President of the Arab Association Mohammad Jameel, Asian Association President Mohammad Qasim Ali, Journalist Hiba Al-Sabbagh and all those who contributed to the forum's success.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



KUWAIT: Hessa Al-Najadah (center) is pictured with Margaret Al-Sayer (left) and Banafsheh Azizi.

BURGAN BANK CONTINUES SUPPORT OF KACCH ACTIVITIES

KUWAIT: As part of its firm Corporate Social Responsibility strategy that is dedicated to supporting humanitarian causes, Burgan Bank reaffirmed its support to the Kuwait Association for Care of Children Hospital (KACCH) by presenting its annual donation. This year is the bank's 15th consecutive year of commitment to KACCH.

Hessa Al-Najadah, Senior Officer - Public Relations at Burgan Bank presented the annual donation to Margaret Al-Sayer, Founding Director of KACCH and Deputy Director, Banafsheh Azizi

KACCH is a non-profit organization that operates Child Life Programs supported by Child Life Specialists and Play Leaders across 6 government hospitals in Kuwait. KACCH staff work closely with nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professional to reduce the negative impact of hospitalization and create a positive experience for sick children and their families.

Burgan Bank's initiative in supporting these children over the past 15 years stems from its firm belief in creating a lasting difference and contributing to the development of healthcare within pediatric facilities at various health institutions. By doing so, Burgan Bank is assuring that children and their families in the hospitals are receiving fundamental support.

Burgan Bank's support to this initiative falls under its recently launched full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.

Crime

Report

DEAD BABY FOUND IN SEWER IN EGAILA

KUWAIT: Ministry of Public Works (MPW) workers conducting periodic maintenance in a sewage plant in Egaila reported finding a dead baby's body in the sewer. The workers reported finding an object blocking the system and on removing it, they found out that it was a premature six-month old dead fetus. Police were informed and they rushed to the scene. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Fatal crash

A citizen was killed when he lost control over his vehicle at the Kabd roundabout and it rolled over several times, said security sources. Further investigations are in progress to determine the cause of the accident.

Roommates assault Nugra man

An Egyptian man accused three of his compatriots of assaulting him in a room they share in Nugra, said security sources, noting that the man provided a medical report of his injuries and explained that he had argued with his roommates and that the argument developed into a fight.

Reckless drivers arrested

Following up the case of the reckless driver who ran over a traffic police officer and was assisted by some friends to flee the site in Naeem in Jahra, security sources said that the young man's father turned him in at Saad Al-Abdullah police station. The suspect turned out to be a citizen in his twenties. Further investigations are in progress to identify and arrest the friends who helped him escape. Separately, a reckless driver was arrested for endangering his and others' lives in Jaber Al-Ali, said security sources. Case papers indicate that the area's residents called the police reporting that someone was dangerously driving his sports car in the rain and on the wrong side of the road. A police patrol was dispatched to the scene and managed to arrest the driver.

Gamblers caught

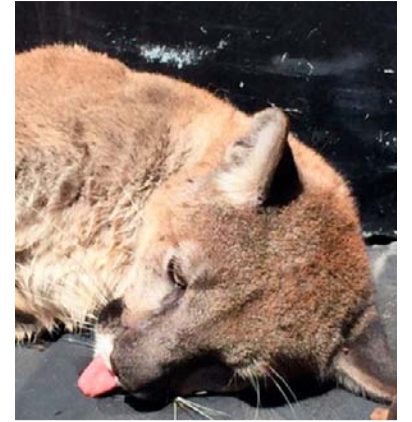
Nineteen Asian nationals were arrested while gambling in a Mahboula apartment, said security sources. Case papers indicate that detectives had been tipped off concerning the suspects' activities and they were all arrested red-handed.

Two trade insult charges

A citizen accused a non-Kuwaiti woman of insulting him, said security sources, noting that the man filed a case at Fintas police station. However, on summoning the woman, she denied the charges and said that it was the complainer who assaulted her at her house and that all what she did was blame him for doing so. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Kuwait Times International

SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 2016



Mountain lion dashes from Los Angeles school

ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED UPSTATE NEW YORK SWINGS BEHIND TRUMP

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TEARS FLOW AS POPE VISITS EUROPE'S MIGRANT FRONTLINE

PONTIFF RETURNS WITH 12 REFUGEES AFTER VISIT TO GREEK ISLAND

LESBOS: Pope Francis took three families of Syrian refugees back to Rome yesterday after visiting the frontline of Europe's migrant crisis at a camp in Greece where migrants wept at his feet, kissed his hand and begged for help. At a sprawling fenced complex on the Aegean island of Lesbos, adults and children broke down in tears before the head of the Roman Catholic Church, after their onward journey to Europe was cut short by an EU decision to block a migrant route used by a million people fleeing conflict since early 2015. While borders have now largely been shut for migrants, Francis symbolically took a small group of refugees with him on his aircraft as he left the island after a five-hour visit.

"The Pope has desired to make a gesture of welcome regarding refugees, accompanying on his plane to Rome three families of refugees from Syria, 12 people in all, including six children," a statement issued by the Vatican said. The individuals were selected from lots drawn, media reports said. They had arrived on Lesbos before a deal between the EU and Turkey came into effect to halt the migrant flow on March 20 and were staying at a different, open camp on the island. Sant'Egidio, a Christian community which offers help for those in need and is headquartered in Rome, will be looking after the families.

"It's one way to show the entire world that we should accept refugees," Petros Vasiliadis, a Greek biblical scholar and retired theology professor said of the pontiff's gesture. "It may motivate other churches to do the same." Francis, leader of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics, shook hands with hundreds of people as hundreds more were penned behind metal barriers at the Moria camp, which holds some 3,000 people. "Freedom, freedom," migrants chanted as the pope walked through the hillside facility in scorching sun. Some women ululated.

You are not alone

"I want to tell you, you are not alone," Francis said in a speech at the camp. "As people of faith, we wish to join our voices to speak out on your behalf. Do not lose hope!" he said, flanked by Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, and Greek Archbishop Ieronymos. On at least three occasions, adults fell to the feet of the pontiff, weeping and begging for help. One woman wearing a crucifix broke through a police cordon and flung herself at Francis's feet.

"No camp, no camp," sobbed the woman, who appeared to be in her early thirties. "I want to go." In a tent where Francis met with migrants, a little girl with pigtails dressed in pink and white bowed at his feet. As he helped her up, she cried uncontrollably. An adult man broke down. Migrants slipped pieces

of paper into his hand as Francis passed by, which he handed to an aide. The pope has often defended refugees and urged Catholic parishes in Europe to host them. His first trip after becoming pontiff in 2013 was to the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, which, like Lesbos, has received thousands of refugees. Hundreds of people have died making the short but precarious crossing from Turkey to the Lesbos shores in inflatable dinghies in the past year, and the island is full of unmarked graves.

Francis and Orthodox leaders later threw wreaths into the sea to commemorate those who died. They stood silently, with heads bowed, as wreaths of yellow and white flowers bobbed over the water.

The migrant crisis has added to an already heavy burden upon Greece, which has received three international bailouts since 2010. Francis said he admired the Greek people, saying they had "kept open their hearts and doors." "Many ordinary men and women have made available the little they have and shared it with those who lost everything. God will repay this generosity," he said. But religious leaders appeared less charitable towards the rest of Europe. A joint declaration by the leaders of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches cited a verse from the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the biblical New Testament - all will be judged by their actions. — Reuters



LESBOS: Pope Francis greets children during his visit to the Moria detention center for migrants and refugees near Mytilene on the Greek island of Lesbos yesterday. — AFP



BEIRUT: Lebanese PM Tamam Salam (right) shakes hands with French President Francois following a joint press conference yesterday. — AFP

HOLLANDE VOWS TO SUPPORT LEBANON

BEIRUT: French President Francois Hollande said yesterday his country will stand by Lebanon to boost security in the tiny Arab country that is "surrounded by crisis and wars" and urged the parliament to elect a new president whose post has been vacant for nearly two years. Hollande said Paris will give immediate assistance to boost Lebanon's capabilities in fighting terrorism, adding that the defense ministers from the two countries will discuss the details.

Hollande's visit to Lebanon is the start of a regional tour that will take him to Egypt and Jordan. During his two-day visit to Lebanon, the French president is scheduled to meet senior officials and visit a group of Syrian refugees in the country's eastern Bekaa Valley. Lebanon is home to more than a million registered Syrian refugees, the equivalent of a quarter the country's population of 4.5 million. Another half a million Syrians live in the country as well.

An official ceremony was held outside the parliament building in downtown Beirut where Hollande received a red carpet welcome. Usually heads of state are welcomed by the president but the post in Lebanon has been empty since May 2014 when the term of President Michel Suleiman ended. "Lebanon is hosting more than 1.5 million refugees and therefore we have to give Lebanon solidarity and assistance," Hollande said after meeting Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, adding that Paris will give assistance worth €50 million (\$56.4 million) in 2016 and €100 million (\$112.8 million) in the coming years.

He later met Prime Minister Tammam Salam at the Grand Serail in Beirut. "France stands by you and France is concerned that security is boosted in Lebanon through military cooperation," Hollande said. "We are with you because Lebanon is surrounded by crisis and wars ... Lebanon that knows the war on its border also knows the threat of terrorism," Hollande said referring to Syria's civil war that has spilled over into Lebanon on several occasions. Lebanon and France have also been struck by attacks from the extremist Islamic State group. A day before the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris that killed 130 people, two suicide attackers struck in Beirut killing nearly 50 people and wounding many others. — AP

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DEADLY EARTHQUAKES ROCK JAPAN



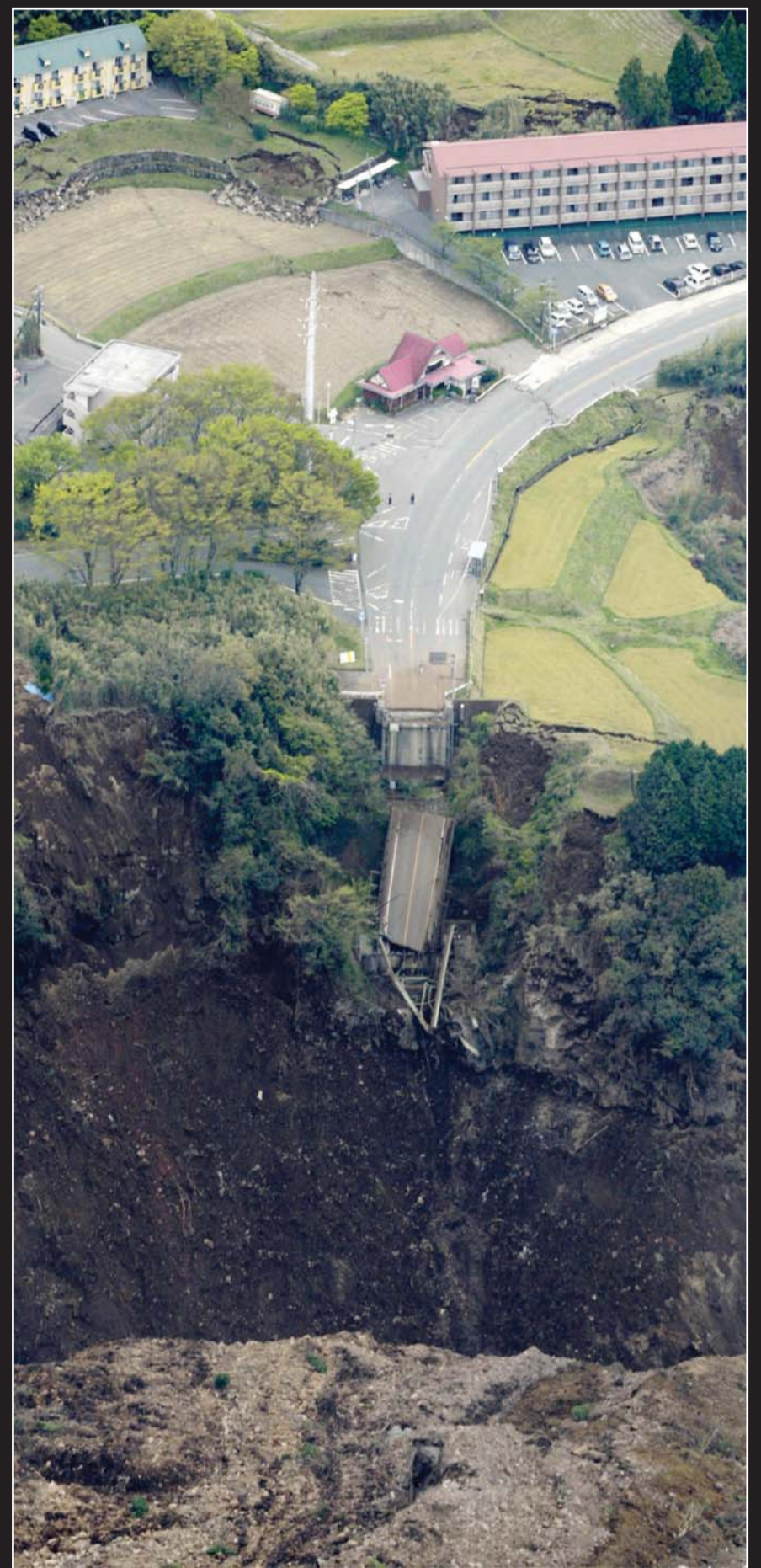
This aerial view shows damaged houses covered with blue plastic sheets to shelter them from the rain after an earthquake in Mashiki yesterday. —AFP



College students carry blankets and foods toward a gym-turned shelter after an earthquake in Minamiaso village, Kumamoto prefecture, Japan. —AP

THE TOLL AND THE DAMAGE IN JAPAN DEADLY QUAKES

TOKYO: Key facts about the two deadly earthquakes that struck the same area in southern Japan on successive nights:
FIRST QUAKE: A magnitude-6.5 earthquake struck at 9:26 pm Thursday at a depth of 11 kilometers (7 miles).
SECOND QUAKE: A magnitude-7.3 earthquake struck at 1:25 am yesterday at a depth of 12 kilometers.
WHERE: Both quakes were centered near Kumamoto, a city of 740,000 people on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands.
DEATHS AND INJURIES: 41 people are reported dead in the two quakes, and about 1,500 injured, at least 184 seriously.
HARDEST-HIT AREAS: Town of Mashiki, which borders the eastern edge of Kumamoto city, and Minamiaso, a rural village farther east near Mount Aso volcano.
DAMAGE: At least 1,000 buildings have been damaged, including 90 totally destroyed. Many roads have buckled and cracked, and huge landslides have blocked roads and left buildings hanging precariously.
UTILITIES: About 200,000 households have no power, and 400,000 have no running water.
EVACUEES: About 90,000 people have evacuated to shelters and elsewhere.
RAIN: Rain is forecast for overnight Saturday, raising fears of more landslides. —AP



MINAMIASO: A bridge is cut off by landslides after the earthquake in Minamiaso, Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. The village near Mount Aso volcano appears to have been the hardest hit by the second earthquake. —AFP



MASHIKI: Evacuees talk to each other at a gym-turned shelter after an earthquake in Mashiki, Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. — AP



The aerial view shows a collapsed road after an earthquake in Minami-Aso, Kumamoto prefecture yesterday. —AFP



Houses are seen destroyed after an earthquake in Mashiki, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan yesterday. — AP



Police officers conduct a search operation at the site of a landslide caused by an earthquake in Minamiaso village, Kumamoto prefecture. — AP

INMATE IN TERROR CASE IN COMA AFTER SUICIDE ATTEMPT

FERHANI ADMITS PLOTTING TO BOMB NEW YORK CITY SYNAGOGUES



NEW YORK: Ahmed Ferhani, who is charged with plotting to blow up New York City synagogues, appears in court in New York. After stating in letters to authorities and reporters that guards had tormented him because of the nature of his case, Ferhani is in a coma after trying to hang himself in New York's notorious Attica prison, according to his lawyers. — AP

NEW YORK: A man who admitted plotting to bomb New York City synagogues has tried to kill himself in prison after guards tormented him because of his terror case, his lawyers said. Ahmed Ferhani, who is halfway through a 10-year sentence in a rare state-level terror case, is in a medically induced coma after trying to hang himself in New York's Attica prison, according to his lawyers. "He was neither protected nor acknowledged" in prison, lawyer Lamis Deek said, calling Ferhani's treatment "an outrage."

The state Corrections Department would say only that Ferhani, 31, has been taken from Attica to an outside hospital and officials were investigating, though the agency wouldn't say what was being investigated. Deek said a Buffalo hospital informed Ferhani's family April 7 of what had happened, but details are unclear. Ferhani's suicide attempt is a somber afterword to a case freighted with the rise of homegrown terrorists, the legal legacy of Sept 11, complaints

about police tactics and questions about his mental health.

While most terror cases are handled by federal prosecutors, New York created its own anti-terror law days after 9/11. It had been used only once - against a gang leader who, appeals courts concluded, wasn't truly a terrorist - before Ferhani and a co-defendant were arrested in May 2011. An undercover investigator recorded Ferhani, an Algerian who came to the US as a child, disparaging Jews and talking about attacking synagogues in retaliation for what he saw as the mistreatment of Muslims worldwide. Then Ferhani bought guns, ammunition and an inert grenade in a police sting. The case showed "the threat of terrorism from these lone-wolf radicals is real," Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr. once said.

But officials faced questions about why federal authorities had declined to pursue the case. Police said there was no doubt about its strength. But Ferhani's lawyers

accused investigators of entrapping a mentally ill man - hospitalized at least two dozen times before his arrest - to justify extensive surveillance of Muslim communities, a program illuminated in stories by The Associated Press. The New York Police Department has since disbanded a unit at the heart of the program but still uses informants and undercover hunters to hunt for terror threats.

A grand jury rebuffed a top terror conspiracy charge but indicted Ferhani and his co-defendant on other terror and hate crime charges with the potential for 32 years in prison. Ferhani pleaded guilty in December 2012, in exchange for 10 years. At his sentencing, he said he'd "use this time to strengthen my mind and character." Ferhani and his lawyers say guards at Attica and another prison beat and taunted him because of his terror conviction. One attack left him needing 12 staples in his head, he said in a letter to The Nation, which first reported his suicide attempt. — AP

COURT'S 'TURN IN' FIGHT OVER CALIFORNIA TEACHER TENURE

LOS ANGELES: Teachers across California may have breathed a sigh of relief when an appellate court upheld job protection that has long been considered sacrosanct. But the court's unanimous ruling that found teacher tenure is constitutional and doesn't deprive students of a fair education may not be settled if the state's highest court decides to review the case, which has ramifications for more than 6 million students and hundreds of thousands of teachers.

A lawyer representing nine students who sued the state - and won at the trial court - vowed Friday to appeal to the California Supreme Court and expressed confidence they have what's needed to prevail. "We knew there would be three rounds to this fight," attorney Theodore Boutros Jr. said. "We think we will win the third and final round because we know we are on the right side of this case and the right side of history." Attorney Michael Rubin, who defended teachers unions in the case, said he doesn't think the California Supreme Court will take up the issue, saying it broke no new ground in its analysis of constitutional principles.

"It puts to rest - we believe forever - the constitutional attacks on job security for teachers," Rubin said Thursday. If the California Supreme Court takes up the case, the attorneys representing the students who filed the lawsuit are facing an uphill battle because the appellate court's opinion is "very soundly and tightly reasoned," said Bill Koski, a Stanford Law professor who directs the school's Youth and Education Law Project. "The appellate court made it pretty clear: This might not be the wisest set of statutes but it's not our job to say what's wise or smart, it's our job to decide what's constitutional," he said.

In Thursday's ruling, the 2nd District Court of Appeal acknowledged that the case did reveal problems with tenure and layoff statutes, and showed the "deleterious impact" of staffing decisions on poor and minority students. But it said state law wasn't to blame. "Some principals rid their schools of highly ineffective teachers by transferring them to other schools, often to low-income schools," Boren wrote. "This phenomenon is extremely troubling and should not be allowed to occur, but it does not inevitably flow from the challenged statutes."

The ruling reverses a Los Angeles Superior Court judge who found evi-

dence to "shock the conscience" that incompetent teachers were almost impossible to fire because of tenure laws and that schools in poor neighborhoods were dumping grounds for bad teachers. The closely watched case highlighted tensions between teacher unions, school leaders, lawmakers and well-funded education reform groups over whether policies like tenure and firing teachers with the least seniority keep ineffective instructors in the classroom, particularly in already low performing schools.

Stuart Biegel, a law and education professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said the California Supreme Court is likely to take up the case because it has state and national implications. But, he said the high court is likely to side with the appellate court decision, which he described as "much more sophisticated in its reasoning" than the trial judge's. He said the proper venue for the fight is at the Legislature, as opposed to the courts. Even if the plaintiffs end up being successful in getting the state's tenure statutes thrown out, the Legislature would need to craft new law as a result.

"Litigation can be a very powerful vehicle and oftentimes it's the correct vehicle," he said. "But in this case I felt from the beginning that it was the wrong direction for plaintiffs to take." Boutros, the plaintiff's lawyer, said there are a number of "strong avenues" he has to appeal the appellate court's ruling. He said the court erred by not relying on the trial judge's factual findings and incorrectly blamed school administrators for the failures of the education system. He also said he thought the court was incorrect in finding that the plaintiffs didn't prove the state's tenure laws violate students' right to a quality education.

Regardless of the result of an appeal, the case has escalated the national conversation around teacher tenure and its potential unintended consequences, and that's a good thing, said Katharine Strunk, an education and policy professor at the University of Southern California. She pointed to similar lawsuits in New York and Minnesota. "What this case has done is highlight the fact that the laws in place enable the unequal distribution of teachers across schools and kids," she said. "The critical piece is that we continue to have a conversation about how to fix these problems." — AP

BRAZIL SEES RISING THREAT FROM ISLAMIST MILITANTS

RIO DE JANEIRO: The threat of attack by militant Islamists is on the rise in Brazil as the country prepares to host the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in August, the national intelligence agency said. Brazil has long regarded itself as an unlikely target of extremists thanks to its historical standing as a non-aligned, multicultural nation that is free from enemies. But Counterterrorism Director Luiz Alberto Sallaberry said in a statement the threat had increased in recent months due to attacks in other countries, and a rise in what he described as the number of Brazilian nationals suspected of sympathizing with Islamic State militants. Sallaberry also confirmed that a credible threat to state security had been made last year.

A tweet threatening Brazil sent in November by Maxime Hauchard, a French national identified as an executioner in Islamic State propaganda videos, was genuine, Sallaberry said. "Brazil, you are our next target," the tweet said. Sallaberry said his agency had tak-

en several measures to avert a potential attack, including sharing information with foreign security forces and improved training. But security experts have warned that many Brazilian officials do not realize how big a stage the Olympics is for anyone seeking to sow terror, either through an attack on game venues, infrastructure nearby or the athletes and 500,000 tourists expected to attend.

Brazilian officials, eager to pull off South America's first Olympics after successfully hosting the soccer World Cup in 2014, have said previously they will ensure a safe games starting Aug 5. Olympic organizers plan to deploy around 85,000 security personnel for the games, double the number used in London in 2012. A large part of this group will be members of the National Force for Public Security, a body of police and other law enforcement officials whose commander stepped down last month amid reports he had criticized embattled President Dilma Rousseff. — Reuters

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EU FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF ADMITS 'IRAN DEAL' DIFFICULTIES

TEHRAN: The European Union's top diplomat during a visit to Tehran yesterday admitted difficulties in implementing Iran's recent nuclear deal with world powers, but maintained that the agreement was on track. Federica Mogherini's comments, in a joint press conference with Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, underscored tension in Tehran over the accord, which has been in force for three months. Under the deal, all nuclear-related sanctions were lifted but Iranian officials have accused the West, particularly the United States, of failing to honor its side of the bargain.

Among their grievances is the contention that US government officials are scaring off European banks from investing in Iran for fear of falling foul of regulations that saw massive fines imposed in recent years. Mogherini, on her first trip to Iran since the nuclear deal came into force in January, said the diplomatic gains of the agreement must now be turned into "benefits in Iranians' daily lives." But Zarif echoed remarks from other Iranian officials about the deal not producing discernible benefits. "It is necessary that the

other side's cooperation, especially the United States, is made good in practice, not only on paper," Zarif said, alluding to Seif's comments.

"We warned the US and we will put some pressure on them, to pave the way for cooperation between non-US banks and the Islamic Republic of Iran," Mogherini sought to play down concern, saying that three months of "challenges" on the deal's implementation was nothing compared to the 12 years of diplomacy it had taken to produce the nuclear agreement. "We obviously have not finished the work on implementing the JCPOA," Mogherini said, referring to the nuclear deal by its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, describing it as "an ongoing task".

'Doing all that we can'

Put to her by a reporter that the banking issues were obstacles, Mogherini countered: "There are challenges in implementation, it is true." She cited 50 pages of guidelines that have been issued to European financial institutions that detail how business can now be conducted with Iran. "We are doing all that we can to reas-

sure our financial and banking system that all the new information on the new system is provided." Mogherini pointed to other evidence of cooperation, saying the EU has agreed to support Iran's bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) for example, and Iran will take part on a joint dialogue on human rights.

But Mogherini also raised with Zarif the EU's concern about recent ballistic missile tests by the elite Revolutionary Guards, which a UN panel said breached Security Council resolutions. She said the EU did not regard the missile tests as a breach of the nuclear deal. "We see this as a worrying step. Any step that could pass different messages (other than cooperation) is not welcome." Mogherini, who personally helped negotiate the nuclear deal between Iran and Britain, China, France, Russia and the US plus Germany, was accompanied by other top EU officials. The six powers led by the United States agreed in July last year to lift sanctions that had locked down much of the Iran's economy for years in exchange for limits on Tehran's nuclear program.

The move allowed Iran to resume a



TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (right) welcomes European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini before a meeting yesterday in the capital Tehran. — AFP

higher level of oil exports when the deal was implemented, as well as opening up more trade opportunities. But with the US still maintaining some sanctions, including on what it says is Iran's sponsorship of designated terror organizations, Iran's access to

global finance remains limited. Mogherini said the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, where the West has been looking for Iran's cooperation with peace efforts, as well as Iran-EU cooperation on energy production and technology were also discussed. — AFP



PORT ELIZABETH: South African president and African National Congress (ANC)'s president Jacob Zuma sings and dances during the Party official launch of the Municipal Elections manifesto yesterday in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. — AFP

SOUTH AFRICA'S ZUMA BIDS TO WIN BACK ANC SUPPORT

RULING ANC LAUNCHES MANIFESTO IN NELSON MANDELA BAY

PORT ELIZABETH: South African President Jacob Zuma, facing calls to resign from within his African National Congress, sought to win back support with the launch yesterday of the party's manifesto in Port Elizabeth, where it risks losing an important poll. Losing power in Nelson Mandela Bay municipality, a stronghold of the ANC's fight against apartheid and named after its liberation hero, would be a symbolic blow for Zuma and his party nationally.

Zuma has faced calls to resign from within the ANC since a court ruled this month that he breached the constitution by ignoring an order to repay some of the \$16 million in state funds spent renovating his private home. Many South Africans are angry at corruption in the ANC and feel the liberation movement has not done enough to help lift people out of poverty since the late Nelson Mandela swept to power on a wave of optimism in 1994.

"If Madiba was still alive I would have been the first one in that stadium," Patricia Domons, 58, told Reuters at her simple home in Port

Elizabeth, using Mandela's clan name. "Now you find we have a president that steals, people are poor and they don't have jobs. Our country is going down and a hell of a lot needs to change." Creating jobs and improving service delivery are expected to feature heavily among the ANC's manifesto pledges. Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa said ahead of the launch that he was "convinced" the ANC would win the Aug. 3 vote and brushed off recent scandals. The ANC will be relying on loyal supporters who don't see an obvious alternative to a party they still associate with its leading role in ending apartheid.

ANC for life

"We are ANC for life," Cumisa Msuthu told Reuters from the Nelson Mandela Stadium where tens of thousands of supporters danced and sang liberation songs. "The ANC is not Zuma. We have and will always be ANC." Zuma survived an impeachment vote last week thanks to the ANC's big majority in the 400-seat national assembly and hopes to now put the scandal behind him.

He is required by law to step down in 2019 after two five-year terms. An Ipsos poll late last year suggested a very tight race in Mandela Bay, with the ANC winning only 43 percent of the vote against 42 percent for the combined opposition parties and 15 percent of undecided voters. In the 2011 local poll in Mandela Bay, where Port Elizabeth is the largest city, the ANC won 52 percent of the vote, against 40 percent for the main opposition Democratic Alliance.

The constitutional court ruling against Zuma and subsequent splits within the ANC may have eroded its support base further since the Ipsos poll was taken, analysts say. Local governments manage large budgets and will be able to influence voters ahead of a presidential election in 2019. "This would be an extremely symbolic victory or loss for the ANC," said Joleen Steyn-Kotze, professor at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. "Should the ANC lose, it would send a very strong message nationally that within its own heartland and stronghold, people are losing faith in its ability to deliver." — Reuters

IRAQ LAWMAKERS QUIT SESSION AIMED AT REPLACING SPEAKER

BAGHDAD: A group of Iraqi lawmakers said they would not take part in a parliament session to select a replacement for the speaker, apparently leaving it without the necessary quorum. Iraq was on course to have two rival claimants to the speakership, further increasing chaos in parliament, which has already seen a vote to sack speaker Salim Al-Juburi, a fistfight among MPs and a sit-in this week. The political turmoil had sidelined Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's efforts to replace the current cabinet, a setback for the premier.

Both the United Nations and Washington have warned that the political wrangling could undermine Iraq's fight against the Islamic State jihadist group, which overran large areas in 2014 but has since lost significant ground. MP Qassem al-Araji announced that 23 lawmakers from the Shiite Badr bloc would not participate in the session, saying the parliamentary division could result in two governments and undermine the fight against IS. "We were living with two parliaments, and that could lead to two governments," Araji told journalists, warning that might result in "the collapse of the front" against IS. "We are against dividing the parliament and we want to maintain the democratic political process in Iraq," Araji said.

Juburi rejected the Thursday vote to

remove him on the grounds that the session lacked a quorum and called parliament to meet yesterday, but cancelled the session over an unspecified security risk. He later announced the official delay of parliament sessions and called for dialogue to end the current deadlock. But Juburi's opponents insisted that the vote to sack him was legitimate and planned to hold their own session to nominate replacements for him and his two deputies. The Badr withdrawal effectively precluded the session from being held, though it was not immediately clear if it was final or just a strategy to gain concessions.

Badr chief Hadi al-Ameri is a top commander of Shiite paramilitary forces fighting against IS, and also aspires to a senior government post. MP Kadhim Al-Shammari, a member of another bloc involved in the anti-Juburi session, called on the Badr lawmakers to return and "participate with their brothers in writing a new history for Iraq." Abadi has called for the current cabinet of party-affiliated ministers to be replaced by a government of technocrats, but has faced significant resistance from the powerful parties that rely on control of ministries for patronage and funds. Those efforts have been put on hold by disputes over the new lineup and by the move to oust the speaker. — AFP

PENTAGON CHIEF IN GULF, SEEKS SUPPORT FOR IRAQ

ABU DHABI: US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter arrived in the United Arab Emirates yesterday for a six-day Gulf tour aimed at galvanizing support for Iraq as it battles the Islamic State group. Washington is eager to see the Gulf Arab monarchies do more to help Baghdad at a crucial moment in its fight against the jihadists. "The success of the campaign against ISIL in Iraq does depend upon political and economic progress as well," Carter said ahead of his visit, using another acronym for the jihadist group. "It's important that we continue to support" Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi in his efforts to build a "multi-sectarian" country, he said. "That's the challenge in Iraq."

Abadi is grappling with plummeting oil prices and a political crisis that led to scuffles in parliament this week, hindering his efforts to replace the cabinet. Carter will hold talks with regional leaders including Saudi King Salman and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, and join US President Barack Obama at a Gulf summit in Riyadh on Thursday. He will also meet US officials overseeing the campaign against IS. Washington has urged its allies to increase support for the fight against the jihadists in Iraq and Syria.

Although the jihadists maintain a firm grip



Defense Secretary Ash Carter

on vast areas of the two countries, they have suffered some serious setbacks including the loss of Ramadi in Iraq. Retaking Iraq's second city of Mosul is among the US-led coalition's top objectives but the battle is expected to be one of the most difficult yet. Washington says it has nearly 3,900 troops in Iraq, mostly in training and support roles. It is said to be preparing to announce a further increase of troops, after deploying a unit specialized in ground raids to capture or kill IS leaders at the start of the year. — AFP

IS MAKES GAINS IN NORTHERN SYRIA FROM REGIME, REBELS

BEIRUT: The Islamic State jihadist group made gains in northern Syria yesterday from both government forces and their rebel opponents, a monitoring group said. The northern province of Aleppo borders Turkey and is criss-crossed with supply routes that are strategic for practically all of Syria's warring sides. Yesterday, IS fighters seized another border village in their offensive against non-jihadist rebel groups in the province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The IS counterattack has rolled back rebel gains in the border area, which had seen advance them from Azaz, a town eight kilometers south of the Turkish border, towards IS bastions further east. "The IS gains have cut off opposition territory around Azaz from rebels in the town of Dudyan further east," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said. "Now the rebels in Dudyan are practically surrounded by IS." The jihadist group also advanced against government

forces near Khanasser, a battleground town southeast of Aleppo that has changed hands several times. The road through Khanasser is the sole link between government-held areas in and around Aleppo and those in the rest of the country.

Yesterday, IS took several hilltops in the area but had not yet cut the supply route, Abdel Rahman said. In Aleppo itself, two civilians were killed by rebel fire on a residential neighborhood in the government-held west of the city, the Observatory said. Aleppo was once Syria's commercial hub, but since rebels seized eastern districts in 2012 a front line has carved through the heart of the city. The escalating clashes in Aleppo province have strained a fragile ceasefire in place since February 27, and left more than 200 combatants dead in the past week. IS and its jihadist rival Al-Qaeda are not party to the truce. In total, more than 270,000 people have been killed since conflict first erupted in Syria in 2011. — AFP

MOUNTAIN LION DASHES OUT FROM LOS ANGELES SCHOOL

LOS ANGELES: Students and teachers at a Los Angeles high school missed their lunch break Friday after a mountain lion strolled onto campus and tried to join them. The big cat was spotted walking across the quad at John F Kennedy High School shortly after noon. Instead of sitting down to eat, students and teachers quickly secured themselves in class-

rooms and called authorities. Police sealed off the area until a game warden could arrive and knock the animal out with a couple of tranquilizer darts, said Andrew HUGHAN, state Department of Fish and Wildlife spokesman.

When officers arrived, the mountain lion bolted into a nearby backyard but quickly grew sleepy and

confused after the darts hit. "He's on his way back to the Santa Susana Mountains, in what we call suitable habitat," HUGHAN said, adding that the animal appeared to be healthy and about 2 or 3 years old. The department later posted a video on Twitter of the "groggy" big cat returning to the wilderness. Kennedy High School is in the city's Granada Hills section, on the edge of mountain lion country. Still, it had to journey a couple of miles through a large residential neighborhood, across a golf course and around a freeway to get there. "Probably what happened was it was chasing a deer, a rabbit or a dog late last night for food, and it looked up this morning, saw the school and thought, 'Oh, oh, I'm in trouble now,'" HUGHAN said.

Mountain lions wander into cities somewhere in California every few weeks, he added, but this one got more attention than usual when it caused a school lockdown. "Be assured that all students and staff are safe," school officials said in an outgoing telephone recording. A famous mountain lion known as P-22 has been wandering the Hollywood Hills near Griffith Park, a sprawling urban wilderness, for some time. P-22 was blamed for devouring a koala in the park's Los Angeles Zoo last month, but it remains popular enough to have its own Facebook page. The animal wears a tracking collar and was famously photographed near the Hollywood sign for National Geographic. — AP



LOS ANGELES: A tranquilized mountain lion is shown in the bed of a pickup truck after it was captured near John F Kennedy High School in the Granada Hills area of Los Angeles. — AP

GUNMEN KIDNAP FOUR INDONESIAN SAILORS OFF MALAYSIA



LAHAD DATU: Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency shows a member of Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Force rescuing an Indonesian sailor after being shot during a kidnapping at the east coast of Malaysia's Sabah state in Lahad Datu. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Gunmen have abducted four Indonesian sailors and shot and wounded one crew member on the high seas off the east coast of Malaysia's Sabah state, waters where Abu Sayyaf militants are known to operate, a senior police official said yesterday. If the Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf is confirmed to be behind the kidnapping, it would be their third such hostage-taking in as many weeks and comes amid a surge in such attacks.

"The incident happened late Friday in international waters. Four Indonesian seamen were abducted by the kidnapers. One man was shot and is being treated at a hospital," Abdul Rashid Harun, Sabah police chief said. The tugboat carrying coal was sailing from Cebu in the Philippines back to Tarakan in Borneo, Indonesia, when the kidnappings occurred. Six other seamen on the tugboat, including the wounded man, managed to escape.

In a bid to curb kidnappings, Malaysia has imposed a temporary ban on the trade route between Sabah and the southern Philippines. "The government has suspended barter trade between the two regions until a comprehensive plan is formulated to ensure the safety and security of Sabah state. It is a temporary ban," Abdul Rahim Abdullah, marine police chief said. "We have deployed marine police boats along with ships from the maritime enforcement agency and the navy to enforce the

ban," he added. On April 1, four Malaysian sailors were kidnapped from a ship near Sabah's Ligitan Island. It is still unconfirmed who was responsible for that kidnapping.

Several days earlier 10 Indonesian sailors were kidnapped in waters off the southern Philippines, with initial information indicating the sailors may have been taken by an Abu Sayyaf faction to Sulu, a remote southern island that is a hideout of the militant outfit. Someone claiming to be from Abu Sayyaf called the vessel's owners to demand a ransom for the sailors' release. Many Western and other embassies routinely issue warnings against traveling to most of the Philippines' Muslim-populated southern regions, which lie just northeast of Sabah, because of the risk of being abducted by the group.

In the past Abu Sayyaf has mainly targeted tourists as they can demand high ransoms for foreigners. Two Canadians and a Norwegian were kidnapped from yachts at a marina in September, with the militants setting an April deadline for a ransom to be paid. The militants in a video demanded one billion pesos (\$21 million) for each of the three foreigners. Since the April 8 ransom deadline passed there has been no word on the hostages' fate. Last year, Malaysian Bernard Then was kidnapped from a seaside restaurant in Sabah, about 300 kilometers from the Abu Sayyaf's Jolo stronghold. He was later killed by the group. — AFP

NORTH KOREA MISSILE LAUNCH A 'CATASTROPHIC' FAILURE: US

SEOUL: A North Korea missile launch meant to celebrate the birthday of the country's founder ended in failure, US defense officials said, an embarrassing setback in what was reportedly the inaugural test of a new, powerful mid-range missile. "It was a fiery, catastrophic attempt at a launch that was unsuccessful," Capt Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said Friday. US officials are still assessing, but it was likely a road-mobile missile, given that it was launched from a location not usually used for ballistic missile launches, on the country's east coast, he said.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency carried an unsourced report that a "Musudan" missile, which could one day be capable of reaching far-off US military bases in Asia and the Pacific, exploded in the air a few seconds after liftoff. A US official speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters told The Associated Press that it appeared to be a Musudan missile but no definitive conclusion had been reached. Despite the failure, the North has another Musudan loaded on a mobile launcher and Pyongyang will likely fire it, according to South Korean and US authorities, Yonhap reported.

US Defense Secretary Ash Carter, speaking to reporters during a stop on the USS John C Stennis aircraft carrier in the South China Sea, said that while the US deemed the launch to be unsuccessful, it "was nonetheless another provocation by North Korea in a region that doesn't need that kind of behavior." The UN Security Council issued a statement saying its members "strongly condemned" the North's firing of a ballistic missile, which it said constitut-

ed a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions although the launch was a failure.

The launch comes as the two Koreas trade threats amid Pyongyang's anger over annual South Korean-US military drills that North Korea calls a rehearsal for an invasion. The North has recently fired a slew of missiles and artillery shells into the sea in an apparent protest against the drills. The surge in belligerent rhetoric and nuclear and missile activity in the North may also be linked to leader Kim Jong Un's preparations for a major ruling party meeting next month that analysts believe he will use to further solidify his autocratic rule.

Some believe that Kim may try to use the country's claims of recent nuclear and missile success as a way to turn domestic focus toward tackling the country's abysmal economy. A senior US defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity because the official wasn't authorized to comment publicly, said the US Strategic Command systems have detected and tracked what officials assessed as a failed North Korean missile launch.

"We strongly condemn North Korea's missile test in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions, which explicitly prohibit North Korea's use of ballistic missile technology," the official said. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said in a statement that said the US is "strongly committed" to the defense of its Asian allies, particularly South Korea and Japan. "We're going to continue to stand with them as they face these threats but also reiterate our commitment to the defense of our allies," Earnest said. — AP



ANSAN: People arrive to offer flowers to the victims of the sunken ferry Sewol during a ceremony for the second anniversary of the sinking at a memorial altar in Ansan, South Korea, yesterday. — AP

2 YEARS AFTER THE FERRY TRAGEDY, GRIEVING RELATIVES AWAIT SALVAGE

304 PERISHED IN SOUTH KOREA FERRY DISASTER

SEOUL: Grieving relatives yesterday threw white chrysanthemums into the sea at the spot where the Sewol ferry sank, as South Korea marked the second anniversary of the disaster which killed 304. Most of the victims were schoolchildren when the ship sank off the southwestern island of Jindo, in a tragedy caused by human error that shocked and enraged the country. Salvage crews are now preparing for the challenging task of raising the 6,825-ton ferry—a key demand of victims' families, who cling to hope that nine bodies still unaccounted for may yet be recovered. "Son, how are you? I've come to see you," a father shouted from the deck of a coastguard vessel that brought mourners to the scene.

"Come back to us now. Your mother is waiting for you," he said before tossing a flower overboard. A crowd of some 2,500 mourners took part in a service on Jindo, reading memorial poems and releasing thousands of yellow balloons. Memorial events also took place in Seoul and in the city of Ansan, where the students had gone to school. Mourners queued to lay flowers in front of hundreds of portraits of victims on an altar set up beside a street in central Seoul. Online websites were full of postings mourning the dead.

The disaster was mainly due to human error—an illegal redesign of the ship, an overloaded cargo bay, inexperienced crew and a questionable relationship between the ship operators and state regulators. Captain Lee Jun-Seok was sentenced to life in prison for "murder through wilful negligence" and sentences ranging from two to 12 years were imposed on 14 other crew members. The \$72 million salvage project being spearheaded by a Chinese company is expected to begin next month and could be finished by late July. "The government will do its best to salvage the ship and bring back the nine missing bodies to the families," Oceans Minister Kim Young-Suk said at the memorial service at Jindo.

'World first'

The Sewol lies more than 40 meters beneath the surface, and officials say lifting the 145-metre-long vessel from the seabed without causing it to break up

will be the main challenge. "Unfortunately, nothing can be guaranteed and we can only do the very best we can do to ensure that the risk is minimized," said Simon Burthem, a naval architect at TMC Marine, a global consulting firm involved in the salvage project. Still, he said, there was an 80 percent chance the operation would succeed. "Lifting the wreck in one piece from such a depth has never been done before, so this is a very, very difficult and challenging project and indeed a world first," Burthem said.

Wang Weiping, the site superintendent of the Chinese salvage company, praised the dangerous work done by dive teams in often treacherous conditions. Their main task had been to seal the vessel with netting to ensure nothing such as human remains tumbles out when the ship is being lifted. For the families of the nine victims whose bodies were never recovered, the two-year wait has been emotionally draining. "It's been 730 days and I can see

the ocean before me," said Lee Keum-Hui, who has been camping out at Paengmok harbor near the salvage site, praying for the recovery of her 16-year-old daughter's body. "I know where she is but I can't get her," Lee said. "I know the government can do more. But all I can do is just wait and trust its words," she said.

Other bereaved family members accused the government of a lack of transparency. "Everything is conducted behind closed doors and the families are not permitted to observe the recovery operation," said Jung Seong-Wook, who acts as a families' representative for the salvage project. The maritime ministry says it can arrange trips for the families as long as they do not disrupt salvage operations. For relatives like Lee, the prospect of not recovering victims' remains is almost unbearable. "We tremble with fear at even the slightest chance of never finding the missing bodies," she said. — AFP



ANSAN: High school students hold candles to pay their respects to the victims of the sunken ferry Sewol during a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the ferry sinking in Ansan, South Korea. — AP

BERNIE SANDERS MEETS PRIVATELY WITH POPE

ROME: Pope Francis said his brief encounter yesterday with US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was a sign of good manners, "nothing more," and hardly evidence of interfering in American politics. The White House hopeful called it a "real honor" to meet "one of the extraordinary figures" in the world, a kindred spirit on economic inequality, which is a main Sanders' campaign theme. Francis was on his way to Greece to highlight the plight of refugees and Sanders was wrapping up his trip to Rome when they met in the lobby of the pope's residence, the Domus Santa Marta hotel in the Vatican gardens. The Vermont senator had attended a Vatican conference Friday on economic inequality and climate change, and flew back to New York for campaign events on Saturday.

"This morning when I left, Sen. Sanders was there. ... He knew I was leaving at that time and I had the kindness to greet him and his wife and another couple who were with them," the pope told reporters traveling back with him to the Vatican. "When I came down, I greeted them, shook their hands and nothing more. This is good manners. It's called good manners and not getting mixed up in politics. If anyone thinks that greeting someone means getting involved in politics, they should see a psychiatrist," the pope said.

Earlier, Sanders said in an AP interview that he told the pope that he appreciated the message that Francis was sending the world about the need to inject morality and justice into the world economy. Sanders said that was a message he, too, has tried to convey. "We had an

opportunity to meet with him this morning," Sanders said. "It was a real honor for me, for my wife and I to spend some time with him. I think he is one of the extraordinary figures not only in the world today but in modern world history."

Sanders said he had the chance to tell the pope that "I was incredibly appreciative of the incredible role that he is playing in this planet in discussing issues about the need for an economy based on morality, not greed." Sanders and his wife, Jane, stayed overnight at the hotel, on the same floor as the pope. Francis noted to reporters that members of the Vatican conference that Sanders had attended also were staying at the hotel.

Jeffrey Sachs, a Sanders foreign policy adviser, said there were no photographs taken of the pope and Sanders together. The Vatican is loath to get involved in electoral campaigns, and usually tries to avoid any perception of partisanship as far as the pope is concerned, although Francis in February rebuked Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump over Trump's stand on immigration. Popes rarely travel to countries during the thick of political campaigns, knowing a papal photo opportunity with the sitting head of state can be exploited for political ends.

But Francis has been known to flout Vatican protocol, and the meeting with Sanders was evidence that his personal desires often trump Vatican diplomacy. "His message is resonating with every religion on earth with people who have no religion and it is a message that says we have got to inject morality and justice into the global economy," Sanders said. — AP



DHAKA: Bangladeshi security personnel escort Shafiq Rehman (center) at a court following his arrest in Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

BANGLADESH'S POLICE ARREST ELDERLY EDITOR FOR SEDITION

DHAKA: Bangladesh police yesterday arrested a well-known magazine editor for sedition, officials said, the latest in a series of detentions of pro-opposition journalists that has sparked fears of a crackdown on the press. Three plain-clothes officers entered 81-year-old Shafiq Rehman's home in Dhaka in the early morning claiming to be from a private television station and took him away, his wife Taleya Rehman said.

Police later announced Rehman, who is also a British citizen and was formerly a speechwriter for the Bangladeshi prime minister's arch-rival, had been arrested for sedition. Officers also said they had found evidence linking the editor to a conspiracy to murder Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy. "He has been arrested over sedition charges filed by police in Dhaka in August

2015," police spokesman Maruf Hossain Sorder said. Police found "connections in a conspiracy to abduct and murder" the premier's son, according to M R Khaled, a deputy police commissioner.

Rehman is the third pro-opposition editor to have been arrested by the government of Hasina, triggering repeated calls by rights groups for their release. Two other top journalists, who edit the country's leading Bengali and English newspapers, have also been charged in criminal lawsuits including dozens of defamation and sedition cases. Rehman was a long-time editor of Jai Jai Din, a mass-circulation Bengali daily. He now edits a popular Bengali monthly magazine called Mouchake Dhil. He previously served as a speechwriter for opposition leader Khaleda Zia, a two-time former prime minister who is involved in a deeply bitter

ongoing feud with the current premier.

In recent months, Rehman became the convener of the international affairs committee of Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and headed a pro-opposition think-tank named G-9. Last week, Bangladesh's high court suspended 72 defamation and other criminal lawsuits filed by government supporters against Mahfuz Anam, the editor of The Daily Star newspaper, over a challenge to their legality. Human Rights Watch is among those who have slammed the lawsuits against Anam, saying they "are part of a larger, organized assault on independent media". It comes amid widening fears for freedom of speech in the Muslim-majority nation, which has seen a spate of Islamist killings of secular bloggers and publishers. — AFP

IN SLOW DANCE WITH CAPITALISM, CUBA'S COMMUNISTS TURN TO FUTURE

HAVANA: Cuba's Communist Party met yesterday under pressure for the slow pace of promised market reforms as it prepares for a future without the octogenarian leaders who guided the country from a 1959 revolution to a cautious embrace of the United States. The meeting was the Communist Party's first congress in five years and the first since President Raul Castro and his US counterpart Barack Obama announced they were to end decades of enmity and seek normal relations.

The party has been secretive about the agenda of the meeting, even by Cuba's opaque standards, triggering grumbling among younger members who have grown accustomed to a freer flow of information and contact with the world. As well as the lack of discussion, party foot soldiers said they were worried that the country had not implemented quickly enough the sweeping market reforms adopted at the last party congress in 2011 to avoid economic collapse.

"The economic plan is still getting on

track but it needs to accelerate," said Wilson Batista, who has been a party member for twenty years. "The world's policies, the world's economy changes daily and we need to adjust ourselves exactly. We need to get on the world economic train." Cuba has improved its financial credibility over the last five years, running trade and current account surpluses and restructuring \$50 billion in mainly old debt, although harsh US sanctions remain in place. A nascent middle-class has emerged, making money from small businesses such as construction and hospitality. But in what one Cuban blogger called "paralysis at the cliff edge," the party has not relinquished control of trade or larger businesses.

Anointing a successor

The party has implemented about a fifth of the measures it adopted in 2011, and Cubans are eager for more, especially a unification of the country's two currencies and an end to the government's monopoly on imports and exports. Many Cubans are tired of waiting, especially

young professionals who are rarely allowed to set up private practices. With news from the outside world closer thanks to more Internet access and booming tourism, ever greater numbers are taking advantage of new freedoms to travel and emigrate.

The congress takes place three weeks after Obama made history as the first US president to visit the island in 88 years and eloquently called for more political freedom and democracy in the one-party state. His words are unlikely to be heeded, because the party sees itself as the greatest defense against Washington's past attempts to dominate Cuba. Cuba's top leaders started their careers as young guerrilla fighters who overthrew a US backed government in 1959, and a few years later repelled the US-backed Bay of Pigs invasion - which the party congress is timed to commemorate.

Now, party chief Raul Castro is 84 and his top lieutenant in the party, José Ramon Machado Ventura is 85. Castro is due to retire as president in 2018 and by



MARIEL: The General Director of Logistics Service of Cuban Mariel port, Annia Quintana (2nd left) and Mathaus Friedberg (2nd right), Director of French company CMA-CGM Logistics, sign bilateral cooperation agreements in Mariel port, Cuba, on April 15, 2016. — AFP

the end of the four-day congress it will be clear whether he remains as party leader until 2021, or whether somebody younger takes over the leadership. Founded in 1965, the Communist Party is

seen as more powerful in Cuba than the government. It was formally led by Fidel Castro until 2011, although his younger brother had effectively taken command several years earlier.— Reuters



HARTFORD: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump greets supporters after speaking at a rally at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford, Connecticut.— AFP

ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED UPSTATE NEW YORK SWINGS BEHIND TRUMP

CRUZ DISMISSED AS TOO RADICAL, TOO RELIGIOUS, UNLIKEABLE

BINGHAMTON: What do a New York lawyer, a business owner who calls himself a left-leaning Republican and a construction worker who elected Barack Obama have in common? They're voting for Donald Trump. None of them live on the breadline. They share surprisingly varied opinions. Yet they are profoundly frustrated with the economy, with career politicians and with perceptions of declining American prestige. The Republican frontrunner's supporters are often portrayed as undereducated, underearning whites. But in upstate New York, where Trump calls himself "the most popular person that's ever lived," the breadth of support spotlights his enduring appeal, albeit as the Republican elites plot to bring him down.

The most divisive presidential campaign in a generation hits New York on Tuesday. "I don't think he's the Hitler everyone puts him out to be, I really truly don't and as a New Yorker I grew up with the guy," says Lloyd Knecht, 59, who owns a heating and air conditioning company that employs 30 people. Knecht works in Binghamton, one of the fastest-shrinking towns in America and a pale imitation of an illustrious past where IBM was founded more than a century ago and where the flight simulator was invented. The gradual departure of IBM and other manufacturing corporations, taking jobs and technology overseas, has left behind unemployment above the US average and a poverty rate higher than the state average.

Knecht worries about rising insurance and wage bills, though he believes in "some sort of national health plan." He fears the economy is becoming sluggish. He supported Obama's decriminalization of petty drug crimes. Trump's populist message promising to bring back jobs and restore national pride with his say-it-how-it-is manner strike a deep chord in an area that has long felt forgotten by state and federal politicians. Bernie Sanders, trailing Hillary Clinton for the Democratic presidential ticket, was this week the first candidate to visit Binghamton since George W Bush 16 years ago.

Heroic-addicted ghost town

Ahead of next week's crucial primary Trump leads the Republican polls in New York state on 53.4 percent to Ohio Governor John Kasich's 21.7 percent and Texas Senator Ted Cruz's 17.6 percent, according to a RealClearPolitics average. Christopher Love, a union member who has lived in the area 42 years and works in construction, says Binghamton has gone from "valley of opportunity" to a "ghost town" where young people either leave or get hooked on heroin.

Trump, a billionaire real-estate mogul and reality television star, is the only candidate talking about issues that matter to him, says Love. "We've got to do something different. What we've been doing the last 30 years isn't working," he said, wearing a Trump 2016 trucker hat. His octogenarian father-in-law, who described

Democrat John F Kennedy as the best US president in his lifetime, is also supporting Trump.

Binghamton supporters are not blind to Trump's shortcomings-his tabloid divorces, business flops, dubious policy pronouncements, talk of banning Muslims. But it just makes him more human, they argue. He may be imperfect, but he's the best of the bunch, they say. Those who spoke to AFP dismissed Cruz as too radical, too religious, unlikeable-even "scary." They write off Kasich and have no time for Clinton, a two-time New York senator, even if one couple admitted to voting for her in the past. "I think it's just the frustration of people who have voted for many years and they're getting disgusted, tired, desensitized even," said Love, 49, asked about Trump's appeal.

You're kidding

Conrad Taylor, a 19-year-old student and elected Democrat on the Binghamton city council,

says it is rural areas where Trump, 69, is making hay. "Would I ever vote for Trump in a million years? No, but I can easily identify why so many people in our area think that he's a good candidate," he said. People are angry with Republican grandees conspiring to deny Trump, who has never held elected office, the nomination-exposing a gulf between Washington's elites and party rank-and-file.

"Frankly, I'm fed up," said Kevin Guyette, a life-long Republican who specializes in personal injury and criminal defense law and another backing Trump for the White House. He is exasperated by Republicans who deny climate change, marginalize women, explain the world through the Bible and refuse to entertain Obama's pick for the Supreme Court. "They make some outlandish comments that defy logic," he said, appearing to ignore remarks by Trump that have seen him accused of everything from misogyny to inciting violence at his rallies.— AFP

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: GOP RACE SPURS AWKWARD ENDORSEMENTS

WASHINGTON: Sen Lindsey Graham says Republican presidential hopeful Ted Cruz is "not my favorite." Ben Carson says there are "better people" than Donald Trump to serve as commander in chief. And those are the candidates Graham and Carson want to win. Presidential endorsements often create strange alliances - remember over-the-top Trump validating buttoned-up Mitt Romney four years ago? But rarely have so many partnerships of political necessity appeared to be as reluctant, awkward, even downright tortured as in the 2016 GOP race.

"Neither Trump nor Cruz win Mr. Congeniality contests," said Ana Navarro, a Republican strategist whose preferred candidate, Jeb Bush, flamed out in February. When it comes to the leading GOP candidates, Navarro said she's "not sure why anybody would want to hang out with them." Bush found a way to throw his support behind Cruz without ever actually having to hang out with the Texas senator. Rather than join Cruz for the traditional on-camera grip-and-grin that normally accompanies an endorsement, Bush took a more subdued approach: a brief, 219-word statement posted on Facebook.

Bush has made no public appearances with Cruz since that initial announcement and has stayed quiet about his support for his former rival on social media. Graham, who joked earlier this year that choosing between Cruz and Trump was like picking between being murdered or poisoned, did hold a private fundraiser for Cruz, but has not made

any public appearances with his Senate colleague. Trump has had more success getting his supporters to appear on stage with him.

His surprise endorsement from Chris Christie stunned the political world and appeared for a time to be a perfect union, with the New Jersey governor traveling with the billionaire businessman, and even standing beside Trump during a celebratory press conference after the March 1 Super Tuesday contests. That's when things took a turn. Christie's deer-in-the-headlines expression as Trump rambled on at length sparked a thousand internet parodies. Not only has Christie not appeared on stage with Trump since then, he's barely spoken about his favored candidate in public and has bristled at questions about the real estate mogul from reporters back home in New Jersey.

Carson was also game for an on-camera endorsement of Trump last month. The soft-spoken retired neurosurgeon, who is a favorite of religious conservatives, praised Trump as a man who is far more reflective privately than he comes across publicly. Trump probably would have preferred if Carson had just left it there. Instead, Carson has set off on one of the most extraordinary surrogate tours, raising more questions about Trump's qualifications to be president than he's answered. He's said he would have preferred another scenario than seeing Trump winning the nomination, suggested Trump's supporters aren't making a rational decision, and conceded that his favored candidate has "major defects."—AP

BRAZIL'S IMPEACHMENT PROBLEM: THE ACCUSERS ARE ALSO ACCUSED

RIO DE JANEIRO: One by one, Brazilian lawmakers rise on national television, faces red with indignation, voices shaking, to demand impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. The problem with this righteous scene playing out in Brazil throughout this weekend? An astonishing number of those deputies are themselves accused of crimes. In Brazil's often surreal politics, the oddest-and most ignored-aspect is that many of the politicians baying for Rousseff's head should be in as much trouble as she is, or worse.

Rousseff faces impeachment on charges that she illegally used creative accounting to mask government shortfalls during her 2014 reelection. She does not deny this and defends herself saying that previous governments used the same tricks, a mitigating factor that numerous legal experts consider legitimate. Now consider Eduardo Cunha, the speaker of the lower house of Congress and architect of the impeachment process plunging Brazil into political war.

He has been charged with taking millions of dollars in bribes linked to a massive embezzlement cartel centered on state oil company Petrobras. The Bible-quoting wheeler and dealer allegedly hid the money in Switzerland. Far from being damaged, Cunha denies the charges and continues to wield huge power, fending off a congressional ethics committee where he is accused of lying about the Swiss accounts. On Sunday, he will oversee the lower house vote on whether to send Rousseff's impeachment case to the Senate. Meanwhile, Michel Temer-the vice president who turned on Rousseff and would become interim president if the Senate opens a trial-is alleged to have been involved in illegal ethanol dealings.

My God!

Temer and Cunha are the two most senior politicians in the country after the president. The next in line, Senate president Renan Calheiros, also faces corruption allegations, including tax dodging and having



BRASILIA: Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff briefly closes her eyes as a governor speaks during a meeting on state land issues, at Planalto presidential palace in Brasilia.—AP

a lobbyist pay maintenance to his former lover with whom he'd fathered a child. Peek further down the power pyramid and the stench of corruption is overwhelming. The NGO Transparencia Brasil says that 58.1 percent of the 513 deputies in the lower house headed by Cunha face or have faced criminal charges, which include corruption but also murder and rape.

In the run-up to Sunday's vote a lower house committee first had to analyze Rousseff's case, coming down heavily on the side of impeachment. Of those 65 deputies, 36 face criminal charges or have already been condemned, Transparencia Brasil reported. And in the Senate, where Rousseff could end up making a final stand, the numbers are even more damning: no less than 60 percent of the 81 senators face or faced charges. The unedifying spectacle of scandal-tainted politicians working to oust Rousseff recently left one Supreme Court judge gasping. Describing seeing Cunha, Temer and others from the heavy-weight PMDB party after announcing they would turn on their former ally Rousseff and seek her impeachment, Justice Luis Roberto Barroso said: "My God in heaven! This our alternative government?"—AFP



BRASILIA: Activists supporting the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff take part in a protest in an area separated by a fence from the Congress in Brasilia.—AFP

PROTESTERS DENOUNCE BIG MONEY IN POLITICS

BOSTON: Conservative and independent protesters channeling themes from the presidential campaigns of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders dumped faux contributions into Boston Harbor on Friday, one of some 30 nationwide demonstrations planned against big money in politics. In Washington, police arrested 142 members of a more liberal group called Democracy Spring including 12 who cuffed themselves inside the Capitol Rotunda to protest the influence of special interests and to denounce laws making it more difficult to vote.

Nearly 1,000 Democracy Spring demonstrators have been arrested in Washington this week. Both the week-long protests in Washington and Friday's nationwide demonstrations led by the activist group Represent.Us have tapped into some of the voter frustration seen on the presidential campaign trail. "From super PACs (political action committees) to lucrative job offers and campaign contributions, there are tons of perfectly legal ways to bribe a politician," said Charlotte Hill, commu-

nications director for Represent.Us.

The group, which has promoted anti-corruption resolutions in American cities, says it neither endorses nor opposes any presidential candidate. Represent.Us said it would stage events in 33 cities. Trump, a billionaire Republican, and Sanders, who describes himself as a democratic socialist running for the Democratic nomination, have both criticized the influence of large campaign contributions in their surprising runs for the White House.

"It doesn't matter if you're conservative or progressive. Two hundred and forty-three years after the original Boston Tea Party, Americans of all political stripes are still facing taxation without political representation," said Dan Krassner, political director of Represent.Us. About 40 activists attended the symbolic re-staging of the Boston Tea Party near the spot where American colonists dumped tea into the harbor to protest taxes levied by the British. Represent.Us activists tossed a stack of wooden crates into the water, representing campaign contributions.—Reuters



A picture taken on Friday shows tens of thousands of vehicles that were seized by police forces due to traffic violations at a makeshift impound in the Wadi Laban suburb, west of Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is listed in a top of countries that suffer from traffic accidents and violations yearly. —AFP

OIL UNION REJECTS GOVT APPEAL TO CANCEL ...

Continued from Page 1

The KPC and subsidiaries still call on the oil trade unions to take part in a proposed joint commission, which is one of workers' demands, to work on a conciliatory solution and overcome this critical stage, Saleh noted.

He pointed to the enormous challenges facing the Kuwaiti economy, which prompted the state to take serious steps to counter them in all sectors, in addition to crystallizing an obvious economic vision to manage oil wealth, the backbone of the national economy. He added that the KPC and its subsidiaries had frozen the suggested retrenchment initiatives during the negotiation period as per articles 131 and 132 of Law 6/2010, out of their responsibility for the size of risks and challenges the oil sector is facing. The minister concluded by calling for necessarily maintaining the oil sector, which is the backbone of Kuwait's national economy, and giving top priority to the country's higher interest.

The union, however, immediately rejected the minister's call as offering nothing new and said the strike will go ahead from today morning. "The strike will go ahead as planned," union chief Saif Al-Qahtani said, holding oil companies and the minister responsible for the strike and the potential losses from it.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Oil Co yesterday started taking special measures to face the proposed strike, said oil sources, noting that 70 percent of gathering centers, gas booster stations and water processing plants had been shut down by KOC and that similar steps had been taken by Kuwait Petroleum Corp. Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) also said yesterday it was closing some units at Ahmadi refinery for routine maintenance, dismissing reports the closures were related to the planned strike, said state news agency KUNA. KNPC said the closures were planned in advance as part of a clean fuels project being implemented at the Mina Al-Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries. It added that it may close one or more of the total 52 units at Ahmadi as part of an emergency plan, if necessary.

Commenting on the strike, cleric Sheikh Ajeel Al-Nashmi said strikes that lead to disruption of public services and affect people's interests are religiously 'haram' (forbidden). Nashmi posted a tweet saying that delaying the work of people, namely those related to

services like electricity, water and the more important oil sector, and the possible losses this would lead to is strictly haram.

Hit by a 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 has not said how long the strike, involving thousands of workers at state-owned oil, gas and petrochemical companies, would last.

KPC said the workers union had boycotted negotiations called for Thursday by the social affairs and labor ministry. It said KPC had offered to "suspend" all spending cuts if the union agreed to join a committee to negotiate a settlement. Union chief Qahtani said the negotiations were illegal and aimed only at preventing the strike. The union is also protesting plans to privatize parts of the oil sector. "The KPC statement is talking about 'freezing' the decisions, while our demand is to cancel them," said Qahtani. "The strike is still on and on time."

Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC), a subsidiary of KPC and one of five state-owned companies that would be affected, has said there is a contingency strategy to ensure production and exports would not be affected. KPC had called on the unions to work with it to find a way out of the dispute, and warned that under Kuwaiti laws it was illegal to obstruct work in public facilities in areas such as oil, gas and petrochemicals. "There is no doubt that the commotion contains a direct and major threat to the stability of the oil sector which represents the main economic artery for the country's revenues and is the source of its wealth and prosperity," the statement said on Thursday. It said that anyone inciting a work stoppage risked "subjecting himself to legal questioning". Other firms whose workers plan to join the strike include KOC, Kuwait Oil Tanker Company, Equate Petrochemical Industries Company and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company.

Strikes are relatively common among public sector workers in Kuwait - one of the world's richest countries per capita - compared to other Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates, where unions are banned. OPEC-member Kuwait pumps three million barrels of crude per day and has three refineries with a combined capacity of 930,000 bpd.

(Material from Agencies used in this report)

WILL AND KATE END INDIA TRIP WITH TAJ...

Continued from Page 1

the city is still thriving, took several black-and-white pictures of the Queen and Prince Philip. In one, the Queen is shown dressed in an elegant overcoat and a knee-length dress, sitting next to her husband in an open-top car. Sharma may have reason to hope he gets his wish - in Mumbai, the couple took time out from engagements to meet with a 93-year-old admirer, Boman Kohinoor. The Britannia & Company restaurant owner became the star of a social media campaign that saw arrangements made for him to meet the royals at the last minute.

Security was beefed up around the monument, a UNESCO world heritage site, ahead of the Duke and Duchess's arrival, with several paramilitary personnel standing guard with sniffer dogs. The mausoleum is currently undergoing renovation

work, with scaffolding covering three of the minarets - and a senior archaeological official told AFP it would not be dismantled for the visit. It marks the final stop of a hectic itinerary for the royal couple, on their first official trip to the country that the British ruled for close to 200 years.

Their whistle-stop tour has seen them hobnob with Bollywood stars in Mumbai and meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi for lunch at a former palace in New Delhi. They then spent two days in Bhutan, meeting the king and the queen of the remote Himalayan kingdom, trying their hand at the national sport of archery, and taking a mountain hike. The couple are set to return to England on Sunday in time for the Queen's 90th birthday on April 21. Crafted in white marble and inlaid with precious stones, the Taj Mahal was built between 1631 and 1648 under Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, in memory of his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. — AFP

YEMEN TALKS TO BEGIN AMID SHAKY TRUCE

Continued from Page 1

Briefing the Security Council Friday ahead of the talks, UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who has conducted months of shuttle diplomacy, said Yemen has "never been so close to peace". The government and the rebels and their allies last sat down to talk in Geneva in December, but six days of negotiations ended with no major breakthrough. "We can expect a hard time" at the Kuwait talks, said April Longley Alley, a Yemen specialist at the International Crisis Group.

"In a best case scenario, the two sides will agree to a package of compromises that will build trust, strengthen the ceasefire, allow for an inclusive government to return to Sanaa and restart the political process," she told AFP. "But this is a tall order." In contrast with previous ceasefires, joint committees of rebel and loyalist troops were formed to monitor compliance. However they have not really begun their work. On Thursday, military sources reported at least 35 pro-government fighters killed in clashes with rebels over three days near the Houthi-held capital Sanaa. The coalition - which is not a party to the Kuwait talks - intervened after the Zaidi Shiite Houthis overran Sanaa in Sept 2014 and later advanced to other regions. Chaos and misery have ruled the Arabian Peninsula country since.

Rights groups criticized the civilian toll from coalition bombings, but also accused the Houthis of abuses. Alley says the government and rebels remain far apart on mat-

ters of substance. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's internationally recognized government insists on the rigid application of UN Security Council Resolution 2216 calling for the political process to resume and for rebels to withdraw from Yemen's cities while surrendering their weapons. The Houthis are allied with elite troops loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Alley says rigid implementation of Resolution 2216 would amount to "a Houthi/Saleh surrender and is unrealistic". It is also unclear if the Houthis would be willing to disband their "revolutionary councils" and allow a more inclusive government to return to Sanaa, she said. Probably most important is for the two sides to agree on interim security arrangements essential for strengthening the ceasefire, Alley said. This would also help prepare for other progress such as the return of the government and Houthi disarmament.

Yemen was already the Arab world's poorest country before the conflict escalated but now the humanitarian situation is "staggering", says the UN. More than 6,300 people have been killed in Yemen since March last year - around half of them civilians - and 82 percent of the population need aid. "We would of course hope and expect all the parties involved to respect the cessation of hostilities," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday. "We have seen that is not, unfortunately, the case but we do think it is largely holding. We are continuing and on track with the peace talks." — AFP



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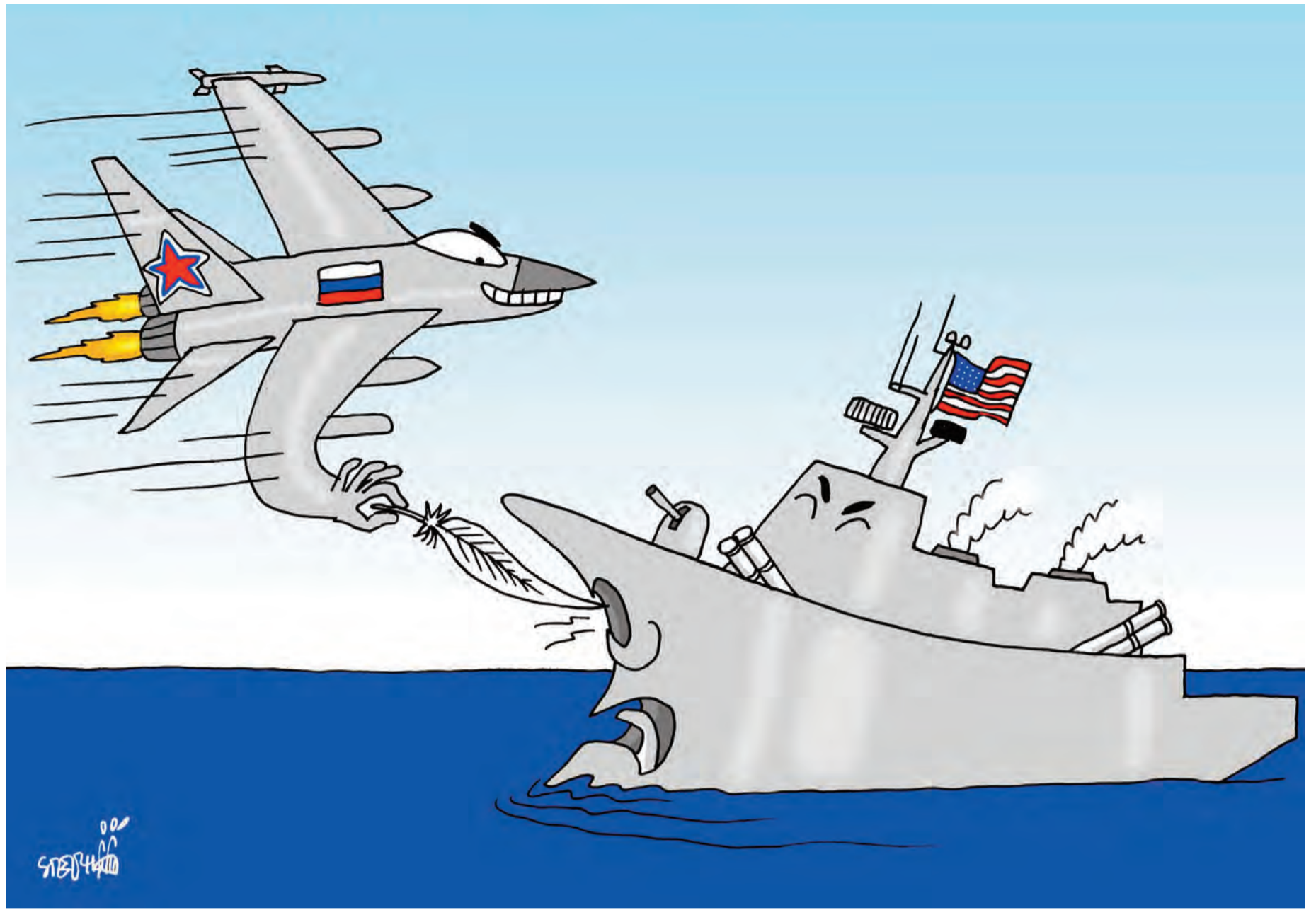
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HOW TO CLEAN UP YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

By Barbara Ortutay

Message party photos, offensive tweets, pepper spraying student protesters ... sometimes, you just want a do-over when it comes to your online presence. And for a hefty price tag, you can. The University of California, Davis is under fire for contracting consultants for at least \$175,000 to clean up its online reputation after a November 2011 incident in which campus police pepper-sprayed peaceful protesters, according to a report in the Sacramento Bee. If that PR campaign worked at all, it's now backfired. Here's how this sort of reputation scrubbing is supposed to help - and some ways in which it might have the opposite effect.

Call the Pros

Services such as Reputationdefender.com and Nymz.com offer to clean up your name, or, as the latter advertises, achieve your "professional and personal aspirations." A company called ICMediaDirect advertises reputation control for \$6,300, in which the service will try to "push down" your undesirable search results by populating Google with friendly links instead. These companies didn't return messages seeking information about their services.



In this Nov 18, 2011 file photo, University of California, Davis Police Lt John Pike uses pepper spray to move Occupy UC Davis protesters while blocking their exit from the school's quad. — AP

Instead of lawsuits, for example, the companies promise that search results will turn up your LinkedIn profile, business website or other sites that portray you in a more positive light. Of course, there's no guarantee any of this will work; it's awfully hard to delete anything permanently from the Internet.

Or Just Ask, If You're Continental

If you happen to be in Europe, you can also exercise your "right to be forgotten." This entails filling out a form that asks search engines like Google to remove certain links when people look up your name. Of course, this means nothing if someone Googles you in the U.S.

Some Things Just Don't Erase

Just ask Justine Sacco, the former IAC media relations representative who lost her job after an unfortunate tweet - one widely seen as racist, although Sacco said she was aiming for irony - raised the hackles of the Twitterverse. Three years later, the incident still turns up first when you search for her name on Google.

You also have to consider the possible blowback when and if your cleanup attempts see the light of day. That's the pickle UC Davis is in now. Some California legislators have called for the resignation of university chancellor Linda Katehi, who approved the PR campaign.

Get Old-Fashioned, If You Have Clout

For companies and public figures like celebrities and politicians, putting a positive spin on the negative can be as simple - or as complicated - as getting a friendly story in the news. Being proactive is key.

Terry Corbell, a business performance consultant, recommends "shameless self-promotion" as a way to build a positive online reputation before disasters happen. Be active on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. If you have a strong reputation to begin with, it's easier to deal with the bad stuff if and when it happens. And if it does?

"If an organization is at fault, they need to come clean," he says. "First is admission of guilt." Katehi did apologize for the original pepper spraying - but so far hasn't followed suit in the current controversy. — AP

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WHY I SUPPORT BERNIE SANDERS

By Dr James J Zogby

In 2003, while I was teaching at Davidson College in North Carolina, I saw an ad in the local newspaper announcing a "Going out of Business" sale of Utica Linen products. The mill that had been making these linens was closing and relocating to Asia where they would be able to pay lower wages. When I saw that ad, I thought back 50 years ago to when that same company's mills had first moved to North Carolina after shutting down operations in Utica, my hometown. They did so to take advantage of North Carolina's cheaper non-union labor.

What I remember most about that period wasn't just how the factories emptied out leaving parts of Utica looking like a ghost town, it was what the closures and loss of thousands of jobs did to my community and my neighbors. Those mills had defined life in Utica for generations. And then they were gone. The stress of mass layoffs created tensions that tore families apart. One third of the population was forced to leave in search of employment. In short order, Utica went from being a vibrant city to a depressed town with dilapidated neighborhoods. And now a North Carolina town was going to suffer as Utica did - for much the same reasons.

A few months ago, I endorsed Bernie Sanders for president. There were many reasons, which I will describe in a moment, but high on my list is that I never forgot what happened to my hometown and so many other American cities across the Northeast and Midwest. Sanders earned my support because he understands what bad trade deals and corporate greed have done to our communities. While some politicians have paid lip service to consequences of factory closings and the exporting of jobs to Asia, Sanders is the only one who has addressed the issue forcefully and pledged decisive action to protect American workers and their communities. I realize, of course, that Sanders isn't going to bring back the Utica of the 1960s, but what he has done is shine a light on the corporate greed that continues to put their interests ahead of their responsibility to be fair to those who have given their lives to build their businesses - opening a national debate on this important concern.

Unvarnished Truth

I have also been impressed with the way Sanders speaks the unvarnished truth about other long-ignored critical issues facing the country - issues like: income inequality, the corrupting role of big money in politics, and

the need for universal health care coverage. By demonstrating a fierce determination to raise these issues, he has the opened space making them a part of our political debate.

Equally impressive is the way young voters have responded to Sanders. Early on, polls were showing that younger voters had grown disenchanted with politics as usual. Unwilling to just settle, they have been inspired by Sanders' passion and authenticity and have become engaged in the process. Millennials have an instinct that can sniff out phonies. In the exit polls in state after state, Sanders overwhelmingly wins the support of voters under 35. And by a 70-point margin, young voters say that they trust Sanders more than his competitor. They see him as authentic and this has moved them to support his candidacy.

I have also been impressed by Sanders' opposition to committing US troops to fight in reckless wars and by his smart and courageous call for balancing concern for Israelis with concern for the Palestinians and by the compassion he has demonstrated for the suffering the Palestinian people have endured living under occupation. On this critical issue, Sanders not only has the best position of any candidate in the race - he has the best position of any major party candidate in decades. This came through so clearly in this week's

Democratic debate in Brooklyn, NY. When asked why he had accused Israel of using disproportionate violence, he stood his ground calmly explaining his position to the cheers of his supporters.

Finally, I am deeply moved when I hear Bernie Sanders speak with a sense of awe at the trajectory his life beginning with his father's immigration to the US, his family's hard work to succeed in this New World, all leading to his run for the presidency. It is a classic American story that resonates in so many ways. The fact that Sanders carries this story with him speaks volumes about the man, how grounded he is, and the source of his commitment to fighting for immigrants and the needs of working people. In many ways, he is the embodiment of the American Dream.

Early on, Sanders candidacy was ignored by the press. Even now, his chances of winning the nomination are cynically dismissed. Through it all, this 74 year old Brooklyn born son of a Polish immigrant continues to rack up victories while transforming our politics for the better. As another New Yorker once famously said, "it ain't over till it's over." Stay tuned.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

SCANT EVIDENCE OF RUSSIA DRAWDOWN IN SYRIA

By Jack Stubbs and Maria Tsvetkova

A month since Vladimir Putin announced the withdrawal of most Russian forces from Syria, his military contingent there is as strong as ever, with fewer jets but many more attack helicopters able to provide closer combat support to government troops. A Reuters analysis of publicly available tracking data shows no letup in supply missions: The Russian military has maintained regular cargo flights to its Hmeimim airbase in western Syria since Putin's declaration on March 14.

Supply runs have also continued via the "Syrian Express" shipping route, Russian engineering troops have been deployed to the ancient city of Palmyra and further information has surfaced about Russian special forces operating in Syria - suggesting the Kremlin is more deeply embroiled in the conflict than it previously acknowledged. "There hasn't been a drawdown in any meaningful way," said Nick de Larrinaga, Europe Editor of IHS Jane's Defence Weekly. "Russia's military presence in Syria is just as powerful now as it was at the end of 2015."

Announcing a drawdown gave Putin some breathing space from Western political pressure over the operation, and an opportunity to carry out maintenance on heavily-used jets. But by keeping a strong military force in place, Putin is maintaining his power to influence the situation in Syria by shoring up President Bashar al-Assad, Moscow's closest ally in the Middle East. He will also want to secure Russia's role in efforts to broker a resolution to the conflict - a process the Kremlin has used to reassert itself as a global political power after being ostracised by the West over the Ukraine crisis.

As recently as Thursday, photos and video footage taken by Turkish bloggers for their online project Bosphorus Naval News showed a Russian Navy landing ship - the Saratov - en route to Russia's Tartous naval facility in the western Syrian province of Latakia loaded with at least ten military trucks.

The Saratov is a regular feature on Russia's "Syrian Express" shipping route, which Moscow has used to transport increased supplies and equipment to Syria since the military draw down was announced. The Russian Defence Ministry did not respond to written questions submitted by Reuters



Russian soldiers stand on a road as smoke rises from a controlled land mine detonation by Russian experts inside the ancient town of Palmyra in the central Homs province on April 14, 2016. — AP

'More Formidable Force'

Russian troops and equipment have also been deployed to Syria by air in recent weeks. An Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane operated by the Russian Air Force under registration number RA-78830 has flown two supply trips a month to Syria since December. Its last flight to Russia's Latakia airbase was on April 9-10 according to tracking data on website FlightRadar24.com. Able to carry up to 145 people or 50 tonnes of equipment, Il-76 planes have been used to transport heavy vehicles including helicopters to Syria, a Russian Air Force colonel told Reuters, bolstering the number of gunships in the country as Russia's jet force deployment is wound down. "We removed some planes and added helicopters. We don't need mass bomb drops during a ceasefire," the colonel said. "Helicopters fly lower and can observe the territory better."

Russia now has more than 30 helicopters operating in Syria, including a fleet of around eight Mi-28N Night Hunter and Ka-52 Alligator gunships stationed at its Shayrat airbase southeast of Homs city, according to satellite images posted online by IHS Jane's analysts.

Separate images show 22 jets and 14 helicopters stationed at the Hmeimim airbase, compared to 29 jets and 7 helicopters seen there in early February, said Justin Bronk, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). "All that's really gone is the fixed wing close air support attack jets," he said. "On the rotary side it's a substantially more formidable force than it was."

Special Forces

The Ka-52, known for its unusual double set of top-mounted rotor blades and no tail rotor, is the Russian military's official special forces support helicopter and its appearance in Syria is testament to the growing number of Russian ground troops in direct combat roles, western officials say. Russia acknowledged having special forces in Syria for the first time shortly after its military drawdown was announced, saying they were conducting high-risk reconnaissance missions and "other special tasks".

Since the announcement, Western diplomats say Russia's forces have increasingly targeted Islamic State militants and an offshoot of Al-Qaeda. Previously Russia focused its

strikes on other Assad opponents, including some viewed by the West as moderate. Swapping jets for helicopters illustrates Russia's new military role in the Syrian conflict, engaging directly with fighting on the ground instead of dropping bombs from thousands of feet. "Russia's attack helicopters are getting much more into the thick of things than their fixed wing aircraft were previously," said de Larrinaga. "We never really saw Russian strike aircraft operating at low level like this before."

Both the Ka-52 and Mi-28N, which is broadly equivalent to the U.S. Apache gunship, were used to provide close air cover to the Syrian army when it secured a major victory by retaking Palmyra from Islamic State militants in March. Bronk said the helicopter deployment was in response to the changing needs of the Syrian army. "They are no longer bombarding besieged cities so much, trying to dislodge rebels," he said. "Instead they are trying to assist a more mobile, manoeuvrable style of engagement. Because that tactical role or focus of Assad's forces has changed, then the Russian support methodology needs to change along with it." — Reuters

LIVERPOOL'S CAN OUT FOR SIX WEEKS WITH INJURY

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool midfielder Emre Can has been ruled out of action for between four and six weeks with ruptured ankle ligaments, the Premier League club confirmed yesterday. The 22-year-old limped off in Thursday's dramatic Europa League win over Borussia Dortmund, and a scan revealed ruptured ligaments. Liverpool's medical team are hopeful the lay-off will only be four weeks allowing the Germany international to make the Europa League final if the club get past Villarreal in the last four. "He is injured. It is with the ligament in the right ankle," said Reds boss Jurgen Klopp of the second injury blow after captain Jordan Henderson damaged knee ligaments in the first leg against Dortmund. "At this moment it is not the best news to be honest. I don't want to give a timescale but we will try everything to get him back as soon as possible," continued Klopp. "It is the last four or five weeks of the season so we should not say 'OK the season is finished' because there is hope and it is not. But if he is not available we have to find other solutions, we have to give the job to different people, change the style. —AFP



VICTORIA: Laurianne Lissar (C) of team France works drills with trainers on Friday at Windsor Park in Victoria, BC, Canada, for the upcoming HSBC World Rugby Women's Sevens World Series. The tournament runs from April 16-17. —AFP

TOMANE SCORES HAT TRICK AS BRUMBIES DOWN WARATAHS

SYDNEY: Winger Joe Tomane scored a hat trick of tries as the ACT Brumbies downed the NSW Waratahs 26-20 in a torrid Super Rugby match yesterday.

The win took the Brumbies four points clear at the top of the Australian conference, with New South Wales languishing in 13th place overall. The victory also ensured the Brumbies defeated the Waratahs twice in a season for the first time since 2012.

"I'm very happy with that," said Brumbies captain Stephen Moore. "We knew we just had to work hard in that second half and I'm very proud of our defence particularly."

After a big loss to the Waikato Chiefs in Canberra in their last outing, the Brumbies needed to get away to a quick start. They did that when Tomane crossed for his first five-pointer after only seven minutes. They were in again eight minutes later when Tomane grabbed his second with a 50-metre run to the line following a break from Wallabies centre Matt Toomua. The Waratahs struck back with a try to winger Reece Robinson and a Bernard Foley penalty, before hitting the front in the 31st minute when Israel Folau finished some superb work from the NSW backs. Folau's try was his 29th

in NSW colours and equals Lote Tuqiri's try-scoring record for the Waratahs.

But any thoughts the Waratahs may have had of taking a lead into the half-time break were dashed when Moore crashed over at the back of a rolling maul. Christian Leali'ifano's conversion put the ACT ahead 19-17 at the break, and they extended that lead to 26-17 when Tomane scored his third eight minutes after the restart.

The match developed into an arm wrestle and the Waratahs got within striking distance with a second Foley penalty when there were eight minutes remaining. But the Brumbies held on to secure the points despite a wave of NSW attacks in the closing stages.

"It wasn't pretty, there was a lot of dropped ball—it was quite slippery and there was a lot of physicality from both sides," said Brumbies coach Steve Larkham.

"But I loved their composure in that last little passage." Waratahs captain Michael Hooper conceded his team had been outplayed. "They came out hard and they hit us early," he said.

"They found some space on the open side, so we need to do some work on our defensive systems." —AFP

SEVENS BIG GUNS SURVIVE GRUELLING DAY IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE: Fiji, New Zealand and Australia all rebounded after losing their opening matches yesterday to scrape into the quarterfinals of the Singapore Sevens, the newest and perhaps most gruelling leg of the World Series.

Fiji, still weary after winning last week's Hong Kong round, were beaten 28-14 by their South Pacific neighbours Samoa first up before hammering Portugal 38-0 then England 26-12 to finish top of pool A in stifling humidity at Singapore's National Stadium.

New Zealand, finalists in Hong Kong and currently second behind Fiji in the championship standings, were thrashed 24-0 by France before they atoned with hard fought wins over Canada (24-17) then the United States (19-12) to finish runner-up in Pool B.

Australia slipped up in their opening fixture against Argentina (12-7) after conceding a late try but safely made it through to the last eight on Sunday with victories over Japan (17-12) and Wales (31-12). "We were probably a little bit off our game but at the end of the day we got the job done," Australia coach Andy Friend told AFP. "Coming so soon after Hong Kong, that was a really tough day, which is why you had three of the top four teams fall over in the first game." Of the top four ranked teams in the world, only South Africa survived the first day undefeated, thrashing Scotland 33-0 before battling to wins over Russia (21-10) and Kenya (14-0).

"I'm pretty happy about day one," South Africa coach Neil Powell told AFP. "It's always a tough week after Hong Kong because all the big teams target that and when they get to the next one they seem to struggle to get back to the same level."

South Africa finished at the top of Pool C and will play New Zealand in the quarters after the All Blacks were blown away by a brilliant French team that scored four unanswered tries, including one in each half from the elusive Jeremy Aicardi.

Fijian born Virimi Vakatawa scored in each of France's three matches, including a double in the 19-17 win over the US France will play Kenya in the quarterfinals while Argentina tackle Samoa. After upsetting Fiji, the Samoans lost their second match to England (12-5), a result which cost them top spot in the group. Fiji played England in the last match of the day, needing to win to keep alive their record of making the quarterfinals at every World Series event since January 2014.

They did it easily in the end and now face Australia in Sunday for a place in the semi-finals. "It's incredibly hard to do the (Asian) double, no team has managed it in the last 10 years," Fiji coach Ben Ryan said. "But we will not for one minute be using it as an excuse if we don't play well this weekend and we don't win our games, it will have nothing to do with fatigue." —AFP

FINA MAINTAIN EFIMOVA BAN

PARIS: Russian swimmer Yulia Efimova's bid to have her provisional suspension lifted has been rejected by the International Swimming Federation (FINA). Efimova was handed a provisional ban in March after testing positive for the banned drug meldonium. The swimmer had asked FINA to lift the ban so that she could compete at Russia's Olympic Trials starting in Moscow today. But FINA said in a statement early Saturday that Efimova will not be allowed to return to competition until after her hearing. "Considering the provisional suspension imposed by FINA to swimmer Yulia Efimova (RUS) and the recent WADA recommendations on the use of meldonium, the FINA Doping Panel decided to maintain the provisional suspension of this athlete, until a hearing of Ms Efimova is held by the FINA Doping Panel," a statement from FINA read. "FINA will not make any further comments on this case, until a final decision is made by the FINA Doping Panel." The 24-year-old, who won a bronze medal in the 200-metre breaststroke at the 2012 London Games, conceded she had taken meldonium for medical reasons before the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) ban on the drug came into effect on January 1. —AFP

PHELPS 'NOT HAPPY' WITH 200M FLY WIN

LOS ANGELES: Olympic superstar Michael Phelps saw plenty of room for improvement after winning the 200m butterfly at the wind-whipped Mesa Pro Swim on Friday in 1min 58.14sec. "Not happy," the 18-time Olympic gold medalist said after winning in a time that didn't crack the top 20 in the world this year—a list led by the 1:54.14 of Japan's Daiya Seto. Phelps was in control at the 100m mark, but Pace Clark closed strong to finish second in 1:58.71 and Jonathan Gomez was third in 1:58.79. Phelps said the wind, with gusts up to 30 mph (48 km/h) were a challenge. "That wind, oh my gosh," Phelps said. "I felt like I was moving backwards with about 15 meters to go going into that wall." Reigning Olympic 100m freestyle champion Nathan Adrian said it was howling so loudly in his ears he was afraid he wouldn't hear the start of the 50m free. He managed, and won in 21.69sec, knocking one-hundredth of a second off his third-fastest time in the world this year. Anthony Ervin was second in 22.28 and Cullen Jones third in 22.30. With the wind at her back, Madison Kennedy won the women's 50m free in a sizzling 24.45sec, sixth-fastest in the world this year. —AFP



ROSBERG TAKES POLE AT CHINESE GRAND PRIX

HAMILTON TO START AT BACK

SHANGHAI: Mercedes has become used to starting on the front row after a dominant couple of years in Formula One. Not so much from the back of the field.

Nico Rosberg will take the team's customary spot of pole position at the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday, but defending world champion Lewis Hamilton will have to start from the last row after an early exit from qualifying due to a power unit problem.

Rosberg set a time of 1 minute, 35.402 seconds on Saturday despite using a harder tire than his rivals, qualifying a half-second ahead of Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo in a surprise second place. Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen and Sebastian Vettel qualified third and fourth, respectively, after misjudging the final hairpin turn on their last laps.

Hamilton had issues with his engine throughout the first segment of qualifying and, even though his team tried to repair the problem, he couldn't set a timed lap.

The last time Hamilton started this far back on the grid was at the 2014 Hungarian Grand Prix when he qualified last after his engine caught fire. He worked his way through the field to finish third in that race.

The British driver was hoping to replicate that feat on a Shanghai circuit where he's had particular success in the past, winning four races. "I take encouragement from (the fact) I've been driving a long time ... there's no question in my mind of how I'm going to battle my way through tomorrow," Hamilton said. "Whether or not you can get all the way up to third, I think that's going to be a very, very tough challenge, for sure." It's been a frustrating few weeks for Hamilton, who already faced a five-place grid penalty in Shanghai for making an early switch of his gearbox after it was damaged in a collision at the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Rosberg, meanwhile, has been on a roll of late, capturing the first two races of the season and five straight dating to last year. "I'm pleased, of course. The whole weekend has gone well," Rosberg said. "I'm not ecstatic because Lewis had bad luck and his car broke down so the fight (with him) didn't happen."

Ricciardo has a pair of fourth-place finishes so far this year and is hoping he can hold off the Ferrari cars - and perhaps Hamilton - on Sunday to get back on the podium for the first time since last year's Singapore Grand Prix.

"It's testament to how far we've come since



SHANGHAI: Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's British driver Lewis Hamilton stands in the pits during the third practice session at the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai yesterday. —AFP

the end of 2015," Ricciardo said. "It feels good to be back up here." Williams driver Valtteri Bottas qualified fifth, followed by Ricciardo's Red Bull teammate, Daniil Kvyat, in sixth. Sergio Perez of Force India was seventh, with Carlos Sainz and Max Verstappen of Toro Rosso eighth and ninth, respectively.

After early showers wiped out yesterday's final practice session, qualifying got off to an eventful start when Manor driver Pascal Wehrlein hit a bump and lost control in a wet patch just three minutes in, skidding off the circuit and slamming into the barrier.

He walked away uninjured but the red flag came out for 20 minutes as his car was removed and officials dried the track. Then, at the end of the second segment, Nico Hulkenberg's front left tire came loose, popped off the car and rolled across the grass. Another red flag was shown, ending the session a minute early as both McLaren drivers were trying for a final flying lap to advance to the third qualifying segment.

Fernando Alonso, racing for the first time since fracturing a rib in a dramatic crash at the Australian Grand Prix, let out a loud groan over his radio when the session ended early.

"It was massively frustrating today because we felt competitive," Alonso said. "That was a shame." Hulkenberg received a three-place grid penalty after F1 officials deemed his team released his car from the pits in an unsafe condition. He initially finished 10th but with the penalty will start 13th, elevating Williams driver Felipe Massa to 10th. Alonso will start 11th, followed by teammate Jenson Button.

Formula One reverted to last year's qualifying format after experimenting with a new rolling-elimination system for the first two races of the season that proved unpopular with drivers and fans alike.

Some fans in Shanghai showed their appreciation for the change, hanging a giant banner from the stands that read, "Finally 'Real' Qualifying is Back." —AP



SHANGHAI: McLaren driver Fernando Alonso of Spain, left, and Ferrari driver Sebastian Vettel of Germany, right, steer their cars during the third practice session of the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit, in China, yesterday. —AP

RICCIARDO BULLISH AFTER CHINA FRONT ROW

SHANGHAI: Daniel Ricciardo believes Red Bull can give Ferrari a run for their money as they all chase race favourite Nico Rosberg in today's Chinese Grand Prix.

The Australian's late surge saw him qualify second behind Rosberg yesterday, helped by some mistakes by Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen and Sebastian Vettel, who occupy row two.

"Today is encouraging," said Ricciardo, who finished fourth in the season's first two races in Australia and Bahrain—both won by Rosberg. "If we can have this on one lap then in the race we should still be pretty competitive. We're normally better off in the race. I hope to have a race with Ferrari." Ricciardo's performance surprised even himself, with Red Bull team chief Christian Horner putting it down to the Australian's new

"go-faster haircut". "Second is pretty awesome," he said after securing his first front row since China two years ago. "It feels good to be back here. We didn't expect this!"

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff also admitted Ricciardo, who scored all three of his Formula One victories in 2014, had caught everyone by surprise. "That kind of came out of nowhere," he said. "We know of Daniel's qualities, he's been impressive. But he wasn't on the radar until Q3 and there he was—P2."

Red Bull team-mate Daniil Kvyat starts on the third row and Ricciardo predicted they could be in the mix at the business end of Sunday's race. "We have to try to keep this going," said the 26-year-old. "We've only had a couple of races, but up until now we've exceeded, maximised every-

thing we've got, and we've shown true dry pace here. "To get a front row in dry conditions is awesome," he added. "It's testament to how far we've come since the end of 2015. I know it's only qualifying, but the plan is to be back here after the race." Ricciardo admitted he had struggled earlier during qualifying, which was delayed for 20 minutes after Pascal Wehrlein's Manor crashed into a wall moments into the first session. "It didn't seem like we were going to be in the fight for the front few rows today," he said. "But I found a bit more speed, although the super-soft is a tricky tyre to manage—it gets chewed up quite a bit as the lap goes on."

"Nico, starting on the softs, should be in good shape but if we can battle for the podium, that will be awesome." —AFP

BURNETT CHIPS IN TO EDGE AHEAD AT LPGA IN HAWAII

KAPOLEI: Katie Burnett chipped in for birdie on the par-4 18th for a 5-under 67 and a one-stroke lead in the Lotte Championship. Winless in 59 career starts on the LPGA Tour, the 26-year-old Georgia player had her second straight bogey-free round to take a 13-under 203 total into the final round at Ko Olina. Su-Yeon Jang was second after a 67. Playing on a sponsor exemption, the 21-year-old South Korean player is coming off a victory last week in the

Korean LPGA event sponsored by Lotte - a win that earned her a spot next year at Ko Olina. US Women's Open champion In Gee Chun (65) and Moriya Jutanugarn (68) were 10 under.

RBC HERITAGE

Top-ranked Jason Day shot a 2-under 69 on Friday in the RBC Heritage for a share of the second-round lead with Kevin Chappell and Charley Hoffman. Chappell and Hoffman shot

68s for the second straight day at Harbour Town to join Day at 6 under 136. Day has won two of his past three PGA Tour events. The Australian opened on the 10th tee and birdied the difficult, wind-swept lighthouse hole at No. 18. He added birdies on Nos. 2, 3 and 6. Luke Donald, tied for the first-round lead after a 66, was a stroke back along with Russell Knox and Patton Kizzire. Donald had a 71, Knox shot 65, and Kizzire 68.

LOTTE CHAMPIONSHIP MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC CLASSIC

Tom Watson was in position to make PGA Tour Champions history after shooting a 4-under 68 for a share of the first-round lead with Tom Byrum and Mark O'Meara in the Mitsubishi Electric Classic. A week after making his final appearance in the Masters, the 66-year-old Watson is trying to become the oldest winner on the 50-and-over tour. Mike Fetchick set the mark in the 1985 Hilton Head Seniors

International on his 63rd birthday. Todd Hamilton, Jesper Parnevik and Kenny Perry were a stroke back at TPC Sugarloaf.

SPANISH OPEN

Spain's Pablo Larrazabal shot an even-par 71 in strong wind to take a two-shot lead after the second round of the European Tour's Spanish Open. Larrazabal had a 3-under 139 total at Valderrama. England's Andrew Johnston was second after a 74. —AP

SEMENYA WINS TRIPLE AT SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONALS

STELLENBOSCH: Stealing the show from a reigning world champion, Caster Semenya won national titles in the 400, 800, and 1,500 meters and ran Olympic qualifying times in the first two events at the South African championships yesterday.

Looking sharper than she has in years, the former 800-meter world champion set world-leading times in the 400 and 800. Finishing with the 1,500, Semenya became the first athlete to win all three titles at the championships, and did it within about four hours.

"The legs don't feel too much pain. I'll pay tomorrow," she said. Even though it's early in the Olympic year, Semenya's performance in her favored 800, which came less than an hour after her 400 race, suggested she may again put a list of struggles behind her to challenge in Rio de Janeiro in August.

The competition may not have been strong, but her times in both the one and two-lap races were: A personal best 50.74 seconds in the 400, and 1 minute, 58.45 seconds in the 800. "I'm quite impressed with the performances of tonight. I didn't expect to run like this, fast times like this," Semenya said. "The 400 and 800, it was just marvelous." Her

1,500 victory was in 4:10.93, outside the Olympic qualifier. In between Semenya's first two victories, world champion Wayde van Niekerk retained his 400-meter title in 44.98 seconds, also going under the South African qualifying mark for the Rio Games.

Van Niekerk cruised through the first 200 to win easily on the final day of the two-day meet in Stellenbosch, near Cape Town. He said he ran cautiously after feeling tightness in his back and hamstrings during his qualifying races on Friday.

"I'm just really pleased that I can leave the track feeling healthy and feeling confident again," Van Niekerk said. "I had quite a few challenges this weekend."

Van Niekerk, whose victory was one of the big surprises of last year's world championships in Beijing, said he'd stay at home and train for the next six weeks before heading to Europe to race in June. "I'll try and pick up the momentum (for the Olympics)," he said.

Shrugging off concerns over the short gap between the 400 and 800 finals, Semenya sped past her rivals on the last corner in the 400. It was her first South African title in the event. —AP

SUPERSTAR LIN DAN BOOTED FROM SINGAPORE OPEN

SINGAPORE: Two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan became the latest casualty at the Singapore Open yesterday when he suffered a stunning semi-final defeat at the hands of Indonesian qualifier Sony Dwi Kuncoro. The 32-year-old Lin, who has never won the tournament, trailed early on against the composed 2004 Olympic bronze medalist Kuncoro, who raced to a 11-4 lead before taking the first set 21-10.

The Chinese superstar salvaged the second set to win 21-17, but the 31-year-old Indonesian kept his cool to seal a nailbiting 22-20 victory in the final set.

On Friday world number ones Chen Long of China and Carolina Marin of Spain had crashed out in the quarter-finals, unceremoniously shown the door by young upstarts.

Chen fell to Hong Kong's 21-year-old Angus Ng, while Marin fell in three sets to Japan's 18-year-old Akane Yamaguchi.

Speaking to media after the game, Lin said: "I lost the first set too quickly and took too long to find my rhythm. I didn't play as well as I could have." Kuncoro, ranked 56th in the world, said he began to believe he could win after his quick-fire start.

"It was such an awesome game and I'm very happy," Kuncoro said. "My game was pretty hesitant in the second set so in the third set I just put in my all and was aggressive. I did not want to follow Lin Dan's style of play," added the Indonesian.

Kuncoro, who won the Singapore Open in 2010, will face Korea's Son Wan-Ho in the finals after Son beat giant-killer Ng.

In the women's singles world number two Ratchanok Intanon beat Yamaguchi 21-12 22-20 to progress to the finals. The clinical Thai will be bidding to win three successive Superseries tournaments in as many weeks when she faces Chinese defending champion Sun Yu. — APF



TAMPA: Alex Killorn #17 and Tyler Johnson #9 of the Tampa Bay Lightning celebrate a goal against the Detroit Red Wings during the third period in Game Two of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals during the 2016 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at Amalie Arena on Friday in Tampa, Florida. —AFP

LIGHTNING GO UP 2-0 OVER RED WINGS WITH 5-2 VICTORY

TAMPA: Tyler Johnson scored a pair of third-period goals Friday night, helping the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Detroit Red Wings 5-2 in Game 2 of their first-round playoff series. Ben Bishop had 30 saves for the defending Eastern Conference champions, who took the first two games at home despite playing without injured leading goal scorer Steven Stamkos and defenseman Anton Stralman. A bloody brawl involving several players capped this one, with 14 penalties called - including a game misconduct on Justin Abdelkader - with 54 seconds left. Game 3 is Sunday in Detroit, where the Red Wings won both regular-season meetings between the teams.

Crawford had a strong game in net and Duncan Keith also scored for Chicago in his first game back from a six-game suspension for a dangerous high stick to Minnesota's Charlie Coyle. Keith assisted on Artemi Panarin's clinching empty-net goal with 1:34 to go. The series shifts to Chicago with Game 3 on Sunday. Vladimir Tarasenko and Kevin Shattenkirk scored for St. Louis.

its first-round playoff series with a victory over Anaheim. Pekka Rinne made 27 saves for the Predators, who got the early jump on the Pacific Division champion Ducks with a gritty road effort. James Neal and Colin Wilson also scored, while Forsberg scored the go-ahead goal when his cross-ice pass to Craig Smith hit defenseman Shea Theodore's skate and trickled past John Gibson. Game 2 is tonite in Anaheim. Captain Ryan Getzlaf and Ryan Kesler scored for the Ducks, who lost an opener for just the second time in seven playoff series under coach Bruce Boudreau. — AP

PREDATORS 3, DUCKS 2

Filip Forsberg got credit for the tiebreaking goal with 9:35 to play, and Nashville opened

NHL results/standings

Florida 3, NY Islanders 1; Tampa Bay 5, Detroit 2; St. Louis 2, Chicago 3; Anaheim 2, Nashville 3.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference													
Atlantic Division					Pacific Division													
W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS													
Florida	47	26	9	239	203	103	Dallas	50	23	9	267	230	109					
Tampa Bay	46	31	5	227	201	97	St. Louis	49	24	9	224	201	107					
Boston	42	31	9	240	230	93	Chicago	47	26	9	235	209	103					
Detroit	41	30	11	211	224	93	Nashville	41	27	14	228	215	96					
Ottawa	38	35	9	236	247	85	Minnesota	38	33	11	216	206	87					
Montreal	38	38	6	221	236	82	Colorado	39	39	4	216	240	82					
Buffalo	35	36	11	201	222	81	Winnipeg	35	39	8	215	239	78					
Toronto	29	42	11	198	246	69	Central Division											
Metropolitan Division					Washington	56	18	8	252	193	120	Anaheim	46	25	11	218	192	103
Pittsburgh	48	26	8	245	203	104	Los Angeles	48	28	6	225	195	102					
NY Rangers	46	27	9	236	217	101	San Jose	46	30	6	241	210	98					
NY Islanders	45	27	10	232	216	100	Arizona	35	39	8	209	245	78					
Philadelphia	41	27	14	214	218	96	Calgary	35	40	7	231	260	77					
Carolina	35	31	16	198	226	86	Vancouver	31	38	13	191	243	75					
New Jersey	38	36	8	184	208	84	Edmonton	31	43	8	203	245	70					
Columbus	34	40	8	219	252	76	Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).											

PANTHERS 3, ISLANDERS 1

Roberto Luongo made 41 saves for his first playoff win in five years, and the Florida Panthers evened their Eastern Conference quarterfinal series by beating the New York Islanders. Reilly Smith and Nick Bjugstad each had a goal and an assist for Florida, which salvaged a split in the series-opening back-to-back. Dmitry Kulikov added an empty-netter with 9.3 seconds left to clinch the win. Game 3 is in Brooklyn on Sunday. John Tavares scored with 3:33 left for New York, and Thomas Greiss stopped 28 shots for the Islanders.

BLACKHAWKS 3, BLUES 2

Andrew Shaw stuffed home a rebound on a power play with 4:19 remaining, minutes after the Chicago Blackhawks won a coach's challenge to negate a goal, and the defending Stanley Cup champions pulled even with the St. Louis Blues in their first-round series. Corey



SINGAPORE: Lin Dan of China returns a shot to Sony Dwi Kuncoro of Indonesia during their men's singles semi-final match at the Singapore Open Badminton championship yesterday in Singapore. — AP

THIRD LOCAL DISABLED GAMES KICKS OFF TODAY

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The third local disabled games will kick off today at the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club in shooting, athletics and target ball for the blind with the participation

of a large number of club players of both genders and will continue for three days.

Club president Shafi Al-Hajiri said this tournament marks the end of a series of championships the club organized this year and included all the sports that are practiced in the club, and aimed at improving the players' levels and prepare for championships abroad, besides being a good opportunity to discover new talent.

Al-Hajiri said the club completed all technical and administrative preparations for the tournament and expected to have good competition technically especially that several players who qualified for the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro next September, particularly in shooting and athletics.

He said the club's athletics track, Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Hall which will see the shooting competition and the Target ball hall are all ready for competition.

Shafi Al-Hajiri appreciated the major support the public authority for sports under its Director General Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and hid Deputy Dr Humoud Fulaiteh gives his club including the patronage of all three local tournaments that is besides its continued support for the national teams abroad.



Shafi Al-Hajiri



HONG KONG: Players from the women's singles pose for a photo at the awards ceremony after qualifying at the Asian Table Tennis Qualification Tournament for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong yesterday. — APF

IBRAHIMOVIC DOUBLE HELPS PSG REBOUND WITH CAEN THRASHING

PARIS: Paris St Germain rebounded after their Champions League exit to Manchester City with a 6-0 victory over Caen in Ligue 1 yesterday.

PSG, who wrapped up the Ligue 1 title last month, suffered heartbreak in midweek when City won the second leg of their quarter-final 1-0 following a 2-2 draw at the Parc des Princes.

They responded emphatically, however, as a Zlatan Ibrahimovic double and

further goals from Blaise Matuidi, Edinson Cavani, Angel Di Maria and Maxwell secured a convincing victory over mid-table Caen. The win moves Laurent Blanc's side on to 86 points — 30 ahead of second-placed Olympique Lyonnais—and needing one more win to equal the club's all-time record points total for a single Ligue 1 season.

"The victory doesn't help us forget the defeat against Manchester City, but

we have to keep going, because the only way we will get over it is by winning," said PSG defender Marquinhos.

Top scorer Ibrahimovic struggled to assert himself against City, but opened the scoring in the 12th minute when his long-range shot evaded goalkeeper Remy Vercoutre, who should have done better. The strike was the Swedish frontman's 31st of the Ligue 1 campaign, his biggest haul in a single league season

during his dazzling career. Matuidi added another in the second minute of first-half stoppage time, before turning provider after the break as he duped Vercoutre with a cut-back, leaving Cavani to bury the ball into the open net. Di Maria added insult to injury when he sent a delicious chipped effort over the advancing Vercoutre in the 52nd minute, while Ibrahimovic's fine volley and substitute Maxwell's close-range

effort compounded the visitors' misery. "Is Ligue 1 too easy? I mustn't say that in front of the TV cameras," added Marquinhos. The beleaguered Vercoutre, whose side remain ninth on 46 points, said he would not be watching a video of the match.

"I'll try to forget it," he said. "Tonight, I'll have nice beer, sleep well and try not to have nightmares about what happened here." — Reuters

SUNDERLAND DOWN NORWICH TO GRAB SURVIVAL LIFELINE



NORWICH: Sunderland grabbed a priceless lifeline in the fight for Premier League survival as goals from Fabio Borini and Jermain Defoe inspired a 3-0 win over relegation rivals Norwich yesterday.

Sam Allardyce's side would have been on the brink of crashing into the Championship if they had lost at Carrow Road, but Borini's first half penalty and strikes from Defoe and Duncan Watmore after the interval significantly improved their hopes of staying up.

Sunderland remain in the relegation zone after their first win in seven matches, but they are now only one point behind fourth bottom Norwich with a game in hand. Allardyce has never been relegated from the top-flight and he could be on course to mastermind another great escape to emulate Sunderland's last-ditch revival under Dick Advocaat 12 months ago. For Norwich, it was further setback to their survival bid after last weekend's loss at Crystal Palace and they face a nervous last four matches as the relegation struggle goes to the wire. Norwich's failure to avoid defeat also meant Aston Villa were given a stay of execution, although the bottom club would be relegated if they fail to win at Manchester United later. After an unexpectedly meeting in the 1985 League Cup final, these two clubs had established such a rapport that matches between them are now played for the 'Friendship Trophy'.

Allardyce was unaware of the curious alliance until it was pointed out in the build-up this week but, with so much at stake, it wasn't long before the relationship was put to the test as tempers frayed.

Robbie Brady sparked the flashpoint when the Norwich winger needlessly shoved Sunderland's DeAndre Yedlin into the advertising boards right in front of the visitors' bench. Brady was confronted by a member of Sunderland's coaching staff and Allardyce wasn't far behind as he angrily pushed away Norwich's Cameron Jerome while players from both sides joined the shoving match. When the furore had died down, Diemerici Mbokani rose to above Younes Kaboul to meet Brady's cross, but the Norwich forward's header was straight at Sunderland goalkeeper Vito Mannone.

UGLY TACKLE

Sunderland threatened when Jan Kirchhoff flicked a free-kick into the path of Fabio Borini, but the Italy striker's cross-shot flashed just past John Ruddy's far post.

As Norwich began to dominate, Mannone alertly kept Kaboul's deflected attempt to clear a Brady cross before brilliantly tipping over Martin Olsson's long-range effort.

Mannone's heroics had kept Sunderland afloat and Allardyce's men took full advantage four minutes before half-time.

Defoe picked out Borini in the penalty area and when he cut back inside to attack Andre Wisdom, the Norwich defender got the slightest touch on the ball before following through to catch the Italian with an ugly tackle that convinced referee Andre Marriner to point to the spot.

Norwich's furious players surrounded Marriner to protest, but Borini ignored the fuss as he calmly slotted the penalty low to Ruddy's right for only his fourth goal of the season. Neil sent on Nathan Redmond at half-time and the Norwich winger nearly had an instant impact with a skidding shot that struck the outside of a post.

But it was Sunderland who struck again in the 53rd minute. Norwich defender Sebastian Bassong was nudged off the ball by Kirchhoff far too easily inside his own half and Borini whipped over a sublime cross that Defoe met with a typically predatory sliding finish at the far post. The Canaries laid siege to Sunderland's goal in the closing stages without success as Lee Cattermole cleared off the line from Mbokani and then Wes Hoolahan. Watmore rubbed salt in Norwich wounds in stoppage-time when he took Seb Larsson's pass and clipped a near post finish past Ruddy. — AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Leicester City v West Ham 15:30
beIN SPORTS 2 HD
Bournemouth v Liverpool 15:30
beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Arsenal v Crystal Palace 18:00
beIN SPORTS 2 HD

SPANISH LEAGUE

Malaga v Athletic de Bilbao 13:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Sevilla v Deportivo La Coruna 17:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD
Rayo Vallecano v Villarreal 19:15
beIN SPORTS 1 HD
Atletico de Madrid v Granada 19:15
beIN SPORTS 3 HD
Barcelona v Valencia 21:30
beIN SPORTS 3 HD

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Atalanta v AS Roma 13:30
beIN SPORTS 4 HD
Fiorentina v Sassuolo 16:00
beIN SPORTS
Juventus v Citta 16:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD
Udinese v Chievo 16:00
beIN SPORTS
Hellas v Frosinone 16:00
beIN SPORTS 8 HD
SS Lazio v Empoli 19:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD
Sampdoria v AC Milan 21:45
beIN SPORTS 4 HD

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Borussia v Hamburger 16:30
beIN SPORTS 5 HD
FSV Mainz 05 v FC Koln 18:30
beIN SPORTS 5 HD



GETAFE: Real Madrid's Costa Rican goalkeeper Keylor Navas (C) dives for the ball during the Spanish league football match Getafe CF vs Real Madrid CF at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez stadium in Getafe yesterday. — AFP

REAL MADRID BEAT GETAFE TO KEEP PRESSURE ON BARCELONA

BARCELONA: Karim Benzema ensured Real Madrid kept the pressure on leader Barcelona in the Spanish league by scoring one goal and assisting on two more as bottom-side Getafe was defeated 5-1 yesterday.

Benzema scored his 22nd goal of the competition before setting up Francisco "Isco" Alarcon and Gareth Bale to put the result beyond doubt early in the second half.

After James Rodriguez made it 4-1, Cristiano Ronaldo rounded off Madrid's seventh consecutive league victory in stoppage time with his tournament-leading 31st goal.

Madrid, which this week advanced to a Champions League semifinal against Manchester City, provisionally passed Atletico Madrid into second place and moved to within one point of struggling leader Barcelona.

"We are doing our job and are getting closer

and closer," said Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane, whose team trailed Barcelona by 12 points just four rounds ago. "We are going to bed one point behind, but we can't look beyond that."

Barcelona will try to end a three-round winless run against Valencia on Sunday, when Atletico will host Granada. Diego Simeone's side, which eliminated Barcelona from the Champions League quarterfinals this week to advance to a tie with Bayern Munich, trails Barcelona by three points. After this weekend there will be five rounds left.

"We have always said that we will never give up," Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas said. "We have to win our remaining matches and then see what happens." Also, Sporting Gijon stayed in the relegation zone, one point above Levante and Getafe, after drawing 1-1 at Las Palmas. Getafe remained winless for a 13th succes-

sive match in the debut of coach Juan Esnaider, a former Madrid player who replaced the fired Fran Escriba on Tuesday.

"We tried," said Esnaider, praising his players' attitude. Despite Getafe's best effort, Madrid outclassed its crosstown rival. Ronaldo, who hit a hat trick on Tuesday to lead Madrid's comeback over Wolfsburg in the Champions League, struck the post early, and waves of attacks inevitably led to Benzema's breakthrough when he used his right foot to sweep in Rodriguez's cross.

Benzema worked a one-two passing combination to help Isco make it 2-0 before halftime, and his pass let Bale romp forward before beating goalkeeper Vicente Guaita in the 50th. Pablo Sarabia got Getafe's consolation goal with six minutes left before Rodriguez and Ronaldo struck. — AP

GOMES THE HERO AS WATFORD BEAT WEST BROM



WEST BROMWICH: Watford's Heurelho Gomes saved two second-half penalties as the Hornets won 1-0 away to West Bromwich Albion in the Premier League yesterday.

Baggies striker Saido Berahino was twice denied from the spot by the Brazilian goalkeeper as he helped the FA Cup semi-finalists preserve a lead established by Ben Watson's 27th-minute goal at the Hawthorns.

Prior to his penalty heroics, former Tottenham Hotspur keeper Gomes had already made two fine saves, denying Stephane Sessegnon in the first half and then producing an acrobatic effort to thwart Gareth McAuley shortly after half-time.

But he topped those efforts with his two penalty stops. Having brought down Berahino in the 66th minute, he then dived to his right to beat away the West Brom forward's first penalty effort yesterday. And three minutes from time he secured Watford's victory when he went low to his left to keep out another Berahino spot-kick, the Hornets winning for just the third time in 16 league matches. Gomes was involved early on when he parried Sessegnon's well-struck free-kick, with the midfielder putting the rebound wide. Soon afterwards, Watford were in front when Adlene Guedioura's corner was steered into the far corner of the net by former Albion loan player Watson. West Brom's James McClaren then squandered a promising position by neither shooting himself or crossing for Berahino, his final ball neither one thing nor the other.

Craig Dawson and Salomon Rondon then combined to create a chance for Sessegnon, but the Benin star was denied by a superb fingertip save from Gomes. McClean sent a shot into the side-netting within a minute of the restart before Gomes athletically tipped McAuley's header over the crossbar.

At the other end, Albion keeper Ben Foster denied Watford captain Troy Deeney. Then came the first of Gomes's penalty saves and he was called upon again when Etienne Capoue tripped James McClean for a second spot-kick.

Berahino didn't shy away from the responsibility, but then suffered the agony of seeing Gomes save again. — AFP



WEST BROMWICH: Watford's Ben Watson, right, and West Bromwich Albion's Salomon Rondon battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match at The Hawthorns, West Bromwich, England, yesterday. — AP



NORWICH: Sunderland's Italian striker Fabio Borini (L) vies with Norwich City's Swedish defender Martin Olsson during the English Premier League football match between Norwich City and Sunderland at Carrow Road in Norwich, eastern England, yesterday. — AFP

NEWCASTLE SEE OFF SWANSEA CITY TO KEEP HOPES ALIVE



ST JAMES PARK: Newcastle United boosted their hopes of avoiding relegation when they beat Swansea City 3-0 at St James' Park where Jamaal Lascelles, Moussa Sissoko and Andros Townsend scored for the home side.

Centre back Lascelles put Newcastle ahead with a header at the end of the first half before Sissoko doubled Newcastle's lead in the 82nd minute when Swansea failed to clear a corner. Townsend added the third with one minute remaining, sliding in Aleksandar Mitrovic's pass to give Rafa Benitez his first win since becoming Newcastle's boss five weeks ago. Although they remain in the relegation zone, they are only three points behind 17th-placed Norwich with a game in hand. Swansea dominated much of the play after the break but Ashley Williams and Jefferson Montero missed good scoring chances. — Reuters

Sports

Rosberg takes pole at Chinese Grand Prix

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Real Madrid beat Getafe to keep pressure on Barcelona

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SEMENYA WINS TRIPLE AT SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONALS

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MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Memphis Depay, centre, is brought down by Aston Villa's Kieran Richardson, right, earning Richardson a booking as Ciaran Clark looks on during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Aston Villa at Old Trafford Stadium, Manchester, England, yesterday. — AP

VILLA RELEGATED AS RASHFORD STRIKES AGAIN

Man United 1
 Aston Villa 0

LONDON: Aston Villa's long-expected relegation from the Premier League was finally confirmed with a 1-0 loss away to Manchester United yesterday as teenage rising star Marcus Rashford scored his seventh goal in 12 games. The 18-year-old striker, also on target in United's FA Cup quarter-final replay win over West Ham United in midweek, struck in the 32nd minute when he turned in Antonio Valencia's low cross. Defeat left bottom-of-the-table Villa 15 points shy of safety with only a maximum of 12 on offer to the Birmingham club in their four remaining league matches this season.

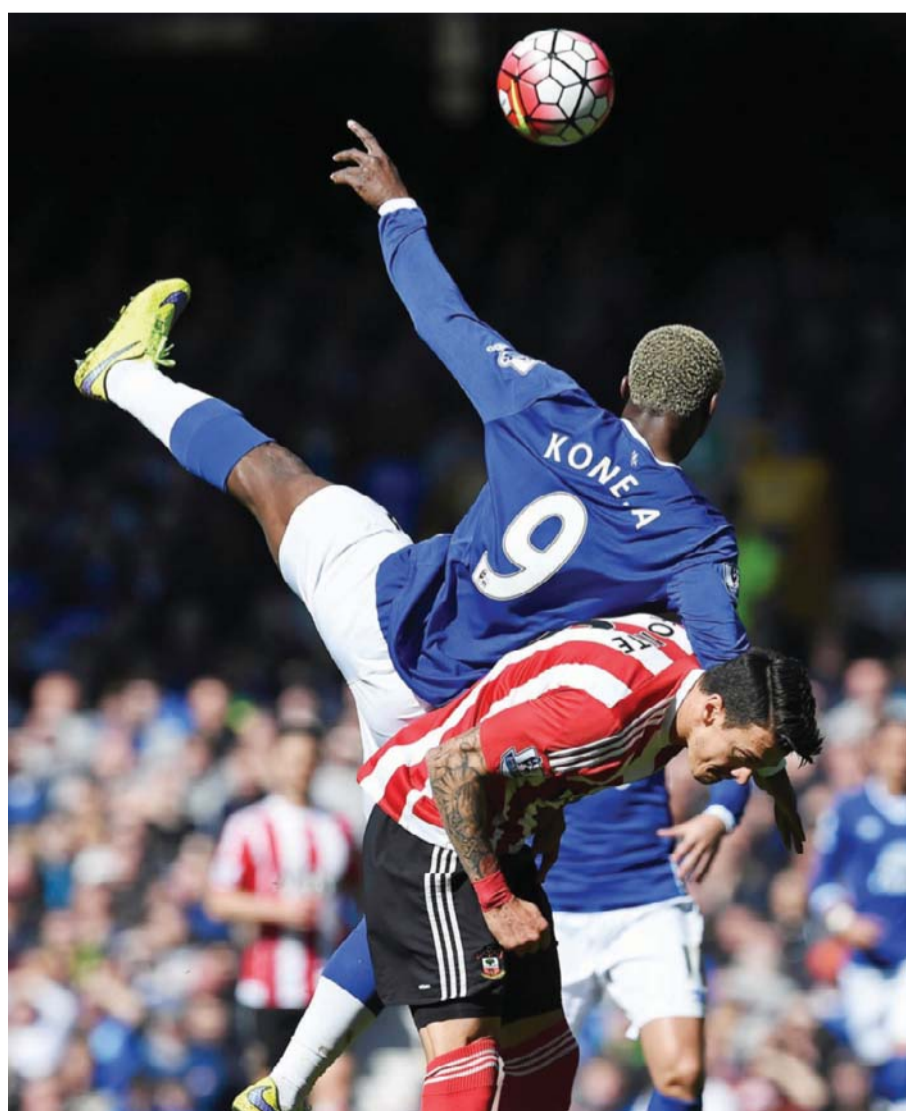
Villa, under the caretaker charge of Eric Black after former manager Remi Garde was sacked last month, have won just three times in 34 league games this campaign and Saturday's loss saw them drop down to the second-tier of English football for the first time in 29 years. "It's a mood of disappointment," said Black. "What I will say is today I thought they were outstanding. I know there has been criticism, some of it deserved, but today they made a step back for the supporters and showed there was some pride for the shirt. "There are players in there capable of playing in the Championship. People in certain places will make sure that Villa will come back, I'm confident of that." United's victory saw them move to within a point of local rivals Manchester City but manager Louis van Gaal criticised his side's display, saying: "I'm not too happy with the performance. We have to finish the games a lot earlier and today we didn't do that." City will strengthen their grip on the fourth

and last Champions League place on offer to English clubs if they win away to Chelsea in Saturday's late kick-off. Earlier, Sunderland gave themselves hope of yet another escape from relegation, with a 3-0 win away to fellow strugglers Norwich City. Victory at Carrow Road left the north-east side still in the bottom three but just one point adrift of Norwich and with a game in hand over the Canaries. Fabio Borini's first-half penalty and strikes from Jermain Defoe and Duncan Watmore after the interval saw Sunderland to a first win in seven matches. The result was an understandable relief for Sunderland manager Sam Allardyce, who told the BBC: "The most pleasing thing of all was the clean sheet, that is our way forward with five games to go. "I know if we can keep two or three clean sheets in those games we'll be safe because I know we can score."

Benitez's birthday present
Newcastle United, Sunderland's north-east

rivals, bolstered their hopes of top-flight survival with a 3-0 win at home to Swansea. Jamaal Lascelles headed in Andros Townsend's corner four minutes before the break and Moussa Sissoko made the game safe for the Magpies eight minutes from time, as they marked manager Rafael Benitez's 56th birthday in style. Townsend rounded off the scoring in the 89th minute. Newcastle remained in the relegation zone but victory saw them move to within three points of Norwich. "I have to say congratulations to the players," Benitez told the BBC. "They showed passion and commitment." Watford, promoted last season, cemented their place in the Premier League with a 1-0 win away to West Bromwich Albion, that saw goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes twice save penalties from Saido Berahino. His first spot-kick stop came in the 66th minute after he had tripped Berahino and Gomes denied the striker again three minutes from time when he dived low to his left to push another penalty effort past the post.

Gomes's saves helped Watford maintain a lead established through Ben Watson's 27th-minute goal at the Hawthorns. Meanwhile Southampton moved to within a point of a top six place after a 1-1 draw away to Everton, unable to win. Ramiro Funes Mori put Everton, who now haven't won any of their last four league games at Goodison Park, ahead in the 68th minute but their lead lasted just eight minutes, with Sadio Mane equalising for the Saints. Sunday will see leaders Leicester City looking to go 10 points clear of second-placed Tottenham Hotspur against West Ham, while Arsenal will try to maintain their grip on third spot at home to London rivals Crystal Palace. Liverpool, buoyed by a dramatic comeback behind Europa League quarter-final win over manager Jurgen Klopp's former club Borussia Dortmund, are away to Bournemouth. Tottenham, bidding for a first English title since 1961, travel to Stoke on Monday. —AFP



LIVERPOOL: Everton's Ivorian striker Arouna Kone (up) vies with Southampton's Portuguese defender Jose Fonte during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Southampton at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

MANE POUNCES TO SECURE POINT FOR SAINTS

EVERTON: A disappointing home draw against Southampton yesterday piled more pressure on Everton manager Roberto Martinez ahead of a week that will define the club's season. Everton took the lead against the run of play through Ramiro Funes Mori in the 68th minute before Sadio Mane capitalised on some poor defending to equalise seven minutes later. Everton suffered more bad news when full-back Seamus Coleman suffered a suspected hamstring injury.

That will be an extra worry for Martinez ahead of games against derby rivals Liverpool and the FA Cup semi-final against Manchester United at Wembley next Saturday. Meanwhile, a disgruntled Everton fan confronted manager Roberto Martinez on the field after a 1-1 draw with Southampton in the Premier League yesterday. Within eight second-half minutes, Everton defender Ramiro Funes Mori scored and then missed a tackle that allowed Southampton striker Sadio Mane to equalize. Discontent at Everton's underachievement has been growing at Goodison Park in recent weeks with Martinez the target of increasing criticism. Eleventh-place Everton has not won at home in the league since early February and has managed just four victories at Goodison in the last year. It was far from ideal preparation for a midweek Merseyside derby against Liverpool followed by Saturday's FA Cup semifinal against Manchester United. Southampton, which remained seventh, could still qualify for the Europa League. —AP

Everton 1
 Southampton 1



LONDON: Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Agüero (R) vies with Chelsea's Burkina Faso midfielder Bertrand Traore during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Manchester City at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. — AFP

AGÜERO HAT-TRICK KEEPS MAN CITY ON THE RISE

Chelsea 0
 Man City 3

CHELSEA: Sergio Agüero scored a hat-trick as Manchester City capped an excellent week by beating 10-man Chelsea 3-0 at Stamford Bridge to move ahead of Arsenal and into third place in the Premier League.

City, who beat Paris St Germain to reach the Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday, deservedly took the lead in the 32nd minute when Agüero got on the end of a slick move prompted by Kevin De Bruyne. The former Chelsea midfielder was equally influential after the break, starting the attack which led to Agüero's second in the 54th minute. Agüero then rounded off the comfortable win from the penalty spot after Thibaut Courtois brought down Fernandinho, a challenge for which the Belgian keeper was dismissed in the 78th minute. The Argentine's hat-trick took his tally to 21 league goals for the season. —Reuters

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Oil market bullish
on Doha hopes

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Huawei brings its global
open ecosystem initiative

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SevenCapital
participates in RIE
2016 expo in Kuwait

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KSE INDICES SURGE ON POSITIVE SENTIMENT

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BASRA: An Iraqi worker operates valves at the Nahran Omar oil refinery near the city of Basra, 340 miles (550 kilometers) southeast of Baghdad, Iraq. (right) Smoke rises from an oil pipe at sunset in the desert oil field of Sakhir, Bahrain. Oil-producing countries are to meet in Qatar today to discuss a plan to freeze output but their gathering comes as nations like Iran rapidly ramp up their pumping. — AP

DOHA IS NO PANACEA FOR OIL MARKET CRISIS

KUWAIT REMAINS OPTIMISTIC, BUT SURGING OUTPUT A CHALLENGE

DOHA: OPEC isn't what it used to be. Ahead of a planned meeting of most of the cartel and other major oil producers in Qatar to approve a freeze on oil production, some OPEC members are pumping record levels of crude even as prices wallow at less than half their level two years ago - a clear sign of the dissonance gripping the group.

While markets may well react off any decision made today in Doha, analysts predict low prices will continue through this year and into the next as producers keep pumping to keep their government budgets afloat.

That calls into question what long-term gain producers can expect from a promised freeze, and indeed how much power OPEC now wields as American shale firms stand poised to re-enter the market if prices rise. "We put the probability of a successful freeze agreement ... at 50 percent," Societe Generale analyst Michael Wittner wrote this month. "There is simply a tremendous amount of uncertainty."

At least 15 oil-producing nations representing about 73 percent of world output are expected at the Doha meeting, Qatar's energy and industry minister, Mohammed bin Saleh al-Sada, has said. The gathering follows a surprise Doha meeting in February between Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, in which they pledged to cap their crude output to their January levels if other producers do the same.

The countries hope the cap will help global oil prices rebound from their dramatic fall since summer 2014, when prices stood at above \$100 a barrel, though no one is talking seriously about the more dramatic step of reducing global supply by collectively cutting production for now.

Prices dropped briefly under \$30 a barrel, a 12-year low, in January, but have climbed to around \$40 a barrel this week, boosted in part by market speculation about the coming meeting. The drop is good news for consumers. Drivers in the United States now pay \$2.05 a gallon (54 cents a liter) on average, the lowest rate for this same date since 2009, according to AAA. Airlines also have enjoyed savings of billions of dollars in jet fuel costs.

But for producing countries that depend on oil revenues, the results have been devastating. OPEC member Nigeria's once-fast-growing economy cratered, while Venezuela faces triple-digit inflation and rationing.

GCC budget crunch

The low prices have squeezed wealthy Gulf nations too, though less dramatically, with rulers across the United Arab Emirates raising fees on airport departures and parking. Iraq says it boosted its production to over 4 million barrels of oil a day in March, record territory, as Kuwait says it pumps 3 million barrels a day and wants to reach 4 million a day by 2020.

Analysts say Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia face the biggest threat from the low prices, especially if no deal is struck. OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia, producing some 10 million barrels of oil per day, is rapidly burning through cash reserves while keeping its production high to fund its ongoing war in Yemen and cover government spending.

"If nothing is decided in Doha, then the fiscal constraints will accelerate much more rapidly than if action is taken and oil prices respond," said Mathias Angonin, a Dubai-based analyst with the ratings agency Moody's.

Kuwait optimistic

Some are hopeful for an agreement. Anas Al-Saleh, Kuwait's finance minister and acting oil minister, smiled and acknowledged being optimistic before being whisked away in an elevator with his entourage after entering the luxury hotel hosting the meeting in Doha.

But several spoilers lurk for oil producers, chief among them OPEC member Iran, which announced late Friday it would send an emissary to the meeting. With many international sanctions lifted after its nuclear deal with world powers, Iran began exporting oil into the European market again and is eager to claw back a market share. It produces 3.2 million barrels of oil a day now, with hopes of increasing to 4 million by April 2017. On Friday, the Iranian Oil

Ministry reiterated it would not join a freeze "before it brings its oil exports to the pre-sanctions levels."

Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia already has said it won't back any freeze if Iran, its Shiite rival, doesn't agree to it, throwing into question whether any deal will be agreed to at all. The kingdom seems determined to ride out the low prices that could squeeze Tehran. That dispute underscores the level of discord inside OPEC as it faces arguably its biggest challenge since the oil glut of the 1980s.

"Ultimately, we believe the biggest hurdle to reaching any meaningful agreement will be the conflicting Saudi and Iranian stances," Goldman Sachs said in a report released this week.

Saudi Oil Minister Ali Al-Naimi said nothing to journalists after arriving in Doha. Yet there is a market risk to walking away without a deal: a contentious OPEC meeting in December that ended without an agreement saw oil prices tumble.

Meanwhile, though more-costly US shale oil production has dropped, it could re-enter the market if oil prices rise. And a large amount of crude already building up provides a major damper on prices, as does a generally weakened global economy, according to the US Energy Information Administration. Perhaps prophetically, Goldman Sachs titled its recent report: "Doha is no panacea." — AP

G20 EMBRACES CRACKDOWN ON TAX HAVENS

FINANCE CHIEFS WARN OVER 'BREXIT'

WASHINGTON: The world's leading economies took a step Friday toward denying tax evaders and money launderers around the world the ability to hide behind anonymous shell companies.

Acting in the wake of the "Panama Papers" scandal, finance chiefs of the Group of 20 powers meeting in Washington supported proposals requiring authorities to share the identities of shell companies' real owners. They also backed creating a blacklist of international tax havens that do not cooperate with information-sharing programs. Making the beneficial owners of companies, trusts and foundations transparent "is vital to protect the integrity of the international financial system," the G20 finance ministers and central bank governors said in a statement. Doing so is important "to prevent misuse of these entities and arrangements for corruption, tax evasion, terrorist financing and money laundering." The declaration came hours after the Panama Papers scandal claimed another victim. Spain's industry minister Jose Manuel Soria resigned Friday over allegations he had links to offshore companies.

Files from the leaked document trove of Panama law firm Mossack Fonseca showed Soria was an administrator of an offshore firm in 1992. He was just the latest in a number of powerful officials, including the leaders of Russia, Iceland, Britain and Argentina, linked by the Panama Papers to offshore tax havens. The leak provided the impetus for the strong proposals to the G20 Thursday by Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Britain.

The five said they would take the lead on creating an international database that provides tax and other authorities the identities of the owners of shell companies, trusts, foundations and other vehicles often used to hide assets. "Today we deal another hammer blow against those who hide their illegal tax evasion in the dark corners of the

financial system," British Finance Minister George Osborne said in a statement. The move laid out a challenge to both Britain and the United States, where the use of shell companies is legal and widespread. But US Treasury Secretary

Jacob Lew expressed support.

"We need to act to deal with tax shelters and the problems of the international tax system permitting havens," which most people see as "unfair," he said.



WASHINGTON: International Monetary and Financial Committee Chair, Bank of Mexico Governor Agustín Carstens speaks with International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde, during the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) conference at the World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings at IMF headquarters in Washington yesterday. — AP

Brexit warning

Under pressure from the IMF and World Bank to help prevent the world economy from stalling, the G20 also pledged to support growth with more investment and other fiscal actions, rather than relying on central banks to stimulate activity with monetary measures such as negative interest rates.

"Monetary policy alone cannot lead to balanced growth," they said. "We will use fiscal policy flexibly to strengthen growth, job creation and confidence."

Lew said the talks focused on the need for more investment in sustainable infrastructure. "Today's low interest rate environment makes it an opportune time to make growth-enhancing infrastructure investments," he said. But the rest of the world should not depend on the United States to spur demand, Lew warned. "The United States cannot and must not be the only engine of growth, nor the importer of first and last resort for the global economy," he said. "All major economies need to deploy a full toolkit of economic policy measures." The G20 ministers, however, warned that the global economy faced a number of serious risks, among them the possibility that Britain would pull out of the European Union.

"Geopolitical conflicts, terrorism, refugee flows, and the shock of a potential UK exit from the European Union also complicate the global economic environment," they said. The G20 statement came during the IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings, where officials warned of potentially severe damage to regional and global economies from the so-called Brexit. With two months to go before Britain holds a referendum on splitting with the EU, IMF chief Christine Lagarde called on the two sides to save their "long marriage." "Because keeping Europe together after what it has gone through over the last century, and what the risks are on the horizon... is actually a huge asset which is vastly underrated in my view," she said. — AFP

SEVENCAPITAL PARTICIPATES IN RIE 2016 EXPO IN KUWAIT

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis are diversifying investments both at home and abroad, specifically in the real estate sector. According to the World Investment Report of 2015, released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Kuwait is the Middle East's largest and the world's seventh largest foreign investor. Many exhibitions related to real estate have been held in Kuwait recently, the latest of which kicked off on Monday at the Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref.

SevenCapital, a real estate investor and developer in the commercial, residential and hospitality sectors based in central and northern UK, is participating in the RIE 2016 expo. Top Real Estate, the marketing arm of SevenCapital, revealed it has a good number of customers from this part of the world. SevenCapital is currently promoting its newest project in Birmingham, 'The Kettleworks', which is expected to be delivered to investors by 2017. It is located in the Jewelry Quarter, with studios and one, two and three bedroom apartments. Adrian Endersby, Business Development Manager of Top Real Estate, said Birmingham is 1.5 hours away from London and considered the second city of England.

"The population of Birmingham is about 3.7 million, but the city proper is not as crowded compared to London, and is considered as one of the best cities in the world," he said. "Birmingham preserved its buildings in their original form and structure but many



John Treacy

refurbishments have been taking place. Kuwaitis are really pleased to know that this city is near the capital city of London - they want to live in a quiet but also very dynamic place. Birmingham is the most livable city in England, and this is the best time to buy properties and expect huge returns on investments," Endersby said.

Lots of real estate and infrastructure developments are in the works in Birmingham, but also many completed projects such as shopping malls and plenty of commercial establishments. Endersby said rentals are also far lower than the capital. "The people there are warm and friendly. This is the most populous British city outside London, and Birmingham has the UK's top

quality of life. People want to live near their workplaces and walk and not be stuck in traffic," he said.

Endersby noted that Birmingham is currently constructing a high-speed train line that could shorten the travel to London from 1.5 hours to 45 minutes. "International banks are setting up retail centers in Birmingham and they are redeveloping very quickly. This can attract thousands of employees each year who need apartments and houses in Birmingham. London is high-value, and has capital appreciation, but the rental value in London is far lower compared to Birmingham. You can expect rental income in London at 3-5 percent while in Birmingham it is about 8 percent. The rental



Adrian Endersby

amount yield can be about 18 percent per year," he added.

Endersby pointed out that Birmingham's real estate is not reliant on international sales. Many in the UK seized the opportunity for investment in the past years, so when they want to sell, they have the local market to buy it. "The good thing about Birmingham is that we are receiving a good amount of investors. We have many investors from the Middle East such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates," he stressed.

The units are sold to investors with 30-percent down payment. The remaining 70 percent is up to investors to pay and the keys will be given to owners after the com-

pletion of the payments, said Endersby. The property is secured with 24-hours security. Kuwaitis and other nationals can own properties in the UK 100 percent for 125 years. "The property is virtually yours and no one can take it away from you. We have a team of lawyers at the Top Real Estate that can help prepare the documentations," he said. John Treacy, Global Sales Manager of SevenCapital noted that most of the properties they developed are mainly sold in the local market, and only 30 percent are sold to international or overseas investors. "Fifty percent of these are sold in Asia, mostly China, Hong Kong and Singapore, while the other 50 percent to investors from GCC countries," he said.

CURRENT GREECE FINANCE PLANS NOT REALISTIC: IMF

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund said Friday that the fiscal projections underpinning Greece's proposals for moving ahead in its bailout program are not realistic. Poul Thomsen, director of the IMF's European Department, raised questions about the forecast that Greece could maintain a 3.5 percent budget surplus for years as part of its plan for debt relief from European Union creditors.

"We question whether it is plausible for a country with such high unemployment and the attendant social pressures to be running such big surpluses over many political cycles to come," Thomsen said at the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington.

"So we are cautioning that... the debt relief needs to be calibrated on something that we think is more realistic," Thomsen was speaking after Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras wrote in an article published in the Financial Times that the IMF should stop tinkering with the country's latest bailout with European creditors, blaming the global lender for causing a delay in talks.

The IMF has been standing by with the possibility of adding its funds to the country's third bailout program with the EU but says it needs to see a strong package of structural reforms and a "credible" plan for growth and fiscal adjustment going forward.

Thomsen said the IMF could back the outlined EU-Greece plan but has

to understand how fiscal targets and a return to economic growth can be achieved. To reach the 3.5 percent target, he said, Greece would need to take large fiscal measures, the equivalent of around 4.5 percent of GDP. "We think that's a lot. That's a lot of if you want-austerity," he said.

"If Greece and its European partners want to stick to that target, we can accept that target. But we need to see the measures." He said the IMF still believes Athens needs to prioritize structural reforms, particularly in tax collection.

"Tax evasion has kept on going up and up, and tax collection rates have gone down and down and down... the numbers are truly extraordinary," he said. He noted that Greece exempts 55 percent of households from taxes, compared to two percent in Portugal.

"What we need to do is to broaden the tax base... that's the first point of discussion." Speaking later, US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew called for the parties to move urgently to resolve their differences.

"This is a problem that needs to be solved and it needs to be solved as quickly as possible," he told journalists. "The solution is not for any one party to say they would walk away, but for all the parties to make the tough decisions about how to get those issues resolved."

"Greece has implemented many difficult policies but there's still a gap and that gap needs to be fixed," Lew added. — AFP

GLOBAL MARKETS ARE CALMER, BUT ECONOMY FACES RISKS

LEADERS SAY CHINESE FALLOUT LARGELY CONTAINED

WASHINGTON: The world economy is still sluggish. But at least markets are calmer and China's economic problems look more manageable than they did when the world's top finance officials met in February. Finance ministers and central bankers from the Group of 20 major economies emerged from their meeting in Washington on Friday relieved that financial markets had recovered from that turbulence. "I came away feeling a little more encouraged than when I arrived," Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz told reporters.

The G-20 discussions took place as part of the spring meetings of the 189-nation International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Talks wrapped up yesterday. Early this year, world markets were being rattled by a drop in the Chinese currency and by tumbling oil prices, both of which seemed to signal deep troubles for the global economy. Since then, the yuan and oil prices have stabilized, and China on Friday said its economy registered solid 6.7 percent growth the first three months of 2016.

The respite from market tumult does not mean all is well with the world economy. The IMF on Tuesday downgraded its outlook for the global economy this year and issued a list of risks that could make things worse: Conflict in the Middle East. A refugee crisis in Europe. The possibility that British voters will decide in June to pull their country out of the European Union. A growing political backlash in the United States and Europe against international trade.

Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso said that the world's financial markets are starting to regain "composure" but "downside risk" persists. He expressed particular concern about risks from volatility in capital flows and foreign exchange rates. Japan is concerned about the value of the yen, which has risen rapidly this year against the



WASHINGTON: Japan's Finance Minister Taro Aso (right) chats with US Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen (left) following the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) family photo during the International Monetary Fund, World Bank Spring Meetings at the IMF headquarters yesterday. — AFP

dollar despite an unusual move by the Bank of Japan in February to introduce negative interest rates in an unsuccessful effort to spur flagging growth and keep the yen low to boost exports. Even China's solid first-quarter numbers raised fears the Chinese government is backsliding on commitments to reform its economy. Critics worry it pumped up the first-quarter numbers by

investing heavily in inefficient state-owned companies - an approach that could drag down growth in the long term. Global finance officials are seeking to address the political backlash against globalization, which has helped propel the presidential campaign of Republican front-runner Donald Trump in the United States and a campaign in Britain to leave the EU. — AP

SPANISH GOVT PRESSURES REGIONS TO CURB SPENDING

MADRID: Spain's acting treasury minister met with the heads of the country's regional governments late on Friday, urging them to control their spending this year in order to rein in one of the European Union's largest public deficits. The task is a politically uncomfortable one for the caretaker government of the centre-right People's Party (PP) at a time when Spain is likely to hold a second general election in June after an

indecisive December vote.

Spain's 17 regions manage their own budgets on big ticket social spending in areas such as health and education where cuts lose votes. Over-spending by the regional governments helped lead the country to the brink of an international bail-out at the time of the euro zone debt crisis.

Since then, many of the regional governments have changed hands

from the PP to coalitions between the opposition Socialists and leftist newcomer parties, making it more difficult for Madrid to enforce austerity. Spain announced a 2015 budget shortfall of 5 percent of economic output last month, missing the 4.2 percent agreed with the European Commission and prompting calls from Brussels and Washington for swift action to cut costs.

Only three of the 17 regions - the Canary Islands, the Basque Country and Galicia - met their deficit targets for 2015. Six even oversaw spending rises from the previous year.

Together the regions booked a deficit of 1.66 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015, overshooting by one percentage point a 0.7 percent target. Acting Treasury Minister Cristobal Montoro said on Friday the government would approve spending cuts worth 2 billion euros at the central government. Rather than asking the regions to implement more cuts, he has asked them to maintain spending levels and use any savings from items such as lower interest rates on debt payments to pay down their deficits.

However, regional heads have said the controls on spending are excessive and will hurt ordinary people. "It's unrealistic, both from a social and a practical point of view," Oriol Junqueras, the economy head of the northeastern region of Catalonia, wrote in a letter to Montoro on Friday. — Reuters



WASHINGTON: Bank of Algeria Governor Mohammed Laksaci (L) chats with Norwegian Minister of Finance Siv Jensen as they arrive for the IMFC Plenary Session during the IMF and World Bank Group 2016 Spring Meetings yesterday in Washington, DC. — AFP

ARGENTINA, IMF RESTORE CHECKUPS AFTER DECADE

WASHINGTON: Argentina will resume annual fiscal checkups with the International Monetary Fund this year after a 10-year hiatus, an IMF official said on Friday. The move marks a repairing of relations that soured in the wake of the country's default on \$100 billion in debt in 2001.

Ties between the two hit rock-bottom when the IMF censured Buenos Aires in 2013 for not meeting an IMF requirement that members must provide reliable, basic economic statistics. "It looks like we are going to go for

two weeks in September," said Nigel Chalk, the Fund's deputy director for the Americas. The Fund will restart its Article IV missions, in which it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the economies of each member country every year.

"It's a very normal process that we do with every other country," Chalk said. The team "will discuss with the central bank, the government, also with civil society and the private sector to see what is going on." The shift comes after the sweeping economic

policy changes of President Mauricio Macri, who took office in December after a long period of IMF-hostile Argentine governments.

Macri has moved to repay defaulted debt and implement market-friendly reforms, as well as replacing the country's statistics chief with someone more credible. Under the previous government of Cristina Kirchner, the government regularly issued data that showed economic growth far higher and inflation far lower than mainstream economists believed. — AFP



WASHINGTON: IMF Secretary-General Lin Jianhai chats with People Bank of China Governor Zhou Xiaochuan (right) as they arrive for the IMFC Plenary Session during the IMF and World Bank Group 2016 Spring Meetings yesterday in Washington, DC. — AFP

OIL MARKET BULLISH ON DOHA HOPES

KUWAIT: Oil prices remained elevated during March-16 on the back of hopes that a deal between OPEC and non-OPEC producers would bring about balance in the oil market. However, these hopes got a temporary jolt during the first week of April with prices tumbling almost 4 percent in a single day when Saudi Arabia said that it would not join an output freeze without the participation of Iran and other major oil producer.

country would continue increasing oil production and exports until it reaches pre-sanction levels. Other factors that supported oil prices included a broad weakness in \$ as well as signs of rising oil demand in China. In addition, the latest inventory data from US pointed to a surprisingly higher fall in inventory levels coupled with a decline in US oil production that declined for the 10th time in the past eleven weeks. US oil production stood

KAMCO OIL MARKET MONTHLY REPORT

emerged that Iraq boosted its output to a record 4.55 mb/d during March-16. This follows news that Russia increased its oil production to historical highs. This recent boost in oil production by OPEC and non-OPEC members indicates that the producers are preparing for a production freeze at their highest possible individual production levels.

Average monthly OPEC oil prices surged 21 percent during March-16, the highest jump in thirteen months, to reach \$ 34.65/b. Similarly, average monthly Kuwait oil prices also surged 20 percent to reach \$ 32.27/b by the end of the month. In terms of monthly production, according to Bloomberg, March-16 output was marginally up by 64 tb/d to 33.09 mb/d as compared to 33.02 mb/d during the previous month. The increase in production was largely associated with increase in production in Iraq, Iran and Angola, partially offset by marginal declines in production in UAE, Nigeria and Libya.

Oil prices

The expected talks on oil freeze today at oil producers' meet has been driving oil prices for over a month. The positive sentiments started fading especially after Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince said that the Kingdom would join the agreement only if Iran and other major producers join the agreement. However, a positive statement from Kuwait's OPEC governor pushed oil prices to above the \$40/b level. On the impact of Iran not joining the output freeze talks, the governor said that this would not hinder the agreement as it will be difficult for Iran to sell its crude in an oversupplied market. He also said that oil market is expected to balance during 2H-16 and oil may close the year between \$ 45 - \$ 60 per barrel. In a similar statement, the CEO of Abu Dhabi's ADNOC said that the oil market would balance by the end of next year and prices are expected to rise in the medium term, although it would remain volatile in the near term.

Demand side factors saw limited upside but a key data point highlighted higher oil demand in China with car sales up 6 percent year-on-year during Q1-16 and is further expected to grow by 5 percent during the first half of the year, according to industry reports. On the supply side, EIA data released at the end of the first week of April-16 saw declining oil production and inventories, which coupled with the ongoing broad softening of the dollar, pushed oil prices to 4-month high levels. However, inventories went up again during the second week of April-16 according to data from EIA and API. Meanwhile, the latest weekly report from Baker Hughes showed that oil rigs in the US declined by eight to a new historical low of 354 rigs bringing the YTD decline in rig count to 184.

Average monthly OPEC oil prices surged 21 percent during March-16, the highest jump in thirteen months, to reach \$ 34.65/b. Similarly, average monthly Kuwait oil prices also surged 23 percent to reach \$ 33.0/b by the end of the month. Prices continued to surge during April-16 resulting in strong YTD-16 gains which stood at 18 percent for OPEC oil and 22 percent for Kuwait oil. Prices of Brent crude also surged during March-16 with average monthly prices up by 19 percent as compared to the previous month's average.

World oil demand

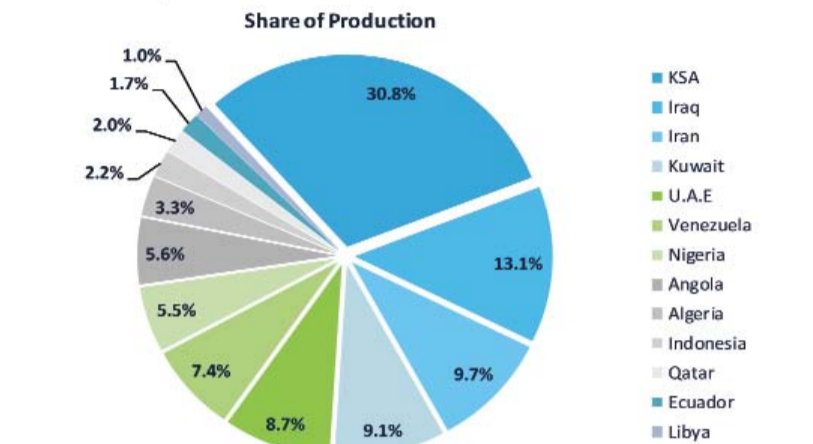
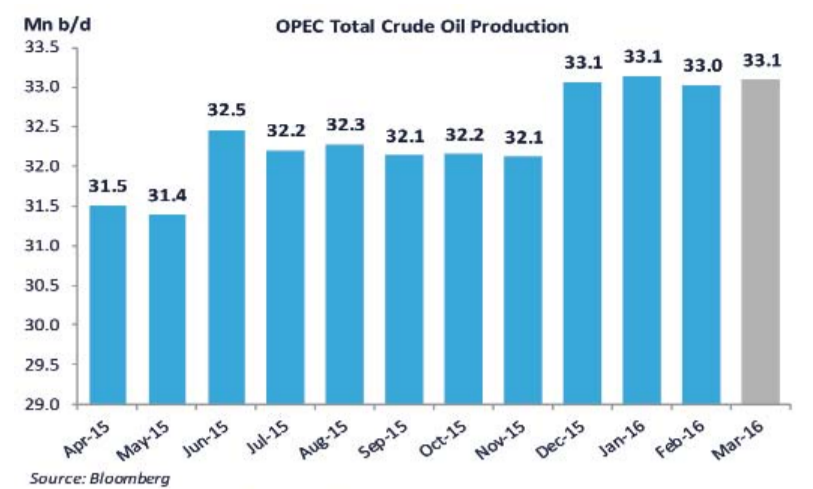
Total world oil demand growth for 2015 was kept largely unchanged from the last month at 1.54 mb/d to reach 92.98 mb/d. Oil demand grew consistently over the four quarters of 2015 with India seeing the largest percentage increase in oil demand during the year recorded at 7 percent. Demand growth in China was also strong but stood at a distant second recording a growth of 3.5 percent or 0.37 mb/d to reach 10.83 mb/d during the year. In terms of absolute demand growth, US recorded the strongest growth of 0.3 mb/d followed by demand growth of 0.26 mb/d

in India, in line with demand growth for the complete OECD Europe region. Demand in total OECD grew by 1 percent or 0.45 mb/d to 46.17 mb/d during 2015 whereas Developing Countries saw an even stronger demand growth of 0.72 mb/d or 2.4 percent to reach 30.72 mb/d during the year.

Oil demand growth for 2016 was surprisingly lowered by 50 tb/d to 1.20 mb/d to an average consumption of 94.18 mb/d. The downward revision primarily reflected economic weakness in the Latin American region that is expected to result in a marginal rise in oil demand in the region. Within the region, economic conditions in Brazil is expected to remain slow during the year although upside risks remain strong that includes the ongoing low oil price environment as well as the upcoming Olympics in the country both of which are expected to push transportation fuel requirements. In OECD Americas, the most recent monthly US oil demand data pointed to a decline in oil requirements due to warm winter and lower industrial activity. However, strong demand for jet fuel helped to offset some decline during the month. Oil requirements also declined in Canada and Mexico during January-16 primarily led by lower demand from the power generation sector partially offset by transportation fuel requirements. OECD Europe also presented a depressed picture for oil demand during the first two months of 2016 on the back of a warmer winter as compared to the previous year as well as the higher baseline effect in 2015. In Asia, oil demand declined in Japan whereas the rest of the region including South Korea, India, Indonesia, Taiwan and China all recorded higher demand during the start of the year.

Non-OPEC oil supply growth in 2015 was once again revised upward by 40 tb/d to 1.46 mb/d to average at 57.13 mb/d on the back of upward revision in Bahrain (3Q-15 and 4Q-15) and Russia (first three quarters of 2015) partially offset by downward revisions for US, UK and Other Asia Pacific regions. The largest increase in oil supply from among the non-OPEC producers in 2015 was recorded for the OECD Americas region (with US being the main contributor to growth) that saw its supply revised upwards by 10 tb/d to 0.92 mb/d in the latest monthly report. Meanwhile, the OECD Asia Pacific region saw a downward revision of 10 tb/d primarily due to decline in crude oil production in Australia. Furthermore, in the Middle East region, production figures for Bahrain and Oman were revised for 2015 that led to an upward revision of 10 tb/d for the region during 2015.

Non-OPEC oil supply growth for 2016 was revised downward by 30 tb/d in the latest monthly oil report and is expected to decline by 0.73 mb/d to



Source: Bloomberg

average at 56.39 mb/d. The downward revision primarily reflects lower expected oil output from onshore mature fields in China as well as lower supply from Columbia. These declines more than offset upward revisions in Canada, Norway, Russia and Oman in Q1-16. In terms of regional supply, the OECD Americas region is expected to see the steepest decline in oil supply in 2016. In a related development, the US EIA, in its monthly drilling report, said that US crude oil production from the seven major shale regions could fall by 114 tb/d to 4.8 mb/d in May-16 as compared to April-16.

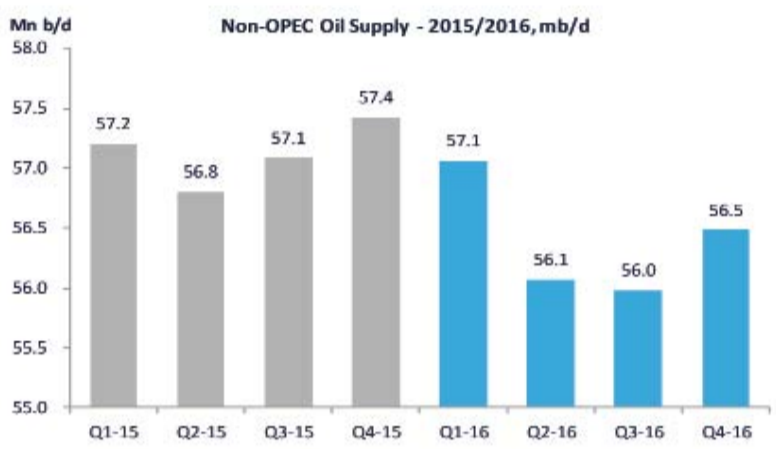
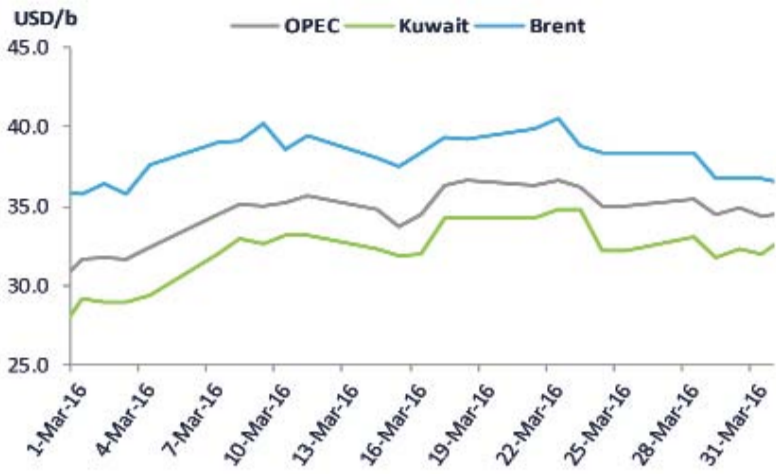
OPEC production & spare capacity

According to Bloomberg, March-16 oil production was marginally up by 64 tb/d to 33.09 mb/d as compared to 33.02 mb/d during the previous month. The increase in production was largely associated with increase in production in Iraq (+150 tb/d), Iran (+100 tb/d) and Angola (+41 tb/d), partially offset by marginal declines in production in UAE (-90 tb/d), Nigeria (-74 tb/d) and Libya (-40 tb/d). Higher production in Iraq comes despite cuts in investment as the country targets to reach an oil output level of 6 mb/d by 2020 primarily by increasing production in the Southern Iraq's Basra region.

Meanwhile, Kuwait, which is currently producing at the rate of 3 mb/d, has plans to add additional 165 tb/d by offering contracts for offshore rigs and support services to drill its first under-

sea wells. In addition, the Khafji oilfield jointly operated by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which was non-operational since October 2014, is set to resume production. The field is expected to reach a pre-stoppage production level of 280 tb/d - 300 tb/d gradually after the requirements of the amended contracts are met. In the medium term, Kuwait plans to increase its total production to 4 mb/d by 2020.

The overall production by OPEC members continued to remain elevated at above the 90 percent capacity by the end of March-16. Among the member countries, Saudi Arabia continues to hold the largest buffer capacity at almost 2.3 mb/d at the end of March-16 followed by Libya with a spare capacity of 0.45 mb/d and Nigeria at 0.39 mb/d. The total share of production of Saudi Arabia stood at 30.8 percent almost in line with its share during the previous month. On the other hand, the share of Iran increased from 9.4 percent in February-16 to 9.7 percent in March-16. The share of Iraq also increased from 12.7 percent during the previous month to 13.1 percent during March-16. Furthermore, Iran's oil minister has forecast that the country's oil output would reach 4 mb/d by March 2017 with an export of 2.25 mb/d. According to a report, the country increased oil production by 0.23 mb/d during the first quarter of the year and has increased exports by almost 0.6 mb/d by giving deep discounts to regain oil market share.

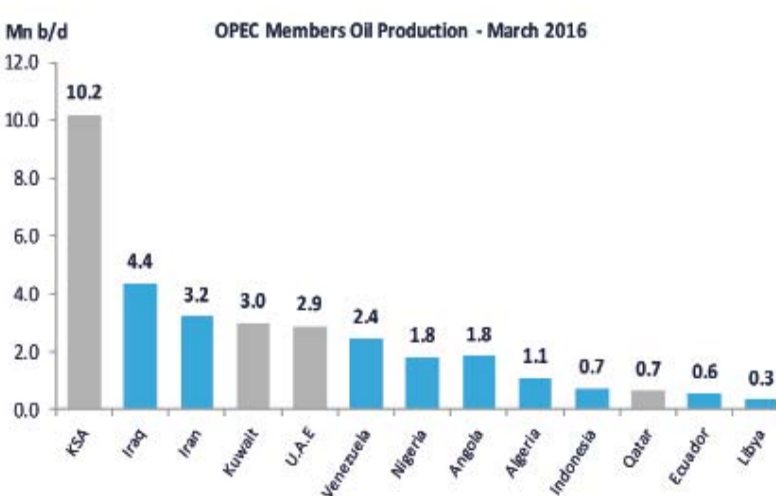
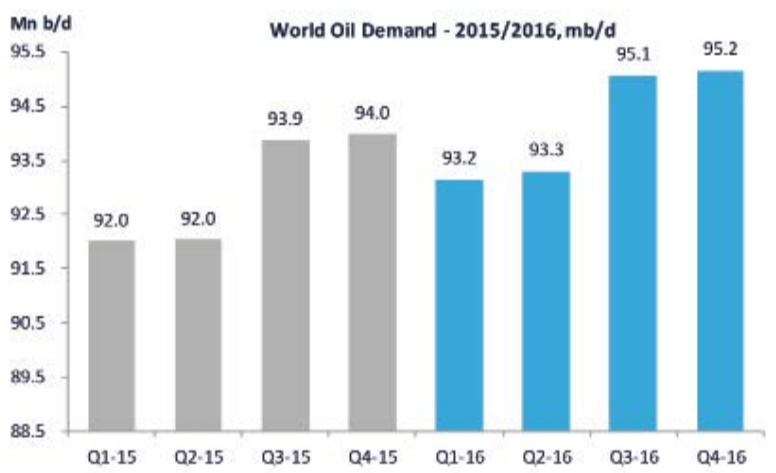


Source for the above charts : OPEC and Bloomberg

Nevertheless, a reassuring statement from Kuwait's OPEC governor regarding output freeze pushed up Brent prices to a 4-month high level of \$ 43.49 on 12-April-16. The governor expressed confidence that irrespective of whether or not Iran joins the oil output freeze decision during the April 16-17 OPEC meeting in Doha, other countries can agree on a production freeze as there is no other option for stemming oil prices. The governor also said that the production freeze could be at February 2016 production levels and could also set a floor price for oil. Meanwhile, an Iranian oil official was quoted as saying that the

at just above the 9 mb/d mark, the lowest production level since November-14, adding to hopes that it would fall below this psychologically important level in the next week. Furthermore, US oil rigs fell for the 15th time in the last 16 weeks to 354 after declining by eight rigs in the latest weekly data released by Baker Hughes.

On the other hand, supply side factors, although significant, did not have much of an impact on oil prices due to the overall positive sentiments in the oil market. With Saudi Arabia already producing at elevated levels and Iran planning to add additional output, it



CITIGROUP PROFIT SINKS 27%, BUT BEATS EXPECTATIONS

NEW YORK: Citigroup's profit fell nearly 27 percent in the first quarter, hurt by weak results at its consumer bank and trading business. But the company's earnings still beat Wall Street expectations.

The New York-based financial conglomerate quarter continued to clean up its balance sheet and slim itself down from the depths of the financial crisis. Citi Holdings, the so-called bad bank that holds most of Citi's toxic assets left over from the bubble years, posted its seventh straight quarterly profit. The value of Citi Holdings' investments fell 44 percent from a year earlier as the bank sold off complicated derivatives, bonds and other assets.

These efforts were part of the reason why Citi was the only large US bank to pass the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Federal Reserve's test for its "living will" earlier

this week. Big banks were required to submit a plan to regulators to show they could be successfully unwound in the event of a bankruptcy or crisis. It's a victory for a bank that was once known for its complicated legal structure and balance sheet. "Winding down Holdings has been a longtime goal and shows Citi's progress in becoming a simpler, smaller, safer and stronger institution," said Citi CEO Michael Corbat in a prepared statement.

Citi's trading operations were hit hard in the quarter though, just like its competitors Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase that reported earlier in the week. Revenues in Citi's markets and securities division fell 15 percent to \$4.1 billion, with stock and bond trading revenue both falling double digits from a year earlier.

The bank was not immune from

the downturn in oil prices either. Citi set aside \$233 million to cover bad loans in the quarter, primarily due to souring energy loans. Citi's global consumer banking division, which includes its US Citibank operations as well as retail banking operations overseas, had net income of \$1.2 billion in the quarter, down 28 percent from a year earlier.

Overall, Citi reported net income of \$3.5 billion, or \$1.10 per share, in the three months ending in March, compared with \$4.77 billion, or \$1.51 per share, a year ago. The results beat the \$1.03 per share analysts had expected, according to FactSet. Revenue in the quarter fell 11 percent to \$17.56 billion, beating the \$17.44 billion that analysts expected. Citigroup shares fell 10 cents, or 0.2 percent, to \$44.88 in late-afternoon trading. Shares are down 13 percent this year. — AP



NEW YORK: People walk past a branch office of Citibank in New York. Citigroup reported financial results on Friday. — AP



TOYOTA MIRAI WINS 2016 WORLD GREEN CAR AWARD

KUWAIT: Toyota Mirai was declared the 2016 World Green Car recently at the New York International Auto Show. In order to win the award, tailpipe emissions, fuel consumption and use of a major advanced power plant technology (beyond engine components), aimed specifically at increasing the vehicle's environmental responsibility, were all taken into consideration. The Mirai was chosen from an initial entry list of eight new vehicles from

all over the world.

"Just as Prius changed the world nearly 20 years ago, the hydrogen-powered Mirai is ready to make history," said Bill Fay, Group Vice President and General Manager, Toyota Division. "With a range of over 500 km per tank, a refueling time of under five minutes and emissions that consist only of water vapor, Mirai is leading the world forward towards a more sustainable future."

According to Takayuki Yoshitsugu, Chief Representative, Middle East and North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, "As recognized pioneers in hybrid technology, we are truly honored to have received such an award.

With the Mirai, Toyota is taking the opportunity to really make a difference for future generations through the adoption of hydrogen fuel-cell technology in order to reduce

harm to the environment. We sincerely appreciate the support of our customers who have endorsed the Mirai and Toyota's future direction in terms of environmentally-friendly vehicles including our approach with the latest Prius model."

Toyota is no stranger to the World Car Awards program - now in its 12th year. The Toyota Prius 2010 has previously earned 'Top Three in the World' status for both the World

Green Car and the overall World Car of the Year categories. In addition, the Toyota 86 was a 'Top Three in the World' finalist for World Car of the Year in 2013; the Toyota iQ in 2009 for the same category; and the Toyota Harrier Hybrid in 2006 for World Green Car.

Vehicles in all award categories were selected and voted on by an international jury panel comprised of 73 top-level automotive journalists from 23 countries around the world.

TAWASUL TELECOM TEAMS WITH TRAVSYS, BV

KUWAIT: Tawasul Telecom, KSCC Kuwait, a leading provider of MPLS telecoms services and Travsys, BV The Netherlands, an IATA certified common use passenger processing (check-in) sys service provider announces combining technologies and technical resources for the successfully delivery, installation commissioning of advanced passenger and baggage handling information sys, IT infrastructure technology and modern network communications sys at Sulaymanyah International (ISU) Airport, Kurdistan - Iraq.



This new contract is for the provisioning, technical operations and 24/7 maintenance professional services contract is for an initial five (5) year contract period with AZMAR Air Handling Co and Sulaymanyah Airport Authorities for management its IT infrastructure, integrate business applications and improve airport management efficiencies across the entire departure and arrival area footprint.

Fajhan Al-Mutairi, TAWASUL CEO commented and said: "Collaborating for the delivery of total solution IT infrastructure services is a winning strategy for TAWASUL to gain market share and take advantage of the enormous emerging growth opportunities with aviation marketplace." And, with state-of-the-art carefully designed products and managed services delivery will keep TAWASUL in the forefront within telecom sector and increasing our growth with new markets in

Middle East and Africa.

Al-Mutairi further added: "This project reinforces our corporate strategy for steady growth by expansion. And, by teaming with TRAVSYS demonstrate that TAWASUL can expand in vertical markets, add value to our brand while still serving the GCC telecom business community with flexible and hi-quality MPLS network communications services."

Firstly, Tawasul and Travsys will provide WAN non-stop airlines host departure control sys connectivity and airline messaging - network operations and maintenance management network infrastructure support 24/7/365 support services.

Secondly, Tawasul and Travsys will install and commission LAN network infrastructure and IATA advanced check-in passenger and baggage handling systems in order to manage increasing airlines growth and scalable electronic check-in /boarding gate facilitate faster boarding with increasing passenger demands.

And thirdly, Tawasul and Travsys will provide all passenger/baggage handling hardware and software systems; and maintain check-in sys, LAN/WAN network sys infrastructure with 24/7/365 online sys monitoring, remote diagnostics, [periodic-schedule- annual] hardware/software/network maintenance management, disaster recovery support, onsite training and certificate coursework for ISU passenger handling agents and airline staff.

Renze Tilma, TRAVSYS CEO said: "With passenger numbers continuing to grow, development of a strong IT network infrastructure and implementation IATA standard practice management supports Sulaymanyah Airport Authorities objective to ease congestion, reduce operating costs and improve the passenger travel experience in Kurdistan - Iraq." Mr. Tilma also added, "We are again delighted to partner with Tawasul Telecom and very pleased with TAWASUL delivery and managed services quality. And, we look forward to teaming with TAWASUL in the future to discover and develop more airlines international airport business opportunities within the enormous Middle East and Africa emerging growth markets."



Participants at Huawei CEM Elite Club.

HUAWEI BRINGS ITS GLOBAL OPEN ECOSYSTEM INITIATIVE

ICT SOLUTIONS PROVIDER STARTS REGIONAL 'CEM ELITE CLUB'

DUBAI: Huawei, a leading global ICT solutions provider, is starting its first 'CEM Elite Club' initiative in the Middle East in response to growing end-user demand for more customer-centric experiences and services by telecom operators in an increasingly connected world. The "CEM Elite Club", was held this week and hosted 43 senior executives from 14 regional telecom players, analyst firms and industry partner organizations coming together to exchange views and share experiences across aspects related with Customer Experience Management (CEM) such as providing holistic solution, expediting ROI towards superior customer experience, use-case sharing, resources and capabilities to name a few.

Huawei has recognized the need for customer-centricity approach within the operator and more so now as communication service providers (CSP's) aspire to transform and become players in the digital business space. These transformations address new challenges to ensure that user experiences are understood by various players within the CSP organization.

"The event's focus is on building a digital business which is an industry trend and undergoing such a transformation brings significant challenges, with the pressure being put on operators and vendors to deliver an outstanding user experience at every touch point and placing it in at the center of the CSP organization," said Sun Xiaofeng, VP of Huawei Middle East.

"This transformation is vital in today's increasingly connected world and CSP's are constantly looking to drive growth faster while reducing their operational expenditure. Adopting an Omni-channel management approach and persona-based marketing strategy ensures that they can deliver on the experience promise, and reduce customer care costs by up to 70 percent while increasing customer satisfaction by 19 percent. Huawei's ROADS vision encompasses the five fundamental characteristics for the ultimate user experience: Real-time, On-demand, All-online, DIY, and Social. This vision will foster an



Regional winners at Huawei CEM Elite Club.

open industry ecosystem that enables agile innovations, advancing the ICT industry as well as all social sectors in the digital age. Customers want a consistent brand experience each time they interact with a company - and they want this experience across all channels delivered through the products and services in both FBB and MBB areas," added Sun Xiaofeng.

Huawei was also present at this week's IQPC CEM In Telecoms Middle East Conference held on 10-13 April 2016, and shared its latest Smartcare solution offerings such as Omni-Channel Management, influencing operators' customer satisfaction (CEI) via persona-based analytics-to-action and showcased a profit-driven Service Operation Center (SOC) that demonstrates how to exploit the wealth of data available to operators. Huawei's team also exhibited capabilities related to FMC (Fixed Mobile Convergent CEM) and CEM Platforms' openness to fulfill ecosystem implementation, especially

for CSP's with Multi-vendors environment.

During the conference, VIVA Kuwait, part of the STC Group, received 1st place award for two CEM categories for 'Best Network Experience' and 'Best Contact Center', having deployed Huawei's SOC SmartCare Solution, while Huawei accepted 1st place award for 'Most Innovative use of Technology to Improve Customer Experience'.

The 'CEM Elite Club' is a recent initiative by Huawei and creates a platform for industry leaders to discuss their requirements, share pain points and investment strategies in the CEM space. The event also serves as a working platform for analysts, operators and industry partners looking to build a CEM ecosystem that enables the development of long-term strategy for improved customer experience and gain the skills and capability to break down cross-functional silos to deliver a seamless customer experience.

OWNING A HOME IN UAE HAS JUST BECOME SIMPLER WITH ABK'S NEW MORTGAGE SCHEME!



KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), one of leading banks in the region, recently launched a new mortgage scheme through its Dubai branch for aspiring home owners in the United Arab Emirates. ABK's new scheme is simple and straightforward and loans can be used for buying a family home or investing in buy-to-let property.

These loans are available to anyone, not just ABK customers. They are designed to be as simple and as flexible as possible, whether you are buying a first home, or if you already own property and want to invest further in property.

The Bank handles most of the paperwork, making the whole process very straight forward and simpler for customers to manage.

The new ABK mortgages are designed to

be extremely user friendly, while being very competitive. They allow:

- * Borrowing up to seven times annual salary
- * Repayment terms up to 20 years
- * Competitive interest rates
- * Loans up to AED 25 million
- * Borrowing up to 70 percent of the value of the property being purchased

To qualify for a loan, customers will need to provide evidence relating to identity and income such as salary certificate, a six month account statement and civil ID or passport.

ABK's commitment to excellence, simplicity and transparency is supported by the Bank's 'Simpler Banking' strategy, which focuses on presenting customers with banking solutions that make their experience as easy and enjoyable as possible.

US RULES FOR NORWEGIAN AIR IN DISPUTE OVER US-EUROPE FLIGHTS

DALLAS: Norwegian Air Shuttle has won preliminary approval to expand flying between the United States and Europe using an Irish subsidiary. The decision Friday by the US Department of Transportation was a setback for the major US airlines and their labor unions, who said the subsidiary will be an unfair, low-wage competitor on key trans-Atlantic routes.

The decision followed intense lobbying and public-relations campaigns by both sides and an unusually long review - more than two years - by regulators.

The Transportation Department said that it will take public comments before issuing a final order that could allow the Norwegian subsidiary to begin flying to the US. Norwegian, a low-fare, no-frills airline, called the decision a victory for consumers and said it intended to hire US-based crews. Bjorn Kjos, CEO of Norwegian Group, said final approval for the US



flights "will be win-win for consumers and the economy on both sides of the Atlantic." He said Norwegian would create "thousands" of jobs and help the economies of its US destinations.

US airline unions immediately criticized the decision. Tim Canoll, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, called it "an affront to fair competition." Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, said the

Obama administration "has chosen foreign corporations over workers' rights and good American jobs." American carriers and their unions had argued that Norwegian decided to expand US service using an Irish subsidiary because Ireland's tax and labor laws are weaker than those in the United States. They said Norwegian would gain an unfair advantage and undercut the American carriers on fares.

American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines all declined to comment Friday. All three operate flights across the Atlantic and have European partners that do the same. The Norwegian subsidiary plans to fly between Boston and Cork, Ireland. The short-term effect of Friday's ruling would appear limited, but the big US airlines could eventually face more competition as Norwegian and other low-fare rivals add routes and flights in the lucrative trans-Atlantic market. —AP

DEEP IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD: A NEWBIE'S FIRST BRUSH WITH VR

NEW YORK: My descent from the boat, gliding through schools of fish and clouds of phosphorescent jellyfish, seemed to be going pretty smoothly. At least until the shark emerged from the deeper gloom and tried to tear its way into my protective cage. Of course, it wasn't really a shark. And I wasn't really in a cage - or underwater or even anywhere near the ocean. But it sure felt like I was.

At its best, this is exactly what you can expect from the much-hyped technology of virtual reality. All you have to do is put on a headset that blocks out the surrounding world and replaces it with one that's fake - but often utterly realistic. Suddenly it's like you've stepped out of your life and into someone else's.

With the debut of new VR headsets from Facebook's Oculus unit, Samsung and Sony over the past few months, virtual reality hype has been off the charts. To its proponents, it's the Next Great Thing, a whole new way of "immersing" (a word you'll be hearing a lot) yourself in games, movies, even live music or sports.

Until a few weeks ago, though, the prospect left me cold. The first wave of VR entertainment consists largely of video games, which have never much interested me. Reports that VR can make you nauseous also put me off. Eventually, though, I had to try it, and my first brush with the technology was intriguing enough to keep me exploring. Just not enough to plunk down more than a thousand dollars for a full-fledged VR system anytime soon. Current VR offerings have a lot of room for improvement; many of them get old quickly once the initial "wow" factor wears

off. It's also hard not to feel self-conscious wearing goofy-looking headgear, especially when surrounded by strangers you can't see. The experience, though, had its moments. Zombies and sharks pushed me uncomfortably close to real terror; a few contemplative moments lost in a blind man's virtual diary, by contrast, proved unexpectedly affecting. And there was another big plus: no queasiness. (For me, at least. Your experience may differ.)

ROLLIN' ROLLIN' ROLLIN'

My first plunge into VR involved a virtual roller coaster. Which is funny only because the real things scare me to death. If I ride them at all, I get on somewhere near the back and keep my eyes shut tight.

This Samsung demo, featuring the company's Gear VR system, got extra points for realism. Its VR video, shot at a Six Flags park, was synced to mechanical chairs that jerked around in time with the coaster's virtual movements. And of course, the video put me right in the first car. For all that, the virtual ride proved sort of tame, at least for a coasterphobe like me. For once, I could keep my eyes open and enjoy gawking at fellow passengers or the trees below me. It may not have matched the adrenaline rush of the real thing, but that was just fine.

GOING DEEP INTO ZOMBIELAND

A demo of Sony's PlayStation VR headset, due out in October, was mostly devoted to games ranging from space shoot-em-ups to family puzzle games. A lot of them



LAS VEGAS: Matthew Taylor paints in 3D virtual reality at the Intel booth using HTC Vive virtual reality goggles at CES International in Las Vegas. — AP

were enjoyable, but few were as dramatic as "The Deep," which had me shaking alone in a dimly lit shark cage while what felt like the real thing circled outside.

I had a similar moment playing "Until Dawn: Rush of Blood," a horror game set in a zombie-infested amusement park. (Yes, it was a lot like the finale to "Zombieland," just like "The Deep" bore more than a passing resemblance to

an up-close-and-personal version of "Jaws.") I knew the zombies weren't really rushing at me through the darkness, but I couldn't help ducking anyway.

A VIRTUAL FILM FESTIVAL

Film festivals are starting to showcase VR films as directors explore the new medium. At New York's Tribeca Film Festival, which opened Wednesday, I watched "Allumette," a dreamy short based on the fairy tale "The Little Match Girl." For 20 minutes, the story took me around a dollhouse-like town built in the clouds. It was charming to crane my neck to look at houses from different angles; at one point, I even stuck my head into a flying boat to see what was going on. "Notes on Blindness: Into Darkness," meanwhile, translates the audio diary of man who'd gone blind into a virtual representation of his world. I found myself in a minimalist landscape in which sounds from a park formed ephemeral images - laughing children, barking dogs - that dissipated as their echoes faded.

VIRTUAL CONCLUSION

Bottom line: My VR experiences to date have mostly been interesting, but still not entirely compelling. It's clearly a medium in its infancy, and creators are still devising new storytelling techniques that can exploit the technology's power. But it's impossible to deny the technology's underlying potential.

Maybe it'll even help me lose my fear of roller coasters one day. — AP

PRIVACY WARS PIT TECH FIRMS AGAINST THE FEDS

NEW YORK: Companies like Apple and Microsoft are pushing back against government surveillance in the courts, arguing that federal authorities have gone too far in obtaining chats, emails and other private information from phones and online services. The stakes for both sides continue to rise. More and more of daily life is moving into digital devices and online, putting individuals more at risk as messages, files and photos move to the cloud. But that information is also a treasure trove for criminal investigators.

Here's what the battleground looks like right now.

APPLE AND THE FBI

Sparks flew for weeks over the FBI's demand that Apple help it unlock an iPhone linked to the December San Bernardino attack that killed 14 people. The FBI wanted Apple Inc. to create a software tool for bypassing a self-destruct feature on the phone. Apple insisted that doing so would weaken security for all iPhone users. But the government

maintained that Apple was required to do so under the All Writs Act, which dates back to 1789. The two sides appeared to be gearing up for a long court battle, but the government announced last month that an outside party had come forward with a way to crack the phone, effectively ending the case. The underlying issue, however, remains unsettled. The FBI said that the method used to unlock the phone only works on the iPhone 5C. Several other pending federal cases involve newer versions of the iPhone. Most notably, the Justice Department is still trying to force Apple to help it unlock an iPhone involved in a New York City drug case. The judge in that case ruled that the government can't use the All Writs Act to justify its request.

MICROSOFT'S COURT BATTLES

Earlier this week, Microsoft filed suit against the Justice Department over its use of court orders requiring the company to turn over customer files stored in its computer centers. Microsoft Corp. says the government is using a dated 1986 law to get court orders for customers' data, while in some cases prohibiting the company from notifying the customer. Microsoft says those "non-disclosure" orders violate its constitutional right to free speech, as well as its customers' protection against unreasonable searches.

According to Microsoft, authorities used the Electronic Communications Privacy Act to demand customer information more than 5,600 times in the last 18 months. In nearly half those cases, the company was ordered by a court to keep the demand secret and, in about 1,750 cases, those gag orders were indefinite. Microsoft is also fighting the government's demand for emails of a non-US citizen that the company has stored in a data center located in Ireland. Company officials have argued the case could open the door to other governments demanding information stored in the US.

WHAT OTHER COMPANIES ARE DOING

With no end in sight to these battles, other companies are also boosting security in hopes of assuring their customers that their information is safe from government snooping. Google, Facebook and Yahoo have increased their use of encryption, which shields private information from prying eyes. They've also sued for the right to report how often authorities demand customer information under national security laws, after former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden leaked details of government data-gathering efforts. — AP



MUNICH: People wait in front of an Apple store in Munich, before the worldwide launch of the iPhone 6s. The government's fight with Apple over an encrypted iPhone may be the first of many battles in a broader war over who gets access to individuals' data, as more tech companies offer encrypted messaging and other services. — AP

APPLE OPPOSES US APPEAL OVER IPHONE IN NEW YORK DRUG CASE

IPHONE PRODUCTION CUT EXTENDED FOR ANOTHER QUARTER

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON: Apple Inc said the US government had failed to show a continued need for its help accessing a locked iPhone in a New York drug case after a third party came forward with a solution to crack a different phone belonging to one of the shooters in December's San Bernardino killings.

The technology company made the argument in a brief filed in federal court in the New York City borough of Brooklyn on Friday, a week after the US Department of Justice said it would push forward with its appeal of a federal magistrate's ruling saying he could not force the company to assist authorities.

The government's decision to continue appealing the February ruling at a higher level, to US District Judge Margo Brodie, came after an outside party provided the US Federal Bureau of Investigation a way to access the phone in the San Bernardino case without Apple's help.

In its brief, Apple argued the government had not said if it had tried to use the secret method from the San Bernardino case on the iPhone in the drug case, nor if authorities had consulted with the unnamed third party or anyone else about it. Apple, which reiterated many of its other legal arguments in the case, said the government "has utterly failed to satisfy its burden to demonstrate that Apple's assistance in this case is necessary." The Justice Department, in a statement, noted that some 70 times before the Brooklyn case emerged, Apple had helped authorities access data on iPhones. "Indeed, Apple has said it would take them only a few hours to open this kind of phone, because they already have a mechanism that would allow them to do so," the Justice Department said.

Prosecutors are challenging a Feb 29 ruling by US Magistrate Judge James Orenstein holding he did not have the authority to order Apple to disable the security of an iPhone seized in a drug probe. That case has taken a higher profile after prosecutors dropped their effort to get Apple's help accessing the phone of Rizwan Farook, one of the two killers in the San Bernardino massacre, which left 14 people dead and 22 wounded, after a third party provided the FBI a method to crack it.

FBI Director James Comey said last week that the method used on the San Bernardino iPhone 5c would not work on other models, including the iPhone 5s, the type in the Brooklyn case.

That phone belonged to Jun Feng, who has pleaded guilty to participation in a methamphetamine distribution conspiracy, which prosecutors are continuing to investigate. Unlike the phone used in San Bernardino, Feng's phone had an older operating system, iOS 7, which is not protected under the same encryption technology, which is why Apple could access it. Meanwhile, Apple Inc will continue its reduced production of iPhones in the quarter ending June in light of sluggish sales, the Nikkei business daily reported, citing parts suppliers

notified of the plan. Apple apparently does not plan to make enough of the newly launched iPhone SE model, the Nikkei report said.

The company's shares fell 1.8 percent to \$110.05. Shares of some Apple suppliers also fell following the report. Skyworks Solutions Inc was down 1.4 percent, Broadcom Ltd fell 2.4 percent while Jabil Circuit lost 1.7 percent. The Nikkei reported in January that the technology giant was expected to cut production of its iPhone 6s and 6s Plus models by about 30 percent in the quarter ended March, but production was expected to return to normal in the current quarter.

The production cut could last longer than the one it implemented in 2013, when Apple cut

production orders for its cheaper iPhone 5C a month after its launch, the Nikkei said. Apple has told parts suppliers in Japan and elsewhere that it will maintain the reduced output level in the current quarter, the Nikkei report said.

Apple did not immediately respond to a request for comment. In January, Apple said it expected a fall in revenue for the quarter ending March - its first forecast for a revenue drop in 13 years - as the critical Chinese market showed signs of weakening. It also reported the slowest-ever increase in iPhone shipments. Global smartphone sales in 2016 are expected to grow at their slowest rate - in single digits in percentage terms, according to research firm Gartner Inc. — Reuters



CUPERTINO: Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks at an event to announce new products at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, California. Companies like Apple and Microsoft pushing back against the surveillance state in the courts, arguing that federal authorities have overstepped their legal authority to obtain your chats, email and other crucial information from phones and online services. — AP

EU WANTS MORE TRANSPARENCY IN WEB SEARCH RESULTS

BRUSSELS: The European Union's digital chief wants search engines such as Alphabet Inc's Google and Microsoft's Bing to be more transparent about advertising in web search results but ruled out a separate law for web platforms. European Commission Vice-President Andrus Ansip, who is overseeing a wide-ranging inquiry into how web platforms conduct their business, said on Friday the EU executive would not take a horizontal approach to regulating online services. "We will take a problem-driven approach," Ansip said. "It's practically impossible to regulate all the platforms with one really good single solution."

That will come as a relief to the web industry, dominated mainly by big US tech firms such as Facebook, Google and Amazon, who lobbied hard against new rules for online platforms and what they saw as an anti-American protectionist backlash. "We praise the Commission for understanding that a horizontal measure for all platforms is practically impossible," said Jakob Kucharczyk, director of the Computer & Communications Industry Association which represents the likes of Facebook, Google and Amazon.

"While a lot of online platforms enable economic growth, their business models differ widely." However Ansip said he was wor-

ried about how transparent some search engines are when displaying ads in search results. The Commission is also looking into the transparency of paid-for reviews as well as the conditions of use of services such as Google Maps, Apple Inc's iOS mobile operating system and Google's Android.

"Maybe it's not too much to ask for more transparency talking about search engines," Ansip said. The former Estonian prime minister also poured cold water on the idea that the Commission would make search engines pay to display snippets of news articles, dubbed the "Google tax," as part of its EU copyright law reform due later this year. The EU executive is looking into making rules on taking down illegal content clearer and more effective without making hosting websites such as YouTube directly liable. "Now musicians ask, please, take it down and keep it down," Ansip said. "We want to make those rules more clear."

But the Commission will not change a provision where websites such as Amazon, eBay and Google's YouTube are not held liable for illegal content that is uploaded on to their systems. They do, however, have a responsibility to take it down once they are notified of it. The Commission will publish a communication detailing its plans on web platforms in June. — Reuters

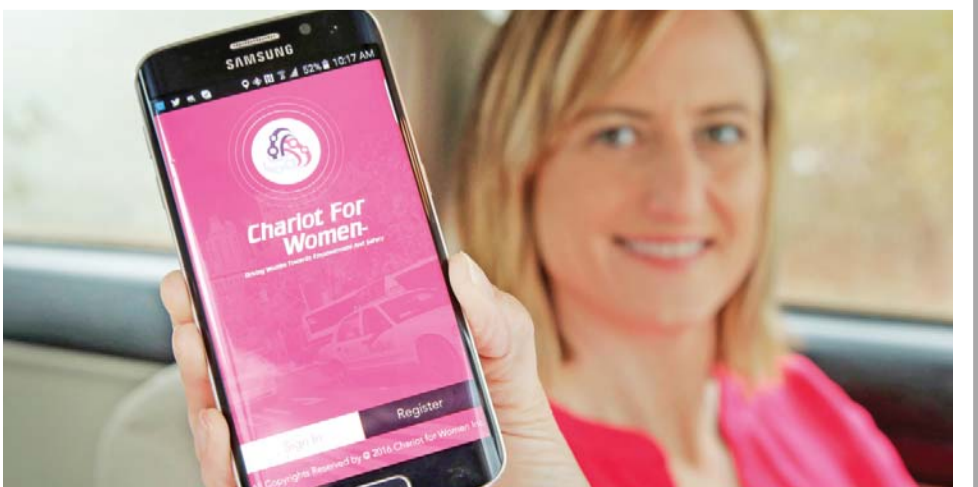
STRONG INTEREST IN US CAB SERVICE JUST FOR WOMEN

NEW YORK: US entrepreneur Michael Pelletz's project of a rideshare service for women and children with vehicles driven by women has prompted such interest that he is postponing the service's launch date. Chariot For Women, fully funded by its founder and close associates, was initially set to kick off on Tuesday. Interest in the service has largely been driven by the apprehension some women have of male taxi rideshare drivers. Several sexual harassment and even rape cases have been reported on rideshare vehicles driven by men.

Pelletz, a former part-time Uber driver, wanted to initially collect a roster of 1,000 potential drivers in the northeastern state of Massachusetts. Like other rideshare services, these drivers would use their personal vehicle to drive on demand. However the drivers would be female, and their customers would be women and children. Without spending a dime on advertising, no fewer than 7,000 female candidates contacted him in four days to offer to become company drivers.

"We need to make sure that our technology can handle the millions of people that are going to use our company," the Boston-based Pelletz told AFP on Friday. "We're going to delay for a few months just to make sure." In Boston, where the service is to be launched, rates will be about the same as Uber and Lyft, the two rideshare giants, but without Uber's progressive pricing system.

Pelletz also said that the company would keep 25 percent of the first \$100 earned daily by each driver, but nothing beyond that. Uber takes a 25 percent share on all rides. "I'm not really in this for the money but because there's such a need to keep women and children safe," Pelletz said. Chariot For Women is not the first service to offer services in this niche, but none has ever been successful, in part due to charges of discrimination. "Our legal department is well prepared" for any challenge Pelletz said. He even hopes to be legally challenged "because laws can change if we show that there is a need," he said. — AFP



CHARLTON: Kelly Pelletz, co-creator of the ride-sharing service Chariot for Women, displays the app on a mobile phone. — AP

MORE INFECTIONS FROM DIRTY SCOPES THAN ESTIMATED

WASHINGTON: At least 300 patients have been sickened by life-threatening infections linked to contaminated medical scopes - more than previously estimated by federal regulators, according to figures released Friday. Between 2010 and 2015 more than 41 hospitals worldwide, most in the US, reported bacterial infections linked to the scopes, affecting 300 to 350 patients, states a memo released by US Rep Ted Lieu, D-Calif. The lawmaker stressed that those figures likely underestimate the problem since hospitals don't always test patients for the antibiotic-resistant "superbugs" that cause such infections. "I'm absolutely certain there are lots more infections out there that are not being reported just because no one is getting tested," Lieu said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Investigators for the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform obtained the updated figures from the Food and Drug Administration as part of a year-long investigation into "superbug" outbreaks tied to the devices. A previous report by a Senate committee found 250 reports of

patients sickened by contaminated scopes, though that finding came from a shorter timespan between 2012 and early 2015. Last year, the FDA reported 142 patient infections from the medical scopes made by Olympus Corp. and other companies.

The FDA came under fire in early 2015 after several high-profile outbreaks at hospitals in Los Angeles and Seattle were linked to so-called duodenoscopes made by Olympus, a Japanese manufacturer which dominates the US market. The specialized fiber-optic scopes are threaded through the digestive tract to diagnose and treat tumors and other blockages of the pancreas and bile ducts. Officials at the hospitals said they had followed the manufacturers' instructions for cleaning the devices. "It was not hospitals or doctors who weren't cleaning the devices correctly or using them correctly, it was a fault with the devices themselves," Lieu said.

Lieu, who represents sections of Los Angeles, introduced two bills Friday that would tighten regulations of reusable medical devices that require cleaning. Among

other steps, companies would need to notify the FDA whenever they change the design or cleaning instructions for a device. A separate bill would require companies to scientifically confirm the effectiveness of their cleaning procedures. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., released similar legislation in the Senate last month. Despite the links to infections, the FDA previously ruled it would keep the devices on the market because they fill an important need in routine medical procedures.

The agency said late Friday it would "carefully consider" the congressional report's findings. It's already taken steps to reduce infection with the scopes, said agency spokeswoman Deborah Kotz in an emailed statement. Duodenoscopes feature a mechanized tip with moveable instruments used to drain blockages and perform other procedures. The complex design makes the scopes extremely difficult to clean, even with mechanical processing equipment. Bodily fluids and other debris can stay in the device's joints and crevices even after cleaning and disinfection. — AP



CALIFORNIA: A farm worker ties almond tree branches with strings as a pumpjack operates near the orchard in Shafter, Calif. A federal review says the US Environmental Protection Agency is failing to protect drinking water reserves from oilfield contamination. — AP



GAUHATI: Khushi, a white tigress, plays with her newborn cub at the state zoological park in Gauhati, India. Countries with wild tiger populations have agreed to do more to protect tiger habitats that are shrinking drastically because of deforestation and urban sprawl, conservationists said. — AP

TOP REPUBLICANS: ZIKA FUNDING LIKELY - BUT TIMING UNCERTAIN

WHITE HOUSE URGED TO FREE UP EBOLA MONEY

WASHINGTON: Top House Republicans said that they are increasingly likely to grant a portion of President Barack Obama's \$1.9 billion request to combat the Zika virus. It's not clear how quickly Congress may act, however, despite the political urgency and a White House pressure campaign. While they have succeeded in forcing the administration to divert almost \$600 million in unspent Ebola funds to fight Zika, Republicans have sat on the White House request, demanding more information and pressuring the administration to free up Ebola money that Obama has promised to help poor nations combat future epidemics.

But the White House says the budgeting maneuver is only a temporary solution and that more money will be needed soon. Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers, R-Ky, told reporters that "we're prepared to try to do a supplemental bill if it's needed" and that action is likely "before the end of the fiscal year" on Oct. 1. At a hearing later, he acknowledged for the first time that the panel is working on a supplemental spending measure but that he wants more details to supplement the administration's request, which he said is "almost a slush fund."

Another senior Republican said additional Zika money most likely wouldn't come before September at the earliest. "We're certainly fine probably through the end of the fiscal year, so it's not like we have to do

something today," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., chairman of the House panel responsible for the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health. "But we do need to do something in the foreseeable future, and I would think before the end of the fiscal year," perhaps as an attachment to a must-pass stopgap funding bill that's required to prevent a government shutdown in October.

Researchers fear Zika causes microcephaly, a serious birth defect in which a baby's head is too small, as well as posing other threats to the children of pregnant women infected with it. Its spread in the US has so far been limited, but the situation is sure to worsen as temperatures warm and the mosquitoes that transmit the virus flourish. Top House Appropriations Committee Democrat Nita Lowey of New York moved to attach the full \$1.9 billion Obama request to an unrelated bill funding the Department of Veterans Affairs but encountered opposition from panel Republicans controlling the panel. Rogers countered by muscling through an amendment to loosen remaining restrictions on the use of Ebola money.

"Instead of providing the funding needed to mount a robust response against the Zika virus, we have forced the administration to rob Peter to pay Paul," Lowey said. "The redirected funds are nothing more than a temporary Band-Aid. It could run out in the middle of summer - peak mosquito season -

and it is insufficient to support advanced research and development of vaccines and diagnostics through clinical trials."

Lowey was echoing Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia M. Burwell, who told reporters last week that without additional funding her agency might have to curtail mosquito control activities and might not be able to produce enough vaccine or develop better tests for Zika. Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis, said Wednesday that the House "will address this situation through the regular appropriations process as the need arises, and our appropriators are looking at how to do just that." Failure to act is sure to mean that the White House will ramp up its election-year criticism of Republicans controlling Congress.

The prospect of Congress taking a seven-week vacation this July and August - the height of the mosquito season - without having acted on Zika could give Democrats a political opening. "I can't in good conscience and out of respect for the taxpayer support a full request without proper information, without justification," Rogers said. Lowey promised to ride herd on the administration to help get the Republicans the information they're demanding. "The administration is already moving ahead with the funds that were appropriated for Ebola," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Tuesday. "And we're anxious to talk to them any time they think there's additional need." — AP

A WOMAN FIGHTS RUSSIAN LAW ON ORGAN REMOVAL WITHOUT CONSENT

MOSCOW: When Elena Sablina's daughter Alina was killed in a car crash in Moscow two years ago, she was devastated. One month later, Sablina accidentally discovered from a forensic report that six of her 19-year-old daughter's organs, including her heart and kidneys, had been removed for transplant. "I was shocked that organs were taken from my child without my permission," Sablina said. Yet all of that was legal. Russian law explicitly allows doctors to take organs from deceased patients without informing their families.

Sablina sued for damages in five Russian courts and has lost every challenge. In frustration, she recently filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, contending that the removal of her daughter's organs violated several articles of Europe's Human Rights Convention. Sablina also hopes her daughter's case will prompt a change in Russian law. "(Doctors) just came with a briefcase and took what they wanted," said Sablina, who said she would not have agreed to the donation even if asked. "Who gave them the right?"

More than a dozen countries in Europe, including Russia, have a "presumed consent" donation system, where, in an attempt to boost the number of available organs, the government assumes people will be donors unless they specifically opt out. Others, like England, require people or their relatives to provide permission before anything can be taken. In some countries with presumed consent, including Spain and Belgium, doctors still consult family members before removing organs. But in Russia, doctors don't always seek the family's permission beforehand.

A recently proposed amendment, however, would require Russian doctors to inform a patient's relatives within 12 hours of their loved one's death of any intention to remove organs or tissue, giving the family time to object. But the amendment does not make it mandatory for doctors to obtain the family's consent before taking organs. The proposal is still awaiting approval and there is no timeline on when

Russian lawmakers might debate it.

Still, that would only be a partial solution, critics say, since Russia still lacks an organ donation infrastructure, including a viable way for people to opt out. After her daughter's accident in Moscow, Sablina and her husband fled from their home in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg to be with her at the hospital. The doctors told them to prepare for the worst. After five days, Sablina said the doctors said they were too busy to talk, that she and her husband could not see Alina that day and asked them to leave. The following morning, Sablina got a telephone call from a funeral home informing her that her daughter had died. She inadvertently discovered the organ removal as she reviewed a criminal case file against the driver implicated in the fatal collision. One doctor had removed her daughter's heart while another took her kidneys. Doctors also cut out part of her aorta, her adrenal gland and a piece of her right lung. Sablina sued the hospital and two other institutions involved. Her lawyer, Anton Burkov, said Russian law gives doctors a disturbing amount of discretion.

"Every single act of organ removal is conducted without any permission from the relatives," he said. "Doctors can freely ignore the families since it is completely legal to harvest organs in secrecy." Burkov said they have requested priority status with the European Court but that a judgment could still take two to four years. A similar case filed by a Latvian mother resulted in a ruling against the country and a modified law. The Russian ministry of health did not respond to repeated requests for comment on the case. Alexei Starchenko, chairman of Russia's National Patient Safety Agency, said every hospital that performs organ transplants has its own waiting list, describing the system as "corrupt" since there is little transparency to explain how organs get distributed, unlike the clear criteria used by most other Western countries. Russian lawmakers say the taking of organs without permission is partly out of consideration for grieving families. — AP



MOSCOW: Elena Sablina, mother of Alina Sablina in 2013, shows her daughter somewhere in Moscow, Russia. When Elena Sablina's daughter Alina was killed in a car crash in Moscow two years ago, she was devastated. One month later, Sablina accidentally discovered from a forensic report that six of her 19-year-old daughter's organs, including her heart and kidneys, had been removed for transplant. — AP

NORTH KOREA RESTAURANTS: LIKE THE COUNTRY, 'SUSPICIOUS AND IN CRISIS'



PYONGYANG: Vehicles are driven in Pyongyang, North Korea. Gas stations have been springing up all over Pyongyang over the past few years, reflecting a major increase in traffic. But with gas prices going up, drivers in Pyongyang are starting to feel some pain at the pump, which might not be good news for the isolated country's shifting domestic economy. — AP

JAKARTA: At a North Korean state-run restaurant in the Indonesian capital Jakarta earlier this week, the usual song and dance dinner performance by the waitresses was cancelled, because there were fewer than 10 customers. Some North Korean restaurants across Asia have closed down and demand is lacklustre at others - like the country itself, the establishments seem to be going through a crisis. Staff are suspicious of too many questions. There are about 130 North Korean restaurants overseas, staffed and operated by workers from North Korea, most of which remit revenue back to Pyongyang. Many are in China while there are others in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Middle East. One, in the Chinese city of Ningbo, was in the news after the North's Red Cross Society identified it as the restaurant from where 13 staff members left for South Korea last week. South Korea has not said where the 13 were before entering the country, although media reports have said they defected via a Southeast Asian nation.

Pyongyang called it a "hideous" abduction by agents from the South. The restaurants are one of the few sources of hard currency for impoverished, sanctions-hit

North Korea, generating roughly \$10 million a year, according to South Korean estimates. Some of the restaurants are reported to have been suffering since harsh new United Nations sanctions were announced against Pyongyang in March following its recent nuclear and missile tests, although the restaurants were themselves not targeted in the UN resolution. South Korea last month discouraged its citizens from eating at North Korean restaurants abroad.

Business was not good at the restaurant in Ningbo, and some residents said it had been shut months ago for renovations. One of two North Korean restaurants in Jakarta has also been closed down while another in Bangkok had a sign on the door saying it was shut until April 20 for renovations. The Pyongyang Restaurant still open in Jakarta is in the crowded Kelapa Gading area in the north of the city, wedged between offices, a bank and other eateries.

"No photos," said one of the waitresses, dressed in a pink and black uniform, when a customer took out a camera. Tables were separated by wooden screens, so guests couldn't see each other, but there were few customers for dinner when a Reuters team visited. Instead of the song and

dance routine, a North Korean concert was being shown on a television, a South Korean branded LG set. The waitresses, who spoke limited Bahasa Indonesia, declined to answer most questions. But asked who owned the restaurant, one of them said: "All North Koreans". Asked if that meant the government, she nodded.

Better in Beijing

In Beijing, the Pingsanguo Restaurant, formerly called the Pyongyang Rungdro, appeared to be doing better. Its 20 tables in the main room were half-full on a weekday night and a short song and dance show was performed at dinner-time. A smaller room was empty. A meal for two, including two North Korean beers, North Korean kimchi and barbecued meats, was priced at 450 yuan (about \$70), which is expensive by Beijing standards. But asked how business was doing, a waitress said: "It's not that good". Many of the waitresses at the North Korean state-run restaurants overseas are chosen from a pool of graduates at the Pyongyang University of Commerce, where they learn to cook, sing, play instruments and dance. Loyalty to the regime is a major consideration for being chosen to go overseas. — Reuters



KAZIRANGA: Britain's Prince William (center), Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, feed baby elephants as a rhino calf looks on at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) at Panbari reserve forest in Kaziranga in the northeastern state of Assam. — AFP

INDIA POACHERS KILL RHINO AFTER ROYAL COUPLE VISIT

GUWAHATI: Poachers shot dead a rhinoceros at a wildlife park in northeast India hours after Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate visited the sanctuary, a wildlife official said Friday. Rangers found the dead rhino with its horn missing on Thursday—the day the royal couple left the Kaziranga National Park in Assam state, home to two-thirds of the planet's remaining one-horned rhinos. "Poachers used AK-47 assault rifles to kill the adult male rhino and after killing the pachyderm they took away its horn," Subasish Das, a senior forest officer said. It was the second rhino killing in the past four days. Poachers killed an adult rhino on Monday before gouging out its horn, leaving it in a pool of blood. Kaziranga has fought a sustained battle against poachers who kill the rhinos for their horns, which fetch huge prices in some Asian countries where they are used for medicines and jewelry. The park's website said 27 rhinos were poached in 2014 and another 17 last year. A recent census estimated

there were 2,400 one-horned rhinos, currently listed as "vulnerable" by conservation groups, in Kaziranga out of a global population of 3,300. During their visit to Kaziranga the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge met wildlife officials battling to protect vulnerable rhinos from poachers, and fed a rhino calf with a giant milk bottle. William, the second-in-line to the British throne, has repeatedly condemned illegal wildlife trafficking and has encouraged anti-poaching efforts. He is a patron of the elephant conservation charity Tusk Trust. A spokesman for the royal couple said they had been upset by the poaching. "The Duke and Duchess were angry to hear about the killing of this rhino during their visit," British broadcaster ITV quoted the spokesman as saying. "They hope their time in Kaziranga encourages others to support the brave rangers that are protecting animals that are so important to the communities that surround the national park." — AFP

LATEST BATTLE TO WIPE OUT POLIO BEGINS WITH VAST VACCINE SWITCH

GLOBAL VACCINE SWITCH A CRUCIAL STEP IN POLIO ENDGAME

LONDON: In a huge immunization effort in 150 countries, health teams will today launch what they hope will be the final push against polio. Stopping transmission of the contagious viral disease that has infected millions is possible within a year, experts say. And full, official, global eradication could be declared by the end of this decade. First, however, the vaccine that has successfully fought polio for more than 30 years needs to be switched for one that targets the last few areas of risk.

It won't be easy, or cheap, but the World Health Organization's director of polio eradication, Michel Zaffran, says failure now - when there have only been 12 cases worldwide this year, in Pakistan and Afghanistan - means the virus could spread across borders again. Success would make polio only the second human disease to be eradicated since smallpox was banished in 1980. "Taking our foot off the pedal now could mean polio will within a few years spread straight back into large parts of the world and create 100,000 or 200,000 cases," Zaffran told Reuters. "The job has not been done and will not be done until we have fully eradicated the virus."

Vaccine complexities

For the endgame in polio to succeed, a coordi-

nated and complex vaccine switch is crucial. Until now, many countries have been using a shot that protects against the three types of wild polio virus - type 1, type 2 and type 3 - but type 2 polio transmission has been stopped since 1999, meaning immunizing against it now makes no sense.

In rare cases it also poses a risk that the weakened type 2 virus in the vaccine can seep into circulation and cause "vaccine-derived" polio infections. So from April 17 to May 1, some 150 countries will engage in a synchronized switch to a bivalent, or two-strain, vaccine that contains no type 2 virus but targets types 1 and 3. It's a massive undertaking and a major step towards eradication, says Zaffran. "We're entering into uncharted territory. This has never been done before. But there's no going back now."

That's partly because polio vaccine manufacturers - among them France's Sanofi Pasteur - have moved production to the bivalent shot and would find it tricky, costly, and time-consuming to reverse that move. Anil Dutta, a vaccine expert at British drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline, which also makes polio shots, is looking beyond eradication to 2019 or 2020, when all "live" oral polio vaccines need to be discontinued. Then the world will switch again, to "inactivated" polio vaccine, or IPV, to further reduce any risk of causing disease

through immunization. Scaling up IPV production to meet the needs of the entire world takes years, he warns, and work must start now to avoid potential supply concerns.

History of misses

But prediction has never been easy in the fight to wipe out polio, and health authorities have missed targets along the way. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, launched in 1988, originally aimed to end all transmission of the disease by 2000. And while there has been a 99 percent reduction in cases worldwide since the GPEI launch, fighting the last 1 percent of polio has been far tougher than expected. In 2013, the GPEI said the global fight against polio would require \$5.5 billion in funding, and more will be needed beyond that to keep a lid on the disease. The virus, which invades the nervous system and can cause irreversible paralysis within hours, spreads rapidly among children, especially in unsanitary conditions in war-torn regions, refugee camps and areas where healthcare is limited.

In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the last two countries where polio currently remains endemic, conflict and propaganda have hampered progress, and in the past posed risks to others. The campaign to eliminate polio in Pakistan is fraught with risk, with Islamist militants attacking health teams they accuse of being Western spies. A polio worker was shot and wounded in February and in January a suicide bomber killed 15 people outside a polio eradication centre in the city of Quetta.

In 2011, a polio virus from Pakistan re-infected China, which had been polio free for more than a decade. In 2013, the disease re-emerged in Syria after a 14-year absence, prompting the need for a vast and expensive regional emergency vaccination campaign. And last year, cases of type 2 vaccine-derived polio posed new threats in Ukraine and Mali. David Salisbury, an immunisation specialist and associate fellow at Britain's Chatham House Centre on Global Health Security, says the last 1 percent is a "very long tail" on a stubborn epidemic.

"The original date for interruption of transmission was 2000. The next target was 2014 and it's currently 2016," Salisbury told Reuters, adding that even with case numbers as low as they are now, "2016 may be optimistic". Liam Donaldson, head of the Independent Monitoring Board of the GPEI, agrees that celebrating the expected extinction of polio virus "would not just be premature, it would be folly". "Polio is still out there," he told a meeting in London. "(It) has fought back with a vengeance at every stage of the game. And it's still fighting." — Reuters



YIWU: Visitors gather at Google booth during the 2016 China International Electronic Commerce Expo in Yiwu, east China's Zhejiang province. — AFP

GOOGLE CALENDAR HELPS MAKE THE MOST OF SPARE TIME

SAN FRANCISCO: Google has made it tougher for people to hide behind excuses when it comes to finding time to hit the gym or learn new languages. Google added "Goals" tools to free calendar applications tailored for smartphones powered by Apple or Android software, using artificial intelligence to let software figure out when one could fit in workouts or lessons. "Whether it's reading more books, learning a new language or working out regularly, achieving your goals can be really hard," Google product manager Jyoti Ramnath said in a blog post. "That's why starting today, we're introducing Goals in Google Calendar."

People can add personal goals such as going for runs or getting to gyms, and then Google calendar software analyzes schedules for optimal times to squeeze in activities, according to Ramnath. Calendar will automatically reschedule time for personal goals if conflicts arise, and is programmed to automatically reschedule activities if users simply prefer to put them off. The more people use the Goals feature in Calendar, the better the software gets at picking times for personal objectives, according to Google. "Calendars should help you make the most of your time, not just be tools to track events," Ramnath said. — AFP



KARACHI: A Pakistani health worker administers polio drops to a child during a polio vaccination campaign in Karachi. — AFP

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NISSAN AL-BABTAIN NAMES \$10,000 GRAND PRIZE WINNER

Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Company (AABC), the exclusive agent of Nissan in the State of Kuwait, arranged a Grande raffle for its customers with the exclusive offers and gifts promised during Hala February 2016.

Nissan Al-Babtain Genuine parts arranged three weekly rounds for 10 winners each week during its February campaign and recently the grand raffle of \$10,000 cash in March in the presence of a large gathering of customers, company management and the ministry

of commerce officials. Mohammad Ghannam was the lucky winner of the Grande raffle. At a glittering ceremony at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, the winner was awarded his prize.

Nissan Al-Babtain Genuine Parts is known for always providing the customers with exceptional offers throughout the year and Hala February offer was a continuation of this year's surprises and will be followed by many more offers for all the loyal Nissan Genuine Parts customers.

KFH TAKES PART IN AUTISM ACTIVITIES

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) organized a number of activities on the occasion of the World Autism Awareness Day in collaboration with Kuwait Autism Center, as part of its corporate social responsibility and efforts to increase awareness of this disease.

KFH availed its media channels on social media to increase awareness, recognition and diagnosis of the disorder to help people recognize the early signs of autism. The bank also supports the government's efforts in this regard. It patronized a seminar themed 'My Journey with Autism' held by Kuwait Autism Center and attended by a number of parents and concerned parties such as teachers. Dr Robert Nasif from the US delivered a lecture showcasing his experience as a father and a specialist. He underlined the importance of increasing awareness of this disease in the society.



'MASALA COFFEE' LIVE SHOW IN KUWAIT

In order to commemorate its 13th anniversary celebrations, NAFO-Kuwait is organizing a live in concert by the one of the most sensational music bands "Masala Coffee" - the band brewed out of relentless urge to create music of all genres - topped with the sweetest nostalgia of Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam ingredients. The music fiesta will be held on the evening of Friday, 13th May, 2016, at the American International School, Maidan Hawally.

NAFO maintains an excellent track record of its past remarkable achievements that were accomplished through sincere and authentic showcasing of unique and astounding public socio-cultural super events. For example, in year 2011 & 2012, NAFO organized mega contemporary dance-music fest "Sangamam" by world renowned cultural fable 'Soorya-Arts Society' and "Samagamam" classical dance-music fiesta by renowned Mohiniyattom exponent Vineetha Nedungadi, playback singers Vivekanandan and Rajalakshmi.

In 2013, NAFO conducted a mega cultural

event - "Krishna" - by the renowned film actress and danseuse Padmasree Shobana and her 16-member team. Furthermore, in 2014, for the first time in Kuwait NAFO introduced the sensational band "Thaikkudam Bridge" presenting a mega musical event and in 2015 dance show "Antaram" by actress Suhasini Maniratnam, and renowned danseuse Gopika Varma. Each of the above breathtaking events were attended and witnessed by more than 1200 spectators. Contemporary dance-musical events of these type is being presented by NAFO, to spread the value of universal friendship, unity and harmony through music, art and culture.

This time the exclusive plug-in live show will be performed by the astounded sensational super band "Masala Coffee", comprising of twelve artists from Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and Kerala, having more than a million hits on YouTube. Several of them associating with legendary maestros in Indian Music, and are also popular stars in TV shows aired Asianet, Kappa Channel Mazhavil Manorama etc.

The band is earning phenomenal popularity worldwide with international touring, especially in the middle-east through their breath taking shows staged in Dubai, Sharja and Abu Dhabi, and also through more than 100 live shows staged in Indian metro cities during a span of last two years. The unique songs of the band got popularized majorly through social media networking sites and have now grown to become one of the most popular bands in India. In spite of it not being specifically classified either under pop, rock or metal etc., it will be no wonder if the band makes its presence felt in Kuwait as an example of how the modern generation is influenced by music that is not of a specific genre but, music of class. A crowd of more than 1,500 spectators is expected to attend and witness this most awaited unique musical extravaganza. Event convener, V R Anil Kumar informed that admission to the show will be strictly restricted through invitations/entry passes only.

Congratulations



Congratulations to Mr/Mrs Hamilton on the arrival of your new baby. May God guide and protect Endia Mary as she grows to be a blessing to your family. Greetings from friends and well-wishers.

IES CELEBRATES 125TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF DR AMBEDKAR

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (IES) paid homage to Dr B R Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Constitution of India, by celebrating his 125th birth anniversary in a befitting way on April 14, 2016 on the school premises. The program was graced by the auspicious presence of the Chief Guest Sunil Jain, the Ambassador of India to Kuwait. The other notable personages present for the august event were the Chairman of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Middle East, N K Ramachandran Menon, the Principal of IES, Vice Principals and the Supervisor Management.

The magnificent event unfurled with the unveiling of the new name of the school library, Dr Ambedkar Library and the inscription of the preamble of the constitution of India at the entrance of the library by the Chief Guest. The other major events of the day commenced auspiciously in the auditorium with the recitation of a verse from the Holy Quran which was followed by the rendition of the Kuwait National Anthem, and the Hindi prayer by the minstrels of the school choir. The lighting of the ceremonial lamp was conjointly performed by the chief guest, chairman, principal, vice principals and the librarians.

The proud gathering was welcomed by the principal, T Premkumar. The floral bouquet of love and respect was extended to the Chief Guest and the principal thanked the ambassador for accepting the invitation though at a very short notice. While welcoming, the principal enlightened the gathering about the main purpose of celebrating the 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr Ambedkar, and its relevance in the present time.

The icing on the cake of the day was the patriotic song rendered by the school choir which left the audience spellbound. Lianna Maria Joseph of 8C delivered a speech on Dr Ambedkar and his contributions to the country. The Chief Guest unveiled the portrait of Dr Ambedkar amidst thunderous applause, a glowing tribute to the Builder of the Modern India. It was indeed a learning environment for the students of grades seven and eight of IES, the key audience of the program, and they essentially imbibed the thoughts and principles of Dr Ambedkar, the First Indian to pursue a Doctorate degree in Economics. A wonderkind of IES, CBSE I stream Sambav Jain (Grade 7), brightened up the audience and won plaudits by reciting a poem on Dr Ambedkar. A classical dance performance by the budding artists of the primary section of IES further enlivened the audience. The multifarious events added entertainment and luster to the whole program. The Chief Guest, Sunil Jain, while addressing the audience, expressed his delight and pride in being a part of such a celebration, and considered it as a great opportunity to meet the young minds. He said that Dr Ambedkar, was the Epitome of Equality and Social Justice, who took the bull by its horns to be successful in his life. Jain stressed upon the challenges to be taken by the youth of the nation, and the key role they had to play to see their country in its best shape. He said, "Only mind can break all barriers in terms of speed.... speed of thinking is faster than the speed of sound....As students of the coming generation you should overcome all the barriers with your determined minds and thinking power".

N K Ramachandran Menon, the Chairman, Bhavans Middle East and the Principal, T Premkumar presented the Chief Guest a memento as a token of gratitude and respect of the Bhavans fraternity. Suresh V Balakrishnan the event coordinator and Vice Principal, CBSEI proposed the vote of thanks. Meenakshi Nayar, the HoD of Social Science, was the emcee of the program. The 125th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Dr B R Ambedkar solemnly concluded with the recital of the Indian National Anthem. The day also marked the first celebration in 2016, when Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has entered its 10th year of excellence in education in the Middle East.





The Kuwait National Guard recently concluded an anti-riot training course held in cooperation with the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS). British Ambassador to Kuwait Matthew Lodge attended the event, which was held under the patronage of Lieutenant General Hesham Al-Refaie, Undersecretary of the Kuwait National Guard.



SPA AQUATONIC INVITES YOU TO DESIGN YOUR OWN WELLNESS DAY PROGRAM

Spa Aquatonic of Crowne Plaza Kuwait Al-Thuraya City announced this week the launch of its new Design Your Own Wellness Package, giving spa enthusiasts the opportunity to treat themselves to a personalized day of relaxation and pampering. Clients can put together a program of three

treatments of their choice to be taken on the same day.

There are 18 massages, body scrubs and masks, as well as facial treatments to choose from, and the variety of treatments is broad: mineral lava body scrubs, plant essence body masks, leg-toning massages - just to

name a few. Professional results guaranteed, as all therapists are trained to the protocols of Thermes Marins de Saint-Malo, leader in French thalassotherapy. Commenting on the spa's new package, Imad Mosleh, Director of Spa Aquatonic: "With the hectic schedules of everyday life, it is important to take time out

to relieve stress. Spa Aquatonic is a place where you can disconnect yourself from the world and feel reborn." The award-winning spa is open every day of the week and features a 650 square meter large therapeutic pool incorporating specific water massage zones: jet baths, currents and counter-cur-

rents, bubble baths, counter-current walking zones, and showers, all of which treat different body parts by different intensity and positioning of water jets. In addition to the luxurious spa pool, Spa Aquatonic features an aqua-cycling space, 17 treatment rooms, and a relaxation room.

MMC EARNs ISO 22000 CERTIFICATE IN FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



MMC Catering began 2016 by acquiring the ISO 22000 Certificate in Food Safety Management Systems, achieving yet another success to add to its list of accomplishments, and reasserting the commitment to its customers towards maintaining consumer safety.

Commenting on this achievement, Mishari Al-Roudhan, MMC owner, said: "The Company has successfully passed yet another test. This achievement is dedicated to all our company employees for the great job they have done over the past few years."

Meanwhile, President Alexander Bitass said: "Acquiring the ISO 22000 certificate is considered an impor-

tant addition to the selection of certificates that we have previously earned. The certificate received, reasserts the management's commitment to following quality and safety standards, as well as the latest management standards at all of its facilities. Acquiring the certificate came after the company's central kitchen passed all audits in order to meet the international standards matching with the ISO 22000 international standard specifications for food safety."

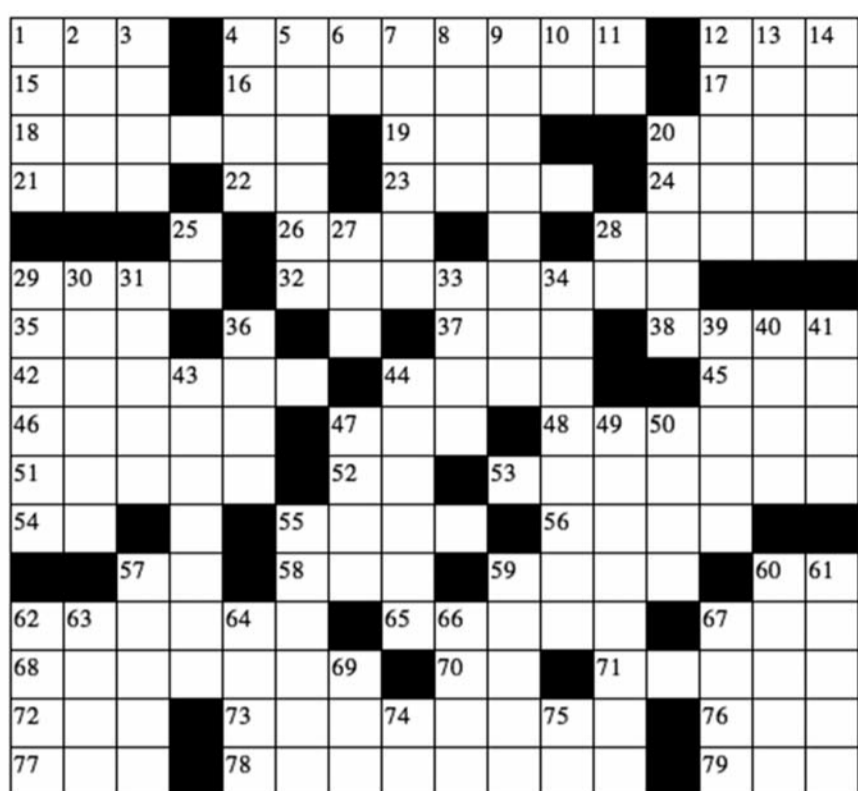
"The food safety management certificate is considered one of the highest standards for ensuring the safety of food products from natural, chemical and biological risks," Bitass added.

MMC Catering earned this international certificate for applying internationally approved quality standards, in addition to the food safety concept that the company adopts in all of its products. This certificate serves as evidence to the safety of the company's products, and the high-standard products it offers to its customers.

"Receiving this international certificate is an indication to the high-performance experiences and advanced capabilities that MCC Catering enjoys in this field, and to reassert the company's position and active role in the food sector," he added.



CROSSWORD 1229



ACROSS

1. An anxiety disorder characterized by chronic free-floating anxiety and such symptoms as tension or sweating or trembling of light-headedness or irritability etc that has lasted for more than six months.
4. Deserving blame or censure as being wrong or evil or injurious.
12. A self-funded retirement plan that allows you to contribute a limited yearly sum toward your retirement.
15. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
16. A skirt consisting of a rectangle of calico or printed cotton.
17. An enclosed space.
18. Soviet physicist who worked on low temperature physics (1908-1968).
19. An affirmative.
21. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
22. Half the width of an em.
23. A person who is entitled by law or by the terms of a will to inherit the estate of another.
24. A narrow thin strip of wood used as backing for plaster or to make latticework.
26. An accountant certified by the state.
29. Resembling or similar.
32. A common large finch of Eurasia.
35. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
37. (informal) Of the highest quality.
38. Unusually short.
42. Spread or daub over.
45. The compass point midway between east and southeast.
46. At full speed.
48. Cooked in hot water.
51. Long-tailed arboreal mustelid of Central and South America.
52. Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
53. Genus of North American herbs.
54. An associate degree in nursing.
56. An organic compound that contains a hydroxyl group bonded to a carbon atom which in turn is doubly bonded to another carbon atom.
58. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
62. Type genus of the Anhimidae.
65. Material consisting of seed coverings and small pieces of stem or leaves that have been separated from the seeds.
68. A loose cloak with a hood.
70. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
71. Jordan's port.
72. A defensive missile designed to shoot down incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles.
73. (Judaism) An eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem.
76. Extremely pleasing.
77. Mythical bird of prey having enormous size and strength.
78. Youthful appearance in an old person.
79. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. Offering fun and gaiety.
2. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may want to spend the morning in getting your own personal business out of the way. You pay bills, write letters and perhaps, make a list to guide you. You could find a lucky break where finances are concerned. A paycheck or a bonus check is soon arriving and you are pleased at the way your financial accounts are progressing. Pulling yourself out of old patterns may be difficult, but your hard work shows great improvement. This could also mean better money managing, no smoking or less fat in your food, etc. There are opportunities to have an adventure this evening. You may enjoy performing at a comedy club-really! You will be discovering that you have a wealth of talents just waiting to be seen!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Tremendous personal insight may come to you today. Any situation that seemed foggy or clouded in the past will become more clear and understandable now. This could come from reading a biography, attending a lecture, composing a poem or just looking through a photograph album. This is a period of transformation for you and if you accept the change, you can move into positive new directions. Today you think about what you have versus what you really want. If they are not one and the same, you may figure out how to make them the same. Doubts fade into the background and reserve is more and more a thing of the past. It is time for breaking out of a shell and letting yourself be known. Your destiny awaits you.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You will happily find that your financial capabilities are more solvent now. It is to your best advantage to continue to save and have your finances divided into good risk investments. If you need advice along this line, plan to make an appointment next week to learn or find the best ways to invest. This afternoon is a good time for surrounding yourself with friends and young people and for having a good time. You enjoy support from those around you. You also may set aside some time to enjoy one of your hobbies today. Perhaps gardening is a good stress-relief for you. Gardening involves creating and caring for a living thing-a work of art in its own right. Hobbies are a wonderful way to eliminate frustration and enjoy your own, personal, creative talents.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Whether you are male or female, the family chores can become quite tedious and boring. Cooperation in redistributing domestic responsibilities among family members builds a strong family unit. An occasional change of chores allows a little variety. Emotional security, a sense of belonging and nurturing are felt instinctively now. Relationships are capable of transformation in positive ways. This is a time of real inner growth through other people. You could also be most persuasive with others and helpful in getting someone else's plans off the ground. You appear most charming this evening and may enjoy being entertained by young people. Patience is a good thing to practice tonight; results are peaceful.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may have a hard time being clearheaded this morning. Thoughts and ideas that come to you just now may be misleading. An early morning walk may help. Take some time with your chores and with your errands this morning in order to save yourself a trip back home or the need to start over with your efforts. You enjoy your day and encourage others to become involved in some cleaning chores; whistle while you work. An animal gets your close attention this afternoon. Your right hemisphere gets a workout this evening as your friends may coax you to improvise in some fun activity. Everyone is laughing! Someone new and romantic comes into your life. Ask questions; learn about likes and dislikes, favorite childhood memories, etc.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Most of this morning is spent in shopping duties and chores. This afternoon could be spent in writing or some other creative project. This is a time for imagination and creativity when it comes to ideas and thinking. This is coupled with the ability to put your thoughts into the way you have of charming and captivating. Writing poetry or a short story, or just planning the events for next week, keeps you quite busy. Young people enjoy your attention. You reflect the feelings of those around you and these young people are full of positive energy. Later today you may want to discuss some ideas you have for changes around the house-especially with a drawing or picture. This is a good time to plan your push toward these changes.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Puttering around in the garage, a workroom or an art room may be where your interests are focused today. You may be inventing or creating all sorts of useful things. A friend who is starting a new business may want to sell you something. This could put you in an awkward position if you do not want to buy. Sometimes being truthful is the only way to go! Otherwise you will be running away from this person all weekend long. You are lucky in money today. There will be invitations from friends to enjoy their fellowship. If there are emotional wounds between you and a loved one, there will be an opportunity to repair those wounds. You would not want to miss the wonderfully close times you and your loved one can enjoy.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your friends and family will notice your positive frame of mind. You will enjoy doing creative things with others today. A wreath on the door or a new mailbox may be a fun project this weekend. You need to express your creative side, and even if all you do is prepare a special dinner, it will make you feel more excited about you and your abilities. In-depth discussions and probing conversations find you at your mental best. There are many answers you have received but have not yet heard-listen. Focus your insights on discovery and not self-criticism. Your analytical abilities are at a high point. A loved one will enjoy your attempts at cooking a special meal this evening. Romance is quite possible tonight. Relax to music.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You have certainly been involved in lots of activities lately. You may decide that this is the day to stay home and relax. Fortunately, you have chosen a day that a relative calls or comes by to visit. This is someone you have not heard from in a very long time. You may enjoy your family more than usual this weekend. You may find yourself reflecting on your own youth or some event in the past. The creative writer in you may wish you had logged a few funny moments as you visit with family this evening. Why not start a memory jar-go back later and write your stories from the little pieces of paper upon which you write down prophetic or funny antidotes you put in this jar. There is a chance to have a special time with someone you love this evening.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may have difficulty feeling upbeat. Perhaps this restful day will be most beneficial-you have been overloaded with work lately. Take a walk outside and enjoy your day off away from work-it's okay to be moody occasionally for a little while. A family member plans a special event and asks for your help. A friendship grows closer as a result of all the times you share your thoughts and feelings. A feeling of being at peace in your life is comforting and you are appreciative. You may express your appreciation to those around you. In your spare time this afternoon you may continue to teach yourself some music or a musical instrument. If another member of your family or a friend plays an instrument, it may be fun to play together.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You and a loved one could begin this day with an early morning bicycle ride. You find yourself visiting and communicating with your friends most of the day. The overall attitude of everyone is good and you are in a mood to communicate with anyone. A vision received during a dream or daydream can predict the future, so take some time to unravel its meaning. You may find yourself in long conversations about dreams and what they might mean to you. A friend who is involved in an interesting area of metaphysics may bring you along to a fun class or gathering; you gain insight and may return for more. A local community activity brings new friends to you. General good feelings and a sense of support and harmony make this a happy time.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have certainly earned a vacation but if you will not be taking a vacation soon, you will probably be planning for one in the near future. You may remember and talk about past vacations and events in order to help you find the common thread for the new plans. Through the end of the spring months, you will find the days are a little easier to maneuver through-people in general just seem happier. A backyard barbecue may attract the neighbors this afternoon. Perhaps they can cook their favorite meal to go with the barbecue ribs you cook. This is a good time for surrounding yourself with friends and young people and for having a good time. Quick answers, great wit and a surplus of insights and solutions are easy to find.

WORD SEARCH

Human Skeleton & Organs

Find and circle all of the skeletal parts and body organs that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

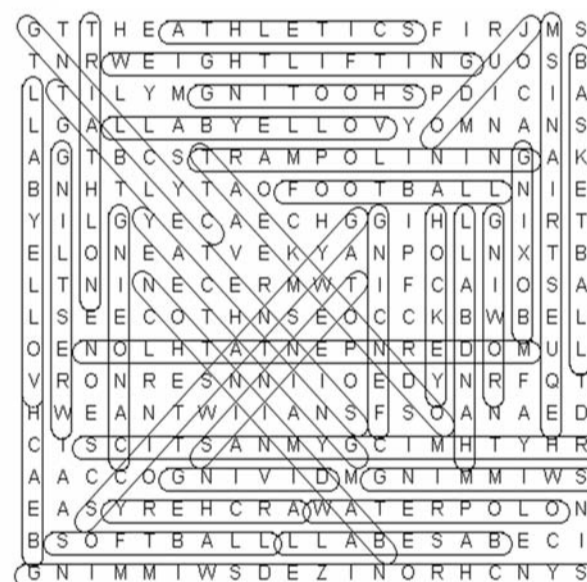
Note: TARSALS and METATARSALS are hidden separately and do not overlap. The same goes for CARPALS and METACARPALS, and BLADDER and GALLBLADDER.



- | | | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| Skeleton: | - CARPALS | - PATELLA | Organs: | - APPENDIX | - LIVER |
| - CLAVICLE | - PHALANGES | - BLADDER | - LUNGS | - PANCREAS | - SKIN |
| - COCCYX | - RADIUS | - BRAIN | - SPLEEN | - STOMACH | - VOICE BOX |
| - CRANIUM | - RIBS | - GALLBLADDER | - HEART | - INTESTINES | - KIDNEYS |
| - FEMUR | - SACRUM | - STERNUM | - TARSALS | - MANDIBLE | - TIBIA |
| - FIBULA | - SCAPULA | - TARSALS | - MANDIBLE | - TIBIA | - ULNA |
| - HUMERUS | - STERNUM | - TARSALS | - MANDIBLE | - TIBIA | - ULNA |
| - INNOMINATE | - TARSALS | - MANDIBLE | - TIBIA | - ULNA | - VERTEBRA |
| - METACARPALS | - METATARSALS | - VERTEBRA | | | |

Yesterday Solution

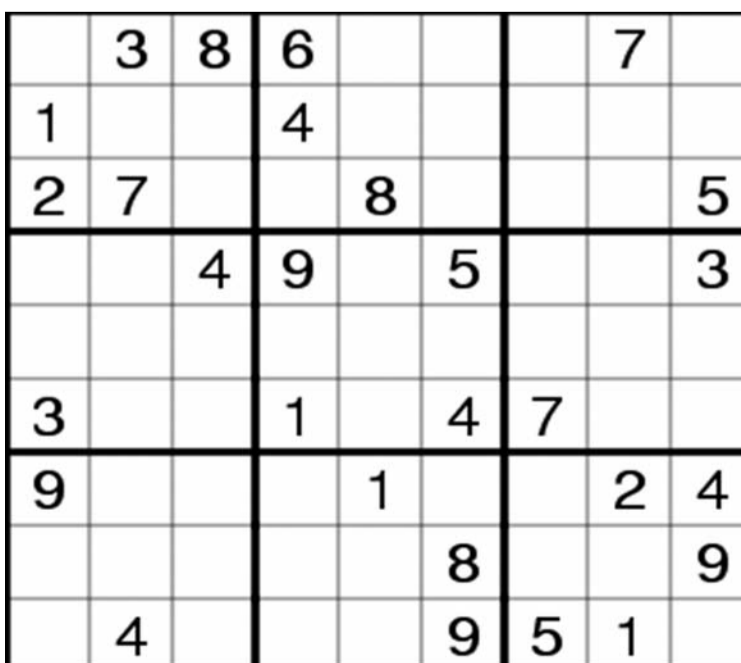
Summer Olympics



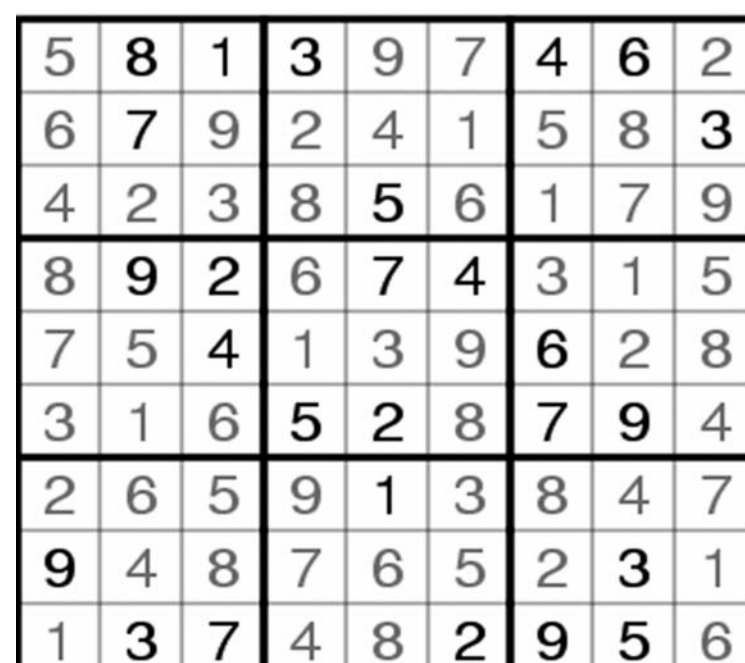
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|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------------|---------|----------|------------|----------|--------|------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|---------------|-----------|----------|
| ARCHERY | ATHLETICS | BADMINTON | BASEBALL | BASKETBALL | BEACH VOLLEYBALL | BOXING | CANOING | CYCLING | DIVING | EQUESTRIANISM | FENCING | FOOTBALL | GYMNASTICS | HANDBALL | HOCKEY | JUDO | MODERN PENTATHLON | RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS | ROWING | SHOOTING | SOFTBALL | SWIMMING | SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING | TABLE TENNIS | TAEKWONDO | TENNIS | TRAMPOLINING | TRIATHLON | VOLLEYBALL | WATER POLO | WEIGHTLIFTING | WRESTLING | YACHTING |
|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------------|---------|----------|------------|----------|--------|------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|---------------|-----------|----------|

The hidden sentence is: THE FIRST OLYMPIC GYMNAST TO ACHIEVE A PERFECT SCORE OF TEN WAS NADIA COMANECI

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



CBS and Big Ticket claim an agent was paid \$17 million 'for doing nothing'

Big Ticket Television and CBS said in a court filing that talent agency Rebel Entertainment Partners was paid \$17 million in package fees "for doing nothing" for the TV series "Judge Judy," and didn't even represent star Judy Sheindlin.

Rebel Entertainment Partners filed suit against Big Ticket and CBS last month, claiming that it has not received contractually obligated payments for "Judge Judy" since 2010, because the show is losing money due to Sheindlin's annual salary of as much as \$47 million. Rebel, led by Richard Lawrence, is a successor agency to Abrams-Rubaloff & Lawrence.

In their response to the complaint, CBS and Big Ticket claim that Lawrence pitched a Judge Judy project to syndicators, but did not disclose that he did not represent Sheindlin. He did represent the producers, Sandi Spreckman and Kaye Switzer, who had interested Sheindlin in doing a show.

According to the response, Big Ticket entered into a packaging agreement with Lawrence's agency ARL to pay 3% of the final production budget of each episode and 5% of Big Ticket's "defined proceeds" from the project.

Their response claims that Lawrence "intended to conceal the fact that he did not actually represent Judge Sheindlin, and was motivated to conceal the true nature of the extent of his representation of the project as a 'package' in order to extract an unjustified commission for 'packaging services' from Big Ticket." CBS and Big Ticket contend that Lawrence and his agency continued to collect commissions long after Spreckman and Switzer were terminated.

"Judge Sheindlin, her producers and crew have worked for 20 years in producing a successful syndicated program," CBS and Big Ticket said. "Lawrence has never been on the set of the program in 20 years, nor has he had any communication with his talent."

Sheindlin renewed her deal with CBS in 2013 and signed an extension in 2015. Rebel Entertainment Partners claimed in its suit, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, that in "the six-month accounting period after Scheindlin's pay raise ... defendants reported net profits of negative \$3,195,217." The suit also claims that "in the six-month accounting period prior to Scheindlin's pay raise, the show reported net profits of \$3,572,195, of which 5% (\$178,609) was paid to Rebel."

The suit called Sheindlin's salary "grossly inconsistent with customary practice in the television industry." Sheindlin is not named as a plaintiff in the suit, but last month she called the lawsuit "laughable." Rebel, which is seeking undisclosed damages, claims that "Judge Judy" has grossed \$1.7 billion since it premiered in 1996, and that Rebel received regular payments for the show until 2010.

James Curry and Benjamin O. Aigboboh of Sheppard Mullin represented Big Ticket and CBS. Attorneys Bryan Freedman and Jordan Sussman are representing Rebel. Freedman has represented Variety's parent company PMC in multiple legal matters. The response to the lawsuit was first reported by Deadline Hollywood. — Reuters



Television Judge Judy Sheindlin, whom this case centers around



Families sue after US sperm bank 'used psychotic convict'

Three Canadian families are suing a sperm bank and its distributor alleging they were given sperm from a convicted felon diagnosed with multiple mental disorders but told he was a genius.

At least 36 women in Britain, Canada and the United States are believed to have been inseminated with the donor's sperm over the past decade, resulting in pregnancies. "It's horrifying," lawyer James Fireman told AFP Friday. "These couples were seeking assistance to build a family and were very vulnerable, they put their faith in the (cryobank) industry, and this happens."

In a claim filed this week, the families allege Xytex Corp.,

based in the US state of Georgia, and Ontario's Outreach Health Services misled them. The plaintiffs are seeking \$11.7 million in damages. None of the allegations have been proven in court.

They allege the companies fabricated the donor's IQ, and said the man was extremely healthy and working towards a PhD in neuroscience engineering. The families—who each had one child using the man's sperm—learned his true identity only when Xytex inadvertently included his contact information in an email to them.

A quick Internet search and a subsequent investigation revealed the donor was actually a 39-year-old Georgia man

who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, narcissistic personality disorder, drug-induced psychotic disorder and significant grandiose delusions.

He had been jailed for burglary and other crimes and dropped out of university 20 years ago, although he eventually returned and last year graduated with a bachelor's degree. According to the claim, the companies continued to sell his sperm even after being informed of the discrepancies in 2014. — AFP

Seattle compost ordinance rotten

A Seattle ordinance that bars people from throwing their coffee grounds, pizza scraps and other potential compost into their trash cans is being challenged by critics who say the liberal city is turning garbage collectors into trash investigators.

A group of homeowners has sued the city over the tactic, claiming it violates privacy protections provided by the state Constitution. The rule that went into effect early last year requires trash collectors to tag garbage cans that contain more than 10 percent compostable material with educational information.

The tactic is projected to divert as much as 38,000 tons of extra food waste from a landfill every year. Several other cities have passed similar food waste laws, including Vancouver, B.C., San Francisco and Portland, Oregon.

Tad Seder, a lawyer for Seattle, said during a court hearing Friday on the lawsuit that garbage collectors are simply glancing at the trash to see if there is any obvious compost. They already look for dangerous items and a host of other banned materials such as paint cans, he said. However, Ethan W. Blevins, an attorney with Pacific Legal Foundation, contends the ordinance requires collectors to make a deeper dive into the private waste of Seattleites.

The case is about "whether the city of Seattle can engage in widespread and frequent inspections of residents' garbage cans without a warrant," Blevins said. He cited a case that was argued in front of the

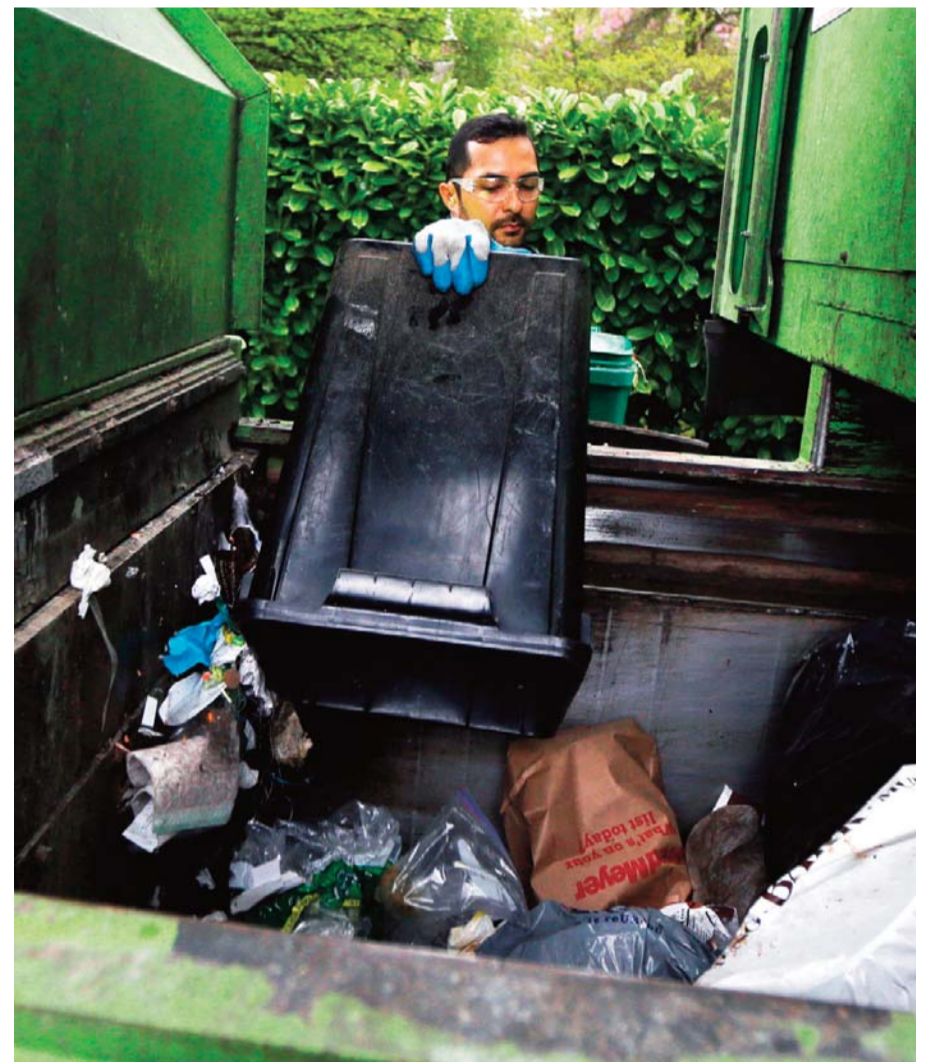
Washington Supreme Court in which Port Townsend police searched a man's garbage for evidence that he was selling drugs after the trash was placed on a curb.

The court ruled police needed a warrant to search the rubbish, even if it was in plain view near the sidewalk. Blevins also presented an affidavit from someone claiming they were tagged for compost violations twice when their trash had been secured in black plastic bags, suggesting collectors opened the bags to search for compost.

Seder said garbage collectors are not police and they're not looking for criminal evidence. The ordinance is a good faith effort to bring people up to speed on the benefits of composting, he said.

Collectors are not supposed to open garbage bags or root around in open bags, but they are required to report flagrant violations of the ordinance, he added. "If you have half of your garbage can filled with pizza crusts, they're going to put a tag on it," he said.

The city initially intended to fine violators a dollar for each offense - a tactic that has been indefinitely delayed, according to Andy Ryan, a spokesman for Seattle Public Utilities. Blevins hopes Judge Beth M. Andrus will invalidate the law entirely. She is expected to rule before April 30. — AP



SEATTLE: David Morales, a garbage driver with Recology, dumps a garbage container for Seattle Public Utilities on Friday. — AP

Kiwi Pastafarians the first to legally tie noodly knot



WELLINGTON: Karen Martyn from the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster poses in her pirate outfit that she wore at the church's first legally recognized wedding yesterday. — AFP

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster held the world's first legally recognized marriage in New Zealand yesterday, with the offbeat movement hailing it as a milestone toward acceptance as a real religion.

Church adherents call themselves pastafarians, wear colanders on their heads, revere pirates and believe the world was created by a giant deity made of spaghetti.

But while they have a love of pasta-based puns and celebrate holidays such as "Talk Like a Pirate Day", followers insist their religion is no joke. New Zealand officials agree, giving Wellington-based pastafarian Karen Martyn the legal right to conduct marriages last month after ruling the church was based on genuine philosophical convictions.

Martyn conducted her inaugural wedding as an ordained "ministeroni" yesterday, when Toby Ricketts and Marianna Young became the first couple in the world to "tie the noodly knot" in a legally recognized ceremony. "It's a formal recognition that we are a church and that's just great," she told AFP ahead of the ceremony.

She said many more weddings were planned, including same-sex unions, which were legalized in New Zealand in 2013. "I've had people from Russia, from Germany, from Denmark, from all over contacting me and wanting me to marry them in the church because of our non-discriminatory philosophy. "We will marry any consenting legal adults who meet the legal requirement."

The wedding took place on a charter vessel decorated

as a pirate ship at the South Island town of Akaroa, with guests dressed in costume. Ricketts, a filmmaker who discovered pastafarianism while making a documentary about religion, said he knew some people may not take the marriage seriously.

"That's kind of what attracted us to it," he told AFP. "We were never planning to get married and have a conventional wedding but this allowed us to do it in a way that we're comfortable... our families are 100 percent behind us."

Prophet and hammock enthusiast

Pastafarianism first appeared in a 2005 open letter written by Bobby Henderson to the Kansas Board of Education in protest over its decision to teach intelligent design in schools. Henderson, 36, a self-described "hammock enthusiast" and computer nerd from Oregon, is regarded as the prophet of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM).

He argued that believing a pasta god made the universe was as no less valid than intelligent design, a form of creationism promoted by Christian fundamentalists, as both theories had no scientific merit.

Since then it has gained popularity and Henderson's website venganza.org details member activities ranging from public parades to campaigns for the right to wear colanders on driving license photographs. "New Zealand is one of the few places that has formally recognized us," he told AFP via email.

'Serious about beliefs'

Not all are happy with the decision, including professor Peter Lineham, a religious history specialist at New Zealand's Massey University. "I am not at all convinced there's a genuine statement of values (in the church)," he told Fairfax New Zealand when the original decision was handed down.

"I know some people who think The Force is rather more meaningful than a spaghetti monster," he added, saying FSM was essentially a satirical body that mocked religion. Martyn disputed the view and said a strong belief system underpinned FSM.

"We are anti-discrimination on any basis for any reason and we truly believe there should be a complete separation of church and state," she said. "We believe in challenging ourselves and other religions and challenging cultural superstitions... we're very serious about our beliefs."

She said there was a major distinction between a joke church and a church that can take a joke and laugh at itself, such as the FSM. "Laughter is the best medicine and it makes life much better and maximises our happiness," she said. "We embrace that to the fullest extent." — AFP



Actress Sharon Stone, 'Working model' Naomi Campbell and singer Mary J. Blige.



Mary J. Blige performing during the show.



Givenchy Designer Riccardo Tisci and Legendary Supermodel Kate Moss.

The 4th Annual amfAR Inspiration Gala in Sao Paulo

Friday night was all about dancing below the equator as amfAR hosted their fourth annual Inspiration Gala in Sao Paulo at the home of Dinho Diniz. Naomi Campbell acted as the evening's host, presenting honorees Nizan Guanaes and Donata Meirelles with the Humanitarian Award.

But the real fun started when amfAR global fundraising chairman

Sharon Stone conducted a live auction that included Moët & Chandon champagne and the opportunity to sit in the brand's box at the 2015 French Open.

Kate Moss, dressed in a bold red frock with tassel detail from Saint Laurent, served an ace when she announced that she would sign the winning bidder's bottle of bubbly. Taking in the action were Riccardo

Tisci, Izabel Goulart, Francisco Costa, and Candice Swanepoel, who witnessed a bidding war break out over private boxing lessons with UFC champion Anderson Silva.

Finally, as the evening came to a close, Mary J. Blige took to the stage to sing and celebrate everyone's efforts in raising \$2.7 million with a rousing performance of her hit "No More Drama."



Models showcasing Monique Lhuillier's Spring Summer 2017 Bridal Collection.



Bridal Spring Summer 2017



NEW YORK CITY: Designer Reem Acra greets the audience after presenting her Bridal Spring/Summer 2017 Runway Show at her Showroom on Friday. — AFP

Cannes Critics Week joins forces with Leica to spotlight Short Films

Critics' Week has enlisted a new backer, Leica, the century-old German camera manufacturer, to support emerging talent whose shorts are competing at the Cannes sidebar. As part of the sponsorship, Leica will give a prize for the best short film. The award will comprise a 4000 Euros grant to help a director make his or her first feature-length film. "For Leica it made sense to ally with Critics' Week because it's a decently-sized section that is highly committed to finding and nurturing great new talent," said Tommaso Vergallo, rep of film products at Leica. Leica will also give each director a camera so that they'll have the opportunity to shoot a portrait of the festival, added Vergallo.

Critics Week, meanwhile, will invite high-profile cinematographers to participate in daily luncheons at its privatized beach. The alliance with Leica underscores Critics' Week's recent efforts to turn the spotlight on short films, as seen with the Next Step program. Now in its second edition, Next Step is a five-day workshop organized in collaboration with the TorinoFilmLab dedicated to helping the 10 directors who are presenting their shorts at Critics' Week to develop their feature debut.

Andrea Arnold, Francois Ozon, Gaspar Noe, Justin Kurzel ("Macbeth"), Claire Burger and Marie Amachoukeli ("Party Girl") are among the filmmakers who were revealed at Critics' Week after showing their short film, said Remi Bonhomme, general coordinator at Critics' Week. The second edition of Next Step, which was hosted in December, showed Cecile Ducrocq whose short "La contre allée" won this year's Cesar (France's Oscar equivalent).



Dr. Andreas Kaufmann, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Leica Camera.

Ducrocq's first feature project is "Love on the Beach," an anthropology-themed romantic comedy turning on a volunteer engineer who finds himself living with the sexually hyperactive Dowayos people somewhere in the Senegalese savannah. Other directors who participated in the second Nextstep workshop included Germany's Patrick Vollrath, Sweden's Isabella Carbonell, Brazil's Joao Paulo Miranda, Indonesia's Lucky Kuswandi, France's Yann Delattre, the US's Sonejhi Sinha, Romania's Andrei Cretulescu, Italy's Fulvio Risuleo and China's Hu Wei.

Last year, Next Step also included panels with music composers to encourage directors to incorporate that aspect into their projects' creative development, pointed out Bonhomme, who helps Critics' Week's artistic director Charles Tesson make the selection.

Critics' Week gathered a solid team of experts and consultants to counsel filmmakers attending the last workshop. These included Antonio Piazza and Fabio Grassadonia, the directors of "Salvo," Julien Lilti, the helmer of "Hippocrate," Didar Domehri, producer at Full House ("Bang Gang"), Laure Caillol, acquisition/co-production/distribution exec at Haut et Court ("The Returned," "The Lobster"), Thomas Pibarot, head of acquisition at Le Pacte ("Timbuktu"), Juliette Schrameck, head of sales and acquisition at MK2.—Reuters



NEW YORK CITY: Comedian Chris Rock and director, producer, screenwriter and composer J.J. Abrams chat at the Tribeca Film Festival.

J.J. Abrams talks TV Show ideas with Chris Rock at Tribeca Film Festival

A half-hour drama created by J.J. Abrams and starring Chris Rock? That was just one of the topics of conversation to come up in a far-ranging public discussion between Abrams and Rock at the Tribeca Film Festival, during which Abrams also apologized for overdoing it on the lens flares, revealed his personal conception of God and refused to answer a pre-teen in the audience who asked him who Rey's parents are.

Speaking with an easy rapport at an event that was part of the Tribeca Talks series of public conversations, the two spitballed an idea for a TV show when Rock asked Abrams what he should be doing in television.

Abrams shot back, "If I nail it, will you do it with me?" "Sure," Rock agreed. "I'm probably a single-camera show," he added. "My skill set is multi-camera, but what's gonna keep me interested, keep me intrigued, in doing 50-whatever shows is probably single camera."

Related John Krasinski Circle J.J. Abrams' "God Particle" Abrams noted, "Usually when I do story meetings, it's with less than 1,200 people," before extolling the virtues of his favorite TV show of all time, "The Twilight Zone," which was a rare half-hour drama. So he's thinking Rock would be good in that format. "A 'Louie' show, a 'Louie' kind of thing, that would be amazing for you," he said.

"I'm down," Rock answered. Rock, who had previously worked with Abrams on the movie parody segments on this year's Oscar telecast, kicked off the Tribeca conversation by asking about Abrams' childhood love of film. The director of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" and "Star Trek" recalled deciding he wanted to be a movie director at age eight, following a visit to Universal Studios.

Abrams' beginnings

A year or two after that, Abrams' father became a film producer himself, prompting Rock to crack, "What job did you get that you didn't deserve? There's gotta be one." "I want to say

"Star Wars," Abrams joked back. The writer-director-producer then recalled how his early screenplay work on films including "Regarding Henry" led eventually to "Felicity," the WB series with Keri Russell that established him as a wunderkind TV creator. He said that "Alias," his spy series with Jennifer Garner, grew out of an idea he had during the early days of "Felicity."

Related J.J. Abrams Producing Greg Grunberg's Graphic Novel Adaptation "When you don't have a bad guy of some sort, episode two is really hard to come up with," he said of "Felicity." "Because first of all, the show took place in college, so it was like, 'Ooh, she got a B!' We were trying to figure out what the story was, and I remember we were on episode five or something, pulling our hair out, and I said in the writer's room, 'If Felicity were a spy, I'd know how to write the show.'"

When the discussion moved on to cinema, Abrams acknowledged that the fanbases for "Star Wars" and "Star Trek," the two franchises he has been involved in rebooting, "are bigger than all of us." "Could you direct 'Fantastic Four?'" Rock asked. "I love the Fantastic Four, and they keep f-ing it up." Soon thereafter, Rock wondered aloud about the lens flares that became Abrams' signature on the "Star Trek" films—and earned him his fair share of mockery.

"I'm over that," he promises. "For a period of time, on 'Star Trek,' there was this idea we had that the future was so bright that it just couldn't be contained. I overdid it, then I went further, and then on the second 'Star Trek' movie I went nuts. We all make mistakes. Mine were with light. We literally had flashlights. The flares weren't put in in post. We had these flashlights and we aimed them right at the lens."

Abrams and Rock also discussed the process of working on "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" and incorporating the characters from the initial "Star Wars" trilogy into the new characters and storylines Abrams and his team had brought to the table. "We knew this movie was a bridge," he said.

Speaking of one of those new characters, Abrams refused to give out any clues as to the parentage of Rey, the young

woman played by Daisy Ridley in "The Force Awakens." "Rey's parents are not in Episode VII, so I can't possibly in this moment tell you who they are," he said to the young audience member who asked him point-blank to throw him a bone. "But this is all I will say: It is something that Rey thinks about too."

Other tidbits to come up in the discussion included the fact that Abrams is a fan of the Duplass brothers—he noted their involvement in both "Transparent" and "Togetherness," two series he admires and would love to work someday with Meryl Streep or Tribeca festival co-founder Robert DeNiro. Rock, meanwhile, would want to direct Denzel Washington in a comedy.

"You can be in it too," Abrams suggested. "Oh, I'm in it," Rock responded. "Kevin Hart ain't in it, I'll tell you that." The evening also, unexpectedly, touched on Abrams' feeling about God, in the wake of a question from a "Star Wars" super-fan (dressed in a Darth Vader-like black cape) about the Force and the filmmaker's own spiritual ideas.

"In all honesty, I don't know if I believe in God," he admitted. "But I do know that when my mother, who passed away a few years ago, was sick, I did find myself connecting with, talking to, thinking about things in a way that I never had before. It's a funny thing, because what George Lucas did so brilliantly was he told a story ... that was about a spiritual connection that we all have."

He went on, "There's something about the notion of all of us being connected, every living thing, that is profound and beautiful and resonant and somewhat true. I don't think, when I was talking to myself in my head, that anyone was listening, but I know that there is something that connects us. There has to be. I love what George did in that regard." — Reuters



Actors Kevin Hart and Dwayne Johnson in the previous film they worked together on 'Central Intelligence'.

Kevin Hart, Dwayne Johnson circling 'Jumanji' reimagining

Sony is getting closer to rebooting a Robin Williams classic with two of the busiest actors in town. Sources tell Variety Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart are in early talks to star in Sony's "Jumanji," a new adaptation of Chris Van Allsburg's original 1981 adventure book.

Schedules are still being worked out, as both Johnson and Hart have heavy production loads ahead, but insiders say things are moving toward a deal. Johnson has an opening this fall with his New Line pic "Rampage" possibly shifting to 2017. The plan would be to shoot "Jumanji" before the third season of his HBO series "Ballers." Johnson will also shoot "Fast 8" this summer, reprising his role of Agent Hobbs.

Hart is expected to shoot "The Intouchables" remake for Weinstein this summer opposite Bryan Cranston, and according to sources, working out this part of the schedule could

prove difficult. The pair showed great chemistry after co-hosting the MTV Movie Awards, and with anticipation high for their upcoming New Line action comedy "Central Intelligence," Sony sees this as the perfect opportunity to pair the two up again for a tentpole.

Jake Kasdan is on board to direct with the pic set to bow on July 28, 2017. Sony-based Matt Tolmach is producing the project with William Teitler. Ted Field, Mike Weber and Van Allsburg will executive produce. Principal photography is expected to start this August in Honolulu, HI.

The reboot's script has been written by Scott Rosenberg and Jeff Pinkner, based on a draft by the original writers, Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers. The 1995 "Jumanji" movie starred Williams, Kirsten Dunst, David Alan Grier, Bonnie Hunt, Jonathan Hyde and Bebe Neuwirth. The story centers on a 12-

year-old boy who becomes trapped in a board game in 1969 and is released 26 years later.

While the original was heavy on action elements, Williams' comedic talents helped deliver the light-hearted family adventure pic the studio wanted. Hart has demonstrated his physical comedy abilities in films like "Ride Along." Hart has already had a busy 2016 with "Ride Along 2" bringing in \$91 million at the domestic box office. His stand-up comedy pic "Kevin Hart: What Now?" bows Oct. 14 and he is also voicing a character in Illumination's "The Secret Life of Pets."

Hart is repped by UTA, 3 Arts Entertainment, and Schreck Rose Dapello and Adams. Johnson is repped by WME, manager Dany Garcia, and Gang, Tyre, Ramer & Brown. — Reuters

Michelle Pfeiffer and others join Jennifer Lawrence in Aronofsky's movie

Domhnall Gleeson, his brother Brian Gleeson, Michelle Pfeiffer and Ed Harris are in talks to join Jennifer Lawrence and Javier Bardem in Paramount's untitled domestic drama. Darren Aronofsky is on board to direct from his own script, which centers on a couple whose relationship is tested when uninvited guests arrive at their home and disrupt their tranquil existence. Aronofsky and his partners at Protozoa Pictures, Scott Franklin and Ari Handel are producing. The studio is planning to start production in June.

Domhnall Gleeson is best known for appearing as Bill Weasley in the final two "Harry Potter" films and as the villainous General Hux in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." The Irish actor also appeared in three other notable 2015 releases—"Ex Machina," "The Revenant" and "Brooklyn"—and has joined Netflix's "A Futile and Stupid Gesture" about the founding of National Lampoon.

Pfeiffer starred with Robert De Niro in Luc Besson's 2013 crime thriller "The Family," with the duo portraying a mafia couple in a witness protection program.

Brian Gleeson's highest-profile role came in "Snow White and the Huntsman." Paradigm reps the Gleesons. Pfeiffer is repped by CAA, Management 360 and Hirsch Wallerstein. The news was first reported by The Hollywood Reporter. — Reuters



Legendary Actress Michelle Pfeiffer.

Features

'The Missing' Writers Harry and Jack Williams Unveil Thriller 'Liar'

In the European Co-production Forum of next week's Series Mania, a festival in Paris dedicated to TV drama, a new project will be presented from brothers Harry and Jack Williams, the writers of child-abduction thriller "The Missing."

The six-part miniseries "Liar," which will be presented in Paris by distributor All3Media Intl. It will shoot in the fall in Bath, West England. The story centers on schoolteacher Laura, who is asked on a date by Andrew, the handsome single father of a child in her class. She's initially reluctant as she's only just broken up with her boyfriend. But to her surprise, she and Andrew have a great evening. He ends up coming back to her place to call a taxi. Cut to the next morning. Laura is lying in bed, a hollow look in her eyes. She goes to her sister's house to tell her that she has been raped.

Andrew doesn't deny that he and Laura slept together, but he furiously denies that it was rape. As the series unfolds, we start to question whether Laura's account of what happened is to be believed or if she's deliberately targeting an innocent man.

"Liar" is a "compelling and deeply emotional thriller." "It is a timely and frightening dissection of the politics of consent, the burden of proof and the destructive power of social justice," All3Media states.

The miniseries is the first full production from the Williams brothers' production company, Two Brothers Pictures, which was established in 2012. "The Missing," which made a big impact on the British drama scene, is now filming its second season in Brussels. The show, which they produced with New Pictures, aired on the BBC in the UK and Starz in the US. The Wall Street Journal



Brothers and Writers Harry and Jack Williams.

described it as "a hard-charging, unfailingly suspenseful mystery." It was nominated for an Emmy, a BAFTA and a Golden Globe.

Alongside the drama output are comedies "Fried" and "Tripped." Further dramas are in development. "This year's Series Mania sees us launching Two Brothers' first full production in 'Liar' to the international co-production market, at a time when 'The Missing' is receiving its much

anticipated French premiere and the second season is filming in Brussels. Jack and Harry have made a genuine impact on the British drama scene, and we at All3Media Intl. are delighted to be presenting Two Brothers to the European co-production community," Rachel Glaister, exec VP press and marketing says. — Reuters



Actor Courtney B. Vance and his wife Actress Angela Bassett.

Courtney B. Vance Joins Tom Cruise in 'The Mummy' Reboot

Hot on the heels of his critically acclaimed performance as Johnnie Cochran in FX's "The People v. O.J. Simpson," Courtney B. Vance has joined the cast of "The Mummy" for Universal Pictures—the first film in the studio's new production endeavor that will expand and unify a network of classic monster movies.

Tom Cruise, Annabelle Wallis and Sofia Boutella also star, in the film, which is set to bow on June 9, 2017. Vance will play a colonel in the pic. The studio tapped Alex Kurtzman and Chris Morgan last summer to help develop a monster universe with rebooted versions of the studio's classic films. Kurtzman is also on board to direct,

and will produce alongside Morgan and Sean Daniel.

Jon Spaihts is penning the script. Plot details are vague other than the fact that the pic will be set in the present day, unlike the previous three installments starring Brendan Fraser. Universal Executive VP of Production Jon Mone and VP of Development Jay Polidoro will oversee the project for the studio. Vance is represented by Gersh, Lighthouse Entertainment and attorney Darrell Miller of Fox Rothschild. Deadline Hollywood first reported the news. — Reuters



MIAMI: Palace Nursing & Rehab Center.

101-year-old Florida woman gets second chance at prom

A 101-year-old Florida woman is getting a second chance at prom. Eleanor Bessin says she attended her prom on a boat in Boston with a man she had been planning to marry. However, he went off to serve in World War II, and when he returned, he developed cancer and died. She still carries his picture.

Student government leaders from TERRA High School are setting up the dance

for about 75 seniors at the Palace Nursing & Rehab. Nursing home staff will vote for a prom king and queen during Thursday's prom. Resident Sadie Gilbert, 86, says she was never invited to her high school prom but will now get the chance to attend. — AP



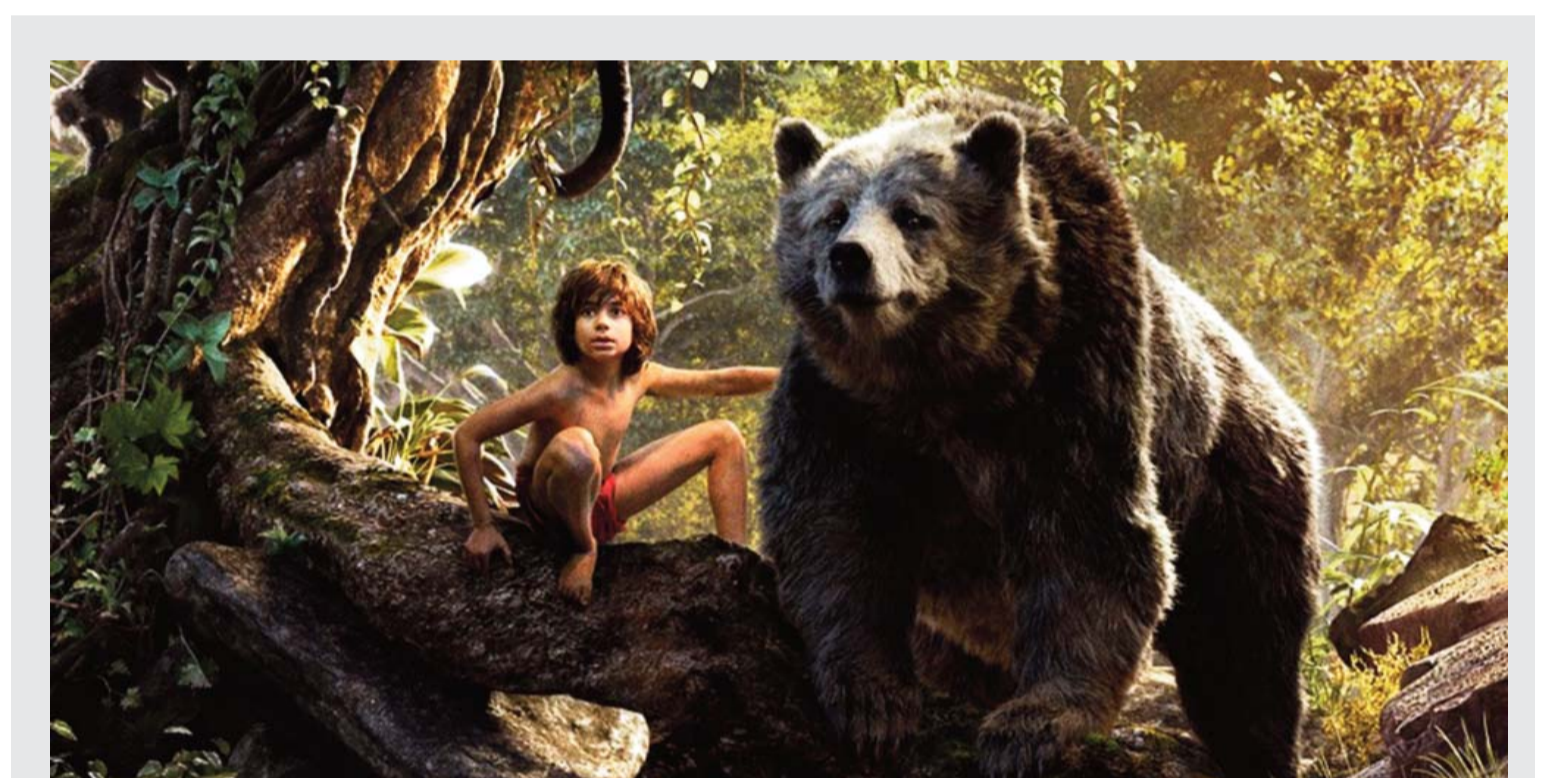
Beyonce Teases Mysterious 'Lemonade'

Beyonce and HBO teased a mysterious "world premiere event" called "Lemonade" yesterday. The singer and cabler posted a cryptic video on their sites and social media platforms about the airdate April 23, 9 p.m. ET. No further details were provided and HBO did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The brief clip shows Beyonce-sporting blonde braids and a fur coat-leaning against the hood of a car while she whispers "What am I gonna do love, what am I gonna do," with the phrase "gonna do" echoing. Rumors have swirled over the last few months that "Project Lemonade" is an album-film. The songstress started posting lemon-themed photos on Instagram six months ago.

Beyonce is no stranger to surprise reveals. She launched her Ivy Park clothing line two days ago, and it's been two months since she debuted a surprise first single and music video, "Formation," from her upcoming album ahead of her Super Bowl halftime performance. She also announced a world tour, which will kick off on April 27 in Miami. She's expected to release a new album later this year, but has not revealed a date.

She released her last album, Beyonce, as a surprise in 2013. HBO aired the 2014 special "On the Run Tour: Beyonce and Jay Z," as well as the 2013 documentary "Beyonce: Life Is but a Dream." — Reuters



A screen shot from the 'Jungle Book' movie.

'Jungle Book' Swinging to Huge \$87 Million Opening

Following past forecasts, Disney's "The Jungle Book" is dominating the US box office with an impressive \$87 million opening weekend at 4,028 sites, yesterday's estimates showed. "The Jungle Book" will notch the third-highest opening weekend of 2016 after "Batman v Superman" at \$166 million and "Deadpool" at \$132.4 million—and far ahead of Disney's "Zootopia" with \$75 million, which had been the top end of projections a few days ago.

The family-friendly tentpole, directed by Jon Favreau, soared to a robust \$32.4 million opening day Friday. The live action-CG hybrid has been embraced by critics, earning a 95% Rotten Tomatoes score, and by audiences with an A+ CinemaScore for the under 18 and over 50 demographics, along with an A rating for the under 25 and over 25 groups.

"The Jungle Book" also has a shot at becoming the second-best April launch of all time if it can top 2014's "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" at \$95 million. "Furious 7" set the April mark last year with \$147.1 million, while 2011's "Fast Five" is the third-highest grosser in April with \$86 million. "The Jungle Book," which carries a \$175 mil-

lion budget, is the latest in Disney's lucrative re-imagining of classic stories. "Cinderella" took in \$67.9 million on its debut weekend last year en route to a \$201.2 million domestic total and a \$542.7 million global haul. "Maleficent" opened two years ago with \$69.4 million on its way to a \$241.4 million domestic cume and \$758.5 million worldwide.

"The Jungle Book" is based on the 19th Century Rudyard Kipling stories about Mowgli, an abandoned human boy who becomes friends with jungle animals after being raised by wolves. Favreau's film includes Bill Murray voicing Baloo the bear, Ben Kingsley as Bagheera the panther, Scarlett Johansson as Kaa the snake and Lupita Nyong'o as the mother wolf Raksha. Newcomer Neel Sethi stars as Mowgli.

MGM-New Line's comedy sequel "Barber Shop: The Next Cut" should also generate solid business in its opening weekend with about \$20 million at 2,661 sites. Ice Cube, Cedric the Entertainer, Common, Regina Hall and Nicki Minaj star in the third installment of the franchise, with MGM overseeing production and Warner Bros. handling distribution. Critics have shown strong support

with a 91% Rotten Tomatoes score.

The fourth weekend of "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" and Melissa McCarthy's "The Boss" are both fading fast in a battle for third place. Warner Bros.' costly superhero tentpole is sliding about 60% to \$9.4 million at 3,505 locations to finish behind "The Boss," which dropped 59% to \$9.7 million at 3,495.

"Batman v Superman" will finish the weekend with about \$311 million in the US—with more than half of that taken in during its opening weekend. It crossed the \$500 million mark internationally on Wednesday.

Lionsgate's debut of its thriller "Criminal" is projected to open softly in the \$5.7 million range at 2,683 locations—well below recent forecasts in the \$7 million to \$9 million area. Kevin Costner stars as a death row inmate who's implanted with a dead CIA agent's memories to complete an unfinished assignment. — Reuters

Coachella Live Stream: How to Watch Online

Not in the desert this weekend? That's ok—you can avoid the long lines and pricey tickets by watching a free live stream of the Coachella Music and Arts Festival on YouTube. This year's headliners are Guns N' Roses, LCD Soundsystem and Calvin Harris. Other performers include Ice Cube, Sia, Major Lazer and ASAP Rocky. The two-weekend, three-day festival takes place April 15-17 and April 22-24 in Indio, California. — Reuters



A photo showing last year's Coachella festival.



Models wait at the paddock during qualifying for the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai yesterday. — AFP

Titanic anniversary: How the tragedy hit Hollywood and Broadway

April 15 marks the anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, which ended its maiden voyage disastrously in 1912. There have been many depictions of the sinking, including the 1953 Fox film "Titanic" and the 1958 "A Night to Remember." For many, the definitive version was James Cameron's 1997 "Titanic," the 11-time Oscar winner with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

Among the many dramatizations was a 1943 German propaganda film (sometimes referred to as "Nazi Titanic"), which combined fictional characters with the real-life events. That set the pattern for most subsequent depictions, including the 1953 edition (directed by Jean Negulesco, and starring Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck). When the British 1958 "Night to Remember" opened, it was an eye-opener, since the filmmakers emphasized realism, aiming for a documentary feel and basing much of the action on facts they learned from actual survivors.

That film, directed by Roy Ward Baker and starring Kenneth More as Second Officer Charles Lightoller, still remains the favorite of many Titanicians. While its realism was impressive, the film missed out on one detail: The boat was shown sinking in one piece. There had been conflicting reports from traumatized eyewitnesses, so generally filmmakers stuck with the theory that the Titanic ended intact. However, when the remains of the ship were discovered in 1985, divers found that the ship had indeed split in half, a detail that was crucial to Cameron's version.

When his film was in production in Mexico, the media reported breathlessly on every new detail of its budget increases and its delays in completion. Variety had a "Titanic Watch" logo on its stories, a clear indication that these reports were going to be an ongoing feature for many months. Finally the film opened on Dec. 19, 1997, and while critical reaction was mixed, every reviewer made mention of the budget, which was estimated at a record-breaking \$200 million.

Nobody predicted that the film would break records in every other area. It was the first film to pass \$1 billion at the box office. It tied the Oscar record with 14 nominations and 11 wins. The soundtrack and theme song ("My Heart Will Go On") were mega-hits. It was the first DVD to sell 1 million copies. Though there is no data to prove it, the film probably increased the sale of Kleenex as well.

People responded to the central love story, but the re-creation of the Titanic and the breakthrough visual effects-

contributed to the emotional power of the film.

Like most of the other film and TV depictions, Cameron's film concentrated on the events from the onboard perspective. Few people write about the effect on the rest of the population. And Variety Archives show that it had a profound effect on people, similar to such events as 9/11 or the Paris terrorist attacks last November. After the sinking, the White Star line sent out a report saying the ship had survived the iceberg and that everyone was fine. When the public learned the truth, they were shaken and depressed.

On April 20, 1912, a Variety story was headlined "Paralyzing Titanic Terror Casts Pall Over Theatres." The article said that attendance had dropped steeply at theaters

and restaurants in the past week; the audiences who opted to attend the theater were glum, while various musical and comedy shows "had an air of funeral services."

The ship hit an iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on April 14; three hours later, it split in half and sank; of the 2,224 passengers, 1,500 were killed. News traveled more slowly in those days, and on the evening of April 15, people in New York proceeded as usual.

Related Film Review: Titanic (1997)

Variety reported that the unnamed sister of Benjamin Guggenheim went to the Winter Garden that evening: "She had been assured in the afternoon that everything was all right, following the false report sent out by the White Star

line that the Titanic was being towed into Halifax." During the show, one of the men in her theater party stepped out for a drink and then "With almost unpardonable stupidity, brought the young woman information about the probable fate of her brother. ... She promptly dropped into a dead faint, almost precipitating a panic in the music hall."

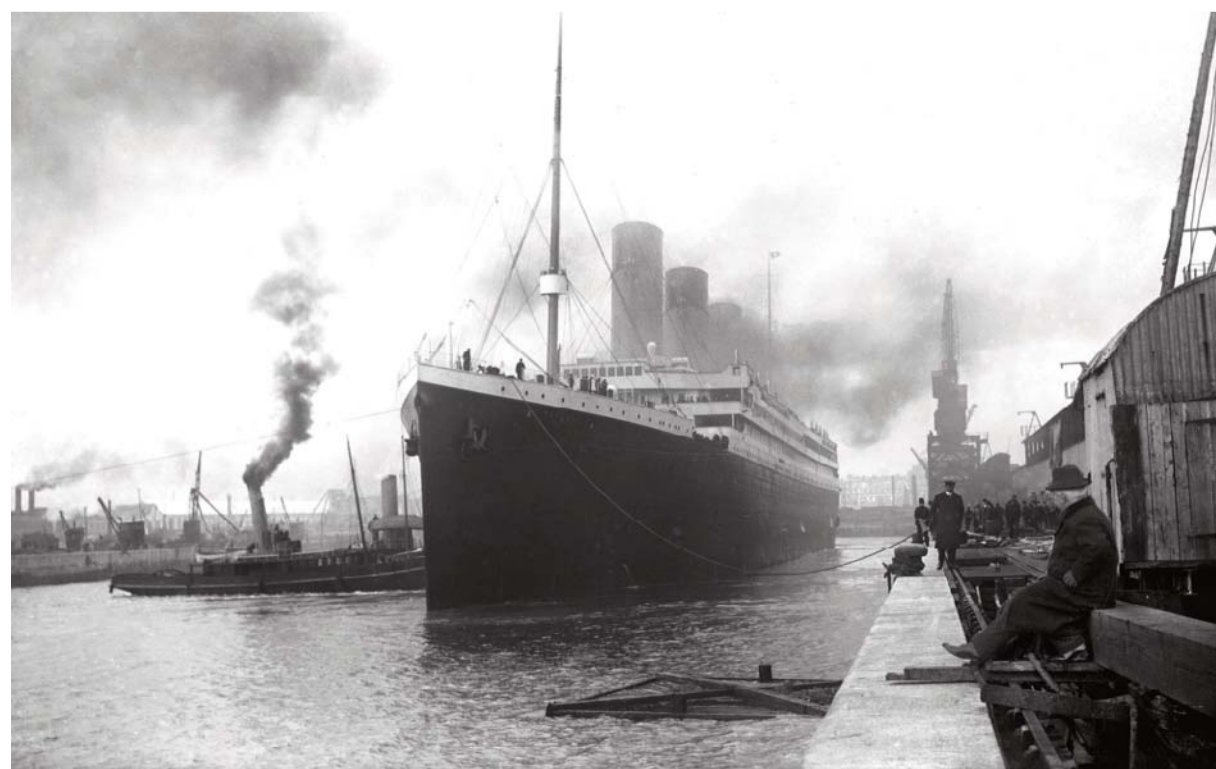
At the Cohan Theatre that evening, some audience members stepped outside during intermission of "The Wall Street Girl" and saw news bulletins posted outside the Times building. They returned and spread the word to the rest of the audience, "with an almost dead silence fastening itself upon the remainder of the performance."

Otherwise, humans did the same things that they always do in the wake of a calamity: Some panicked, some tried to help and some tried to make a fast buck. Variety reported that within the first two weeks after the sinking, nearly 50 American vaudeville acts cancelled their engagements in Britain, declining to cross the Atlantic. Tourists were also spooked: "Cancellations commenced to flood the steamship agencies. It is expected that ocean travel will be very light this season."

Meanwhile, plucky people worked to make things better. The Women's Titanic Memorial Society raised \$10,000 for the survivors; in Boston, The Actors' Fund Benefit promised that 25% of proceeds from all shows on May 4 would be given to the Titanic Fund, which resulted in across-the-board sellout business.

And of course scam artists tried to make money. In Philadelphia, the Police Department warned all theater managers they would be breaking the law if they showed reels of fake footage pretending to depict the sinking of the Titanic, the rescue of survivors "and other scenes attending the recent calamity." Law enforcement in other cities similarly tried to squash this deception.

And while the public went into mourning in April, they recovered quickly. On May 25, A British producer announced that a staging of the Titanic disaster, "with all realistic details," would debut in a Gloucester vaudeville show. And in Chicago, a spectacle called "The Sinking of the Titanic" opened at White City Park, replacing a re-enactment of the Battle of Manila. — Reuters



The real Titanic beginning its failed journey in April 15, 1912.