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US, GULF UNITED AGAINST IS



RIYADH: (From left) Mohammad bin Salman second crown prince of Saudi Arabia, King of Bahrain Hamad bin Eissa Al-Khalifa, Kuwait's HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Oman's Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmoud Al-Said, President Barack Obama, Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, Secretary General of the GCC, Abdul Latif Bin Rashid Al-Zayani of Bahrain, participate in the Leaders Photo at the Diriyah Palace during the GCC Summit in Riyadh yesterday.— AP



RIYADH: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shakes hands with US President Barack Obama at the Diriyah Palace during the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Riyadh yesterday. — KUNA

RIYADH: US President Barack Obama said yesterday that Washington and Gulf Arab states were united against the Islamic State group as he sought to overcome strains on Iran to boost efforts against the jihadists. In Riyadh for talks hosted by Saudi Arabia, Obama said the United States still has "serious concerns" about Iran, but insisted no country has an interest in conflict with Iran.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrived in Kuwait, yesterday after participating in the joint US-Gulf Summit. The summit, which tackled strengthening strategic partnerships between the GCC and the United States, was attended by

US President Barack Obama, King Mohammed VI of Morocco and the GCC leaders. Obama, on likely his final presidential visit to America's historic Gulf allies, was in Riyadh seeking to reduce tensions with the Arab states rooted in US overtures to their regional rival Tehran.

With the IS jihadists suffering a series of recent setbacks in areas under their control in Syria and Iraq, Washington is seeking more help from the oil-rich Gulf monarchies to keep up the pressure.

Speaking at the close of the summit of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Obama played down any divisions and vowed continued cooperation in the battle against the extremists.

Continued on Page 2

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ROYADH: US President Barack Obama (C-L) attending a meeting with Saudi King Salman (C) and Saudi Defense Minister and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (C-R) during the US-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit in Riyadh yesterday. — AFP

US, GULF UNITED AGAINST IS

Continued from Page 1

"We remain united in our fight to destroy (IS)," he said. "Given the ongoing threats in the region, the United States will continue to increase our security cooperation with our GCC partners including helping them improve their own capacity to defend themselves," Obama said.

'Destabilizing activities'

Seated beside Saudi King Salman inside a Riyadh royal palace, Obama said concerns remained about Iran's "destabilizing activities" despite its landmark nuclear agreement with world powers and the lifting of sanctions. "Even with the nuclear deal we recognize collectively that we continue to have serious concerns about Iranian behavior," Obama said. He warned, however, of the risk of confrontation with Tehran. "None of our nations have an interest in conflict with Iran," Obama said. Iran's emergence from international isolation following the nuclear deal has worried the Gulf monarchies, who fear Tehran will be emboldened to seek a still bigger regional role. Gulf Arab states and Iran back opposing sides in a range of Middle East conflicts, including in Syria and Yemen.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states belong to the US-led coalition that has been carrying out air strikes against IS in Syria and Iraq since mid-2014. But US officials have urged them to do more, especially to support Baghdad, which is battling political chaos and an economic crisis as well as the extremists.

Ben Rhodes, a close adviser to Obama, said there were "political steps that can be taken," as Iraq would need assistance to hold on to and rebuild areas reclaimed from IS.

Obama said a cessation of hostilities in Syria is "obviously under tremendous strain" as fighting has intensified in some areas despite efforts to hold peace talks in Geneva.

Washington hopes that in both Syria and Yemen—where a Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes against Iran-backed rebels in March last year—an end to broader fighting can lead to a greater focus on the battle against IS and other jihadists.

UN-backed peace negotiations between Yemen's warring sides were due to start in Kuwait yesterday, and Obama "urged all parties" to abide by a ceasefire that began on April 11. Jihadists—including the powerful local branch of Al-Qaeda—have exploited the Yemen conflict to strengthen their presence in the country's south. Both Defense Secretary Ashton Carter and US Secretary of State John Kerry joined Obama in Riyadh, holding meetings with top officials.

Strains 'overblown'

The diplomatic offensive followed months of rising tensions between the United States and the Gulf monarchies, which have for decades enjoyed strong security ties.

Prince Turki Al-Faisal, the kingdom's former intelligence chief, told CNN that Obama's conduct and declarations have made Saudi Arabia realise that the relationship has changed. "My personal view is that America has changed," he said. "How far we can go with our dependence on America? How much can we rely on steadfastness from American leadership? What is it that makes for our joint benefits to come together? These are things that we have to recalibrate," the senior royal said.

In highly unusual moves, Saudi state news channel Al-Ekhbaria did not broadcast either the start or the summit meeting or Obama's airport arrival on Wednesday.

At a press conference after the summit, Obama said talk of strains "was always overblown", saying there were "tactical" differences on how to deal with Iran. Obama also told the summit that Washington and Gulf states would work together to lessen the impact of the dramatic fall in oil prices since early 2014.

The United States and GCC "will launch a new high-level economic dialogue with a focus on adjusting lower oil prices, increasing our economic ties and supporting GCC reforms", Obama said. Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, and its petroleum-rich neighbours have been forced to cut subsidies and adopt other measures to deal with deficits caused by plunging oil prices, which make up the bulk of their revenues. — AFP



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrived in Kuwait yesterday after participating in the joint US-Gulf Summit. — KUNA

AMIR ARRIVES IN KUWAIT AFTER US-GULF SUMMIT

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrived in Kuwait yesterday after participating in the joint US-Gulf Summit.

The summit, which tackled strengthening strategic partnerships between the GCC and the United States, was attended by US President Barack Obama, King Mohammed VI of Morocco and the GCC leaders.

His Highness the Amir was received at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Acting Oil Minister Anas Al-Saleh, senior officers in the Army, Police

and National Guard.

His Highness the Amir was accompanied to the summit by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Director of His Highness the Amir's Office Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad,

Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Abu Al-Hassan, head of Amiri Protocols Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser, Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah, head of media and cultural affairs at the Amiri Diwan Yusef Al-Roomi, head of political and economic affairs at the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Fawaz Saud Nasser Saud Al-Sabah, and other senior officials. — KUNA

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: Vendors hawk their wares for shoppers at the Al-Maqasees market in Kuwait City. — Photo by KUNA/Ali Alroumi

Local Spotlight

THE NEW TERESA



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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While we follow the news of most goodwill ambassadors around the world, I wonder how we have benefited from Arab goodwill ambassadors and what makes Western ones seem more serious and generous. Why do goodwill ambassadors like Angelina Jolie show more interest towards our sufferings rather than Arab ones?

A goodwill ambassador is a person who advocates for a specific cause. They generally deliver a humanitarian call for support and promote ideals from one entity to another, or to a population. UN agencies have been carrying out these missions for years and to some extent have reached their goals. Jolie represents UNHCR as its goodwill ambassador, and in this role she has conducted more than 40 field visits around the world, becoming well-versed in the phenomenon of displaced people and a tireless advocate on their behalf.

Although there are many Western celebrities who have been given this title, she was the only one who showed real interest and passion in the call to support those who are in desperate situations. She didn't have to. She is not even an Arab, but her sense of humanity led her to fly many hours from home just to tell the world to look and listen to innocents suffering under siege and conflicts.

Angelina Jolie visited Lebanon last month and met many Syrian refugees. She said the international community must address the root causes of the global refugee crisis. In a press conference, she added that she had hoped to be in Syria helping victims to return to their homes on the fifth anniversary of the uprising against President Bashar Al-Assad. She made a great statement, saying that it's "tragic and shameful that we seem to be so far from that point".

The war in Syria is the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in a generation. But how many Arab goodwill ambassadors took such a courageous initiative to step out of their ivory towers and speak openly about this global crisis and point fingers at politicians for their shameful deeds? How many Arab goodwill ambassadors know that half of Syria's prewar population of some 23 million has been displaced, with around five million having fled their homeland, mainly to neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq?

After a tidal wave of refugees poured into Europe last year, some countries began erecting political and physical barriers to migration. Jolie also called on such countries to adhere to their international obligations to aid refugees. That's what one woman did without any obligation, except for her sincere commitment to the humanitarian cause. What about all those Arab goodwill ambassadors who hang their certificates on the wall and show them off to the media. Where are they and why are they not making a single effort for these troubled people, even those in their homelands? Granting this honor has been a complete waste.

Surprisingly, all goodwill ambassadors are from the acting field. We have so many people like well-known doctors who can provide more help than just singing and dancing, because at least they know what is real human suffering resulting from injuries. It's time for UN agencies to consider such an idea, because it's about substance rather than appearances.

To Angelina Jolie, you conveyed a message where many of your partners failed: "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted".

In my view

BRIDGING MINDS

By Jeri Al-Jeri

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The Ties Center in Kuwait recently offered a lecture on cultural similarities and differences. The lecturer was Dr. Teresa Leshner and I had the valuable opportunity to ask her comments on a theory to explain the cognitive differences between Arabic and English speakers. To summarize, the grammatical differences between us causes Arab speakers to order information and data in a more flexible order than those who speak English where there is a standard format: Subject-Verb-Object. As a result, English speakers enjoy a stricter and straighter chain of logic. But is the divide between minds greater than what we think?

Grammar: The operating system of the subconscious

We language the mind, our one and only vehicle to perceive life, to understand our desires and each other's ideas. Therefore, we can easily say, that in order to tap into cultural differences, we ought to diagram the relationship between different languages. The people of these languages make them meaningful through every letter they produce. However, it is the linguistic rules and regulations that shape their minds the way it is or to be more poetic, grammar is the operating system of the subconscious. It is safe to say, that the method of "hacking" cultural differences is to map grammatical differences between languages.

Oxford University stated, that like human genealogy, a language's ancestral tree can be traced back to its father's language, via decoding sound particles of a word formula form a certain language, as a blood sample, and then analyze its phonological and morphological properties (how it is said and how it is written). Then compare it with similar words from older languages in the archives. From this, they successfully track a language's family tree.

Researchers found all languages share specific family trees among them, even tribal clusters that parallel human families and tribes. For example the Italian language and its neighbors, the Spanish and the French language share Latin roots. On the other side of the world, Japanese and Korean share the exact "father language", ancient Chinese. Turkish and Tajik and Tatar are another example. And in terms of tribalism, the Indo European languages cannot be considered as a family, but as a tribe that stretches across continents. Logically, we infer that all mankind came from a single mother. A mother with a singular tongue. Bilingualism did not have a chance in a one person world.

Experts of various languages in the world, have compiled words in dictionaries and used the science of etymology (word history) to highlight "shared" words between languages. But a bolder attempt is to map grammatical associations between languages to decode our mental uniqueness from each other. We have succeeded in figuring all our phonological similarities. But did not the same with our group. This why we still sing our issues to each others as cultures but not compute it is as it is. The example of simulating a Samsung android to a calculator mimics how people of different systems of cognition attempt to think about others.

It is not very futuristic to implement the science of Universal Linguistics to bridge minds. For example in Arabic, our subject can be in the end or in the middle of a sentence. Our verbs can host the "doer" and clarify whether it is a male or female, allowing the listener or the reader to feel an emotional trigger, whenever we want. In English, it is more mechanistic, everything has to be on time. I believe this is the only science that has a blue print for bridging minds.

For the love of movement

By Faten Omar

At some point in almost every little girl's life, she dons soft pink slippers and learns to soar. Ballet teacher **Teni Matian** danced and refused to play with toys and dolls when she was around three years old. Her supportive family helped Matian become a ballet dancer and a certified teacher of the Royal Academy of Dance in London. "My family supported me and never asked me to be a doctor or engineer, even when I got high marks in my studies. They kept pushing me to learn more about dance and getting the highest scores in my BA and MA degrees," she said.

Matian spoke to Kuwait Times about her experience as a ballet teacher who teaches youth with and without disabilities. Matian not only teaches dance, but has also directed and produced several choreographic pieces for the TV show "So You Think You Can Dance".

After a potentially career-ending injury, Teni's perseverance and passion shone through and landed her a role giving classes in ballet based on the RAD syllabus. "I'm a certified teacher of the Royal Academy of Dance in London and now part of LAPA Loyac since March, teaching kids how to dance, and the best ones will be prepared to take the dance test by the Royal Academy of Dance in London," she noted.

Hip hop, free movement and more

Matian has also trained as a dance teacher for hip-hop, free movement and holding dancing sessions for people with disabilities in Kuwait and Armenia. She told Kuwait Times that because of her love of children and their vivid



ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE TEACHER HELPS GIRLS IN KUWAIT LEARN TO SOAR

imagination, she teaches them ballet to make them reach their dreams. "Kuwait is going to establish an opera house and I'm hoping that this big investment in the country will really help unleash a new wave of dance and creativity," said Matian, expressing happiness and hope.

Before Matian came to Kuwait, she used to hear from people that this country was dead end for artistic work and her dreams of dancing will crash. "I'm very surprised by the achievements and influence of the youth in Kuwait, especially at Loyac. Many of us did not know this exists, and it is a matter of time parents will realize that ballet is one of the

great dances that their children can continue pursuing it as a career to make them happy and make them feel free to fly like butterflies," she enthused.

Matian has taught, trained and choreographed for people with and without disabilities. These young people rediscovered their abilities through movement, and a new sense of identity emerged through the exploration of their fullest potentials of being persons with disabilities. "Only our own selves can transform the idea of being 'disabled' to 'being able'," she said.

Matian advises people to try something new. "We can

always become new persons when we try new things in life, so don't give up on your dreams. And that is why I'm the funniest and craziest person - I can be a child or an adult and I have learned to play different characters." Teaching dance for Teni is an honor and a dream come true. Deep down, she is still that little girl dreaming big and wanting to be a dance teacher, inspire young ballerinas and pave the road for them. "Dancing is my life and I only hope that there are many more young ballerinas out there that feel the same way. I always say that my career and my job is not work for me - it is my passion, my love, my soul."



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Reading: A popular pastime in Kuwait



Story and photos by Athoob A. Al-Shuaibi

There is a stereotype that people in Kuwait don't read. Perhaps because people in Europe and America can often be seen reading in public in trains, coffee shops, at the bus stop, and of course in bookshops. Here, however, it is rare to find someone sitting and reading a book. You are more likely to see people in a coffee shop playing on their smart phone.

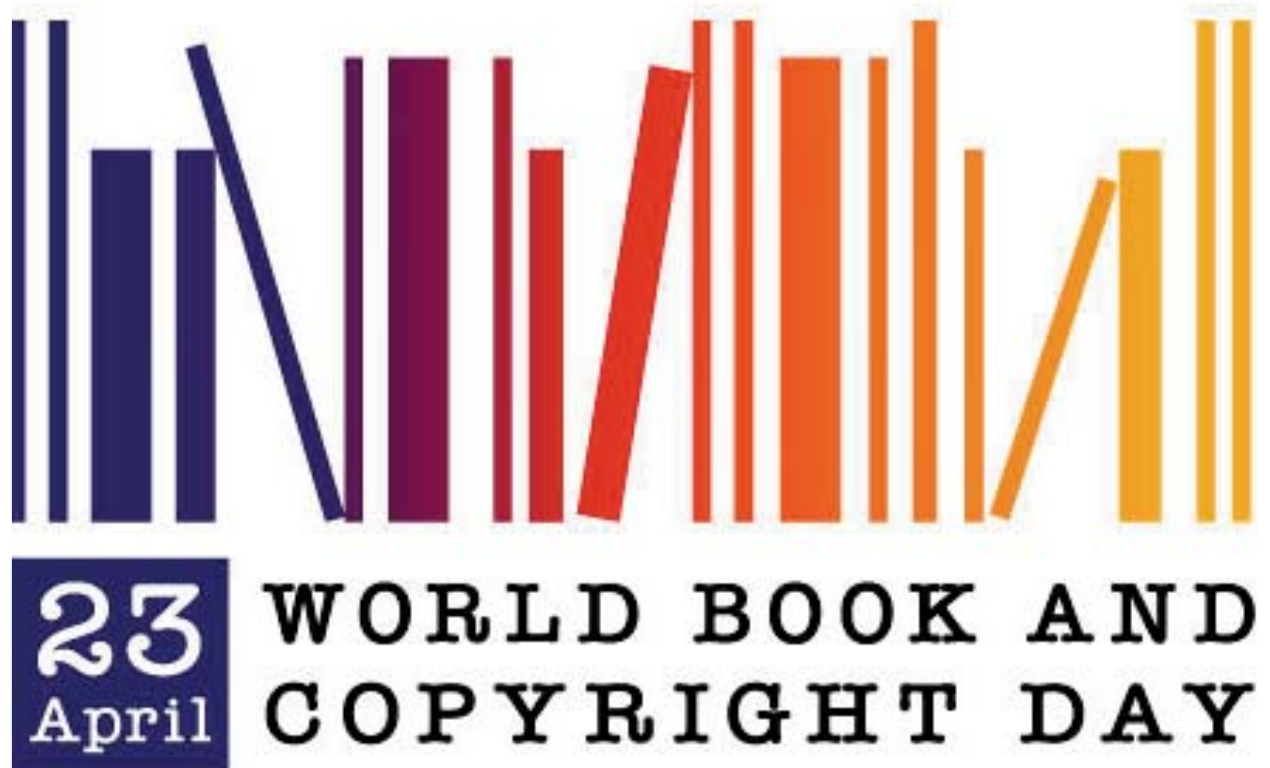
There is, however, a large subgroup of devoted readers and writers here. In honor of World Book Day, the Kuwait Times would like to celebrate readers in Kuwait by highlighting some of the many groups and activities for book lovers in Kuwait.

Clash or collaboration? Social media and books

There are a growing number of groups online and on social media that promote reading in Kuwait. Readers here organize readings, lectures, events and other social activities through social media to promote love of the written word.

One such group is ReadershipQ8 that focuses on promoting reading and reading activities. "Our project is a reading club and initiatives, such as selling used books and holding cultural evenings plus fundraising in favor of different charities by selling books," explains Bader Bin Ghaith, a caricature artist, booklover and ReadershipQ8 member.

Since 2009, a non-profit, nongovernmental cultural project called "Al Jalees" has been nurturing book reading, taking another turn in attracting readers by spreading over 75 reading groups in the country, so far. They believe that the evolution of any society won't happen without the revival of reading among its members.



FLIPPING THE STEREOTYPE



Moreover, there are other groups that gather to coincide the Kuwait Annual International Book Fair which has been running for 40 years.

Libraries, book clubs and more

Some book reading clubs are managed under the umbrella of social groups like the British Ladies Society, The Diwan Club, or The Salon Book Club. Furthermore, there are reading monthly meetups run by bookstores like Bibliophiles at Q8 Bookstore and Takween Bookstores.

Nowadays also more and more hang out destinations, galleries and other hot spots like the library of the Contemporary Art Platform (CAP) and the National Library of Kuwait are holding lectures and cultural events to nourish culture and reading of Kuwait as well as storytelling events for kids at Dar Al Athar (DAI), Al-Shaheed Park and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL).

Manal Al-Nashmi, founder of Hzaya.com, an online children's bookstore, thinks it has become an urgent responsibility to make

Local groups and organizations, online and in real life, promote reading through lectures, storytimes, activities and gatherings

our children want to carry the books in the time that smart phones and iPads have become a fierce competitor against.

"We at Hzaya attempt to facilitate the selection of appropriate books for children by their parents, books that reinforce ethics and good manners" She explained. "In addition to selling books, we organize events targeting children and through them, sometimes, create their own characters and write their own story. Then later, represent it on a stage," she added.

The world celebrates International Book Day on April 23. Organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the day aims to encourage reading.

Incidentally, UNESCO recently published a study shows that mobile technology improves literacy rates in developing countries. The report, issued in April 2014, on the occasion of the World Day of Book and Copyright, indicates that large numbers of people living in countries with high illiteracy rates and a severe shortage of printed material read full copies of books and novels online. In other words, the reading of books is not dying and the Internet isn't an enemy.



Statement by Ghaith Al Ghaith, CEO, flydubai

flydubai welcomes the publication today of the Interim Report (Preliminary Reference Information) on Accident Investigation by the Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC). We would also like to thank the investigating authorities for their continued commitment to investigate this tragic accident.

With regard to the five initial flight safety recommendations flydubai has, as part of the ongoing communications within our emergency response plan, continued to update our crew and engineers with the information published by the IAC.

With regard to the recommendations 2 and 3, these same procedures for go-around and flight simulator training have been in place since the airline was launched in 2009 and form part of standard operating procedures in line with industry best-practice.

In relation to the fourth and fifth recommendation, as standard practice we review safety recommendations in the industry.

flydubai is audited by the regulator and meets the highest safety, operating and training standards.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah leaves for New York yesterday. —KUNA

KUWAIT AMONG COUNTRIES TO SIGN PARIS AGREEMENT

PREMIER TO ATTEND SIGNING CEREMONY ON CLIMATE TODAY

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the accompanying delegation left here yesterday heading to New York to represent His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the signing ceremony of a new global agreement on climate which will take place at the United Nations Headquarters.

More than 150 countries from around the globe will send their representatives to gather at the World's top body to partake in the high-level signing ceremony of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, creating a better future for people and the planet. Over 60 Heads of State and Government will attend the ceremony held today, including French President François Hollande, demonstrating the continued high level of engagement by world leaders to accept and implement the Paris Agreement.

In a press statement, HH the premier asserted the importance of the climate agreement reached by countries around the world during the Paris summit to curb global warming that threatens humanity.

The Premier said that Kuwait is keen to cooperate with the international community to address this dangerous phenomenon experienced by all countries of the world,

noting that the document that will be signed during the meetings of the United Nations aims at preventing global warming. He added that the commitment of states to apply the agreement will work to achieve food security and economic progress as well as reducing emissions, noting that the agreement would oblige the industrialized and rich nations to provide \$100 billion annually for developing countries as of 2020 to protect the environment and take action to reduce consumption of conventional energy and invest in alternative energies. His Highness added that the agreement achieves significant interests for Kuwait, which suffers from the phenomenon of rising temperatures, despite the ongoing measures taken to handle this phenomenon with growing fears of continued warming in the coming years. His Highness expressed his hope that the 196 countries that had reached the future global agreement on climate would take up their responsibilities in the application of its provisions so that this phenomenon would be dealt with to spare the world further serious environmental disasters.

He renewed Kuwait's emphasis on cooperation with any international efforts aimed at preventing disasters and provide a decent life for all peoples of the world,

noting that Kuwait was in the forefront of the countries concerned to reach an agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions. His Highness is accompanied by Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Dr. Ali Saleh Al-Omar and a number of senior officials in the Diwan of His Highness the Prime Minister and the Environment Public Authority (EPA).

Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that Kuwait's high representation-HH the Prime Minister— in this "historic event," highlights the "importance" of the issue for the state. "It is a clear message to the international community that Kuwait is serious towards this vital issue, and willing to contribute along with other countries to reduce negative manifestations of the climate change phenomenon," he added. Ambassador Al-Otaibi told KUNA he is hoping for other countries to join this significant bind, and sign the agreement in order to guarantee its implementation. "Implementation is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emission and build climate resilience," he said. —KUNA

KUWAIT OIL OUTPUT UP AFTER STRIKE ENDS

DUBAI: Kuwait's crude oil production rose to around 2.9 million barrels per day on Thursday, while its refining capacity stood at 830,000 bpd, acting oil minister Anas Al-Saleh was quoted as saying by state news agency KUNA. Kuwait's oil production was hit by a three-day strike by oil and gas workers. The strike was called off early on Wednesday. Kuwait's crude output was 3 million bpd before the strike, while it was refining around 930,000 bpd. — Reuters

KUWAIT CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAF) celebrates the Earth Day, which falls today, by holding workshops and activities aimed at highlighting importance of preserving environment. The aim of these activities is to shed light on importance of preserving environment for the sake of the safety of earth, said Engineer Ghanem Al-Sanad, Director of Agriculture Guidance Department at PAAF.

Biological diversity lead to clean environment thus allowing sustainable supply of food and raw materials used by human beings, Al-Sanad told KUNA. He said that being "culturally diversified will trigger biological diversity." Al-Sanad said some creatures became extinct because they lost their homes due to the "negative human intervention."

This intervention, he said, was through deforestation and construction of building. "Forests and deserts are the home of most of biological creatures, and the human is destroying a complete biological system," he said, and called for further spread of environment awareness principles.

Al-Sanad, meanwhile, said celebrating the Earth Day began around four decades ago with the aim of spreading awareness among public about importance of preserving the environment and the planet, adopting an environmental-friendly lifestyle to ultimately create the environmental citizen. He said the environment has been subject to wars and conflicts.

"Destroying natural resources lead to poverty ... and the pollution can cause spread of diseases ... damages to environment will have harmful consequences," he added. Al-Sanad said PAAF has been implementing a series of environmental projects aimed at preserving biological diversity.

PAAF, he added, organized a workshop about how laws were regulating the use of pesticides, the safe uses of pesticides in order to protect the environment. PAAF, said Al-Sanad, was also holding lectures at schools to raise environmental awareness. He said earth was providing human beings with different kinds of resources for human beings, so there has been a "solid relationship between human and earth ... that is why we should protect our mother earth and treat it kindly through preserving natural resources and wellbeing."

Al-Sanad said raising awareness on the importance of protection of earth required a lot of time and effort to enforce the principle of environmental safety. He also said PAAF was also educating the public about the dangerous impacts of global warming. —KUNA

AL-ESSA APPLAUDS KU FOR MARTYRS MEMORIAL WALL

KUWAIT: Building a memorial wall for Kuwaiti martyrs at Kuwait University is an appreciation to those who gave their lives to the country during its darkest of times, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Bader Al-Essa said yesterday. The memorial wall displays 2,216 pictures of Kuwaiti martyrs who died during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990; the material used to build the memorial wall were a donation from the National Industries Company.

It was put up at the University campus in Shuwaikh in collaboration with the Martyrs Office.

During the memorial wall inauguration speech, Al-Essa, who is also the Higher President of Kuwait University, said that this humanitarian, societal and academic monument is a reminder of courage and patriotism. On his part, President of Kuwait University Dr. Hussain Al-Ansari pointed out that the memorial wall is a testimony for Kuwait University to inspire ideologies of loyalty, patriotism and good citizenship among students and members of the society.

The memorial wall will be a favorite backdrop to many events and activities on campus. Saleh Al-Wafan, at the Martyr Office, said that similar memorial wall will be erected in many institutions and schools across the country to induce a sense of patriotism. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Bader Al-Essa during the opening of a memorial wall for Kuwaiti martyrs at Kuwait University yesterday. —KUNA



KUWAIT: UN-brokered peace talks to end civil war in Yemen started in Kuwait yesterday. A view of the delegations attending the talks. — KUNA

YEMEN PEACE TALKS OPEN IN KUWAIT AFTER DELAY

HOUTHJI DELEGATION, EX-PRESIDENT SALEH ARRIVE

KUWAIT: UN-brokered peace talks to end 13 months of armed conflict in Yemen opened in Kuwait City yesterday after a rebel delegation arrived following a three-day delay, state television reported. A team representing Yemen's government, a rebel Houthi delegation and their allies from ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh's party were taking part, along with a UN special envoy and Kuwait's foreign minister.

The United Nations has been pushing the talks that it hopes will end a conflict that has been exploited by jihadists and sent tensions between Iran and its Gulf rivals soaring.

More than 6,400 people have been killed and almost 2.8 million displaced since a Saudi-led coalition began operations in March 2015 against Iran-backed rebels who have seized swathes of territory, including the capital Sanaa. The talks were originally supposed to start on Monday but were delayed after the rebels failed to show up in protest against what they described as Saudi violations of a ceasefire, in effect since April 11.

"They (the rebel delegation) have arrived in Kuwait just a few minutes ago and negotiations have started," Charbel Raji, spokesman for UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, said. Insurgents have sent representatives from the Shiite Huthi group and members of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's General People's Congress party.

A member of the Yemeni government delegation confirmed that the

talks were to open at 1600 GMT. President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi had sent a message to UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed demanding the "negotiations open on Thursday evening" and rejecting "rebel conditions to modify the agenda agreed on," according to a member of the government delegation.

Hadi's people arrived in Kuwait at the weekend and threatened to pull out if meetings did not begin yesterday. Mahdi Al-Mashat, a representative of rebel leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, said Wednesday that the rebels had been assured that the agenda for the talks would be "clear and tackle issues that could help achieve peaceful solutions".

Writing on Facebook, Mashat warned however that "we will have the right to suspend our participation" if the assurances are not met. Diplomats say that rebels are demanding an end of the Arab coalition operations and a naval blockade on Yemen that began more than 13 months ago.

They also want UN sanctions against some of their leaders, including Saleh, to be lifted.

Saudi ally Turkey said yesterday that it has frozen assets belonging to Saleh and his son, in line with the sanctions. Saleh amassed billions of dollars through corruption and stashed assets in at least 20 countries during his 33 years in power, according to a UN report released last year.

Talks 'allow Al-Qaeda focus'

US President Barack Obama is visiting Saudi Arabia, where he is expected to discuss the wars in Yemen and Syria with Gulf leaders. Ben Rhodes, one of Obama's closest foreign policy advisers, urged all Yemeni counterparts on yesterday to participate "constructively" in the Kuwait talks. A political resolution to the country's conflict would "allow for a focus on (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) AQAP in Yemen," he said.

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group have gained ground in the government-held south, carrying out attacks against officials. Yemen's rebels seized control of Sanaa in 2014 before expanding, forcing Hadi's government to declare main southern city Aden as the temporary capital. And while the loyalists managed since July to reclaim large areas, they have been unable to dislodge the rebels from Sanaa and other key areas.

Fighting has continued on several fronts, military sources said, as each side blamed the other for truce breaches. The rebels fired a Katyusha rocket late Wednesday on the loyalist-held city of Marib, east of the capital, according to an AFP journalist there.

Pro-government military sources reported heavy fighting in Nahm, northeast of Sanaa, and sporadic clashes elsewhere. The rebels claimed on their sabanews.net website that coalition warplanes carried out two air strikes on Nahm and flew sorties over other areas, including Sanaa. —AFP

68 ILLEGAL LABORERS ARRESTED IN RAID

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior as part of the joint committee held inspection raids on illegal work sites in residential areas in Jeleeb Al-Shuyoukh yesterday.

Abdullah Al-Mutawteh, Deputy General Director for Manpower Protection Affairs at (PAM) stated that this raid was held based on orders given by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and State Minister for Planning and Development Affairs Hind Al-Subeih. This was in continuation of the raid already conducted previously aiming to regulate the labor market.

68 laborers were arrested as they were working in contravention of their residency permits.

Al-Mutawteh added that these raids will continue on a regular basis to eliminate this phenomenon of illegal workers. As part of the awareness campaign of PAM, he also called upon the employers to respect the labor law.

The raid was led by Mohammed Al-Dhafi, head of the joint committee, Brigadier General Saleh Al-Anezi, Director of the Farwaniya Security Department and 14 inspectors from PAM in addition to a team of police officers.



KUWAIT: Head of B shift at Sabhan Fire Center Major Ahmad Al-Ali, and Farwaniya Fire Center Major Mushari Al-Tourah lead a fire fighting mission at Sabhan.

FIRE BREAKS OUT IN SABHAN WAREHOUSE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Farwaniya and Sabhan Fire Centers responded to a call about a fire in a three-story house, under construction. The fire was in three mobile rooms where wood and construction material were stored. The fire was contained before resulting in any injuries.

The operation was under the command of Head of B shift at Sabhan Fire Center Major Ahmad Al-Ali, and Farwaniya Fire Center Major Mushari Al-Tourah.

International

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NEW YORK: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump (right) appears with family members on the NBC "Today" television program, in New York yesterday. His family, from left are: Daughter Tiffany Trump, son Eric Trump, daughter Ivanka Trump, son Donald Trump Jr., and Donald Trump's wife Melania Trump. — AP

TRUMP, CRUZ FEUD SHIFTS TO SEASIDE RESORT

RIVALRY COURT PARTY LEADERS AHEAD OF HIGH-STAKES CONTESTS

HOLLYWOOD, Florida: The messy fight for the Republican presidential nomination is shifting to a luxury seaside resort in south Florida as Donald Trump and chief rival Ted Cruz quietly court party leaders ahead of another set of high-stakes delegate contests.

Cruz conceded publicly for the first time that he doesn't have enough support to claim the nomination before the party's summertime national convention, but he also vowed Wednesday to block Trump from collecting the necessary delegates as well. The Texas conservative predicted a contested convention that many party loyalists fear could trigger an all-out Republican civil war.

"What's clear today is that we are headed to a contested convention," Cruz told reporters in between private meetings with Republican National Committee members gathered at the Diplomat Resort & Spa for the first day of their three-day annual spring meeting.

Campaigning in Indiana, Trump railed against his party's leadership, even as his senior lieutenants courted GOP officials behind closed doors in Florida. "It's a rigged, crooked system that's

designed so that the bosses can pick whoever they want and that people like me can't run and can't defend you against foreign nonsense," Trump charged at the Indiana State Fairgrounds.

Roughly at the same time, Trump's newly hired political director, Rick Wiley, was hosting a series of private meetings at the Florida resort with party officials from states set to vote in the coming weeks. The veteran political operative, who previously worked for the RNC, is tasked with helping Trump play catch-up in the complicated state-by-state nomination process.

Trump's top aides were set to deliver a private briefing to RNC members Thursday afternoon outlining his path to victory. Both Trump and the Democratic front-runner, Hillary Clinton, were pushing ahead toward Northeast primaries on an increasingly direct path to party nominations after trouncing their challengers Tuesday in New York.

Clinton, now 81 percent of the way toward clinching the Democratic nomination that eluded her eight years ago, can lose every remaining contest and still prevail. Advisers to rival Bernie Sanders offered no signs of the Vermont senator giving up

before the Democrats' Philadelphia convention.

Trump is increasingly optimistic about his chances in five states set to vote on Tuesday: Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. He is now the only Republican candidate who can possibly collect the 1,237 delegate majority needed to claim the nomination before the party's July convention. Cruz and Ohio Gov. John Kasich have been mathematically eliminated, yet both contend they can win the nomination at the convention.

Despite getting shut out of the delegate race in New York, Cruz is aggressively courting delegates across the nation who could hold great sway at the convention. Kasich and Cruz set their sights on Pennsylvania and Indiana respectively, looking to capitalize on any remaining delegates up for grabs, even as polls show Trump dominating in some of the biggest remaining races. Trump, meanwhile, joined his wife and adult children on NBC's "Today" Thursday for a town hall that discussed family and politics. Trump weighed in on the decision to put Harriet Tubman on the face of the \$20, replacing Andrew Jackson, a move he described as "pure

political correctness." He said Tubman is "fantastic," but Jackson has "been on the bill for many, many years" and "really represented somebody that really was very important to this country."

Trump also said transgender people should be able to use whichever bathroom they choose, responding to North Carolina's so-called "bathroom law" which directs transgender people to use the bathroom that matches the gender on their birth certificates. "There have been very few complaints the way it is. People go, they use the bathroom that they feel is appropriate. There has been so little trouble," he said.

The side-by-side GOP efforts at this late stage - with Trump amassing primary victories while Cruz digs for the support of delegates who could settle the nomination - are unprecedented in recent presidential campaigns and add to the deeply uncertain nature of the race. While the primary campaign is a focus of the RNC meeting, party leaders are painfully aware that any changes in the nomination process could fuel Trump's charges of an unfair system. Party chairman Reince Priebus has discouraged any rule changes this week. — AP

ARAB LEAGUE CHIEF CALLS FOR SPECIAL COURT TO TRY ISRAEL

CAIRO: Arab League chief Nabil Al-Arabi called yesterday for a special criminal court to be set up for Israel, at a meeting to condemn an announcement that it will never return the Golan Heights. Delegates to the 22-member Arab bloc based in Cairo are expected to pass a resolution denouncing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pledge Sunday that the occupied Golan Heights would remain Israeli "forever".

Israel occupied the Golan during the 1967 Middle East war with Syria, Egypt and Jordan, and annexed it in 1981, in a move never recognised by the international community. Israeli media have reported that Netanyahu organised a cabinet meeting in the Golan where he made the pledge amid fears Israel could come under pressure to return the area as part of a future peace deal for its war-torn neighbour.

Israel was acting like "a country that is above the law and accountability," Arabi told delegates at the start of the Arab League meeting. He demanded "a special criminal court for the Palestinian cause," along the lines of international tribunals set up to try ex-officials of "the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia and Sierra Leone".

Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Cairo and delegate to the Arab League, Ahmed Qattan, accused Israel of trying to profit from the conflict in Syria.

"The Zionist entity is exploiting the years of crisis in Syria," he said. With Syria suspended from the League, its 21 other members yesterday unanimously approved a resolution condemning Israel and asking the UN Security Council to force Israel to submit to international law and UN resolutions. The text of the resolution referred to Netanyahu's "aggressive statements" on Sunday and "Israel's repeated attempts to impose the status quo in order to annex" the Golan. — AFP

SYRIA RELIEF EFFORTS INTENSIFY EVEN AS PEACE TALKS FALTER

BEIRUT: Aid groups launched their largest delivery of assistance yet in war-torn Syria yesterday after the UN evacuated hundreds of besieged residents, intensifying relief efforts even as peace talks falter. The International Committee of the Red Cross said that the 65-truck convoy of food and medicines to the besieged rebel-held town of Rastan was the first aid it had been able to deliver to the area's 120,000 residents since 2012.

Earlier, the United Nations evacuated 500 people "in urgent need of life-saving medical attention," and their families, from four other besieged towns, two held by the government and two by rebels. The two relief operations came after the Syrian opposition walked away from UN-backed peace talks complaining that more needed to be done to relieve civilians in rebel-held areas. More than four million people live in besieged or hard-to-reach areas with little or no access to food or medicines. ICRC spokesman Pawel Krzysiek said Thursday's convoy was carrying food parcels, wheat flour and other nutritional items, as well as medicines and equipment to improve water supply in Rastan, a rebel-held enclave in the central province of Homs that has been under army siege since 2012. "This is the largest joint humanitarian convoy we have done in Syria so far," he told AFP.

Once they reach Rastan, ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent teams will assess the water and waste infrastructure, as well as the nutritional and other needs of residents.

Many of the 120,000 people living in and around the town had fled fighting in neighbouring Hama province. The United Nations carried out the medical evacuations from the four besieged towns in a carefully synchronised joint operation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent that lasted through Wednesday night.

At dawn yesterday, the evacuees were brought to a staging area in a rebel-held part of central Syria before being transported on for treatment, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said.

Exactly 250 evacuees were brought out of the besieged rebel-held towns of Madaya and Zabadani near Damascus. The same number were evacuated from Fuaa and Kafraya, pro-government towns under siege by Islamist rebels.—AFP



IDLIB: A Syrian family is seen at a shelter after a convoy of buses and ambulances transporting wounded civilians and rebels from the Syrian villages of Zabadani and Madaya arrived in the area of Idlib yesterday during an operation in cooperation with the United Nations to evacuate hundreds of wounded people from besieged Syrian towns. —AFP

50 REGIME FORCES SURRENDER TO KURDS IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

SYRIA KURDS TRAIN NEW ARMY TO PROTECT 'FEDERAL REGION'

QAMISHLI, Syria: Fifty Syrian pro-government fighters surrendered yesterday to Kurdish forces in the northeastern city of Qamishli, a Kurdish security source said as fighting raged for the second consecutive day. "A group of fighters loyal to the regime were taking cover in a prison in Qamishli, and Kurdish forces gave them until noon to hand themselves in," a Kurdish security source told AFP.

"When they didn't, the Kurdish forces stormed the prison, and the 50 regime fighters surrendered," he said. He said other regime fighters from around the city were firing rockets at the prison.

Fighting between the Kurdish police force, known as the Asayish, and fighters from the pro-regime National Defence Forces erupted on Wednesday after a scuffle at a checkpoint in the city. It resumed at around midday yesterday, an AFP reporter said, adding that loud blasts from heavy weapons were heard across the city. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that since Wednesday 10 NDF fighters, four Kurdish forces and two civilians have been killed.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State group claimed in a statement that it carried out a suicide bombing in Qamishli yesterday afternoon that caused several casualties.

The claim could not be independently confirmed. In August, IS claimed responsibility for a suicide attack that killed 16 people in the city.

Qamishli is under the shared control of the Syrian regime and Kurdish authorities, who have declared zones of "autonomous administration" across parts of north and northeast Syria.

Syrian troops and seasoned Kurdish fighters have coordinated on security in

Hasakeh province where IS jihadists have tried to advance, but tensions have built up between the sometimes-rival authorities.

Defence

In a leafy field in Syria, fighters in beige fatigues negotiate an obstacle course as they are trained to defend a Kurdish federal region across the country's north. Clutching rifles under a bright spring sun, the men are among thousands undergoing obligatory nine-month training to join the Autonomous Protection Forces.

The APF, its commander-in-chief Renas Roza says, will be responsible for defending the federal region declared last month at a Kurdish-led conference. "This is the nucleus of a new army that will take up the defence of the federal region in northern Syria," Roza tells AFP in his headquarters at Amuda near the border with Turkey. The clean-shaven commander sits under a large poster bearing the APF logo a long, curved sword crossed over a rifle below a red five-point star.

Roza says thousands of Kurdish, Arab and Syriac Christian men between the ages of 18 and 30 have completed the compulsory training. For the first two months, conscripts are taught military structure and tactics, and then have lessons on human rights and interaction with civilians.

Three stages of training are led by the powerful People's Protection Units (YPG), the military arm of the leading Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Fadi Abdo Lahdo, a Syriac fighter training in the Bawr camp near Rmeilan, says his trainers are from the YPG's commando force.

Dealing with civilians

"We're learning how to cross over both cement barriers and natural barriers," says the fair-haired fighter, squinting in the sunlight. Other training sessions are administered by civic institutions. "I served five months and I still have four months before I finish my service," says Rinas Ahmad, an 18-year-old conscript with gelled hair. "We were trained on military life and on how to deal with civilians so we don't become like the Syrian (government) army," Ahmad says.

Syria's Kurds have both exploited and benefited from the chaos of the five-year-war to expand their control across northern parts of the country.

When the regime's armed forces withdrew from Kurdish-majority areas in 2012, Kurds filled the void with a system of three "autonomous administrations".

The three cantons, known from west to east as Afrin, Kobane and Jazire, already feature their own independent police forces, driving licences and schools. In March, a Kurdish-led summit in Rmeilan announced that it would establish a "federal region" uniting the cantons. It elected a 31-member assembly tasked with laying the groundwork for the federal region by September.

The announcement was swiftly shot down by both the mainstream opposition and the regime, which categorically reject a federal system for Syria.

Rounding up recruits

In anti-government demonstrations across the country, some protesters burned the Kurdish flag to show their opposition to federalism. Syria's Kurds have continued their preparations nevertheless.—AFP



SYDNEY: Australian television presenter Tara Brown (center) and producer Stephen Rice (right) arrive at Sydney airport yesterday after they were released on bail from prison in Beirut.—AFP

AUSTRALIAN TV CREW ARRIVE HOME AFTER BEIRUT KIDNAP DEAL

SYDNEY: An Australian television crew accused of aiding a mother in the botched kidnapping of her two children in Lebanon arrived home yesterday, amid reports of a multi-million dollar deal struck with the father to drop abduction charges. Brisbane mother Sally Faulkner and the Channel Nine team were arrested and charged last week after Faulkner's son and daughter were snatched in broad daylight on a Beirut street. But they were released on bail Wednesday after the father, Ali al-Amin, decided not to pursue the charges in court. Bailed star reporter Tara Brown led her producer Stephen Rice, cameraman Ben Williamson and sound recordist David Ballment on to the earliest flight out of Beirut after their release from custody.

The Nine team arrived in Sydney yesterday, touching down about 10 pm (1200 GMT) on an Emirates flight from Dubai.

They were mobbed by a large media scrum as they left the airport via a private exit, and were whisked off in waiting black vans. "I'm just so glad to be home," Brown said as she was escorted by Rice to a van. Ballment added that he was looking forward to "a shower and seeing my wife".

Faulkner, however, remains in Beirut for a custody hearing with her estranged husband. It was a disastrous end to the news story the crew had planned.

Deal struck

Faulkner's lawyer Ghassan Mughabghab earlier said a deal had been struck granting Amin full custody of the children in line with Lebanese law. The commercial Nine network did not mention any deal they were reportedly behind, but announced a full inquiry into the bizarre episode.

The Australian newspaper said "a multi-million dollar deal was struck to drop abduction charges".

"Nine pays dad to win freedom for crew and mum," Sydney's Daily Telegraph headlined, adding that "a massive sum of cash" had been paid in compensation. The Sydney Morning Herald said it had cost several hundred thousand dollars, but that an exact figure could not be confirmed.

The crew and Faulkner still face potential charges by Lebanon's public prosecutor, but they can be sentenced in absentia. Amin's lawyer Hussein Berjawi told AFP he had not dropped charges against two Britons and two Lebanese allegedly involved in the abduction through a child recovery agency. "They intended to get away in a boat captained by a member of a private child recovery agency," a Lebanese security source said.

'Public interest'

The crew were arrested April 7, a day after the two children were grabbed. Video footage shows them walking with an elderly person said to be their grandmother before several figures jump out of a car, shove the adult aside and carry the children off in the vehicle.

Police later found Faulkner with the children, reportedly a six-year-old girl and a four-year-old boy, at a home in Beirut. They were handed back to their father through the courts. Faulkner accused him of taking them for a holiday to Beirut and then refusing to return them to Australia.—AFP

IRAQ IDENTIFIES SIX VICTIMS FROM RAMADI MASS GRAVES

US UPS PRESSURE ON IS WITH B-52 BOMBER STRIKE

BAGHDAD: Six bodies have been identified so far from two mass graves unearthed this week in the western city of Ramadi, nearly four months after Iraqi forces routed Islamic State militants from the Anbar provincial capital, officials said yesterday.

Arrested Islamic State militants had led authorities on Tuesday to the mass graves inside the city's soccer stadium, believed to contain up to 40 bodies. Some of the victims were blindfolded and had their hands tied, Iraqi officials had said earlier. The city's mayor, Ibrahim Al-Osag, told The Associated Press that the six identified victims included a policeman, his wife and son, two security personnel and a civilian. Al-Osag said the bodies, and those of some two dozen other people were reburied after DNA samples were taken.

Councilman Athal Al-Fahdawi said 32 bodies have been exhumed so far, and authorities are waiting for more forensic teams to come to Ramadi as many government employees have yet to return to their jobs after fleeing from the violence. Ramadi fell to IS in May 2015 and was liberated in December. There have been many instances of mass graves being uncovered in territory wrested from IS militants in Iraq and Syria - thousands of people have been killed in summary and extrajudicial killings by the Sunni militants and the graves have been a dark testimony to the group's brutality. In June 2014, some 1,700 Iraqi soldiers were captured and then killed by IS militants when they overran Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit. At the time, the soldiers were trying to flee from Camp Speicher, a nearby army base where they were deployed. Mass graves with hundreds of Iraqi soldiers.

B-52 bomber hits

Meanwhile, the US Air Force for the

first time deployed a B-52 bomber against the Islamic State, the Pentagon said Wednesday as it ramps up a 20-month campaign to smash the jihadists. The bombing mission, in which a hulking B-52 destroyed a weapons storage facility south of Mosul, comes the same week that Defense Secretary Ash Carter visited Baghdad and announced extra US troops, cash and equipment for the anti-IS campaign in Iraq.

In other signs of an increasing tempo, US commandos working with Kurdish troops conducted a raid targeting a senior IS group figure and the Pentagon said it has changed how air strikes risking civilian deaths are approved. Under the new rules, authority now comes from the commanding three-star US general in Baghdad, instead of going through a four-star at the US Central Command's headquarters in Florida.

Baghdad-based military spokesman Colonel Steve Warren insisted the changes do not lessen oversight standards in determining when civilian losses are an acceptable risk.

"This does not translate to more civilian casualties, this translates to a more rapid execution of strikes," Warren said. The Pentagon has acknowledged 26 civilian deaths due to US-led coalition strikes since the campaign began in August 2014 in Iraq, and credits the use of guided missiles in keeping the number relatively low though independent observers say the figure is far higher.

More US troops

Carter this week announced an additional 217 US forces would be deployed to Iraq as advisors, pushing the official count there past 4,000. The Pentagon has also offered Apache attack helicopters for use in an eventual push on Mosul, Iraq's second city and which is under control of the IS group.

Separately, Danish lawmakers have approved a plan to commit seven F-16 warplanes, a transport aircraft and 400 military personnel to expand its fight against the extremists. Monday's strike by a B-52 Stratofortress blew up an IS weapons storage facility in the town of Qayyarah, about 35 miles (60 kilometers) south of Mosul. The enormous planes, originally designed in the 1950s, became a symbol of US might during the Cold War and the aircraft was used to conduct carpet bombing in Vietnam.

Warren said the B-52s are only being armed with guided bombs. "There are memories in the collective unconscious of B-52s, decades ago, doing... arguably indiscriminate bombing," Warren said. "Those days are long gone. The B-52 is a precision-strike weapons platform and it will conduct the same type of precision strikes that we have seen for the last 20 months."

Several B-52s arrived in Qatar earlier this month to replace a contingent of newer B-1 bombers that had been working in Iraq and Syria for about a year. Warren also announced that US commandos in northern Iraq had targeted Suleiman Abd Shabib Al-Jabouri, "one of ISIL's military emirs and an ISIL war council member." The Kurdish regional security council said Jabouri was killed in the raid, conducted jointly with Kurdish fighters.

'Shoving match'

The US military has since 2014 led an international coalition against the IS group in Iraq and Syria after the jihadists captured vast areas of territory across the two countries. Despite major gains, including the recapture of the Iraqi city of Ramadi, the coalition has still not chased IS fighters from Raqqa in Syria or Mosul, as well as several other important towns.—Agencies



RAFAH: Palestinian Hamas security forces deploy on the Palestinian side of the border with Egypt in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip yesterday. (Hamas has deployed forces along the Egyptian-Gaza border to counter Cairo's concerns it is aiding militants from the Islamic State group in Egypt's lawless Sinai Peninsula. — AP

MIGRANT SMUGGLERS 'SHIFTING ROUTES RAPIDLY,' WARNS NATO

TRAFFICKERS STILL TRYING TO SMUGGLE PEOPLE: STOLTENBERG

ANKARA: NATO said yesterday it had no plans to wind up a mission to stop migrant traffickers in the Aegean Sea and warned smugglers were changing routes very quickly.

Alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg said traffickers were still trying to smuggle people from Turkey to Greece, despite the apparent success of an unprecedented naval mission by NATO to help tackle Europe's migration crisis. "We have seen a significant reduction in the numbers" attempting the perilous crossing from Turkey to Greece, particularly since the implementation of a deal between Ankara and the European Union, he admitted.

"But I think it is important not to end this activity too early because we still see that the smugglers are trying to get people over the Aegean," he said at a press conference during a visit to Turkey. He said NATO's deployment of ships and helicopters in Turkish and Greek territorial waters, launched in early March, would "stay as long as needed," rather than pull out now that numbers are dropping.

He warned that leaving could "see a return of high numbers of people," adding that the alliance would "need to remain flexible because the people smugglers are

shifting routes very rapidly".

'Platform for cooperation'

According to the UNHCR, the daily average number of people arriving in Greece via the Aegean has reached 134 so far in April, down from 870 in March, when the NATO civilian operation launched and the EU-Turkey deal took effect. Under the accord, migrants who travel to the Greek islands—a main entry point for those seeking a new life in Europe—are being returned to Turkey in return for billions in EU aid. The EU also promised to resettle one Syrian refugee for every Syrian taken back by Turkey, to grant visa-free travel to Turks within the border-free Schengen Zone and to reassess Turkey's stalled EU membership bid. Stoltenberg said the NATO mission was creating "an additional platform for cooperation between Turkey and Greece and between Turkey and the EU".

Information gathered from the operation was passed on to Turkey, Greece and the European border agency Frontex and was helping Ankara "take action to help break the business model" used by smugglers, he said.

But critics of the EU-Turkey deal have warned that it is likely to merely see traffickers attempt



Children sit next to a tent at a makeshift camp for migrants and refugees at the Greek-Macedonian border near the village of Idomeni yesterday. About 50,000 people remain stranded in Greece since the closure of the migrant route through the Balkans in February. Over 10,000 of them are stuck in a slum-like camp at Idomeni on the border with Macedonia.—AFP

new routes or return to the tried and trusted but very dangerous crossing from the coast of Africa to Italy.

The dangers faced by migrants on that route was underscored on Wednesday after reports emerged

of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean in which some 500 people were feared to have drowned. More than one million people crossed clandestinely to Europe in 2015 while some 179,000 have made the trip since

the start of this year, according to UNHCR figures.

More than 3,700 people died in 2015 trying to make the perilous crossing over the Mediterranean, with 761 recorded as dead or missing this year. — AFP



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S AFRICA DROUGHT TRIGGERS DR CONGO FOOD SHORTAGE

'DISHONEST TRADERS' CAUSING THE SHORTAGES: MINISTER

LUBUMBASHI, DR Congo: Children are going to bed hungry in DR Congo's second city, their parents say, as food shortages caused by a severe drought in southern Africa drive up prices. For Lubumbashi's two million plus people, who depend for almost all their staples on imports from nearby Zambia, the talk is all about the soaring price of maize flour—and the shortage of this basic food.

"It has been more than a month since Zambia refused to deliver export permits for their flour," Coundouris Psaromatis, a Greek businessman who runs a chain of shops and supermarkets in Lubumbashi, told AFP. "In all of my shops, I have no more bags of maize flour to sell: it's all gone."

This week a delegation of four key ministers travelled from the capital Kinshasa to the southeastern copper and cobalt mining hub to address the growing crisis. A day later President Joseph Kabila came too. Jeanne Kayakez, a maize flour seller at the main Mzee-Kabila market who has 11 children, says even she is struggling.

"Even I am unable to feed my children at the moment. For two weeks we've been eating cassava roots and sometimes

rice. It's really sad," she said.

'Stop lying to us'

Times are tough, said Eudoxie Gungwa, who sells clothes at the market. "People aren't buying my clothes and maize flour is rare and expensive. What'll happen to us? The authorities should stop lying to us with false promises," she said. Lubumbashi has suffered particularly badly following a move by Zambian authorities to limit the export of corn and corn products, such as maize flour a key ingredient in local cooking. Zambia, along with Malawi, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, is suffering food supply problems, while South Africa has said the recent drought was its worst in more than 100 years. Faced by food shortages Zambian officials banned the export of corn and corn products on April 5.

Though the restriction was lifted a week later, the volume of corn products crossing into DR Congo has yet to recover to pre-ban levels, causing shortages in the country's south east. Lubumbashi, which is just 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the Zambian border, has been hit hardest.

Last Saturday, a 25 kilo (55 pound) bag of

maize flour was selling for 20,000 Congolese francs (\$21.50 at the unofficial, local exchange rate) compared to just \$10 in January. Earlier that week the price reached a peak of \$30 per bag.

'Dishonest traders'

The World Food Programme (WFP) said it is following the situation closely. In an interview with AFP, Agriculture Minister Emile Mota accused "dishonest traders" of causing the shortages by taking advantage of the period before the harvest.

The ministerial taskforce said it had taken a series of measures to "flood the markets of Lubumbashi" with maize flour, including exempting corn and corn products from import duties.

But one agricultural expert, who asked to remain anonymous, blamed the "weakness of the local offering", pointing to the area's high population growth and heavy dependence on copper and cobalt mining. The expert said the season in the Lubumbashi area had been good but warned that the food produced during the harvest from May to June would not be enough to end the crisis. — AFP

SPAIN HEADS TOWARDS ELECTION AS PARTIES REJECT LAST-MINUTE DEAL

MADRID: Spain's political parties yesterday ruled out last-minute talks to secure a parliamentary majority and form a government, making it virtually inevitable that there will be a new election in June.

Spain has been without a government since an inconclusive December election and King Felipe VI is due to meet all parties next week in a last-ditch attempt to strike a deal. But Acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whose People's Party (PP) came first in the December vote although well short of a majority, said yesterday he would tell the king he did not have enough support to form a government.

The election led to the most fragmented parliament in Spain's modern history, with the PP winning 123 seats in the 350-seat lower house, the Socialists 90, anti-austerity Podemos 69 and Ciudadanos 40.

Rajoy also said Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez was to blame for the stalemate. "Pedro Sanchez can avert the elections. I call him once more to work on a grand coalition government that would bring stability to Spain," he tweeted.

Sanchez has repeatedly ruled out such a possibility and a senior member of the Socialist Party repeated yesterday that this option was not being considered. "Is there seriously somebody who still think there could be a grand coalition with the PP? Rajoy knows it from day one, we ran in the elections to make sure he would no longer be prime minister," said the party's leader in parliament, Antonio Hernando.

Hernando also criticised the anti-austerity party Podemos ("We Can") for not agreeing to back a three-way coalition with the Socialists and liberal newcomer Ciudadanos ("Citizens"). Nearly 90 percent of Podemos members last week voted against such a government and the party

opened the door on Wednesday to running on a joint platform with a former communist movement if a new vote is called, in a bid to overtake the Socialists as the biggest leftwing political force.

Meanwhile, Ciudadanos leader Albert

Rivera, whose alliance with the Socialists failed to win enough parliamentary support, called on Rajoy and Sanchez to take a step back and allow a "transition" government lead by an independent figure to be voted in. — Reuters



Some of Africa's longest serving rulers (from top L) Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe addressing the 65th General Assembly at the United Nations in New York, Angola's President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos making a declaration in Luanda tomorrow President of Equatorial Guinea Teodoro Obiang Nguema during the opening of the African Cup of Nations in Bata yesterday (from bottom L) then Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi during a press conference on the sidelines of the 16th Arab League Summit in Tunis on May 22, 2004 shows, then President of Gabon Omar Bongo at a working session of a European Union and Africa summit in Lisbon on December 8, 2007 and then President of Togo Gnassingbe Eyadema at the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (COMESSA) meeting in Syrte on March 7, 2002. — AFP

TURKEY MEETS LESS THAN HALF EU VISA WAIVER TERMS: EU

BRUSSELS: Turkey has met fewer than half the conditions for its citizens to be granted early visa-free travel to the European Union, just 10 days before a deadline for it to meet the requirements, an EU official told lawmakers yesterday. The EU promised last month to extend visa liberalisation to Turkey by the end of June in return for its agreement to take back all illegal migrants who cross to Greece from its shores, provided it fulfilled all the so-called benchmarks.

The executive European Commission is due to report to member states and the European Parliament on May 4 whether Ankara has met the goals, and has set April 31 as a cut-off date for Turkey to pass the necessary measures. Marta Cygan, a director in the Commission's migration and home affairs department, told a European Parliament hearing that Ankara now satisfied in full or almost entirely 35 of the 72 conditions.

"The Turkish authorities have definitely been accelerating the implementation of administrative and legal reforms allowing them to fulfil the requirements," she told lawmakers. Visa-free travel for Turkey, a nation of 79 million, is controversial among the 28 EU states, even though they would not be allowed to work or stay longer than three months.

Some fear it would open doors to more Muslim migration to a bloc already struggling with the biggest influx of refugees and migrants since World War Two.

Arrivals of migrants and refugees on Greek islands have dropped sharply since the EU-Turkey agreement went into force on March 21, but Ankara threatened to walk away from the deal should it not get visa liberalisation in June. During the hearing, lawmakers insisted Turkey should only be granted easier travel terms if it fully satisfies all the criteria. Some also criticised the migration accord with Ankara over human rights concerns.

"I am personally very much in favour of visa liberalisation with Turkey and many other countries. But we are mixing things up here. We have the migration agreement with Turkey and one does get the impression that we are selling ourselves here a bit," Dutch member Sophia in 't Veld said. — Reuters

TURKISH COURT OVERTURNS 275 VERDICTS IN 'COUP PLOT' TRIAL

ANKARA: Turkey's supreme court of appeals yesterday overturned the convictions of 275 people, including a former military chief, who allegedly plotted to overthrow the country's Islamist-leaning government. The decision opens the way for a re-trial and their possible acquittal.

The high court on Thursday cited several flaws in the trial of ex-military chief Ilker Basbug, other military officers and lawyers, academics and journalists. They were accused of membership in an organization dubbed Ergenekon that allegedly plotted in 2003-2004 to topple Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then prime minister and now Turkey's president. The lengthy trial contributed to the gradual erosion of the powers of the army, historically viewed as a guarantor of Turkey's founding principle of secularism.

The appeals court said the lower court had, among other flaws, failed to prove Ergenekon's existence and ruled that the defendants were denied a fair trial. It also ruled that Basbug, the former military chief, should have been tried by a high court in line with regulations on the prosecution of senior officials.

The trial, which began in 2008, grew out of an investigation into the seizure of 27 hand grenades at the home of a noncommissioned officer in Istanbul in 2007. The defendants were accused of plotting high-profile attacks that prosecutors said were aimed at sowing chaos in Turkey to prepare the way for a military coup. The lower court sentenced Basbug and 18 of the defendants to life in prison in 2013.

The Ergenekon case had polarized the country. Some saw it as an opportunity to unravel a shadowy ultranationalist and pro-secular network that allegedly acted behind the scenes with impunity, while others believed the trial was a government attempt to muzzle Erdogan's secular-minded foes and undermine Turkey's secular legacy. The Ergenekon trial and a similar trial against other military officers helped Erdogan's government reshape Turkey's military and assert civilian control in a country that had seen three military coups since 1960. — AP

FRENCH COURT BANS SMOKING AREA IN HIGH SCHOOL

CERGY-PONTOISE, France: A French court ruled yesterday that a high school outside Paris was not allowed to create a smoking zone on its premises, a measure taken by many schools after the jihadist attack on the capital in November. The move was a bid to stop high school pupils crowding on pavements to grab a quick smoke between classes, which authorities and some parents feared would make them a target for potential attacks.

The Paul Lapie high school in Courbevoie is one of three taken to court by anti-smoking groups, who are up in arms at teenagers being given the right to smoke in schools a decade after it was banned.

The administrative court said the school's principal must "ensure the respect of public health laws banning smoking in school establishments." Pressure group Non-Smokers' Rights (DNF), which filed the complaint along with another anti-tobacco group, said the ruling would set a precedent.

"This is the confirmation of the illegality of all smoking zones in high schools, including in open air spaces," the DNF's Stephen Lequet said.

Shortly after the November 13 attacks on Paris nightspots and the national stadium which left 130 dead, the Islamic State group issued threats against French schools.

Under the state of emergency imposed after the attacks, a circular signed by both the education ministry and interior ministry was sent to schools urging them to avoid having pupils gather outside their premises. Some schools then sent out letters to parents about new dedicated smoking areas, even specifying that ashtrays would be provided. However the official rules have been clouded with confusion, with conflicting guidelines from the education ministry.

'We feel abandoned'

Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem said last week that "during this period of heightened security, high school students must simply be asked not to smoke". "According to the minister it is a difficult balance and we must remain pragmatic," a spokeswoman at the education ministry told AFP earlier this week.

Vallaud-Belkacem's remarks were slammed by the main school principals' union SNPDEN, which said it felt "abandoned" by the education ministry. SNPDEN national secretary Joel Lamoise told AFP the union had "noted" the court's ruling, but he maintained it was "unrealistic" to ask pupils not to smoke during school hours. "We have been placed in a difficult situation, this circular allowed us to create special zones inside schools, we feel abandoned now," he said.

Lamoise has argued that "the terrorist risk is much greater right now than the health risk. Between two diseases we are trying to deal with the worst."

A study in June 2015 showed that one in three 17-year-olds smoke daily in France. — AFP

RELIGIOUS GROUP SUES SAN FRANCISCO OVER OPEN-AIR URINAL

SAN FRANCISCO: A religious organization sued the city of San Francisco to remove an open-air urinal from a popular park that it calls unsanitary and indecent. The Chinese Christian Union of San Francisco filed a civil complaint last week demanding the city remove the concrete circular urinal from iconic Dolores Park.

The group says the urinal, which is out in the open and screened only with plants for privacy, "emanates offensive odors," "has no hand-washing facilities" and "it's offensive to manners and morals."

The lawsuit alleges that the item installed in February discriminates against women and the disabled and exposes those who use it to "shame and embarrassment."

"The open-air urination hole violates the privacy of those who need to use the restroom but would be required to expose their bodies and suffer shame and degradation of urinating in public view," it says.

The city attorney's office said in a statement that it will fight the litigation. It pointed out that the 16-acre park is well-known for its "counterculture, immodest sunbathers, pot brownie vendors, spectacular city views, and famously irreverent 'Hunky Jesus' contest."

The office said residents advocated for the facility, called a "pissoir" (piss-WAH), to stop people from urinating on walls, bushes and sidewalks. "If I had to predict the top 100 things in Dolores Park likely to offend these plaintiffs, I wouldn't have guessed that this would make the cut," city attorney spokesman Matt Dorsey said in the statement. — AP



LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (centre L) accompanied by her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh greet wellwishers during a 'walkabout' on her 90th birthday in Windsor, west of London yesterday. — AFP

BRITAIN HAILS 'STEADFAST' QUEEN ON 90TH BIRTHDAY

CAMERON: 'A ROCK OF STRENGTH FOR OUR NATION'

WINDSOR: Britain celebrated the 90th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II yesterday with tributes to a popular monarch who has steered it through the decline of empire and a wave of scandals to the Internet age.

The sovereign, who has been on the throne since 1953, emerged from Windsor Castle dressed in a lime green outfit and matching hat to accept presents and flowers from hundreds of well-wishers. Prime Minister David Cameron hailed her as "a rock of strength for our nation" while her son and heir Prince Charles marked the occasion by reading Shakespeare in a special broadcast on BBC radio.

Later on, the monarch, who last year overtook her great-great grandmother queen Victoria to become Britain's longest-reigning monarch, will host a family dinner to celebrate.

She will also light a beacon, the first in a chain of a thousand which will be lit around the country and the world, symbolising the length of her life and her reign. In an address to the House of Commons to mark the occasion, Cameron said she had been "steadfast, a rock of strength for our nation, for our Commonwealth and on many occasions for the whole world". He said Britain was "uniquely blessed" to have her and praised the queen's "unshakeable sense of duty" while noting she was now "starting to take things a little easier".

While still an active monarch, the queen has scaled back her duties in recent years as Prince Charles and grandson Prince William plus wife Kate take a more prominent role. The royals remain popular but some analysts question what will happen when the queen—who is in good health, enjoying regular rides on her favourite pony and walking her corgis—reaches the end of her life.

In an editorial, The Times newspaper praised her as "a symbol of continuity and the best embodiment we have of a complex national identity".

But it warned the monarchy "will not long retain its popularity" if Charles, who often writes to ministers about issues close to his heart like the environment, is seen to breach constitutional convention by interfering in politics as king.

New family photos

To mark the queen's birthday, there were two military gun salutes at London's Hyde Park and the Tower of London, and parliament will be lit up in the red, white and blue of the British flag.

Buckingham Palace also released new official pictures of the queen taken by US celebrity photographer Annie Leibovitz. They were shot at Windsor Castle, where she will on Friday host US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

In one photograph, the monarch is pictured with four of her beloved dogs outside the mediaeval castle west of London, and in another she is surrounded by some of the youngest members of her family, including a great-granddaughter clutching one of the queen's trademark handbags.

Prince Charles read an extract from William Shakespeare's "Henry VIII" about the future Elizabeth I in tribute to his mother on the BBC World Service. "She shall be, to the happiness of England/ An aged princess," read the text, which also described her as "a pattern to all princes living with her/ And all that shall succeed".

Not a foot wrong?

In recent years, Britain's royal family has not always been on an assured footing as it seems to be now. It went through what the queen described as an "annus horribilis" or horrible year in 1992 when Prince Charles separated from his first wife Diana, while two of the queen's other children also went through breakups and Windsor Castle was hit by fire.

The monarchy's popularity plunged after Diana died in a Paris car crash in 1997 and the queen was initially accused of reacting coldly. Advisors subsequently steered the royals towards a more modern image.

Some 68 percent of Britons think the monarchy is good for Britain, according to a YouGov survey last year. Royal fan John Loughrey, who has slept on a bench outside Windsor Castle since Monday to be there for the queen's big day, described her as "unique".

"She hasn't put a foot wrong," said Loughrey, dressed in red, white and blue, before launching into a rendition of the national anthem. — AFP



WINDSOR: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II collects flowers and good wishes during a walkabout to celebrate her 90th birthday in Windsor, England yesterday. — AP

SAUDI EXECUTES PAKISTANI MAN FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia executed a Pakistani national yesterday for smuggling drugs, taking to 86 the number of people the ultra-conservative kingdom has put to death this year. Shah Zaman Khan Sayyed had been found guilty of attempting to smuggle heroin and amphetamines into the kingdom, the interior ministry said. The sentence was carried out in the Riyadh region. Most people put to death in Saudi Arabia are beheaded with a sword. The executions so far this year include 47 for "terrorism" carried out in a single day on January 2.

Amnesty International said Saudi Arabia had the third highest number of executions last year, at least 158. That was far behind Pakistan, which put to death 326 people, and Saudi Arabia's regional rival Iran, which executed at least 977, said Amnesty, whose figures exclude secretive China. The kingdom's latest execution occurred just hours before US President Barack Obama arrived on an official visit. The British human rights organization Reprieve urged Obama to raise the case of three young men on death row who were minors at the time of their arrests. Among them is Ali al-Nimr, nephew of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr, who was among the 47 people executed in January.—AFP

EX-UN CLIMATE CHIEF QUITS INDIA THINK-TANK AMID 'SEX PEST' CLAIMS

NEW DELHI: Former UN climate panel chief Rajendra Pachauri said yesterday that he quit his Indian think-tank to pursue other interests, at a time when he is facing allegations of sexual harassment. The 75-year-old faces several police charges including sexual harassment, after a female employee at his New Delhi-based Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) filed a complaint last year accusing him of sending inappropriate texts and emails. Pachauri announced yesterday that his term had ended last month at TERI, which he had been heading for more than three decades.

"My term as a Member of the Governing Council ended on March 31, 2016," Pachauri said in a statement sent to AFP by his lawyer Ashish Dixit. "I felt that it was time for me to move away and get engaged in other interests which I have harbored over the past few years for activities at the global level," he added. Pachauri, a leading voice on the dangers of global warming, was forced to quit as chairman of the Nobel Prize-winning UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in February 2015 after a colleague in her late twenties filed a complaint against him.

In July, TERI announced it would replace Pachauri after a backlash over his return to work while facing the allegations. A court had barred him from entering the institute's office for many months following the complaint. It later allowed him to return to work while still on bail, on the condition that he steer clear of his alleged victim. His appointment as TERI executive vice-chairman in February caused outrage, forcing the institute, where he had worked for 35 years, to put him on indefinite leave. Pachauri denies the complainant's accusations and has said his emails and mobile phone were hacked. The police charges against him are due to be heard by a Delhi court on Saturday. Earlier this month, a third former employee of Pachauri accused him of sexual harassment during a short stint as his secretary in 2008 — an allegation Pachauri rejects.—AFP



MUMBAI, Maharashtra: This file photograph shows Indian UB Group chairman Vijay Mallya as he poses with models during the launch of the Kingfisher 2014 calendar in Mumbai.—AFP

INDIA INVESTIGATORS WANT BRITAIN TO DEPORT LIQUOR BARON

NEW DELHI: India's financial crimes agency said yesterday it is seeking the deportation of former airline boss Vijay Mallya from Britain, after he left the country owing more than \$1 billion. The 60-year-old, a part-owner of the Force India Formula 1 team who used to run a liquor empire and Kingfisher Airlines, left India on March 2 despite calls for his arrest and is believed to be in Britain. Last week an Indian court issued an arrest warrant for the heavily-indebted entrepreneur after he failed to appear before investigators looking into the finances of Kingfisher Airlines, which ceased operating in 2012 leaving millions of dollars in unpaid bills.

"We have written to the (foreign) ministry for assistance in the deportation of Mr Mallya as the process would involve using diplomatic channels," a spokesman at the Enforcement Directorate, the federal financial crimes investigator, told AFP on condition of

anonymity. "We have been given enough indication that he is indeed in the UK," he added. The agency's investigation relates to loans which the state-run IDBI bank made to Kingfisher Airlines, despite allegedly knowing it was suffering financial troubles-leading the bank to sustain huge losses.

The official said he expected the foreign ministry to decide in the next few days whether to ask Britain to deport Mallya, who was formerly known as the "King of Good Times". The foreign ministry, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment, has already suspended Mallya's passport. Mallya inherited United Breweries Group (UBG) from his father at the age of 28 and turned it into one of the world's largest spirit makers, hosting extravagant yacht parties with Bollywood stars and politicians along the way. His profile rose further when he acquired a stake in the Force India F1

team and ownership of the Royal Challengers Bangalore cricket team. The Enforcement Directorate has reportedly accused him of siphoning off money from Kingfisher to buy property abroad—a claim the company denies. Separately, he is being chased by a group of mostly state-run banks over \$1.34 billion in unpaid loans made to the airline. In an affidavit filed to India's top court yesterday, Mallya said the banks had no right to demand any information about his overseas assets and asked the court if he could disclose the details in a sealed envelope. Earlier this month the banks rejected his offer to repay \$600 million and told the Supreme Court they wanted him to return to India so they could negotiate with him personally over the total owed. The businessman, who is also a member of India's parliament, has denied absconding and has criticized the media for what he has called a "witch hunt".—AP

PAKISTAN ARMY CHIEF SACKS SENIOR OFFICERS FOR CORRUPTION

'THOSE WHO ARE CORRUPT SHOULD BE WORRIED NOW'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's army has fired several senior officers over corruption charges, senior military sources told AFP yesterday, in a rare display of accountability by the country's most powerful institution. "I can confirm the sacking of at least six senior officers which include a lieutenant general," said a senior officer based in military headquarters, crediting popular army chief Raheel Sharif with launching the investigation leading to the dismissals.

Another source confirmed the sackings. It was unclear when the officers were fired, the precise nature of the charges, or whether they would face criminal pro-

ceedings in a civilian court. The move was hailed by commentators because wrongdoings committed by the army, which has ruled Pakistan for around half of its existence and continues to exert control over foreign policy, rarely come to light. "It's an extraordinary development," retired general Talat Masood told AFP. "The military has taken the lead in punishing corrupt officials and has set an excellent example. It will have a very serious impact and very positive impact in the future. Those who are corrupt should be worried now."

The news comes as Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif faces pressure

over revelations made in the so-called Panama Papers linking his family to a series of offshore companies. Earlier this month he announced the formation of a commission to investigate the allegations in the documents from Panama-based law firm-Mossack Fonseca—that have exposed how some of the world's most powerful people secrete their assets offshore. Masood added that the court martial would increase pressure on the prime minister to clamp down on corruption, which has long held back the South Asian economy, in the civilian government.—AFP

INDONESIA FEARS PIRACY SURGE ON SHIPPING ROUTE

JAKARTA: Indonesia fears piracy on a shipping route along its sea border with the Philippines could reach Somalian levels and has told vessels to avoid danger areas, officials said yesterday, after a spate of kidnappings. Analysts say the route carries \$40 billion worth of cargo each year. It is taken by fully laden super-tankers from the Indian Ocean that cannot use the crowded Malacca Strait. Concerns over maritime attacks by suspected Islamist militants are disrupting the coal trade, with at least two Indonesian coal ports suspending shipments to the Philippines.

Up to 18 Indonesians and Malaysians have been kidnapped in three attacks on tugboats in Philippine waters by groups suspected of ties to the Abu Sayyaf militant network. Abu Sayyaf, which has posted videos on social media pledging allegiance to Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, has demanded 50 million pesos (\$1.1 million) to free the Indonesian crew.

"We don't want to see this become a new Somalia," Indonesian chief security minister Luhut Pandjaitan told reporters, referring to the southern Philippine waters of the Sulu Sea, where the abductions took place. Piracy near Somalia's coast has subsided in the last few years, mainly due to shipping firms hiring private security details and the presence of international warships.

The foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines will meet in Jakarta to discuss the possibility of joint patrols, Pandjaitan said. He said the armed forces chiefs of the three countries would hold talks in Jakarta on May 3. The Indonesian Navy has instructed all commercial vessels "to avoid piracy-prone waters around the southern Philippines", a spokesman for the Indonesian military said. The navy is increasing patrols around Indonesia's borders with Malaysia and the Philippines "to prevent acts of piracy and hijacking", Tatang Sulaiman told Reuters. The Kuala Lumpur-based Piracy Reporting Centre has also warned ships sailing in the Celebes Sea and northeast of the Malaysian state of Sabah on the island of Borneo to stay clear of suspicious small vessels.

Coal trade hit

Two Indonesian coal ports have blocked departures of ships for the Philippines and more suspensions are expected, said Pandu Sjahrir, chairman of the Indonesian Coal Mining Association, and a director of Jakarta-listed coal producer Toba Bara Sejahtera. Toba had suspended all shipments to the Philippines, Sjahrir said. Other companies had cancelled shipments "from both sides", he added. Indonesian state-owned coal miner Bukit Asam said it was diverting Philippine coal shipments to Hong Kong for the next three months. The company ships less than a million tons to the Philippines per year, Bukit Asam corporate secretary Joko Pramono told Reuters. One company with a fleet of 40 dry cargo ships saw a silver lining, however. "If Indonesia bans tugs and barges from exporting coal then it will have to travel in larger cargo ships, of 32,000 to 64,000 tons," said Khalid Hashim, managing director of Bangkok-listed Precious Shipping.

"All this would of course be beneficial for shippers like us." Indonesia, the world's largest thermal coal exporter, supplies 70 percent of the Philippines' coal import needs, which Indonesian data shows stood at about 15 million tons, worth around \$800 million, last year. Philippine coal importers, however, said they could import coal from other countries including Australia, South Africa and Russia and source more locally if Indonesian shipments dried up.—Reuters



INDIA: An Indian farmer tries to revive his unconscious cattle dying on an unploughed field during a water crisis in Gondiya village, 45km from Allahabad, yesterday.—AFP

MORE THAN 100 FEARED DEAD IN INDIA HEAT WAVE

BHUBANESWAR, India/KARACHI, Pakistan: More than 100 people are feared dead in India in an early-summer heat wave which forced schools to close and halted outdoor work like construction, government officials said yesterday. Neighboring Pakistan, which suffered its hottest spell in decades last year, plans to open 500 response centers to provide shelter and cold water to people if a heat-wave warning is issued, a government official said. No heat deaths have yet been reported.

India's hottest months are May and June, but some states have already registered temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), forcing authorities to take emergency steps. In the southern Indian

state of Telangana, 45 people have died from heat exposure, and another 17 in Andhra Pradesh, officials said. Some 43 were believed to have died in neighboring Odisha, although an official there said each of the deaths was being investigated.

Y.K. Reddy, a director at the Indian Meteorological Department, said Telangana has recorded its highest April temperatures since at least 2006. Reddy said there were worries the death toll in Telangana could rise and his department was issuing heat-wave warnings to advise people to stay indoors. Schools in Telangana were shut last week two weeks ahead of their summer holidays. As an emergency measure, Odisha has ordered schools to remain

closed until April 26 and banned construction work during the hottest times of day.

Some small-scale businesses were already suffering. "I am closing my shop before noon because it is too hot," said Tulu Sahu, a small grocery seller in Bhubaneswar city in Odisha. "You cannot stay in the shop." Pakistan, where extreme heat killed more than 1,000 people during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan last year, has started gearing up to tackle any sudden rise of patients who report heat-related illnesses. "We have enough supplies and staff to meet the possible situation," said Seemin Jamali, head of the accident and emergency department at Karachi's Jinnah Hospital.—Reuters



KOLKATA: Indian Christian nuns from the Catholic Order of the Missionaries of Charity queue as they wait to cast their votes for state assembly elections inside a polling station in Kolkata yesterday. State assembly elections in West Bengal are taking place in five phases from April 4 to May 5. — AFP

THAI JUNTA CHIEF ACCUSES FORMER PM THAKSIN OF STIRRING PROTESTS

BANGKOK: The leader of Thailand's junta yesterday accused fugitive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of being behind a series of small anti-junta protests that have flared in the capital this week.

Rivalry between the former telecommunications tycoon and the military-dominated establishment has been at the heart of a decade of fractious politics and any suggestion Thaksin is stirring dissent is likely to raise concern about stability. The military seized power in May 2014, overthrowing an elected government led by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, saying it had to maintain order after months of anti-government protests organized by allies of the establishment.

The military government has banned protests and stifled criticism and anti-junta activity is rare. But since Monday, activists have gathered at various places in Bangkok to show opposition to a military-backed

draft constitution and to protest against the detention of a former minister who spoke out against it. Asked by reporters who was behind the protests, junta chief Prayuth Chan-ocha replied: "Lobbyists living overseas and Thaksin."

The army ousted Thaksin in a 2006 coup. He has lived in self-imposed exile since being sentenced to a prison term in 2008 on corruption charges he said were politically motivated. He remains hugely popular among his legions of poor, rural supporters and is still highly influential. With his huge wealth, he is seen as capable of supporting more active opposition to the government, if he chose to. Thaksin was not immediately available for comment but Noppadon Pattama, a former legal adviser to Thaksin, said in a statement that Thaksin was not behind the protests. "Thaksin Shinawatra has not employed any lobbyists overseas," he said. "He is not behind any government in exile."

Several people have been detained at the protests but there has been no violence. Opponents of the military government, including Thaksin's supporters, object to the constitution that will be put to a referendum on Aug. 7, saying it would give the military sweeping powers. The military denies seeking indefinite power saying the constitution should heal divisions and usher in stable, clean politics. Watana Muangsook, who was a minister of social development in a Thaksin government, was taken into military custody on Monday over criticism of the constitution he posted on Facebook. Watana's lawyer, Narinpong Jampak, told Reuters by telephone that he was with his client but he declined to comment. The government said this week campaigns, either for or against, would not be allowed in the run-up to the referendum. The military has promised an election by the middle of next year. — Reuters

LEADING PHILIPPINE CANDIDATE SAYS HE MAY CUT US, AUSTRALIA TIES

MANILA: Trash-talking Philippine presidential favorite Rodrigo Duterte has warned he is prepared to cut diplomatic ties with the United States and Australia after their ambassadors criticized his joke about the jailhouse rape of a missionary. Duterte also told the ambassadors to "shut their mouths", as controversy continued to rage over his comments in which he said he wanted to have been the first to rape the Australian woman who was brutalized and murdered in a 1989 prison riot. "If I become president, go ahead and sever (diplomatic ties)," Duterte, 71, said on the campaign trail on Wednesday night, referring to the relationships with the United States and Australia, two of the Philippines' closest allies.

Duterte, who while campaigning has called the pope a "son of a b***h" and promised to kill tens of thousands of criminals, recounted at a recent rally the riot events as part of his tough-on-crime pitch to voters. "They raped all of the women... there was this Australian lay minister... when they took them out... I saw her face and I thought, 'Son of a b***h. What a pity... they raped her, they all lined up,'" he told the crowd. "I was mad she was raped but she was so beautiful. I thought, the mayor should have been first." Duterte was at the time mayor of Davao, a major city in the southern Philippines where he is accused of running vigilante death squads that have allegedly killed more than 1,000 people.

The front runner has at times on the campaign boasted about running the death squads, claiming they killed 1,700 people, but also denied any links to them. Duterte has similarly offered varying responses to the rape comments, with his media team releasing a statement in which he apologized. But on the campaign trail, he has repeatedly told reporters he would not say sorry. Australian ambassador Amanda Gorely criticized his remarks this week, saying on Twitter: "Rape and murder should never be joked about or trivialized. Violence against women and girls is unacceptable anytime, anywhere". US ambassador Philip Goldberg later agreed with her. "Statements by anyone, anywhere that either degrade



ILOILO, PANAY ISLAND, Philippines : This photo shows Rodrigo Duterte, front-runner presidential candidate for the May 9 elections, swearing in front of a national flag and supporters (not pictured) during a campaign sortie in Iloilo City, central Philippines. — AFP

women or trivialize issues so serious as rape or murder are not ones that we condone," Goldberg said in an interview with CNN Philippines television.

'Shut your mouths'

Duterte has repeatedly expressed anger at what he regards as their intervention in domestic politics. "It would do well with the American ambassador and the Australian ambassador to shut their mouths," Duterte told reporters on Wednesday. A US embassy spokesman told AFP yesterday there was no immediate response to Duterte's remarks about the ambassadors. An Australian embassy spokeswoman said there would be no comment.

In another warning to the country's traditional allies, Duterte's camp signaled it was prepared to change foreign policy and start direct talks with China over a long-running territorial dispute. President Benigno Aquino has been

improving defence ties with the United States and Australia to bolster the Philippines in its dispute with China over the South China Sea.

China claims most of the South China Sea, even up to the coasts of its neighbors like the Philippines which has accused China of "bullying" other claimants. Aquino has refused to hold direct talks with China over the dispute, preferring multilateral discussions and filing a legal challenge with the United Nations. However a Duterte spokesman said in an interview with ABS-CBN television yesterday that he would be prepared to talk directly with China. "He is also supporting multilateral efforts to rein in China but at the same time, he is open to bilateral talks," said Peter Lavina. "He said, if we can talk to China (about) joint development of the resources of the South China Sea and eventually we need China's investments and technology." — AFP

IN VIETNAM, OUTRAGE AND OPTIMISM AS PARTY THWARTS DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT

HANOI: Schoolteacher Do Viet Khoa loves dogs, even though a puppy he once owned cost him his chance to run in Communist Vietnam's upcoming parliamentary election. Khoa was eliminated during the ruling Communist Party's tough vetting process for independent candidates. Most of the 75 constituents hand-picked by the party to attend his public hearing declared him unsuitable to be a lawmaker. What swayed their vote, Khoa said, was when the party chief of his commune spoke out against his dog. "He complained about my dog shitting in front of the door of my neighbor's house," he told Reuters. "It's ridiculous." Khoa, 48, actually gave away his mischievous puppy before applying to contest a seat in the legislature, which is tightly controlled by the Communist Party.

"Why was I hindered when I played by the rules?", he said. More than 100 Vietnamese - an unprecedented amount - tried to run in the May 22 election as independents, including activists bent on testing the party's sincerity about fostering inclusiveness and a democratic spirit. But almost all the self-nominated candidates in Hanoi failed to get on the ballot. The two who passed vetting in Hanoi were directors of medical and environmental research institutes run by the government.

Like Khoa, who said neighbors were told to vote against him, many independents complained the Vietnam Fatherland Front, an umbrella group of the party's social organizations, had rigged the process to keep ordinary people out. Vietnam's election commission has yet to respond to questions about the elimination of independents. The full list of approved candidates will be finalized next week for the five-yearly election, the only national poll the public votes in. Nguyen Dinh Nam, who runs a tech company, won approval of 99 percent of constituents at his hearing. He said they voted with a show of hands rather than risk manipulation of a secret ballot, but he still didn't make the cut.

"You don't like outsiders in the system - the trust of 99 percent of people is not as important as your plan?" he wrote in a Facebook swipe at the Fatherland Front. A surprise loser was Tran Dang Tuan, 59, former deputy director of state-run broadcaster VTV, who runs another cable TV channel and had hoped as a lawmaker to promote poverty alleviation and higher journalism standards. Tuan failed, even though he had unanimous support at his meeting.

Singing for Obama

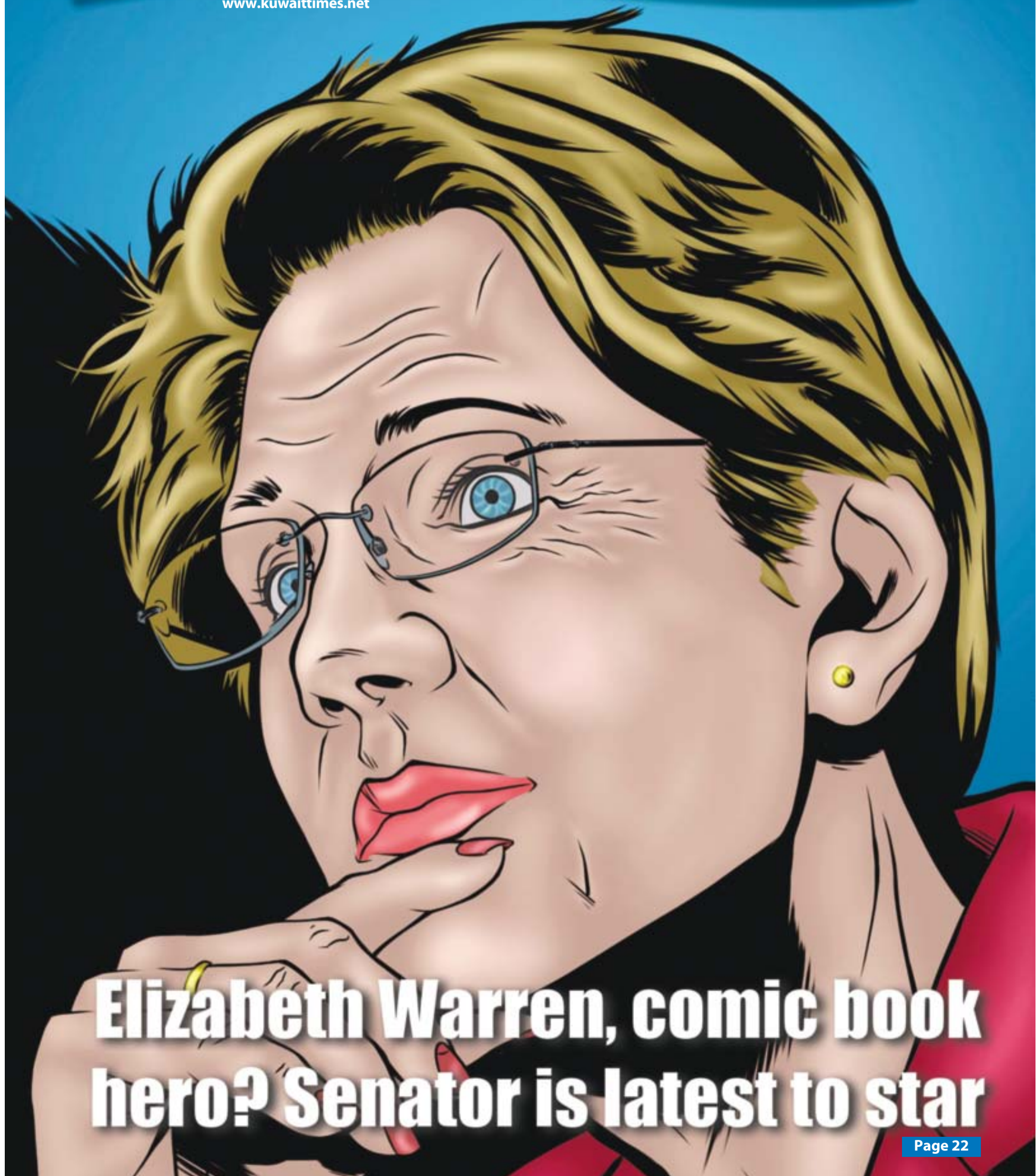
Singer Mai Khoi, who has upset conservatives with her sexy attire and braless performances, was the most high-profile independent. Dubbed "Vietnam's Lady Gaga", she is still waiting to hear her fate. She says non-party candidates have been cheated and has sent an invitation to U.S. President Barack Obama to meet her when he visits Vietnam next month, so she can discuss the election issue, and sing for him.

"I want to talk about how the United States can help to improve our laws on elections and political participation," Mai Khoi said. "These results demonstrate the party does not care what the people think." The 4.5 million-member Communist Party has monopolized all levels of power for 41 years. That includes the 500-seat National Assembly, which has a small minority of non-party lawmakers endorsed by state institutions. — Reuters

★ FEMALE ★ FORCE ★

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Elizabeth Warren, comic book hero? Senator is latest to star

Sudan's top girl band eyes world tour 45 years on



The Nightingales — Sudan's best-loved girl band — perform at a concert in the capital, Khartoum.

Stepping onto a Khartoum stage and launching into their first song, The Nightingales—Sudan's best-loved girl band—still raise whoops and cheers from adoring fans, 45 years after their debut. Sisters Amal, Hadia and Hayat Talsam were known in their 1970s heyday as the "Sudanese Supremes" for their stylish bobs, matching dresses and their soulful ballads, changing the image of female artists in Sudan forever. Their outfits may have changed a little—at the January concert in Khartoum, the sisters appeared in long robes and loose headscarves—but the audience's adoration has only increased, with fans dancing and singing in front of the stage.

Their vintage brand of Sudanese pop, songs of longing and youth blending elements of folk music with their driving vocals aim to show the world another side to Sudan. "We want to travel the globe and offer our art to all the peoples of the world," Amal said after the concert at the family home, sitting beside her sisters. "We could show a beautiful side of Sudan to the outside world" said Hadia, the oldest of the sisters, grinning. Although they haven't got round to planning their tour, they do have some prior experience.

'Vibrant period'

The Nightingales were formed in 1971, when a family friend came to their home in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city, to ask their father if he could pick three of his seven daughters to perform a song he wrote. The trio performed so well that they made the arrangement permanent and they were picked to tour Sudan with president Jafer Al-Nimeiri, a socialist-leaning army officer who seized power in 1969. "It was a very, very vibrant period for culture and art," said Hayat, the quietest of



The Nightingales — Sudan's best-loved girl band — perform at a concert in the capital, Khartoum.



Amal Talsam, member of Sudanese band 'The Nightingales', watches an online video of the band playing in the 1970s during an AFP interview at her family home.

the sisters. Amal said she was 15, Hadia 17 and Hayat just 13 years old when they started touring, building a region-wide fan base. But in socially conservative 1970s Sudan, not everyone was pleased at the three young women travelling unaccompanied and singing and dancing in front of crowds.

But the sisters won acceptance by force of character and with support from their family. "The Nightingales changed the way people looked at female artists in Sudan," said Hadia. The group did nothing to change their looks and even appeared on the state broadcaster performing their songs. Other female artists had preceded them but their music had been more traditional.

Neighbors, friends and even some relatives criticized their father for their on-stage and television appearances as their fame grew. "Our father wasn't interested in any of that and he used to encourage us a lot," Hadia said proudly. "We were able to stand firm and fight back against people who were against us and our progress and our presence on stage proved that there was nothing wrong with it," Amal added. By the 1980s, the group had cemented their reputation as one of the country's best loved groups ... but Sudan itself was changing. Nimeiri grew increasingly paranoid and repressive toward the end of his 16-year reign, declaring sharia Islamic law in 1983 and igniting another civil war with southern rebels.

'Better than the Supremes'

The Nightingales kept playing but in 1988, with all three married and other commitments, they played their final concert in Khartoum. Amal and Hadia left for the Gulf with their

families, before moving to the US, while Hayat stayed in Khartoum.

The next year, now-president Omar al-Bashir seized power in an Islamist-backed coup and his military authorities imposed a curfew that lasted for years, putting limits on musical performances.

But in 2007, Hadia and Amal performed in New York's Central Park at a festival of Sudanese music and people urged them to return to Sudan for a full reunion. Apprehensively, Hadia and Amal returned the next year and organized a concert with Hayat at the officers' club in central Khartoum, unsure whether their fans would remember them after 20 years. When they arrived, the streets were jammed with expectant fans.

"The only thing that changed was they liked it much more and it was a huge success," Amal said. Now, the Nightingales tour Sudan when they are all in the country together, drawing hundreds of spectators of all ages to their shows across Khartoum. They have lost none of their glamour, singing in matching outfits, with performances punctuated by mid-set costume changes—and a quick cigarette break. Amal, Hadia and Hayat are confident they can win more fans abroad and are keen to arrange their tour. And would the comparison with the Supremes help draw foreign crowds in? "Honey, we're better than the Supremes," Amal shot back in American-accented English. "We came to their country, but they never came here". — AFP



Fans watch 'The Nightingales'-Sudan's best-loved girl band perform at a concert in the capital, Khartoum.

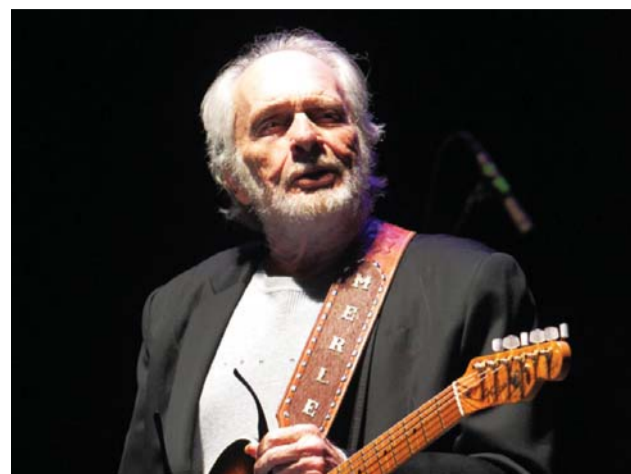
American Country Countdown Awards to honor Merle Haggard

Singer and songwriter Toby Keith will perform a tribute to the late legend Merle Haggard during the American Country Countdown Awards on May 1. Dick Clark Productions and Cumulus Media announced yesterday that the awards show will include a special tribute to the "Okie from Muskogee" singer and songwriter, who died on his 79th birthday on April 6. Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey will introduce the performance.

Keith will perform with Haggard's longtime backing band, The Strangers, which includes his son Ben. Haggard's widow,

Theresa, will also be in attendance. Other performers for the show include Luke Bryan, Carrie Underwood, Brooks & Dunn, Martina McBride, Florida Georgia Line, Kelsea Ballerini, Sam Hunt and Cam. The show will air live on Fox from the Forum in Inglewood, California.— AP

In this May 3, 2014, file photo, Merle Haggard performs in concert at Harrah's Resort in Atlantic City, NJ. — AP



Singer Rihanna performs on day 3 of the 2016 Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival Weekend 1 at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California. — AFP

Beyonce plans charity drive on 'Formation' tour

Pop superstar Beyonce announced Wednesday that she would partner with charities on her upcoming tour, raising support for causes including improving water in lead-poisoned Flint, Michigan. Beyonce, whose "Formation" tour opens next Wednesday, encouraged fans to contribute on the CrowdRise website to the United Way charity in Flint, with donors entered into a raffle to win VIP-section tickets. Fans can also win tickets and upgrades by signing up on-site at concerts to support groups. The beneficiaries are Global Citizen, which is dedicated to ending extreme poverty worldwide and puts on an annual concert in New York's Central Park, and Chime for Change, a group founded by the Gucci fashion house that works with Global Citizen to promote the inclusion of women and girls. "Through our collaborations with our strategic charity partners, we've created simple ways for everyone to participate," said Ivy McGregor, director of philanthropy at Beyonce's charitable arm BeyGood.

"Because we believe together we can make the world better standing, living and giving in Good Formation," she said. The United Way, generally considered the largest charity in the United States, will also highlight local issues on each stop. Beyonce also plans charity events on the sidelines of the tour in her hometown of Houston, the gangsta rap capital of Compton, California, and in Detroit where she will highlight the water crisis in nearby Flint. More than 8,000 children in low-income Flint, which is majority African American, are believed to have drunk municipal water tainted by lead levels that had grown alarmingly high but were not immediately addressed by the government.

Beyonce has named the tour after her new song "Formation," one of her most political works in which she takes up the mantle of the Black Lives Movement against police brutality. Cable network HBO on Saturday will broadcast a Beyonce project entitled "Lemonade," which a fan site has speculated will be an "album-film." — AFP



This file photo shows Beyonce onstage during the 58th Annual Grammy music Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

Rihanna

passes Beatles on US all-time hits list

Pop superstar Rihanna has surpassed The Beatles as the artist to rule the US singles chart for the second longest. Rihanna's "Work," which features input from rapper Drake and is the first track off her latest album "Anti," spent its ninth week on the top of the Billboard singles chart for the seven days through Friday. Billboard magazine, which has published the weekly chart since 1958, confirmed Wednesday that the Barbados-born singer has now spent 60 weeks in the top spot in total, one more than The Beatles.

But she is still well away from capturing the top rank from Mariah Carey, who has reigned for 79 weeks. Carey's hits notably included "My Sweet Day," her 1995 ballad with Boyz II Men inspired by the AIDS epidemic, which spent a record 16 weeks on the top of the chart. On the latest album chart, folk rockers The Lumineers opened at number one with "Cleopatra," which also topped the list in Britain. It is the second album by the Denver-based band, who broke through with the 2012 song "Ho Hey," which was widely used on television programs and advertisements. — AFP

James Bond director Guy Hamilton dies at 93



In this file photo, dated Saturday May 14, 2005, Frederick Baker, the Anglo-Austrian director of "Shadowing The Third Man", left, and Britain's Guy Hamilton, director of four James Bond films, pose prior to their joint press conference at the 58th international Cannes film festival in Cannes, southern France.—AP

Guy Hamilton, the director of four James Bond films, has died on the Mediterranean island of Majorca at the age of 93. Hamilton was at the helm of iconic 007 movies "Goldfinger" in 1964 and "Diamonds are Forever" in 1971, both starring Sean Connery, as well as 1973's "Live and Let Die" and 1974's "The Man with the Golden Gun," both with Roger Moore as Bond. Early films included 1954's "An Inspector Calls," starring Alastair Sim, 1955's "The Colditz Story," starring John Mills, and 1961's "The Best of Enemies" with David Niven.

He went on to direct movies like "Funeral in Berlin" in 1966, starring Michael Caine, 1969's "Battle of Britain," with Caine and Trevor Howard, 1978's "Force 10 From Navarone," with Harrison Ford, and two Agatha Christie adaptations, 1980's "The Mirror Crack'd," with Angela Lansbury, Tony Curtis and Rock Hudson, and 1982's "Evil Under the Sun," with Peter Ustinov, James Mason and Maggie Smith. — Reuters

Damien Hirst works leaked formaldehyde gas

Iconic works of art by British artist Damien Hirst involving dead animals preserved in giant tanks leaked potentially-dangerous formaldehyde gas during a show at London's Tate Modern gallery, it emerged Wednesday. Scientists testing a new sensor for the remote detection of the carcinogenic gas in the 2012 exhibition found levels above those legally permitted, according to a study in the journal *Analytical Methods*. "It has been found that the tanks are surrounded by formaldehyde fumes, constantly exuded in the atmosphere (likely via the sealant), reaching levels of 5 ppm (parts per million), one order of magnitude higher than the 0.5 ppm limit set up by legislation," the abstract states.

One work that emitted high levels was "Away from the Flock", a 1994 exhibit showing a lamb preserved in formaldehyde solution in a glass and steel box. Gas was also detected around

"Mother and Child (Divided)", a 1993 work which comprises four boxes containing a calf and cow each bisected, although the exact level was not recorded in the journal article.

Similar tests also revealed formaldehyde gas around some artworks in the Summer Palace in Beijing, although no levels were given. The scientists suggested this could be blamed on new lacquer painted on the old works. A spokesman for the Tate Modern said: "Tate always puts the safety of its staff and visitors first, and we take all necessary precautions when installing and displaying our exhibitions. "These works contained a very dilute formaldehyde solution that was contained within sealed tanks." Hirst's representatives had no immediate response to the study which was led by Pier Giorgio Righetti at the Politecnico di Milano in Italy. — AP



This file photo shows a man walking past a sculpture by British artist Damien Hirst, "Away From The Flock" at the Oceanography Museum in Monaco. — AFP

Elizabeth Warren, comic book hero? Senator is latest to star

Her parents didn't hail from the planet Krypton, and she was never bitten by a radioactive spider, but that hasn't stopped Elizabeth Warren from starring as a comic book hero. "Female Force: Elizabeth Warren" tells the true-life story of Warren's rise from Oklahoma schoolgirl to US senator and champion of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. The 22-page comic is the brainchild of Portland, Oregon-based publishers Storm Entertainment and is part of a larger series designed to celebrate the lives of notable women. Past subjects include Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Madonna, Sarah Palin, Condoleezza Rice, Facebook executive Cheryl Sandberg, Nancy Reagan, Tina Fey and Caroline Kennedy.

The most popular comic in the series told Michelle Obama's life story, and sold about 75,000 copies. There have been about 70 titles in all.

Publisher Darren Davis said he was drawn to Warren's story because of the role strong women have played in his life. "She's a woman that has it all. She has the family. She has the career. She has a strong work ethic," he said. "We thought she had a really strong story."

Instead of leaping over tall buildings in tights and a cape, or battling mad jokers and villainous penguins, Warren's political superpowers are focused on something she sees as even more threatening: the Wall Street and Capitol Hill power brokers she holds responsible for hollowing out the middle class. The bulk of the book steers clear of ideological battles and instead zeroes in on Warren's personal and professional struggles, from hardscrabble childhood and young mom to law

student, law professor and candidate for Ted Kennedy's old US Senate seat.

"We really want to showcase these people's lives and where they came from rather than making some political statement," he said. Warren had nothing to do with the book, and learned about it only after publication. She hasn't commented publicly on her turn as comic book hero. Matt Reyes, manager of New England Comics, said there's a niche audience for a biographical comic book that tells Warren's story, especially in her hometown of Cambridge.—AP



This undated image provided by Storm Entertainment shows the cover of a comic book "Female Force: Elizabeth Warren" featuring a likeness of Massachusetts Sen Elizabeth Warren. — AP



A cat takes part in the long jump event in Hallmark Olympic Stadium during the taping of the Hallmark Channel's Kitten Summer Games in New York. — AP

Tiny paw-thletes compete in Hallmark's Kitten Summer Games

What do the four-legged footballers of the Hallmark Channel's Kitten Bowl do in the offseason? They go for the gold in their own Summer Games, including a de-cat-hlon and freestyle wrestling. And, bonus, the 90 or so furry Olympians were up for adoption by the rescue group North Shore Animal League America, organizers said Tuesday at the taping of the TV special to air Aug 5, in time for the human games in Rio de Janeiro.

The cuteness quotient was off the leash as the tiny competitors found their footing on bite-size playing fields, frolicking on scratchable rings at the gymnastics "venue" and jumping little hurdles decked out with delectable feathers intended to keep competitors on the move over at track and field.

Love all animals

Escapees were corralled by spotters, who ringed the sets as huge cameras shot the action. Beth Stern, North Shore's ambassador and wife of shock jock Howard Stern, was on hand. She's a self-proclaimed crazy cat lady, filling her Instagram with the couple's many fosters and six permanent pet cats. She keeps an eye out for special needs cats, sheltering two that are blind, with one that has only three legs due to arrive soon.

"Those are the underdogs," Stern said. "Those are the ones that sadly wind up in shelters for way too long." Stern is a magician in finding homes for her fosters, totaling more than 200 in the last couple of years. "We always have a house full of fosters," she said from Tuesday's sidelines. "But we are dog people, too. We both love all animals."

Hallmark decided to stage a kitten Olympics special on the success of its three Super Bowl-timed Kitten Bowls. Mary Carillo, an NBC sports reporter who will be in Rio, is co-host of the kitty games - despite her allergy to cats. She was joined by David Frei, who retired this year as the longtime host of the Westminster Kennel Club show telecast. And yes, he was seen fraternizing with - scandal! - a kitten or two.

"I do love cats, but we have two dogs," Frei said. The kitten games, including some full-grown cat "judges" also up for adoption,

come during "kitten season," the time of year that homeless female felines give birth at rapid rates. "It's when the temperatures are warmer. That enhances the mother cat's heat cycles," Stern explained. "That results in hundreds upon hundreds of cats and kittens in so many shelters right now and they become overcrowded. People need to learn to spay and neuter. If they see strays in their yard trap, neuter and return. Let's try to solve this problem."

Brutishly proportioned

In addition to promoting adoption through the Kitten Games, North Shore will hold an adoption marathon starting April 30 and running for 36 hours, straight through to May 1. More than 700 dogs, cats, puppies and kittens will be available. Carillo, loaded up on allergy meds, is a Kitten Bowl veteran. We caught up with her when there was a slight, er, paw in the competition. "Unlike a lot of other professional athletes, they kind of take their sweet time. All of a sudden in the middle of a big event there's a cat nap," she smiled. "They don't know the rules. They don't care. They kind of just freestyle it at an awful lot of these events."

Carillo, too, has dogs, including Petey Boy, a rescue. Despite her allergy, she once owned an outdoor cat in Florida and loves them just as much. "And they're actually terrific athletes. Their balance, their movement, the way they stalk," she said. Rio will be her 13th straight turn as an Olympics reporter, analyst and commentator. She has already made a couple of trips to shoot feature stories. But on this day, it was all about the cats. Was she worried about purrrrrrformance enhancing drugs among the furry, fleet-footed hopefuls? A couple of the competitors were brutishly proportioned. "I tell you what, they're not afraid to dip into the catnip? I've noticed that myself," Carillo joked. "You've gotta keep an eye on them. They're animals, and they're bloodthirsty competitors."— AP

Jewish family makes claims to prized Passover manuscript

The grandchildren of one of the earliest Jewish victims of the Nazis are laying claim to a jewel of Israel's top museum: The world's oldest illustrated Passover manuscript. The descendants of a German Jewish lawmaker say the famed Birds' Head Haggadah, a medieval copy of the text read around Jewish dinner tables on Passover, was stolen from their family during the Nazi era and sold without the family's consent 70 years ago to the predecessor of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem - an act the family calls a "long-standing illegal and moral injustice."

The medieval manuscript, which tells the biblical tale of the Israelite exodus from Egypt, has long vexed scholars with its peculiar drawings of Jewish figures with bird-like heads. Now, a new page in the manuscript's history is being written, as a high-profile American attorney who restored looted masterpieces by artist Gustav Klimt to their Jewish heir - a courtroom drama made famous in the recent Hollywood film "Woman in Gold" - is taking on the case.

Priceless value

The manuscript is currently displayed behind glass in a darkened room at the Israel Museum in a special exhibit ahead of the weeklong Passover holiday, which begins today. The family wants the manuscript to remain at the museum, but it demands the museum pay compensation and rename the manuscript after the family, or face a lawsuit. "We want a compromise," said Eli Barzilai, 75, who lives in Jerusalem. He is leading the restitution demand in Jerusalem on behalf of his cousins in the United States and Berlin. He said the manuscript is so rare, its value is priceless. The Art Newspaper, which first reported the ownership claim, said the family is seeking "less than" \$10 million, but neither Barzilai nor the family's lawyer would cite a figure to The Associated Press. "If we go to court," he said, "there's no turning back."

Barzilai, who is spending Passover on a tour of China with his wife, said his lawyer and the Israel Museum had exchanged documentation regarding the Haggadah, and that Barzilai would meet museum staff for the first time in May. The museum said in a statement that it "looks forward to meeting with Mr Barzilai, following its several suggestions that he do so, and to learning about whatever new information and documentation he has and to sharing what the Museum knows with him."

In an email exchange provided by Barzilai's lawyer, the museum's lawyer acknowledged the Marum family's ownership of the Haggadah "for a period of time up until 1933." Written in southern Germany around 1300 by a scribe identified only as Menahem, the Bird's Head Haggadah has long been a riddle. Marc Michael Epstein, Vassar College professor and author of the book "The Medieval Haggadah," called it "as mysterious as the Pyramids

of Giza, the monoliths of Easter Island, or Mona Lisa's smile." Much of the enigma surrounds its strange illustrations of Jewish figures. Epstein believes the heads on the figures are those of griffins, a beloved mythical creature, and the drawings were meant to offer a positive representation of Jews while skirting a biblical prohibition against depicting human likenesses.

Jewish immigrant

Barzilai says the 14th-century Haggadah was a wedding gift



In this photo the famed Birds' Head Haggadah, a medieval copy of a text read around the Passover holiday table, is seen on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. — AP

from his grandmother's family to his grandfather, Ludwig Marum, a lawyer from the German town of Karlsruhe who served in Germany's parliament and opposed Hitler. The Nazis paraded Marum and other opponents across town before taking them away. Marum was later killed at the Kislau concentration camp.

A Jewish lawyer named Shimon Jeselsohn who worked with Marum managed to flee and eventually moved to Israel after World War II. One day, he read in the newspaper about a special Haggadah purchased by the Bezalel National Museum, the forerunner to the Israel Museum. Jeselsohn recognized it as the Birds' Head Haggadah. Marum had kept it in his law office, Jeselsohn said in his memoirs.

Curious as to how the manuscript ended up in Jerusalem, Jeselsohn began making inquiries. The museum director told him

a Jewish immigrant from Karlsruhe brought it after the war. When Jeselsohn asked the immigrant where he got it, he said a Jewish doctor had given it to him. But when the doctor denied it, the immigrant offered no further explanation, and Jeselsohn grew suspicious. He wrote to Barzilai's aunt, Elisabeth, who had survived World War II and moved to New York, to update her about the Haggadah's journey.

After a visit to Israel in 1984 to see the Haggadah at the Israel Museum with Barzilai, Elisabeth wrote to the museum that she believed the immigrant who had brought it to Jerusalem "had no right to sell it," but that the Marum family wanted it to remain at the museum "for the benefit of the public." For years, the family did not act. Dominique Avery, Elisabeth's daughter, says her late mother thought she had no recourse to retrieve the manuscript and she deferred to Barzilai.

Separate identities

After Barzilai heard a speech last year at the Israel Museum by E Randol Schoenberg, the lawyer who retrieved the Klimt paintings, Barzilai enlisted the lawyer's help. The family's demands are delicate, because they are leveled at the leading museum of a country that gave refuge to Holocaust survivors and that has long seen itself as a caretaker of the cultural artifacts of Holocaust victims. "The Israel Museum should be even more sensitive to the claimant's side," said Schoenberg. The museum said it has in recent years restituted 18 works looted during World War II, and is in the process of restituting three more works.

There are two researchers dedicated to combing through the museum's collection for looted objects, the museum said. Why Barzilai waited until his 70s to pursue the manuscript is another question mark in the story. Barzilai spent his childhood with an adopted family, and only learned as a teenager that he had been adopted and that his biological parents had perished in the Holocaust. It was too painful a truth to bear, he said, and he wanted to forget his connection to the Marum family. "We were two separate identities," he said. Even when he accompanied his aunt Elisabeth to see the Haggadah, he said he took no special interest in the manuscript. Through his quest to reclaim the Haggadah at this stage in his life, Barzilai says he has reclaimed a part of himself. "The Haggadah," Barzilai said, "was a trigger." — AP

1990s WWE wrestling star Chyna dies in Southern California

Chyna, the tall, muscle-bound, raven-haired pro-wrestler who rocketed to popularity in the 1990s and later made the rounds on reality TV, has died, authorities said. Police in Southern California said they were responding to a 911 call from a friend of the former World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler



In this Sept 7, 2000 file photo, WWF wrestler Chyna arrives for the 2000 MTV Video Music Awards, at New York's Radio City Music Hall. — AP

when they found her dead in her Redondo Beach apartment. A friend had gone Wednesday to check on Chyna, whose real name is Joan Marie Laurer, after she had failed to answer her phone for a few days, Redondo Beach police said in a statement. The friend told the 911 operator that Laurer wasn't breathing.

The 46-year-old Laurer was dead when officers arrived, police said. Neither police nor coroner's officials have released any cause of death. An autopsy was planned in the next few days. Laurer billed herself as the "9th Wonder of the World" because her wrestling predecessor Andre the Giant had already called himself the eighth. She was a member of the wrestling squad that dubbed itself "D-Generation X," often wrestled against men and at one point was the WWE women's champion. After leaving the WWE in 2001, Laurer posed for Playboy and appeared in adult films and on reality TV, including the shows "The Surreal Life" and "Celebrity Rehab with Dr Drew."

A statement posted Wednesday night on her website reads, "Today we lost a true icon, a real life superhero. Joanie Laurer aka Chyna, the 9th Wonder of the World has passed away. She will live forever in the memories of her millions of fans and all of us that loved her." Laurer was a native of Rochester, New York, and graduated from the University of Tampa in Florida before taking up wrestling. She joins a long list of WWE professional wrestlers who have died relatively young, including Rick Rude, Curt "Mr Perfect" Hennig, the Ultimate Warrior and Owen Hart. — AP



In this file photo, Joanie Laurer, former pro wrestler known as Chyna, flexes her bicep as she arrives at the 31st annual American Music Awards, in Los Angeles. — AP photos



Healthy overnight **Strata**



By Melissa D'Arabian

Breakfast in bed is a love language in our home. Anytime there is a special occasion to celebrate - a birthday, Mother's Day, Father's Day, whatever - the rest of the family follows an unspoken agreement to meet early in the kitchen to craft a breakfast-in-bed tray. I'm always first to the kitchen, and as I get the project rolling, my daughters show up one at a time, bleary-eyed and clutching handmade crafts or cards and some flowers picked from the garden. As the team leader for many of the breakfasts our family has orchestrated over the years, I've developed a few best practices. And my No.

1 tip: Do the bulk of the work the night before. Overnight breakfast recipes are key. The (critical) decorating of the tray with small kiddos sucks up a surprising amount of time, leaving precious little space for complex recipe execution in the morning.

Tip No. 2: Serve something a little special. Stepping outside the routine breakfast menu has incredible power to make the

whole morning feel like a party.

Tip No. 3: Keep in mind the logistics of eating off a tray while mostly reclined in bed. Cereal, aside from breaking rule No. 2, is just about impossible to eat in bed without spilling. And while you don't need to be limited to finger food, think twice before getting too cozy with messy and liquid-based meal ideas. (It takes weeks for the smell of maple syrup to leave a comforter after a serious spill. Listen to the voice of experience on this one.)

• what dish covers all these bases? And is healthy? Egg strata, which layers bread, eggs, meat and veggies all in one dish. I make mine in a muffin tin, which results in perfect portioning, pretty presentation and the flexibility to pick up breakfast with your hands or use a fork and knife. I use white whole-grain bread and a combination of eggs and egg whites to keep the nutrient profile reasonable. So even your morning breakfast party can boost your day with protein and fiber.

Easy Overnight Individual **Egg Strata**

Start to finish: 45 minutes, plus overnight chilling

Ingredient

Servings: 8
8 slices of white whole-grain bread
2 small breakfast sausage links or 1 large link chicken sausage, mild or spicy (uncooked), casings removed
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 cup finely chopped button or mixed mushrooms
4 ounces frozen chopped spinach, thawed and excess liquid squeezed out
1/4 cup (2 ounces) light cream cheese
1/4 cup salsa
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 whole eggs
2 egg whites
3/4 cup low-fat milk
Kosher salt and ground black pepper
2 medium tomatoes, cut into 8 thin slices
1/4 cup shredded Gruyere, Swiss or cheddar cheese

Preparation

Cut the crusts off the bread, then cut the crusts into 1/2-inch cubes and set aside.

Use the palm of your hand to lightly press the slices of bread flat, making them thin and a little doughy. Coat the cups of a muffin pan with cooking spray, then gently press 1 slice into each cup, creating 8 little crusts. Set aside.

In a medium saute pan over medium-high, cook the sausage, crumbling with a spoon, until no longer pink, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and mushrooms and cook until fragrant, about another minute. Add the spinach, cream cheese and salsa, then cook for another 2 minutes (the mushrooms will not be fully cooked). Remove from the heat and stir in the mustard. Allow to cool for several minutes.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg whites and milk until frothy. Add the slightly cooled mushroom and sausage mixture and stir to combine. Season with generous pinches each of salt and pepper. Place a few cubes of bread crust in each muffin cup, then spoon the egg mixture on top. You may not need all of the bread crusts. Lay 1 slice of tomato on top of each tart, then 1/2 tablespoon of cheese over that.

Cover the muffin tray with foil and refrigerate for up to 24 hours. When you are ready to serve, heat the oven to 350 F. Bake for 15 minutes covered, then remove the foil and continue baking until the eggs are firm, another 10 to 15 minutes.

Nutrition information per serving: 170 calories; 50 calories from fat (29 percent of total calories); 6 g fat (2.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 75 mg cholesterol; 430 mg sodium; 19 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 10 g protein.



Serving fruit for dessert can be both virtuous and decadent

By JM Hirsch

According to my grandmother, fruit is God's candy, making it the perfect ending to a meal. I agree with Grandma - fruit is a lovely, healthy way to end a meal. But I'll also confess that the dessert lover in me sometimes craves something a smidge fancier. And by fancier, I mean with chocolate. Berries are the perfect dessert fruit because their flavor is concentrated and bold, and they are both sweet and just a tiny bit tangy. Berries are gorgeous and elegant, which is important when it comes to pulling off fruit as a true dessert and not some sort of healthy consolation prize (try serving sliced apples at your next dinner party and you'll see what I mean).

Plus, berries are rich in antioxidants, high in fiber and low in calories. Raspberries, for instance, have just about 60 calories per cup. And despite their sweet taste, they pack only about 5 grams of sugar, but a whopping 8 grams of fiber. All of which means this dessert isn't just tasty, it's filling, too.

Perhaps the best benefit to making berries the star of dessert is that there's a little wiggle room to add a few bells and whistles. One of my favorite fruit dessert strategies is to whip up a simple syrup (just water and sugar heated until they come together in a thin syrup) with cool flavors. Think about adding interesting spices, such as cardamom with vanilla bean and black pepper, or herbs, such as mint or basil and lemon zest. Then just drizzle your way to dessert magic.

Add a tablespoon of liqueur or wine to the syrup - think orange liqueur or Marsala - and the flavors really pop. A few drops of almond extract or even cocktail bitters also are great. Only a tiny bit of a flavorful syrup is needed, but be aware that you are adding a bit of (worthwhile) sugar. Just before serving, use a vegetable peeler to shave off a few shards of deep, almost bitter chocolate, and you've just turned simple fruit into a weekend-worthy dessert.

Ingredients

Bitters and berries
Start to finish: 20 minutes, plus steeping
Servings: 6
1/3 cup raw coconut sugar
1/3 cup water
1-1/2 tablespoons angostura bitters
1/2 vanilla pod, sliced open lengthwise, seeds scraped out
1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
2 tablespoons orange juice
4 cups mixed fresh berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and/or blackberries)
Very dark chocolate bar

Preparation

In a small saucepan over medium, heat the sugar and water, stirring occasionally, until the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes. Stir in the bitters, vanilla pod and seeds, orange zest and juice, then cook for another 1 to 2 minutes, or until fragrant. Remove from the heat and allow to steep at room temperature for at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 hours. Discard the vanilla pod. Refrigerate if not using right away. Divide the berries among 6 dessert cups. Spoon about 2 tablespoons of the syrup over each berry bowl. Top with shavings of dark chocolate.

Nutrition information per serving: 110 calories; 20 calories from fat (18 percent of total calories); 2 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 20 mg sodium; 24 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 19 g sugar; 1 g protein. — AP



10 fresh, delicious ways to dress up your spring asparagus

The fact that decent asparagus is now available all year doesn't really matter. We've been programmed to think of it as something we must eat in spring. And so we shall. The good news is that asparagus is wildly versatile. It's delicious raw (and, so long as you don't mind the cliché, wrapped in prosciutto), roasted, shaved, sliced, chopped, even pureed (think creamy soup). Its assertive flavor means it pairs well with robust meats (everything from the roasts of early spring to the barbecue of early summer), but it still is light and fresh enough to work in a salad (farro and feta would be nice). So to help you get spring off to a great start, here are 10 fresh, easy ideas for eating more asparagus.

10 fresh idea for asparagus:

Soup: Cut 1 bunch of asparagus into 1/2-inch pieces. Steam until just tender and still bright green. Reserve 1/2 cup of pieces, then blend the remaining asparagus with 1 cup warmed half-and-half and 1 cup warmed low-sodium chicken broth or stock. Season with salt and pepper and a pinch of cayenne. Spoon into bowls and top with the reserved pieces of asparagus and a sprinkle of crumbled feta cheese.



Pizza: Arrange thin asparagus spears over a prepared pizza crust. Top with slices of brie and pieces of torn prosciutto. Bake at 400 F until the crust is golden and the cheese is melted, about 10 minutes. Drizzle with balsamic glaze.

Panini: Assemble a sandwich of sundried tomato pesto, cooked bacon, asparagus spears and fontina cheese. Butter the outsides of the bread and pan fry, pressing with a spatula until the cheese is melted and the sandwich is heated through.

Roasted: Toss asparagus lightly with oil, then season with salt and pepper. Spread on a rimmed baking sheet and roast at 400 F until browned and tender. Bigger stalks are best for this. Sprinkle with crumbled blue cheese and toasted walnuts.

Pilaf: In a skillet, cook 2 chopped shallots in 3 tablespoons butter. Add 1 bunch asparagus (chopped small) and 1/2 cup chopped pecans. Cook until tender and lightly browned. Add 2 cups cooked rice and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme. Season with salt and black pepper.

Glazed: In a skillet, melt 2 tablespoons butter. Add a bunch of asparagus and 2 tablespoons maple syrup. Cook until the asparagus is tender and the sauce is slightly reduced. Season with salt and pepper, then stir in the zest of 1/2 lemon.

Noodles: Using a paring knife or peeler, cut a bunch of asparagus lengthwise into thin strips. Boil 8 ounces of fettuccini pasta, adding the asparagus during the last minute of cooking. Drain and toss with butter, 1 minced clove garlic and freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Season with salt and pepper.

In a jacket: Microwave a baking potato until tender. Cut in half and scoop out the middle, leaving enough potato flesh to keep the shape. Mash the scooped out middle and stir in a handful of shredded cheddar cheese, chopped fresh chives and chopped lightly

steamed asparagus. Spoon back into the potato skins and place on a baking sheet. Bake at 400 F for 15 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and lightly browned.



Bruschetta: Thinly slice a bunch of asparagus diagonally. Combine with 1 cup chopped roasted red peppers, 1 cup diced fresh mozzarella cheese, 1/4 cup torn basil leaves, 1 minced clove garlic, 2 tablespoons olive oil, 2 tablespoon red wine vinegar and 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard. Season with salt and black pepper. Serve over slices of rustic bread.

Salad: Boil 1 pound fingerling potatoes in salted water, then drain and cool. Slice the potatoes into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Combine with 1 bunch asparagus, lightly steamed and cut into 2-inch pieces. Dress with 1/2 cup creme fraiche, 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 2 tablespoons chopped chives, 1 tablespoon finely minced fresh rosemary, salt and pepper.-AP

Friday Times Books

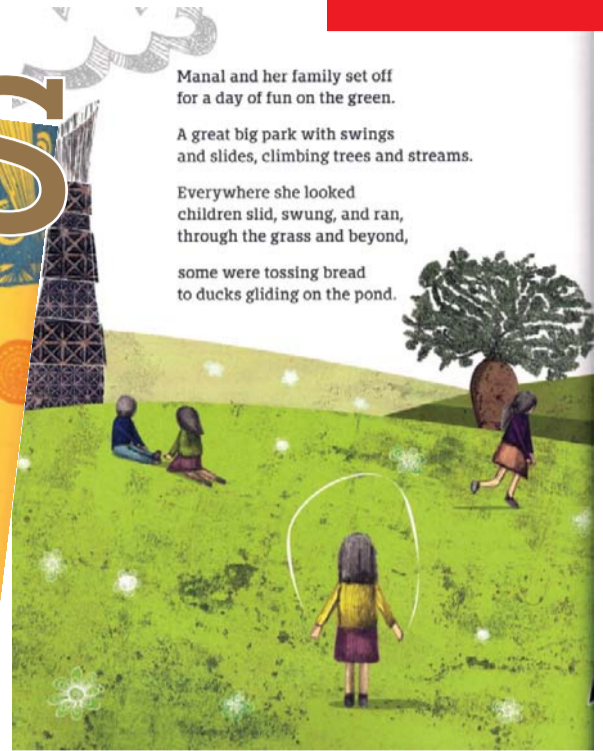


Manal and her family set off for a day of fun on the green.

A great big park with swings and slides, climbing trees and streams.

Everywhere she looked children slid, swung, and ran, through the grass and beyond,

some were tossing bread to ducks gliding on the pond.



Children's book, Manal's world, marks World Book Day

Reviewed by Jamie Etheridge

April 23 marks World Book Day, a global event organized by UNESCO aimed at celebrating books and encouraging a love of reading for all. To mark World Book Day in 2016, the Hamad bin Khalifa University Press (HBKU Press) has selected the lovely children's book "Manal's World" by Muneera Saad Al-Rumaihi and illustrated by Gulnar Hajo.

The bilingual book (written in both Arabic and English) tells the story of a young wheelchair-bound girl Manal who befriends a lonely child, Noora. Manal lives a highly imaginative life, with stories filled with dolls, princesses and fairies. One day when her family takes Manal to the park, she notices a girl sitting on a bench by herself, not playing with anyone. Manal rolls over and starts talking to the girl. But Noora is shy and refuses Manal's invitation to play - at least until Manal finds a way to share her imagined world.

The book highlights a few interesting themes - inclusiveness and empathy. Manal sees that Noora is shy and rather than forcing her to 'get over it' or abandoning her

and going back to play on the swings, Manal persists and finds a way to engage with Noora to help her overcome her shyness. The children spend time outside in the park and the girls play with dolls and read books, encouraging healthy lifestyle activities away from electronics and media.

The storyline, though short, conveys a sweet message of friendship. It also normalizes and empowers children with disabilities. Manal may be in a wheelchair, but there's no mention of that in the story. It's not an issue or a problem that has to be overcome, merely a fact of her life. Instead we see her in her wheelchair at the park enjoying the same activities as the other kids. She is also charming, confident and empathetic to other children, rather than (as has often been the case in children's literature) becoming the object of someone else's concern.

The illustrations are beautiful and soft, conveying a graphically intricate yet engaging world of children - a perfect read-aloud story for pre-K, kindergarten and early primary grades. There are a few disparities between the English and Arabic texts but hardly noticeable. The bilingual text is also great for parents teaching their children Arabic and English as they can read the book in both languages to further encourage bilingual reading.

"Good reading starts early and children who share books with others are more likely to develop language skills and advanced reading levels," said the book's author, Al-Rumaihi. "I am very excited that Manal's World was chosen as this year's book. I hope that the story will encourage children to embrace reading and storytelling."

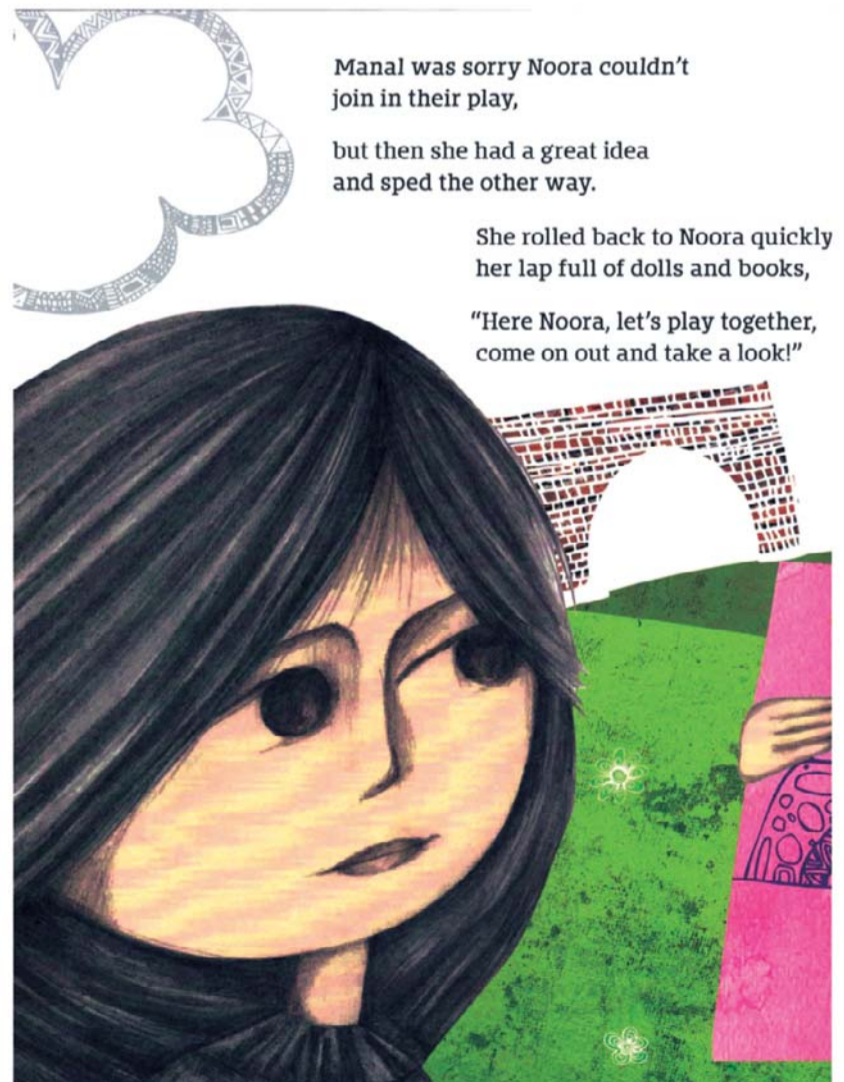
HBKU Press, to celebrate World Book Day and "to positively impact children in challenging circumstances," will be distributing copies of Manal's World to children in refugee camps across the Middle East. Furthermore, Al-Rumaihi will be joining the book's illustrator Hajo in Istanbul for a celebration at her bookstore, Pages, on April 23 and 24. The events will include two days of illustration workshops and reading circles with young Syrian children.

Manal was sorry Noora couldn't join in their play,

but then she had a great idea and sped the other way.

She rolled back to Noora quickly her lap full of dolls and books,

"Here Noora, let's play together, come on out and take a look!"



لاحظت منال فتاة جالسة في سكون،
تتطلع إلى الأطفال وهم يلعبون.
اقتربت منها وحيثها: «السلام عليكم...»
ردت الفتاة: «وعليكم السلام.»

German museum exhibits racist stickers spanning 130 years

One of Germany's main history museums is exhibiting racist and anti-Semitic stickers spanning more than a century, a show that comes as the country worries about increasing racism amid the migrant crisis. The show at the German Historical Museum in Berlin features about 600 stickers and replicas, racist and anti-racist. Among the earliest exhibits is a mock train ticket from 1893 offering Jews a trip "to Jerusalem, one way" and a Jewish group's 1900 sticker proclaiming that "anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools."

The show includes anti-Jewish stickers from before and during the Nazi era, and present day messages such as "refugees not welcome." Museum head Alexander Koch said Tuesday the stickers are "inglorious signs of the polarization of a society and inglorious signs of a society that uses anonymity." — AP



Friday Times

FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2016

Travel



Guyana's

**rain forest:
Waterfalls,
cliffs, tiny
golden frogs**

The 741-foot high
Kaitour Falls in
Guyana's verdant rain
forest. — AP photos



From 6,000 feet above Guyana's rain forest, the jungle canopy below spread to the horizon in every direction, like wall-to-wall green carpeting. Winding, mud-brown tributaries of the Demerara River shimmered in the sunlight. My endless view of the jungle and the aggressive hum of the plane's propellers eventually drowned out the grittiness I'd experienced in the capital, Georgetown. Headed for Kaitetur Falls, I began to relax, for the first time in three days.

I'd come to this South American nation to see where my father-in-law grew up, and my husband prepared me for conditions I wasn't exactly used to. The gargantuan bugs, he warned, were as ubiquitous as the abject poverty. I went into the trip with an open mind but slathered myself with insect repellent so strong that it actually rubbed varnish off wooden furniture.

Those first days in Georgetown, though, I felt like a target. Crime is rampant and unemployment is high. I was hassled by vendors working from ramshackle stalls, and I was told it wasn't safe for me to go any-

where alone, even during the day, or walk anywhere at night, even in groups. One bartender insisted we take a taxi three blocks as the sun was setting, and he provided a password to make sure we got the cab he called: "ambassador."

Self-sacrifice

I couldn't wait for our excursion to the country's interior. The plane took off from a small airstrip near Georgetown, hooked a left for an aerial view of the low-rise capital, and veered south over the vast expanse of green. About 90 minutes later, we bounced onto an

airstrip with the buzz from a brief, disconcerting alarm and came to a stop about 200 yards from the cliff that produces one of the world's largest waterfalls.

A guide told our group of about a dozen that the Potaro River drops a staggering 741 feet, about the height of the Time Warner Center in New York. The waterfall gets its name from Kai, a Patamona chief who according to legend paddled his canoe over it in self-sacrifice to appease Makonaima, the Great Spirit, and protect his tribe from raiding rivals. As the guide led us through lush vegetation, he helped us search for tiny golden frogs,

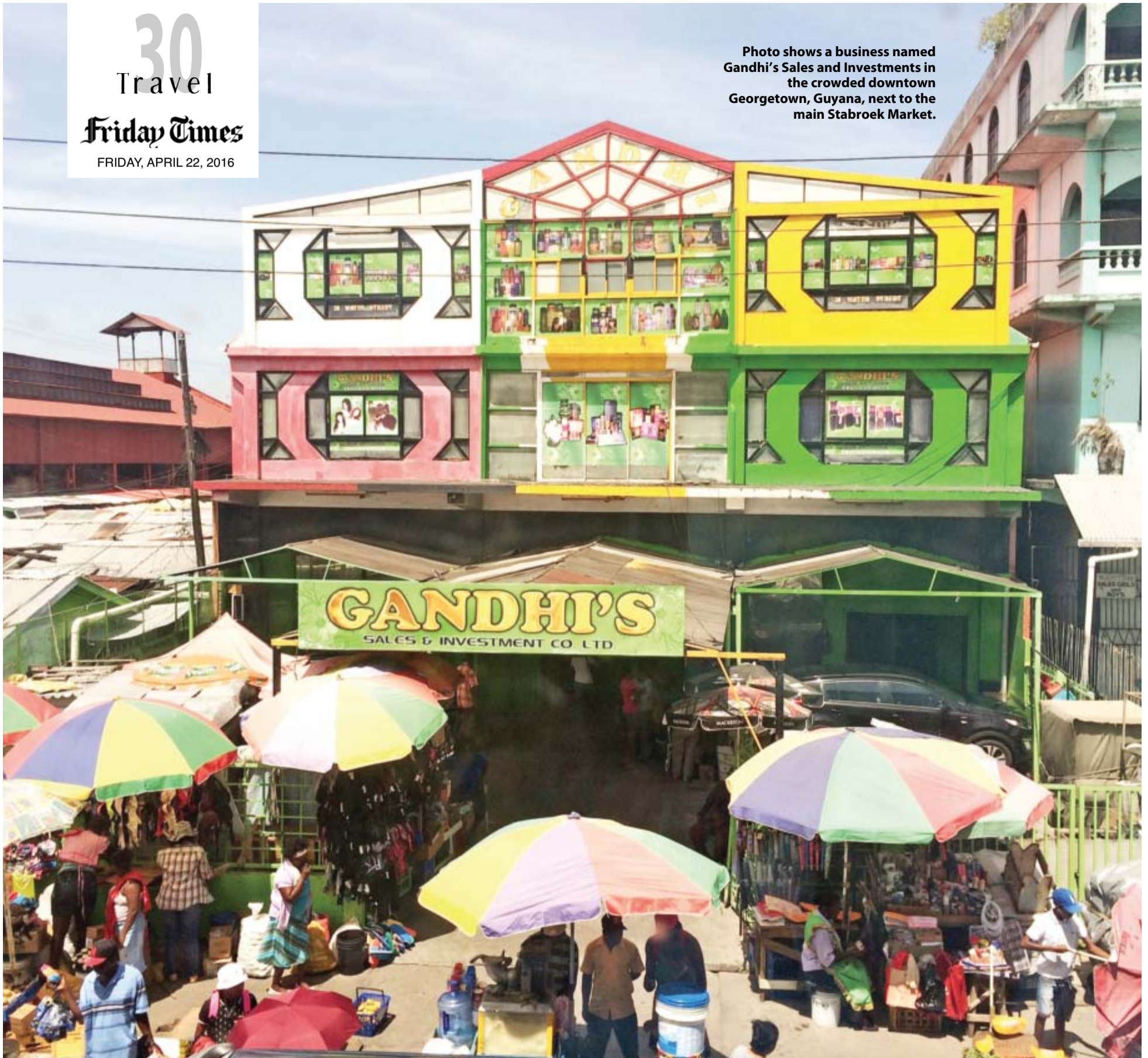
small as yellow M&Ms, that live their entire lives in pools in the leaves of giant bromeliads, a relative of the pineapple that grows 15 feet tall. He pointed to other highlights: a rubber tree with a fruit resembling a red onion; a vine you can slice and drink water from; a sticky scarlet moss that traps insects, one of six carnivorous plants in the park.

Closer to the falls, the distant "shhhhhh" of crashing water rose to a low rumble. I clambered over and under gigantic boulders and up to an overlook, taking in my first view of the cascade freefalling into the verdant canyon.



An aerial view of Georgetown, Guyana, over the propeller of a plane headed to Kaitetur Falls.

Photo shows a business named Gandhi's Sales and Investments in the crowded downtown Georgetown, Guyana, next to the main Stabroek Market.



I ignored signs to stay at least 8 feet from the edge, getting low to peer into the straight drop dozens of stories below as low passing clouds blended with the rising mist.

Over the next couple of hours, we hiked trails around the waterfall and scaled up to two more lookout points for closer, even more stunning views. Standing at the third, I realized this was the most isolated place I'd ever been. The falls are at least a three-day trek from the nearest road. Rejuvenated, I returned to Georgetown for another few days with newfound appreciation for Guyana. I soon learned there's hope in the capital since a new government took power last year, with efforts to clean up both the corruption and litter that have deterred tourists. Already, my in-laws said, the capital was cleaner than they remembered.

Coconut milk

Meanwhile, all those taxi rides were cheap, averaging about \$2 US per trip, and we traversed the city in search of hidden delights. I sopped up probably a dozen versions of curry with roti, the Indian flatbread, including one made from labba, an herbivorous jungle rodent the size of a lamb. And cook-up rice that was on nearly every menu - a varying one-pot dish with black-eyed peas and coconut milk - reminded



Kaitaur Falls guide Maxwell Basil pointing out the red fruit of a rubber tree.

me this former British colony shares more in common with the Caribbean than its Latin neighbors to the south.

By the end, I was weaving through crowds at the main Stabroek Market with the confidence of a local. More comfortable now, I chatted with vendors about the cornucopia of exotic fruits, settling on a fragrant bag of red bananas. On our last night in town, a cousin of my husband's took us to a bar, Seeta's. It was the only place I saw that was packed after dark. We knocked back a few bottles of Banks beer, mixed in with the crowd and met plenty of warm, inviting people, and I finally saw the other side of this evolving destination.

If you go...

Guyana's Kaitaur Falls: Day trips from Georgetown by Roraima Airways cost \$180 per person, but several companies do tours. Trips are subject to minimum passenger counts and weather; <http://roraimairways.com>. Guyana is listed among the countries that fall within the zone for mosquito-borne transmission of the zika virus. — AP

WORD SEARCH

Stephen King Movies

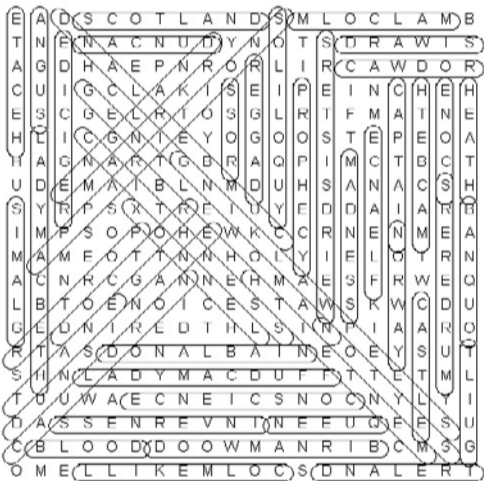
Find and circle all of the Stephen King Movies that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

I N N S I N G R A V E Y A R D S H I F T E
M A X I M U M O V E R D R I V E T E Q C E
N L E T S E V E S N A M G N I N N U R A N
T A Y N F I W O H S P E E R C O I T N R U
R N D A R O S T A N D B Y M E C M O E R U
B G Y L N O L G W E O D A Y K I D M E I T
R O R T I T B N S R J E L S S A I M D E E
F L A A G H S I H E U A I F E R I T Y F N L
N I T N H E K N A S C L R K W A O K U I L
N E A I T S C I N L V Y H O D P L N L T U
I R M S F T U H K E C A H E E T S O T S B
H S E T L A R S R D L S C A R P M C H I R
T R S R I N E I H F P R E I E U E K I R E
E W T A E D I H D E I C H R S P L E N H V
W A F E R G R F E N M I L F O I A R G C L
S S P H H T E R M P H E N K R L S S S I I
N G S W F I C R P M A N G L E R O S T P S
U B A F I R E S T A R T E R L I S D H E D
E Y E S T A C N I S R E K L A W P E E L S
N R O C E H T F O N E R D L I H C O V E L
E N O Z D A E D N R E H C T A C M A E R D

- APT PUPIL
- CARRIE
- CAT'S EYE
- CHILDREN OF THE CORN
- CHRISTINE
- CREEPSHOW I
- CREEPSHOW II
- CUJO
- DARK HALF
- DEAD ZONE
- DOLORES CLAIBORNE
- DREAMCATCHER
- FIRESTARTER
- GRAVEYARD SHIFT
- GREEN MILE
- HEARTS IN ATLANTIS
- LANGOLIERS
- MANGLER
- MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE
- MISERY
- NEEDFUL THINGS
- NIGHT FLIER
- PET SEMATARY
- QUICKSILVER HIGHWAY
- ROSE RED
- RUNNING MAN
- SALEM'S LOT
- SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION
- SHINING
- SILVER BULLET
- SLEEPWALKERS
- STAND BY ME
- THE STAND
- THINNER
- TOMMYKNOCKERS
- TRUCKS

Yesterday's Solution

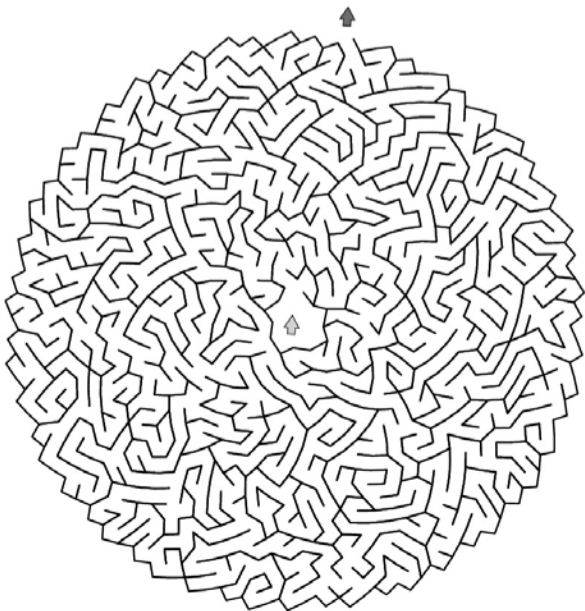
Shakespeare: Macbeth



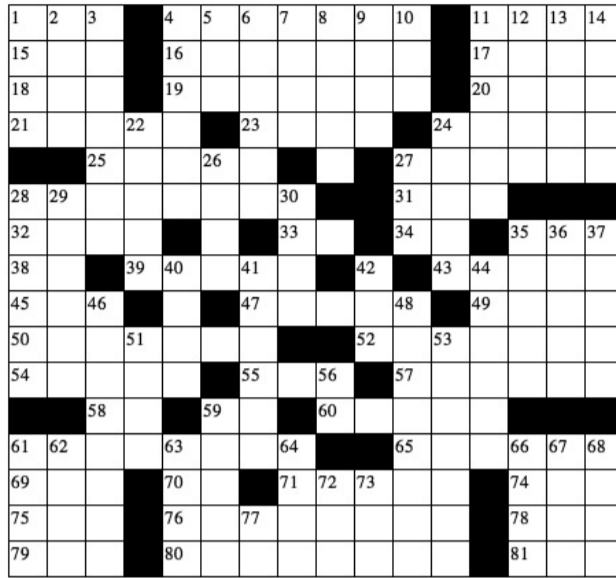
- ANGUS
- APPARITIONS
- BANQUO
- BIRNAM WOOD
- BLOOD
- CAITHNESS
- CAPTAIN
- CASTLE
- CAULDRON
- CAWDOR
- COLMEKILL
- CONSCIENCE
- CUMBERLAND
- DAGGER
- DOCTOR
- DONALBAIN
- DUNCAN
- DUNSIANE
- ENGLAND
- FLEANCE
- GENTLEWOMAN
- GLAMIS
- GUILT
- HEATH
- HECATE
- INVERNESS
- IRELAND
- LADY MACBETH
- LADY MACDUFF
- LENNOX
- MACBETH
- MADNESS
- MALCOLM
- MENTEITH
- MURDERERS
- NORWAY
- PORTER
- PROPHECY
- QUEEN
- REGICIDE
- ROSS
- SCONE
- SCOTLAND
- SEYTON
- SIWARD
- SLEEPWALKING
- SOLILOQUY
- THANE
- WEIRD SISTERS

Hidden sentence: BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS, SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

CHALLENGING MAZE



CROSSWORD 1234



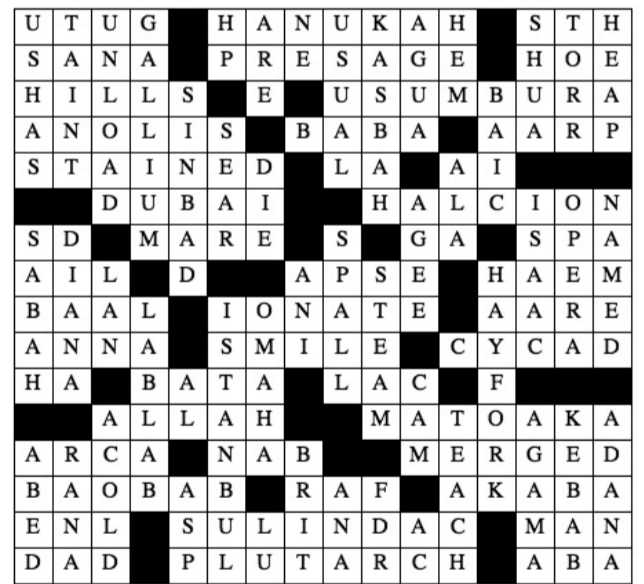
ACROSS

- Minor or subordinate.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
- Amphibians that resemble lizards.
- Open to or abounding in fresh air.
- Any high mountain.
- A canvas or leather bag for carrying game (especially birds) killed by a hunter.
- Set lower.
- A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
- Type genus of the Anatidae.
- A member of the people inhabiting the Aleutian Islands and western Alaska.
- (Arthurian legend) One of the knights of the Round Table.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- American novelist (1909-1955).
- A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
- A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- Having winglike extensions.
- Of or relating to Oman or its people.
- Bright and pleasant.
- Muslim name for God.
- (Norse mythology) Ruler of the Aesir.
- The size of a book whose pages are made by folding a sheet of paper three times to form eight leaves.
- True antelopes.
- (combining form) Indicating radiation or radioactivity.
- An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- Having short a smooth or spirally ridged shell with thick usually toothed outer lip and toothed operculum.
- A radioactive gaseous element formed by the disintegration of radium.
- Ritual hand movement in Hindu religious dancing.
- Experiencing or expressing gladness or joy.
- The state of existing and being localized in space.
- An associate degree in applied science.
- A hard brittle blue-white multivalent metallic element.
- The iridescent internal layer of a mollusk shell.
- The cry made by sheep.
- Being six more than fifty.
- A language spoken by the Atakapa people of the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
- Canadian hockey player (born 1948).
- The fatty flesh of eel.
- Indonesian wild pig with enormous curved canine teeth.
- A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.

DOWN

- (informal) Exceptionally good.
- River in eastern Asia.
- Board a plane.
- A victim of a mugging.
- A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
- Mildly acid red or yellow pulpy fruit eaten as a vegetable.
- Chief port of Yemen.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- By bad luck.
- The number that is represented as a one followed by 6 zeros.
- West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
- Garlic mayonnaise.
- A city in northwestern Turkey.
- Relating to or associated with or comprising a convulsion of the brain.
- Genus of erect herbs of the Middle East having showy flowers.
- Used as a Hindi courtesy title.
- The inner and longer of the two bones of the human forearm.
- Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
- (Greek mythology) One of the three Graces.
- A unit of weight used in east Asia approximately equal to 1.3 ounces.
- A cushion on a throne for a prince in India.
- A member of the Uniat Church.
- Infections of the skin or nails caused by fungi and appearing as itching circular patches.
- Wife or mistress of Zeus and mother of Apollo and Artemis in ancient mythology.
- Chinese Taoist sect claiming to follow the teaching of Lao-tzu but also incorporating pantheism and sorcery.
- A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
- The 3 goddesses of fate or destiny.
- (Norse mythology) A huge ash tree whose roots and branches hold the earth and heaven and hell together.
- A republic in Central America.
- Located at or near the back of an animal.
- Any of numerous tropical or subtropical American plants of the genus Verbena grown for their showy spikes of variously colored flowers.
- Before noon.
- The large trunk artery that carries blood from the left ventricle of the heart to branch arteries.
- Cleanse (one's body) with soap and water.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- (Sumerian) Water god and god of wisdom.
- Very dark black.
- A village in eastern Ireland (northwest of Dublin).
- A unit of length equal to 3 feet.
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- (computer science) The part of a computer (a microprocessor chip) that does most of the data processing.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku

					5	4		
					3	6		
3	4				7	9		8
7				6			9	4
1	6			8				5
9		7	5				8	1
			4	3				
		8	1					

Yesterday's Solution

4	9	3	1	7	8	6	2	5
5	6	8	2	3	4	7	9	1
7	2	1	9	5	6	4	8	3
1	3	9	6	4	5	2	7	8
2	7	5	8	1	9	3	6	4
6	8	4	3	2	7	5	1	9
3	4	2	7	8	1	9	5	6
8	5	6	4	9	2	1	3	7
9	1	7	5	6	3	8	4	2



01:00 The Believer
02:40 She's Gotta Have It
04:05 Soul Plane
05:30 George Washington
07:00 Solarbabies
08:35 Captain Jack
10:15 Teen Witch
11:45 The Man In The Iron Mask
13:55 The Adventures Of Gerard
15:25 Teen Witch
16:55 The Night They Raided Minsky's
18:35 The Man In The Iron Mask
20:45 Big Screen
21:00 The Believer
22:45 Big Screen
23:00 Juice



- 00:45 I'm Alive
01:40 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
02:35 Tanked
03:25 Animal Cops South Africa
04:15 Gator Boys
05:02 Treehouse Masters
05:49 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
06:36 Swamp Brothers
07:00 Swamp Brothers
07:25 My Cat From Hell
08:15 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
09:10 Treehouse Masters
10:05 Tanked
11:00 My Cat From Hell
11:55 Bondi Vet
12:25 Bondi Vet
12:50 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
13:45 Gator Boys
14:40 Treehouse Masters
15:35 Tanked
16:30 Animal Cops South Africa
17:25 River Monsters
18:20 River Monsters
19:15 Tanked
20:10 Shamwari: A Wild Life
20:40 Shamwari: A Wild Life
21:05 Treehouse Masters
22:00 River Monsters
22:55 Gator Boys
23:50 River Monsters



- 00:15 Eastenders
00:50 Holby City
01:45 Stag
02:40 Silent Witness
03:35 Waking The Dead
04:35 Eastenders
05:10 Doctor Who
06:00 Holby City
06:55 Doctors
07:25 Doctors
07:55 Eastenders
08:25 Dickensian
09:15 Death In Paradise
10:10 Doctor Who
10:55 Doctor Who
11:45 Doctor Who
12:35 Doctor Who
13:20 Holby City
14:20 Doctors
14:50 Eastenders
15:20 Death In Paradise
16:20 New Tricks
17:15 New Tricks
18:15 Doctors
18:45 Doctors
19:20 Father Brown
20:05 Happy Valley
21:00 Happy Valley
22:00 Undercover
23:00 Stag
23:55 Doctors



- 00:00 Charlie Rose
01:00 Bloomberg West
02:00 First Up With Angie Lau
03:00 First Up With Angie Lau

- 04:00 Trending Business
05:00 Trending Business
06:00 Asia Edge
07:00 Bloomberg West
08:00 Countdown
09:00 Countdown
09:30 On The Move
10:00 On The Move
11:00 The Pulse
12:00 Bloomberg Surveillance
13:00 Bloomberg Surveillance
14:00 Bloomberg Go
15:00 Bloomberg Go
16:00 Bloomberg Go
17:00 Bloomberg Markets
18:00 Bloomberg Markets: European Close
19:00 Bloomberg Markets
20:00 Bloomberg Markets
21:00 Bloomberg Markets
21:30 Brilliant Ideas
22:00 Bloomberg Markets
23:00 What'd You Miss?



- 00:00 News Update
00:30 Dialogue
01:00 News Update
01:15 China 24
02:00 The Heat
02:30 News Update
03:00 Global Business
04:00 News Update
05:00 News Update
06:30 Dialogue
07:00 News Hour
08:00 Global Business
09:00 News Update
10:30 Sports Scene
11:00 Global Business
12:00 News Update

- 12:30 Culture Express
13:00 Africa Live
14:00 News Update
14:30 Dialogue
15:00 News Update
15:15 China 24
16:00 News Update
16:15 Global Business
17:00 News Update
17:15 World InSight
18:00 Asia Today
18:30 Culture Express
19:00 News Update
19:30 The Heat
20:00 Africa Live
21:00 Global Business
21:30 Dialogue
22:00 News Update
22:15 China 24
23:00 News Update
23:15 World InSight



- 00:00 CNBC Originals
00:30 CNBC Conversation: Felipe Calderon
01:00 U.S. Squawk Alley
02:00 Asia Squawk Box
05:00 Asia Street Signs
07:00 Capital Connection
08:00 Squawk Box Europe
11:00 Europe Street Signs
12:00 Worldwide Exchange
13:00 U.S. Squawk Box
16:00 Squawk On The Street
18:00 U.S. Squawk Alley
19:00 Fast Money: Half Time Report
20:00 U.S. Power Lunch
22:00 U.S. Closing Bell



- 00:20 Fast N' Loud
01:10 Salvage Hunters
02:00 For The Love Of Cars
02:50 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
03:40 Thrift Hunters
04:05 Storage Wars Canada
04:30 Auction Hunters
05:00 How Do They Do It?
05:30 Fifth Gear
06:00 You Have Been Warned
06:50 Troy
07:40 Superhuman Science
08:05 Superhuman Science
08:30 The Island With Bear Grylls
09:20 Bear Grylls: Mission Survive
10:10 So You Think You'd Survive?
11:00 Salvage Hunters
11:50 For The Love Of Cars
12:40 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
13:30 Misfit Garage
14:20 Overhaulin'
15:10 Extreme Car Hoarders
16:00 The Island With Bear Grylls
16:50 The Island With Bear Grylls
17:40 The Island With Bear Grylls
18:30 The Island With Bear Grylls
19:20 The Island With Bear Grylls
20:10 The Island With Bear Grylls
21:00 Misfit Garage
21:50 Overhaulin'
22:40 Street Outlaws
23:30 Killing Fields



- 00:20 Through The Wormhole With Morgan Freeman

- 01:08 Secret Space Escapes
01:55 Moon Machines
02:42 Ecopolis
03:29 Mythbusters
04:16 Secret Space Escapes
05:03 Moon Machines
05:50 Engineering Thrills
06:37 How Do They Do It?
07:00 How Do They Do It?
07:23 Mythbusters
08:08 Ecopolis
08:53 Engineering Thrills
09:38 Through The Wormhole With Morgan Freeman
10:23 Secret Space Escapes
11:08 Moon Machines
11:53 Engineering Thrills
12:38 Mythbusters
13:23 Through The Wormhole With Morgan Freeman
14:10 Ecopolis
14:57 Invent It Rich
15:44 Moon Machines
16:31 Engineering Earthquakes
17:18 Ecopolis
18:05 Mythbusters
18:50 Da Vinci's Machines
19:40 Moon Machines
20:25 Through The Wormhole With Morgan Freeman
21:15 Racing Extinction
22:45 Moon Machines
23:35 Mythbusters



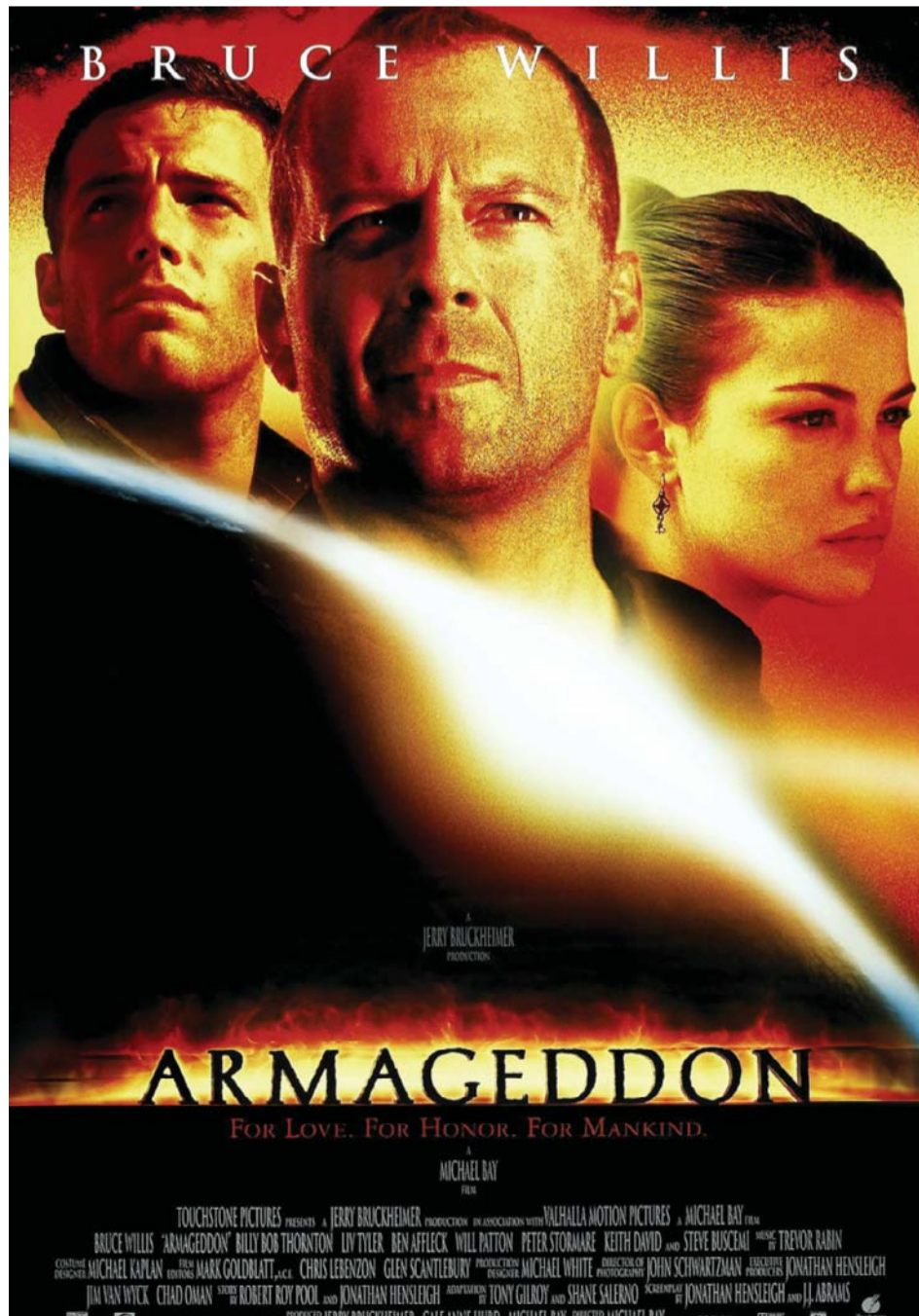
- 00:00 Violetta
00:45 The Hive
00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:40 Hank Zipzer
02:05 Binny And The Ghost
02:30 Violetta
03:15 The Hive
03:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:10 Hank Zipzer
04:35 Binny And The Ghost
05:00 Violetta
05:45 The Hive
05:50 Mouk
06:00 Lolirock
06:25 Sofia The First
06:50 Gravity Falls
07:15 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
07:40 Jessie
08:05 Shake It Up
08:30 Shake It Up
08:55 Hannah Montana
09:20 Hannah Montana
09:45 Girl Meets World
10:10 Girl Meets World
10:35 A.N.T. Farm
11:00 A.N.T. Farm
11:25 Jessie
11:50 Jessie
12:15 Whisker Haven Tales With The Palace Pets
12:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
12:45 Fish Hooks
13:10 Austin & Ally
13:35 Austin & Ally
14:00 Liv And Maddie
14:25 Cars Toons
14:30 Liv And Maddie
14:55 Dog With A Blog
15:20 Dog With A Blog
15:45 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
16:10 Violetta
17:00 Violetta Recipes
17:10 Wendy Wu: Homecoming Warrior
18:40 Best Friends Whenever
19:05 Evermoor Chronicles
19:30 Violetta
20:20 Violetta Recipes
20:30 Harriet The Spy: Blog Wars
22:00 Binny And The Ghost
22:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
22:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:10 Hank Zipzer
23:35 Binny And The Ghost



- 00:00 Crime Stories
01:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
02:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
03:00 The Jail: 60 Days In
04:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
05:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
05:30 Frenemies
06:00 I Killed My BFF
07:00 Gangs Of Britain...
08:00 Crime Stories
09:00 Frenemies
09:30 Private Crimes
10:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
11:00 After The First 48
12:00 The FBI Files
13:00 I Killed My BFF
14:00 Crime Stories
15:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
16:00 Gangs Of Britain...
17:00 After The First 48
18:00 The FBI Files
19:00 I Killed My BFF
20:00 Crime Stories
21:00 The Killer 48
22:00 The Killer Speaks
23:00 Nightmare In Suburbia



- 00:05 Art Attack
00:30 Henry Hugglemonster
00:45 Calimero
01:00 Zou
01:15 Loopdidoo
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:05 Calimero
02:20 Zou
02:30 Loopdidoo
02:45 Art Attack
03:10 Henry Hugglemonster
03:20 Calimero
03:35 Zou
03:45 Loopdidoo
04:00 Art Attack
04:25 Henry Hugglemonster
04:35 Calimero
04:50 Zou
05:00 Loopdidoo
05:15 Art Attack
05:35 Henry Hugglemonster
05:50 Calimero
06:00 Zou
06:20 Loopdidoo
06:35 Art Attack
07:00 The Hive
07:10 Zou
07:25 Loopdidoo
07:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
08:05 Sofia The First
08:30 Goldie & Bear
08:45 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
09:10 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
09:35 Doc McStuffins
10:00 Sofia The First
10:30 Goldie & Bear
10:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
11:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
11:25 The Lion Guard
11:50 Handy Manny
12:15 Jungle Junction
12:30 Special Agent Oso
12:45 The Hive
13:00 Sofia The First
13:25 Miles From Tomorrow
13:50 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
14:15 The Lion Guard
14:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
15:10 Miles From Tomorrow
15:35 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
16:00 Sofia The First
16:25 Jungle Cubs
16:50 Aladdin
17:15 The Lion Guard
17:40 Goldie & Bear
18:05 Miles From Tomorrow
18:30 Sofia The First
19:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
19:30 The Lion Guard
20:00 Goldie & Bear
20:30 Sofia The First
21:00 Jungle Cubs
21:25 Aladdin
21:50 Gummi Bears
22:20 Lilo And Stitch
22:50 Zou



ARMAGEDDON ON OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

23:05 Henry Hugglemonster
23:20 Calimero



06:00 Boyster
06:10 Super Matrak
06:35 Super Matrak
07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:25 K.C. Undercover
07:50 Supa Strikas
08:15 Annedroids
08:40 Lab Rats
09:10 Kirby Buckets
09:35 Guardians Of The Galaxy
10:00 Rocket Monkeys
10:25 Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors
10:50 Boyster
11:20 Boyster
11:45 Pair Of Kings
12:10 Pair Of Kings
12:35 Lab Rats
13:00 Lab Rats
13:30 Phineas And Ferb
13:55 Phineas And Ferb
14:20 Kickin' It
14:45 Kickin' It
15:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
15:15 Rocket Monkeys
15:40 Guardians Of The Galaxy
16:05 Mighty Med
16:30 Kirby Buckets
16:55 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
17:25 K.C. Undercover
17:50 Supa Strikas
18:15 Lab Rats
18:40 K.C. Undercover
19:05 Cars Toons
19:10 Annedroids
19:35 Phineas And Ferb
20:00 Kirby Buckets
20:25 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:55 K.C. Undercover
21:20 Pickle And Peanut
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Mighty Med
22:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am



00:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
00:55 The Grace Helbig Show
01:25 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
02:20 E! News
03:15 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
04:10 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
05:05 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
06:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
06:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
07:50 Style Star
08:20 E! News
09:15 Giuliana & Bill
10:15 Giuliana & Bill
11:10 The Grace Helbig Show
11:35 The Grace Helbig Show
12:05 E! News
13:05 Dash Dolls
14:05 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
15:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
16:00 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
17:00 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
18:00 E! News
19:00 Christina Milian Turned Up
20:00 WAGS
21:00 WAGS
22:00 E! News
23:00 Botched



00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
00:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:00 Private Chef
01:30 Private Chef
02:00 Valerie's Home Cooking
02:30 Valerie's Home Cooking
03:00 Man Fire Food
03:30 Man Fire Food
04:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
04:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
06:00 Chopped
07:00 Man Fire Food
07:30 Man Fire Food
08:00 Chopped



BEARS ON OSN MOVIES HD



09:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
09:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
10:00 The Kitchen
11:00 Trisha's Southern Kitchen
11:30 Trisha's Southern Kitchen
12:00 Chopped
13:00 The Pioneer Woman
13:30 The Pioneer Woman
14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
14:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
15:00 Man Fire Food
15:30 Man Fire Food
16:00 Chopped
17:00 The Kitchen
18:00 Trisha's Southern Kitchen
18:30 Trisha's Southern Kitchen
19:00 Chopped
20:00 Guy's Grocery Games
21:00 Chopped
22:00 Cutthroat Kitchen
23:00 Iron Chef America



00:20 Pawn Stars
00:45 Pawn Stars Australia
01:10 Down East Dickering
02:00 Ice Road Truckers
02:50 Ax Men
03:40 American Restoration
04:05 American Restoration
04:30 Pawn Stars
05:00 Grave Trade
06:00 The Curse Of Oak Island
06:50 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
07:40 Battle 360
08:30 American Restoration
08:55 Mountain Men
09:45 Alaska Off-Road Warriors
10:35 Swamp People
11:25 Fifth Gear
12:15 Counting Cars
12:40 Counting Cars
13:05 American Pickers
13:55 Grave Trade
14:45 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
15:35 Battle 360
16:25 Counting Cars
16:50 Shark Wranglers
17:40 Aussie Pickers
18:30 Duck Dynasty
18:55 Duck Dynasty
19:20 Alaska Off-Road Warriors
20:10 Swamp People
21:00 Storage Wars: New York
21:25 Storage Wars: New York
21:50 Pawn Stars
22:15 Pawn Stars Australia
22:40 Battle 360
23:30 Inside Alcatraz: Legends Of The Rock



00:10 Sara's New Nordic Kitchen
00:35 Tom's Istanbul Delight
01:00 Cesar To The Rescue
01:50 Chefs Run Wild
02:15 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
02:40 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
03:05 Cruise Ship Diaries
03:30 Tales From The Bush Larder
03:55 Street Food Around The World
04:20 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
04:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
05:10 Tales From The Bush Larder
05:35 Tales From The Bush Larder
06:00 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
06:50 Cesar To The Rescue
07:40 Chefs Run Wild
08:05 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
08:30 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
08:55 Cruise Ship Diaries
09:20 Tales From The Bush Larder
09:45 Street Food Around The World
10:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of

Australia
10:35 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
11:00 Tales From The Bush Larder
11:25 Tales From The Bush Larder
11:50 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
12:40 Cesar To The Rescue
13:35 Chefs Run Wild
14:00 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
14:30 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
14:55 Cruise Ship Diaries
15:25 Miguel's Feasts
15:50 Street Food Around The World
16:20 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
16:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
17:15 Tales From The Bush Larder
17:40 Tales From The Bush Larder
18:10 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
19:05 Cruise Ship Diaries
19:30 Miguel's Feasts
20:00 Street Food Around The World
20:25 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
20:50 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
21:15 Tales From The Bush Larder
21:40 Tales From The Bush Larder
22:05 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
22:55 Cesar To The Rescue
23:45 Chefs Run Wild



00:30 Hot In Cleveland
01:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
01:30 Web Therapy
02:00 The Brink
02:30 You're The Worst
03:00 Mad Love
03:30 Living With Fran
04:00 Two And A Half Men
04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
05:30 My Name Is Earl
06:00 The Bernie Mac Show
06:30 Community
07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
08:00 Two And A Half Men
08:30 My Name Is Earl
09:00 Mad Love
09:30 Kevin From Work
10:00 I Hate My Teenage Daughter
10:30 Community
11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
12:00 The Bernie Mac Show
12:30 Two And A Half Men
13:00 My Name Is Earl
13:30 Community
14:00 Living With Fran
14:30 Kevin From Work

15:00 I Hate My Teenage Daughter
15:30 Hot In Cleveland
16:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
16:30 The Bernie Mac Show
17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
18:00 Fresh Off The Boat
18:30 Black-Ish
19:00 2 Broke Girls
19:30 The Simpsons
20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
21:00 Hot In Cleveland
21:30 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
22:00 Comedians
22:30 The Brink
23:00 You're The Worst
23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers



01:15 Stretch
03:15 Armageddon
06:00 Airplane vs. Volcano
08:00 The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen
10:00 Age Of Dinosaurs
12:00 Armageddon
15:00 The Hulk
17:30 The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen
19:30 Transformers: Age Of Extinction
22:15 Lucy



00:00 Role Models
02:00 Pitch Perfect
04:00 The Misadventures Of The Dunderheads
06:00 Nitro Circus: The Movie
08:00 Green Card
10:00 The Misadventures Of The Dunderheads
11:45 Pitch Perfect
13:45 The Other Sister
16:00 Green Card
18:00 At Middleton
20:00 Wish I Was Here



01:30 One Last Look
03:00 Foxcatcher
05:15 A Valentine's Date
07:00 1911
09:00 10 Years

11:00 A Valentine's Date
13:00 Atlas Shrugged Part 2: The Strike
15:00 God Help The Girl
17:00 10 Years
19:00 Not Fade Away
21:00 A Walk Among The Tombstones
23:00 By The Gun



01:45 Secret Window
03:30 Calvary
05:30 Reds
09:00 Les Miserables
12:00 Paradise
14:30 The Alamo
17:00 Manny
19:00 Low Down
21:00 Legends Of The Fall
23:15 Dallas Buyers Club



01:45 The Purge: Anarchy
03:30 Barely Lethal
05:15 The Imitation Game
07:15 Into The Storm
09:00 Step Up All In
11:00 Bears
12:30 The Imitation Game
14:30 Taken 3
16:15 The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies
18:45 The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part I
21:00 The Age Of Adaline
23:00 Wild



01:00 Hatching
02:45 Captain Sabertooth And The Treasure Of Lama Rama
04:30 Dixie And The Zombie Rebellion
06:00 Tarzan
08:00 Blackie And Kanuto
10:00 Zarafa
11:30 Marco Macaco
13:00 Captain Sabertooth And The Treasure Of Lama Rama
14:45 Snow Queen
16:30 Jungle Shuffle
18:15 Zarafa
20:00 Echo Planet
22:00 Snow Queen
23:45 Jungle Shuffle



00:00 Careful What You Wish For
02:00 Next Goal Wins
04:00 Not Safe For Work
06:00 Marvel's Hulk vs. Thor & Wolverine
08:00 Until She Came Along
10:00 Son Of Batman
12:00 Fast Girls
14:00 Ashes
16:00 Until She Came Along
18:00 High Road
20:00 No Good Deed
22:00 Sleeping Beauty



00:30 Super League
02:30 Inside The PGA Tour
03:00 PGA Tour
06:30 European Tour Weekly
07:00 Golfing World
08:00 World Rugby
08:30 Welsh Open Snooker
10:00 Super Rugby Highlights
10:30 Live Super Rugby
12:40 Live Super Rugby
15:00 World Rugby
15:30 Gillette World Sport
16:00 Super Rugby
18:00 Golfing World
19:00 Super Rugby Highlights
19:30 Super Rugby Highlights
19:55 Live Super Rugby
21:58 Live Super League



Aries (March 21-April 19)

There are many different levels of symbolism surrounding money and your day seems centered on symbolisms of money. Perhaps you are involved with the spending or earning of money-whatever the case, there are indications of conflict. There may be a compromise in the works-check it out. A high-power workout at your noon break or before the noon meal may help to clear your thinking. A light meal with a power drink would also be good for your energy level, if possible. In other words, be good to yourself and your accomplishments will be many. You may find yourself signing up to volunteer in a pioneer village and perhaps to learn as much as to help. Projects surrounding a family tree seem to be the talk of the evening-fun times.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Contracts and a variety of negotiations from the simple to the complex are in your forecast. Be direct in working toward a responsible agreement or settlement. You may desire greater material security at this time. As you understand cost, insurance, unexpected expenses, depreciations, etc., you look for ways to invest, invest and invest again. It's that rainy day that people talk about, that has you working so conscientiously to gain financial security. Good for you, do whatever it takes to set up a good and honest estate-you will succeed. Do something for yourself this afternoon and buy a good-fitting pair of shoes. More than birthday celebrations are in order tonight-a friend asks you to play a special role in an important event.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It is amazing to see how successful you are each day because of your many responsibilities. Perhaps you have a method of accomplishment from which others can learn. Today would be a good time to set up a card catalog with categories of the new things you might like to learn or trips you might like to take or techniques that will help you reach some long-term goals, resulting in a sense of reward and fun. If you hold two jobs or if you help in a charity or have responsibilities from different areas of your life, this card catalog will help you categorize a few things and see where you might be able to say no occasionally. You will also no longer lose or have trouble finding those valued phone numbers of leads or ideas.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Progress in a work situation will go rather well until late this afternoon. You could be entertaining thoughts of a job change today. Eliminate projects that are going nowhere. If your job does not give you a sense of purpose and structure you may feel that it is time to find a new job with better pay and opportunities for greater self-fulfillment. A personal responsibility may interfere with your progress this afternoon. A bit of money will come to you from an unexpected avenue. There are opportunities later this evening to have lots of fun conversations while dining. The best technique for handling a frustrated youngster this evening is in the listening mode. The young person will find personal answers while talking-watch.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

The ability to speak with superiors or describe what you see is a talent that is always in demand. You spend a little time today in observing the people that are in management. You learn styles and techniques that are beneficial to you in your own work. Obtaining information takes on importance. There could be some snags with money this afternoon. Pay attention to your real needs and let that be your guide in decision-making with money. Communicate feelings with a loved one-careful with the phrasing of your words. This evening, you and your loved one may attend a community meeting. Both of you are willing to help make a difference in your community and may find yourselves heading a committee. You will have help in this endeavor.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your mind is very quick, with the result that you may be more sensitive to what you hear and what you eat-perhaps too much coffee. Quick-witted you are, but this could also result in misunderstandings; however, you are able to unravel the most difficult and you will be able to find answers. Concentrate on the work at hand and be grateful for your opportunities to show off your talent. If you think you really know what you want in life, challenges will help you to focus your goals. Your own abilities may be recognized and someone may ask your advice. You are able to cut through the red tape and get at the truth of a matter. This is a great time to consider your state of affairs, just how you feel about your present and future plans. There is time this afternoon for a co-worker get-together. Jokes and a general release of tension are good for all.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Someone could challenge you on a very sensitive issue-this could result in some intense discussions. You may be very forceful in what you say and think, so it would be good to ask for a little time to think a subject over before expressing your opinion. You may touch upon some emotional issues and find yourself analyzing too many things if you are too quick to respond-stay with the facts. Professional projects are encouraging. An after-work exercise program is the best way to transition between work and home, especially if work is full of stress. Problems seem to have easy answers now and at home this evening, you might volunteer to be the cook. If your mate or loved one could fix a salad, you could throw together an excellent meal with a little wine.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is a good time for making decisions about contracts or partnerships. You can trade, sell, close a deal or negotiate an agreement today. You can expand your enjoyment of life with more recreation, entertainment and creative pursuits. There are new opportunities for romance. Pleasant social activities are on the increase-especially those related to educational, religious or cultural interests. This is also a good time to travel for pleasure. Sports or games with children can be great fun. Let your artistic expression and personal style flourish. Go to a party or reception with your mate. Give a gift, send cards. There are pleasant opportunities to strengthen your friendships and make new acquaintances.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This is the day to start new ventures. You also have the ability to communicate with superiors or describe what you see. You could be seen by others as just the person to be put in charge of some project or perhaps the go-between regarding company issues and employee issues. This talent requires a conservative mind. There is a new project beginning that will require some research. You help guide others to perfect their communication skills by setting an example. You are apt to spend a great deal of time apart from work with co-workers this afternoon. Make it a point to lighten up and laugh at yourself as well as the quandaries of life. Tonight, the romantic dreamier side of you is in full blossom. A good book or movie may be in order later this evening.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Job-related subjects take precedence today. Rewards, recognition or a promotion is evident soon. There may be some difficulties in the workplace today but you can use any difficulties to your advantage, not necessarily in showing how you can upstage someone but in how helpful you can be in solving problems. Ongoing projects will be successful. You succeed in whatever comes to your attention. Meetings, conferences or business travel needs planning this afternoon. Going home today, you may need some type of transition time activity. Perhaps feeding the ducks, renting a park bicycle, running, etc., are good things to do before walking into your home tonight. Spend time laughing and enjoying the family tonight.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

It is a good day to solve problems and make important decisions. You will find a way around almost any obstacle and are able to guide yourself easily. Your sense of inner direction is good and should lead to new opportunities. You are alert and aware of new trends and can quickly pick up the signal or scent of a new opportunity. You may have some serious moments but that just helps to keep the psychic and physical energies in balance. If you stay too focused you could become sharp with others. A little overtime this afternoon is welcomed. If a hot meal is not waiting for you at home, stop off at the grocery store and pick up some soup or stew and cornbread to heat up. This evening is a good time to listen to updates from the family.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Empty your mind of any limitations today. Fresh challenges light your fires. You have a powerful urge to be first or come out on top. Away with the old and on to the new-let nothing stand between you and your objective! Fervor can take you far-sometimes in harm's way, if you are not careful. Although you may be rushed, stop and take a little time to be pleasant to others-they will remember. Insert a bit of laughter into your day in order to lighten your load for now. Going home after work, try some type of music that you would not normally hear as an alternate choice while traveling. A sibling may confer with you this evening about future educational needs. You could have a lawyer in the family soon.

COUNTRY CODES

Afghanistan	0093	Kuwait	00965
Albania	00355	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Algeria	00213	Laos	00856
Andorra	00376	Latvia	00371
Angola	00244	Lebanon	00961
Anguilla	001264	Liberia	00231
Antigua	001268	Libya	00218
Argentina	0054	Lithuania	00370
Armenia	00374	Luxembourg	00352
Australia	0061	Macau	00853
Austria	0043	Macedonia	00389
Bahamas	001242	Madagascar	00261
Bahrain	00973	Majorca	0034
Bangladesh	00880	Malawi	00265
Barbados	001246	Malaysia	0060
Belarus	00375	Maldives	00960
Belgium	0032	Mali	00223
Belize	00501	Malta	00356
Benin	00229	Marshall Islands	00692
Bermuda	001441	Martinique	00596
Bhutan	00975	Mauritania	00222
Bolivia	00591	Mauritius	00230
Bosnia	00387	Mayotte	00269
Botswana	00267	Mexico	0052
Brazil	0055	Micronesia	00691
Brunei	00673	Moldova	00373
Bulgaria	00359	Monaco	00377
Burkina	00226	Mongolia	00976
Burundi	00257	Montserrat	001664
Cambodia	00855	Morocco	00212
Cameroon	00237	Mozambique	00258
Canada	001	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Cape Verde	00238	Namibia	00264
Cayman Islands	001345	Nepal	00977
Central African Republic	00236	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Chad	00235	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Chile	0056	New Caledonia	00687
China	0086	New Zealand	0064
Colombia	0057	Nicaragua	00505
Comoros	00269	Nigar	00227
Congo	00242	Nigeria	00234
Cook Islands	00682	Niue	00683
Costa Rica	00506	Norfolk Island	00672
Croatia	00385	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Cuba	0053	North Korea	00850
Cyprus	00357	Norway	0047
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Oman	00968
Czech Republic	00420	Pakistan	0092
Denmark	0045	Palau	00680
Diego Garcia	00246	Panama	00507
Djibouti	00253	Papua New Guinea	00675
Dominica	001767	Paraguay	00595
Dominican Republic	001809	Peru	0051
Ecuador	00593	Philippines	0063
Egypt	0020	Poland	0048
El Salvador	00503	Portugal	00351
England (UK)	0044	Puerto Rico	001787
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Qatar	00974
Eritrea	00291	Romania	0040
Estonia	00372	Russian Federation	007
Ethiopia	00251	Rwanda	00250
Falkland Islands	00500	Saint Helena	00290
Faroe Islands	00298	Saint Kitts	001869
Fiji	00679	Saint Lucia	001758
Finland	00358	Saint Pierre	00508
France	0033	Saint Vincent	001784
French Guiana	00594	Samoa US	00684
French Polynesia	00689	Samoa West	00685
Gabon	00241	San Marino	00378
Gambia	00220	Sao Tome	00239
Georgia	00995	Saudi Arabia	00966
Germany	0049	Scotland (UK)	0044
Ghana	00233	Senegal	00221
Gibraltar	00350	Seychelles	00284
Greece	0030	Sierra Leone	00232
Greenland	00299	Singapore	0065
Grenada	001473	Slovakia	00421
Guadeloupe	00590	Slovenia	00386
Guam	001671	Solomon Islands	00677
Guatemala	00502	Somalia	00252
Guinea	00224	South Africa	0027
Guyana	00592	South Korea	0082
Haiti	00509	Spain	0034
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Sri Lanka	0094
Honduras	00504	Sudan	00249
Hong Kong	00852	Suriname	00597
Hungary	0036	Swaziland	00268
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sweden	0046
Iceland	00354	Switzerland	0041
India	0091	Syria	00963
Indian Ocean	00873	Taiwan	00886
Indonesia	0062	Tanzania	00255
Iran	0098	Thailand	0066
Iraq	00964	Toga	00228
Ireland	00353	Tonga	00676
Italy	0039	Tokelau	00690
Ivory Coast	00225	Trinidad	001868
Jamaica	001876	Tunisia	00216
Japan	0081	Turkey	0090
Jordan	00962	Tuvalu	00688
Kazakhstan	007	Uganda	00256
Kenya	00254	Ukraine	00380
Kiribati	00686	United Arab Emirates	00976



PHU LOC, Vietnam: A villager shows dead sea fish he collected on a beach in Phu Loc district, in the central province of Thua Thien Hue. — AFP

VIETNAM INVESTIGATES MASS FISH DEATHS

HANOI: Vietnam yesterday said it was investigating whether pollution is to blame for a spate of mysterious mass fish deaths along the country's central coast after huge amounts of marine life washed ashore in recent days. Tons of fish, including rare species which live far offshore and in the deep, have been discovered on beaches along the country's central coastal provinces of Ha Tinh, Quang Tri, Quang Binh and Hue. "We have never seen anything like it," aquaculture official Nhu Van Can said yesterday. The strange situation first came to light when farmed fish in the area began dying in great numbers, he said, with locals later discovering huge numbers of dead fish on beaches.

Local fishermen told state-run media that they are burying hundreds of kilograms of fish everyday. "If you sail just three miles offshore, you can see dead fish all over the ocean floor," the state-run Tuoi Tre quoted local fishermen as saying. Signs point to the fish having been poisoned by "unidentified substances," Tran Dinh Du, deputy director of agriculture in Quang Binh province, said, according to the report. "We have asked people not to eat the fish and not use the fish as food for their livestock," Du added. State news outlet Thanh Nien quoted worried locals saying they dared not eat any of the washed up fish, adding in their report that "all signs (are) pointing to an environmental disaster." — AFP

NEW HEART DRUGS STRUGGLE TO WIN SALES; DOCTORS HOLD BACK

COST A CONCERN FOR NEW LIFE-TIME HEART MEDICINES

LONDON: New heart drugs hailed as breakthrough treatments by researchers are struggling to gain traction among prescribing doctors, posing a headache for makers such as Novartis, which reported more weak sales for its Entresto medicine yesterday. Novartis has touted the novel heart failure drug as a \$5 billion-a-year seller and is banking on the product to help offset loss of patent protection on its blockbuster cancer medicine Glivec.

Yet first-quarter sales of \$17 million were well below analyst expectations of \$25-30 million and the company now predicts 2016 sales of just \$200 million, or less than half of consensus forecasts compiled by Thomson Reuters Cortellis. Novartis' problems are not unique. Sanofi and Amgen are also battling to win prescriptions for their new so-called PCSK9 cholesterol-fighting injections Praluent and Repatha. Such difficulties are in marked contrast to other disease areas such as cancer, where Bristol-Myers Squibb's new treatment Opdivo is an outstanding commercial hit. Novartis' own psoriasis drug Cosentyx is also beating expectations.

US heart specialist Richard Chazal, president of the American College of Cardiology (ACC), believes slow uptake of pricey new heart drugs highlights the peculiar difficulties surrounding such medicines, which are typically given for life. "Cost is a problem," he said in an interview. "There is concern on the part of many clinicians that if patients are reasonably stable and one starts a new medicine then they may become discouraged by the cost and actually stop taking medication."

The US list price for Entresto is around \$4,500 a year, while the PCSK9 drugs cost about

\$14,000. Adding to doctors' reticence is the lack of specific guidelines from professional bodies such as the ACC, American Heart Association and European Society of Cardiology. While updated guidelines covering the potential use of Entresto are in the works, the delay has frustrated some experts such as Milton Packer, one of the cardiologists who led trial research into Entresto that found it cut the risk of both cardiovascular death and admissions to hospital by a fifth.

Packer complained in a journal article last month about the fact that the guideline process had so far been "silent". For Praluent and Repatha there is the added complication that while both drugs have been shown to reduce cholesterol dramatically, clinical trials are still ongoing to prove this will actually cut heart attacks as expected. In the long term, most experts still predict the new clutch of heart drugs will become multibillion-dollar-a-year sellers, but it is going to be a longer haul than initially anticipated.

"We're extraordinarily fortunate to have these wonderful new tools that science shows us can potentially improve outcomes," said Chazal. "How to use them is something we are still working through but I think we will see increased uptake in the next 12 months." In a bid to invigorate Entresto sales, Novartis said it was expanding its US field force of sales representatives, starting this month, and also launching a direct-to-consumer advertising campaign. However, the combination of lower sales and increased marketing spend suggests that Entresto - arguably the Swiss company's single biggest new drug hope - will take time to contribute significantly to the bottom line. — Reuters

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Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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Friday Times BUSINESS

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OMAN PICKS BANKS FOR FIRST INTERNATIONAL BOND IN YEARS

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Asian shares near 5-1/2-month highs

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LINAN, China: A man charges an electric vehicle at a charging point in Linan, east China's Zhejiang province. — AFP

AUTO SHOW SHOWCASES CHINA'S SUV LOVE AFFAIR

BEIJING: China's love affair with SUVs is helping to cushion the blow of an unexpectedly painful slump in the rest of its crowded auto market. Sales of SUVs, seen as the safest option on China's rough, chaotic roads, soared 52 percent last year. That helped the overall market grow 7.3 percent - a sliver of its 45 percent peak in 2009 - even though car and minivan sales sagged. "Ten years ago, no one wanted an SUV because it was considered to be a bulky truck for peasants," said Michael Dunne, a consultant on Chinese auto market strategy. "Now the cool factor has kicked in and SUVs are super-hot in the China market."

Scrambling for a piece of that action, automakers from General Motors Co and Volkswagen AG to local players Great Wall and BYD are making SUVs the star of this month's Beijing auto show, the biggest of the year in the biggest auto market. The show "will highlight the growing tension between international and local brands as they fight to outshine each other with new products," said Namrita Chow of IHS Automotive in a report. Overall sales growth is likely to fall further this year to 6 percent after economic growth fell last year to a 25-year low, though total volume might reach 25 million vehicles, according to Chow.

'Profitability will suffer'

An industry group for Chinese auto dealers has warned against stocking up on inventory that might not sell. A few years ago customers waited months for delivery of popular models. The speed of the decline surprised US, European and Asian automakers that are counting on China to drive

revenue growth. They have poured billions of dollars into new factories and models designed for Chinese tastes. "Nobody foresaw how quickly demand would slow," said Dunne. "Prices will fall. Profitability will suffer."

Communist leaders have encouraged auto manufacturing as an economic development tool, though creating globally competitive Chinese brands turned out to be harder than they hoped. Foreign automakers that want to produce cars in China have been required since the 1980s to work through state-owned partners that Beijing hoped would learn enough to launch their own brands. When that failed to work fast enough, communist leaders extended support to independents such as BYD Auto, an electric vehicle maker, and Geely Holding Group, which bought Sweden's Volvo Cars in 2010 with support from state banks.

Global automakers were required to help state-owned partners create Chinese brands such as GM's Baojun and Nissan's Venucia in exchange for being allowed to expand their own production. Meanwhile, major cities pay a price in throat-searing smog so severe that half of Beijing's cars were ordered off the road in December. The SUV boom has helped to rescue domestic Chinese automakers that had steadily lost market share to bigger, richer foreign brands. Total profit for Chinese brands fell last year despite 10 percent sales growth, according to Robin Zhu of Bernstein Research. Zhu said that squeeze will worsen as more SUVs flood the market.

Chinese brands account for 65 percent of SUVs sold, dominating the market's lowest tiers, where

profits are slim. Most Chinese automakers have left behind the days of quirky and bargain-priced but poor-quality vehicles. They have invested heavily in technology and brought in Western designers to create sleek models that could be mistaken for Japanese or Korean brands. "The foreign car makers are going to face more challenges," said analyst John Zeng of LMC Automotive. "The quality and competitiveness of local car makers are getting stronger and stronger."

This month, BYD Auto unveiled the Yuan compact SUV, starting at 59,000 yuan (\$9,100) for the gasoline version and 209,900 yuan (\$33,000) for a gas-electric hybrid. Also ahead of the Beijing show, Geely debuted the Boyue SUV, starting at 98,800 yuan (\$15,200). At the show, automakers plan an avalanche of new SUVs ranging from 45,000 yuan (\$6,900) compacts to luxurious land yachts with heated seats and video players. The original off-road brand, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles' Jeep, is due to debut its China-manufactured Renegade. Honda Motor Co plans to unveil two SUVs designed for China.

Best-selling SUV

Local brands Great Wall Motor Co, China's best-selling SUV brand, and Chery Automobile Co plan to show at least one new model. Also this year, state-owned automakers Shanghai Automotive Industries Corp., Guangzhou Auto Co and Dongfeng Motor Co are expected to launch as many as three new SUVs. That should raise annual SUV production in China above 7.2 million

units, with possible sales reaching 7.7 million, Chow says. Automakers also are working on futuristic technologies including electric and self-driving cars, shared vehicles summoned by smartphone and Internet-linked onboard services.

GM plans to launch at least 10 electric or hybrid vehicles in China over the next five years, according to Matt Tsien, the Detroit automaker's president for China. That is part of 60 new or refreshed GM vehicles planned over the next five years. Joining the fray, technology companies including search engine Baidu Inc. and e-commerce giant Alibaba Group have announced plans to develop self-driving cars, navigation and other advances. On Wednesday, a Chinese company, LeEco, which started out as video website LeTV, unveiled what it said is a self-driving all-electric car. The company said it would announce details at the Beijing auto show.

Automakers are encouraged by the fact that China's overall vehicle ownership rates still are low compared with developed countries. China has 172 million cars and 280 million licensed drivers, according to government data. That is the equivalent of 13 cars for every 100 people, well below the US level of 80 per 100 people. But efforts by Beijing and other big cities to curb smog by limiting new car registrations are forcing automakers to look for buyers in smaller towns, where profits are thinner. SUV sales are so strong that some Chinese brands are gambling their futures on the boom by putting all their resources into that segment, said Zeng. "That strategy is effective in the short-term but in the longer term quite risky," he said. — AP

SOFTBANK SLAMS BID TO UNSEAT FOUNDER'S HEIR APPARENT

TOKYO: Japanese mobile giant SoftBank yesterday hit back at a bid by a group of investors to unseat the former Google executive seen as heir apparent to its billionaire founder Masayoshi Son. The company slammed the "unsubstantiated allegations" leveled at its president Nikesh Arora, whom the investors said should be investigated and possibly sacked over potential conflicts of interest tied to his role as an adviser to a private equity firm. SoftBank said yesterday

"the Board takes its duties seriously and is in the process of reviewing the letter".

Son, one of Japan's richest men and the chief executive of SoftBank, has referred to Arora as his likely successor. Yesterday, he backed the former Silicon Valley executive. "I have complete trust in Nikesh and one thousand percent confidence in him and know he will continue to do great things for SoftBank in the future," Son said in a statement. The unidentified group, represented

by a US law firm, outlined its concerns in a letter to the Tokyo-based company, suggesting Arora, 48, may have also been involved in past wrongdoing while they questioned his business track record, Bloomberg News reported.

The group also contacted US mobile giant Sprint, which is owned by SoftBank. Arora sits on its board. "Despite these issues, the SoftBank board saw fit to make Arora the third-highest paid executive in the world

without any track record of accomplishment at the company," the letter said. The letter has not been made public and SoftBank declined to supply a copy to AFP. Arora's salary made headlines last year with reports saying SoftBank was paying him \$135 million. Arora—who gave up a high-profile post at Google to join the Japanese firm in 2014—said last year he would buy \$483 million in SoftBank shares to show his confidence in its prospects.—AFP

SWISS WATCH EXPORTS PLUNGE ON HONG KONG, US SLOWDOWN

ZURICH: Global exports of Swiss watches plummeted in March, amid a dramatic contraction of sales in main markets Hong Kong and the United States. Exports fell 16.1 percent from March 2015 to 1.5 billion Swiss francs (\$1.5 billion, 1.4 billion euros), the Federation of the Swiss Watch Industry (FHS) said. In 2015, watch exports recorded their first full-year decline since 2009, contracting by 3.3 percent with weakening Hong Kong demand already the main factor.

And FHS said the downward trend was accelerating. The numbers last month, it said, were "the lowest March figures since 2011." "The scale of the downturn is also unusual, since we must go back to the crisis of 2009 to find rates of variation of this order," it said. Analysts voiced disappointment at lacking improvements on the market. "The mood amongst watch retailers seems to have deteriorated in recent months," Citi Research analyst Thomas Chauvet said in a note, blaming "subdued economic conditions, stock market and (currency) volatility, travel fears after several terrorist attacks in Europe and depressed oil prices."

The slump came as top Swiss watch market Hong Kong saw one of its sharpest downturns, slumping a full 37.7 percent compared to March a year earlier. The Hong Kong watch market has steadily shrunk since the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella protests chased away the wealthy Chinese tourists who previously travelled there in droves to purchase luxury timepieces. And the strengthening Hong Kong dollar has since prompted them to look to other markets where prices are more attractive. Exports to the United States, the second largest market for Swiss watches, meanwhile fell 32.9 percent in March.

And the market in China slumped 13.7 percent, countering signs of a timid recovery seen at the end of last year. After years of euphoric growth, the Chinese market took a major hit following a 2013 Beijing decision to crack down on corruption by banning extravagant gifts like expensive watches to public officials. Germany was basically the only market bucking the downward trend last month, showing 2.2 percent growth over March 2015, "which confirms the steady improvement in its situation," FHS said. Japan, which had recently provided a small dose of optimism to the gloomy market, meanwhile disappointed, recording a 9.4 percent drop in demand from a year earlier.—AFP



TOKYO: Businessmen walk past the electronic stock indicator outside a security company in Tokyo yesterday. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index soared 2.70 percent, or 457.08 points, to close at 17,363.62, boosted by a broadly weaker yen and another oil price surge, though Mitsubishi Motors collapsed 20 percent after it admitted falsifying fuel efficiency tests.—AFP

FUEL-CHEATING SCANDAL WIPES \$2.5BN OFF MITSUBISHI STOCK

SHARES NOSEDIVED AMID PANIC SELLING

TOKYO: Mitsubishi Motors shares nosedived again yesterday as panic selling wiped about \$2.5 billion off the automaker's market value in response to its shock admission that it cheated on fuel-efficiency tests. The embarrassing revelation is the latest in a string of recent scandals to hit Japanese firms, while German giant Volkswagen struggles to restore its badly dented reputation after a massive emissions scandal. The news has also raised questions about Mitsubishi's future as it faces the prospect of huge lawsuits and fines.

Yesterday, the embattled stock went into freefall, plunging to 583 yen (\$5.31) in Tokyo, down 20 percent, after it dived 15 percent on Wednesday when the news first broke. Japanese transport ministry officials descended on a company research and development centre yesterday morning, as the government slammed the maker of Outlander sport utility vehicles and Lancer cars. "This has critically damaged consumers' trust and it won't be tolerated," top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said yesterday. "It's an extremely serious issue." Mitsubishi admitted Wednesday that

unnamed employees rigged tests to make some of its cars seem more fuel-efficient than they were in reality.

The company said it would halt production and sales of the affected vehicle models—mini-cars sold in Japan including some made for rival Nissan—and warned that the number of cars involved in the scandal would likely rise. Mitsubishi's top executive conceded Wednesday that the crisis would take a bite out of its bottom line, as the firm widens an internal probe to cars sold overseas. "This is not a simple problem and we need time" to assess the impact, president Tetsuro Aikawa told a news briefing. "But I'm sure there will be an impact. The damage will be big."

Company loyalty

The collapse of Mitsubishi's stock on Wednesday was its biggest one-day plunge since 2004. At that time, Mitsubishi was struggling to launch a turnaround as it teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, hit by a lack of cash and a series of huge recalls linked to deadly defects. Bailouts by the Mitsubishi group companies saved the automaker,

which had covered up defects linked to flawed axles that could lead to wheels coming off the car.

Regulators must now deal harshly with Mitsubishi to ensure it overhauls a corporate culture that prizes unwavering loyalty to the company even more than many Japanese firms, likely a key driver in the latest cover-up, one expert said. "Just as Volkswagen got slapped with very severe sanctions...Mitsubishi also needs to face tough measures so it's guaranteed that the company will change," said Hideyuki Kobayashi, a business professor at Hitotsubashi University, who authored a book about the company's struggles a decade ago.

The falsified figures were discovered after Nissan found inconsistencies in fuel-economy data. Japan's number-two automaker said it would halt sales of the affected mini-cars, but added that it had no immediate plans to change its business relationship with Mitsubishi. Mini-cars, or kei-cars, are small vehicles with 660cc gasoline engines that are hugely popular in the Japanese market, although they have found little success abroad.—AFP



FRANKFURT: A dandelion stands in front of the headquarters of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany yesterday. The European Central Bank held its key interest rates steady at its policy meeting yesterday, as it monitors the effects of a raft of new easing measures six weeks ago. —AFP

ECB'S DRAGHI DEFIANT IN FACE OF GERMAN CRITICISM OF STIMULUS

FRANKFURT: Europe's top central banker struck a defiant tone yesterday over German-led criticism that the European Central Bank has over-stepped the mark in its ultra-low interest rate policies. After the bank's decision to keep its interest rates unchanged at record lows, ECB President Mario Draghi said the bank can deploy more stimulus if global troubles threaten to push a modest economic recovery off the rails and further weighs on inflation. Overall, though, he sounded a relatively optimistic - and firm - tone that helped the euro rise 0.6 percent to \$1.1373.

"We obey the law, not the politicians," he said. Draghi and the ECB have come under German criticism over recent policy moves. Some conservative German politicians have grumbled about the low returns to savers and on pension savings. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaueble went so far as to credit half of the support for the anti-euro, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany party to public discontent over ECB policies. Draghi defended the bank's policies and noted that the ECB is tasked with setting policy for all the countries in the euro-zone, not just Germany. The same policies backed by the ECB have been enacted around the world, he noted.

The European Union treaty that created the ECB and the euro forbids the central bank from taking advice from governments, and says that member governments agree to respect that. Political independence shields a central bank from pressure from politicians who may want more expansive monetary policy that could help them get re-elected - but which could cause long-term harm to the economy.

The bank did not change the measures that have caused controversy. The bank's 25-member governing council kept its key benchmark interest rate at zero. The refinancing rate determines the cost of central bank credit to commercial banks, and through that steers many other short-term lending rates. It also didn't touch its rate of minus 0.4 percent on funds left on deposit at the central bank by commercial banks. That highly unusual negative rate is aimed at getting banks to lend the money, not stash it, and help stoke inflation in the euro-zone.

The ECB aims to have annual inflation across the euro-zone at just below 2 percent. In the year to March, the rate was zero. Draghi said inflation in the euro-zone will likely fall below zero in the coming months due to shifts in energy prices. However, he said it should start picking up in the second half of the year and continue rising in 2017 and 2018. "The governing council will continue to monitor closely the evolution of the outlook for price stability and, if warranted to achieve its objective, will act by using all the instruments available within its mandate," he said.

He added that it's "crucial" to ensure that current very low inflation rates do "not become entrenched" in second-round effects on wage and prices. In addition to holding interest rates at drastic lows, the euro-zone's chief monetary authority kept its bond-buying program unchanged. It is pumping newly printed money into the banking system by purchasing bonds from banks at the rate of 80 billion euros (\$90 billion) per month through at least March 2017, and longer if needed. It is also planning long-term loans to banks that will earn negative interest - that is, the ECB will pay banks to take the loans instead of the other way around.—AP

EURO IN THE CROSSHAIRS, GIVING DOLLAR A BREAK

RALLY IN COMMODITY CURRENCIES TAKES BREATH

TOKYO: The euro wavered yesterday, well off its overnight peak as investors adjusted position ahead of a policy meeting by the European Central Bank later this session. The ECB is widely expected to hold interest rates unchanged at record lows, but President Mario Draghi is likely to drive home the case for ultra-loose monetary policy. "The task now for the ECB lies more along the lines of promoting the effectiveness of these new expansionary policies and assertion that the Bank can do more if needed," said Rodrigo Catril, FX strategist at National Australia Bank. Last month, while the ECB delivered aggressive easing measures, the euro perversely rallied after Draghi said there was probably no need for more rate cuts if the latest stimulus worked.

The euro stood at \$1.1293, compared with \$1.1358 in Asian trading on Wednesday and well below its overnight peak of \$1.1388. Against the yen, it edged down about 0.1 percent to 123.98. With three major central bank meetings looming, market participants cited a lack of market conviction on direction bets. The Federal Reserve is scheduled to hold its

policy review on April 26-27, while the Bank of Japan will meet on April 28. BOJ officials are growing more receptive to stepping up monetary easing measures by buying more ETFs invested in shares, as weak global growth threaten the country's fragile economic recovery, sources have told Reuters.

On Wednesday, BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the central bank's presence in the exchange-traded fund (ETF) market is "not too big," signaling that topping up purchases of ETFs could be a real, near-term option. But the BOJ could hold off on additional steps for now. Despite the yen's recent appreciation, a Reuters poll published yesterday showed most Japan companies still expect to maintain or see a small increase in operating profits this financial year. While no action is expected from the Fed, traders will be looking for clues in its policy statement that the central bank is preparing markets for a June interest rate hike.

Fed Chair Janet Yellen has repeatedly said the Fed will be cautious in tightening policy, prompting markets to barely price in

a rate hike this year. US Treasury yields have fallen as a result, though they hit three-week highs on Wednesday as oil and stocks gained, which helped the dollar. "This week has been all about the risk rally," said Bart Wakabayashi, head of FX sales at State Street Global Markets in Hong Kong. "It's clear there is just a reversal of positions going on. Maybe oil could be driving this," he said. The higher US yields helped the greenback come within a whisker of 110.00 yen, off this week's trough of 107.75 plumed on Monday.

The dollar was last steady at 109.78 yen. With the euro on the back foot, the dollar index reversed all of Tuesday's fall and was up around 0.1 percent at 94.575, off Tuesday's low of 93.926. Crude prices were off lows hit earlier this week but remained pressured by concerns over a global glut after Russia and Iran said they were ready to raise oil production further, while US inventories climbed slightly. That stemmed the recent rally in commodity currencies. The Aussie added 0.2 percent to \$0.7807 but was below the previous session's 10-month peak of \$0.7830. —Reuters



JOHANNESBURG: Hundreds of people queue during the official opening of South Africa's first Starbucks store, also the US coffeehouse chain's first store in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Johannesburg yesterday. — AFP

STARBUCKS LAUNCHES ITS FIRST CAFE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG: Hundreds of coffee lovers queued early yesterday in an upmarket Johannesburg shopping centre as international chain Starbucks opened its first cafe in sub-Saharan Africa. The US-based global brand plans to open 12 to 15 more stores in South Africa over the next two years, with a long term plan of up to 150 outlets. The cafe's first customers formed a long line at Starbucks' doors in the Rosebank district of the city before the opening at 7:30 am.

"We've been queuing for twelve hours, since 7:30 last night and we wanted to be the first customers at Starbucks, and we were," said 19-year-old student Mohamed Mala. Another customer, Norma Cooper, described the arrival of the cafe as "long overdue." "Starbucks has been one of the things missing from

the South African scene," said the bank employee. A second branch will open later this month at another shopping mall in the financial capital Johannesburg, but there are no plans to expand to other countries in the region.

Starbucks, which operates more than 22,000 cafes worldwide, has a presence in only two other African countries-Egypt and Morocco. A caffe latte in the stylishly-designed shop costs between 27 and 33 rand (\$1.89- \$2.30). In terms of wages, a junior bank teller's hourly rate in South Africa starts from 19.28 rand while an administrative clerk starts from 17.94 rand, according to Payscale, a private salary survey firm. Starbucks will compete with a host of well-established locally-owned brands and independent coffee shops. "The timing is right. We are going to offer

coffee lovers a special experience," said Carlo Gonzaga, chief executive of Taste Holdings, the local partner of Starbucks Coffee Company.

Gonzaga told journalists the prices were set for the South African market and not linked to the exchange rate, which has seen the South African currency fall against the US dollar. "We also carefully considered South African customer tastes when we developed our menu, and customers can expect local products like Rooibos tea," he said. Some of the coffee beans are sourced from nine African countries, including Kenya and Burundi. South Africa has the most developed economy on the continent, and several American food chains have opened doors here recently, including Burger King and Krispy Kreme Doughnut.—AFP

ASIAN SHARES NEAR 5-1/2-MONTH HIGHS

STOCKS TAKE HEART FROM OIL'S SURPRISING RESILIENCE

TOKYO: Asian shares reached a 5-1/2-month high yesterday as oil prices rallied over 4 percent overnight thanks to a smaller than expected increase in US crude inventories and abiding hopes that producers may eventually agree ways to ease a global glut. Spreadbetters expect the positive momentum in Asia to trickle to Europe, forecasting a higher open for Britain's FTSE, Germany's DAX and France's CAC. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan rose 0.8 percent, brushing its highest since early November. Japan's Nikkei gained 2.6 percent.

Australian shares rose 0.9 percent and Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 1.8 percent. Shanghai rose 0.4 percent. Wall Street shares ended less than 2 percent short of a record-high close on Wednesday as a rebound in oil prices added to optimism sparked by a raft of earnings reports. The S&P 500 gained 0.08 percent to 2,102.4,

and had gained 15 percent since mid-February. Oil prices surged on Wednesday and eventually popped up to a five-month high after a smaller-than-expected build in US crude inventories offset oversupply worries stirred by Kuwaiti oil workers strike ending a strike.

Oil bulls also bet that major crude producers would meet again to try to curtail output even as Moscow denied media reports that Russia planned to host such a meeting. Last Sunday, Russia and OPEC nations had failed to reach an agreement on freezing production at a meeting in Doha, Qatar.

"Despite the denial from Russia, oil prices were strong, pointing to strong market sentiment. I suspect there is speculation that oil producers will eventually agree on an output freeze," said Masahiro Ichikawa, senior strategist at Sumitomo Mitsui Asset Management.

US crude rose above \$44 a barrel to touch their highest since November. Brent crude poked above \$46 for their highest in five months. Many other commodity prices were also firm, with copper rising to as high as \$4,994.50 a ton, its highest level in a month. The Thomson Reuters Core Commodity Index also rose above its March peak to its highest level since early December. Silver extended gains after Tuesday's sharp gains to hit an 11-month high of \$17.397 per ounce. It last traded at \$17.256, up about 5 percent so far this week. In contrast, safe-haven gold stayed in its well-worn \$1,210-1,280 range since February and last stood at \$1,247.36 per ounce, up 1.2 percent on the week.

In the currency market, commodity-linked currencies held firm. The Canadian dollar hit a 9-1/2-month high of C\$1.2593 to the US dollar. It last stood at C\$1.2643. The Australian dollar was at \$0.7807, hav-

ing hit an 11-month high of a \$0.7830 on Wednesday. Against other currencies, the US dollar maintained a firm tone overall, and held an upper hand against the euro ahead of the European Central Bank's policy meeting later in the day.

ECB President Mario Draghi is likely to drive home the case for ultra-loose monetary policy, hitting back after a barrage of criticism from German officials who dispute the bank's recipe for tackling the euro zone's economic malaise.

"The task now for the ECB lies more along the lines of promoting the effectiveness of these new expansionary policies and assertion that the Bank can do more if needed," said Rodrigo Catril, FX strategist at National Australia Bank. The euro traded nearly flat at \$1.1291, having fallen 0.5 percent on Wednesday. Against the yen, the dollar nudged up to a two-week high of 109.90 yen. — Reuters

OIL PRICES UP

LONDON: Crude prices firmed yesterday after the International Energy Agency (IEA) said 2016 would see the biggest fall in non-OPEC production in a generation, helping to rebalance a market dogged by oversupply. IEA chief Fatih Birol said low oil prices had cut investment by about 40 percent in the past two years, with sharp falls in the United States, Canada, Latin America and Russia. Benchmark Brent crude futures were up 21 cents at \$46.00 a barrel by 1001 GMT. US crude futures were 17 cents higher at \$44.35. Both crudes have gained around 70 percent in value from their lows reached between January and February.

The drop in supply from some producers could be offset by increased production in countries including Russia and Iran, however. Russia's energy minister said the country might push oil production to historic highs. Iran has reiterated its intention to reach output of 4 million barrels per day, after a global deal to freeze output collapsed and Saudi Arabia threatened to flood markets with more crude. Nigeria will hold talks with Saudi Arabia, Iran and other producers by May, hoping to reach a deal on an output freeze at the next OPEC meeting in June, the West African country's oil minister told Reuters.

"The focus of the market is primarily on price-supportive news and that's just an indication of how sentiment is," Saxo Bank senior manager Ole Hansen said. Hansen said fund flows into commodities had been strong this week, driven by a weaker dollar. Earlier this week, the dollar hit 10-month lows against some commodity-related currencies. The Thomson Reuters Core Commodity Index rose to its highest since early December. "This whole recovery has been driven by supply being capped and supply is price-sensitive and again we're back to levels where we could see some of these producers breathe again," Hansen said.

French bank BNP Paribas said any hope of the market rebalancing from the current surplus relied on a predicted decline in US oil production. "The US accounts for the bulk of non-OPEC's 2016 oil supply contraction of 700,000 barrels per day forecast. If the decline in the US oil supply proves insufficient to tighten balances, then ... the oil price will remain low," it said. In refined products, China's exports of diesel and gasoline soared, spilling surplus fuel into a market that is already well supplied, and threatening to cut Asian benchmark refining margins further. — Reuters



SYDNEY: Shoppers walk out of Dick Smith store during a closing down sale in the central business district of Sydney yesterday. The Reserve Bank has slashed rates by 275 basis points since November 2011 to boost the economy, but it has been almost a year since its last cut in May 2015. — AFP

SILVER HITS 11-MONTH HIGH

GOLD RISES MORE THAN 1%

LONDON: Silver hit an 11-month high yesterday, boosted by perceptions the metal had become undervalued versus gold coupled with technical momentum, while gold rallied more than 1 percent ahead of a European Central Bank meeting. Silver is up more than 7 percent this week, and on track for its biggest weekly rise since January 2015 after a break of key chart resistance last week sparked a wave of buying.

It reached its most expensive versus gold in six months yesterday, with an ounce of gold buying 72.3 ounces of silver, against a more than seven-year high of 83 ounces in late February. Spot silver was up 2.9 percent at 0945 GMT at \$17.41 an ounce, having earlier touched its highest since May 2015 at \$17.60. Gold was up 1.3 percent to \$1,259.16 an ounce, while US gold futures for April delivery were up

\$6.80 an ounce at \$1,261.20. "Silver has most certainly been developing its own strong momentum, the way it has rallied and outperformed gold," Saxo Bank's head of commodities research Ole Hansen said. "Gold has been 'saved' this time round by silver, as demand has slowed."

Holdings of the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, New York's SPDR Gold Shares, has seen outflows of 14 tons so far this week, while silver ETF holdings have surged. "(Silver) could potentially be running out of steam ahead of the 17.80 high from last year, and that could lead trigger some profit taking," Hansen said.

"The strength of the market will be determined by whether \$16.80 will be strong enough to cap the correction once it starts." Bullion traders are now awaiting the out-

come of an ECB meeting later in the session for any impact on the dollar, in which the precious metals are priced. The ECB is not expected to make any policy changes at its rate-setting meeting.

"ECB President (Mario) Draghi will probably present details of the recently decided measures," Commerzbank said in a note. "In addition, he will keep all options open as regards the future monetary policy of the ECB. If he shows himself more open to possible further rate cuts, this is likely to support gold." The euro held steady against the dollar ahead of the meeting. The focus will also be on US economic data that could affect the Federal Reserve's monetary policy. Among other precious metals, spot platinum was up 1.3 percent at \$1,030 an ounce, while spot palladium was up 0.5 percent at \$596.33 an ounce. — Reuters

OMAN PICKS 5 BANKS FOR FIRST INTERNATIONAL BOND IN YEARS

DUBAI: The government of Oman has chosen five banks to arrange the sultanate's first international bond issue in almost 20 years, sources aware of the matter said yesterday. The upcoming US dollar-denominated issue comes as Oman, like other Gulf states, looks to tap international bond markets to shore up state finances pressured by low oil prices. Oman has chosen Citi, JP Morgan, Mitsubishi UFJ Securities, Natixis and National Bank of Abu Dhabi to arrange the bond, the sources said, who spoke on condition of anonymity as the information isn't public.

The Finance Ministry did not respond to a request for comment. The sale will be structured to comply with Reg S/144a regulations, meaning the transaction can be sold to investors in the United States, and is targeted to happen in the second quarter, according to the sources. However, other bankers cautioned that given a truncated time frame in the second quarter, with the holy month of Ramadan commencing in early June, and the amount of work to be done to prepare an offer after such a long absence from international markets, a deal may not emerge until the third quarter. Reuters reported in February that Oman was seeking to sell the bond in the second quarter and had invited a small group of banks, most of which had participated in the sultanate's \$1 billion sovereign loan earlier in the year, to pitch for arranger roles.

One notable absentee from the bond arrangers is Gulf International Bank, which was one of three banks - along with Citi and Natixis - to underwrite the loan before it was sold to other lenders. Oman, rated A3 by Moody's and BBB- by Standard & Poor's, joins other Gulf sovereign issuers in tapping international bond markets in 2016: Abu Dhabi is currently meeting fixed income investors ahead of its first bond issue in seven years, while Bahrain and Sharjah have already sold a bond and a sukuk issue respectively this year.

Oil's plunge since 2014 has hit Oman's finances hard. Its state budget swung to a deficit of 4.07 billion rials (\$10.6 billion) in the first 11 months of 2015 from a surplus of 233.4 million rials a year earlier. To bridge the deficit, Oman has begun spending cuts, tax rises and fuel subsidy reforms. The country has an extended domestic borrowing programme, including regular Treasury bill auctions. The borrowing is adding pressure to liquidity in the local banking system and forcing the government to raise money abroad. Oman's central bank executive president, Hamoud Sangour Al-Zadjali, said in February the government might issue bonds by the middle of this year as part of a plan to borrow up to \$10 billion from abroad. — Reuters

SAUDI ELECTRICITY'S NET LOSS NARROWS

DUBAI: State-run Saudi Electricity Co (SEC), the Gulf's largest utility firm, reported a narrowing first-quarter net loss yesterday as higher tariffs boosted its operating income. The company, which the government aims to split into several components this year to improve efficiency, made a loss of 1.37 billion riyals (\$365.32 million) in the three months to March 31, according to a bourse statement.

This compares with a loss of 1.94 billion riyals in the same period a year earlier. NCB Capital had forecast of SEC would make a quarterly loss of 1.28 billion riyals. The utility cited increased operational revenues from higher tariffs and a reduced amount of energy bought from independent producers as the reason for its smaller loss. This is despite an 80 percent increase in the cost of fuel as a result of higher energy prices, the company said.

Saudi's government has lowered utility subsidies, raising electricity, water and fuel prices. Saudi officials say these increases are unlikely to change the projected growth in demand, which has been at around 8 percent per year. SEC has said the price changes would roughly balance out because the higher costs associated with higher fuel prices would be offset increased revenues from electricity sales. Saudi companies issue brief earnings statements early in the reporting period before publishing more detailed results later. SEC's results are acutely seasonal because of the big swing between power demand in winter and summer, when high temperatures lead to much greater use of air conditioning. — Reuters



PEDERNALES: A mother and her children in a shelter in Pedernales, Ecuador. A 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Ecuador on Wednesday, sowing new panic four days after a powerful quake killed more than 500 people and injured more than 5,000. — AFP

QUAKE-HIT ECUADOR TO HIKE TAXES, SELL ASSETS

INTERNATIONAL BOND ISSUE EYED

PEDERNALES: Ecuador will temporarily increase some taxes, sell assets, and may issue new bonds on the international market to fund a multi-billion dollar reconstruction after a devastating 7.8 magnitude quake, a somber President Rafael Correa said. The death toll from Ecuador's weekend earthquake neared 600 and rescue missions ebbed as the traumatized Andean nation braced itself for long and costly rebuilding. "It's hard to imagine the magnitude of the tragedy. Every time we visit a place, there are more problems," Correa said, fresh from touring the disaster zone.

The leftist leader estimated the disaster had inflicted \$2 billion to \$3 billion of damage and could knock 2 to 3 percentage points off growth, meaning the economy will almost certainly shrink this year. Lower oil revenue had already left the poor nation of 16 million people facing near-zero growth and lower investment. In addition to \$600 million in credit from multilateral lenders, Correa, an economist, announced a raft of measures to help repair homes, roads, and bridges along the devastated Pacific Coast.

"We're looking at the possibility of issuing bonds on the international market," he said on Wednesday afternoon, without providing details. Ecuador had been saying before the quake that current high yields would make it too expensive to issue debt. Yields on its bonds are close to 11 percentage points higher than compara-

ble US Treasury debt, according to JPMorgan data, and creditors are likely to be wary after the quake. Correa's government in 2008 defaulted on debt with a similar yield, calling the value unfair. His government has since returned to Wall Street and Ecuador currently has some \$3.5 billion worth of bonds in circulation.

In a nationally televised address later on Wednesday, Correa also announced the OPEC nation was poised to shed assets. "The country has many assets thanks to investment over all these years and we will seek to sell some of them to overcome these difficult moments," he said. He also unveiled several short-term tax changes, including a 2-point increase in the Valued Added Tax for a year, as well as a "one-off 3 percent additional contribution on profits," although the fine print was not immediately clear. The VAT tax is currently 12 percent. Additionally, a one-off tax of 0.9 percent will be imposed on people with wealth of over \$1 million. Ecuadoreans will also be asked to contribute one day of salary, calculated on a sliding scale based on income.

'Food, please'

Briefly pausing talk of reconstruction and hindering rescuers, another quake, of 6.2 magnitude, shook the coast before dawn on Wednesday, terrifying survivors. "You can't imagine what a fright it was. 'Not again!' I thought," said Maria Quinones in

Pedernales town, which bore the brunt of Saturday's disaster. That quake, the worst in decades, killed 570 people, injured 7,000 others, damaged close to 2,000 buildings, and forced over 24,000 survivors to seek refuge in shelters, according to government tallies.

Four days on, some isolated communities struggled without water, power or transport, as torn-up roads stymied deliveries. Along the coast, stadiums served as morgues and aid distribution centers. "I'm waiting for medicines, diapers for my grandson, we're lacking everything," said Ruth Quiroz, 49, as she waited in an hour-long line in front of a makeshift pharmacy set up at the Pedernales stadium. On a highway outside the town, some children sat holding placards saying: "Food, please."

When a truck arrived to deliver water to the small town of San Jacinto, hungry residents surrounded the vehicle and hit it as they yelled: "We want food!" Scores of foreign aid workers and experts have arrived in the aftermath of Saturday's disaster and about 14,000 security personnel have kept order, with only sporadic looting reported. But rescuers were losing hope of finding anyone alive even as relatives of the missing begged them to keep looking. Speaking from the highland capital, Quito, Correa said the death toll would likely rise further, although at a slower rate than in previous days. "May these tears fertilize the soil of the future," he said. — Reuters

SALE SHINES AS WHITE SOX DOWN ANGELS

CHICAGO: Chris Sale became the major leagues' first four-game winner, allowing two hits in seven innings to lead the Chicago White Sox over the Los Angeles Angels 2-1 Wednesday. Sale (4-0) allowed a pair of singles by Mike Trout and an unearned run. David Robertson got four outs for his sixth save in as many attempts, allowing Trout's third hit and completing a fourth-hitter. Chicago improved to 10-5. Last season, the White Sox began 10-14 and didn't reach double digits in victories until May 26. Tyler Saladino homered in the first off Garrett Richards (0-3), who gave up two runs - one earned - and four hits in 6 1/3 innings.

RANGERS 2, ASTROS 1

Cole Hamels extended his career-best winning streak to 10 games while Rougned Odor had a two-run homer as Texas beat Houston. Hamels hit the first two batters of the game, gave up three straight singles to start the second and surrendered a leadoff hit in the third. But the Astros couldn't score, helping Hamels (3-0) by making an out on the bases in each inning. The ace left-hander allowed rookie Tyler White's fifth home run in the sixth but combined with reliever Sam Dyson to strand the tying run at third with one out in the seventh. Jake Diekman got called third strikes on Colby Rasmus and Evan Gattis with the tying run at second in the eighth before closer Shawn Tolleson pitched the ninth for his fifth save. Doug Fister (1-2) allowed Odor's second homer in the second inning as the Astros lost their ninth straight at the Rangers.

DIAMONDBACKS 2, GIANTS 1

Zack Greinke and Madison Bumgarner both pitched well in a showdown of NL West aces, but Wellington Castillo hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning to help Arizona beat San Francisco. Greinke (1-2) got his first win with Arizona and remained undefeated against the Giants - he's 8-0 in 11 starts against San Francisco and 3-0 against Bumgarner. He gave up a run on six hits over 6 2/3 innings, walking one and striking out seven. Brandon Drury added two hits for the Diamondbacks, who won their fourth straight and have taken 11 of their last 13 in San Francisco. Bumgarner (1-2) went seven innings, giving up the two runs on five hits. He walked one and struck out eight as the Giants lost their fourth straight and seventh of eight. Brad Ziegler earned his fourth save, extending his team record to 32 consecutive.

REDS 6, ROCKIES 5

Tucker Barnhart hit a game-ending single off Christian Bergman (0-3) over a five-man infield in the ninth as Cincinnati overcame a bullpen meltdown and took advantage of a Colorado baserunning blunder. Colorado appeared to tie the score 3-3 in the seventh when Dustin Garneau doubled with two outs and pinch-hitter Ryan Raburn singled to right. But Raburn was called out on appeal by umpire Adrian Johnson for missing third base. But Colorado tied the score in a three-run eighth when the first two batters reached against Blake Wood, Gerardo Parra hit into a run-scoring forceout off Tony Cingrani, and Paulsen hit a two-run double. Ross Ohlendorf (3-2) pitched a perfect ninth.

CARDINALS 5, CUBS 3

Matt Holliday homered and Carlos Martinez (0-3) allowed one run and three hits in seven innings as St. Louis avoided getting swept in the three-game series. Trevor Rosenthal got his fourth save of the season by striking out the side in the ninth. It was his 100th career save. Kyle Hendricks (1-2) gave up four runs and seven hits in 5 1/3 innings.



SAN FRANCISCO: Matt Duffy #5 of the San Francisco Giants dives for and catches a line drive hit off the bat of Chris Owings (not pictured) of the Arizona Diamondbacks during the sixth inning at AT&T Park on April 20, 2016. — AFP

ATHLETICS 5, YANKEES 2

Kendall Graveman (1-1) tossed three-hit ball for 6 1/3 innings and struck out eight for Oakland, 5-0 in the road this season. New York (5-8) has lost six of seven and is last in the AL East. Billy Burns had three hits, Khris Davis delivered a two-run single and the A's won their fourth straight following a four-game slide. Burns and Chris Coghlan hit consecutive doubles off Nathan Eovaldi (0-2) to start a three-run fourth inning. Josh Reddick had an RBI single and Stephen Vogt added a sacrifice fly.

RED SOX 7, RAYS 3

Mookie Betts hit a two-run homer and David Ortiz drove in three runs with a pair of doubles to back Rick Porcello as Boston stopped a three-game losing streak. Porcello (3-0) allowed three runs and six hits in seven innings, struck out nine and walked one. He held the Rays scoreless on two hits through five innings while the Red Sox opened a 6-0 lead against Chris Archer (0-4). Archer gave up six runs and eight hits in 4 1/3 innings as the Rays' three-game winning streak ended. He is 0-7 with a 6.39 ERA in his last 10 starts.

DODGERS 5, BRAVES 3, 10 INNINGS

Justin Turner gave Los Angeles the lead with a 10th-inning double to snap Atlanta's four-game winning streak. The Braves failed in a bid to become the first team to win five straight games after starting a season 0-9, according to STATS. Braves rookie center fielder Mallex Smith, charging toward left field, made a diving attempt for Turner's sinking drive off Jason Grilli (1-1) but the ball bounced off his glove. Smith slipped and crawled before finally retrieving the ball as Chase Utley, who led off with a single, scored from second. Yasmani Grandal added a run-scoring single off Alexi Ogando. Daniel Castro's two-run single in the fourth gave the Braves a 3-0 lead. Adrian Gonzalez hit a two-run homer off Eric O'Flaherty to tie the game in the sixth. Joe Blanton (1-1) pitched a scoreless ninth. Kenley Jansen got the final three outs for his sixth save.

MARINERS 2, INDIANS 1

Taijuan Walker (1-0) allowed just an unearned run and three hits over six innings while Norichika Aoki had a two-run triple in the second. Jason Kipnis' sacrifice fly in the third scored Cleveland's run, which was unearned thanks to first baseman Adam Lind's fielding error. Danny Salazar (2-1) allowed two runs and three hits in seven innings.

NATIONALS 3, MARLINS 1

Bryce Harper doubled in a run and Yusmeiro Petit (1-0) allowed one run in four innings of relief after starter Joe Ross departed in the third inning because of a blister on the middle finger of his pitching hand. Harper, who began the night leading the majors with 20 RBIs, hit a two-out double in the third to score Ross from first base for a 2-0 lead. Michael Taylor homered with two outs in the fifth off Wei-Yin Chen (0-1). The ball wouldn't have cleared the center field fence last year, before the Marlins Park dimensions were shortened. Washington's Daniel Murphy, who entered leading the majors in hitting, went 2 for 4 and hiked his average to .429.

TIGERS 3, ROYALS 2

Jordan Zimmermann (3-0) scattered seven hits over 6 1/3 innings in his third straight scoreless start while Victor Martinez drove in the 1,000th run of his career. Francisco Rodriguez served up back-to-back homers to Alex Gordon and Salvador Perez in the ninth before striking out Mike Moustakas to leave runners on first and second. It was K-Rod's fourth save of the season and 390th overall, matching Dennis Eckersley for sixth-most. Ian Kinsler drove the other two runs for Detroit. Ian Kennedy (2-1) allowed two runs and six hits in 6 1/3 innings.

ORIOLES 4, BLUE JAYS 3

Caleb Joseph doubled off Joe Biagini (0-1) with two outs in the 10th inning and scored on Josh Thole's passed ball. Mychal Givens (1-0) worked the 10th for Baltimore. Josh Donaldson hit his sixth home run and Edwin Encarnacion had two RBIs for the Blue Jays, whose three-game winning streak ended.

PHILLIES 5, METS 4, 11 INNINGS

Peter Bourjos drove in the winning run on an infield single with two outs in the 11th inning to lift Philadelphia over New York. Yoenis Cespedes and Lucas Duda hit consecutive homers and Neil Walker had four hits for the Mets. Freddy Galvis hit a two-run homer for the Phillies, who avoided a three-game sweep. Jeanmar Gomez (2-0) tossed two scoreless innings for the win. Galvis ripped a one-out double to right off Hansel Robles (0-1) with one out in the 11th. A few batters later, Bourjos hit a sharp bouncer down the third-base line. David Wright made a backhanded grab but the speedy ninth-place hitter easily beat the throw and Galvis scored.

PADRES 8, PIRATES 2

Drew Pomeranz struck out a career-high 10 and held Pittsburgh to four singles and Matt Kemp homered to lead San Diego to victory. The Padres have taken the first two of three games against the Pirates for their first home series win this season. Pomeranz's previous career high in strikeouts was eight, accomplished twice before, most recently Thursday at Philadelphia. Only two Pirates baserunner reached scoring position against Pomeranz (2-1) over 6 2/3 innings. San Diego roughed up lefty Jeff Locke (0-2) for eight runs and 11 hits in three-plus innings. Kemp hit his fifth homer leading off the fourth. It was estimated at 441 feet off Locke into the Padres' bullpen beyond the fence in left-center.

BREWERS 10, TWINS 5

Aaron Hill, Chris Carter and Domingo Santana each hit home runs to help Jimmy Nelson and Milwaukee beat Minnesota. Nelson, who had never faced the Twins, allowed four runs on 10 hits. He struck out six and walked one to keep the Twins winless in seven games on the road. Hill led off the bottom of the sixth with a solo shot off Ryan Pressly (1-1) after the Twins tied it at 4 in the sixth on Oswaldo Arcia's two-run homer and Eddie Rosario's home run. Brian Dozer chased Nelson (3-1) with a double down the first-base line. Carlos Torres walked the next two batters, but escaped the jam when he struck out Arcia. — AP



DISABILITY - NOT INABILITY

THIRD DISABLED TOURNAMENT

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The third Disabled Tournament organized by Kuwait Disabled Sports Club came to a close on Wednesday night at the club halls. Activities include; shooting, athletics and target ball for the visually impaired. In the results of the third and final day, Al-Nasser team (represented by Abdallah Al-Haraz, Abdelaziz Al-Otaibi, Rashid Al-Hassan and Talal Al-Azmi) won the target ball event; Tahreer team took the second place while Wahda ended in third place.

The Pistol Shooting event was won by Mohammad Ajeel, followed by Ali Al-Khalifa - and Abdallah Latif (third position). In athletics, Abdelrahman Al-Kandary won the first place in the Discus Throwing Sitting Event; Nasser Saleh (second) and Mohammad Al-Mutairi (third). In the Shot-put Throwing, Majid Al-Dhaye emerged victorious - taking the first position; Mohammad bin Jabal took the second place; Mohammad Ajeel (third).

In sitting Shot-put Event, Mohammad Nasser won the first place, followed by Abdelaziz Masoud and Ahmad Al-Badri (third). In the 60-meter Running Wheelchairs for the (T33) category, Ahmad Naqa Al-Mutairi won the first place followed by Nasser Saleh and Hamad Al-Adwani respectively. In the same distance for the (T53-54) category - Hamad Al-Adwani grab the pole position, followed by Faisal Al-Rajih and Nasser Al-Azmi (third).

Representative of the Public Authority for Sports and Director of 'Sports for All' department said the authority - headed by Sheikh Ahamd Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is keen on supporting all sports clubs. He said that the club has succeeded in organizing three local tournaments this season, and urged all Kuwaiti youth with disabilities to join the club.

Meanwhile, KDSC Secretary General Mansour Al-Sharheed said this is the latest championship on the agenda for preparing players who are participating in the Rio de Janeiro Paralympics next September. "It was a good opportunity to prepare these athletes - also is good to discover new skills," Al-Sarheed said.



NEUVIRTH, FLYERS HOLD OFF ELIMINATION

PHILADELPHIA: Michal Neuvirth stopped 31 shots in his first start of the playoff series, helping the Philadelphia Flyers stave off a sweep with a 2-1 win over the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night. The Capitals still lead the series 3-1 headed into Game 5 Friday night in Washington. Shayne Gostisbehere and Andrew MacDonald each scored for the Flyers. Neuvirth was sensational in the third after TJ Oshie scored early in the period to make it 2-1. The Capitals still have never swept a best-of-seven playoff series. The game was marred by a scary hit that saw Flyers center Scott Laughton leave on a stretcher. The Flyers said he was taken to Jefferson Hospital for precautionary reasons.

PANTHERS 2, ISLANDERS 1

Alex Petrovic scored the tiebreaking goal midway through the third period and the Florida Panthers beat the New York Islanders to even their first-round playoff series at two games apiece. Teddy Purcell also scored for Florida, and Jaromir Jagr had an assist for his 200th career playoff point. Roberto Luongo stopped 26 shots. John Tavares had his third goal of the series for New York, and Thomas Greiss finished with 27 saves. The Panthers got their first playoff road win since April 17, 2012, against New Jersey in Game 3 of the first round. Game 5 of the best-of-seven series is today's night in Sunrise, Florida.

STARS 3, WILD 2

Jason Spezza scored the go-ahead goal with a deflection off his skate while Ales Hemesky and Patrick Eaves each scored on a second-period power play to give Dallas' special teams a lift as the Stars defeated the Minnesota Wild to push their series lead to 3-1. Antti Niemi assumed the net from Kari Lehtonen, who started the first three games, and made 28 saves for the Stars. They'll host Game 5 in Dallas today. Jason Pominville and Charlie Coyle both gave the Wild the lead with second-period goals, but they weren't able to sustain the momentum from a spirited comeback in Game 3 for the entire night.

SHARKS 3, KINGS 2

Brent Burns and Joe Pavelski scored power-play goals in the second period and the San Jose Sharks again moved to the brink of eliminating the Los Angeles Kings from the playoffs. Patrick Marleau added a power-play goal in the third period and Martin Jones made 26 saves against his former team to put San Jose up 3-1 in the series heading into Game 5 on Friday night in Los Angeles. But knocking the Kings out is never easy. The Sharks blew a 3-0 series lead to Los Angeles in the first round two years ago, becoming the fourth NHL team ever to lose a best-of-seven series after winning the first three games. Trevor Lewis and Luke Schenn scored and Jonathan Quick made 26 saves for the Kings. — AP

CAVALIERS TIE THREE-POINT RECORD IN WIN OVER PISTONS

CLEVELAND: LeBron James scored 27 points and JR Smith made seven of Cleveland's NBA playoff record-tying 20 3-pointers as the Cavaliers opened a 2-0 lead in their series with a 107-90 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Wednesday night. The top-seeded Cavs put away the up-and-coming Pistons in the third quarter, outscoring them 27-15 to protect home-court advantage. There was nothing easy about their first two wins and the Cavs, favored to win the Eastern Conference and return to the finals, will have their work cut out when the best-of-seven series resumes today night at Detroit. Kyrie Irving added 22 points for Cleveland, which went 20 of 38 on 3s and tied the postseason record shared by Golden State (2015), Dallas (2011) and Seattle (1996). Andre Drummond scored 20 and Reggie Jackson 14 for the Pistons, who have lost 10 straight playoff games against Cleveland. Drummond was just 4 of 16 from the line.

HEAT 115, HORNETS 103

Dwyane Wade sank two key late baskets as the Miami Heat shot better than 57 percent for the second straight game en route to a 115-103 playoff victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Wednesday. After a franchise playoff-best first half of shooting, Miami maintained control in the second half to protect home-court advantage in the Eastern Conference series and go ahead 2-0. Game three is tomorrow in Charlotte. In Western Conference action, LeBron James scored 27 points and the Cleveland Cavaliers tied an NBA playoff record with 20 three-pointers in a 107-90 victory over the Detroit Pistons. Wade scored a team-high 28 points and added eight assists for the Heat, who shot 57.9 percent from the floor on Wednesday. That followed a game one victory in which they shot 57.6 percent. "We came out and played the game we needed to play," said Wade.

The Hornets cut an 18-point deficit in the third quarter to seven with under four minutes to play, but the Heat clamped down defensively. A total of five Miami players finished in double figures, including Hassan Whiteside who scored 17 points on eight-of-eight shooting from the field and Luol Deng with 16 points. Whiteside added 13 rebounds and two blocks, and Goran Dragic scored 18 points and Josh Richardson scored 15. "Everything was falling for me," Whiteside said.



CLEVELAND: Detroit Pistons' Andre Drummond (0) drives to the basket against Cleveland Cavaliers' Kevin Love (0) during the second half in Game 2 of a first-round NBA basketball playoff series on Wednesday, April 20, 2016. The Cavaliers won 107-90. — AP

Miami took a 72-60 lead into halftime thanks to shooting a franchise playoff-best 74.4 percent from the field in the first half, including seven-of-10 from three-point range. While the Heat were nine-of-16 from three-point range, the Hornets hit just one-of-16 from beyond the arc. Kemba Walker had a game-high 29 points and Al Jefferson scored 25 on 12-of-17 shooting from the floor for the Hornets. The Hornets' Marvin Williams missed all 10 of his shots from the floor to finish

scoreless. Nicolas Batum had nine points and seven rebounds but left early in the fourth quarter with a sprained left ankle and did not return.

CLIPPERS 102, TRAIL BLAZERS 81

Chris Paul scored 25 points and J.J. Redick added 17 as the Los Angeles Clippers pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat the Portland Trail Blazers 102-81 and take a 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series. Damian Lillard and Mason

Plumlee led the Blazers with 17 points each. CJ McCollum added 16 after being held to nine in their 20-point loss in the series opener. Plumlee and Al-Farouq Aminu had 10 rebounds each. Portland shot a season-worst 34.1 percent. Game 3 is tomorrow in Portland. Blake Griffin had 12 points and nine rebounds and DeAndre Jordan had 18 rebounds for the Clippers, who shot 46 percent and topped 100 points for the second straight game. — Agencies

THE NBA MAKES NEW PLAY IN AFRICA IN PURSUIT OF FANS

NEW YORK: The NBA is making a new play for fans in Africa by splitting with the continent's biggest sports broadcaster and teaming up with a Zimbabwean telecommunications entrepreneur who started his first business with \$75. The NBA announced yesterday that it has a new multiyear deal with Econet Media to show live games and other NBA programs on Econet's pay TV, Internet and mobile platforms in sub-Saharan Africa from the 2016-17 season.

The deal makes Econet the NBA's official broadcaster in sub-Saharan Africa and will offer viewers over 500 games a year, the NBA said, including the playoffs and finals. It also includes WNBA games. It will see the NBA end its relationship with South Africa-based satellite TV broadcaster SuperSport. That contract expires at the end of this season. The NBA didn't disclose financial details or say exactly how long

the Econet agreement was for. "I can tell you this is the largest partnership in the history of the NBA in Africa," NBA vice president and managing director for Africa Amadou Gallo Fall said in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press.

Fall confirmed the new agreement to the AP ahead of the public announcement. Econet began life as a cellphone network in Zimbabwe, where founder Strive Masiyiwa started his first company with \$75. He also fought a long legal battle against the government of President Robert Mugabe to be allowed to compete against Zimbabwe's state-run telecommunications company. Masiyiwa now has telecom and media businesses across Africa, and in North America, South America, Europe and Asia. Masiyiwa's net worth was estimated to be \$600 million in 2014, according to Forbes Magazine.

The partnership would likely offer

Africans more affordable access to the NBA even though it would still be on Econet's new pay TV service. Distributing more content on mobile devices could also help the NBA's reach on a continent where only a few have satellite or pay TV, but millions have cellphones and other wireless devices. "In Africa, a mobile device is the first screen for many," Fall said. "We really wanted to tap into the opportunity that space offers." NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Econet was "the ideal partner to extend our reach in sub-Saharan Africa."

With a population of more than 900 million, sub-Saharan Africa is one of the last frontiers for the NBA. Basketball is popular in parts of West Africa, but is generally a minor sport for the rest. To change that, the NBA has had an office in Johannesburg, South Africa, run by Fall since 2010. Last year, the league brought over Chris Paul, Luol Deng, the Gasol brothers and a list of

other NBA stars to play an exhibition game at an arena in downtown Johannesburg, its first game in Africa. It was the first of the big US sports leagues to go to Africa. But to highlight the challenge, the game wasn't sold out even though it was held in a small, 4,000-seat arena.

Still, the exhibition was preceded by talk from Silver, who also made the trip, that the NBA might be ready for a pre-season and ultimately a regular-season game in Africa in the "not-too-distant future." Without giving a timeframe, Fall said "I can guarantee you that's the plan." Before that, the NBA needs to spread the word in Africa and try and catch up with soccer, which currently dominates the sports channels. The NBA plans to have platforms to show live games in all 54 countries in Africa within five years, Fall said. "It's a massive continent," he said. "There's an opportunity for multiple sports to grow and prosper." — AP



TURIN: Juventus' forward Paulo Dybala from Argentina (2nd left) scores a penalty during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus Vs Lazio on April 20, 2016 at the 'Juventus Stadium' in Turin. — AFP

JUVENTUS MARCH ON; TOTTI SETS ROMA HEARTS RACING

MILAN: A Paulo Dybala brace kept Juventus' title push on track but Francesco Totti stole the show in Serie A with two goals in a 3-2 win over Torino that moved Roma closer to Champions League qualification on Wednesday. Juve's closest rivals Napoli had fired a warning shot after putting six unanswered goals, including a hat-trick from Belgium midfielder Dries Mertens, past Bologna on Tuesday. But the Turin giants were not to be fazed as they continued their bid to emulate their 1935 feat of winning five consecutive titles by beating Lazio 3-0.

Juventus will win the title if they beat Fiorentina on Sunday and Napoli lose at Roma a day later. But coach Massimiliano Allegri said: "We need four points so we need one win and a draw. We still have four games left, two of which are at home, but all we're thinking of is Sunday's game. "We're going to Florence and that will be complicated because there's a big rivalry between the sides." After Mario Mandzukic put Juventus in front six minutes before the interval, the Croatia striker turning Paul Pogba's pacy drive

into the net, Juventus moved up a gear against Simone Inzaghi's visitors.

Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi had warned of Juve's "invincibility" and after the visitors lost right-back Patric for a second bookable offence against Dybala the writing was on the wall. From the free-kick, Brazilian midfielder Hernanes forced Federico Marchetti into action but the Lazio keeper could do nothing minutes later when Dybala sent him the wrong way from the spot after Leonardo Bonucci was hauled down in the area. Dybala completed his brace with his 16th league goal of the campaign, the Argentine collecting Sami Khedira's ball to beat Marchetti from distance just after the hour. Juve's 26th win of the season maintained their nine-point lead on Napoli with four games remaining.

'Like an epic film'

Third-placed Roma were trailing 2-1 with four minutes remaining after Josef Martinez had added to Andrea Belotti's first half penalty in the 80th minute for visiting Torino. That meant Napoli looked likely to open up an eight-point gap on Luciano

Spalletti's side, but the Italian coach had other ideas. Roma had seen several penalty claims waved away during the game and Spalletti played his final card five minutes from the end. Totti had levelled late when he made a cameo appearance in a 3-3 draw at Atalanta on Sunday.

But the 39-year-old playmaker, in which could be his final weeks as a player at the club, went one better. Seconds after replacing Seydou Keita, Totti slid in at the back post to meet Miralem Pjanic's free-kick to guide the ball past Daniele Padelli on 86 minutes. Three minutes later Roma won a controversial penalty for handball in the area, and although Padelli got a touch on Totti's drive it was not enough.

The ageing captain was mobbed by the bench and fans were seen crying in the stands as Roma kept the pressure on to sit five points behind Napoli. "I don't know how to describe it, but it was like the ending of an epic film," midfielder Alessandro Florenzi told Premium Sport. Behind the top three, the chase for Europa League qualification got complicated. —AFP

MARSEILLE EDGE SOCHAUX TO SET UP PSG FINAL

PARIS: Crisis-hit Marseille beat second-tier Sochaux 1-0 on Wednesday to set up a French Cup final date with arch rivals Paris Saint-Germain, just a day after dismissing coach Michel. The top-flight strugglers were poor for much of the game, but Florian Thauvin scored the only goal shortly after half-time. It was the first match back in charge for OM interim coach Franck Passi, after he also stood in earlier this season in the aftermath of Marcelo Bielsa's shock resignation, and he was pleased with how the team reacted to Michel's departure. "I'm proud of my players. They had a challenge and they rose to the occasion," Passi said. "The point was to take Marseille to the Stade de France, it was our only door (to save our season) and the players were wide awake tonight. "This season has been crazy so let's be crazy, we will push PSG in the final."

Passi gave just a second start of the season to injury-plagued midfielder Abou Diaby and partnered Steven Fletcher with Michy Batshuayi in attack, but Marseille were toothless in the opening 45 minutes. Sochaux have used the confidence found in a Cup run that has seen them beat Bastia, Nantes and Monaco from the top flight, to embark on a five-match unbeaten streak and move away from danger of relegation to the third tier. In a dire first half the hosts had the only chance of any note, but after Benjamin Mendy could only partially clear, Florian Martin blazed his effort well wide.

Marseille came out after the interval in improved form and took the lead when much-maligned winger Thauvin, on loan from Newcastle United, collected Fletcher's pass, before racing past his marker and finishing coolly at the near post. Albert Cartier's Sochaux had plenty of possession in the last half an hour but barely threatened an equalizer. The closest they came was through a Raphael Caceres free-kick which sailed harmlessly over. PSG edged to victory at Lorient on Tuesday night, as Zlatan Ibrahimovic grabbed the winner 15 minutes from time with his 42nd goal of the season. Laurent Blanc's men are still targeting a domestic clean sweep of trophies ahead of the French League Cup final against Lille tomorrow. — AFP



MONTBELIARD: Marseille forward Florian Thauvin controls the ball during the French Cup semi-final football match between Sochaux (FCSM) and Marseille (OM) on April 20, 2016, at the Auguste Bonal Stadium in Montbeliard, eastern France. — AFP

BAYERN HEAD TO BERLIN WITH 4TH TITLE IN SIGHT

BERLIN: Bayern Munich can clinch a record fourth consecutive Bundesliga title tomorrow if they beat Hertha Berlin away and second-placed Borussia Dortmund lose at strugglers VfB Stuttgart. Bayern, aiming for another league title in coach Pep Guardiola's final season in Munich, are seven points clear of Dortmund with four matches left. The desired combination of results for Bayern would open up an unassailable 10-point gap with three matches remaining and secure their 26th German league title.

Guardiola's team will be brimming with confidence after reaching the German Cup final with a 2-0 win over

Werder Bremen on Tuesday despite failing to hit top form. "I would like to thank my players for giving me another week of working with them," said the Spaniard, who has made sure of a high-profile farewell on the grand stage of Berlin's Olympic Stadium on May 21 before his move to Manchester City. If they win the title, Guardiola will have led Bayern to three consecutive league titles in as many seasons in charge.

However, Bayern will be looking to improve on the slightly disappointing form they have shown in recent matches as they also have one eye on next week's Champions League semi-final against

Atletico Madrid. "If we circulate the ball a bit better, if we move a bit better, then the opponent will not be able to attack us," Captain Philipp Lahm said. "We have to change that. We can play better and we will play better again soon." Guardiola could also have central defender Jerome Boateng back in the squad for the first time in months after the Germany international returned to team training this week following an adductor muscle injury in January.

Hertha, who were eliminated from the German Cup by Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday, have failed to win any of their last three league matches and are in dan-

ger of missing out on Champions League football next season. The Berliners have dropped to fourth place on 49 points, two behind Bayer Leverkusen, who occupy the last automatic qualification spot for the continent's elite club competition. The fourth-placed team will advance to the qualifying rounds and fifth-placed Borussia Moenchengladbach, on 45 points, will be poised to pounce should Hertha continue to struggle. "We play and give it everything we have and so we should not talk as if everything was bad," Hertha coach Pal Dardai said after the 3-0 German Cup defeat. "A bit more respect, please." — Reuters

VAN GAAL, MARTINEZ SEEK SILVER LINING IN FA CUP

LONDON: Three of the four managers leading their teams out at Wembley for this weekend's FA Cup semi-finals will do so knowing defeat could have serious ramifications for their short-term future. Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal has been dealing with so-called "must-win" games throughout a troubled season and tomorrow's clash with Everton falls into that category.

Everton boss Roberto Martinez, meanwhile, has fallen out of favor with a large section of the club's fans who have seen no tangible progress this season. Crystal Palace's woeful form since Christmas has turned up the heat on Alan Pardew too, although a semi-final against Watford represents an opportunity for redemption. Watford manager Quique Flores is per-

haps the odd man out. The Spaniard has made an impressive impact in his first season at the club who were promoted last season, guaranteeing survival with plenty to spare.

Dutchman Van Gaal has faced a ceaseless debate about his Old Trafford future after crashing out of the Champions League group stages and serving up some turgid football earlier in the season when United fell out of the title race.

He has soldiered on, however, and a silver lining is on the horizon with United favorites to lift the trophy for the first time since 2004 after beating West Ham United 2-1 in a quarter-final replay last week with their best display of the season. Even if he does achieve that, there is no guarantee that he will see out the final season of his

contract as a top-four finish in the Premier League was his first priority.

But having won trophies everywhere in his long coaching career, he would at least be able to hold his head high. "I have said for the club it is much more important that we are finishing in the first four positions because the Champions League is the highest level," he said.

"But a trophy is of course fantastic, especially the FA Cup, as it is a lot of years that we didn't win it. "There is a big arousal among the fans. It is nice to see they are hungry to get the FA Cup, but still we have to beat Everton first." Martinez won the FA Cup with modest Wigan Athletic in 2013 when they beat Manchester City in the final a few weeks before being relegated, securing his move to Everton.

But after finishing fifth in his first season, the club finished 11th last term and, despite a squad full of flair players, were 12th going into Wednesday's derby with Liverpool. "If we win the games, everything will be fine; if we lose, everything will be my fault," Martinez said this week.

Pardew was part of the Palace side that reached the 1990 final and his return to the club as manager in January 2015 turned the club from relegation candidates to contenders for Europe midway through the current campaign.

Palace have stalled since, however, and Pardew hopes the FA Cup can re-ignite his squad. "For us and Watford, one of us is going to hurt and one's really going to come alive. So we really want to be that team that comes alive," he said. — Reuters



MONTERREY: Mexican Tigres' player Jurgen Damm (left) vies the ball with Miguel Samudio (right) of America Mexican team, during the CONCACAF Champions League first leg football final, in Monterrey, Mexico on April 20, 2016. — AFP

CLUB AMERICA BLANK TIGRES 2-0 IN OPENER

MONTERREY: Defending champion Club America scored a pair of second half goals to defeat Tigres 2-0 in the first leg of the CONCACAF Champions League final on Wednesday night. Dario Benedetto scored in the 49th minute and Osvaldo Martinez added an insurance marker three minutes into stoppage time as the Mexican side took a huge step towards defending their title with a victory on the road at Estadio Universitario.

The second leg will be hosted by Club America in Mexico City next Wednesday. The victory puts Club America in the driver's seat heading into game number two as they also

increased their SCCL unbeaten streak to 12 games. Tigres had more shots on goal (6-1) and corner kicks (7-1) but they failed to capitalize on their chances as Club America were able to clamp down defensively when needed. One of Tigres best chances in the first half came in the 33rd minute when Javier Aquino got in alone on goalkeeper Hugo Gonzalez, but sailed a blast high over the crossbar. Club America's hard work paid off early in the second half when Benedetto opened the scoring by finishing off a pretty passing play. Oribe Peralta back-heeled a nifty pass to Martinez who floated a cross to the back post where Benedetto was waiting for the easy tap-

in header. It marked the first SCCL goal for Benedetto since he posted a hat-trick in last year's final—a 4-2 second-leg win over the host Impact de Montreal. Martinez sealed the victory in the third minute of extra time by rifling a right-footed blast to the near post and past a diving Nahuel Guzman who had no chance on the play.

It was Martinez's first goal of the competition. Club America thought it had also scored in the 57th minute as Guzman raced 50 yards out of his net and fouled Peralta. Club America recovered the ball and scored into the empty net, but the officials disallowed it because of an offside. — AFP

LEICESTER FACE NERVY TEST; SPURS' SHADOW LOOMS

LONDON: The Premier League title is tantalizingly close for Leicester City but like all the best fairytales there are usually some frights before everyone lives happily ever after. When Claudio Ranieri's merry bunch beat Sunderland 2-0 on April 10 they were 10 points clear at the top for a couple of hours until chasing Tottenham Hotspur beat Manchester United.

Last weekend things took a sinister turn when top scorer Jamie Vardy was sent off at home to West Ham United and Leicester needed a dubious last-gasp penalty to draw 2-2. Tottenham's 4-0 thrashing of Stoke City on Monday narrowed the gap to five points with four games to play. Vardy will discover yesterday whether he will receive further punishment after being charged with improper conduct following his reaction to his red card.

That is why when Leicester kick off against Swansea City on Sunday, 24 hours before Tottenham host West Bromwich Albion, there will be sweaty palms aplenty at the King Power Stadium. Leicester have ground out points in recent weeks but with 22-goal striker Vardy suspended against Swansea after playing in their last 47 Premier League games, what looks like the perfect home fixture against a side virtually assured of avoiding relegation suddenly looks fraught with danger. Tottenham's surge is turning the screw ever so slightly and Leicester fans have been reminded of 1963 when the side known as The Ice Kings had the old first division title in their grasp before losing their last four games.

Ranieri, who will probably play Leonardo Ulloa in the Vardy role this weekend, has told them not to worry. "We were worried at the start of the season when we needed to get to 40 points.

Now we enjoy," he said. "Never do I speak to my players about the gap, blah, blah, blah. Everything is in our hands. If we fight and we win then ok. If the other team, it could be Arsenal, Tottenham, I don't know who, are better than us and win the title, well done." Tottenham, who have scored the most goals and conceded the fewest this season, are relishing the chase and will be ready to pounce should Leicester slip. Harry Kane, who leads the scoring charts with 24 goals, said playing after their title rivals was no problem.

"Watching all the football over the weekend and having to wait until Monday night to play gets you ready, gets you firing," said the England striker. "We've got to win all our games. We want to win all four of them and then we will go from there."

The battle to avoid joining Aston Villa in the Championship also continues, with Sunderland able to climb out of the bottom three if they beat Arsenal at home on Sunday. Resurgent Newcastle United will also try and take advantage of fourth from bottom Norwich City not playing, although they face a difficult assignment at Liverpool tomorrow. — Reuters

SCOTT DRAWS FLAK, SPLITS SPORT WITH OLYMPIC SNUB

LOS ANGELES: Australia's former world number one Adam Scott drew criticism and reignited debate over golf's inclusion in the Olympics after announcing he would skip Rio because of his busy schedule. Golfing legend Jack Nicklaus and two-time major winner Johnny Miller both expressed disappointment at Scott's move as golf returns to the Games after a 112-year absence.

"Playing for your country is a lot bigger than playing for yourself," Miller said, according to newspaper reports. The 35-year-old Scott, currently world number seven, made his announcement on Wednesday. "My decision has been taken as a result of an extremely busy playing schedule around the time of the Olympics and other commitments, both personal and professional," he said in a statement.

But Miller blasted back: "I would say I don't care how tired you are, and I wouldn't even care where you place in the tourna-

ment, but you need to be there to represent your country." Nicklaus, winner of a record 18 majors and regarded as the greatest golfer in history, told reporters at a charity golf event in Ohio: "I think that's sad. I think it's sad for the Olympics and for the game of golf. "I don't know Adam's circumstances, so I couldn't comment on what he's dealing with. Obviously, he felt like he couldn't play, and if he felt that way, I understand. But it's unfortunate."

Australian golf great Jack Newton jumped to Scott's defense and told critics to lay off the 2013 US Masters champion. "It's a personal decision," Newton was reported as saying yesterday. "He's not letting the country down. He's not letting the Olympics down." But outspoken Australian swimming great Dawn Fraser was strongly critical of her fellow countryman.

"Well done Adam great to put your country on hold so that you can fulfil your own

schedule," the triple Olympic 100m freestyle gold medalist wrote on her Facebook page, adding that she worked three jobs to realize her own Olympic ambitions. "How much money do you want in life... I am still trying to survive at 78 years of age but a very proud Australian," added Fraser.

'Shouldn't be Olympic sport'

Golf Australia chief executive Stephen Pitt told the Sydney Daily Telegraph that Scott's decision would enable another player to seize a spot at Rio. However, some US golf pundits applauded Scott's move and said it illustrated why the sport should not have returned to the Olympic fold. The US PGA Championship has been moved forward and becomes July's second major, two weeks after the British Open, in a packed 2016 golf calendar. "Scott is not the only marquee name who doesn't embrace the Olympic golf tournament being squeezed

into a such a small window in July and August," wrote Jim McCabe on golfweek.com. "Don't be surprised if you hear from another one or two."

Another comment piece on the USA TODAY website was headlined: "Adam Scott just showed why golf shouldn't be an Olympic sport." "An Olympic gold medal should be the highest honor there is to win in the chosen sport. Anything less devalues the entire competition. That's not the case in golf," the column read. Scott has long been lukewarm on attending the Games, maintaining that the four major tournaments remain the pinnacle of the sport. "I'll still base my schedule around the majors and if the Olympics fits in, then it does," he said at the Australian Open last November. Last week, another former major champion, Fiji's Vijay Singh, also announced he would skip the Olympics, citing concerns over the Zika virus. — AFP

LASER-FOCUSED BURTON HOPES FOR A SMOOTH SAILING IN RIO

MELBOURNE: Having steered his laser through sofas, big tree branches and other floating debris in Guanabara Bay, Australian sailor and medal hopeful Tom Burton is ready to expect the unexpected when he competes at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics. The quality of Rio's water-ways has long been a worry for competitors and organizers alike, and some athletes have complained of stomach ailments after training at their aquatic venues.

Burton, who has trained in Rio a number of times, feels the water has improved but said his last cruise of the bay was an eye-opener. "We were there in March and there were some floods and that made it really quite bad," Burton, the world's top-ranked laser sailor, told Reuters in an interview. "A lot of the rubbish was getting washed out into the bay. You'd come across couches and bits and pieces of trees. It was quite bad. "I'd be quite upset if it was like that during the Olympics. Hopefully they get onto that."

Laid-back and measured in his responses, it's hard to imagine 25-year-old Burton losing his cool about anything but the Sydney resident is dead serious about his pursuit of Olympic gold, having fought ruthlessly to snare the sole spot available in the laser class. Australia's sailing program is hugely competitive and yielded three gold medals at London out of the entire delegation's total of seven. Burton missed out on qualifying for London to Tom Slingsby and after helping him train, watched his team mate win the title at Weymouth.

Australia's world number two Matthew Wearn is the bridesmaid this year after losing out to Burton in a tough qualification battle. Although laser sailors must rely on their own wits during competition, Burton has no shortage of people to turn to for advice at Rio. Iain Jensen and Nathan Outteridge, who won gold in the 49er class at London, are on the team, along with Mathew Belcher, who won the 470 category with Malcolm Page. Expectations for more sailing gold at Rio will be high in Australia, but Burton said the chance to continue the nation's outstanding legacy from London would be more motivating than pressure-inducing.

"It's definitely an achievement just going to Rio given Australia is one of the top sailing nations, especially in the laser," said Burton. "A lot of guys in the team selected were guys that were there last time. "You're surrounded by a good bunch of guys that know how to do it and get the job done. "It's a nice team to be part of and a good atmosphere. I've just got to focus on my job and get it done."

World rankings will mean little when Burton is perched on his single-hull dinghy off the Marina da Gloria at the start of a week-long battle royale against the world's top sailors. Burton feels the event is wide open and immediately drops the name of 43-year-old veteran Robert Scheidt, Brazil's twice Olympic laser champion, as among his biggest threats. Burton will arrive in Rio five weeks before the opening ceremony to get more familiar with the race courses both in and out of the bay. With competitors given boats of identical specifications, knowing the conditions will be essential and Burton said he still had plenty of homework to do. "It's very complex with the tide and the current, together with the shifting winds inside the bay, and having big mountains surrounding it, like Sugarloaf, it's quite complex," he said. — Reuters



Actress Katerina Lechou (right) acting the high priestess passes the Olympic flame at the Temple of Hera yesterday during the lighting ceremony of the Olympic flame in ancient Olympia, the sanctuary where the Olympic Games were born in 776 BC. — AFP

TORCH LIT IN ANCIENT OLYMPIA

RIO GAMES COUNTDOWN BEGINS

ANCIENT OLYMPIA: The Olympic flame was lit yesterday in an ancient temple in one country in crisis and solemnly sent off carrying international hopes that Brazil's political paralysis will not taint the Rio Games that start in barely 100 days. As the flame was kindled in the 2,600 year-old Temple of Hera at Ancient Olympia, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach and Rio organizers sought to rally support for their cause. Bach told the ceremony that the Rio Games will be held "in a world shaken by crises" but hailed preparations for the first Olympics in South America.

"In just a few weeks, the Brazilian people will enthusiastically welcome the world and amaze us with their joy of life and their passion for sport," he predicted. "This will be Brazil's moment and this will be Brazil's Games." "Despite the difficulties that Brazil is facing today, the flame is a timeless reminder that we are all part of the same humanity," Bach said. Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff cancelled her attendance at the flame ceremony as she battles threatened impeachment proceedings.

In her place, Rio 2016 organizing committee chairman, Carlos Nuzman, said the flame "brings a message that can and will unite, our dear Brazil, a country that deserves its quest for a brighter future."

Setting off from a Greece beset by its own economic turmoil and now at the forefront of Europe's migrant crisis, the flame will tour Greece and then go to scores of Brazilian cities before it arrives at Rio's Maracana Stadium for the August 5 opening ceremony. After giving thanks to the ancient Greek sun god Apollo, head priestess Katerina Lechou—a prominent theatre and TV actress—handed the flame to the first relay runner, Greece's artistic gymnastics world champion Lefteris Petrounias.

Refugee torch-bearer

He passed it to Brazilian volleyball legend Giovane Gavio, an Olympic gold champion at the 1992 Barcelona and 2004 Athens Games who is now director of volleyball for Rio 2016. Overall, some 12,000 torchbearers will carry the flame through Brazil. In a gesture to the migration crisis, a Syrian man who lost a leg in the civil war in his country will carry the torch through the Eleonas refugee camp next Tuesday, a UN source said. The man, whose name is to be officially announced Friday, has been living and working in Athens since being granted asylum in Greece.

A team of up to 10 refugees will take part at the Rio Olympics. Forty-three athlete refugees have been identified by the IOC as possible contenders. The Olympic

torch will be handed over to Brazilian officials on Wednesday in a ceremony at the historic all-marble Olympic stadium in Athens, site of the first modern Games in 1896. The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics, when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Olympics. Brazil's preparations have been overshadowed by the government crisis caused by accusations that Rousseff juggled government accounts to disguise budget shortfalls during her 2014 reelection.

The beleaguered president insisted this week that Rio's preparations are ahead of schedule. "The Games are in a totally adequate situation, we're even a little ahead of schedule and more so than we had planned for," Rousseff said Tuesday. Bach on Wednesday said he was confident that Rio will lay on an "excellent Games".

The IOC and Rio organizers have played down fears over the quality of water in Rio bay to be used for yachting and some swimming. "We are very confident that the competition area will offer safe and fair conditions," Bach said this week. There have also been travel warnings and athlete cancellations over the Zika virus that is believed to potentially cause serious birth defects if contracted by pregnant women. — AFP

FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2016

OLYMPIA: The Olympic flame is symbolically passed from one torch to another after the official ceremonial lighting of the flame in Ancient Olympia, Greece yesterday, with the former Brazilian volleyball player Giovane Gavio and Greek gymnast Eleftherios Petrounias. The flame will be transported by torch relay to the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, which will host the 2016 Olympic Games. — AP



'OLYMPIC FLAME' FOR TROUBLED RIO GAMES