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AMIR REAPPOINTS SHEIKH JABER AS PM

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday renamed outgoing Prime Minister HH Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah to form the next Cabinet. The decision came after the Amir held consultations with former speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and former prime minister HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, in addition to Sheikh Jaber himself. Former three-time speaker and opposition leader Ahmad Al-Saadoun was not present at the consultations.

Sheikh Jaber was first appointed to the post in late 2011 after the resignation of Sheikh Nasser. He has to form the new Cabinet before Dec 11 when the National Assembly is scheduled to hold its first meeting. Newly-elected MPs have called on the prime minister to carefully read the outcome of the general polls, in which the opposition won almost half of the 50 seats.

Meanwhile, opposition MPs held

their first coordination meeting hosted by veteran opposition MP Mohammad Al-Mutair. The meeting was attended by 25 lawmakers and two more who could not attend said they support its decisions. Mutair said the meeting discussed at length the issue of electing the speaker, as three opposition MPs have said they will contest. Mutair said he decided to withdraw from the race in favor of MPs Abdullah Al-Roumi and Shuaib Al-Muwaizri. A four-MP committee was also formed to study the cases of Roumi and Muwaizri in order to try and help select one of the two.

Their next meeting will be held on Saturday with the aim to resolve the speakership issue and come up with one candidate to face off with Ghanem, who is expected to run. Several lawmakers have openly called for electing a new speaker to replace Ghanem. MP Yusef Al-Fadhlah, who did not attend the opposition meeting, called on his Twitter account on the government

Continued on Page 13



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday. —KUNA

VIENNA: The OPEC oil cartel defied expectations yesterday and nailed down its first joint output cut since 2008 after tough talks in Vienna, sending oil prices soaring. Brent North Sea crude for January delivery was up \$3.77 at \$50.15, the first time it has risen above \$50 in a month. West Texas Intermediate was up \$3.98 at \$49.21. The accord announced by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is aimed at reducing a global supply glut that has kept prices painfully low.

It represents a dramatic reversal from OPEC's Saudi-led strategy, introduced in 2014, of flooding the market to pressure rivals, in particular US shale oil producers. The cartel will lower its monthly output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 32.5 million bpd from Jan 1, Qatar's energy minister and president of the OPEC conference said. "This is a major step forward and we think this is a historic agreement, which will definitely help rebalance the market and reduce the stock overhang," Mohammed bin Saleh Al-Sada told a news conference in Vienna. He also said that the deal will help lift global inflation accelerate to a "more healthy rate," including in the United States.

It finalizes a preliminary deal struck in September in Algeria when OPEC agreed to cut production but left the details to clear up later. Negotiations got bogged down in a game of poker between OPEC's three biggest producers, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran, on who would do the heavy lifting. Iraq had said it did not want to pump less crude because it was short of money to fight Islamic State group extremists. It also disputed how much it actually produced.

Continued on Page 13



NEW YORK: Former Goldman Sachs executive Steven Mnuchin, US President-Elect Donald Trump's nominee for Treasury Secretary, speaks with reporters in the lobby of Trump Tower yesterday. — AP

TRUMP TO LEAVE BUSINESS TO FOCUS ON RUNNING COUNTRY

TREASURY CHIEF NAMED

NEW YORK: US President-elect Donald Trump yesterday tried to stifle concerns that his business empire represents a conflict of interest, promising to put it aside as he packed his cabinet roster with fellow billionaires. In one of his trademark pre-dawn tweetstorms, the Manhattan real estate mogul said that next month, he will reveal a plan to put aside his "great business in total in order to fully focus on running the country."

The 70-year-old tycoon did not say who would take over his multi-billion dollar global property and luxury branding interests, but said his children would be present at a December 15 news conference. He has previously said his daughter Ivanka and sons Eric and Don Jr could take day-to-day charge of the business while he is president, but it is not clear what he would do with his personal stake. "While I am not mandated to do this under the law, I feel it is visually important, as president, to in no

way have a conflict of interest with my various businesses," he tweeted.

US law does not require Trump to give up his business portfolio, although the Constitution states that no federal official can receive a gift or "emolument" from a foreign government. Some previous presidents have placed investments in a blind trust, but they were not required to do so. Critics argue it would be an unprecedented ethical conflict for Trump to maintain an interest in properties spanning the globe that rely in part on goodwill from foreign governments and regulators.

And, even on home soil, his company has attracted criticism for marketing the new Trump International Hotel in Washington - just a few blocks from the White House - to foreign diplomats. But his new chief of staff, Reince Priebus, insisted there were "smart ethics lawyers" working on a "plan".

Continued on Page 13

CURRENCY BAN SLIMS
FAT INDIA WEDDINGS

PAGE
21

PALESTINE STARTUPS
KEEP INNOVATING

PAGE
27

RIYADH MOTOR SHOW BACK IN GEAR

ALWALEED: LET WOMEN DRIVE

RIYADH: An outspoken billionaire Saudi prince has called for an "urgent" end to his country's ban on women driving, saying it is a matter not just of rights but of economic necessity. "Stop the debate: Time for women to drive," Prince Alwaleed bin Talal said on his official Twitter account. Alwaleed is an unusually forthright member of Saudi Arabia's extensive royal family. He holds no political posts but chairs Kingdom Holding Co, which has interests including in US banking giant Citigroup and the Euro Disney theme park.

He is a longtime advocate of women's rights in the conservative Islamic kingdom, which has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women and is the only country where they are not allowed to drive. In conjunction with his short tweet, Alwaleed's office



Prince Alwaleed

issued an uncharacteristically long statement late Tuesday outlining his reasons for supporting an end to the ban. "Preventing a woman from driving a car is today an issue of rights similar to the one that forbade her from receiving an education or having an independent identity," Alwaleed said. "They are all unjust acts by a traditional society, far more restrictive than what is lawfully allowed by the precepts of religion."

He also detailed the "economic costs" of women having to rely on foreign private drivers or taxis, since public transit is not a viable alternative in the kingdom. Using foreign drivers drains billions of dollars from the Saudi economy, Alwaleed said.

Continued on Page 13

RIYADH: In a Saudi economy where restraint is the buzzword, this week's small-scale Riyadh Motor Show is a sign of the times. But following widespread economic austerity in the kingdom hit by falling oil revenues, the fact that the event is being held at all after a three-year absence has given hope to car retailers. Although it is usually an annual event, the last show was in 2012. "There was not much interest from different companies to participate" in the intervening years, said Alaa Aboumerhi, general manager of marketing for Hyundai Wallan, Saudi distributors for the South Korean brand.

Hyundai sedans are on display alongside rivals including Japan's Toyota, China's Chery and US brands Chevrolet and GMC at the four-day event which

began on Tuesday night. European luxury brands are absent from the show, which is targeted at the average buyer and takes up just one section of a Riyadh convention center. Much of the hall is devoted to auto accessories. Saudi media described the exhibition space as several times smaller than at the previous show.

Retailers in the kingdom in general are complaining of lower sales and residents say they have less money to spend. On top of hikes in the prices of petrol, electricity and water over the past year, the cabinet in September imposed a wage freeze on civil servants, who make up the bulk of the workforce. Among saving measures at the highest levels, top government officials will no longer be given cars.

Continued on Page 13



RIYADH: Saudi women look at a luxury sports car during the 30th International Riyadh Motor Show on Tuesday. — AFP



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with former National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.

AMIR HOLDS TRADITIONAL CONSULTATIONS BEFORE APPOINTING PREMIER HIS HIGHNESS RECEIVES INVITATION TO ATTEND GCC SUMMIT

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday former National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, former Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The meeting is part of the current traditional consultations conducted to appoint the new prime minister. His Highness the Amir earlier met with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and later with First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince met with Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Amir received a letter from Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, which was delivered by the Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Khalifa. The letter included an invitation to His Highness the Amir to attend the 37th session of the GCC's supreme council and the GCC summit that will be held next month in Manama with the participation of the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Theresa May. Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah attended the meeting.— KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with former Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Bahraini Ambassador to Kuwait Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Khalifa.



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah meets with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman. — KUNA

DEPUTY FM MEETS US AMBASSADOR

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah met yesterday with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman, discussing bilateral relations between the two countries in addition to latest regional and international develop-

ments. Foreign Ministry officials attended the meeting, including Assistant Foreign Minister for Al-Jarallah's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Abdullatif Al-Omar and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Two Americas, Reem Al-Khaled. —KUNA

KUWAIT, UK EYE CLOSER TIES

UK TO ORGANIZE INVESTMENT EXPO ON KUWAIT

KUWAIT: Means of boosting cooperation, mainly the economic and consultative areas between Kuwait and Britain were the focus of discussions between Chairman of Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Board of Commissioners Nayef Al-Hajraf and Lord Mayor of the City of London Andrew Parmley.

The two sides discussed developing cooperation in the training and rehabilitation fields which are in line with the agreement that was signed for this purpose last August, the authority said in a press statement yesterday. The agreement aims to serve dealers of securities activities through implementing the international qualifications tests on limited jobs to raise sufficiency of dealers at market, it added.

The deal stressed the need to share expertise with international institutions so as to upgrade Kuwait's market, it noted. The authority stressed that it seeks to establish, or contribute to establishing, an educational or a training institution in the area of securities markets, the statement concluded.

Investment expo

Meanwhile, Parmley announced on Tuesday that the UK plans to organize an exhibition on investment opportunities in Kuwait, adding that it is slated for 2017 in London in coordination and cooperation of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA).

Parmley made his remarks on the sidelines of his official visit to Kuwait, during which he met with several Kuwaiti officials and businessmen to discuss boosting commercial ties between the two countries.

The two-day visit was very fruitful and included a number of significant meetings with Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Acting Oil Minister Anas Al-Saleh, Sheikh Dr Meshal Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, KDIPA's



KUWAIT: Chairman of Capital Markets Authority (CMA) Board of Commissioners Nayef Al-Hajraf meets with Lord Mayor of the City of London Andrew Parmley. — KUNA

Director-General, Bader Al-Saad, CEO of Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), and representatives of a number of economic institutions in London, he said.

Income sources

These meetings also highlighted details on Kuwait's plan to diversify its income sources and minimize dependence on oil as a main source for the country's income, Parmley said. The Kuwaiti-British talks also tackled other vital subjects such as Kuwait's development plan, efforts

to transform the country into commercial and financial hub, and the inauguration of HSBC's new headquarters, said the British official.

On the volume of trade-exchange, he said that British exports to Kuwait has amounted to around GBP 1.5 billion in 2015. On entry visas, Parmley said that his government issues nearly 100,000 visas annually for Kuwaiti citizens, adding that the UK has also recently adopted the use of e-Visa system to facilitate the issuance and approval procedures for the applicants. — KUNA

KUWAITI ENVOY DISCUSSES AUSTRALIA'S MEMBERSHIP CANDIDACY FOR UNHCR

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Australia Najib Abdulrahman Al-Bader and Australia's First Assistant Secretary Multilateral Policy Division Lachlan Strahan discussed Australia's candidacy for membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) for the 2018-20 term.

The UNHCR is made of 47 Member States, which are elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly of the United Nations through direct and secret ballot. The General Assembly takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard.

This is the first time Australia has sought membership of the Human Rights Council. Australia is gathering support to get a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the 2018 to 2020, Bader pointed out in a press statement yesterday. Australia enjoys an 'excellent' record on human right issues and has proved itself as a good global citizen and a powerful advocate for change.

The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows: African States: 13 seats, Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats, Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats, Western European and other States: 7 seats and Eastern European States: 6 seats. —KUNA



Kuwaiti Ambassador to Australia Najib Al-Bader meets with Australia's First Assistant Secretary Multilateral Policy Division Lachlan Strahan.

KUWAIT, UK DISCUSS BOOSTING MILITARY TIES

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah discussed with Britain's Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier boosting defense ties. The two officials also discussed issues of common interest, Kuwaiti Army Moral guidance department said yesterday. The meeting was attended by British Ambassador to Kuwait Matthew Lodge, British Defense Attache Captain Finlay McLean, Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khodhr and other officials.

Separately, Kuwait's Deputy Army Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans Authority Major General Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Omairi said that ongoing military meetings between Kuwait and Italy aims to enhance cooperation up to its highest level.

Moral Guidance and Public Relations Department of the Kuwaiti Defense Ministry said in a press statement yesterday that General Omairi's remark came on the sidelines of the signing ceremony for the ninth meeting minutes for the Kuwaiti-Italian military committee to activate the Military Memorandum of Understanding between both nations.

General Omairi welcomed the visiting Italian military delegation, where he conveyed greetings from Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah and Army's Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khodhr, the statement added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with Britain's Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier. — KUNA



Deputy Army Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans Authority Major General Ahmad Abdulwahab Al-Omairi poses for a group photo with the Italian military delegation.

KUWAIT REITERATES SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIAN CAUSE

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait has reiterated its firm stance supporting the Palestinian cause, which has been on the top priorities of the United Nations. This came in a speech by Kuwait's Permanent Mission to the UN delivered by second secretary Naif Ghazi Al-Otaibi before the 71st session of the UN General Assembly on Tuesday night.

Otaibi, in the speech, lauded the steadfastness and struggle of Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation, stressing Kuwait's support for Palestinians to gain all their legal political rights through establishing an independent state of Palestine and with Eastern Jerusalem as its capital based on the 1967 borders, and set a deadline to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The State of Kuwait also has welcomed the French initiative calling for holding an international conference for peace to issue an international multilateral mechanism aiming to stop fully illegal settlement activities and then ending Israel's occupation, he said.

He affirmed that Kuwait has buttressed all efforts and endeavors by the international community aiming to reach a comprehensive and fair solution to the Palestinian cause based on the Arab Peace Initiative, the principles of international law and international legitimacy resolutions.

Kuwait has denounced Israel's continued illegal and inhumane blockage on the Gaza Strip that constitutes a violation of the US Security Council resolution 1860 and the Fourth Geneva Convention in 1949, he added.

Otaibi called for releasing



NEW YORK: The second secretary of Kuwait's Permanent Mission to the UN Naif Ghazi Al-Otaibi delivers his speech. — KUNA

Palestinian detainees and prisoners and sending an international committee to investigate the situation in the Israeli prisons. He affirmed Kuwait's backing to the Palestine's request calling for getting the UN full membership to be a step for achieving a comprehensive and fair solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Kuwait also has buttressed Palestine to join the international charters, conventions and organizations, he stated. The Kuwaiti representative called on the international community, mainly the Security Council, to provide an international protection to the unarmed Palestinian people living under the Israeli's military occupation. Kuwait stresses that the Security Council must assume its responsibilities towards implementing its resolutions, mainly 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and pressing Israel to halt its blatant violations of the international humanitarian law on Palestinian territories so as to put an end to the cause, Otaibi concluded. — KUNA

KUWAIT WON'T REDUCE EGYPTIAN MANPOWER

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Egyptian minister of immigration and Egyptians abroad affairs Nabila Makram stressed that Kuwait's ambassador to Cairo Mohammed Saleh Al-Thuwayyehk strongly denied any intention to reduce the number of Egyptians in Kuwait. Makram added that she met Thuwayyehk to discuss

enhancing cooperation between both countries as part of bilateral cooperation in various fields. She added the major problem facing the Egyptian community in Kuwait and other GCC states is the sponsorship system. Makram also highlighted that she was in constant contact with relevant Kuwaiti authorities to resolve the Egyptian teachers' rent allowance problem.

BOGUS HELPERS' OFFICE BUSTED

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Detectives received information about an unlicensed domestic helpers office run by an Ethiopian man. The man provided helpers on an hourly basis to citizens and expats, which is illegal according to Kuwait's labor regulations. Furthermore, all the maids were either absconding or working for other sponsors. Residency detectives conducted a raid and all persons inside were arrested. Kuwait has seen an uptick in the establishment of unlicensed or 'fake' offices hiring out domestic helpers as the costs of recruiting domestic helpers from abroad has risen drastically.

Cable theft gang arrested

Residency detectives arrested members of a gang involved in the theft of electricity cables belonging to the Ministry of Electricity and Water. Detectives uncovered a gang consisting of a number of Bangladeshi nationals, who were involved in stealing the



This photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows members of a gang arrested for stealing cables.

KUWAIT AIRWAYS PLANE HAS MINOR ACCIDENT IN MUMBAI

KUWAIT: A Kuwait Airways passenger plane was involved in a minor accident at Mumbai airport, the company said in a statement yesterday. It said the wingtip of an A320 aircraft scratched Kuwait Airways' A330 aircraft's left outboard flap after landing at the airport. Kuwait Airways flight KU301 had left Kuwait International Airport earlier yesterday, and the plane was parked at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji

International Airport when the contact between the wings took place. The other plane was moving.

Slight damage was caused to the wing of the Kuwaiti Airways plane. According to the statement, Indian authorities have opened an investigation in the accident. It added that the passengers were safely disembarked, and an alternative plane was provided for the Mumbai-Kuwait return flight.

KANDARI FIRST MP TO FILE FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

RAIN CONTINUES THROUGH TOMORROW

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: MP Abdul Kareem Al-Kandari yesterday submitted his financial disclosure statement to the Public Anti-Corruption Authority, becoming the first lawmaker to do so. Accordingly, the authority reminded other lawmakers that they had to submit their statements within 60 days after the declaration of parliamentary election results.

In the meantime, MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah urged the government to perform differently and show more cooperation with the parliament, starting with the inaugural session when the speaker, deputy speaker and committee members are elected. "I urge the government to refrain from voting in these elections to show its good intentions," he underlined, noting that the government has the right to take part in the voting but added it is not a must.

Cautious optimism

Separately, the Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF) said that the recent elections created a state of cautious optimism that calls for selecting a suitable Cabinet accordingly. In a press release it issued yesterday, KDF stressed that the elections led to considerable change of up to 60 percent in the new parliament formation, and this calls for the government to meticulously review the results and accordingly appoint a Cabinet suitable for this particular phase, especially when a large number of young lawmakers who are more capable of

effecting socioeconomic reforms won the elections.

KDF also called to show national solidarity and political stability by cancelling and amending a number of laws that undermine liberties. Furthermore, KDF stressed that the top public priorities now include issuing a general amnesty to free all prisoners of conscience, cancelling the political isolation law, passing a law to protect citizenship and prevent withdrawing them except through court orders related to forgery, and amending and developing the current electoral system to adopt the relative electoral list system in order to achieve justice amongst various electoral constituencies and prevent by-elections and vote-buying.

In addition, KDF also called for holding a national conference with the participation of all blocs without alienating any in order to jointly discuss various views on political, social, economic and educational reforms.

Challenge

Meanwhile, a candidate who lost in the elections yesterday filed a strange complaint contesting the results. He wondered how he did not get any vote - not even his own. "I did vote for myself!" he exclaimed. In the meantime, a number of Mutairi tribe diwans urged all the tribe's candidates in the fourth constituency to file complaints contesting the election results.

Separately, a court yesterday sustained a previous ruling sentencing a blogger known as 'Chabreet Seyassi' (Political Matches) to 10

years in prison and acquitting lawyer Falah Al-Hajraf and Bader Abdul Aziz, who had all been accused in a state security case.

Also yesterday, a lawyer filed a state security case against a poetess accusing her of posting a tweet in which she insulted and denigrated the followers of a doctrine, which undermines national solidarity. The poetess is expected to be summoned for further investigations.

Rain continues

Following rain in various areas including Salmi and Jahra where it rained relatively heavily, Kuwait Meteorology Department reminded of its previous warning that scattered rain might fall and could sometimes be thundery, accompanied by winds of up to 50 kph. The department also expects rain showers to continue today and tomorrow.

University project

Led by the acting assistant secretary general for planning and follow up at the Supreme Planning and Development Council Haifa Al-Mudaf, a team including a number of female engineers and researchers yesterday visited the Sabah Al-Salem University City project site. Mudaf said that the visit was part of the follow-up plan for the projects listed in the development plan to make sure work is progressing according to schedule. She added that two of the faculties' buildings will be completed and handed over next year, while the other nine colleges would be completed in 2019.



Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah greets an officer. — Interior Ministry photos



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah delivers his speech at the ceremony.

INTERIOR MINISTER HAILS OFFICERS' EFFORTS

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met yesterday with senior ministry officials to highlight their achievements and work on developing various ministry sectors. The meeting, which has become a habit since Sheikh Mohammad assumed his position, was attended by several assistant undersecretaries and top security officials, including Undersecretary Lieutenant General

Suleiman Al-Fahad and Advisor Lieutenant General Ahmad Al-Abdullah Al-Khalifa.

Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled hailed security forces, and conveyed greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for the success of security plans during the recent

parliamentary elections. He also thanked all ministry servicemen and civil employees for the efforts they exerted in implementing various security plans carried out in the past few months, starting with security preparations for the holy month of Ramadan, the Hajj season, the Ashura occasion during the Islamic month of Muharram, in addition to securing various mosques and Husseiniyas and schools and facing other security threats.

14.6 PERCENT KUWAITI ADULTS DIABETIC: MOH

KUWAIT: Around 14.6 percent of adults in Kuwait have high blood glucose levels, the Ministry of Health (MoH) revealed yesterday, citing a study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO). In a ceremony to mark the 'World Diabetes Day', head of the MoH's media office Ghalia Al-Mutairi noted that around 6.1 percent of adults have been diagnosed with blood disorders. Moreover, she revealed that diabetes accounted for 4 percent of the total of deaths in Kuwait in 2012, adding that the disease is prevalent in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations.

The number of diabetics in the world has quadrupled since 1980, the result of obesity and a sedentary lifestyle, Mutairi added. She also highlighted the need for diabetics to undergo regular medical tests to help treat the disease.

Meanwhile, MoH announced that it is due to host next month 17 international consultant physicians who will be conducting intricate surgical procedures, with help from a multinational contingent of doctors in the country. In a statement issued yesterday, MoH noted that the visit is part of the ministry's endeavor of inviting health experts to Kuwait on a monthly basis, where they will share their knowhow with local doctors. Moreover, the 17 consultant physicians, all of whom are well versed in a variety of medical fields, hail from nine nations including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Italy, France and others. The physicians will also take part in medical lectures, workshops and conferences, the statement added. MoH routinely undertakes such initiatives in efforts to infuse some international expertise into the country's healthcare system. — KUNA



A view of the attendance at the discussion.

CULTURAL DISCUSSION AT SHEIKH JABER CENTER

KUWAIT: A group of intellectuals discussed on Tuesday the concept of culture and its multi-faceted influence in the globe and Arab world in general, and in Kuwait in particular. The seminar, presented by former information minister Dr Saad Al-Ajmi and moderated by ex-information minister Mohammad Al-Sanousi, discussed if culture was a luxury or a mean to survival.

Sanousi, in the seminar held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, said generally human beings lost interest in culture in general and reading, and instead became glued to the social media which he described as "a weapon with positive and negative impacts." Ajmi said culture has many linguistic explanations which could differ in behaviors between literate and illiterate persons. Culture, he said, also meant the civilization of a certain community. Allah the Almighty created people

with different cultures and religions "so how can a person scrap cultural diversity, and fight for the spread of one culture and excluding others?" he wondered.

"Culture is a way of survival and cannot be scrapped. We have to live with cultural diversity for

the sake of survival, thus it is not a luxury," he said. Members of the audience called for respect of the cultural diversity and respect of the others. They said media and educational institutions have a vital role to play to boost this belief. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Former information minister Mohammad Al-Sanousi (right) speaks during the lecture as former minister Dr Saad Al-Ajmi looks on. — KUNA

In Brief

AMIR CONDOLES BRAZIL

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Brazilian President Michel Temer, on the victims of the Colombian plane crash which killed a number of players of a Brazilian soccer team and injured others. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to President Temer. —KUNA



CROWN PRINCE CONGRATULATES PM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory letter to His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for being appointed as Prime Minister by an Amiri decree earlier yesterday. His Highness the Prime Minister was also assigned to name his new cabinet members. In his letter, His Highness the Crown Prince wished His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak success in his endeavors. —KUNA



BAHRAIN AFFIRMS TIES

MANAMA: Minister of the Bahraini Royal Diwan Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad bin Salman Al-Khalifa stressed yesterday the importance of the Kuwaiti-Bahraini deep-rooted ties and distinguished relations. This came during his visit along with General Commander of Bahrain's Defense Force Sheikh Khalifa Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa to Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah. —KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: The 'Marina Waves'; a landmark structure located in the Marina Crescent in Salmiya. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAITI CHARITY ORGANIZATION PROVIDES MULTI-PURPOSE FACILITIES IN DJIBOUTI



DJIBOUTI: A picture of Al-Rahma (mercy) International Association's multi-purpose building complexes in Djibouti. —KUNA

DJIBOUTI: Al-Rahma (mercy) International Association's multi-purpose building complexes in Djibouti and Obock provinces, are important facilities that highlighted the generosity of the Kuwaiti people. The facility, which opened in 2007, offered various kinds of services to the local populace, Head of the Djibouti province complex Dr Abdullah Fatouh, noting that it mainly catered to the health and educational needs of the Djiboutian people.

The complex hosts a school and an orphanage that answered the need of over a thousand

students and orphans, said Dr Fatouh. He added that the complex also provides services to the less fortunate as well as scholarships for students who excelled in their studies.

Meanwhile, head of the complex's health services center and hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Sharqawi revealed that their facility was heavily sought by people due to the high standard of health services. The center has the latest and up-to-date medical gadgetry used in treatment, said Dr Sharqawi who noted that more wards and departments were being opened in the hos-

pital which in turn will increase the facility's capacity to treat and receive patients.

In the meantime, head of the association's public relations Dr Ahmad Abdelmutaleb said that another complex was opened in the province of Obock, 280 kilometers from the capital city Djibouti. The facility played a similar role to the one in the capital region, said the official, adding that the complex in Obock played a major role in receiving some 3,000 Yemeni refugees escaping the wail of war in their country. —KUNA



KUWAIT DISTRIBUTES MONEY COUPONS TO DISPLACED IRAQIS

IRBIL: The State of Kuwait on Tuesday distributed money coupons to displaced Iraqi people in the northern city of Irbil to buy their needs from shops. Kuwait is keen on helping the displaced Iraqis as part of its "Kuwait by your side" campaign, and is distributing money coupons to the displaced from Mosul, Salahuddin and Anbar to give them free choice to buy their own needs from shops, said Dr Omar Al-Kanderi, Consul General in Irbil.

The aid, whether the ones in Iraq or

other parts of the world, are upon instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to help the needy people, he said. Kuwait, said Kanderi, would distribute the money coupons to 10,000 families.

The Kuwaiti humanitarian assistance, he added, would also include health and education services, or building of shelters. Kuwait launched its campaign in Iraq's Kurdistan province in the middle of 2015, and has distributed around 170,000 food baskets so far. —KUNA



DUBAI: Kuwait Consul General in Dubai and UAE's Northern Emirates Theyab Al-Rashidi delivers his country's participation paper in Expo 2020 to Chairman of event's Dubai Higher Committee Sheikh Ahmad Bin Saeed Al Maktoum. —KUNA

KUWAIT HANDS PARTICIPATION PAPER IN DUBAI'S 'EXPO 2020'

DUBAI: Kuwait officially handed yesterday its participation paper in the international fair 'Expo 2020' to be held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The paper was handed during a meeting between the Kuwait Consul General in Dubai and UAE's Northern Emirates Theyab Al-Rashidi and Chairman of the Expo 2020 Dubai's Higher Committee Sheikh Ahmad Bin Saeed Al Maktoum.

"Kuwait is preparing to take part in this important international event that Dubai will be hosting for four years, being an important opportunity to reflect the distinguished deep-rooted relations between both countries", Rashidi said following the meeting.

Bright image

Kuwait's participation in this Expo will contribute in reflecting a bright image of the joint heritage in the Gulf region, as well as the Kuwaiti achievements in various domains for millions of expected visitors to this international event, he said. Kuwait will communicate with Expo 2010's Organizing Committee by next month in order to set the first steps for establishing the Kuwaiti pavilion, he added.

Rashidi expressed his deep confidence in the leadership and management of UAE's national cadres in managing Expo 2020. Meanwhile, he congratulated UAE's political leadership and people on the occasion of their country's National and Martyr Days, wishing them further pros-

perity, progress, security and stability.

Expo 2020's Chairman stressed the committee's keenness in offering the Kuwaiti side all the possible facilities to best serve the country's pavilion. Expo 2020 is a modern cultural event that is held every five years, and is considered the largest of its kind worldwide. Each country takes part in this fair with a pavilion in which it demonstrates various aspects of its civilization and achievements in the cultural, scientific and economic sectors.

Celebrations

In other news, Kuwait's Information Ministry participated Tuesday in celebrations marking the United Arab Emirates (UAE) National and Martyr Days, held at the City Walk in Dubai. UAE Minister of Culture Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan launched the four-day celebrations and visited the Kuwaiti pavilion, and got acquainted with the publications and old photos displayed.

Jassem Al-Hamar, director of supervision and evaluation sector at Information Ministry's Foreign Media Department, said the pavilion reflected Kuwait's keenness to share the UAE and its citizens their national celebrations.

Hamar said the pavilion aimed at highlighting to visitors the deep-rooted relations between the Kuwaiti and UAE people. Many countries are participating in celebrations held at the City Walk to display their cultural and artistic activities. —KUNA

KUWAIT, TURKEY DISCUSS BOOSTING INVESTMENT, TRADE

ISTANBUL: Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousif Al-Ali met with Turkish Minister of Development Lutfi Elvan to discuss boosting trade and commerce. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 7th Bosphorus Summit, which kicked off on Tuesday and concludes today in Istanbul. The two sides also discussed investment opportunities and sharing experience in the field.

Ali had stated Tuesday that Kuwait placed significance on participating in the summit "to discuss ways of cooperation with friendly countries," adding that this participation comes as part of its efforts to take part in major international economic summits.

Effective presence

Ali pointed out that the Arab presence in the summit was effective, with Saudi Arabia taking part as a guest of honor. The Saudi delegation to the three-day event was led by Dr Majed Al-Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and Investment, who addressed the gathering by voicing his country's plan to have an advanced economic rank by the year 2030 despite the world economic recession, citing the key economic reforms projected by the Saudi economy over the coming few years. Qasabi also shed light on the Kingdom's plan to launch a number of non-oil economic reforms, including promising economic sectors and government services, thanking organizers of the event for choosing the Kingdom as guest of honor. The economic summit is scheduled to discuss, among other issues, Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 and Turkey's vision 2023.

Exceptional circumstances

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had stated in the opening of the summit that his country is facing exceptional circumstances that



ISTANBUL: Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousif Al-Ali (left) meets with Turkish Minister of Development Lutfi Elvan. —KUNA

need to be met with exceptional support from partners and international financial institutions. He drew the attention that his government has launched a package of economic and financial reforms to attract investment.

The summit is held under the theme 'An International Goal ... An International Future' in the participation of official delegates from 70 countries, including heads of state, prime ministers, senior officials and businesspeople.

On its stalled EU membership request,

Erdogan said Turkey has been waiting for an answer from the EU for over 50 years, and criticized last week's non-binding vote by the European Parliament urging a freeze to Turkey's EU accession talks, calling it "harassment."

"We have not closed the EU subject yet. But the picture we have faced does not allow us to fall for positive expectations on this subject. There are always many alternatives before Turkey. We would continue our way by considering one of these options," said Erdogan. —KUNA

KFAED'S TUNISIA INVESTMENTS HELP ACHIEVE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL STABILITY: AMBASSADOR

TUNIS: Investment volume of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) in Tunisia reflects a strong desire to help the Arab country achieve economic and social stability, a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday.

The participation of Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Oil Minister Anas Al-Saleh

in the international conference to support the economy and investment (Tunisia 2020) reaffirmed this aspiration, Ali Al-Dhifeeri, Kuwait's Ambassador to Tunisia said.

On Tuesday, the Fund offered Tunisia soft loans worth \$500 million over the coming five years, while other Kuwaiti investment bodies are closely eyeing business opportunities in the country, Al-Thifeeri said.

Addressing the opening of the two-day event last Tuesday, Minister Saleh said that they are following with relief Tunisia's achievements on the political level. "Tunisia has completed all phases of democratic transition with the least damage that usually results in such deep transformations of the political and social structure," he noted.

Up to 2,000 delegates are taking part in the conference, repre-

sented 14 UN missions, foreign countries and leading international banks, in addition to businesspeople. The Kuwaiti delegation accompanying Al-Saleh includes KFAED Director General Abdulwahab Al-Bader, KFAED regional director for the Arab countries Abdullah Al-Saqr and Executive Director of the Public Reserve Division at Kuwait Investment Authority Bader Al-Ajeel. —KUNA

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النجاح Al-Anbaa

IS THE ASSEMBLY'S IMPORTANT?

By Nermin Al-Houti

Many people may find the title of my column a little strange, and the majority might accuse me of being undemocratic. Despite all these hypothetical theories, I repeat the question: Is there any importance of the existence of the National Assembly? The column today has two parts to present the question to our readers, and I leave the judgment and finding the solution to them.

The first part is about the money spent on the Assembly and the nation's deputies. We should calculate the money being spent out of the state budget on Abdullah Al-Salem Hall and those who work there. There should be an office for each MP, who needs at least two or three employees (as secretaries), and the offices themselves should be finely furnished, along with state-of-the-art electronic equipment, bearing in mind that all these accessories are replaced every year. How many employees, tea boys and office boys are there to keep the MP's mood at its best? We should not forget that a car is also allocated to each MP, as if the deputies of the nation do not possess cars. It seems that if "anything is free...give me more".

Three meals a day and afternoon tea - this is not an assembly; it is a five-star restaurant. My dear MPs, what about the food in your own houses, and what about the personal chef? This is in addition to stationery, security employees and WiFi services so that our MPs can tweet and play games. We should not forget the official trips and the Majles TV Channel, so that the people's voices can be heard. The question that presents itself is - is there anyone among us who heard a whimper about his issues inside Abdullah Al-Salem Hall? The majority are silent because of interests that we do not know or hear about, and only our MPs know about it, but only care about their personal interests and ignore our nation's voice.

The second part: How many assemblies came into existence? They either got dissolved or their term ended. What are MPs' achievements and work compared to the prosperous life they enjoy under the Abdullah Al-Salem dome? How many petitions were presented at the complaints committee, and how many out of them were discussed and solved? Nothing, in my own personal opinion. If the Audit Bureau gets an opportunity to account for all the mistakes of its employees, we will find a huge amount of financial violations, and the decision will be to abolish the Assembly, because it is a burden to our nation. "If you cannot say what is right, then do not cheer what is wrong." — Sheikh Mohammad Al-Mitwalli Al-Shaarawi.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



الجريدة

Al-Jarida

CORRUPTION, A MAJOR ISSUE

By Hassan Al-Essa

The prime issue the new young parliament is facing is corruption at various state bodies. This does not mean that there are no other worthy concerns, but corruption is our major concern. It is a deep-rooted disease that has been undermining the state's foundations and has very strong connections with influential private sector establishments and individuals. Fighting the corruption ghost ought to be a major concern for lawmakers who still believe that Kuwait is more than just a source of money from which they wish to get as much as they can.

According to bribery principles, corruption does not only mean deals worth billions or mega contracts that are tainted. It goes far beyond and includes the whole chain of command, from small employees who get paid without doing any work to the top of the 'misery' ladder, and ministers who adjust everything with the help of special advisors who push their own interests. The cycle endlessly continues from up to down and vice versa. Corruption also goes beyond financial issues and prevails in the legislation and monitoring machineries that keep reflecting endless ugly images. Corruption is also oppressing free opinion. People

with opinions are haunted by the laws and people are chased out of the country and forced to leave, which is the worst intimidation. They are not only deprived of expression, but are also forced to say what the string-pullers want them to speak, eventually, joining a large flock that does not dare to speak about corruption in public. These sheep continue living without noticing the butchers waiting at the corner of the near future.

This state of indifference and getting over-indulged in daily consumption habits is our real dilemma. We are on the verge of an economic disaster under a completely incompetent political administration that still runs things by old methods and limited mentality, which resists change and fears facing challenges.

For now, the new parliament doesn't need to file an interpellation to absorb public anger and gain more public support if it goes beyond any redlines. Public awareness is what the country really needs right now. We are facing serious challenges at the border. The region is changing and moving fast into the unknown while 'they' remain the same. Keep up to what you have been entrusted with.

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

DRIVER RUNS OVER MAN TO 'SCARE HIM'

KUWAIT: A 19-year-old Kuwaiti citizen ran over a Bangladeshi man who was sitting at a bus stop in a bid to 'scare him'. The man told police he was just 'having fun' and that he was driving along with a friend of his in Shaab when he saw the victim at the bus stop. The citizen drove the car towards him to 'scare him off', then hit him when he did not move, according to his statements. Police and paramedics went to the scene, sent the victim to Mubarak hospital and arrested the driver. Separately, a citizen told police she ran over a juvenile in Sabah Al-Salem area. The boy was taken to Adan hospital while the woman was taken to the police station for questioning.

Strange kidnapping

A strange case of suspected kidnapping was reported in Nahda area. A man called police to report that a woman had been kidnapped but when police went to the area, located behind a housing care building, they found an unlocked car but no one inside. The man told police that he saw a woman getting into another car, driven by an unknown man. He also mentioned that the woman was his wife and she got into the car without being forced. Police are investigating.

Helper robs sponsor

A citizen told Mubarak Al-Kabeer police that her Nepalese domestic helper stole KD 900 worth of jewelry and KD 2,000 in cash before disappearing. A case was filed and investigations are ongoing.

Flat damaged

A citizen accused two persons he knows of damaging his brother's flat because of previous dispute. Detectives are working on the case.

Sexual assault

A woman in her twenties trusted a colleague of hers who promised to marry her, and went with him for a ride. But when they were alone, the man sexually assaulted her so she jumped from the car and ran away. The woman went to a police station and filed a report.

Medical malpractice?

A citizen accused a doctor of causing the death of his 51-year-old mother due to a medical error. The case was referred to detectives to investigate the doctor's credentials and treatment.

Harasser attacked

A citizen attacked a young man who was harassing his wife. The attacker was arrested and the young man was taken to Mubarak Hospital and placed under guard.

— Translations from the Arabic press



EQUATE SPONSORS GPCA FORUM

DUBAI: EQUATE Petrochemical Company, a global producer of petrochemicals, sponsored the 11th Annual Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Forum as part of its contribution to the growth and progress of the industrial sector.

EQUATE President and CEO Mohammad Husain said, "During 2015, the Arabian Gulf's petrochemical production exceeded 144 million tons, which increased from almost 137 million tons in 2014. Such rates prove this region's status as a global petrochemical production hub."

Husain, who is also a GPCA Board Member, noted, "Petrochemicals remain the Arabian Gulf's second main source of income after oil. For this industry to continue its positive contribution, it requires sustainability and innovation through advanced solutions, high-quality products and top in-class services."

Husain explained, "The petrochemical industry still faces the same challenges of fluctuating prices due to supply and demand, feedstock availability, adequate infrastructure and, most important, specialized human capital. Regardless of these challenges, EQUATE continues its efforts as petrochemical company with operations in Kuwait, North America and Europe. Such a focus on our values of Trust, Sustainability, Reliability and Innovation enables us to become the world's second largest Ethylene Glycol (EG) producer. At the same time, EQUATE is currently the only Middle Eastern company that has been successful to access USA shale gas resources."

As part of its participation in the event for the 11th year, EQUATE sponsored a professor and students from the College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University to attend

the event and interact with other delegates. EQUATE's sponsorship of the professor and the students for this event and other previous GPCA activities is part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the college during 2008 for overall partnership in industrial and academic fields.

During the exhibition on the sidelines of the forum, EQUATE hosted a number of prominent figures in the petrochemical industry, energy and economic sectors. EQUATE's participation included a display stand welcoming the event's over 2000 participants from around the globe.

The 11th Annual GPCA Forum 2016 is held in Dubai, UAE, during November 27-29. The forum gathers top executives from petrochemical and chemical companies, as well as government bodies and other entities to discuss various topics.

KFH HOLDS 'CREATIVITY' WORKSHOP FOR EMPLOYEES

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) organized a specialized brainstorming workshop themed 'Unleash Your Creativity' for its employees as part of its policy to invest in the human resources, while equipping them with all what they need to optimally assume their duties as per highest standards of quality.

The 4-day workshop encompassed around 60 male and female staff from different departments at the bank. It primarily focused on alternate thinking and idea generation processes. The workshop was designed to unlock creative potential of participants to develop a renewed outlook towards business.

Moreover, the workshop tackled many skills in efforts to achieve its objectives such as focusing on effective communication skills, understanding creativity in relation to individuals (Mind Mapping), creating the 'right' (creative) environment at the workplace - tools and suggestions, creative problem solving tools, application of creative thoughts - understanding problem, generating ideas, planning for action, discussing tools and techniques, Brainstorming (Town hall process), transactional Analysis and creative application, ideation, conversion, implementation in addition to the ability to take risks and experiment (attitude building). Participants expressed their appreciation for holding this workshop as it paved the way for creating innovative environment and offered the techniques to unleash their Creative spirit.

Participants expressed their appreciation for holding this workshop as it paved the way for creating innovative environment and offered the techniques to unleash their Creative spirit.





Trump dines with Romney, plans new victory tour

OVER 10,000 ROHINGYA HAVE FLED TO BANGLADESH

50,000 POUR OUT OF EAST ALEPPO

'MOTIONLESS BODY OF A GIRL WAS LEFT CRUMPLED IN THE STREET'

ALEPPO: More than 50,000 Syrians have joined a growing exodus of terrified civilians from east Aleppo, a monitor said yesterday, as the UN Security Council was set for emergency talks on fighting in the city. As government forces pressed an assault in the divided city, regime artillery fire killed at least 26 civilians in east Aleppo yesterday morning, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

Civilians have poured out of the besieged rebel-held east, battered by air strikes and heavy artillery fire by advancing regime forces. AFP's correspondent in a southeastern district described artillery shells "coming down like rain" yesterday. After one mortar attack, the motionless body of a girl was left crumpled in the street, her arm severed and her head pierced by a sliver of shrapnel. Rescue volunteers carried her body away on a motorcycle.

Regime forces and allied fighters have seized a third of the rebel-held east of Aleppo since they began an operation to recapture all of the battered second city just over a fortnight ago. They now fully control the city's northeast and pressed their offensive yesterday on Aleppo's southeastern edges, advancing in the Sheikh Saeed district, according to state news agency SANA. The loss of Aleppo would be the biggest blow for Syria's opposition since the conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests, before spiraling into a civil war.

'Situation desperate'

More than 50,000 people have fled Aleppo's rebel-held districts, the Observatory said yesterday, including at least 20,000 to government-held territory and another 30,000 to Kurdish-controlled districts. Many others have travelled south into the remaining territory held by rebels.

Another AFP correspondent near a temporary government-run shelter on the edge of

Aleppo yesterday saw dozens of displaced residents huddled on the back of pick-up trucks under the pounding rain. Hundreds also massed in the newly recaptured neighbourhood of Jabal Badro to board government buses heading to west Aleppo. "The situation of those fleeing is desperate," said Pawel Krzysiek, head of communications for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Syria.

Syria's Red Crescent is offering assistance in government-held areas, but does not yet have access to east Aleppo.

The UN has for months sought access to the east, but a plan it presented earlier this month to deliver aid has yet to be approved by the government. The UN Security Council is to hold an emergency meeting later yesterday on the situation, receiving a briefing from a UN

humanitarian official and the UN's peace envoy Staffan de Mistura. British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson said he hoped the meeting could lead to "an end to the carnage, particularly in Aleppo".

"I would urge all those with responsibility for that, both the Assad regime and their supporters in Russia... to think of what they can do to bring peace, stop the bombardment,

stop the killing of innocent civilians and get to the negotiating table," he told AFP after meeting his Cypriot counterpart in Nicosia. Syria's opposition National Coalition said it was working with France on a draft UN resolution seeking an immediate ceasefire in Aleppo, though regime ally Russia was likely to veto such a proposal.

'Waiting for death'

Yesterday morning, 26 civilians including seven children were killed in government artillery fire on the Jubb Al-Qubbeh district in east Aleppo, the Observatory said. The White Helmets rescue group published photos of the aftermath of the shelling on Jubb Al-Qubbeh, showing an apocalyptic scene with bodies, pieces of flesh, and suitcases strewn across the street. In one image, a young man wept next to two bodies, their top halves obscured by blankets. The feet of one body were clad in pink socks, the other wore red boots done up with white laces. The Observatory says nearly 300 civilians, including 33 children, have been killed in east Aleppo since the latest government assault began on November 15. Another 48 civilians have been killed in west Aleppo, according to the monitor.

State news agency SANA said eight civilians including two children had been killed in rebel fire on several districts in the city's west yesterday. The violence in the city has prompted international concern, though there has been little sign of a plan to intervene. UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al-Husseini on Wednesday said civilians in eastern Aleppo faced "a nightmare which clearly violates the most basic norms of human rights and any shred of human decency." "Pounded by accelerating bombardment, deliberately deprived of food and medical care, many of them-including small children-report that they are simply waiting for death," he said. —AFP



ALEPPO: This photo provided by the Syrian Civil Defense White Helmets, which has been authenticated based on its contents and other AP reporting, shows a Syrian boy sitting next to bodies after artillery fire struck the Jub Al-Quba district. —AP

NEW

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GAZA PRIVATE SECURITY FIRMS' MUSCLE MEN RING UP DOLLARS

GAZA: Trained in martial arts and firearms, their muscled physiques bursting out of tight t-shirts, young men in Gaza are increasingly finding work with private security firms retained by banks, local celebrities and international visitors. Three private security companies are now competing in Gaza, offering protection for high-profile Arab and Western delegations or cautious businessmen shifting goods and cash around the fenced-in territory.

While Hamas, the Islamist group that has run Gaza since 2007, has its own armed units to protect international visitors, it does not object to competition from private companies, as long as they

coordinate with the authorities. Akram Al-Balawi, who runs the Castle Security Company, said he had 6,000 applicants when he announced he was hiring. He snapped up 65 men. "Our staff are carefully selected, they are body-built, highly educated and with good manners," said Balawi, sitting in his office in the heart of Gaza City. "They are not affiliated with political factions."

While Hamas maintains tight security in Gaza, where around two million Palestinians live, there are occasional skirmishes among militant factions and some criminal activity. Israel also carries out occasional air strikes in response to mor-

tar fire and has fought several wars with Hamas and other militant groups in recent years. Balawi said his guards only carry guns when escorting a convoy of money or foreign ambassadors. Major missions, like visits by UN officials and senior European figures, are usually escorted by Hamas-run security, he said.

'Muscle of the tongue'

He recently opened the door to women applicants. And, with Gaza unemployment at 43 percent - and as high as 60 percent among graduates - there is no shortage of candidates for a decent paying job. Those accepted receive paid training at a unit of

Gaza's Hamas-run Interior Ministry. They learn martial arts, the use of weapons and how to deal with volatile crowds.

Staff earn between \$400 and \$600 a month, Balawi said. Eyad Al-Bozom, the Interior Ministry spokesman, said visits by international delegations are coordinated with them and Hamas's security teams are not paid. Recently their units protected a group of Western diplomats in Gaza, he said. "(Private security) is still a new experience but we are keen to pursue it and develop it so we give a chance to the civil community to be part of this issue," Bozom said.

At an open space in Gaza, 35 new applicants were put through their paces, carry-

ing out simulations on how to protect clients and get them away from danger. A gun, an AK-47 rifle and a submachine gun were used in the drill. "We learnt that using a weapon is the last resort," said Islam Salama, 21, an undergraduate in Arabic. "Before the weapon comes the muscle of the tongue."

Saeed Youssef, a 25-year-old business graduate, said he rushed to apply because work opportunities in Gaza were so scarce. "We are forced to cope with the labour market. I needed the job to build a life, have a future," he said. "People view the unemployed as losers, even if they are educated." — Reuters

ABBAS TO ADDRESS FATAH CONGRESS

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories:

President Mahmoud Abbas addresses his Fatah party's first congress since 2009 yesterday as he contends with internal dissent and grim prospects for advancing his decades-long goal of achieving a Palestinian state. The 81-year-old leader was re-elected head of Fatah as the congress opened on Tuesday, but speculation has mounted over who will eventually succeed him as Palestinian president. He has not publicly supported a successor.

His speech is before some 1,400 delegates in Ramallah. It comes with Palestinians facing continued Jewish settlement building in the occupied West Bank and an incoming Donald Trump administration in the United States seen as far more friendly to Israel. More than 600,000 Israeli settlers now live in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians see as their future capital.

The United States, European Union and others have warned that continued settlement building is eating away at prospects for a two-state solution to the conflict, the basis of years of negotiations. A controversial Israeli bill to legalize some 4,000 settler homes in the West Bank had been due to come up for a first reading in parliament on Wednesday, but it was delayed until Monday as behind-the-scenes debate continued.

The international community considers all Israeli settlements in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem and the West Bank to be illegal, whether they are authorized by the government or not. The Israeli government differentiates between those it has approved and those it has not. The progress of the bill, approved earlier by a committee of ministers on behalf of the government, has demonstrated the power of the settler movement in Israel.

Hamas outreach

Fatah's five-day congress is expected to discuss whether to seek to introduce a UN Security Council resolution against Israeli settlements. Abbas, head of Fatah, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian Authority following Yasser Arafat's death in 2004, has consistently called for a negotiated solution and opposed another violent uprising. But he has grown unpopular, with polls showing most Palestinians want him to resign, and many have lost faith in the so-called peace process spelled out in the Oslo accords of the 1990s that he helped negotiate.

Some analysts see the congress as an attempt by Abbas to marginalize political opponents, including longtime rival Mohammed Dahlan, currently in exile in the United Arab Emirates. Observers have seen the reduced number of officials to vote-down from more than 2,000 in 2009 — as part of a move to exclude Dahlan supporters.

The election of members of Fatah's parliament and its central committee will signal the direction the oldest Palestinian party will take. The congress also comes with Fatah and its Islamist rival Hamas, in power in the Gaza Strip, still deeply divided. Fatah dominates the Palestinian Authority, which runs the West Bank. However, a letter from exiled Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, in which he said he was "ready to cooperate with Fatah," was read at the opening of the congress on Tuesday.

Abbas and Meshaal recently met in Qatar for the first time in two years. On Tuesday, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that hopes for a two-state solution were fading fast, decrying settlement building and home demolitions by Israel. But he also criticized the Palestinians' "paralyzing lack of unity." — AFP



ADANA: This picture obtained from the Ihlas News Agency shows an injured girl taken to hospital following a fire at a school. — AFP

EIGHT HELD OVER TURKEY GIRL DORM FIRE AS ANGER GROWS

ANGER GROWING OVER POSSIBLE NEGLIGENCE

ISTANBUL: Turkey yesterday detained eight people over a deadly fire at a dormitory for schoolgirls that left 12 people dead, as anger grew over possible negligence that caused the tragedy. The blaze, which officials said was likely caused by an electrical fault, tore through the building's wooden interior on Tuesday night as panicked youngsters tried to jump from windows to safety.

Some officials suggested many of the victims were killed on the top floors of the dormitory in the southern region of Adana after they were unable to open a fire door to flee the flames. "We will learn lessons from this and we will do what needs to be done to ensure this never happens again," said Education Minister Ismet Yilmaz, adding that an inspection in June had not uncovered any issues. In Ankara, Turkish police used tear gas to disperse a protest outside the education ministry by activists angered that the devastated dormitory was managed by an influential religious sect.

DNA tests needed

Those detained as part of the investigation into accusations of "causing death by negligence" include the manager of the dormitory in the Aladag district of Adana, the Dogan news agency said. Five people were detained initially while three other suspects were being treated for wounds in hospital. A total of 14 arrest warrants have been issued.

Dogan said most of the dead would be identified using DNA tests, in a sign that the victims were too badly burned to be identified visually. Ten of those killed were schoolchildren aged up to 14, while the fire also claimed the life of a member of the teaching staff. The four-year-old daughter of the dormitory manager being held by the police also died, Dogan said. Twenty-four people including 16 children were injured, Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak told a press conference.

Fire doors shut?

Officials said the fire was likely caused by an electrical fault which then spread rapidly due to the dormitory's wooden structures and carpeted floors. Adana governor Mahmut Demirtas said Tuesday some of the schoolgirls were injured after jumping out of windows to escape the flames. He added that none of those injured was in a serious condition. Adana city mayor Huseyin Sozlu told Turkish television Tuesday that the dormitory's fire door was locked and that most of the dead were recovered from near that exit.

But Kaynak said that according to initial findings, the door had been unlocked. "There's even a curtain hanging near the exit door undamaged," he said, but added that the situation would become clearer after an investigation. The building is assessed twice a year by the education ministry, Kaynak said, adding that it was last checked in June. The Turkish government banned the

broadcast of images of the catastrophe's aftermath, a common measure after such disasters.

'A shame and a crime'

The head of the Egitim-Is education union Mehmet Balik said the dormitory belonged to a religious Sunni Muslim sect in Aladag known as the Suleymanci. The girls had been sleeping there as the state-run dormitory had been demolished ahead of expansion works, Dogan reported. Media reports said the Suleymanci accommodation was the girls' only option in the area.

The Suleymanci is one of the biggest religious communities in Turkey and is renowned for having a major influence in politics. The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) blamed the government for failing to properly fund education accommodation, forcing poor families to use accommodation run by religious communities. "Such fires are not the first and will not be the last so long as the government's policy and irresponsibility remain in place," it said in a statement.

"It is a shame and crime to condemn our children to uncontrolled dorms and any form of abuse." But ruling party spokesman Yasin Aktay emphasized that "the fact the building belonged to a religious community" could not be accepted as the sole reason for the fire. "It is too early now to make links but if there is such a scenario, if there is such neglect, it will not be ignored," he said. — AFP



RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, center, waves to fellow Fatah members as he arrives for the opening session of the Fatah party conference, in the West Bank city. — AP

REPORT POINTS TO IRAN ARMS PIPELINE TO YEMEN

RIYADH: International investigators have found a suspected "weapon pipeline" from Iran through Somalia to Yemen where Shiite rebels are battling the government, according to a report released yesterday. Saudi Arabia and the United States have accused Iran of arming the Houthi rebels in Yemen, but Tehran denies the charges. Since March last year Riyadh has led an Arab coalition fighting the Houthis and their allies in support of Yemen's internationally recognized president, Abedrabbu Mansour Hadi, after the rebels overran much of the country. The analysis by Conflict Armament Research (CAR) is based on the seizure in February and March this year of weapons from dhows, traditional sailing vessels, in the Arabian Sea.

British-based CAR, which is primarily funded by the European Union, analyzed photographs of weapons confiscated from the dhows by the Australian warship HMAS Darwin and the French frigate FS Provence. The ships were part of a joint international task force that operates separately from the Saudi coalition. HMAS Darwin seized more than 2,000 weapons, including AK-type assault rifles and 100 Iranian-manufactured rocket launchers, from the dhow bound for Somalia, CAR said. The seizure by FS Provence included 2,000 assault rifles "characteristic of Iranian manufacture" and 64 Hoshdar-M Iranian-made sniper rifles, all of which were in new condition, CAR said.

Stockpiles

There were also nine Russian-made Kornet anti-tank guided missiles, it said.

UAE forces within the Saudi-led coalition reported recovering in Yemen a Kornet which CAR said is part of "the same production run" as those on the dhow. This "supports allegations that the weapons originated in Iran and that the dhow's cargo was destined for Yemen," CAR said. French government sources said the dhow was headed to Somalia "for possible transshipment to Yemen," CAR said.

Light machine guns, suspected to be North Korean made, were found with the same serial number sequence on both dhows, "which suggests that the materiel derived from the same original consignment," the report added. It also referred to the US Navy's seizure from a dhow in March of AK-type assault rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns which the US believed "originated in Iran and were destined for Yemen." Two of the dhows were made by Al Mansoor of Iran, CAR said. Although their findings were "relatively limited," the investigators said their analysis "suggests the existence of a weapon pipeline extending from Iran to Somalia and Yemen."

This involves "significant quantities of Iranian-manufactured weapons and weapons that plausibly derive from Iranian stockpiles," they said. It said that traffickers offload weapons in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland in northern Somalia "for local arms markets or as transshipment points for onward supply to Yemen". Other analysts have questioned the extent of Tehran's influence over the Houthis, a minority group which fought six wars against Yemen's government from 2004 to 2010. — AFP

IRAQI FAMILY'S SEARCH FOR 'LOST GIRL' TAKEN BY IS

KHAZER: In a camp near Mosul a picture of a three-year-old girl, snatched from her mother's breast by Islamic State militants when they overran her Christian town two years ago, is taped to a wall along with a desperate plea from her parents. "Lost Girl," reads the poster in the displaced people's camp, urging anyone with information about Christina Ezzo Abada to call the number provided.

Almost nothing is known about what happened to Christina since her abduction, but her family assumes she was taken to Mosul and is praying she will be found among the tens of thousands of people now fleeing the city. In the cramped cabin where they live, her parents keep vigil around the television, tuned to a channel tracking the progress of Iraqi security forces as they fight to recapture the city from Islamic State. A picture of Christina hangs on the wall next to an image of Jesus.

"We hope she's alive," said her mother, Aida Nuh, the dark circles around her eyes giving her a haunted expression. "Maybe someone will bring her and look for us and make contact. God knows". Christina's case is unusual. Although Islamic State is known for its brutality and has kidnapped thousands of men, women and children from Iraq's Yazidi minority, Christians faced a different ultimatum under the militants' rule - pay a special tax for protection, convert to Islam, or die by the sword.

Most fled, but around 30 remained in the

Christian town of Qaraqosh, about 15 km south-east of Mosul, including Nuh and her husband, along with Christina, their youngest daughter. It is a decision they have lived to regret, but at the time it was unclear how the militants would treat them, and Nuh said she expected Iraqi security forces to regain control in a matter of days. Nevertheless, they sent their four elder children to safety in the nearby Kurdish region as a precaution.

Snatched

Twenty days went by in Qaraqosh with Christina and her parents holed up at home, fearful of the black-clad militants, who came to them demanding they convert to Islam, but also provided food and water when asked. On Aug 22, 2014, the militants instructed all remaining Christians to gather at a local hospital for medical tests, and Nuh and her husband obeyed. But there were no tests, and after a short interval the militants ordered them onto a minibus waiting outside, which had been smeared with mud to prevent passengers looking out or anyone seeing in.

The militants, whom Nuh identified as local Arabs, searched the group of around 30 Christians for valuables, which they took, and separated four members of the group before corralling the rest onto the bus. Nuh sat with Christina on her lap and was breast-feeding her when one of the militants came up and

wrenched the girl away.

"Who will look after her? She needs me," pleaded Nuh, trailing the man as he got off the bus with her daughter. He said he was following orders from his emir, or commander, before disappearing into the hospital, barring her way. She continued to beg, and eventually the emir emerged from the hospital carrying Christina, who was crying. "I told him to give her back to me," recalled Nuh. "He didn't speak. With his eyes he motioned at me to get back on the bus."

When she resisted, the militants first threatened and then forced her onto the bus, which drove to a wasteland on the edge of Islamic State territory and dumped the entire group there. That was the last time Nuh saw her daughter. In the days after she was taken, Christina's parents called local Arabs with links to Islamic State who told them she had been placed with a family and was in safe hands. But then contact was lost. Further efforts to track the girl down have yielded nothing, although some speculate she ended up in an Islamic State orphanage. It is not clear why the militants kidnapped Christina, who would now be five-years-old.

Earlier this week, the family returned to Qaraqosh for the first time since leaving more than two years ago. On the way there, the car stopped and Christina's father, who is blind, got out and heard the voice of a young girl. "I heard 'papa! papa!'," he said. "I called 'Christina! Christina!', but she didn't reply." — Reuters

RWANDA TO PROBE FRENCH OFFICIALS' GENOCIDE ROLE

KIGALI: Rwanda on Tuesday opened a formal probe into 20 French officials suspected of playing a role in the 1994 genocide, in a move likely to further sour diplomatic ties with France. Kigali has long accused France of complicity in the genocide of some 800,000 mostly ethnic Tutsis, at the hands of Hutu extremists, angering Paris and straining relations.

"The inquiry, for now, is focused on 20 individuals whom, according to information gathered so far, are required by the prosecution authority to explain or provide clarity on allegations against them," said prosecutor general Richard Muhumuzi in a statement. This will enable prosecutors to decide "whether the

concerned individuals should be formally charged or not".

Muhumuzi said the relevant French authorities had been contacted and that full cooperation was expected. The dispute centers on France's role prior to the genocide as a close ally of the Hutu nationalist regime of Juvenal Habyarimana. The shooting down of his plane over Kigali on April 6, 1994 was the event that triggered 100 days of meticulously planned slaughter. France is accused of missing or ignoring the warning signs, and of training the soldiers and militiamen who carried out the killings.

And when the genocide was in full swing, it was further accused of using its diplomatic clout to stall

effective action. When it did finally send in troops in Operation Turquoise it was accused of only doing so to counter the advance of the Tutsi rebels of Paul Kagame, who is now president, allowing the perpetrators to escape to neighboring Zaire which later became the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Long-running spat

France says its soldiers were only deployed after most of the killing had happened and that their presence helped save thousands of lives. And French officials insist that any guilt for failing to prevent the genocide is shared by the entire international community, accusing Kagame of raising the issue in a bid

to distract attention from what they say is his own poor human rights record.

When contacted by AFP, the French defense ministry referred to a statement issued on November 16 by Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian after a list of 22 high-ranking French officers suspected of involvement was first published by Kigali. There was "nothing new" in the list, Le Drian said at the time, adding that it was "almost identical to one produced in 2008" and "to say that the French army took part in genocide was a disgraceful lie". Although relations between Kigali and Paris were completely frozen from 2006 to 2009, they were on the mend until 2014 when Kagame

repeated accusations that French soldiers were both accomplices and "actors" in the bloodbath.

The remarks prompted France to pull out of ceremonies to mark the 20th anniversary of the massacres. The stormy relationship took an even worse turn when the French judiciary decided in October to reopen an investigation into the shooting down of Habyarimana's plane to hear testimony from a former general who accuses Kagame of being behind the assassination. "It is France which should be in the dock," said Kagame. In apparent retaliation, Rwanda on November 1 published the list of 22 senior French officers it accuses of being involved in the genocide. —AFP



NEELUM VALLEY: In this photograph taken on November 18, 2016, Pakistani Kashmiri men prepare an underground bunker in Athmuqam village at the Line of Control, the de facto border between Pakistan and India. —AFP

UN: OVER 10,000 ROHINGYA HAVE FLED TO BANGLADESH

'ACTUAL NUMBER COULD BE MUCH HIGHER'

DHAKA: At least 10,000 Rohingya have arrived in Bangladesh in recent weeks after fleeing violence in neighboring Myanmar, the United Nations said yesterday. An estimated 30,000 Rohingya, a Muslim minority living mostly in Myanmar, have been forced to leave their homes since a bloody crackdown by the army in the western state of Rakhine.

Bangladesh has stepped up patrols on the border to try to stop them from entering, but last week it said thousands had flooded into the country, many with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. "Based on reports by various humanitarian agencies, we estimate that there could be 10,000 new arrivals in recent weeks," said Vivian Tan, a spokeswoman for the UN refugee agency in Bangkok. "The situation is fast changing and the actual number could be much higher."

Those interviewed by AFP inside Bangladesh had horrifying stories of gang rape, torture and murder at the hands of Myanmar's security forces. Analysis of satellite images by Human Rights Watch found hundreds of buildings in Rohingya villages have been razed. Myanmar has denied allegations of abuse, but has also banned foreign journalists and independent investigators from accessing the area to investigate. Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate, has faced a growing international backlash for what a UN official has said amounts to a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Yesterday she vowed to work for "peace and national reconciliation," saying her country faced many challenges, but did not mention the violence in Rakhine state. Rohingya community leaders in Bangladesh said another 3,000 displaced Rohingya were stranded on an island in the Naf River that divides the two countries, attempting to enter Bangladesh.

Little to no aid

"They have been stuck in the island for almost a week without sufficient food and clothes," Abu Ghalib told AFP. But a spokesman for the Bangladesh border guards said the claims could not be verified as the island was not Bangladeshi territory. Bangladesh has reinforced its border posts and deployed coast guard ships in an effort to prevent a fresh influx of refugees. In the past two weeks, Bangladeshi border guards have prevented hundreds of boats packed with Rohingya women and children from entering the country. Nevertheless Rohingya leaders

in Bangladesh said the number of arrivals had risen this week. But so far little or no aid has been provided for the new arrivals with Bangladeshi authorities fearing food, medicine and shelter will encourage more to cross the border. Shinji Kubo, who heads the UN refugee agency in Bangladesh, said the new arrivals needed "urgent" help. "Obviously these people have come from Myanmar after terrible experiences and without any belongings. The winter is approaching. So everyone is really worried about their wellbeing," he said.

More than 230,000 Rohingya are already living in Bangladesh,

most of them illegally, although around 32,000 are formally registered as refugees. Tan said the UN was urging the Bangladesh government to allow the Rohingya safe haven. "We are ready to support the government to provide effective humanitarian assistance for these individuals in need of international protection," she said. Violence in Rakhine-home to the stateless ethnic group loathed by many of Myanmar's Buddhist majority has surged in the last month after security forces poured into the area. It followed a series of attacks on police posts blamed on local militants. —AFP

URGENT RUSH TO BUILD BUNKERS IN PAKISTANI KASHMIR AS FEARS GROW

NEELUM VALLEY, Pakistan: Residents in Pakistani Kashmir are racing to build underground bunkers for the first time since the 1990s, frightened by what they say is the worst cross-border violence since a ceasefire was agreed in 2003. Months of tension between India and Pakistan have erupted into shellings and gunfire across the disputed Kashmir frontier, claiming the lives of dozens of people, including civilians.

People in Azad Kashmir's Neelum Valley say the attacks come once or twice a week, and they never know when they might have to dive for cover. Chand Bibi has concrete and steel rods waiting to be transformed into an underground bunker where her terrified family can take shelter as the monstrous boom of shelling reawakens old nightmares. "You are talking about fear," the 62-year-old says. "We are near to dying at the moment we hear the boom. The voice of the guns is horrible."

When it comes, Bibi and her relatives pile blankets, quilts and clothes on top of their children to muffle the noise and their panic. Soon the extended family of about 20 people will be able to flee underground to the bunker they have paid 300,000 Pakistani rupees (\$3,000) to build—just under the cost of constructing a mud house in the valley, where the average worker makes around 800 rupees per day.

Sultan Ahmed is spending even more: up to 500,000 rupees for a three meter by four meter (10 foot by 14 foot) space reinforced by more than 20 centimeters (eight inches) of concrete, fortified with steel rods, and buried under nearly a meter of soil. Some 25 people will be able to take shelter inside the bunker once it is completed, the 47-year-old teacher says.

Business booming for masons

Local mason Ghulam Hussain tells AFP his business has increased because of the renewed violence, as he packs his tools after finishing a bunker at one house to rush to another and start again. Around half a million people live within range of Indian fire along the Pakistani side of the Line of Control, the de facto border that has divided the Himalayan region since 2003, according to Farooq Haider Khan, leader of Azad Kashmir. He

says the government plans to build "community bunkers".

Kashmir is one of the world's most dangerous flashpoints, bitterly divided between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947 but claimed in full by both. They have already fought two wars over the mountainous region, but years of relative peace after the 2003 ceasefire were shattered in September, after India blamed Pakistani militants for a raid on an army base that killed 19 soldiers.

India said it had responded by carrying out "surgical strikes" across the heavily militarized border, sparking a furious reaction from Islamabad, which denied the strikes took place. On Tuesday armed militants stormed a major Indian army base near the frontier with Pakistan, killing seven soldiers in the most audacious such attack since the September raid. The fear spiraling on the Pakistani side is not only consuming residents tourism to the scenic Neelum Valley has plummeted this year, local official Sardar Abdul Waheed tells AFP. "I am nervous that if this situation continues my whole investment will be sunk," says Zulfikar Ali, who built a guesthouse in the valley last year.

Valley cut off

Since AFP's visit the Neelum Valley has been cut off. Cross-border firing hit a civilian bus there on November 23, killing at least nine people, one of the highest one-day tolls since the latest unrest began. In response authorities shut down the main road connecting the Azad Kashmir capital of Muzaffarabad with the valley, effectively sealing it off from the rest of Pakistan with no word when it will be reopened. Before the valley was closed, many residents told AFP they could not afford to leave and had nowhere to go.

Others, however, said they refused to be driven away. Those who cannot pay the high cost of transporting bunker materials from Kashmir's main cities to the remote valley are fortifying their homes in whatever way they can. "We are just placing sandbags to reinforce the front walls," says 65-year-old widow Zarina Bibi, head of a family of 15. "We are in a state of fear all the time. We don't know when the Indian troops will start shelling again." —AFP

INDIAN WOMEN ENTER LANDMARK MOSQUE WITH SONG AND TEARS

MUMBAI: Hundreds of women poured into the inner sanctum of the iconic Haji Ali Dargah mosque in Mumbai on Tuesday after a Supreme Court order granted them equal access, sparking hope for other cases of discrimination against women. The lengthy legal battle for women to enter the heart of Haji Ali Dargah is one of many cases for equal access in places of worship in India. Members of the Haji Ali Dargah Trust, which had argued it would be a "grievous sin" to allow women near the tomb of the 15th century Sufi saint housed within the mosque, welcomed women from across India on Tuesday with tea.

"It was a hugely emotional experience. It has been a tough battle, with many hardships, but we are glad we prevailed," said Zakia Soman, co-founder of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), or Indian Muslim Women's Movement, a rights group

that had filed a petition in the Mumbai High Court for equal access. "This is a beginning. It gives me greater confidence about other matters of gender justice we are fighting for, such as triple talaq," whereby a Muslim man can divorce his wife by saying "talaq" - or "I divorce you" - three times.

The Haji Ali Dargah mosque, built on an islet about 500 meters from the coast, can only be reached at low tide and draws thousands of worshippers each day. On Tuesday, women entered the shrine with their heads covered, amid song and prayer, Soman said. Women had been allowed in Haji Ali Dargah's inner sanctum until 2011, when their entry was suddenly banned. BMMA filed a petition in 2014 against the ban, and the Mumbai court in August ordered the mosque's trust to lift it. The trust challenged the order in the Supreme Court, which last month upheld the lower court's order. —Reuters



In this May 20, 2015, file photo, migrants including Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims sit on the deck of their boat as they wait to be rescued by Acehese fishermen on the sea off East Aceh, Indonesia. —AP

IN BANGLADESH, YOUNG STUDENTS PROTECT FAMILIES FROM FLOODS

KURIGRAM: Bangladeshi teacher Monjurul Islam was talking to his class of 10-year-olds about how the planet is heating up, when Mosammat Ferdousi stood up and asked: "We are experiencing heavy floods in the last few years - is this linked to climate change?" Islam told his pupils climate change "might be a reason", adding scientists believe the country's increasingly frequent floods and lightning strikes could be linked to global warming.

"Most of my students know about climate change, its impacts and what they should do," said Islam, head teacher at Char Bazra Uttarpara Primary School in Bozra village, in the northern district of Kurigram. Ferdousi said she and her classmates had learned "we need to plant lots of trees" to combat climate change.

Their school is near the Teesta River, and during the monsoon season which lasts from June to December, it goes under water. River bank erosion is also a big problem here, and teachers fear their school might disappear into the river some day. Every year, hundreds of schools in Kurigram district are inundated. In August, around 250 primary schools were closed for more than two weeks due to flooding. "During monsoon, we need to shift the school to nearby high land," Islam said. "As this is a flood-prone area, we also teach students what to do during a flood," he added.

In the syllabus

In Bangladesh, both the government and aid groups are working in schools to educate

students about disasters and climate change. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board has included climate change and disasters in the school syllabus since 2013. There are chapters on climate change and disasters in the books used by children aged between 10 and 15, in classes five to 10.

In addition, some humanitarian agencies run disaster management programs in schools. International charity Save the Children, for example, is leading such a project in three disaster-prone areas, funded by the European Commission and assisted by local NGO Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service. It is being implemented in 50 schools covering some 4,600 pupils, including Char Bazra Uttarpara Primary. "Students and their guardians are very enthusiastic about learning disaster management as they benefit from it in any major disaster," said project technical officer KM Alamgir Hossen.

Every year, thousands of Bangladeshi schools are affected by floods. This August alone, more than 1,000 primary schools were flooded in northern and central regions of the low-lying nation. At Char Bazra Uttarpara Primary School, Class Three teacher Khadiza Begum has taught her students what to do when flooding hits. She asked them if they would drink floodwater.

"No, Madam," the whole class chanted. "Flood water can cause diarrhoea," one student replied. Many posters in the school give practical instructions on how to act

during floods, in the local language, including advice to stay away from electricity poles, find a safe place to go in advance, and store books up high. Islam told the Thomson Reuters Foundation the school also conducts drills, where teachers show students how to perform first aid on those injured in floods or earthquakes.

Community benefit

Class Five student Tanjila Akhter said children pass on the information to their parents and neighbors. "Most of my neighbors think I know a lot about floods and other such things, as they get benefit from me," she said. Amina Begum, 35, whose daughter studies at the school, said she had learned a lot from her child.

"We experience floods every year. In the past, we did not have a plan for floods beforehand, but after my daughter told me we should have one, now we work out earlier where we will take shelter during floods, and how to take care of our essential possessions and livestock," she said. "Our loss due to floods is insignificant compared to previous years," she added.

Jahangir Alam, a community leader and member of the school management committee, said the whole village is gaining from the school's disaster management program. "Children are change agents. When they tell their parents about what they have to do during a flood, their parents pay heed to the warnings," he said. —Reuters

S KOREAN OPPOSITION STRUGGLES FOR CLEAR IMPEACHMENT PLAN

SEOUL: South Korean President Park Geun-hye's conditional resignation offer appears to be causing cracks in what previously had been a strong push for her impeachment, with opponents now struggling to set a date for a vote to strip her of power. Park offered Tuesday to leave office if parliament arranges a safe transfer of power, triggering an immediate backlash from opposition parties, which called the overture a stalling tactic to help the president navigate through a huge political scandal involving her shadowy confidante.

Leaders of the country's three main opposition parties met yesterday and agreed to stick with their plan to try to vote on an impeachment motion as early as Friday. But they also said they'd meet again if that plan does not work, meaning they're bracing for the possibility that a Friday vote might not take place. Much of their hesitation to pick a clear date is due to the fact that there are not enough opposi-

tion lawmakers to pass an impeachment through parliament, and they would need help from dissenters in Park's ruling Saenuri Party.

Impeachment motion

The three opposition parties and anti-Park independent lawmakers have a total of 172 seats in the 300-seat National Assembly. A passage of an impeachment motion requires at least 200 votes in favor. About 40 ruling party lawmakers have expressed their willingness to vote to oust Park. But after Park's resignation offer Tuesday, made in an address to the nation, anti-Park lawmakers gathered and agreed it would be best for Park to resign in April, after the installation of a neutral Cabinet that can help ensure a stable power transfer until a new president is elected, according to the office of Hwang Young-cheul, one of the lawmakers who attended the meeting.

They said they would still take part in a possible impeachment vote on Dec 9 if details for an April resignation aren't worked out through negotiations, Hwang's office said. Opposition parties have previously said a vote on Park's impeachment would take place either on Friday or Dec 9, because parliamentary plenary sessions are already scheduled on those days. "It's true that some cracks have taken place at anti-Park forces in the Saenuri Party after her speech," said an official at the main opposition Democratic Party, formerly known by its Korean-language name, Minjoo. The official, who requested anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media, said opposition parties are using unofficial, backroom channels to see if they can still secure enough Saenuri lawmakers who would align with their impeachment drive.

If impeached, Park's presidential powers would be suspended until the Constitutional Court makes

a ruling on her fate. The court would have 180 days to deliberate. Park, in her Tuesday speech, continued to deny accusations by prosecutors that she colluded in the criminal activities of her longtime friend Choi Soon-sil, who, despite having no official role in government, allegedly had a say in policy decisions and exploited her presidential ties to bully companies into giving large sums of money to businesses and foundations that Choi controlled.

Confidential documents

Prosecutors have indicted Choi, two ex-presidential officials and a music video director known as a Choi associate for extortion, leaking confidential documents and other charges. The scandal has sparked mass protests every Saturday in Seoul. About 30,000 anti-Park demonstrators gathered in the city's downtown area yesterday, according to protest organizers. — AP



BANDA ACEH: Indonesian military personnel and officials gather for a photograph with performers during an "Archipelago Unity" gathering, being held across the country to call for peace and reduce tensions ahead of a December 2 protest. — AFP

INDONESIA PROTESTS AWAKEN FEARS FOR MINORITY CHINESE

A COUNTRY WITH A HISTORY OF LASHING OUT

JAKARTA: The capital of Muslim-majority Indonesia is on edge ahead of what is expected to be a second massive protest by conservative Muslims against its Christian governor and no group more so than its Chinese minority. They have reason to be concerned. The movement against the governor, who is being prosecuted for allegedly insulting the Quran, has overflowed with racial slurs against his Chinese ancestry, an unnerving sign in a country with a history of lashing out violently against the ethnic minority that makes up 1 percent of its 250 million people.

The first major protest against Gov. Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama on Nov 4 drew more than 100,000 people to Jakarta's streets. Some held up banners calling for Ahok to be killed or decrying Chinese influence. It ended in violence, with one death and dozens injured after hard-liners attacked police. A separate mob tried to invade the apartment complex where Ahok lives in the north of the city and vandalized property in the area, which is home to many Chinese.

Hard-line organizers of the protest, who were unsatisfied by a police decision earlier this month to formally name Ahok as a suspect in the blasphemy case instead of arresting him, are promising another giant rally on Friday. After police pressure, they have agreed to concentrate the rally around a national monument in central Jakarta and insist it will be peaceful. The furor over Ahok, sparked by his criticism of detractors who argued the Quran prohibits Muslims from having a non-Muslim leader, has highlighted religious and racial fault lines in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and the growing challenge from proponents of Shariah law to its secular system of government.

Painful memories

For Chinese Indonesians, the controversy has awakened painful memories of the mass protests that ousted late dictator Suharto during the 1998 Asian financial crisis. Boiling resentment against immigrant Chinese tycoons who profited from ties to Suharto and his famously corrupt family spilled over into mob attacks on Chinese property and people, killing many. Nearly two decades later, Jakarta's Chinatown is still scarred by the burned out shells of buildings torched in the chaos.

"Certainly as Chinese descendants, we are still traumatized by the riots in 1998," said Clement Alexander, a grocery store owner in a narrow lane of the bustling Petak Sembilan market in Chinatown. "We heard that horrible event may happen again if the government fails to control the protests. It's scared us, but we cannot do anything except pray," he said.

"For rich ethnic Chinese, they could flee to Singapore or to other countries, but for lower-class people like me it is rather difficult, we just survive and depend on the government for protection." When Ahok in 2012 became the first Chinese to be elected deputy governor of Jakarta, and the first Christian in half a century, it was seen as a sign of the pluralistic tolerance fostered by the moderate form of Islam practiced in Indonesia.

But his rise to governor in 2014 to replace political ally Joko "Jokowi" Widodo after his election as president was unpalatable to hard-liners. With the support of moderates that hope to gain from Ahok's fall, they have elevated their agenda to the national stage, and revealed that intolerant interpretations of Islam adapted from

the Middle East have made greater inroads than believed.

Ahok is running for a second term as governor in elections due in February but since the blasphemy accusations erupted in September, his sky-high popularity in opinion polls has melted away. A pro-tolerance rally in Jakarta on Nov. 19 attracted less than 10,000 people. A military-organized event in the city on Wednesday meant to showcase respect for all of Indonesia's six officially recognized religions was mainly populated by soldiers, schoolchildren and police, who had no choice about attending.

Clogged streets

For the Nov 4 protest, the normally clogged streets of Jakarta were nearly emptied of cars, embassies closed, countries such as Australia issued advisories against travel to the city and many businesses shuttered for the day, particularly in Chinatown. "We are afraid the riots in 1998 would be repeated. But I don't want to talk about that horrible event," said Jhony Tan, owner of a store selling Buddhist worship paraphernalia.

"I hope the government can handle this issue, so there's no negative impact to any other community, especially to ethnic Chinese here. If they fail, Indonesia will be ruined," he said. "I'm sure the majority of Indonesian people are willing to see that this problem has nothing to do with us." Christiano Wibisono, an ethnic Chinese businessman and former government adviser whose home was burned in the 1998 riots, said that despite communal tensions, he is hopeful the government will maintain calm during Friday's protest and beyond. — AP

HK'S ANTI-CHINA LAWMAKERS LOSE APPEAL OVER SEAT BAN

HONG KONG: Two pro-independence Hong Kong lawmakers lost their appeal yesterday against a ban preventing them from taking up their seats in parliament as Beijing faces accusations of stepping up interference in the city's politics. Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching deliberately misread their oaths of office, inserted expletives and draped themselves with "Hong Kong is not China" flags during a swearing-in ceremony in October.

Speaking after yesterday's judgment, an angry Leung said the "invisible hand" of Beijing had intervened in Hong Kong's affairs. Leung and Yau were voted in to parliament in citywide polls in September which saw several rebel candidates take seats for the first time, advocating either independence or self-determination for Hong Kong.

The new movement supporting a possible split from Beijing for the semi-autonomous city has gained traction as young pro-democracy campaigners grow increasingly frustrated with a lack of political reform. Beijing hit out at the pair in a special "interpretation" of the city's constitution earlier in November that effectively prevented them from taking up their seats because of the way they took the oath.

Following Beijing's protest, Hong Kong's High Court ruled the two lawmakers should be disqualified from the legislature because their oaths were invalid, in an unprecedented judicial review brought by the city's leader and justice secretary. Yau and Leung appealed, but lost out yesterday in a judgment that took Beijing's ruling into account, amid criticism that the separation of powers in Hong Kong has been compromised.

The Court of Appeal's judgment referred to Beijing's ruling as giving the "true meaning" to the part of the constitution that requires lawmakers to take an oath of alle-

giance to Hong Kong as a special administrative region of China. The judgment said the court's duty to apply the city's constitution, known as the Basic Law, outweighed the doctrine of separation of powers and non-intervention.

'Political suppression'

Yau and Baggio were originally offered a second chance at taking the oath by the president of the legislature, but Beijing stepped in to prevent that. Its special interpretation of the Basic Law ruled that any oath-taker who does not follow the prescribed wording of the oath, "or takes the oath in a manner which is not sincere or not solemn", should be disqualified.

Yesterday's appeal judgment said there could be "no dispute" that Yau and Leung had declined to take the oath. Leung said he did not believe he had done anything wrong. "The way the oath incident has developed from an affair within Hong Kong to what it is now is unexpected to us all," he told reporters. Leung said the pair were actively considering their next step but had not decided whether to proceed to the Court of Final Appeal.

The judgment came as the government announced plans to take a third newly elected lawmaker to court over her oath-taking. The department of justice said it would initiate proceedings against teacher Lau Siu-lai, a prominent activist who made her name during the city's mass pro-democracy rallies in 2014 and now advocates self-determination for Hong Kong.

It gave no further detail on the grounds for the case. Lau's oath was rejected during her swearing in as she read the pledge at a snail's pace, leaving long gaps between every word. She was later given a second chance to read it and was able to take up her seat. Lau slammed the decision to take her to court as "political suppression". — AFP



HONG KONG: Democratically elected lawmaker, teacher Lau Siu-lai (C), from the 'Democracy Groundwork' party, holds a press conference with other lawmakers at the Legislative Council (Legco). — AFP

PHILIPPINES ENDS SIEGE AGAINST REBELS PLEDGED TO ISLAMIC STATE

MANILA: Troops in the southern Philippines retook a disused building from Muslim militants yesterday, ending an intense five-day siege that killed dozens of fighters the authorities say had pledged allegiance to Islamic State. The incident highlights the challenges facing President Rodrigo Duterte in keeping order in the Philippines, particularly in his native south, riven by nationalist rebellions for decades.

The military stepped up its offensive after the weekend, pounding rebels holed up in a disused municipal hall with artillery and bombs dropped from aircraft. The army said 30 security forces were wounded and 61 rebels killed in the operation. The militants belonged to the Maute group, one of several Islamist groups in the country's restive south.

The siege ended as Duterte visited injured soldiers in Lanao del Sur province, where seven of his advance security party were wounded on Tuesday, when suspected Maute militias set off a bomb under their truck. "The town is deserted and the Maute is withdrawing towards the mountain," said military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla. "They have been decimated. The capability to sustain and get back to the fight is no longer there."

The government suspects the Maute group in a Sept. 2 bombing in Duterte's

home city, Davao, which killed 14 people and wounded more than 70. Last week Duterte appealed to the Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf to disarm and start talks. He urged them to halt piracy and kidnapping and not retaliate on civilians for military operations to drive the rebels from their island strongholds. Duterte has recently warned Islamic State could take root in the Philippines and stressed the need to avoid "contamination", a risk also faced by neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia.

The former mayor, who is overseeing a drugs crackdown that has killed more than 2,500 people, offered an olive branch to Maute, questioning why it wanted to take orders from Islamic State. "Maute, they are inspired by ISIS," Duterte said. "As harsh as I can ever be." Separately, two men were arrested on Monday north of the capital, Manila, over the planting of a homemade bomb near the US embassy. The device was detonated safely by police, who suspect the Maute of being behind it. — Reuters

AT REVOLT SITE, FILIPINOS PROTEST MARCOS BURIAL

MANILA: Thousands of Filipino protesters returned yesterday to the site of a 1986 revolt that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, this time to condemn his burial at a heroes' cemetery. Police said at least 3,000 people gathered at the "People Power" monument along the main EDSA highway in metropolitan Manila, chanting "Dig

him up." Protesters held up pro-democracy placards, including one that read, "Keep calm and democracy will die."

Millions gathered three decades ago at the site just outside the main military and police camps in a largely peaceful uprising to oust Marcos, ending a presidency marked by massive

corruption and human rights violations. Yesterday's protest was the latest in a growing political storm following the Nov. 18 burial, which was allowed by President Rodrigo Duterte and upheld by the Supreme Court amid protests by anti-Marcos groups.

The rally speakers included Maria Serena Diokno, who resigned Tuesday as head of the government's historical commission to protest the burial. "We should never forget our history," Diokno said. "We won't allow even a part of the dictatorship to return." A few thousand activists gathered separately last week in a "Black Friday" protest at Manila's seaside Rizal Park, where they carried Marcos' effigy in a mock coffin.

Duterte, whose father served in Marcos's Cabinet, allowed the burial on grounds that there was no law barring his interment at the Heroes' Cemetery, where presidents, soldiers, statesmen and national artists are buried. It was a political risk in a country where democracy advocates still celebrate Marcos's ouster each year. Duterte's decision was upheld earlier this month by the Supreme Court. Marcos opponents had 15 days to appeal the decision, but Marcos's family, backed by Duterte's defense and military officials, buried him in a secrecy-shrouded ceremony with military honors at the cemetery. The stealthy burial enraged democracy advocates and sparked protests in Manila and other cities, including in southern Davao city, the president's hometown. — AP



MANILA: Anti-Marcos activists shout slogans during a protest at the People Power monument against the burial of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos at the Heroes' Cemetery. — AFP

TRUMP TO LEAVE BUSINESS TO FOCUS...

Continued from Page 1

Trump has admitted the hotel's brand is probably "hotter" now that he is the president, but has vaguely promised to "phase out" his hands-on, check-signing role in Trump Organization business.

Meanwhile, the Republican is building the cabinet team that will join him in the capital after his Jan 20 inauguration with a mission to "drain the swamp" of Washington corruption. So far, aside from former generals sidelined by President Barack Obama's administration, Trump has focused on recruiting super-rich conservative figures from Wall Street and private business. On Tuesday, Trump dined on frog legs, scallops and sirloin at a Michelin-starred restaurant with Mitt Romney, former Massachusetts governor and private equity baron.

Romney's own failed 2012 campaign for the presidency foundered in part because Democrats tagged him as a member of an aloof, super-rich elite, but Trump is considering him as a possible secretary of state. The latest two figures Trump has nominated for senior roles - Wall Street veteran Steven Mnuchin and stressed asset investor Wilbur Ross - are both billionaires and even richer than Romney.

Trump's defeated Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, was attacked during the campaign for accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars for giving private speeches to Goldman Sachs bankers. But Trump, having already named former Goldman banker Steve Bannon as his chief strategist, this week nominated another, Mnuchin, for the key role of Treasury secretary. Mnuchin was a partner in Goldman Sachs before he launched an investment fund

backed by Democratic Party supporter George Soros. He financed Hollywood blockbusters like "Avatar" and "Suicide Squad".

Alongside Mnuchin, Trump picked Ross, best known for investing in failing steel and coal firms and turning them into saleable investments, as commerce secretary. Appearing with Ross on CNBC, 53-year-old Mnuchin said: "We're thrilled to be here and we're thrilled to work for the president-elect and honored to have these positions."

Mnuchin's appointment is widely seen as a reward for taking Trump's side at a time when many of the Republican Party's major donors, such as the billionaire Koch brothers, had shunned him. Trump's picks are the first major nominations to his economic policy team. The president-elect has vowed to cut corporate taxes and to encourage multinational companies to repatriate their earnings. He plans to scrap the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial reforms, enacted to protect consumers and the financial system from Wall Street excesses that some argue caused the financial crisis.

Ross has advocated a steep tariff on Chinese steel imports to prevent what Trump has alleged is the dumping of cheap commodities on the US market. Today, Trump was scheduled to embark on a victory tour of sorts, leading an evening rally with his running mate Mike Pence in Cincinnati, Ohio. The pair are also to appear earlier in the day at the Indianapolis plant of an air conditioning firm that announced yesterday it would maintain 1,000 jobs in the Rust Belt - a pledge Trump had made during the campaign. The transition team has dubbed it a "thank you tour". — AFP



An Emirati man carries balloons yesterday in the "Flags Garden", featuring 4,000 UAE flags creating the shape of the country's map, two days ahead of UAE National Day in Dubai. — AP

ALWALEED: LET WOMEN DRIVE

Continued from Page 1

He calculated that families spend an average of 3,800 riyals (\$1,000) a month on a driver, money which otherwise could help household incomes at a time when many are making do with less.

Even if their husbands can take time out to transport the women, that requires temporarily leaving the office and "undermines the productivity of the workforce", Alwaleed said. "Having women drive has become an urgent social demand predicated upon current economic circumstances." The prince said he is making his call on behalf of those with "limited means".

Activists say women's driving is not technically illegal but that the ban is linked to tradition and custom. Some women have challenged the prohibition by getting behind the wheel and posting images of themselves

online. A slow expansion of women's rights began under the late king Abdullah, who in 2013 named them to the Shura Council which advises cabinet. Abdullah also announced that women could for the first time vote and run in municipal elections, which were held last December. These and other decisions were initially opposed by "certain elements" in Saudi society but soon became accepted, Alwaleed said, calling for "a similarly decisive" political act.

In April, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said change cannot be forced, and "it is up to Saudi society". In Alwaleed's view, however, "what cannot be allowed is to have one segment imposing its preferences on the rest of society". Sahar Hassan Nasief, a women's rights activist in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, said the appeal from such an influential figure could help to bring about change. "Everybody's talking about him," she told AFP. "I think his comments gave us a lot of hope." — AFP

RIYADH MOTOR SHOW BACK IN GEAR

Continued from Page 1

Economic cutbacks will be accompanied by a drop in automobile sales this year, Aboumerhi said. "As for Hyundai, we are still maintaining our market share," with sales of about 50,000 units per year which places it second in the Saudi market, he said. The motor show, which the Arab News daily said drew an estimated 10,000 visitors on the opening day, is a chance for dealers to show off their latest models and to even take orders.

Onsite bankers are ready to help with financing. "The economy, it's not really good," said Hassan Abdulaziz, manning the Toyota display which included a Hilux diesel pickup truck that sells for 104,000 riyals (\$27,733). Around him, Saudi men in traditional white thobes lifted bonnets and sat in the driver's seats.

Marketing student Waleed Mubarak sounded optimistic about the kingdom's prospects as he looked for a new car with a budget of 150,000 riyals. "There's no problem with the economy now in Saudi Arabia," he said. Another visitor, Abdullah Bajabar, wasn't so sure. Having just returned from several years in Canada, he said he needs a car even though "the economic situation is difficult".

Other visitors seemed more interested in filming themselves and the vehicles, which included monster trucks and a yellow sports car slung so low it seemed to touch the floor. A young Saudi man in Western clothes

preened in a convertible while taking a selfie. Across the aisle, a DJ spun hip hop tunes beside a display of colored wheel rims and a vintage Chevrolet.

Even though the conservative kingdom is the world's only country where women cannot drive, visitors included a few women dressed in traditional black abaya robes. There were no scantily clad females helping to promote the cars, as occurs in many countries. A luxury car show in Saudi Arabia's slightly more liberal Red Sea city of Jeddah was reportedly sanctioned after it used female sales promoters.

Local media reported last month that pictures on social media showed young Saudi women posing in long white robes with their faces uncovered in front of a car display. Jeddah will next month host the annual Saudi International Motor Show, the kingdom's largest. Organizers of that event say Saudi Arabia is the Middle East's biggest importer of vehicles and auto parts.

A car remains essential for getting around Saudi cities crisscrossed by multi-lane highways, where public transit projects are under development but not yet finished. For Hyundai's Aboumerhi, Saudi Arabia's intensified effort to diversify its oil-dependent economy should lead to an improvement next year. "By the end of this year there will be a lot of changes, positive changes, which will reflect for sure on the automotive sector," Aboumerhi said. — AFP

OPEC AGREES ON FIRST OUTPUT CUT SINCE 2008

Continued from Page 1

Iran has only been able to freely to export oil since last year's nuclear deal came into force in January, and wants to return to pre-sanctions output levels. The dispute was complicated by the fierce rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, backing different sides in the wars in Yemen and Syria. Fawad Razaqada, a market analyst at Forex.com, said before OPEC's announcement that Iran was "playing a clever game" against its archrival.

But Saudi Arabia also played hardball, saying it was prepared to leave the Austrian capital without a deal. Energy Minister Khaled Al-Falih had said recovering demand will boost prices next year - cut or no cut. Even though expectations were therefore low, failure to get a deal would have sent oil prices tumbling, perhaps as low as \$30 per barrel, analysts had said. Also it would have reignited debate about the very purpose of OPEC, 56 years after its creation.

Saudi Arabia would contribute around 0.5 million bpd by reducing output to 10.06 million bpd, a source said, while Iran would freeze output at close to current levels of 3.797 million bpd and other members would also cut production. "OPEC has proved to the skeptics that it is not dead. The move will speed up market rebalancing and erosion of the global oil glut," said OPEC watcher Amrita Sen from Energy Aspects.

Focus will now turn to OPEC's efforts to get non-members, in particular Russia, to reduce their output by a hoped-for 600,000 bpd. Russia has said it is ready only to freeze production but Sada said yesterday that Russia

has committed to reducing its output by 300,000 bpd. Before the meeting, Falih said OPEC was focusing on significant cuts and hoped Russia and other non-OPEC producers would contribute a reduction of another 0.6 million bpd. "It will mean that we (Saudi) take a big cut and a big hit from our current production and from our forecast for 2017," Falih said. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh yesterday said he was positive since Iran had not been asked to cut output. He also said Russia was ready to reduce production. "Moscow have agreed to reduce their production and cut after our decision," Zanganeh said.

While consumers might not welcome the more expensive fuel that a deal would bring, OPEC members' public finances have been shot to bits by two years of rock-bottom prices. It has exacerbated an already desperate situation in Venezuela, where Human Rights Watch says shortages of basics are so bad that there is a "profound humanitarian crisis". Even fabulously wealthy Saudi Arabia has slashed salaries and spending and is on course for a budget deficit of \$87 billion in 2016, and owes foreign firms billions in unpaid bills. The low crude price has also hit investment in oil facilities, raising the prospect of oil shortages further down the line.

However, further downwards pressure on oil prices could come from the United States and president-elect Donald Trump, whose policies could see a renewed rise in US oil production. Trump has promised to eliminate regulations restricting fracking, support oil and gas pipeline construction and open restricted federal lands and offshore areas for exploration, including Alaska. — Agencies

AMIR REAPPOINTS SHEIKH JABER AS PM

Continued from Page 1

to refrain from voting in the election of the speaker and other posts in the Assembly, including panels. MP Mohamad Al-Huwailah also said the present political situation requires the election of a new speaker for the new Assembly. Mutair said the meeting also discussed how to tackle the most urgent issues of revocation of citizenships and scrapping laws passed by the previous Assembly, which curb public freedoms. The meeting agreed to prepare a roadmap for dealing with the legislative requirements in the new Assembly. They agreed the need to amend the voting system, prohibit withdrawal of citizenships without a court ruling and pro-

pose economic reforms and measures that do not add any burden on citizens.

Newly-elected Islamist opposition MP Abdullah Fahhad said two messages have already been sent to the government - one by the ballot boxes and the second by the opposition MPs' meeting yesterday. He said the government must understand these messages. MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said the threat to dissolve the Assembly no longer scares opposition MPs. He said he expects the new Assembly to be dissolved and fresh elections in Jan 2018. New MP Ahmad Al-Fadhli, the son of late pro-government MP Nabil Al-Fadhli, strongly criticized the opposition lawmakers' meeting, saying such meetings divide the Assembly.

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Focus

SUBWAY HIGHLIGHTS
INFRASTRUCTURE WOES

By Ian Simpson

Hailed as "America's Subway" when it began operating 40 years ago, Washington's Metro transit system now could serve as Exhibit A for the US infrastructure woes President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to fix. Crucial to helping the federal government run smoothly, the second-busiest US subway is facing falling ridership, accidents, a \$290 million budget gap, job cuts and soaring costs to fix its crumbling rail lines.

Its problems became clear in March when the system shut down for a day of safety inspections following a fire. That caused commuter chaos in the nation's capital, leaving workers scrambling to find transportation via buses, carpools and bikes. Passenger traffic has fallen nearly 20 percent from a 2009 peak, with former riders finding other ways to get to work or telecommuting to avoid the trains. This has set off a vicious cycle of lower revenues leading to service cuts and higher fares that drive more riders away.

The head of the system's largest union says the Metro is in a "death spiral," and analysts suggest its only way out could be bankruptcy or a federal takeover. Trump's vow for \$1 trillion in infrastructure spending across the country offered a rare glimmer of hope to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, which oversees the subway.

"Since he is a Republican and we have a Republican Congress, there is now no excuse for not getting this done," said authority Chairman Jack Evans, who has backed a federal takeover of the 190 km system. The system is of particular concern to federal officials since many of the 700,000 people who ride it each day work for the US government. When it struggles to stay open during snowstorms, it often snarls government operations.

Metro is far from alone in falling behind, with subways in nearby New York and Boston also facing billions of dollars in delayed maintenance. Nationwide, the US public transit system faces an \$86 billion repair backlog, according to the American Public Transportation Association. Washington's subway has long been plagued by safety systems that the National Transportation Safety Board this year called "fundamentally flawed." Eighteen passengers and workers have died since 2005, according to the Federal Transit Administration. The agency took over safety supervision last year, the first time a subway system has come under US government oversight for such lapses.

Repair Costs Soar

Metro General Manager General Manager Paul Wiedefeld said he would have moved a lot faster to fix some of the issues had he known the extent of the problems when he took the job a year ago. "We are working very hard to do the best that we can for the agency and for this region," Wiedefeld told a news conference this month. He has said the repair program will cost \$60 million, but a federal report this month said the final price tag could be double that.

Much of the trouble at Metro, which also carries many of the 21 million tourists who visit Washington each year, results from a two-track design that means trains cannot be diverted for repairs or traffic. The system sprawls from Washington into neighboring Maryland and Virginia. It relies on those states, as well as federal and local governments, to cover close to half its costs.

Washington's Democratic mayor has proposed a 1-cent sales tax to fund the system, an idea the Virginia and Maryland governors rejected. In a proposed \$1.8 billion budget for the fiscal year beginning in July that Wiedefeld called "a reality check," Metro warned it would need to run trains less frequently and raise fares to offset declining revenue. Metro workers flooded a board meeting this month to condemn the proposed cuts, which include hundreds of layoffs. "Metro's budget should not be balanced on the backs of riders and workers," said Steve Williams, vice president of Teamsters Local 922.

But cost cuts are not keeping up with the decline in revenue, and Metro will have to ask for another \$130 million from the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland to close a projected \$290 million shortfall in its next budget. —Reuters



TRUMP CLAIMS MIRROR CONSPIRACY WEBSITE

Some of the most incendiary claims made by Donald Trump - both before and after his election - appear to be based on a US website denounced as a purveyor of hoaxes and conspiracy theories. The president-elect's unsubstantiated claim this week that "millions" of people voted illegally in this month's election had been reported on the infowars.com website, based on a study debunked by the online fact-check group Snopes and others.

It was not the first time Trump had repeated information reported in infowars, a site operated by radio host Alex Jones, who is known for claims that the 9/11 attacks were faked by the US government. During the White House campaign, Trump had repeated claims made on infowars that his rival Hillary Clinton was "wearing an earpiece" and that Muslims had celebrated during the Sept 11 attacks.

Left-leaning media watchdog group Media Matters for America has documented dozens of instances where Trump has recycled claims from Jones and infowars. Trump has not repeated some of the most outlandish claims on infowars - that aliens from space had landed in Florida or that the mass killing of children at Sandy Hook Elementary School was faked to win support for gun control - but critics say that it would be troubling for the president-elect to rely on the site for information.

"A lot of what he (Jones) says is just pure nonsense," said Angelo Carusone of Media Matters. "What he is presenting is an alternative universe. He is advancing a broader world view that there is a global world government and every day they are going out there to take away your power." For Carusone, it remains unclear if Trump believes what was published on infowars or is merely pandering to its readers, but he said either scenario would be disturbing.

Fear of Sharia

For example, Carusone said that infowars ran "completely fabricated" stories saying that Muslims were imposing sharia law in US cities. "If the president believes that and starts to make policy based on the belief that we have sharia law, we have a problem," said Carusone. Infowars has nonetheless amassed a significant reader base - with some 14.3 million unique global visitors and 75 million views over the past month, according to the web intelligence firm Quantcast.

Other spectacular - and wholly unsubstantiated - stories on the site included claims that Clinton was involved in a child pedophilia ring operated out of a Washington pizza parlor, and that juice boxes had been laced with chemicals to induce homosexuality in children. In the most recent incident, Trump appeared to echo the claim by infowars that he would have won the popular vote against Clinton in addition to the Electoral College if votes by illegal immigrants were discounted. As it stands, Clinton won the popular vote by more than two million ballots and both experts and officials across the political spectrum have disparaged Trump's unsubstantiated claim of mass fraud.

Trump was interviewed during the campaign by Jones, who also claimed to have had several phone conversations with the Republican billionaire, raising concerns about influence on policy. "Alex Jones is the most prolific and unhinged conspiracy theorist in America," said Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights group which monitors "hate groups." "The fact that our president-elect treats him as if he were a serious thinker and critic is appalling. This is a man who believes, among other things, that the government is responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing, the Boston Marathon attack, the mass murder in Orlando, Florida, and any number of other similar attacks by terrorists." —AFP

THE POWER OF 'FAKE NEWS'

The Internet rumor had the makings of a bizarrely sordid scandal involving a top political aide to Hillary Clinton, allegations of pedophilia and a restaurant in an upscale part of Washington. It ended in death threats against a small business owner - and became a shocking case study in the dangers of the growing prevalence of "fake news". The fake news phenomenon has sent major internet companies scrambling to respond amid claims that bogus reports that proliferated ahead of the US presidential election may have skewed the result.

This episode started in October after WikiLeaks published a batch of hacked emails from John Podesta, the chairman of Clinton's presidential campaign. Journalists and others have pored over the tens of thousands of stolen communications in search of politically relevant information. But some readers honed in on a handful of innocuous messages recounting a Clinton fundraiser involving James Alefantis, the owner of a popular Washington pizzeria called Comet.

Almost immediately, "pizzagate" was born as right-leaning conspiracy theorists on the discussion sites 4chan and Reddit claimed Comet was not just a purveyor of pizza and beer but in fact a sinister front hiding a politically connected pedophile ring. Word quickly spread. "They've apparently uncovered an elite child trafficking network which celebrates its tendencies using code words and disturbing artworks," alleged the website The Vigilant Citizen, which claims to study symbols.

In this world, nothing was innocent. Nude paintings on the walls were suspect. Patterns on a child's dress or the menu revealed supposed pedophile symbols and a picture of a girl playing with masking tape was evidence of sexual abuse. Theorists even resorted to the French language in search of potential codes: the name James Alefantis was supposedly derived from the French phrase for "I love children".

As the Nov 8 election drew near, hundreds of threatening messages flooded Alefantis's Instagram account. The restaurant's Facebook page was also barraged with negative comments.

"My first reaction was there's a bunch of crazies out there. Everyone is hyped up about the election, so it will go away," Alefantis told AFP. "But instead it went the other direction."

'Weaponized' Social Media

After Donald Trump's shock victory, things got even worse. "It was a combination of people telling us that they were going to come and do something or that we've been found out and that we should show where the tunnels are," Alefantis told AFP. To all appearances, there is nothing untoward about Comet. Friendly and stylish, the restaurant is divided into several areas, including one with ping-pong and Fussball tables, and stages for alternative rock performances in the evening. "Comet is a place that bridges," said neighborhood resident Leslie Harris who is helping the restaurant respond to the onslaught. "In the early evening, people with strollers bring their little kids in for pizzas. It's an adult hang out but the irony of it is that it has also been this safe place for our teenagers."

Alefantis believes the "coordinated and orchestrated attack" was in reality retribution for his political views and his support of Democrats. "I'm an independent business owner and I feel I have the right to make decisions on who I support and how I utilize my resources," he said. Alefantis has contacted the local police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation but there is little that can be done for the time being. Under pressure, Reddit has closed the "pizzagate" discussion, citing "repeated violations of the terms of our content policy."

But the attacks have not ended. "It would be like whack-a-mole," said Claire Wardle of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism. "It's impossible to regulate or to police these places so instead we have to think of other ways to give users tools to recognize what's trustworthy or not." In the meantime, Alefantis is calling for greater social media awareness. "It has to be recognized within the broader society that social media can be weaponized," he said. "You can be easily taken down or destroyed by this sort of attacks." —AFP

PARK AGAIN BUYS TIME, BUT FAILURE LOOMS

She pulled off a deft bit of political maneuvering, probably born of desperation. Now South Korea's president has a sliver of breathing space as impeachment closes in and millions through the streets to clamor for her to just go away. For Park Geun-hye, the next few days, perhaps the most crucial in her presidency, will determine what political price she will pay, and exactly how much time she has bought. Lawmakers want to impeach Park over prosecutors' allegations she allowed a confidante to pull government strings and pursue extortion schemes.

Her offer to shorten her term in office if a bickering parliament can set up a legal pathway to do so has been widely criticized as a stalling ploy aimed at luring back members of her conservative party who supported impeachment. That support by former Park loyalists is crucial if a coalition of opposition parties is going to secure the necessary impeachment votes.

Park's conditional resignation proposal, if it delays impeachment, could give her time to search for a way to exit with some sense of grace, rather than be impeached and stripped of power while a court reviews whether to drive her from office. To some extent, she has already succeeded in wriggling some of the way out from what had very recently looked like an impossible political situation. What had seemed to be an inexorable legislative march toward impeachment has slowed, though it's not yet clear how much.

Some of Park's former allies who'd turned against her now say that an impeachment vote originally planned for tomorrow should be pushed back a week. Some influential members of her ruling party also called yesterday for impeachment efforts to pause while lawmakers examine how to set up a legal roadmap for Park's resignation proposal.

Opposition parties agreed yesterday to push for an impeachment vote tomorrow, but will regroup and try again Dec 9 if they don't have enough initial support to impeach

Park over what prosecutors say was collusion with Choi Soon-sil, a confidante who allegedly had a large say in government

affairs. Choi held no official government position, and allegedly used her ties to the president to pressure companies into giving money to foundations and companies Choi controlled or established. Park denies prosecutors' claims.

While the politicians scramble to regroup, the president's speech has angered many citizens. After all, they say, if Park really cared about what most South Koreans say they want, she would have simply resigned. Instead, she appears to be looking to regain just enough of her former allies' backing to at least delay the effort to get the necessary two-thirds support needed in parliament for impeachment.

This puts opposition lawmakers in something of a bind. Where they once had a strong momentum for impeachment provided by huge protests each weekend, they now may face painful negotiations in a deeply divided parliament. This means navigating a splintered ruling party and the sometimes conflicting views of various opposition parties. Although unlikely, legislative squabbling could even allow Park to limp across the finish line of her single, five-year term in early 2018.

All the while, everyone must gauge how this will play in Dec 2017 presidential elections, and the widely expected presidential campaign of Ban Ki-moon, who is finishing up his term as UN secretary general. So Park may have bought herself some time. But she has done nothing to change the widespread feeling here that she must go. If lawmakers fail to impeach her tomorrow, this may become especially clear on Saturday.

As has happened the last five Saturdays, hundreds of thousands of people are again expected to choke downtown Seoul's streets in a party-like atmosphere of defiance. This could allow lawmakers to win back the energy they will need to unite disparate groups in parliament and push through an impeachment vote. In the end, Park's political machinations may only delay the inevitable. —AP



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SWING KING AKRAM TO TRAIN S LANKA PACERS

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka yesterday said it has roped in legendary Pakistan pacesman Wasim Akram as a mentor ahead of the team's gruelling tour of South Africa next month. Akram, 50, will conduct a day-long coaching clinic in Colombo today, Sri Lanka Cricket said, in what would be the first of a series of programmes involving foreign experts. "We are honoured that Akram has accepted our invitation to be a part of this initiative," Sri Lanka Cricket chief Thilanga Sumathipala said. Sumathipala also said the 2019 World Cup could be within the grasp of Sri Lanka if the team is given the right guidance. Sri Lanka won the World Cup in 1996 but choked twice in the finals of the 2007 and 2011 editions. The latest coaching session comes as the victorious team returned home Tuesday after beating Zimbabwe in a two-Test series in Harare and lifting a triangular tournament that also involved the West Indies. Regarded as one of the best left-arm pacemen ever to grace the game, Akram took 414 Test wickets and 502 in 356 one-day internationals-both still a Pakistan record. Sri Lanka are set to tour South Africa for three Tests, three T20 matches and five ODIs starting December 26, with national coach Graham Ford warning of a tough challenge against the formidable Proteas. — AFP

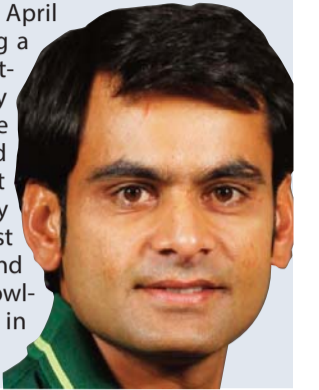


EL CLASICO TO HOLD MINUTE'S SILENCE FOR AIR CRASH VICTIMS

MADRID: Saturday's blockbuster La Liga clash between Barcelona and Real Madrid will be preceded by a minute's silence for the 71 people killed in a plane crash that decimated the Brazilian football team Chapecoense. "Every day and every weekend there are hundreds of thousands of players travelling in cars, buses, trains and planes... they are always exposed to this risk of accidents," said La Liga president Javier Tebas on Wednesday. "We want to recognise, remember and offer our condolences to the families." A minute's silence will also be held before all matches in the Copa del Rey across Spain on today. Madrid, Barca and Atletico Madrid were among a host of Spanish clubs to express shock and sadness at the plane crash in Colombia on Tuesday. Former Atletico midfielder Cleber Santana was one of those killed as the plane went down just before reaching its destination in Medellin, where Chapecoense were to play in a Copa Sudamericana final. Three Chapecoense players were among six survivors rescued from the wreckage.—AFP

ICC CLEARS HAFEEZ'S BOWLING ACTION

ISLAMABAD: Mohammad Hafeez's bowling action was cleared by the International Cricket Council yesterday, and the Pakistan offspinner can resume bowling in internationals. Hafeez was reassessed in Brisbane on Nov. 17, when it was revealed that the amount of elbow extension for all of his offspin deliveries was within the allowed 15-degree level of tolerance. He was first suspended from bowling in November 2014, and reassessed and permitted to resume bowling in April 2015. He was reported again in June 2015 during a test against Sri Lanka at Galle, and was subsequently suspended from bowling for 12 months in July 2015 after an independent assessment revealed he employed an illegal bowling action for the second time in 24 months. The ICC said in a statement that umpires were still able to report Hafeez if they believe he was displaying a suspect action. To assist the umpires, they will be provided with images and video footage of the bowler's remodeled legal bowling action. Hafeez has 52 wickets in tests, 129 in ODIs, and 46 in T20s. — AP



ACICO PARTICIPATES IN ANNUAL CHARITABLE EVENT OF RUNQ8



KUWAIT: Contributing to the events of the annual charitable RUNQ8 benefiting the Fawziya Al Sultan Center for Treatment & Development of Special Needs Children, ACICO Group - Kuwait's leading Construction Materials Manufacturer - eagerly participated in support of this noble cause.

Conveying her delight, Eng Ghosson Al Khaled - Deputy Chief Executive Officer of ACICO Industries, expressed the importance the company associates with participation in such community events that contribute towards shedding light on social challenges that require attention from all sectors of society.

Al Khaled stressed that this participation comes within the scope of ACICO's corporate social responsibility plans that aim to strengthen relations between the company and the active institutions within the community.

Al Khaled extended her appreciation to all ACICO participants for their conscientious involvement in this noble humanitarian cause, and was delighted as one of ACICO's participants earned the 8th place completing 5k at this charitable race. She also expressed her deep gratitude to the organizers and those responsible for the event wishing them all the best and success for their future.

BACH LAUDS RIO, TELLS TOKYO 'TO SHOW THE WAY'

TOKYO: The head of the International Olympic Committee yesterday praised the Rio Games for overcoming significant difficulties, while urging 2020 host Tokyo to put its own stamp on the event.

IOC President Thomas Bach addressed the close of a debriefing event held in Tokyo to reflect on Rio's experiences and share tips with future host cities.

Rio, faced "extremely difficult political circumstances in Brazil", Bach said via live video from Switzerland, adding it also faced "financial, social and ethical" issues.

Despite that, the Games were "the most consumed games ever in Olympic history," he said, adding this was down to the hard work of the organisers.

The 2016 Rio Olympics were generally seen as successful despite Brazil's political and economic crisis as well as security and attendance problems. The three-day meeting drew senior officials from the IOC and Olympic organisers from both Rio and Tokyo as well as their respective mayors. But it was focused mostly on broad issues including logistics, planning and communication, while problems that have plagued the Olympics such as doping were not on the agenda, officials said.

"The topic was not discussed," IOC official Christophe Dubi, told a press conference after the meeting.

"However it's fair to recognise the report that has been produced," he added, referring to a November 2015 bombshell World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) study that unveiled systematic state-sponsored doping and corruption.

Among other attendees were South Korea's Pyeongchang, host of the Winter Games in 2018, and Beijing, which is holding them in 2022. Bach said Tokyo should "show the way for future organisers how well Olympic Games can be organised in a sustainable and feasible way."

Tokyo vice governor Takashi Yamamoto also praised Rio and said the Japanese capital will follow in its footsteps.

"Even with financial constraints, Rio achieved success by tapping private sector capital," he said at the meeting. "That's something Tokyo must learn from."

Tokyo is under intense pressure to slash costs amid warnings that the 2022 Games could cost an eye-popping \$30 billion-four times the initial estimate and almost triple that of the 2012 London Olympics.

On Tuesday, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike dropped a proposal to move a canoeing and rowing venue outside the capital, instead vowing to cut construction costs on that and another facility, while delaying a decision on whether to build a new volleyball facility or use an existing one. —AFP

TOKYO ORGANIZERS PROMISE COST-CUTTING FOR OLYMPICS

TOKYO: Hoping to avoid last-minute financial pressures, Japanese officials said yesterday they are determined to keep total costs of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Games below 2 trillion yen (\$18 billion) after a three-day debriefing from organizers of the Rio de Janeiro Games.

Rio was forced to make cuts up to the opening of this year's games because the Brazilian economy went into severe recession after the Olympics were awarded in 2009.

Tokyo's estimated costs have ballooned in the face of construction costs that have soared since the city launched its bid for the Olympics in 2011 and secured the games in 2013.

"We're committed to reducing costs," Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto said after the debriefing wrapped up. "The city government, the national government and the organizing committee must all work together."

A Tokyo government panel has said the cost of the Olympics could exceed \$30 billion - four times the initial estimate - unless drastic cuts are made. Muto proposed putting a 2 trillion yen (\$18 billion) cap on total Olympic costs but IOC vice president John Coates said the ceiling was too high. "The figure of 2 trillion is a starting point," Muto said. "From there we will move to reduce it further. Mr. Coates has said it should be lower and we agree with that." More than 500 officials took part in the debriefing sessions here that are aimed at drawing lessons from the Rio Games for Tokyo and other future organizers.

Representatives of the International Olympic Committee, Tokyo organizers and Japan's central and city governments have been meeting in Tokyo to discuss ways of reducing costs.

Tokyo Olympic organizers agreed Tuesday to keep the rowing, canoe sprint and swimming venues at their planned sites in Tokyo, rather than moving them to existing venues outside the capital. A decision on a possible switch of the volleyball venue was postponed until late December. Coates, who heads the IOC's coordination commission for the Tokyo Games, emphasized the need to resolve issues quickly. "The sooner you get out there and arrive at entering into your various procurement contracts to commence construction then the cheaper it's going to be," he said.

Tokyo initially won the bid on a promise to stage a compact games but has moved several events to neighboring prefectures since beating out Istanbul and Madrid in the IOC voting.

Basketball will be staged in Saitama, a one-hour train ride north of Tokyo, while cycling was transferred to Izu, over two hours away from the capital. In addition to the IOC executives and representatives from Rio and Tokyo, the debriefing was attended by organizers of the 2018 Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, and 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, as well as delegations from the three bid cities for the 2024 Olympics - Paris, Budapest and Los Angeles. —AP



TOKYO: John Coates, chairperson of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Coordination Commission for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, gestures as he makes a speech during the closing plenary session of the three-day IOC Debriefing meeting of the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

KDSC TO HOLD ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: Kuwait Disabled Sports Club (KDSC) will organize the Annual International Festival Day for solidarity with the disabled next Saturday at the club premises. The festival includes a sports tournament for the disabled that will continue until December 6. KDSC Chairman Shafi Al-Hajiri said the festival is under the



Shafi Al-Hajiri

patronage of Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. Al-Hajiri said the festival's operetta is an honoring of Kuwait's athletics players Ahmad Naqa for winning the gold medal in the Paralympics. He said Kuwait's shooter Fuhaid Al-Daihani will also be honored.



IOC President Thomas Bach

VICTORIOUS KUWAIT TENNIS PLAYERS RETURN HOME

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Tennis team that won the doubles gold medal in the men's and juniors Arab Championship that was held in Morocco returned home. President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, Deputy Chairman of KTF Abdelsamad Al-Aryan, Board Member Ali Al-Daihani, and PSA representative Bashar Al-Kandari received the delegation. Kuwait's players Mohammad Al-Ghareeb and Abdallah Maqdis won the doubles gold medal after beating Morocco's Khalid Alloush and Mahdi Jaddi in the final match 6/3, 6/3.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber expressed his satisfaction with Al-Ghareeb and Maqdis' achievements, and dedicated it to HH The Amir and HH The Crown Prince and Kuwaiti people.

On the other hand Kuwait was on top of all Arab countries that participated in Davis Cup, including those in North Africa. Kuwait placed 59th worldwide, followed by Tunis 65, Morocco 71, Algeria 83, Lebanon 84, Syria 85, Egypt 95, Qatar 97, UAE 100, Jordan 101, Iraq 107, Bahrain 108, Saudi Arabia 113, Oman 122 and Libya 132.



KSSC TO ORGANISE SHOOTING TOURNAMENT

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sports Club (KSSC) will organize the Public Sports Authority tournament at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex from December 2-4. The tournament includes skeet, trap, double trap, 10m pistol and rifle, and 50m rifle besides Olympic archery.

President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng. Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi lauded the interest of Public Authority for sports in shooting and shooters and the support it gives to ensure continued success at all levels and arenas.

The closing ceremony will be held Sunday, December 4 at 7 pm at the shooting club premises.



Duaij Al-Otaibi

FIREFIGHTING COE, RUSSIA AGAIN IN IAAF SPOTLIGHT

MONACO: A reform-driven Sebastian Coe and drugs-tainted Russia will again be in the spotlight of athletics' world governing body when the IAAF gathers for three days of crunch meetings starting today.

A crucial part of the opening IAAF Council meeting will be dedicated to the latest update from Norwegian Rune Andersen, the head of the IAAF Taskforce looking into the steps Russia is taking to combat doping.

The International Association of Athletics Federations first enforced a ban on Russian athletes in international competition in November 2015 after a bombshell World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) report unveiled systematic state-sponsored doping and corruption.

Andersen will report to IAAF's decision-making body whether he thinks Russia have since met the reinstatement conditions set down. The initial ban has twice been extended, in March and June this year.

It was Andersen's latter Taskforce report in Vienna that scuppered Russian athletes' chances of competing at the Rio Games, despite a last-ditch campaign to overthrow the ban led by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin has in recent days, however, approved a law criminalising doping in sports, while Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko has promised anti-doping inspectors full access to military cities which are normally closed to members of the public although often listed as training bases by many Russian athletes.

Staying with the anti-doping theme, Coe will on Saturday preside over a Special IAAF Congress, a one-issue meeting concentrating on the governance structure reform proposals presented in his 'Time for Change' document.

The reforms have already been given wholesale support by the IAAF Athletes Commission, whose members said they believed that the reforms would "set and enforce higher ethical standards and enable athletics to regain the credibility and trust it deserves".

Coe has gone out of his way to ensure his reform process is widely understood, having embarked on a roadshow in October and November that took in the Dominican Republic, Chile, Portugal, Australia, Qatar and South Africa.

The Briton, twice an Olympic 1500m gold medallist, is pushing for an independent drugs testing regime as part of his overhaul of world athletics, saying that "results management" has been a failure given "national interest involved".

He is proposing an "independent Athletics Integrity Unit", which will be responsible for doping matters, taking powers away from national associations. The unit would also look into illegal betting and transfers of allegiance.

Other mooted reforms include a restructuring of the IAAF Council so that it has 50 percent female membership, new checks and balances on the president, and new vetting procedures on individuals.

The proposed changes, which need a two-thirds' majority to be passed at Saturday's vote, have been brought about by the scandal which continues to engulf athletics.

'COVER UP'

In the latest revelation, a weekend report by Germany's ARD television and France's Le Monde newspaper said the wanted son of ousted IAAF president Lamine Diack took millions of euros from Russian competitors in return for "total protection" from failed doping tests.

Six athletes each paid between 300,000 and 700,000 euros (\$318,000-\$740,000) to top officials including Papa Massata Diack who is wanted by French authorities but in hiding in his native Senegal, the report said.

His father, Lamine Diack, who was charged after standing down as IAAF president in August 2015, is under house arrest in France.

"The organised cover-up of suspected doping in the world of track and field has as such assumed a previously unimagined scale," said ARD. "And once again, it is primarily athletes from one nation under scrutiny: Russia."

Sandwiched between the two IAAF meetings come the IAAF Athletics Awards, which were cancelled last year in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Fresh from securing an unprecedented third consecutive treble of Olympic golds at the Rio Games, Usain Bolt is hot favourite to walk away with the men's Athlete of the Year award from Mo Farah and Wayde van Niekerk.



Sebastian Coe

In the women's category, 10,000 m Olympic champion Almaz Ayana from Ethiopia is up against double sprint champion Elaine Thompson of Jamaica and the Olympic hammer thrower champion, Poland's Anita Wlodarczyk. —AFP

CAS BANS CHERNOVA, ENNIS-HILL SET FOR THIRD WORLD TITLE

LAUSANNE: Russian heptathlete Tatyana Chernova was banned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Tuesday for doping and stripped of her 2011 world title, effectively handing the crown to Jessica Ennis-Hill.

Chernova's gold medal from the world championships in Daegu, South Korea is now set to be awarded to the Briton Ennis-Hill, the 2012 London Olympic champion and silver medallist at this year's Rio Games. CAS banned Chernova, 28, for three years and eight months, with all her results over a two-year period from the world championships in 2011 now void.

Ennis-Hill, who won world gold in her own right in 2009 and 2015, has long called for the 2011 title to go to her after Chernova had a sample from the 2009 world championships retested later to reveal an anabolic steroid. Chernova, just the latest Russian athlete punished for doping, would not have been eligible to compete in South Korea if her positive test had been discovered at the time.

Soon after the CAS statement came out, Ennis-Hill posted a message on Instagram alongside a picture of her and a celebrating Chernova in Daegu. "This image was forever imprinted in my mind! However much it drove me on for what I was about to achieve at my first Olympics in London, in my heart I just knew it was wrong," Ennis-Hill wrote.

"So happy to finally be receiving my gold medal. Triple World Champion WOW!" Ennis-Hill, the 2012 Olympic champion, won her other heptathlon world golds at Berlin in 2009 and Beijing last year.

As well as losing her 2011 world title Chernova has also been deprived of her 2012 Olympic bronze, with Lithuania's Austra Skujyte set to inherit third. CAS issued bans for Russian middle distance runners Ekaterina Sharmina (three years) and Kristina Ugarova (two years).

All three cases were referred to CAS by athletics' governing body the IAAF in February with the top sports court stepping in to take over from Russia's suspended athletics federation the ARAF.

The IAAF had ruled that CAS was to determine the fate of all Russian athletes accused of doping.

This trio were found guilty after their "Athlete Biological Passports (ABP) showed evidence of blood doping," CAS said in a statement. Tuesday's verdicts are open to appeal. In its statement CAS said: "The collection of the blood samples for these athletes started many years ago (dating back to 2009 for Ms Chernova, to 2011-2012 for the others), but the analysis of the blood values and of the Biological Passports was conducted in 2015."

Russia's image in world sports has been badly tarnished by evidence of state-sponsored doping that saw its athletics team and entire Paralympic squad excluded from the Rio Games this summer. —AFP



Jessica Ennis-Hill

SIX NATIONS INTRODUCES BONUS POINTS TO REWARD ATTACKING RUGBY

LONDON: Attacking rugby will be rewarded with bonus points in next year's Six Nations, organisers said yesterday, including match winners taking four points instead of two.

The Six Nations is the last major rugby tournament to introduce bonus points—Super Rugby had them from the inception of the competition in 1996, the World Cup brought them in from 2003 and the southern hemisphere Rugby Championship and European Champions Cup also awards them. The move, which will be on a trial basis and apply also to the Women's and Under-20s Six Nations tournaments, will see the winners of each match receive four points instead of two, but if they score four or more tries they will garner a bonus point as well. The new measure for the Six Nations has been called for by many within the game in recent years.

John Feehan, chief executive of the Six Nations, said they had sought to strike the right balance between rewarding attacking rugby and maintaining the climax to the showpiece—in the 2015 edition three countries went into the final games with chances of winning the crown.

"The drama and excitement of the last weekend of the Six Nations Championship is unique and is, more often than not, driven by a number of teams on equal championship points all competing for first place on the table," said Feehan.

"It is important for us to ensure that any bonus-point system which is implemented would not, in any way, take away from this unique dynamic.

"At the same time, we are also conscious that we must reward try-scoring and an attacking style of play that will deliver more tries and greater rewards for fans and players alike."

Even losing sides can come away with something if they meet certain provisos, gaining one point for either losing by seven points or less or for scoring four tries in a defeat, and two points if they lose by seven points or less but score four tries in the process. If there is a draw both teams split the points as before, only this time they will get two apiece.

A Grand Slam like England achieved in their first Six Nations under Eddie Jones this year will see the team awarded three extra points, which would give them some form of insurance over teams who might lose a match but gain enough bonus points to overhaul the side that beat all of their rivals. —AFP

WORLD CHESS BATTLE HEADS FOR TIEBREAK ENDGAME

NEW YORK: The battle for the world chess crown heads into a four-game tiebreaker yesterday, after 12 regular rounds failed to separate reigning champion Magnus Carlsen and his Russian challenger Sergei Karyakin.

After a win apiece and nine draws, the pair head into the chess equivalent of extra time in soccer, beginning a series of four quickfire games in New York at 2pm (1900 GMT). Unlike the earlier rounds, which lasted an average of six hours, the rapid play rules mean the players have just 25 minutes each, so each game will be over in an hour. If they are still tied afterwards they will play a series of blitz games, played at the rate of five minutes per player at the start, with three seconds added after each move.

"If there is still no winner, Carlsen and Karyakin will play an Armageddon game in which white has five minutes and black has four, but black only has to draw to win the match," the World Chess Federation said. The accelerated games leave plenty of opportunity for harried mistakes, and while predictions are difficult, Carlsen—a king of the blitz format—remains favourite.

The Norwegian, who turned 26 yesterday, has played several blitz tournaments this year, beating US grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura in one in October.

But he has occasionally shown flashes of losing his cool, as when he slammed

the door of the press room after defeat in the eighth round, earning a fine of five percent of his prize money.

'CAPABLE OF UPSET'

Karyakin, a child prodigy who became the youngest ever chess grandmaster at the age of 12, has known Carlsen for years and has little to lose, with no-one even expecting him to reach the final.

"Sergei has impressed everyone with his tenacity these last few weeks so he is perfectly capable of pulling an upset," said So, who travelled to New York from Minnesota to watch the clash.

Much has been made of the clash as a reprise of the great Cold War chess battles of the 1970s, but Karyakin, who is from Crimea and supported Russia's 2014 annexation of the peninsula, has played down political overtones.

But he knows that a hero's welcome will await him in Russia—where chess was elevated to the status of national institution in the Soviet era—if he wins the crown. The last Russian to claim the title was Vladimir Kramnik in 2007.

In a sign of the final's significance to Moscow, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov was in New York to see the start of the head-to-head.

As well as the title, the winner will also take home 600,000 euros (\$637,000), while the loser will walk away with a consolation prize of 400,000 euros. —AFP

AUSTRALIA'S CUMMINS TO MAKE LATEST COMEBACK IN ONE-DAYERS

SYDNEY: Pat Cummins' international career has had more than its fair share of false starts due to injuries but captain Steve Smith hopes the upcoming one-day series against New Zealand will prove a launchpad for the Australia fast bowler to kick on.

The right arm, who made a dream test debut against South Africa as a raw 18-year-old in 2011 with match figures of seven for 117, was recalled to the Australian side for the first time in more

than a year for the three-match Chappell-Hadlee series.

The 23-year-old missed all of last season after yet another stress fracture in his lower back but returned with a vengeance in Australia's domestic one-day competition last month, taking 15 wickets at 18.60.

Chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns said when the one-day squad was named last week that he was particularly pleased to see him back bowling with

real pace. With Australia choosing not to rest test spearheads Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, Smith had three genuinely quick bowlers at his disposal for the series against New Zealand that starts in Sydney on Sunday.

"It looked like he bowled with some good pace so it's nice to have the option of Starc, Hazlewood and Cummins at our disposal," Smith told Australian Associated Press in Sydney on Wednesday. "It's very exciting."

Cummins, man of the match in his test debut, has been blighted by injury since, suffering heel problems, a torn side muscle and stress fractures in his back. Such have been the extent of his injuries, he has played just eight first-class games since he made his debut for New South Wales against Tasmania in Hobart as a 17-year-old. His last first-class game was on last year's Ashes tour of England. Smith, however, said that if he could prove his fitness through limit-

overs cricket then he could be in the frame for Australia's tour of India next February. "Obviously he's going to play these one-dayers. I dare say he'll play the one-dayers at the back end of the summer as well and I think after Christmas he might be playing some Shield cricket," Smith added. "India's possible. He's obviously got to play some Shield cricket first and see how he goes ... how his body holds up. "So far he's going pretty well."—Reuters

COOK AND ENGLAND TO UNWIND BEFORE TEST

MOHALI: England captain Alastair Cook is looking forward to a rare week-long break in a hectic playing schedule after the heavy third Test defeat against India in Mohali Tuesday. Virat Kohli's side won by eight wickets to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the five-Test series.

But England's players are looking to unwind with some welcome down time in Dubai before making the short trip from the Gulf resort city to Mumbai for the fourth Test, which begins on December 8.

"The break comes at a very good time, obviously, after three back-to-back Test matches," Cook told reporters after the defeat. Some of the England squad have been on duty since landing in Bangladesh on September 30 for three one-day internationals followed by the 1-1 draw in the Test series there. Cook himself has spent just 18 hours with his new-born daughter after dashing home from the Bangladesh tour for her birth.

"We have this week off and I think, most people going to Dubai," said Cook. "Mentally it will be a break from cricket. We will come back little bit more refreshed."

Cook's team has endured tough couple of months after losing a Test to Bangladesh

for the first time and are now staring at a series defeat against top-ranked India.

But Cook remembered that four years ago in India England came back from 1-0 down to win the four-Test series 2-1 and said that if they show greater consistency they can still save the series.

"The challenge is to try and put in that performance in which consistently, over five days, we play well. "We have done it in one game (the first Test in Rajkot), we haven't done it in the other two," said Cook.

Cook said it was difficult to compare with the 2012 tour, because the two teams have changed character since.

"The India we played in 2012 was different, probably an ageing team compared to now," Cook said, adding that his current side were still learning how to tackle unfamiliar sub-continent conditions with low, turning pitches.

"In 2012 we were a lot more experienced and had played a lot more in the sub-continent over the three years before that. "This side, only two in the top order (Joe Root and Cook himself) have played more than one or two games in the sub-continent before we played in Bangladesh. That's probably the difference."—AFP



WIESBADEN: F1 Mercedes driver and 2016 World Champion, Nico Rosberg from Germany celebrates with fans in Wiesbaden Germany, yesterday. Rosberg was born in Wiesbaden. — AP

FLYING FINN EYES FAVOURITE WILD OATS IN SYDNEY TO HOBART

SYDNEY: Australia's blue water Sydney to Hobart classic will this year see the domination of eight-time line honours winner Wild Oats challenged by a Scandinavian dark horse and a Korean debut among more Asian entries.

Four supermaxis will tackle the grueling 628-nautical-mile race among a field of 93, organisers said yesterday, with local hero Wild Oats the favourite.

Skipper Mark Richards can't forget last year's shock retirement with a split mast and said improvements had been made.

"We've learnt a lot from last year," he said at the official launch for the December 26 race.

"Our preparation this year has been fantastic," including thousands of miles of sailing and some "tweaking".

Richards has removed the yacht's horizontal hydrofoil, explaining that a new 11-metre long forward section of the hull negated the need for it. It also makes the vessel 300 kilograms lighter.

Wild Oats XI, which will be racing in its 12th Sydney to Hobart, "is still a great machine," he added.

Finn Ludde Ingvall took line honours in 2000 and 2004 and he is back for 2016 with Nicorette completely redesigned and renamed CQS. The 90-foot maxi has grown into a 100-foot supermaxi in a bid to rival the world's fastest yachts, with legendary New Zealand skipper Chris Dixon at the helm.

Ingvall, who lives in Sydney, rates Wild Oats "the best yacht in the world", despite its early retirement last year allowing US supermaxi Comanche to win in two days, eight hours, 58 minutes and 30 seconds.

"It's not the same boat," he told reporters about CQS. "From the mast forward, it's new and from the steering

backwards it's new. She's a very radical thing, incorporating a lot of ideas.

"We should be good in light airs," he added. "In some conditions we will be up there but we are focusing on taking the boat to the finish line."

That's the ambition of most entrants for the 72nd version of the race from Sydney down Australia's east coast and across the wild Bass Strait to Hobart.

ARRIVE IN ONE PIECE

Another rebadged supermaxi is Scallywag, now owned by Hong Kong businessman Seng Huang Lee, which came second in line honours last year as Ragamuffin.

Supermaxi Perpetual Loyal is also back for another tilt after pulling out of the previous two races with damage.

Among 12 international entries, the Korea Ocean Sailing Club has chartered a 52-footer and named it Sonic for the nation's first Sydney to Hobart.

Team Korea is mostly from Seoul and Busan with experience from the America's Cup, while skipper Kwangmin 'Andrew' Rho contested last year's race aboard Flying Fish Arctos, the organisers said. China has two entries for 2016 with Dong Qing back with Ark323 and a new crew after a stormy debut ended in early retirement for the country's first ever entry last year. "We did not expect 50-knot winds," Qing said of the savage southerlies that blasted the race in 2015, with dozens of boats pulling out.

"This year we are going to be better."

Overall handicap honours went to Australia's Balance last December with the TP52 competing again, hoping for a second successive crown. "We will be doing our damndest to get there in one piece," said owner Paul Clitheroe. —AFP



SYDNEY: Rolex Sydney to Hobart yacht race 2015 winner Paul Clitheroe, owner/skipper of Balance, and Mark Richards, skipper Wild Oats XI pose with the trophy at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia in Sydney yesterday. Australia's grueling Sydney to Hobart yacht race, one of the world's most famous races starts on Boxing Day and is the 72nd edition of the epic contest. — AFP

HAMILTON ONE OF THE BEST, BUT NO FRIEND: ROSBERG

WIESBADEN: Formula One world champion Nico Rosberg hailed Mercedes team mate Lewis Hamilton as one of the greatest drivers of all time yesterday but ruled out forging any friendly ties with the Briton as long as they raced each other.

Rosberg, who lost out to Hamilton in the previous two years, made it third time lucky when he clinched his maiden title with a second-place finish behind the triple world champion at the season finale in Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

The pair have been at loggerheads all season and their frosty relationship had been compared by Mercedes boss Toto Wolff as a volcano ready to erupt.

Hamilton compounded matters further

when he deliberately slowed the pace from the front in Abu Dhabi, hoping to back Rosberg into a position where rival drivers could overtake the German in a last-ditch effort to overhaul his 12-point deficit.

"Lewis is one of the best of all time. He sets a high standard," the 31-year-old Rosberg told reporters during a visit to his Wiesbaden birthplace in Germany.

The tense atmosphere between the childhood friends as they waited for Sunday's podium ceremony spoke volumes, with Rosberg hoisting the sport's 86-year-old commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone into the air but choosing to ignore Hamilton. There was minimal eye contact, let alone a handshake.

"It will always be difficult between us. We are in the same team and race against each other for titles," Rosberg said. "It is virtually impossible to have a good relationship. We used to be best friends when we were young so at least we have this respect for each other. This helps somewhat," he added.

"I do not know how he feels at the moment but I know how I felt in 2014 and 2015." Rosberg lost any hope of claiming the 2014 title with an engine problem at the final race of the season but he has been free of such reliability issues this year. "For me it was difficult to stomach. In 2015 I lost to him again. It will now take some time for him to process this," Rosberg said. — Reuters

PAKISTAN CAN BOUNCE BACK AGAINST NEW-LOOK AUSSIES

LAHORE: Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq believes it can bounce back from its 2-0 loss in New Zealand when it takes on a new-look Australia in a three-test series next month.

"Australia is not a settled team, and they have made changes in the last (test) match (against South Africa)," Misbah said in Lahore yesterday. "Their new players are familiar with their own conditions, but at the same time when someone comes new into test matches, you have a chance to exploit it."

Australia avoided being whitewashed by South Africa as new caps Matt Renshaw, Peter Handscomb, and Nic Maddinson won the day-night third test in Adelaide last weekend. Misbah returned home after losing the first test in Christchurch because of the death of his father-in-law. He would have missed the second test in Hamilton anyway, because he was handed a one-match suspension for another slow over-rate. He will rejoin the team before the first day-night Test in Brisbane on Dec. 15.

Pakistan's top order struggled in seaming conditions in New Zealand. They lost nine wickets in the last session in Hamilton to lose by 138 runs. Only opener Sami Aslam and Babar Azam scored half-centuries in four test innings. However, Pakistan kept faith in the same 16-man squad for the three tests against Australia.

"Conditions were difficult in New Zealand with plenty of grass on both wickets," Misbah said. "But I believe wickets will be better in Australia, and this team has the capability to make a comeback."

Pakistan, which rose to No. 1 in the test rankings, slipped to No. 4 after losing in New Zealand. But Misbah said Pakistan wasn't suddenly a bad team.

"In one series, if your bowlers or batsmen do not perform, you can't say it's not a good team," he said. "We have been taking 20 wickets (in a test match) in UAE, and I hope the players have learnt their lessons in New Zealand."

The 42-year-old Misbah, who has already quit ODIs and Twenty20s for Pakistan, has no immediate plans to quit tests, and said as long as he stayed fit and the team needed him he will play on. "The team's confidence level has come down with the recent performances in New Zealand. I am focusing on the Australian series and raising the level of the team and regaining the confidence of players."

"I have said before, you don't know what happens tomorrow, but I have no fitness problem and hope to play as long as I stay fit. If I felt the team still needs me and I stay fit, I will continue playing." —AP



Misbah-ul-Haq

FA EXPECTED TO CONFIRM SOUTHGATE AS ENGLAND BOSS

LONDON: Gareth Southgate is expected to be approved as the new England manager by Football Association chiefs yesterday, according to British media reports.

Southgate has been in interim charge since replacing Sam Allardyce in September after he was forced out just 67 days into his reign following a Daily Telegraph investigation into corruption in football.

The 46-year-old Southgate has made it clear he wants the job and, given the lack of other quality candidates, is believed to have done enough during

his four games in charge to convince the FA to hand him the post on a permanent basis. Southgate's position should be ratified during an FA board meeting later, although an official announcement is unlikely to be immediate.

The former Middlesbrough boss, who would become England's third manager this year following the departures of Roy Hodgson and Allardyce, spoke to a five-man panel at St George's Park last Monday after the end of his interim reign. FA chairman Greg Clarke, chief executive Martin Glenn, technical director Dan Ashworth, former England play-

er Graeme Le Saux and League Managers' Association chairman Howard Wilkinson were all involved.

While it was billed as an interview it was more of a discussion about Southgate's vision of the England team.

Glenn had previously confirmed Southgate was in a strong position and the former England defender wanted the job.

During his brief tenure Southgate has already had to deal with controversy with captain Wayne Rooney pictured mingling with guests at the hotel where England were based during his free time

following the 3-0 World Cup qualifying win over Scotland.

Newspaper reports suggested the skipper was drunk and made an unscheduled appearance at a wedding reception, with chief executive Glenn promising an investigation into the conduct of all players and staff during their free time.

Southgate was unbeaten in his four games, winning two and drawing two, including this month's win over Scotland which left England top of Group F as they bid to reach the 2018 World Cup.

England also beat Malta and drew in Slovenia before a 2-2 friendly draw with Spain in Southgate's last game, when they squandered a two-goal lead in the final minutes at Wembley.

Southgate's backroom team will be discussed at the board meeting, with Chelsea assistant coach Steve Holland set to be handed a full-time role with the senior national side. The FA must also look at the age group set-ups with under-20 manager Aidy Boothroyd having temporarily stepped up to replace Southgate, who had previously served as under-21 boss. —AFP

TIGER FINDS SUPPORT FROM RIVALS HE INSPIRED

NASSAU: Tiger Woods never knew he had so many friends among his golfing rivals until he needed their support after a 15-month back injury layoff that ends today at the Hero World Challenge. The former world number one returns in the 18-player invitational after having not played a competitive round since August 2015, the longest layoff of the 14-time major champion's career.

"I've missed being out here with the guys. I miss the fraternity. I miss the camaraderie," Woods said Tuesday. "I've had a lot more close friends out here than I thought."

Two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson says Woods has benefitted from bonds made in the days when he inspired an epic fan following but seemed distant and alone from rivals.

"Tiger is a great man and to see him open up, I think it's for the better," Watson said. "He has got a smile on the face and a bounce in his step. Who cares about the golf? I think he's learning that now that we all miss him. We miss the interaction with him, seeing him practice, just listening and learning from him. So I think he sees how much he truly is missed." Woods grew nearer to some players during his time as a US assistant Ryder Cup captain earlier this year. "My relationships with a lot of these players have gotten closer, either through hanging out at the restaurant (the Woods Jupiter) or if it's out playing or the Ryder Cup, going out to dinner and BSing, it has been fun," Woods said.

"I've had a lot of friends help me. It's hard to fathom how many players have really rallied and tried to help me come back and offered any kind of advice, any kind of help, whether it's with equipment, playing, getting out and going out to dinner, just being part of the tour and part of the fraternity."

'MORE THAN JUST GOLF'

Woods seemed a man alone during much of his career's success and after his

infamous sex scandal, but has kindled new friendships from a new generation of tour players, those he inspired rather than dominated. "I think Tiger has softened now with his kids and the way he's interacted in the (Ryder Cup) team room, what he said, how he put his arm around certain people and trying to inspire them," Watson said. "His own foundation is probably changing him, making him realize that there's more than just golf or being the greatest golfer of all time. That's going to help him in golf and it's going to help him in life."

Watson, the 2012 and 2014 Masters winner, won last year's Challenge with a 25-under par 263 total over the 7,267-yard Ernie Els-designed layout at the Albany resort. The event is owned by Woods' foundation and is putting down roots in the Bahamas after three sites in three years. Watson is among those who have played it through several injury comebacks for Woods, whose ailing knees and back cut into his campaigns before wiping out his 2015-16 season. "It's amazing to see the outpouring of support from our side. He has meant so much to all of us. He has inspired all of us, touched all of us in different ways," Watson said. "We're just excited, us guys in the field. We're pulling for him and want him to be the best he can."

'WE WANT OUR CHAMPION BACK'

Watson summed up the feelings of many golf fans who dream of Woods' glory era but just want to see him play, in the same way that Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player were loved long past their peak days. "Just let us watch you for four days," Watson said. "I don't care what the score is. We want our champion back. We want our Tiger Woods back."

"If he feels good after four days and he's not hurting on Monday morning, then he'll play in January. He'll play these events that we're used to seeing him in and used to watching him dominate and get excited about." — AFP



MILWAUKEE: Milwaukee Bucks' Michael Beasley and Cleveland Cavaliers' Tristan Thompson go after a loose ball during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, in Milwaukee. — AP

ANTETOKOUNMPO STARS AS BUCKS STUN CAVALIERS

MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo tied a career high with 34 points and the Milwaukee Bucks stunned the Cleveland Cavaliers 118-101 on Tuesday night. Antetokounmpo added 12 rebounds and five assists while Milwaukee ended Cleveland's four-game winning streak. Jabari Parker had 18 points and Michael Beasley had 17 off the bench for the Bucks. LeBron James had 22 points for the Cavaliers, who fell to 13-3. Kyrie Irving added 20 points. Milwaukee led by 22 points in the fourth quarter and cruised past the defending champions, who benched their starters midway through the final period. The Bucks outscored Cleveland by 14 points in the third quarter. Cleveland rode hot early shooting to a 14-point first quarter lead, but Milwaukee closed on a 10-0 run and trailed by only two at the end of the period. The hot hands of Antetokounmpo and Beasley sparked Milwaukee in the second quarter as the Bucks built an advantage of eight points before leading 58-54 at the half.

NETS 127, CLIPPERS 122, 2OT

Sean Kilpatrick scored 31 of his career-high 38 points after the third quarter and Brooklyn stopped a seven-game losing streak with a double-overtime victory over Los Angeles. The Clippers started the game without Blake Griffin, ended it without the ejected coach Doc Rivers and dropped their third straight game by blowing an 18-point lead. Chris Paul had 26 points, 13 assists and 10 rebounds for the Clippers, but the best guard on the floor in crunch time was Kilpatrick, who also had a career-best 14 rebounds. Brook Lopez added 27 points for the

Nets. DeAndre Jordan had 21 points and 23 rebounds for the Clippers, who rested Griffin, their leading scorer.

MAGIC 95, SPURS 83

Serge Ibaka had 18 points and Orlando took advantage of a sloppy night by San Antonio to snap the Spurs' nine-game winning streak. San Antonio committed a season-high 19 turnovers in its worst scoring performance of the season. The Spurs have four home losses in the first two months of this season after falling just once at AT&T Center in 2015-16. Evan Fournier scored 13 points and Nikola Vucevic had 12 to help the Magic snap a four-game skid. Orlando entered having lost eight of 11, but they were looser and more fluid than San Antonio from the start. The Spurs' turnovers resulted in 19 points for the Magic. Kawhi Leonard had 21 points for San Antonio and LaMarcus Aldridge added 16.

PELICANS 105, LAKERS 88

Anthony Davis had 41 points and 16 rebounds, helping New Orleans dominate short-handed Los Angeles. Jrue Holiday scored 22 points in his first start this season and Omer Asik had 10 points and 11 assists while New Orleans snapped a two-game skid. The Lakers expected to be healthier with forward Julius Randle returning to the lineup following a three-game absence because of a hip injury, but about two minutes into the game, starting shooting guard Nick Young was carried off with a strained right Achilles tendon. Lou Williams scored 16 points for the Lakers and Randle finished with 12, but Los Angeles was in a 20-

point hole by the second quarter.

JAZZ 120, ROCKETS 101

Gordon Hayward scored a season-high 31 points, helping Utah beat Houston for its season-best fourth straight win. Utah started strong en route to a season high for scoring. Rodney Hood had 10 points during a 20-5 first-quarter run after trailing 16-9, and Houston never led again. Hood finished with 19 points. Rudy Gobert recorded his 11th double-double of the season with 16 points, 14 rebounds and three blocks. Hayward had seven assists and five rebounds. James Harden scored 26 points but was an inefficient 8 for 23 from the field. He also had seven assists and five rebounds, while Eric Gordon scored 24 points off the bench.

PISTONS 112, HORNETS 89

Tobias Harris scored 24 points, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope and Marcus Morris each had 18 points and Detroit beat Charlotte for its third straight win. Ish Smith added 13 points while Detroit shot 49 percent from the field. Kemba Walker had 23 points for the Hornets, who were playing their fourth game in five nights. The Pistons hadn't played since Saturday and looked much fresher throughout the game in snapping Charlotte's two-game winning streak. Detroit took a 10-point lead into the fourth quarter after Caldwell-Pope knocked down a pair of 3-pointers late in the third. Things got sloppy from there with the Hornets turning the ball over frequently on bad passes, and the game quickly turning into a blowout. —AP



NASSAU: Tiger Woods of the United States takes a club from his bag, alongside caddy Joe LaCava, on the fourth hole during the pro-am ahead of the Hero World Challenge at Albany, The Bahamas yesterday in Nassau, Bahamas. — AFP

SUPER BOWL WINNER SHARPER GETS 20 YEARS FOR DRUG-RAPE

LOS ANGELES: Former NFL star Darren Sharper was sentenced Tuesday a 20-year prison term, ending a tour of shame and punishment in the courthouse where he first admitted drugging and raping women in four states.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Michael Pastor denounced Sharper's "horrible conduct" and "disgraceful abuse of trust" during the hearing that concluded prosecutions that unmasked the popular former all-pro safety and Super Bowl champ as a serial rapist.

Under the terms of a plea deal negotiated with prosecutors in four states, Sharper will be eligible for parole in about eight years because California law requires he serve half his sentence and he has already been behind bars more than two years since his arrest.

But he will probably serve more time if an appeals court upholds an 18-year prison sentence handed down by a New Orleans federal judge who rejected the deal as too lenient. Sharper has appealed that harsher sentence.

Sharper, 41, sat quietly in court in orange jail scrubs and never addressed the court or two emotional victims who spoke about evenings that began innocently enough partying with

friends turned into nightmares they can no longer escape after he secretly slipped drugs in their shot glasses and insisted they drink. Both women blacked out and later awoke to the groggy reality that something terribly wrong had occurred that they couldn't immediately comprehend in their drug-induced stupor.

"I started vomiting, my head was pounding and I had trouble seeing clearly," said one victim, who said her rape on Jan. 15, 2014 was "the worst night of my life."

The woman, identified only as Jane Doe 2, teared up before she even addressed the court and dabbed at her nose with a tissue throughout. She said her surfing career spiraled downward afterward, she lost her self-confidence, lives in fear and at one point considered suicide. "The only good thing about this situation is that this disgusting low-life human will be sent to prison for many years and is likely he will never be able to do this to another woman again," she said. "I hope this scumbag will now feel as worthless as he has made me feel." Sharper, 41, was working as an NFL network analyst when women in several cities began reporting how nights of partying with their girlfriends and Sharper ended with them

waking up in his hotel room confused and discovering they had been sexually assaulted.

Sharper's arrest came as the NFL was dealing with off-field problems with players accused of crimes ranging from spousal abuse to murder.

The second woman, identified as Jane Doe 4, was with a friend when they were drugged by Sharper in his hotel room in 2013, hours after they met at a Sports Illustrated 50th anniversary party. She woke up on a bed with her clothes on, blood coming out of her nose and did not know where she was. She said her friend had been sexually assaulted, and both fled fearing for their lives.

"It's one thing to be a victim, but to be the victim that got 'lucky' in some eyes is not easy to live with," Jane Doe 4 said. "When I think back to that night I wonder what he could have done to me. That's not lucky. It's haunting." The Associated Press does not generally name people who are victims of sex crimes. Sharper retired from the league in 2011 after a 14-year career with the Green Bay Packers, the Minnesota Vikings and, finally, in New Orleans with the Saints, where he won a Super Bowl. —AP



LOS ANGELES: In this Feb. 20, 2014, file photo, Darren Sharper looks toward his attorney, Blair Berk, during an appearance in Los Angeles Superior Court in Los Angeles. The former NFL football star's tour of shame and punishment reached its conclusion in the Los Angeles courtroom where he first admitted drugging and raping women in several states. Sharper was sentenced Tuesday to 20 years in prison. — AP

SOMEDAY SOCCER WILL RETURN TO CHAPECOENSE, AS AT MAN UTD

LONDON: Someday, somehow, soccer will likely return to Chapecoense.

Through the grieving and after the funerals of the 19 team members who died in a plane crash, soccer will probably be played again, just as it was at Manchester United and Torino following similar tragedies.

"For so many years I was at the heart of Manchester United's effort to maintain its place in football," England great Bobby Charlton wrote in his 2007 autobiography. "There was always one great hope: the return to greatness of my beloved club."

Chapecoense, a team from the small Brazilian town of Chapeco, was on its way to play in the Copa Sudamericana final - South America's second biggest

club tournament - when the charter airline carrying the players, staff and media crashed into a Colombian mountainside, killing 71 on board.

Three players survived, but all suffered serious injuries. In 1958, eight Manchester United players died on the field by the 20-year-old Charlton, the English team soon set about ensuring the soul of "Busby Babes" was not extinguished.

Torino was the dominant force in Italian soccer before the 1949 Superga air disaster killed 18 players. The team had won the previous four Serie A titles, but it took until 1976 for the team to win the league again - its last league title.

"It's a destiny that binds us inextricably," Torino wrote on Twitter after the

Chapecoense disaster. "We are with you fraternally." The Chapecoense administrators who survived or didn't travel with the team have to balance the responsibility of caring for the families in mourning and the players still alive. Matheus Saroli, the coach's son, forgot his passport so he couldn't travel. An injury prevented Alejandro Martinuccio from joining his team in Colombia for the first leg of the Copa Sudamericana final against Atletico Nacional - the biggest match in the club's history.

Since the crash, Chapecoense has been offered players on loan by rival clubs Flamengo, Palmeiras and Sao Paulo in order to keep going, just like Manchester United was 58 years ago.

Matt Busby's talented 1958 United

squad had been destined for greatness. The team was flying back from Belgrade after securing a place in the European Cup semifinals. Two months later, a reassembled United team lost to AC Milan. "I played my heart out on the night and I was man of the match against Milan," forward Kenny

Morgans, who died in 2012, recalled in 2008 ahead of 50th anniversary of the disaster. "Then I just sort of packed my career in. I didn't want to play in the first team because I missed the boys that had died." After Munich, some United players felt abandoned by the club. "Jackie Blanchflower and Johnny Berry found life very hard after Munich," teammate Albert Scanlon recalled in the 2007 book "The Lost Babes" before his death two years

later. "Munich killed not only a lot of the players who were on that flight but some of the survivors, too, and all the young players who had to come in a year or two early. They were never the same." A decade later, United won European soccer's top prize for the first time. Charlton, fittingly, scored twice in a 4-1 victory over Benfica in the European Cup final, capping the recovery of a club that has gone on to become the most successful in the English game.

"(Munich) brought a great deal of sympathy at the time and, from then on, the romance was built purely because of the way Matt rebuilt the team and won the European Cup in '68," former United manager Alex Ferguson said, "and did it the right way." —AP

AGENT PROVOCATEUR PIQUE LEADS BARCA INTO FRESH CLASICO BATTLE

MADRID: Among the stalwarts of Barcelona's near decade of dominance of Spanish football there is no one that stokes the ire of Real Madrid like Gerard Pique.

Pique is Barca's best defender, leader, possible future president and principal provocateur to the Madrid fans and media.

Yet, ahead of the latest meeting between the Spanish giants on Saturday, Barcelona, who trail Madrid by six points at the top of La Liga, need the positive side of Pique's game and character more than ever.

"With you it all began" are words the former Manchester United man has become synonymous with in Spain.

His thanks to Colombian musician Kevin Roldan at Barca's treble celebrations in 2015 for performing at Cristiano Ronaldo's 30th birthday party that precipitated a Madrid collapse in La Liga sparked a wicket backlash.

Pique was booed for months after even when playing for Spain. However, the roles may now be reversed. Madrid's revival under coach Zinedine Zidane in 2016 began when Pique opened the scoring the last time the sides met in April.

When Pique nodded Barca in front, the Catalans were set to move a mammoth 13 points clear in the title race.

Instead, Real battled back to win 2-1, missed out on the title to Barca by just one point on the final day of the season and haven't lost in La Liga since.

alongside Lionel Messi before returning to Barca in 2008 after a brief spell in England.

"He expresses himself wonderfully. He has a great ability to communicate," was Barca boss Luis Enrique's reaction to Pique's recent admission that he sees himself as a future Barca president rather than coach.

"I would vote for him," added Manchester City boss and still Barca member Pep Guardiola.

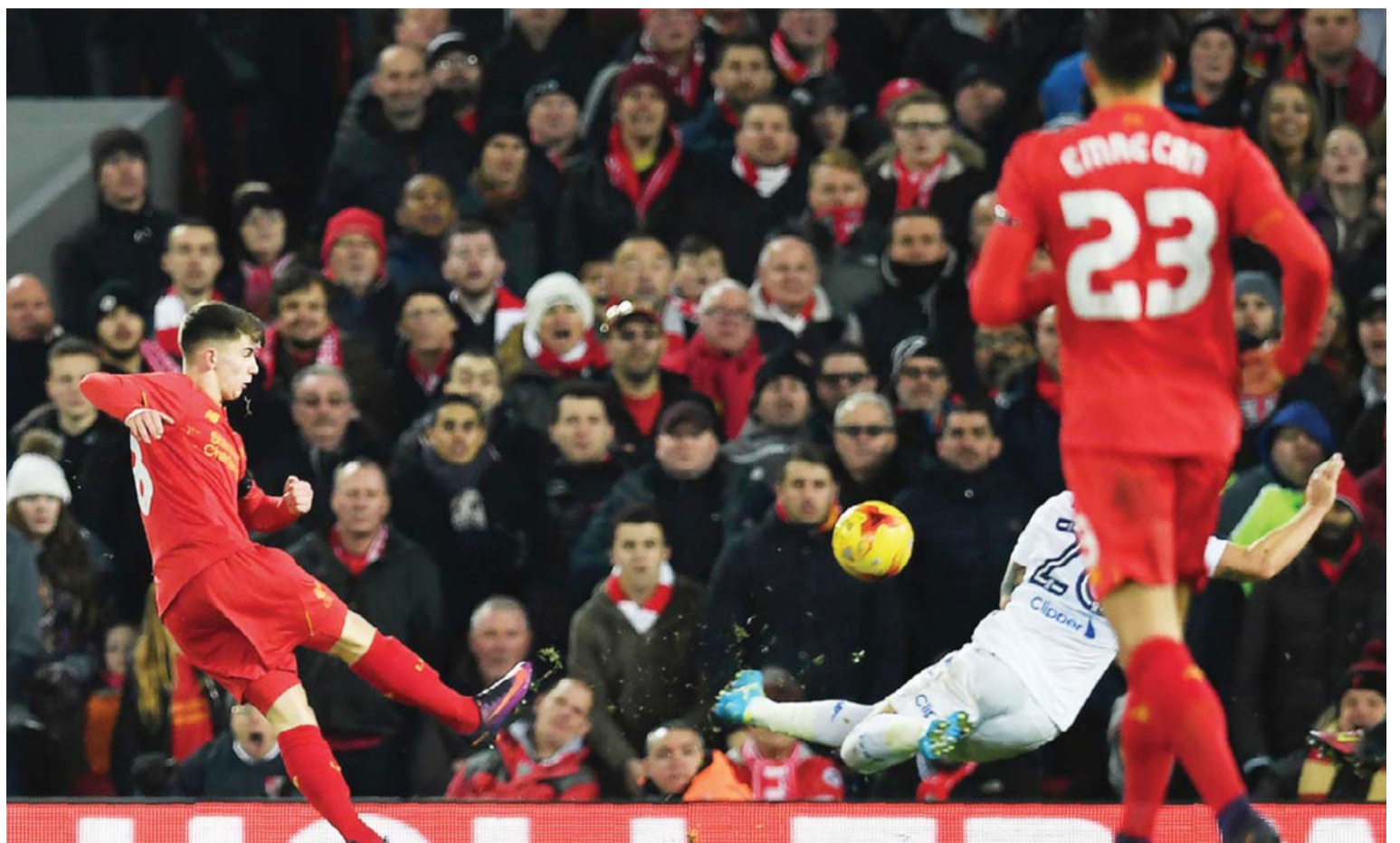
Pique is far from all talk. Current Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu admitted the club's 220 million euro (\$236 million) shirt sponsorship with Japanese online retailer Rakuten was initiated by a dinner set up by Pique and his world famous Colombian pop star partner Shakira.

However, his outspoken nature has often caused a backlash.

Pique has openly supported a campaign for Catalonia to be given a referendum on independence.

In October he announced his decision to retire from international football after the 2018 World Cup after being falsely accused of cutting the colours of the Spanish flag off his shirt in the latest of series of spurious controversies questioning his commitment to play for Spain.

In a match always charged with political as well as sporting tension, Spanish eyes will be peeled on Pique's performance as much as Messi and Ronaldo. — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Welsh striker Ben Woodburn scores his team's second goal during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Liverpool and Leeds United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on Tuesday. —AFP

WOODBURN HELPS LIVERPOOL REACH LEAGUE CUP SEMIS

LONDON: Liverpool reached the League Cup semi-finals after 17-year-old Ben Woodburn enjoyed a night to remember by becoming the club's youngest ever goalscorer when he wrapped up a 2-0 victory over Leeds United on Tuesday.

The youngster volleyed powerfully into the net from close range in front of the Kop in the 81st minute to double Liverpool's lead and simultaneously erase former England striker Michael Owen from the club's record books.

At 17 years and 45 days, Woodburn was 98 days younger than Owen, when he found the net for the first time in 1997.

It had been a testing evening for Liverpool, who were frustrated for the majority of the tie at Anfield and were outplayed at times by their second-tier opponents, with Leeds pegging them back and striking the woodwork in the second half. However, the hosts' Divock Origi slid home the opening goal after 76 minutes before Woodburn struck four minutes later against the Anfield side's old rivals.

"We all know how young Woodburn is, but it doesn't look like this in training sessions," Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp told Sky Sports. "It's a nice story and all the boys are really happy for him. Everybody is smiling in the dressing room." Liverpool will be joined in the last four by Hull City, who got past Championship (second-tier) leaders Newcastle United as the visitors missed three penalties in a 3-1 shootout defeat after the match had finished 1-1 at the end of extra time.

EIGHT CHANGES

With a host of injuries to deal with and a congested festive fixture schedule looming, Liverpool coach Klopp rang made eight changes from the side that beat Sunderland in the Premier League on Saturday and gave several youngsters an opportunity to shine.

There was a makeshift feel to the way Liverpool played in the first half as Leeds enjoyed the best chances with Hadi Sacko forcing a superb early save from Simon Mignolet and Kemar Roofe curling a beautiful effort against the post after the break.

It was not until later in the second period that the hosts began to find some rhythm, with Georginio Wijnaldum striking the post minutes before Origi slid in to poke a brilliant cross from another youngster, Trent Alexander-Arnold, in at the near post.

Woodburn's moment arrived five minutes later with Origi's cross to the far post finding the young striker unmarked. He smashed the ball high into the net and wheeled away in celebration in front of a jubilant Kop.

A drab encounter that finished 0-0 after 90 minutes at Hull sprang to life in extra time as Newcastle took the lead when Mohamed Diame prodded home in the 98th against his former club. The advantage lasted just a minute, however, with Robert Snodgrass equalising for Hull, who played with 10 men in extra time after striker Dieumerci Mbokani was sent off in the 89th.

Hull keeper Eldin Jakupovic was the shootout hero, saving from Jonjo Shelvey and Yoan Gouffran, while their Newcastle team mate Dwight Gayle hit the crossbar.

Arsenal host Southampton and Manchester United welcome West Ham United in the two remaining ties later. —Reuters

LEADER

Whilst the captaincy at the Camp Nou is awarded based on longevity, Pique is undoubtedly the leader of this Barca team now shorn of the likes Carles Puyol and Xavi Hernandez.

"On Saturday we have more to play for than Madrid, they can lose, we can't," he said on Monday. "We always need to believe in this team."

FUTURE PRESIDENT?

Often chosen to face the media in the most difficult times, Pique also sets the tone on and off the field for a Barca side that has lost some of its identity this season. The champions had less possession in a match they didn't win for the first time since 2008 in being thoroughly outplayed by Real Sociedad in a 1-1 draw on Sunday.

"The performance at Anoeta was a disaster," said Pique, who was brought through the club's famed youth academy



SPAIN COPA DEL REY

Hercules v Barcelona	0:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
beIN SPORTS MAX 4 FR	
beIN SPORTS 17 HD ES	
Valladolid v Sociedad	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
Gimnastica v Deportivo Alaves	23:00
beIN SPORTS	
Huesca v Las Palmas	23:00
beIN SPORTS	

RUSSIAN GAME LEFT IN THE COLD AFTER CALENDAR SWITCH

MOSCOW: The Russian Premier League has suffered from falling attendances since changing its calendar six years ago as freezing conditions and a lack of indoor stadiums make life uncomfortable for fans and players. The winter break therefore cannot come soon enough for a league which goes into hibernation for three months on Dec. 5 with temperatures having plummeted below zero.

There have been calls for a return to the 'spring-autumn' system that was jettisoned in 2010 from the current 'autumn-spring' arrangement but not from Russian Football Union (RFU) honorary president Vyacheslav Koloskov.

"This would be laughed at around the world," the former RFU chief, who wants clubs' infrastructure and facilities to be upgraded, said in a telephone interview.

"The new system is more progressive than 'spring-autumn' as it is adapted to the European and world standards. However, it does have its faults," he told Reuters.

He added that the key to improving the popularity of the sport at the home of the 2018 World Cup hosts is to improve the infrastructure, especially the provision of indoor facilities.

"There should be only one decision and that is to build the necessary infrastructure around the country, especially in the Urals and Siberia where the winters are particularly harsh."

From 1992 until 2010, the Russian championship had a 'spring-autumn' system, which started in March and finished in November. This calendar is traditionally used in countries in the north of Europe like Sweden and Norway, where winter starts early, and by November pitches can be covered in snow.

However, former RFU president Sergei Fursenko decided the country would be better off moving to an 'autumn-spring' system from 2012 after a transitional 18-month season in 2011/12 so the campaign could finish in May. —Reuters



GUINGAMO: Guingamp's players warm up prior to the French L1 football match Guingamp against Nice yesterday at the Roudourou stadium in Guingamp, western of France. — AFP

FOOTBALL MOURNS BRAZILIAN PLAYERS KILLED IN AIR CRASH

MEDELLON: Emotional tributes were paid yesterday to the Brazilian football team Chapecoense Real that was virtually wiped out in a plane crash in the Colombian mountains that killed 71 people. The charter plane, a British Aerospace 146, reported electrical problems just before the crash as it arrived in Medellin where Chapecoense were to play in the Copa Sudamericana final.

But a Colombian military source said the airliner may have run out of fuel. "It is very suspicious that despite the impact there was no explosion. That reinforces the theory of the lack of fuel," the source told AFP.

The weather at the time of the disaster was bad. Six people miraculously survived the crash Monday night. Three of the survivors were footballers, but goalkeeper Jackson Follmann had his right leg amputated, said the San Vicente Foundation Hospital outside Medellin. Two flight crew and a journalist following Chapecoense for the game against Medellin also escaped.

Brazil ordered three days of national mourning for the team. Fans flocked to the Chapecoense stadium in Brazil to mourn the team, who have emerged from nowhere over the past two years to take South American football by storm.

Other Brazilian clubs have offered them players so they can carry on competing. Special funds have also been set up.

Football legends Pele and Maradona and current superstars Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo led tributes to the Chapecoense team. Ronaldo joined Real Madrid teammates in a minute's silence for the Brazilian team.

BLACK BOXES FOUND

"The pain is terrible. Just as we had made it, I will not say to the top, but to have national prominence, a tragedy like this happens," club vice-president Ivan Tozzo told Globo SporTV. "It is very difficult, a very great tragedy."



CHAPECO: People attend a mass in memoriam of the players of Brazilian team Chapecoense Real killed in a plane crash in the Colombian mountains, in Chapeco, in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina, on Tuesday. —AFP

Sports

Firefighting Coe,
Russia again in
IAAF spotlight



Hamilton one of
the best, but no
friend: Rosberg



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016

SUPER BOWL WINNER SHARPER GETS 20 YEARS FOR DRUG-RAPE Page 18



NEW YORK: Henrik Lundqvist #30 and Ryan McDonagh #27 of the New York Rangers block the net late in the third period as Derek Ryan #33 of the Carolina Hurricanes takes the shot at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday in New York City. The Rangers defeated the Hurricanes 2-1. — AFP

NASH, VESEY RALLY RANGERS TO WIN OVER HURRICANES

NEW YORK: Jimmy Vesey scored the tiebreaking power-play goal with 5:12 remaining to lift the New York Rangers to a 3-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night. Rick Nash had a goal and an assist, Nick Holden also scored and Henrik Lundqvist stopped 19 shots to help the Rangers snap a four-game skid at home (0-3-1). Hurricanes defenseman Ron Hainsey received a double-minor for hooking and an unsportsmanlike misconduct with 6:47 to go and Vesey took advantage 95 seconds later for his eighth goal of the season and first since Nov. 12. Viktor Stalberg scored twice in the first period in his return to New York for the first time since leaving the Rangers to sign with Carolina in the offseason. Cam Ward finished with 25 saves as the Hurricanes lost for the third time in four games.

SABRES 5, SENATORS 4

Jack Eichel had a goal and an assist in his season debut as Buffalo beat Ottawa. Ryan O'Reilly scored twice for the Sabres, while Kyle Okposo and Sam Reinhart also scored. Robin Lehner started and gave up one goal on six shots before leaving late in the first period. Anders Nilsson replaced him and stopped 26 shots. Mike Hoffman had three goals and an assist for the Senators, and Mark Stone also scored in his 200th NHL game. Craig Anderson, making his sixth straight start, made 23 saves. Eichel had missed the first 21 games after spraining his left ankle ahead of the Sabres' season opener.

BLACKHAWKS 2, PANTHERS 1, SO

Richard Panik and Artemi Panarin scored in a shootout, and Chicago beat Florida in the Panthers' first game since Tom Rowe took over as interim coach. Panik also scored in regulation and Corey Crawford made 38 saves in Chicago's first home game in 16 days. The Blackhawks went 3-3-1 on their 12-day circuit trip. Panarin beat Roberto Luongo with a slick backhand in the second round of the shootout. After Aleksander Barkov was stopped by Crawford at the other end, Panik converted his chance with a well-placed wrist shot past Luongo on the glove side. Florida returned to the ice for the first time since coach Gerard Gallant was fired after a 3-2 loss at Carolina on Sunday night. Jaromir Jagr scored in the third period and Luongo made 32 saves, but the Panthers lost for the third time in four games.

FLYERS 3, BRUINS 2, SO

Shayne Gostisbehere scored in the ninth round of a shootout to lift Philadelphia past Boston. Steve Mason made 45 saves through overtime, and defenseman Michael Del Zotto and center Claude Giroux scored in regulation for the Flyers, who won their second straight. David Krejci and Brad Marchand had the goals for the Bruins, who lost for the fourth time in five games. Tuukka Rask turned aside 19 shots and seven of nine shooters in the tiebreaker. Both goalies were outstanding in overtime. Mason snatched a shot by Krejci with about 30 seconds remaining, and Rask slid to his right to

stop Giroux's one-timer.

JETS 3, DEVILS 2

Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine each scored his 13th goal of the season to help Winnipeg beat New Jersey. Blake Wheeler had the other goal for the Jets, and Scheifele added an assist. Connor Hellebuyck made 23 saves in his fifth straight start for Winnipeg. Devils rookie Miles Wood, with his first NHL goal, and Nick Lappin scored for New Jersey. Cory Schneider stopped 26 shots for the Devils, who had earned at least a point in their previous three games (1-0-2). Winnipeg has won five straight at home.

RED WINGS 3, STARS 1

Anthony Mantha scored the go-ahead goal midway through the second period and Detroit beat Dallas. Petr Mrazek stopped 34 shots for the Red Wings, who are 3-0-1 in their last four games for their best stretch in more than a month. Kari Lehtonen made 17 saves for the Stars. He was pulled for an extra skater with more than 2 minutes left, and the Red Wings took advantage when Steve Ott scored an empty-net goal to make it 3-1 with 1:03 remaining. Dallas, playing the second of back-to-back games on the road, has dropped two straight and won just three of its last nine overall.

BLUE JACKETS 5, LIGHTNING 1

Josh Anderson had a goal and two assists, Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 26 shots and Columbus cruised past Tampa Bay. Scott Hartnell had a goal and an assist, and William Karlsson, Alexander Wennberg and Sam Gagner also scored as the Blue Jackets beat the Lightning for the second time in five days. Columbus is 8-1-1 in its last 10 home games. Columbus played sharp defense, kept the puck in Tampa Bay's end and created plenty of good looks and quality shots. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 33 saves, and Valteri Filppula scored for the Lightning with less than 3 minutes left to spoil the shutout.

PREDATORS 5, AVALANCHE 3

Ryan Johansen and Austin Watson each had a goal and an assist to lead Nashville past Colorado. Viktor Arvidsson, Mike Fisher and Kevin Fiala also scored, and Roman Josi had two assists for the Predators. Pekka Rinne stopped 37 shots, improving to 17-7-2 in his career against the Avalanche. He also finished the month 9-1-2. Johansen and Watson scored in the first 2:42 of the third period to put Nashville up 5-2. The Predators have won eight of 11. Mikko Rantanen and Rene Bourque each had a goal and an assist, and Mikhail Grigorenko also scored for Colorado, which has started a five-game homestand 0-2-1.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, OILERS 2

Auston Matthews scored his 10th goal of the season as the Toronto beat Edmonton for the Maple Leafs' second road win of the season. James van Riemsdyk, Nazem Kadri and Zach Hyman also scored for Toronto, which has won

two straight. Frederik Andersen stopped 28 shots. Connor McDavid and Andrej Sekera scored for the Oilers, who have lost three in a row. Cam Talbot gave up four goals on 14 shots over the first two periods, and Jonas Gustavsson stopped all nine shots he faced in the third. Matthews got the Maple Leafs on the scoreboard at 5:45 of the first, and van Riemsdyk made it 2-0 less than 3 minutes into the second. After Sekera pulled Edmonton within one, Kadri restored the two-goal lead at 6:00. Hyman extended Toronto's lead to 4-1 with just over 3 minutes remaining in the middle period.

SHARKS 2, COYOTES 1

Brent Burns scored a power-play goal 19 seconds into overtime and San Jose wrapped up a successful homestand with a victory over Arizona. Chris Tierney also scored and Martin Jones made 18 saves. San Jose won four of five games on the homestand and improved to 8-3 overall at the Shark Tank this season. Max Domi scored the lone goal for the Coyotes, who lost their fifth straight in San Jose. Mike Smith made 40 saves but had no chance on Burns' one-timer in overtime. Martin Hanzal was called for high-sticking Melker Karlsson with 0.3 seconds left in regulation and the Sharks did not take long to capitalize in the extra period. San Jose set up quickly in the offensive zone and Joe Pavelski fed Burns at the top of the faceoff circle for the big shot that beat Smith for his ninth goal of the season.

DUCKS 2, CANADIENS 1

John Gibson made 39 saves and Anaheim got goals from Richard Rakell and defenseman Cam Fowler to beat NHL-leading Montreal. Andrew Shaw scored with 2 minutes left and Carey Price stopped 36 shots for the Canadiens (16-5-2). Struggling just a few days ago, the Ducks (11-8-4) suddenly look like a different team. They had lost three consecutive games before winning Friday at San Jose, the defending Western Conference champion. Gibson was stellar in net, fending off his first 38 shots before Montreal, having pulled its goalie, got a late score from Shaw.

CANUCKS 5, WILD 4

Sven Baertschi scored his second of the night with 2:35 left in regulation as Vancouver beat Minnesota. Brandon Sutter and Ben Hutton each had a goal and an assist, and Loui Eriksson also scored for Vancouver. Henrik Sedin and Troy Stecher had two assists each and Ryan Miller stopped 38 shots. Ryan Suter scored the tying goal late in the third for Minnesota. Jason Pominville had two goals, Jason Zucker added a goal and an assist, and Nino Niederreiter had two assists. Darcy Kuemper got the start with Devan Dubnyk given the night off and finished with 30 saves. Baertschi, who has struggled to rediscover his scoring touch that emerged toward the end of last season, tipped Stecher's point shot to cap a crazy third period that saw the teams combine for five goals. — AP

BENNEL CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE

LONDON: Former coach Barry Bennell, who is at the centre of a scandal rocking English football, was on Tuesday charged with eight counts of child abuse, prosecutors said.

Bennell, who has already served three jail terms for previous child sex offences, has faced a slew of new allegations by at least 20 former footballers spanning three decades beginning in the 1970s when he was working for Crewe Alexandra, Manchester City and Stoke City. "Following a review of the evidence, in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors, Mr Bennell, 62, has today been charged with eight offences of sexual assault against a boy under the age of 14," said a statement from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Bennell, who it was revealed on Monday had to be hospitalised when he was found unconscious in a hotel near London, will appear in court on December 14.

The latest charges stem from Cheshire Police but six other police forces are investigating accusations made against Bennell in a scandal Football Association Chairman Greg Clarke has called "the greatest crisis" in English football he could recall.

Former Newcastle player Derek Bell, who waived his anonymity to the Guardian, claimed he was subjected to "horrendous" sexual abuse at his local boys football club in the 1970s. "It was pure, unbelievable heartache. Thinking my mam and dad were next door and he was performing these sexual acts. He had groomed us for a couple of years and he thought it was normal," Bell said. "Deep down in my mind I knew it wasn't normal, but I was so scared to speak and come out and say it wasn't right."

Former Northern Ireland international Mark Williams spoke out, with Sky News revealing he had waived his anonymity to describe his torment. "My life has been affected irreversibly both personally and professionally and it has been soul-destroying to carry this burden for 30 years," he said. Police Scotland have also confirmed they have launched a probe following abuse allegations north of the border.

The FA has also launched its own internal review appointing leading lawyer Kate Gallafent, an expert in child protection, to head it up. The British Government announced on Tuesday they will bring the police and the FA together for a meeting on the developing scandal.

Clarke took over as FA chairman in August and has already had to deal with the removal of Sam Allardyce as England coach over comments he made in a newspaper sting and the 'poppygate' row with FIFA.

He told Sky News it was time to finally



Barry Bennell

deal with the issues after they had been ignored. "It's certainly the biggest (crisis) I can remember," said Clarke. "I think the moral consequences of failing to deal with some of these issues in the past we must get to the bottom of."

Clarke doesn't know if the FA at the time deliberately turned a blind eye to the goings on although a reporter who made a documentary about sex abuse in football for Channel Four in 1997 has claimed there is a FA report from 2005 detailing 250 victims and spread over a number of clubs.

"I don't know if there was a cover-up or not, I really don't know," said Clarke.

Ahead of the report being published the club announced they have retained an external law firm to carry out an investigation concerning an individual employed by the club in the 1970s, who is now dead.

The club has contacted the FA to ensure that all possible assistance is provided as part of their wider investigation," a Chelsea statement read. — AFP



LUXURY SHOPPERS CROWD LONDON FOR BREXIT BARGAINS



NEW DELHI: An Indian vendor waits for customers in a shop supplying traditional wedding dresses and suits in New Delhi. Jatin Pal's wedding was just days away and his family were finalizing plans for an extravagant multi-day celebration until Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned high denomination notes overnight, throwing cold water over the festivities. — AFP

INDIA CASH BAN SLIMS DOWN BIG FAT WEDDINGS

NEW DELHI: Jatin Pal's wedding was just days away and his family were finalizing plans for an extravagant multi-day celebration then Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned high denomination notes overnight, casting a dark shadow over the festivities. Within hours of Modi's surprise November 8 announcement, 500 and 1,000 rupee (\$7.25, \$14.50) notes—some 85 percent of all cash in circulation—were withdrawn, leaving millions across the vast country out of pocket.

The move—described by the prime minister as a "surgical strike" against corruption and tax evasion—coincided with the start of India's annual wedding season, when thousands marry during a three-month period deemed auspicious in the Hindu faith. "We marry once and you try to make it memorable in every possible way. But the cash crunch is proving otherwise," said Pal. "This has soured the happiness and left a bad feeling."

Life savings are ploughed into weddings in India, with a typical urban family spending up to \$75,000 on celebrations, according to an estimate by Goldman Sachs. Traders say almost all wedding-related purchases are traditionally made in cash from savings put aside over years—even decades—but that the cur-

ren- ban means many families are being forced to cut back. "Indian parents start planning and saving for the wedding as soon as a child is born," Priyanka Gupta, owner of a bridal store told AFP, adding that she had seen a significant drop in business since the demonetisation. Delhi-based wedding planner Shrawan Kumar said most of his clients spend between 1.5 million and 2 million rupees, but that some had scaled back plans by as much as 40 percent. Others have simply decided to postpone or even cancel. "I can't pay the waiter, photographer, transport, florist, vegetable seller through cheques. We are at a loss," Kumar said. Another casualty has been one of Delhi's oldest gold markets, which has temporarily closed after tax officers raided jewelers across the country on reports of a gold buying spree following the currency ban as people tried to turned their cash into gold. Almost 50 percent of gold sales in India are linked to weddings, according to the World Gold Council, with most purchases made in cash.

'No black money'

Stubbornly long queues outside banks have become a ubiquitous sight across the country as the new rupee bills have been slow



AHMEDABAD: An Indian bride poses for a photograph holding 2500 INR in cash, given as a mandatory 'mahr' payment by the groom's family to the bride at the time of marriage, and which legally becomes her property, a mass wedding ceremony in Ahmedabad. — AFP

to get into circulation. The government has put temporary restrictions on the amount of cash people can exchange or withdraw in an attempt to wean the country off cash and

bring more into the formal-and taxable-banking sector.

Following outrage from families planning weddings, the government allowed a special

one-time withdrawal of 250,000 rupees per wedding party to help cover costs—small fry for an Indian wedding.

But Pal's father Ranbir said they had twice tried and failed to get the extra money under the scheme—which requires paperwork proving a wedding is in the works—and instead borrowed around 450,000 rupees from friends. "It is frustrating when you have saved money for the wedding but can't use it," said Ranbir. "We should be making arrangements for over 700 guests who will come to the wedding. Look what we are doing."

Short of cash, the family has had to scale back the celebrations. Madhur Jain, who runs a wedding card shop in Old Delhi, said he had received just three orders a week since the demonetisation, down from an average of 30. "The old notes are out and new notes are nowhere to be seen," Jain said. But despite most customers paying in cash, bridal shop owner Gupta was quick to dismiss suggestions that so-called "black money"—unaccounted money was involved in the industry. "There is no black money involved in the weddings," she said. "More than anything this means shattered dreams of families (hoping) to celebrate an ideal wedding." — AFP

CALLERS FOR DOLLARS: INSIDE INDIA'S SCAM CALL CENTERS
ALLEGED KINGPIN SOUGHT BY INDIAN POLICE

MUMBAI: In late September, a woman in National City, California, received a voice message on her phone saying she was in trouble with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over "tax evasion or tax fraud."

Panicking, she rang the number and told a man who said he was from the IRS: "I can pay \$500," half the sum demanded. "I could do a payment plan. I just can't pay all of it at once." "Ma'am, you can pay \$500 today itself. You can do that?" the man asked, adding that lawyers would look at her accounts and work out a monthly payment plan, but she had to pay half now.

In transcripts of the conversation that investigators shared with Reuters, the man told her to keep the phone line open and drive to a nearby grocery store, where she bought \$500 worth of iTunes gift cards and gave the 'agent' the redemption codes. She had just been scammed — one of at least 15,000 people the US Justice Department says lost more than \$300 million in an "enormous and complex fraud" running since 2013. The department last month brought grand jury charges against 56 people in India and the United States for "telefraud" scams run from fake call centers in India.

Investigators have arrested 20 people in the United States, and Indian authorities have made

75 arrests following October raids on three premises in the Thane suburb of Mumbai. Charges include conspiracy to commit identity theft, impersonation of an officer of the United States, wire fraud and money laundering. Indian police say they are looking for Sagar Thakkar, a man in his early 30s also known as Shaggy, who they believe masterminded the scam. Thakkar was also among those named by the US Department of Justice. Reuters was unable to contact Thakkar for comment; he is not known to have a lawyer, and police believe he fled to Dubai last month.

"We are trying to complete the procedure to issue a red corner notice for Thakkar," Parag Manere, a deputy commissioner at Thane police, told Reuters, referring to an Interpol arrest warrant. Police said Thakkar led a lavish lifestyle, frequenting 5-star hotels and driving expensive cars with proceeds from the scam. He gave one, a 25 million rupee (\$365,000) Audi R8, to his girlfriend. "We have seized an Audi car, and are trying to find other assets of Thakkar," Manere said.

The FBI, which is involved in the investigations, declined to comment. The Department of Justice did not respond to requests for comment for this article. At a news conference last month, Assistant Attorney General Leslie Caldwell said

the US would seek the extradition of suspects in India, and warned others engaged in similar schemes they could face jail terms. In interviews before the US charges were filed, police, suspects and call center workers in India told Reuters how the scam was run. Training materials and taped conversations, which investigators believe were made by call center instructors for training purposes, shed some light on an operation aimed to exploit the aged and gullible.

'Taught to be tough'

"The revenue was unpredictable. Some days were good, some were bad," Haider Ali Ayub Mansuri, who said he managed operations at one fake call center, told Reuters as he was returned to jail in India last month after a court extended his custody. He is among the 75 arrested by Indian police. "On a good day, we extracted as much as \$20,000 from a single US citizen," he said. In India, the sheer scale of the operation surprised many. For months, hundreds of young men and women worked nights at several call centers in Thane.

Callers posed as IRS officers and threatened their victims, often newly-arrived immigrants and the elderly, into paying fictitious tax penalties electronically — sometimes by buying gift

cards and turning over the redemption codes, Indian investigators said. "They used to blast out pre-recorded messages to thousands of citizens who were asked to call back. When they called back, there was a center just like this," said Manere at Thane police.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided premises in early October as call center workers settled in for their shift. The buildings housed seven call centers, and over a few days more than 700 people were detained. Most have since been released, but told not to leave the city. Callers bullied their victims with the threat of arrest, jail, seized homes and confiscated passports. "There was one instance where an old lady was crying," because she didn't have the money to pay, said a former call center worker who spoke only on condition of anonymity. "But we kept insisting on the money. We were taught to be tough," he said. On a follow-up raid in Ahmedabad, 500 kms north of Mumbai, police uncovered what they believe was "a nerve centre for these centers," said Manere. "A lot of money has been transacted. It's been going on for a few years." The police raids found little in the way of documentation, beyond some training materials. Another former worker said this was likely because call center managers stopped employ-

ees from bringing pens and phones to work. Reuters was unable to independently confirm the accounts provided by call center workers.

Another former worker, an economics graduate, told Reuters she took a job without knowing what the center did. The 12,000 rupee (\$180) monthly salary was well below the going rate for a graduate, she said, but it was a job, and "people aren't hiring." She said several of her colleagues looked as though they had just left high school. Her first week was spent in training with floor managers. While callers spoke to their victims, she said dozens of trainees squeezed in around the room, and had to memorize pages of dialogue for use on calls.

Another former employee said his instructors told him his work was illegal, but there was "nothing to worry about." Callers made "fast money," another former caller told Reuters. In comments confirmed by investigating officer Mukund Hatote, the worker said: "For every dollar you brought in, you were given 2 rupees (around a third of a US cent)."

People wanted to leave rather than be involved in something they suspected was illegal, he said, but carried on because managers offered weekly incentives, such as cash or gadgets, for meeting their targets. — Reuters

NO CHICKEN, NO CAFES: EGYPTIANS SCRIMP AS PRICES LEAP

CAIRO: Money had already been tight as food and electricity bills climbed for weeks. So Ashraf Mahrous, a 45-year-old civil servant, warned his wife, "Black days are ahead," when Egypt floated its pound and hiked fuel prices this month. Mahrous is now looking for a side job. Rising infla-

tion has forced him to stop eating chicken and borrow cash from friends to make ends meet. He also gave up his regular evening cafe visits and slashed his son's allowance. "We can no longer survive on my salary," Mahrous, a father of two, said. "The situation is very, very, very difficult."

Struggling to cope with price increases, some Egyptians are scrimping on meals, buying used clothes or considering moving their children to cheaper schools. Even the better off are feeling the pinch. And more price jumps are likely amid a slew of economic decisions designed to revive a battered economy, lure back investors and end a dollar crunch. Egypt recently took what many economists say is the necessary step of floating its pound and cutting fuel subsidies as it sealed a \$12 billion loan deal with the International Monetary Fund.

Even before the pound plunge, inflation had stood at 13.6 percent in October. A hard currency crisis led to shortages in medicines and basic staples like sugar. Unrest and uncertainty after Egypt's 2011 uprising has hurt tourism and deterred foreign investors. "Egyptians are in for a tough time over the next year," said Jason Tuvey, Middle East economist at Capital Economics who expects inflation to peak at more than 20 percent in the middle of next year. While the recent decisions "should ultimately lay the foundations for a period of stronger economic growth," it will take time before such benefits can be reaped, he said.

state-run news agency.

Business environment

Tuvey predicts inflation won't fall back to single digits until near the end of 2018, and it could take even longer before Egyptians see the rewards for their sacrifices in the form of more jobs and wage growth. Investors want to see more changes to improve the business environment, he said. "Egypt has all the ingredients to become a manufacturing hub," he said. "To the extent that a weaker pound and economic reforms could spark a move in that direction, we'd certainly see job prospects stem from prospects of growth, and wages as well should pick up."

Until then, officials have counseled patience and promised to protect the neediest. In a bid to soften the blow, the central bank raised its key interest rates by three percentage points this month and the army is handing out millions of food parcels at discounted prices. These efforts provide little consolation to Mahrous, who said his daily transportation costs have increased after the fuel subsidy cuts. Food eats up the largest chunk of his salary of 1,300 pounds a month, he said. — AP



CAIRO: Egyptians carry their children as they shop at a popular market in Cairo, Egypt. — AP

Pound loses value

The Egyptian pound quickly lost about half its value, plunging to around 18 to the dollar, in a country heavily dependent on imports ranging from food items to raw materials. With salaries remaining largely the same, nearly everyone in the already deeply impoverished country effectively had a sudden, large pay cut. Multiple previous governments had balked at such moves for fear of stoking unrest. The devaluation came after other steps that increased prices - the introduction of a value-added tax and hike in household electricity prices.

News

in brief

Bank of England urged to remove the £5 note

LONDON: A petition calling for the Bank of England to remove a new banknote from circulation had on Tuesday received more than 70,000 signatures, with critics angry it is produced with animal product. The polymer £5 notes (\$6.2, 5.9 euros) were unveiled in September, with the Bank of England extolling the new banknotes for being waterproof and having enhanced security features. But the central bank has this week come under fire for using tallow, a product derived from animal fats, in the polymer pellets used to make the £5 notes. A Change.org petition calling for animal products to be removed from banknotes has now gained more than 70,000 signatures. "This is unacceptable to millions of vegans, vegetarians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and others in the UK," the petition reads. Doug Maw, a 47-year-old vegan who started the petition, said the use of tallow was "incredibly disrespectful". "We have no choice with money. We have to use it. They issue it through ATMs and hand them to us in shops."

Striking Lufthansa pilots ground nearly 900 flights

BERLIN: The latest strike by Lufthansa pilots grounded almost 900 flights yesterday and German companies and other Lufthansa staff called for an end to the protests which are costing the airline 10-15 million euros a day. Pilots staged a four-day strike last week then resumed their protest over pay that dates back to early 2014 on Tuesday, taking the number of cancelled flights in the latest round of walkouts to about 4,500. One of Lufthansa's major corporate customers, Siemens, said the strikes were harming the Germany economy and the country's image and warned Lufthansa that it needed to become more reliable. "As a major customer we have to consider how we can deal with this on a long-term basis," Siemens CEO Joe Kaeser told German daily Bild, adding that the pilots should resume talks. Analysts have said the walkouts are a good opportunity for rivals such as Ryanair and easyJet to gain market share and could mean Lufthansa misses its 2016 profit target. Its shares dropped 2.7 percent yesterday.

Egypt's CIB in talks to sell 70% CI stake

CAIRO: Egypt's largest listed bank CIB is close to finalizing a deal to sell a 70 percent stake in its investment banking arm CI Capital to a group of local investors, sources with knowledge of the discussions said yesterday. Commercial International Bank declined to comment. A deal to sell CI Capital to Beltone Financial, a unit of billionaire Naguib Sawiris's Orascom Telecom Media and Technology Holding, was agreed in February but later fell through after the deal failed to secure approval from the Egyptian Financial Supervisory Authority. Sawiris said at the time he planned to merge CI Capital with Beltone Financial to create one of Egypt's largest investment firms. Banking sources said CIB had been seeking to find other buyers for the investment bank, whose market value they estimated at near 1 billion Egyptian pounds (\$56.24 million). One source familiar with the deal said it was likely to be completed "within hours".

Mejda Group set to back Tunisian tourism project

TUNIS: Qatar's Mejda Group is to sign a deal to develop a \$220 million tourism complex near Tunis, a Tunisian official and a representative of the Qatari group said yesterday. The tourism complex will be located just north of the Tunisian capital at Raoued, and will include a luxury hotel, 90 rental villas and a shopping centre, a senior Tunisian official said. The project is expected to create 1,500 jobs, with work to start in December, the official said. Mejda Group has already built a luxury hotel in Tabarka, close to the Algerian border in north-west Tunisia. The deal for the new development, announced at a two-day international investment conference in Tunis, is due to be signed later by Mejda Group and Tunisia's tourism minister. After the conference opened on Tuesday Western and regional partners, including Qatar, pledged billions of dollars in financial assistance for Tunisia.

Brazil economy shrinks 0.8% in third quarter

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's ailing economy shrank again in the third quarter, with GDP falling 0.8 percent, the state statistics office said yesterday. The performance was slightly better than market expectations of a 0.9 percent drop, but was the seventh consecutive quarterly decline. Brazil's economy is in its deepest recession for decades and the country's credit rating has been reduced to junk status by all three main international rating agencies. However, center-right President Michel Temer, who took over this year after the impeachment of leftist president Dilma Rousseff, has vowed to introduce strong austerity measures to balance the books. A first stage in the program - a 20 year budget freeze - was approved in an initial vote by the Senate late Tuesday. The austerity policies are running into resistance from unions and many public employees who say the measures will only make an already painful economic situation worse.



PELALAWAN, Indonesia: A girl pushes a cart while working at a palm oil plantation area in Pelalawan, Riau province in Indonesia's Sumatra island. — AFP

LABOR ABUSES FOUND AT INDONESIAN PALM PLANTATIONS SUPPLYING GLOBAL COMPANIES

KIDS AS YOUNG AS 8 WORK IN 'HAZARDOUS' CONDITIONS

JAKARTA: Global consumer companies, including Unilever, Nestle, Kellogg and Procter & Gamble, have sourced palm oil from Indonesian plantations where labor abuses were uncovered, Amnesty International said yesterday. Children as young as eight worked in "hazardous" conditions at palm plantations run by Singapore-based Wilmar International Ltd and its suppliers on the Indonesian islands of Kalimantan and Sumatra, Amnesty said in a report.

Amnesty, which said it interviewed 120 workers, alleges that many of them worked long hours for low pay and without adequate safety equipment. The palm oil from these plantations could be traced to nine multinational companies, it said. "Despite promising customers that there will be no exploitation in their palm oil supply chains, big brands continue to profit from appalling abuses," said Meghna Abraham, senior investigator at Amnesty. The NGO said it chose Wilmar as the focus of its investigation as the company is the world's largest processor and merchandiser of palm and lauric oils, controlling more than

43 percent of the global palm oil trade.

Other companies operating palm plantations in Indonesia include Golden Agri-Resources Ltd, Indofood Agri Resources Ltd and PT Astra Agro Lestari Tbk. Even though Indonesia has strong labour laws under which most of the abuses can amount to criminal offences, these laws are poorly enforced by the government, Amnesty said. Wilmar said it welcomed the NGO's report, which helps to highlight labour issues within the broader palm oil industry, but added that finding a solution requires the collaboration of governments, companies and civil society organizations. "We acknowledge that there are ongoing labour issues in the palm oil industry, and these issues could affect any palm company operating in Indonesia," it said.

"The focus on Wilmar ... is often used to draw attention to problems in the wider palm oil industry," Wilmar supplies around 10 percent of the total palm oil used in Nestle's products, the Swiss food giant said in an email. Nestle said it is working with Wilmar to improve the traceability of the commodity. "Practices such as those identi-

fied in Amnesty International's report have no place in our supply chain," Nestle said. The company said it would investigate allegations related to its purchase of palm oil along with its suppliers. Procter & Gamble also said in an email it is working with Wilmar to "ensure they can remedy any potential human rights infringements in their supply chain".

Reducing child labor

Indonesia is the world's biggest producer of palm oil, used in everything from snacks and soaps to cosmetics and biofuels. The sector employs millions, and plantation operators say it is difficult to have complete oversight of labor conditions. No company would "consciously" hire underage labor as that is against the law, but some plantation workers get their children to help out, Sumarjono Saragih, an official at the Indonesian Palm Oil Association, told Reuters by telephone. "If children want to help their parents, companies cannot forbid that," Saragih said. The government has been trying to reduce child labour by giving subsidies and other assistance to families,

Maruli Hasoloan, a senior official at the manpower ministry, told Reuters in an email.

The ministry will also study working conditions at palm plantations and improve labour protection in Indonesia, he said. Agus Justianto, an official at Indonesia's environment ministry, said that a company found guilty of labor violations could get its permit revoked, but it is "not in the environment ministry's domain." US snack and breakfast food company Kellogg Co said it is committed to ensuring that its palm oil is obtained from "known and certified sources that are environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable".

If Kellogg finds or is made aware of any supply chain violations, it would discuss corrective actions with its suppliers, it said. "If the concerns are not adequately addressed, we take action to remove them from our chain." Unilever said while significant progress has been made to tackle environmental issues associated with palm cultivation, more needs to be done to address "these deeply concerning social issues" and promised to work with its partners. — Reuters

GULF BANK APPOINTS DAHER AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank yesterday announced the appointment of Antoine Daher as Chief Executive Officer, effective 1 December 2016, following the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait. Daher, previously Gulf Bank's Deputy CEO, succeeds Cesar Gonzalez-Bueno who had been CEO since March 2014. Omar Kutayba Alghanim, Chairman of Gulf Bank, commented on the appointment: "We are very pleased to welcome Antoine Daher as Gulf Bank's new Chief Executive Officer."

He has been part of the Bank's senior management team since 2013, and he has a track record of strong leadership, both within and outside of Gulf Bank. His deep banking and financial knowledge, combined with his thorough understanding of Kuwait and the region, make him uniquely qualified to lead Gulf Bank

into the future. The Bank's Board of Directors, management team, and I are looking forward to working closely with him in creating the next chapter of the Gulf Bank success story."

Daher was assigned the position of Deputy CEO, Wholesale Banking at Gulf Bank in 2013. Prior to joining Gulf Bank, he served as General Manager for Domestic Corporate Banking at National Bank of Kuwait from 2011 to 2013 and Head of the Domestic Multinational unit from 2007 to 2011. Daher also worked at National City Bank in the USA, where he held several positions in Project Finance, Structured Finance, Corporate Banking, and Capital Markets. Daher holds a BSc in Civil Engineering, and an MBA from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. He has also attended Executive Education courses given by the Harvard Business School.



Antoine Daher CEO

Omar Alghanim



COCA-COLA AND NBC EXPAND INVESTMENT IN GAZA

KUWAIT: The Coca-Cola Company and National Beverage Company (NBC) yesterday officially inaugurated a new Coca-Cola bottling facility located in Gaza, which represents a \$20 million investment in the region. The new bottling facility further expands National Beverage Company's Palestinian operations to four bottling plants and four distribution centers, and immediately creates 120 direct jobs in Gaza, while indirectly supporting more than 1,200 Palestinians through a local value-chain of suppliers, distributors and retailers.

Following planned future expansion within the next three years, the Coca-Cola Gaza plant will eventually employ 270 people, bringing the total number of direct Palestinian jobs across the West Bank and Gaza to more than 750, and the total number of indirect job opportunities to more than 7,500.

The Coca-Cola Foundation, NBC and Mercy Corps, the international development organization, also announced a new \$1.3 million charitable initiative designed to address two regional development challenges -ensuring access to clean drinking water and creating

employment opportunities for Palestinian youth. The 'Empowering Sustainable Communities in Gaza' initiative aims to support over 30,000 Palestinian beneficiaries within three years.

The charitable initiative includes plans to construct a desalination plant near Al Maghazi refugee camp in the center of Gaza that will provide a sustainable water source to a population of more than 24,000 registered refugees. NBC is the third largest Palestinian employer and the fifth largest Palestinian investor with over 600 direct employees, and is the largest food and beverage company in the region, having produced sparkling and stills beverage products since 1998, including Coca-Cola, Fanta, Sprite, Cappy juice, Arwa and Jericho mineral water.

With existing bottling facilities in Jericho, Tulkarem, Ramallah and its Ramallah headquarters and main distribution center, construction of the Gaza plant began in 2014 and began production in April 2016. "National Beverage Company and Coca-Cola share great pride in having been part of the fabric of

Palestinian communities for almost 18 years, and our new Gaza plant shows our ongoing commitment to investing and supporting progress in communities around the world," said Muhtar Kent, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Coca-Cola Company.

"We believe that strong businesses can help enable strong communities, and we are delighted to welcome new Gazan employees, distributors and retailers to our Coca-Cola system, while jointly undertaking important work with NBC and Mercy Corps that we believe can have a positive and lasting impact for years to come."

"Ever since NBC first began operations, we have been firmly committed to building a successful Palestinian business that can create employment opportunities, support the national economy and demonstrate the great capabilities of our region while serving products of the very highest quality," said ZahiKhouri, Founder and Chairman of National Beverage Company. "The opening of our first Gaza plant is an important milestone in this journey and provides great evidence of the tremendous commercial opportunity that exists."

"Empowered with the spirit of leadership and with self-confidence, skill, and talent, NBC has worked with partners on the ground to expand its supply chain from city-to-city and village to village in the West Bank, with a long-term hope and clear ambition to operating in Gaza," said Imad Hindi, the General Manager of NBC. "This new productive operation will eventually create thousands of direct and indirect job opportunities to address unemployment challenges and make a tangible contribution to the Gazan economy."

Accredited with international quality standards and following Coca-Cola's robust global certifications, the new Gaza bottling facility and distribution center spans over 15,000 square meters and contains a single bottling line that is capable of filling up to 36,000 returnable glass bottles per hour with Coca-Cola sparkling beverages.

The Coca-Cola beverages produced in the new bottling plant will be distributed in Gazan communities through 18 branded trucks which will move from city-to-city and from village-to-village.

Since 1998, NBC, The Coca-Cola Company and The Coca-Cola Foundation have supported dozens of community initiatives including an after-school football program, in collaboration with PACES, which offered 10,000 Palestinian students with football coaching and life-skills training. Access to computer labs has also been provided for the first time for 27,000 Palestinian school students in rural villages through the "Lana Al Ghad" school.com project.

For the last five years, aspiring Palestinian entrepreneurs have also participated in the Coca-Cola MENA Scholarship Program, attending a month-long world-class business skills program in the United States created by Coca-Cola, Indiana University's Global Business Institute and the US State Department. Recently, and as part of a commitment to environmental stewardship, NBC has inaugurated a power generation plant of photoelectric cells in its headquarters, which will generate 320 kilowatts of electricity to meet 90% of the power needs of the headquarters and main warehouses of NBC.

Supporting Business Banking Across Kuwait
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As an entrepreneur, you need a banking partner who is always by your side. NBK offers Business Banking services at many convenient locations to help you achieve your vision by providing you a complete range of business banking solutions, at 4 main offices and 7 supporting locations dedicated to serving your local business.

NBK'S 'BUSINESS SERVICES CLIENTS'

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait presents its Business Services Clients - an integrated bundle of banking services and solutions, which provide businesses with more flexibility and security. The program is aimed at providing an exceptional banking experience to businessmen and supporting their projects.

The business banking services of National Bank of Kuwait provide an unprecedented banking experience, through the management of clients banking business, and giving them the opportunity to concentrate on their business. NBK is unique in making available branches and specialized offices for its business banking services at the most modern methods through specialized client relations officers round the clock.

Assistant Director General of Personal Banking Services at NBK and Director of Business Banking Services Department Bader Al-Mutawa said NBK has always been keen on developing its performance and



Bader Al-Mutawa

products to remain the number one banking partner. NBK business services provide an integral group of services and products that include facilities related to financing projects and business accounts that can easily be managed.

RBS FAILS THE BANK OF ENGLAND 'STRESS TEST'

RBS NEEDS \$2.49 BILLION IN ADDITIONAL CAPITAL

LONDON: Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) will cut costs and sell assets to boost capital levels, it said yesterday after failing this year's Bank of England stress test, which warned of a "challenging" outlook for Britain's financial system. State-backed RBS rushed out a statement after the result announcement to say it would take a range of actions to make up the capital shortfall identified by the tests of around 2 billion pounds (\$2.49 billion).

The bank's shares were down 2.3 percent at 192 pence by 0901 GMT. The unexpected result underlines the litany of problems with which RBS is grappling, including a mounting legal bill for misconduct before the 2008 financial crisis and difficulties selling off assets such as its Williams & Glyn banking business. Analysts said the result would further delay RBS's ability to start returning capital to shareholders.

"We expect RBS will announce further restructuring at its full-year results, likely dashing any hopes for excess capital returns," Jefferies analyst Joseph Dickerson said in a note. The lender said it had agreed a plan of action with the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA), the Bank of England's enforcement arm, that should mean it does not have to tap markets to raise the money. "RBS has agreed a revised capital plan with the PRA to improve its stress resilience in light of the various challenges and uncertainties facing both the bank and the wider economy," the bank said. RBS is expected to settle soon with US authorities over its alleged mis-selling of mortgage backed securities in the run-up to the financial crisis.

Barclays' escape

Barclays also fell short by some measures but will not have to submit a new capital-raising plan because it has already announced steps to strengthen its defences, the BoE Financial Policy Committee (FPC) said. Standard Chartered missed the test's minimum Tier 1 capital target but also escapes the need for new capital-raising measures because of steps already being taken. The performance of the seven lenders tested was worse than many market participants had expected. "This is the highest average fall in CET1 (a measure of capital) and leverage ratios we've seen in the history of a UK concurrent stress test," said Steven Hall, banking partner at KPMG. This year's health check, the third so far by the Bank of England since the 2007-09 financial crisis forced taxpayers to bail out lenders such as RBS, was the toughest yet, with scenarios combining shocks to both global and domestic economies.

Britain's financial system faces elevated risks from leaving the European Union and market volatility after the US election, the Bank of England said. HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group, Nationwide and Santander UK did not reveal any capital inadequacies in the test, the central bank said. Britain's banking system underwent a severe real-life test in June when markets and sterling plummeted in response to Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

RBS said that it needs an extra percentage point of capital, equating to about 2 billion pounds, which could be achieved by further asset sales rather than tapping markets. The

lender's new capital plan has already been accepted by the PRA.

Satisfactory overall

The level of capital in the UK banking system was satisfactory, the Bank of England said, at 13.5 percent of risk-weighted assets and the need for RBS and Barclays to raise their capital holdings does not alter the overall picture. "The Financial Policy Committee judged that, as a consequence of the stress test, the banking system is in aggregate capitalized to support the real economy in a severe, broad and synchronized stress scenario," the FPC said.

The Bank of England also gave more detail on a second stress test that will be introduced next year alongside its annual check, saying that it will cover a seven-year period-compared with five in the basic test-and look at "severe headwinds" challenging profitability. Banks could be required to change their business models to make them more sustainable as they face a prolonged period of low interest rates and uncertainty over Britain's future relations with the European Union after it leaves the bloc.

"Changes to business models as the UK withdraws from the EU could have implications for resilience," the central bank said. The Bank of England is now developing a system-wide test to assess the dynamics of broader markets under stress and will conduct an in-depth assessment of risks from derivatives trades. The FPC also published yesterday an assessment of insurers' investment activities, concluding that changes are needed to the EU's Solvency II insurance rules. — Reuters

LUXURY SHOPPERS CROWD UK CAPITAL FOR BREXIT BARGAINS

LONDON: While the prospect of Brexit is weighing on much of the British economy, tourism and luxury goods businesses are cashing in on bargain-hungry visitors lured by the slide in the pound. London's tourism agency says sales of goods eligible for sales-tax exemption have gone up by a third since the Brexit vote in June, which sent the pound sterling plunging against the euro and dollar. "We calculated that over the last four months it's been about 12 percent cheaper for Europeans to come and shop here," said Chris Gottlieb, head of leisure marketing at the agency London & Partners. The pound is now at 1.17 euros compared with 1.3 euros before the shock vote to leave the European Union, while it has also fallen to \$1.25 from \$1.49. The result is that London has become the cheapest city for luxury goods shopping in the world in dollar terms, according to a study by Deloitte.

'Going to spend much more'

In tourist areas, the effects are evident. "We're going to spend much more money than we planned to," said Radostina Nonova, a Bulgarian tourist, laughing as she lugged her bags on Carnaby Street in the heart of London's shopping district. "We didn't plan to shop too much but it's obvious that the prices are very good for us." "So we shop and we can afford to eat and drink outside. That was not possible years ago," she said. French tourist Christophe Disic said he did not come just because the pound was low but "when we changed our money we realised we had a few more pounds for fewer euros".

When speaking to US tourists, shopkeepers are quick to take out their calculators. "We're an American brand. Our products are designed and



LONDON: Pedestrians carry shopping bags in Oxford Street in central London. — AFP

assembled in the States. But with the weakening of the pound it actually happens to be cheaper for the American tourists to buy an American product in London," said Denis Sagajevs, who works in Shinola, a shop selling watches and leather accessories. "It's affected by the fact that they can claim VAT on their way back. We pretty much on a day to day basis explain that to customers from the States. It happens to be quite a strong sales driver," he said.

Some shops are adapting their advertising and sales tactics to the new consumer behavior.

"Before the vote, European tourists were couples who came to be together and maybe bought a couple of things," said James, the manager of a luxury men's clothes shop on Carnaby Street. "Now, there are groups of friends who rush in. They grab everything they can carry." James estimated that European and US shoppers coming to his store have increased by around 50 percent. Instead of spending on costly advertising in British newspapers as it did before, his firm is changing tactic to appeal more to overseas visitors. — AP

EURO-ZONE INFLATION HITS 31-MONTH HIGH

BRUSSELS: Euro-zone inflation rose to a two-and-a-half-year high in November as Europe moved further away from the very low consumer prices that have put an already fragile economic recovery under threat. The level matched forecasts by analysts and will come as a relief to the European Central Bank which has embarked on a highly controversial and massive stimulus program to boost inflation. The Eurostat statistics agency yesterday said consumer prices in the 19-country currency bloc rose by 0.6 percent this month, the first time it has hit that level since April 2014. The euro-zone's ultra-low inflation is a huge worry for the ECB, where the goal is to keep inflation near 2.0 percent.

Inflation reflects underlying consumer demand in the economy and while still edg-

ing higher this month, 0.6 percent means Europe is short of a full-fledged recovery. Analyst Howard Archer said that core inflation-stripped of highly volatile food and oil prices-still remained far too low at 0.8 percent. "The muted November core inflation data highlight that the ECB cannot relax on the inflation front yet, even if the headline rate looks primed to rise appreciably over the next few months," Archer of IHS Global Insight wrote. World oil prices have crept up in recent months, snapping a long decline that destabilized the global economy and brought a spell of deflation to Europe. ECB chief Mario Draghi earlier this month said the euro-zone's tentative recovery remained heavily reliant on the bank's monetary boost, fuelling expectations of more stimulus to come. — AP



FLYDUBAI INAUGURATES BANGKOK SERVICE

KUWAIT: Dubai-based flydubai has officially launched its Bangkok service, marking the start of its first double daily route outside of the GCC. The inaugural flight from Dubai International Terminal 2 landed at Bangkok International Airport today, providing connecting routes for travel through Dubai. As a popular tourist destination, Bangkok offers holidaymakers a variety of experiences from adventure, sport, and health and wellness retreats. In addition, flights to Bangkok will provide passengers with alternative travel options into neighboring South East Asian cities.

Commenting on the launch of the new route, Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer at flydubai, said: "Today's inaugural flight to Bangkok is a significant milestone for our airline and represents the increasing maturity of flydubai's network. We look forward to offering business and leisure travelers from both Dubai and Bangkok increased choice and flexibility across our network." Reflecting on the recent passing of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, Ghaith Al Ghaith added: "We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the Thai people on the loss of their King.



flydubai joins the nation in mourning their leader."

Speaking at a press conference held with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Sudhir Sreedharan, Senior Vice President, Commercial (GCC, Subcontinent and Africa) for flydubai, said: "Bangkok is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, offering a wide range of attractions and activities. With the addition of this important city to flydubai's growing network we will not only offer passengers from Dubai alternative travel options

through Thailand, but additionally connect Thailand to Russia and Europe via Dubai, strengthening the UAE's position as an international travel hub."

Thailand is the latest addition to flydubai's network of more than 90 destinations, offering increased choice and flexibility for business and leisure passengers. By the end of the second half of the year the airline will have added eight new aircraft to its fleet. flydubai has recently launched its rewards program, OPEN, designed to make earn-

ing and spending reward points simple and straightforward. Discussing the start of flydubai flights to Bangkok, Tanes Petsuwan, the TAT Deputy Governor for International Marketing (Europe, Africa, Middle East and Americas) said "flydubai's new direct flights between Dubai and Bangkok adds another welcome dimension to UAE-Thailand relations in a number of ways.

The start of these flights brings fresh promise to our business and

trade ties, our respective roles as regional trade fair capitals, and to our cultural and tourism development." Passengers travelling on the new Bangkok route will have the option of a Business Class experience, benefitting from a dedicated 24-hour Business Team to assist with bookings and enquiries throughout the journey, as well as priority check-in service, comfortable spacious seats and a range of in-flight entertainment and dining options. WiFi services are available on half of the flydubai fleet.

Passengers travelling in Economy Class on the new Bangkok route will have access to interactive audio and video seat back entertainment systems with more than 1,200 hours of films, television and music. A hot meal is also included. For the launch of flights to Bangkok, flydubai is offering special promo rates. Business Class return fares to Bangkok will start at AED 3,240 while Economy Class return fares will start at AED 1,240 including taxes. Flights can be purchased from flydubai's website (flydubai.com), its Customer Centre (+971) 600 54 44 45, flydubai travel shops or through travel partners.

PLAZA MEMORIES MAY UNNERVE TRUMP-FUELED US DOLLAR BULLS

MARKETS DRAW PARALLELS BETWEEN TRUMP AND REAGAN

LONDON: Parallels between Donald Trump's US economic plan and early 1980s Reaganomics have supercharged the dollar, reminding some that its rampant gains 30 years ago eventually required intervention to reverse them. The greenback's surge under then-president Ronald Reagan was so powerful that by 1985 it required a rare international accord between the world's five leading economic powers and their central banks to weaken the currency - the so-called Plaza Accord, named after the New York hotel where the deal was inked.

Trump - who purely coincidentally owned the Plaza for a while after the accord - has pledged a \$1 trillion fiscal package of tax cuts and infrastructure spending over 10 years. This follows a path set by Reagan in the early 1980s and markets are taking their cue. The rise in US bond yields and expected path for interest rates based on growth prospects has boosted the dollar's five-year rally, lifting the currency to a 14-year high. Most observers expect it to appreciate next year as the US economy outperforms and the Federal Reserve raises rates while other major economies and central banks lag behind.

But the dollar can only rise so much without harming US manufacturing, a sector Trump has promised to support. Memories linger of the three million manufacturing jobs lost in the early 1980s under Reagan before the historic agreement in 1985 between the Group of Five leading economies to bring the dollar down. Nigel Lawson, British finance minister in 1985 and a signatory of the Plaza Accord, notes that the drive to weaken the dollar then was led by

Washington. "The Plaza agreement was a US initiative," Lawson told Reuters in an email. "In present circumstances, that seems unlikely to occur."

Jim O'Neill, former chief economist at Goldman Sachs who was cutting his teeth in currency markets in New York at the time of the accord, agrees that no action will be taken yet. But history shows that dollar appreciation always ends up being met with resistance from Washington. "Dollar expansions usually end when US policymakers stop them and say 'enough is enough,'" O'Neill said. "It's inevitable that Washington curbs the dollar rally at some point. It's illogical that the US can tolerate a sharp rise in the trade-weighted dollar."

Not the same

While there are parallels today with the early 1980s, there are also huge differences. When Reagan entered the White House in 1981 the US current account was broadly balanced. But the dollar's surge and debt-driven consumer boom blew it out to a deficit of around 3 percent of gross domestic product by Plaza. The deficit today is just over 2 percent of GDP compared with a record 6 percent a decade ago, but could start to widen again if a Trump boom emerges to widen the US growth and yield gap with the rest of the developed world.

Another difference is the level of US interest rates and inflation. Back then, Fed chief Paul Volcker crushed 15 percent inflation by virtually doubling interest rates to 18 percent in 1981. US inflation and rates may be moving higher again, but from historically low levels. They pale

against Volcker/Reagan era, even if the path for US policy and the dollar appears to be diverging widely with Europe and Japan.

Then there's emerging markets, and China in particular. Emerging markets now account for more than half global economic output and have stockpiled trillions of dollars of foreign exchange reserves, much of that banked in US bonds. The electronic flow of capital across borders has never been greater or faster. Thirty five years ago their presence on the global economic and financial stage was negligible. China's weighting in the trade-weighted dollar in 1981 was less than 1.5 percent. Today, it is almost 22 percent. China is now the world's second biggest economy, the largest international creditor to the United States, and dollar-denominated borrowing in emerging markets runs into the trillions of dollars.

The stock of dollar-denominated debt of non-banks outside the United States currently stands at just under \$10 trillion, of which \$3.3 trillion is in emerging markets, according to the Bank for International Settlements. This worldwide vulnerability to a rampantly strong dollar could serve as an automatic stabilizer because it is in everyone's interest to keep it for overly strengthening. Steve Barrow, head of G10 strategy at Standard Bank and who also cut his teeth in financial markets at the time of Plaza, reckons the dollar's "impulsive" rally could go another 10 percent before being corrected by the market. "Plaza came after the dollar had turned. Central banks came in to reinforce it," Barrow said. —Reuters

UAE'S GULF CAPITAL MAY SELL SOME INVESTMENTS

DUBAI: Private equity firm Gulf Capital plans to sell some of its investments towards the end of 2017 and early 2018 as market sentiment and the regional economy improve, its chief executive said.

Karim El Solh declined to say which stakes the Abu Dhabi-based company, one of the biggest private equity firms in the region, was considering offloading but said that they would be appealing to global strategic buyers. Sources familiar with the situation said Gulf Capital's stake in Egyptian medical firm TechnoScan and its remaining stake in utility business Metito Holdings were both for sale.

"Regionally, over the next two years, as the market comes back and economies recover, we will consider some regional exits," El Solh said in an interview. "I can see the exits coming more towards the end of 2017 and early 2018 as the regional markets recover and investor sentiment comes back," he said. Economies in the Gulf have been hurt by the slide in oil prices since the middle of 2014, which has hit spending by governments dependent on energy revenues and sapped consumer confidence. Economists think regional growth could rebound slightly in 2017, on the assumption oil prices pick up.

Despite the slowdown in growth, merger and acquisition activity in the Gulf has been relatively brisk in 2016 as the low oil prices have pushed family-owned businesses to spin-off assets and state-linked companies to consolidate.

Notable deals include Gulf-based Adeptio's acquisition of a 67 percent stake in Kuwait Food Co (Americana) from a wealthy Kuwaiti family for about \$2.35 billion, and the merger of Abu Dhabi's two largest banks, National Bank of Abu Dhabi and First Gulf Bank, in a deal due to be completed early next year.

Gulf Capital said this month it had acquired a controlling stake in Sporter.com, an online retailer of sports and nutrition supplements in the Gulf region, while it bought Saudi Arabian food and drinks distributor Multibrands in May. Once Gulf Capital's investments reach the five-year mark, the firm starts to actively plan for a sale, El Solh said. "We are hopeful that we will be able to close some interesting global exits in the near future despite the soft regional economic environment," he said.

"Some of our companies with a global geographic footprint, a fast growth rate and a large diversified customer base will be appealing to global strategic buyers," Gulf Capital acquired its stake in Dubai-based Metito in 2006 and the company has established itself as the largest privately owned water group in the Middle East, with a focus on developing markets. In July 2014, it sold 32 percent of the company to Japan's Mitsubishi Corporation and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, leaving it with a 23.8 percent stake. In November 2009 it purchased a 75 percent holding in TechnoScan, the largest chain of medical diagnostic imaging centers in the Middle East. —Reuters



OOREDOO CUSTOMERS CAN GET 2 PHONES IN ONE CONTRACT PERIOD

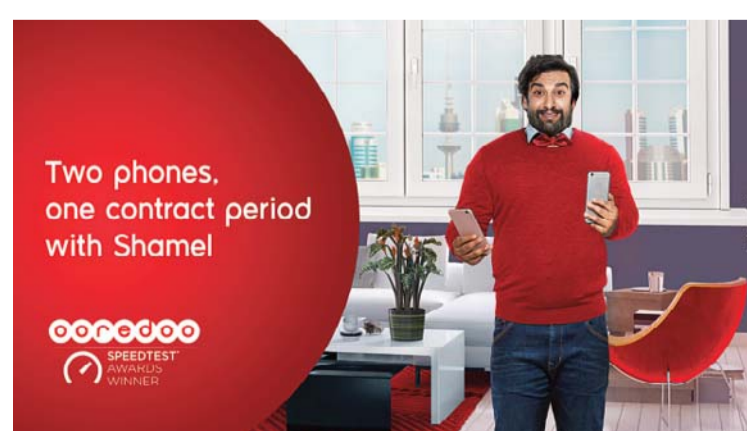
A NEW FEATURE TO ALL SHAMEL POST-PAID PLAN CUSTOMERS

KUWAIT: Ooredoo, Kuwait's fastest network for 2016, announced the launch of a new and exciting feature to the Shamel plans, where it enables customers to purchase a second



Mijbil Al Ayoub

phone under the same contract period. For customers to avail from this new feature, customers must already be on a commitment period not less than 6 months. Commenting on the newly added feature to the Shamel plan, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director of Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait said: "The Shamel plans have witnessed great success, both customers' feedback and sales figures demonstrated this. Our main goal as a company is to meet our valued customers' needs; therefore, we have added a new feature which will



cater for the different requirements of our customers"

Ooredoo subscribers can now enjoy the privilege of freezing their contract for up to 3 months a year when they travel, without worrying about paying bills for months that they don't use. Additionally, Ooredoo now allows customers to transfer contracts to other customers even

during the contract period, with no penalties or extra fees. Additionally, all Shamel subscribers can enjoy unlimited calls on the Ooredoo network, in addition to other perks such as minute and data rollover, to ensure that they are making full use of their package.

Customers can visit the Shamel website, which allows customers to

get all the needed information about Shamel in a simple interactive way. The website employs the latest technology to offer customers an interactive easy-to-navigate experience, paying attention to all the details to communicate the information in a concise way. It divides the features of the Shamel into various eras, spanning from the 1980s, to the present day. Upon choosing any of the eras, the television commercial lead character explains to the customers directly one of the new Shamel features.

Customers who are interested in getting the Shamel plans can leave their contact details on the website and will be contacted by a customer care agent. The interactive videos of each era use the fashion, style, and decor used in that specific period, while the character explains the features in a concise, down-to-earth and comical way. For more information about Shamel website, please visit the following website: shamel.ooredoo.com.kw

ELECTRIC CAR FACTORY PLANNED IN ARIZONA TO HAVE 2,000 WORKERS

PHOENIX: Electric car maker Lucid Motors said Tuesday it will build a manufacturing plant in Arizona that will begin production in 2018 as it looks to compete in the fast-growing market for luxury electric vehicles.

The company said it chose the Casa Grande location from dozens of other spots around the country. Construction of the factory will begin next year in a move expected to bring an initial 400 jobs. The company projects the plant will have 2,000 workers by 2022.

Lucid, which recently changed its name from Atieva, has been around for a decade, focusing its early years on making batteries. Its staff includes former Tesla employees, including its chief technology officer.

The decision came amid rising demand for electric cars from traditional automakers and Silicon Valley startups such as Lucid. Tesla Motors is building a sprawling battery factory near Reno, Nevada, after receiving a generous \$1.3 billion incentive package from the Nevada Legislature.

Faraday Future, another electric car maker, is building a factory near Las Vegas after getting \$335 million from the state,

although the project has been stalled amid questions about its funding source.

Prominent role

Automotive jobs took on a prominent role in the recent presidential race as Donald Trump repeatedly blasted trade agreements that shifted manufacturing from the Rust Belt to other countries.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey has made job creation and a business-friendly climate top priorities of his administration. He previously made a trip to California to lure the Lucid factory. "It's a real sign that the state is attractive, that California companies and companies from around the country see Arizona as a great place to do business," Ducey said.

Lucid is receiving government assistance from the Arizona Commerce Authority that could total in the millions. The future for startup electric vehicle makers is far from a sure thing, especially for companies that have yet to manufacture a single car, said Sam Abuelsamid, a senior analyst for the market research firm Navigant who has studied Lucid and met with company execu-



LORDSTOWN, Ohio: In this Tuesday, June 15, 2010, file photo, workers at General Motors' Lordstown Assembly plant put the final touches on Chevy Cobalts. — AP

tives. He cites a litany of challenges.

Tesla has struggled to turn a profit despite huge demand for its Model X and

more affordable Model 3. Vehicle reliability is a major concern for any new car maker, especially in a marketplace where traditional

automakers are manufacturing their own electric vehicles. And battery technology is highly expensive.

"We'll see if Lucid can do it any better than Tesla has," Abuelsamid said. "The car's not going to be in production until quite a ways out. I wouldn't call it entirely paperwork at this point because they do have real, developed prototypes but it's certainly not ready for prime time yet."

He also noted how startups are at the mercy of investors who can become skittish about handing over cash. He cited the Faraday plant in Nevada where construction work was suspended recently at the factory site. Abuelsamid said the Chinese entrepreneur backing that company was also an early investor in Lucid.

A news conference announcing the move Tuesday featured business and political leaders along with top company officials. The company showed off two prototypes for its planned car. "We're very excited to be bringing new jobs and our innovative technology to Casa Grande," said Brian Barron, Lucid's director of global manufacturing. — AP

NETFLIX LAUNCHES DOWNLOADS FOR OFFLINE VIEWING ON SMARTPHONES, TABLETS

LOS ANGELES: Netflix has finally rolled out a feature subscribers have been requesting for years: The company will now let members worldwide download select TV shows and movies for viewing on Apple and Android devices while disconnected from the internet.

The latest versions of the company's mobile apps include a "download" button on the details page for a film or TV series—although not all titles on the streaming service are currently available to watch offline. The app also includes a "find something to download" feature.

Netflix said it will add more series and movies to download in the future. Original series including "Orange Is the New Black," "Narcos," "House of Cards," "Stranger Things," "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," "Master of None" and "The Crown" are available for download starting yesterday.

"While many members enjoy watching Netflix at home, we've often heard they

also want to continue their 'Stranger Things' binge while on airplanes and other places where internet is expensive or limited," Eddy Wu, Netflix's director of product innovation, wrote in a blog post announcing the feature.

Amazon Prime Video has offered offline viewing to members on iOS and Android apps for more than a year, while YouTube Red subscribers also have access to videos in offline mode.

Netflix's new download feature is included in all plans and available for Android and iOS phones and tablets. To download titles, users will need iOS 8.0 or later or Android 4.4.2 or later as well as the latest update of Netflix's app.

Netflix execs had previously raised the prospect of allowing downloads for offline viewing, but they had suggested the company would first launch the feature in countries with constrained bandwidth infrastructure. — Reuters



RAMALLAH: Hussein Nasir al-Din points towards a screen at the office of his company Red Crow, a startup that monitors security developments and sends real-time alerts and maps to clients on August 17, 2016. — AFP

FACEBOOK ADDS FREE GAMES LIKE 'PAC-MAN' TO MESSENGER APP

NEW YORK: You can now play "Pac-Man" with your Facebook Messenger buddies. Facebook is adding the option to play games with your contacts on the messaging app beginning this past Tuesday. You can access the feature in the latest version of the app by tapping a game controller icon. Games available include classics such as "Pac-Man," "Space Invaders" and "Galaga," as well as newer titles like "Words With Friends." It's the latest effort by the world's biggest social network to get people to spend even more time on its properties.

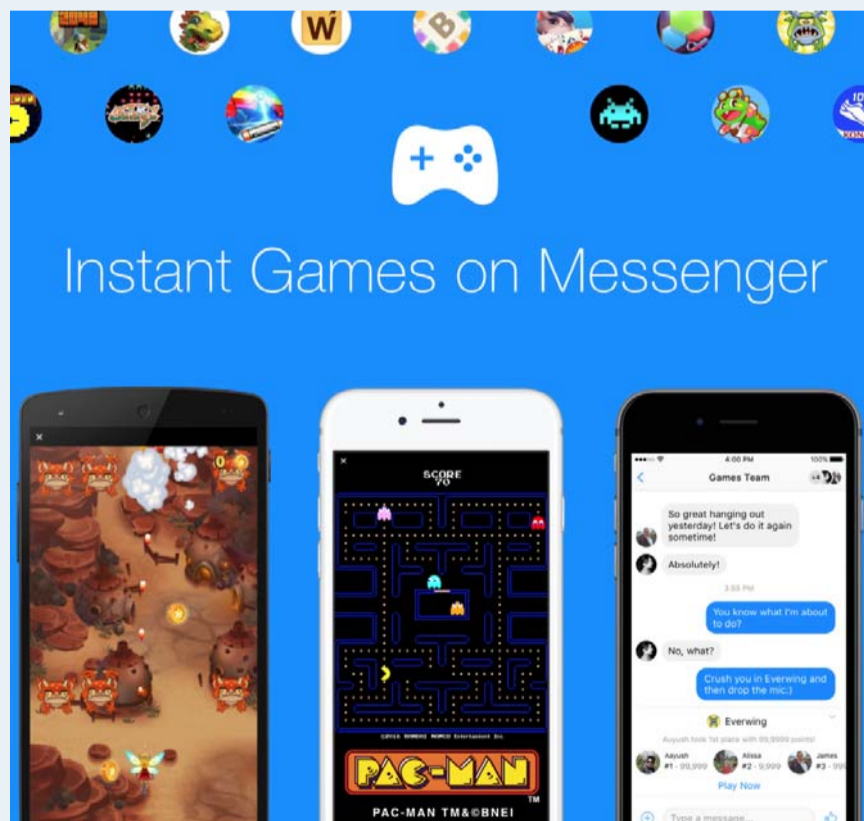
Messenger has a billion users. The app will recommend games based on whether your friends play. Currently there is no way to play with people who are not your Messenger contacts, so if your friends don't like to play games, you are out of luck.

Called "Instant Games," the feature will

begin in 30 countries, with 17 titles, though more will come. In addition to Messenger, users can also play solo games in their Facebook news feed. Facebook tested the waters with two simple Messenger games earlier this year - soccer and basketball, both of which involved flicking balls on the screen with your finger. They proved popular.

Facebook has a long history with gaming, which began with "FarmVille" years ago when people logged in using desktop computers. But since then, Facebook gaming has sort of fallen by the wayside, even as mobile games from "Candy Crush" to "Pokemon Go" have remained popular. Facebook hopes to change that with its Instant Games.

The games themselves are simple to play, and like the earlier soccer and basketball games, load inside Messenger and don't open in a separate app. — AP



SAN FRANCISCO: This image provided by Facebook shows a demonstration of Facebook's new option to play games with contacts on Facebook Messenger. Beginning Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2016, the feature can be accessed in the latest version of the messaging app by tapping a game controller icon. — AP

SAN FRANCISCO'S PUBLIC RAILWAY SYSTEM HIT BY HACKERS

SAN FRANCISCO: Some passengers on San Francisco's public railway enjoyed free rides during part of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend after hackers infiltrated hundreds of its workers' computers and email accounts.

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency says it decided to open the gates at underground stations of its light rail system Friday and Saturday after detecting a "ransomware" attack aimed at stealing sensi-

tive information in an attempt to be paid for the data's return. Regular fares were still charged for bus rides.

Agency spokesman Paul Rose says an investigation determined that the hackers didn't get any financial records or other potentially damaging information about the system's customers or employees. As of late Monday afternoon, the agency was still trying to determine how much revenue it lost while giving free rides. — AP

PALESTINIAN START-UPS INNOVATE WAY PAST OBSTACLES

SPECIALIZING IN US REAL ESTATE

RAMALLAH: At first glance, Mashvisor is just one of thousands of websites specializing in US real estate. But it has a unique feature, undetectable to customers: its designers created it in the West Bank and it is run from the Israel-occupied Palestinian territory.

"The great thing about a start-up is you can work on it anywhere in the world. You can be in Palestine, you can be in Cambodia, Vietnam, China. It doesn't matter," explains Peter Abu al-Zolof, who founded Mashvisor more than a year ago with a friend.

Last week, Mashvisor became the first Palestinian company to get the support of the influential American 500 Startups venture capital fund. It is one of a number of Palestinian start-ups in the occupied Palestinian territories, long overshadowed by Israel's so-called "Start-up Nation".

The online platform automates and analyses US real estate data nationwide to find investors the best property deals. As in Silicon Valley, the staff dress casually, drink coffee from state-of-the-art machines in garish colours, and pad through the office wearing US-made headphones around their necks.

But working in the West Bank brings unique challenges. In October 2015, a wave of violence broke out across Israel and the Palestinian territories. Abu al-Zolof's friend and founding partner Mohamed Jebrini, who lives in Hebron,

found himself stranded in the city as roads were closed, 45 kilometers (30 miles) from their Ramallah offices. "He was stuck in Hebron and I was stuck in Ramallah and we were still working on our company," explains Abu al-Zolof.

And the American-Palestinian says the online nature of what they do means they can avoid many of the frustrations for other companies in the West Bank, where the Israeli army checkpoints often present very physical challenges to commerce. "There are no walls, there are no challenges, there is nothing that can stop this kind of thing," he says. "It's a virtual market, so there are no checkpoints where they tell you: 'You can't sell this. You can't take this out of the country.'" The company benefited from the support of the Ramallah-based Leaders, an organization that helps nurture start-ups.

'No unemployment'

Shadi Atshan, Mashvisor's director general, told AFP that in the start-up scene there was "no unemployment-unlike almost all other industries and economic sectors in Palestine which have high unemployment". "Those with good skills can earn a very high income."

The unemployment rate in the occupied Palestinian territories is 27 percent, according to figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

The Ibtikar investment fund has invested

around \$800,000 (750,000 euros) in ten start-ups so far, according to its executive director Ambar Amleh. She stresses their work is not charity. "This isn't work that should be funded by donors or grants. The expectations of making money should be there from the beginning because we are creating companies," she told AFP.

Palestinians are still a long way behind Israel, where companies in Tel Aviv's start-up scene regularly sell for tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. In 2013, Google bought the Israeli traffic app Waze for more than \$1 billion, a figure unimaginable in the Palestinian scene.

But Amleh points out the huge government support for Israeli start-ups, which don't exist in the Palestinian territories. "I think more and more people are starting to see that they really can make something they have been dreaming about come true."

Hussein Nasir al-Din and his partner Laila Aqal have a business inextricably linked to the conflict-monitoring the security situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The Red Crow website, run out of a small office in Ramallah, monitors security developments and sends real-time alerts and maps to clients.

Their customers include UN agencies, diplomats and organizations that operate in the field and adjust their security programs according to events. Soon they want to expand to the Egyptian and Iraqi markets. — AFP

SUN SETTING ON JAPAN SOLAR BOOM

CHIBA, Japan: The sun is setting on Japan's clean-energy boom, despite projects like a massive floating solar farm near Tokyo, as the government cuts subsidies and bets on nuclear and coal-fired power, critics say. Workers at the floating power station, one of the world's biggest, have just finished laying about 50,000 interconnected panels on a vast dam reservoir. Taking up space equivalent to several Tokyo Dome-sized baseball stadiums, the vast carpet of panels will supply power to about 5,000 homes from early 2018.

The project is the centerpiece of a solar-dominated wave of renewable energy investments that followed the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The accident forced the shutdown of reactors that had supplied about one-quarter of resource-poor Japan's energy. To plug the gap, electricity providers have been obliged since 2012 to buy power generated from green suppliers, including solar, at above-market rates - known as feed-in tariffs - fixed by the government each year.

But renewable energy investments have plateaued and are set to fall in the coming years as Tokyo cuts back subsidies while commodities including coal, oil and natural gas remain cheap. Japan is also facing a shortage of land for new solar installations.

Kyocera, which is behind the floating farm south of Tokyo, is building a solar plant on an abandoned golf course. "Several dynamics in the Japanese power sector have shifted since (2012) - such as weakening government support, cheap-

er fuel alternatives and electricity sector reform - which have all contributed to the slowdown in growth," BMI Research said in a report.

'Simply Insane'

Some say Japan's future solar potential now sits squarely on the roofs of millions of homes. "There is still a big potential for the Japanese market," said Atsuhiko Hirano, head of Solar Frontier, a unit of Japanese oil giant Showa Shell. "Utility-scale projects have been the driver so far. In contrast, the residential market has not grown so much. So there is still much more area where we can grow." (But) we are pushing the government to go further."

Solar accounts for a small fraction of Japan's energy mix - 3.3 percent in 2015. But Tokyo has said it wants renewables - also including hydro and wind power - to account for 22 to 24 percent of the total by 2030. Critical government support appears to be waning, however, as Tokyo drives a push to restart mothballed atomic reactors - an unpopular move among the nuclear-wary public. The pro-nuclear drive is supported by utilities, which complained about being forced to buy and distribute subsidized power, especially with oil and natural gas prices at multi-year lows.

Japan is also raising eyebrows with plans to invest billions of dollars at home and abroad in new power plants fired by cheap coal - even as it calls for more green power at home. That includes half a dozen large coal-fired power sta-

tions within about 100 km of Tokyo, which Greenpeace has branded "simply insane" over health concerns posed by air pollution.

Energy Security

Coal is also the biggest climate change culprit, generating more carbon pollution per unit of energy generated than oil or gas. Within the G7 club of rich nations, Japan is alone in investing heavily in coal-fired energy on its own soil, with more than 40 new power plants in the pipeline. That sets it apart from even big polluters such as China and India which are pushing away from coal-fired power - although US President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to bring back coal and refocus US energy policy on fossil fuels. "Japan is betting its economy and energy security on risky coal investments," said Taylor Dimsdale, Washington-based head of research at energy think-tank E3G. "The coal development pipeline in the rest of the G7 countries has dried up with no further plants expected beyond a handful of projects that are already under construction." Japan was among the worst performers in terms of countries cutting back on energy-related CO2 emissions in an annual ranking released during UN climate talks in November. Critics say they don't have much hope for Tokyo's long-term commitment to renewable energy. "After the Fukushima disaster there was an infatuation with renewable energy and the government was clearly pressing the accelerator," said Kimiko Hirata, international director for the Japanese NGO Kiko Network. — AFP

DRUG EPIDEMIC STALLS HIV DECLINE IN WHITES WHO SHOOT UP

NEW YORK: The long decline in HIV infections among white people who inject drugs has stalled, another grim side effect of the nation's drug abuse epidemic.

Health officials released the news Tuesday, as part of a call for more use of needle exchange programs. "We really risk stalling or reversing decades of progress on HIV transmission," said Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report comes as the nation is facing an ongoing epidemic of opioid and heroin use that has led to an increase in drug overdose deaths, particularly among white people. The increase in drug abuse is also hampering efforts to slow diseases carried in the blood that can be spread when injection drug users share needles.

The CDC previously reported a rise in new hepatitis C infections, which is tied largely to injection drugs. Most cases of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, are transmitted through sex - only about one in 11 HIV infections diagnosed each year are among people who inject drugs. But sharing dirty needles can spread HIV much more quickly.

More than 100 injection drug users were infected with HIV in early 2015 in rural Scott County, Indiana. The state's governor at the time - Mike Pence, now

the vice president-elect - declared a public health emergency and authorized a limited need-exchange program to prevent the virus from spreading further.

Until recently, HIV cases in injection drug users had been falling for all racial groups. Cases still are falling in blacks and Hispanics. But for whites they stopped falling in 2012. In 2014, for the first time, a larger number of white inject drug users were diagnosed with HIV than injection drug users in any other racial or ethnic group. Traditionally, far more cases were seen in urban blacks.

At least part of the reason is that white injection drug users are often younger and more likely to share needles, according to a 22-city CDC study of people who inject drugs. Nearly half of white injection drug users shared needles with other addicts in 2015, compared with a third of Hispanics and a fifth of blacks. Needle exchange programs give out clean syringe needles in exchange for used ones. Medical experts have found that such programs cut down transmission of HIV and do not cause increases in drug use.

Congress, though, has gone back and forth on allowing the federal government to fund the programs. For now, federal funds can be used for some program costs, but not for the purchase of sterile needles or syringes. —AP



AUSTIN, Indiana: In this April 4, 2015 file photo, a sign points to the entrance of the Community Outreach Center. — AP



PINGTANG, China: This picture taken on September 24, 2016 shows the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST). — AP

'THANK THE ALIENS': THOUSANDS DISPLACED FOR CHINA'S HUGE TELESCOPE SEEKING GLOBAL PROMINENCE

PINGTANG, China: Humanity's best bet at detecting aliens is a giant silver Chinese dish the size of 30 football fields—one that simultaneously showcases Beijing's abilities to deploy cutting-edge technologies and ignore objectors' rights as it seeks global prominence.

The Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical Telescope (FAST) in the country's southwest, which was launched in September and cost 1.2 billion yuan (\$180 million) to build, is the world's largest radio telescope.

Once fully operational, FAST will be able to peer deeper into space than ever before, examining pulsars, dark matter and gravitational waves and searching for signs of life. Authorities also hope it will bring tourist dollars to the province of Guizhou, one of China's poorest regions. But it

comes at the cost of forcibly displacing about 9,000 villagers who called the site in Pingtang county their home.

Many were outraged at being forced to leave the valley surrounded by forested karst hills and hundreds of families are now suing the government, with some cases being heard this week.

Octogenarian Han Jingfu drank pesticide days after being made to sign a relocation contract and died at his front door, neighbors and relatives said. China built FAST as part of efforts to take on international rivals and raise its embarrassingly low tally of Nobel Prizes, explained Peng Bo, director of China's National Astronomical Observatories, which oversees the telescope.

The 500-metre-wide (1,640 feet) dish dwarfs its nearest competitor, the US's Puerto Rico-based

Arecibo telescope, which is only 305 meters across. "We said we had to be a little more daring, because we had to surpass the US no matter what," Peng said. "I think we can get a few Nobel prizes out of it. We as Chinese people really want to win them."

The world's most populous country and second-largest economy has so far only won one scientific Nobel, awarded last year to chemist Tu Youyou for medicine. FAST's receivers are more sensitive than any previous radio telescope, and its pioneering technology can change the shape of the dish to track celestial objects as the Earth rotates. It could catalogue as many pulsars in a year as had been found in the past 50, Peng said. But he acknowledged that FAST will be overtaken by the larger Square Kilometer Array telescope in South Africa and Australia, which will be built over the next decade.

'Pushed into a corner'

FAST needs a five kilometer-wide (three miles) "radio silence" buffer zone around it with electronics banned in order to reduce interference with the sky's much fainter frequencies. Relocated residents would "enjoy better living standards", the official Xinhua news agency said when the dish was completed in July. "Villagers in nearby communities admired their luck, saying they should 'thank the aliens,'" it added.

But villagers allege land grabs without compensation, forced demolitions and unlawful detentions, and up to 500 families are suing the Pingtang county government. Lu Zhenglong, whose case was heard Tuesday, said officials demolished his house without warning or consent when he was not even present, burying his furniture. "What would have happened if I had been inside?" he told AFP, adding that authorities had "pushed ordinary people into a corner. It's really unbelievable". A neighbor also surnamed Lu said: "They've chased us all off to some wasteland and ordered us to live there with no way to maintain our old standards of living. For 90 percent of us, basic survival is a problem."

The rubble of their homes now lies under soil and new saplings in a tourist park just outside the radio silence zone, with a museum, a space-themed hotel and visitor reception facilities which will sell tickets for nearly \$100 each. According to the Pingtang county government website, the park was aimed at "high-end people from developed cities" and cost more than 1.5 billion yuan-more than the telescope itself.

'Eye to the sky'

Meng Xiujun, whose Elites Law Firm in the southern city of Guangzhou is handling most of the cases, said officials tried to intimidate him, telling him he should "see the bigger picture for a key national project". But he told AFP: "This isn't just a matter of economic interests-once you start asking average citizens to kneel down or beat them, it becomes about human rights and problems with China's rule of law." The Pingtang county government did not respond to requests for comment by AFP. — AFP

SEN WARREN BLASTS DRUG APPROVAL BILL AS 'EXTORTION'

WASHINGTON: Sen. Elizabeth Warren has delivered a ferocious attack on congressional Republicans and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell over a medical research bill, putting fellow Democrats on the spot by pushing them to oppose a measure she said "is corrupt, and it is very, very dangerous."

As Congress began the final stretch of its post-election session, Warren said the 996-page measure - a top priority for GOP leaders and backed by the biomedical industry - was riddled with provisions that she called "a bunch of special giveaways" to big pharmaceutical companies. "They didn't send us here to whimper, whine or grovel," she said on the Senate floor about Democrats, using the populist rhetoric that has given her one of her party's highest profiles. "They sent us here to say no to efforts to sell Congress to the highest bidder."

All but taunting her own party, Warren, D-Mass., said, "Republicans will control this government, but they cannot hand that control over to big corporations unless Democrats roll over and allow them to do so."

She said the research bill would "legalize fraud" by reducing the scientific evidence the government needs to approve existing drugs for new uses. She said it would "cover up bribery" by exempting medical companies from publicly reporting some payments they make to doctors. Those provisions, she said, outweighed the "tiny fig leaf" of additional money the bill provides for biomedical research and combating abuse of addictive opioid drugs. "I cannot vote for this bill. I will fight it because I know the difference between compromise and extortion," said Warren, who some mention as a potential 2020 presidential contender.

Warren's comments came with Democrats in the early stages of decoding

their lesson from this month's elections. Hillary Clinton shockingly lost her White House bid to Republican Donald Trump and Democrats remained in the House and Senate minority, making only small gains in each chamber.

Warren is expected to try tugging her party toward more progressive policies, while some more moderate Democrats are emphasizing the need to appeal to the type of working-class white voters who helped Trump win Midwestern states carried in recent elections by Democrats.

The House plans to vote on the research legislation Wednesday, with Senate consideration expected next week.

The measure calls for spending \$6.3 billion over the next decade, including \$4.8 billion for research at the National Institutes of Health. There is also \$1 billion for grants to states for drug abuse prevention and research, and \$500 million for the Food and Drug Administration to accelerate drug and medical device approval processes.

To pay for that, the bill would cut a public health fund in President Barack Obama's health care law, reduce some payments made by Medicaid and Medicare and sell oil held in the government's strategic petroleum reserve.

Warren said the bill benefits a Republican donor who backs contentious therapies that are supposed to regenerate cells. She did not name the donor during her speech but said McConnell, R-Ky., has accepted contributions from him. A McConnell spokesman declined to comment.

No. 2 Senate GOP leader John Cornyn of Texas, on the Senate floor as Warren spoke, criticized her for making "a political speech" and launching "personal attacks" on senators and called her comments "beneath the dignity of the United States Senate." — AP



MANCHESTER, New Hampshire: In this Oct. 24, 2016, file photo, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass. speaks at a rally for Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton at St. Anselm College. — AP

WANT TO DELAY DEATH? THEN SWIM, DANCE, OR GET ON COURT, STUDY SHOWS

LONDON: Swimming, racquet sports and aerobics are associated with the best odds of staving off death, and in particular of reducing the risk of dying from heart disease or stroke, scientists said on Tuesday.

In a study of various types of exercise and their risk levels, the researchers found that participation in specific sports showed significant benefits for public health, and urged doctors and policymakers to encourage people to take them up.

While the research, published in the British Journal and Sports Medicine, showed no added advantage for people who favor running and football or rugby, independent experts said this was purely due to the design of the study. "This study must not be misinterpreted as showing that running and football do not protect against heart disease," said Tim Chico, a consultant cardiologist at professor at Britain's Sheffield University who was asked to comment on the findings.

The study analyzed data from 11

annual health surveys for England and Scotland carried out between 1994 and 2008, covering 80,306 adults with an average age of 52. Participants were asked about what type and how much exercise they had done in the preceding four weeks, and whether it had been enough to make them breathless and sweaty.

Exercise included heavy domestic chores and gardening; walking; cycling; swimming; aerobics, gymnastics or dance; running; football or rugby; and badminton, tennis or squash. The survival of each participant was tracked for an average of nine years, during which time 8,790 of them died from all causes and 1,909 from heart disease or stroke.

Overall, compared with respondents who had not done a given sport, risk of death during the follow up period from any cause was 47 percent lower among those who played racquet sports, 28 percent lower among swimmers, 27 percent lower among dance aerobics fans and 15 percent lower among cyclists. — Reuters

TRUMP NOMINATES PENCE ALLY TO OVERSEE HEALTH PROGRAMS

INDIANAPOLIS: The architect of Gov. Mike Pence's Medicaid expansion in Indiana is expected to play a key role in determining how Republicans replace President Barack Obama's health care law.

Seema Verma, a consultant who helped design Pence's approach to the Medicaid program for the poor in Indiana, was named Tuesday as Donald Trump's choice to head up the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Republicans praised her nomination. President-elect Trump said in a statement that her decades of experience "will transform our health care system for the benefit of all Americans."

But supporters of the current health care law were less pleased. They oppose requirements that poor people pay for medical care, which is included in the Medicaid policy adopted in Indiana and is up for consideration by other Republican-led states. "We're really concerned," said Judith Solomon, vice president for health policy at the liberal Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.

Prior to Pence, Verma was a consultant to former Republican Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, who pushed for a precursor to Pence's current Medicaid plan. Her firm, SVC Inc., has been paid more than \$6.6 million by the state of Indiana since 2011 for her consulting work, according to records.

In a 2008 blog post on the website HealthAffairs, co-authored with a Daniels' administration official, Verma outlined a philosophy that "melds two themes of American society that typically collide in our health care system, rugged individualism and the Judeo-Christian ethic."

Personal responsibility

Indiana's Medicaid program "combines these diametrically opposed themes by pro-

moting personal responsibility while providing subsidized health protection to those who can least afford it," she wrote. The nomination, if approved, would give Verma a significant voice in the policies Trump's presidential administration chooses to pursue if he makes good on a campaign promise to repeal and replace the ACA.

Under Pence, Indiana accepted federal money made available for low-income health care under Obama's law. But the state only took the money after the Obama administration agreed to an added twist: requiring poor people to pay nominal fees for the care they receive. Those who don't keep up on monthly payments, which can be as low as \$4, aren't eligible for as many services.

In most states, the poor are not required to pay such fees. The Indiana program has extended health care benefits to more than 300,000 people in the state.

In Kentucky, where Verma consulted for Republican Gov. Matt Bevin, the state has requested federal permission to require people on the state's Medicaid plan to pay monthly premiums, have a job or volunteer for a charity to remain eligible for health benefits.

Pence has said that requiring the poor to make payments for Medicaid means they are taking personal responsibility and have "skin in the game."

But some Republicans in his home state disagreed. Republican Indiana state Rep. Ed Clere, former chairman of a health care committee in the state's General Assembly, said requirements other than fees, such as quitting smoking or taking steps to improve personal health, also demonstrate "personal responsibility" and could be more cost effective in the long run. "In my experience there was an unwillingness to expand the conversation beyond financial participation," Clere said. — AP

LEANING SAN FRANCISCO TOWER SEEN SINKING FROM SPACE

SAN FRANCISCO: Engineers in San Francisco have tunneled underground to try and understand the sinking of the 58-storey Millennium Tower. Now comes an analysis from space. The European Space Agency has released detailed data from satellite imagery that shows the skyscraper in San Francisco's financial district is continuing to sink at a steady rate - and perhaps faster than previously known.

The luxury high-rise that opened its doors in 2009 has been dubbed the Leaning Tower of San Francisco. It has sunk about 16 inches into landfill and is tilting several inches to the northwest. A dispute over the building's construction in the seismically active city has spurred numerous lawsuits involving the developer, the city and owners of its multimillion-dollar apartments.

Engineers have estimated the building is sinking at a rate of about 1-inch per year. The Sentinel-1 twin satellites show almost double that rate based on data collected from April 2015 to September 2016.

What the data shows

The satellite data shows the Millennium Tower sunk 40 to 45 millimeters - or 1.6 to 1.8 inches - over a recent one-year period and almost double that amount - 70 to 75 mm (2.6 to 2.9 inches) - over its 17-month observation period, said Petar Marinkovic, founder and chief scientist of PPO Labs which analyzed the satellite's radar imagery for the ESA along with Norway-based research institute Norut. "What can be concluded from our data, is that the Millennium Tower is sinking at a steady rate," Marinkovic said in a telephone interview Monday from The Hague, Netherlands.

The data detected a small slowdown this summer but one that needs further analysis, he said, and does not change the overall data. "There is quite a steady subsidence."

The Sentinel-1 study is not focused on the Millennium Tower but is part of a larger mission by the European Space Agency tracking urban ground move-

ment around the world, and particularly subsidence "hotspots" in Europe, said Pierre Potin, Sentinel-1 mission manager for the ESA.

The ESA decided to conduct regular observations of the San Francisco Bay Area, including the Hayward Fault, since it is prone to tectonic movement and earthquakes, said Potin, who is based in Italy. Data from the satellite, which is orbiting about 400 miles (700 kilometers) from the earth's surface, was recorded every 24 days.

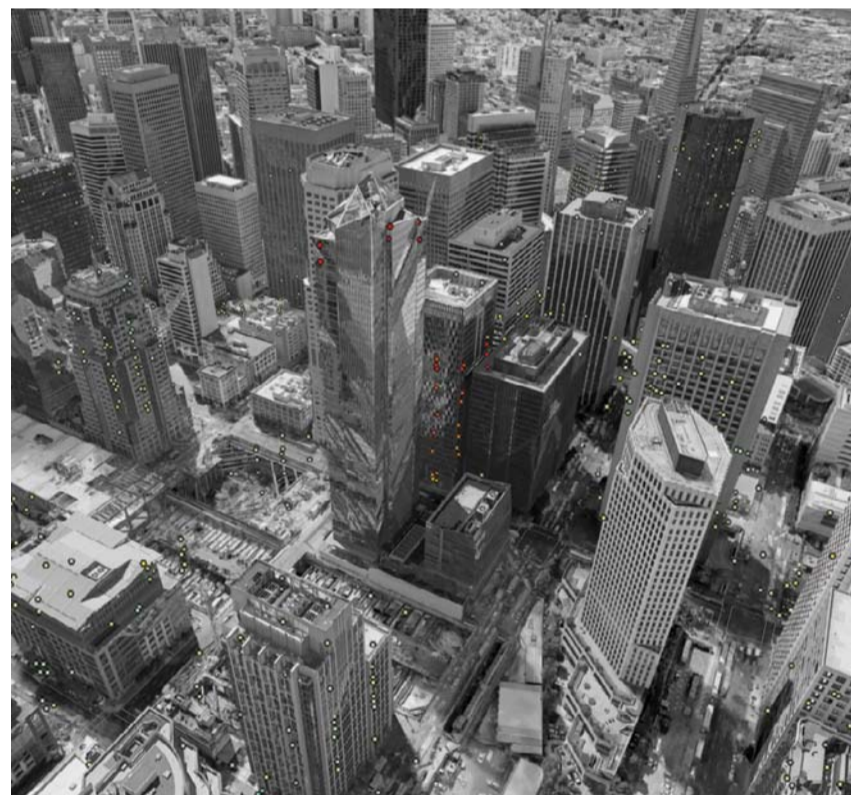
The building's developer, Millennium Partners, insists the building is safe for occupancy and could withstand an earthquake. The developer's spokesman PJ Johnston said he had no direct comment on the satellite data but issued a statement saying that the Millennium Tower is a state-of-the-art building that was "designed and constructed to the extraordinarily high standards" mandated by San Francisco.

He reiterated the developers' blame for the tower's problems on the city's construction of an adjacent railway station, which they say removed ground water from beneath the Millennium Tower that caused it to sink and tilt.

The city agency, the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, blames the building's "inadequate foundation" which is not anchored to bedrock. The tower is supported by piles driven 60 to 90 feet into landfill.

Engineers hired by the building and its developers have drilled deep holes around the building to test soil samples to determine if the building has stopped sinking, and if there's a way to fix it.

One of the building's tenants, Jerry Dodson, says that developers have given tenants the impression that the sinking was slowing and stopping. "To have the space agency looking at it debunks what (developers) have put out there. Now we know it's continuing to sink at an accelerated rate," said Dodson, an attorney who has helped organize homeowners lawsuits. "I can tell you that satellite data is way more accurate that digging in the dirt." — AP



SAN FRANCISCO: The image provided by the European Space Agency ESA on Thursday, Nov. 24, 2016, shows the Millennium Tower on the base of modified Copernicus Sentinel satellite data. — AP



WASHINGTON: Minority Whip Richard Durbin, D-Ill., speaks to the media with Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev, after the Senate Policy Luncheon on Capitol Hill on Tuesday. — AP

GOP COULD REPEAL, BEFORE REPLACING, OBAMACARE

SWIFT ACTION ON TRUMP'S PROMISE

WASHINGTON: Congress may vote to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law before coming up with a replacement, GOP leaders said Tuesday.

The approach could allow congressional Republicans to take swift action on one of President-elect Donald Trump's campaign promises, while putting off the hard part. And while repealing the law could be done with GOP votes alone, any replacement plan would likely require the cooperation of minority Democrats in the Senate, something that will not be easy to come by.

"Nothing's been decided yet but I would move through and repeal and then go to work on replacing," House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy told reporters at the Capitol. "I think once it's repealed you will have hopefully fewer people playing politics, and then everybody coming to the table to find the best policy." "We will get started on this right way," the California Republican added. Without specifying a timeline, McCarthy suggested Congress could vote on a repeal quickly, while putting off the date for it to take effect. As that date neared, McCarthy predicted, there would be political pressure for all parties to come together around a replacement.

Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Senate Republican, outlined a similar process, with a repeal vote followed by "a multiyear transition into the replacement." "This is a failed piece of legislation and it's coming apart at the seams," Cornyn said, "but it's going to take us a while to make that transition from the repeal to actually replacing it with more affordable coverage."

Repeal history

Six years after the Affordable Health Care Act became law, congressional Republicans have voted dozens of times to repeal it in part or full. But they still haven't unified behind legislation to replace it, or to ensure that the 20 million people who've gained coverage don't suddenly find themselves uninsured.

Now that Trump has won the presidency and Republicans will control both chambers of Congress next year, the GOP will have to deliver. That is certain to be tricky.

In one complication, Republicans can use a

legislative maneuver called "budget reconciliation" to repeal the health law with a simple majority vote in the 100-member Senate. But to advance a replacement they would likely need 60 votes, requiring some Democrats to go along. Incoming Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York has already warned Republicans he will try to turn their efforts to repeal the health law into a political nightmare. Democrats argued Tuesday that GOP plans to pass a repeal bill but delay the replacement wouldn't work. The resulting uncertainty could cause insurance companies to flee the marketplace, said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois.

"We'd find ourselves with even fewer options out there," Durbin said. "So I think the

Republicans, in the sober, cold nights when they sit around after their 57th repeal vote, say, 'What in the world would we do if we repealed it?' They don't have a plan."

The back-and-forth came the same day Trump announced the selection of House Republican Rep. Tom Price of Georgia as his secretary of Health and Human Services. Price helped craft a House GOP plan on health care that was unveiled over the summer, relying on individual tax credits to allow people to buy coverage from private insurers. But the proposal fell far short of a full-scale replacement, leaving key questions unanswered including the size of the tax credits, the overall price tag of the plan, and how many people would be covered. — AP

UNDER-50 SMOKERS FACE HIGHER HEART ATTACK RISK

PARIS: Smokers under 50 are eight times more likely than non-smokers of the same age to have a major heart attack, scientists said yesterday. The gap in risk between those who do and don't consume tobacco diminishes with age, dropping to a five-fold difference among 50-to-65 year-olds, and a three-fold gap among over-65s, the team said.

The findings are surprising because younger men and women typically do not have as many of the health problems—diabetes, high blood pressure or cholesterol—associated with an increased chance of heart failure. "Smoking is perhaps the most powerful of all risk factors, exerting its effect much sooner than any other," concluded the study, published in the journal Heart.

All smokers face a markedly higher danger of heart attacks than non-smokers, but it had not been clear how the risk compared between age brackets. To find out, a team of researchers led by Ever Grech of The South Yorkshire Cardiothoracic Centre at Northern General Hospital in Sheffield, England, examined data from 1,727 adults who underwent

treatment for a common type of heart attack—known by the acronym STEMI—between 2009 and 2012. Such attacks result in a large portion of the heart muscle dying. Nearly half the patients were current smokers. The rest were almost evenly divided between ex-smokers and people who had never picked up the tobacco habit.

On average, current smokers were at least a decade younger than ex- or never-smokers when the heart attack hit, the study found. They were also twice as likely as non-smokers to previously have suffered from coronary artery disease. Across the population of South Yorkshire, 27 percent of adults under the age of 50 consumed tobacco, said the study. But nearly 75 percent of STEMI heart attack patients under 50 were smokers.

Overall, smokers were more than three times as likely to have a STEMI than ex- and non-smokers combined, the data showed. The results should be a wake-up call to young smokers, the researchers warned. "Further efforts to reduce smoking in the youngest are needed," the study said. — AFP

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AL-SAYER MEDICAL SPONSORS 19TH SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE FOR KUWAIT DENTAL ASSOCIATION

In the presence of Minister of Health, Al-Sayer Medical Company, one of Al-Sayer Group Holding Companies, sponsored the 19th Scientific Conference for Kuwait Dental Association and the 46th conference for Arab Dentists Unions, which was held under the patronage and presence of Minister of Health Dr. Ali Al Obaidi.

Several lectures were delivered during the conference by a large number of specialists from Gulf Countries, Arab Countries, US, Canada, Britain, Germany, Sweden, Brazil and south Africa. The conference was a great platform to explore the latest medical devices and equip-

ment as well as provide training and development services for physicians through the latest technologies in the field of dentistry.

According to Dr. Hossam Afify General Manager Al-Sayer Medical Company "We would like to extend our congratulation to Dr. Ali Al Obaidi Minister of Health for this successful conference and Dr. Sami Al Manea Head of Kuwait Dental Association and Secretary General of Arab Dentists Union and Dr. Eyad Al Makeet Head of Conference who contributed to the development of dentistry services in Kuwait giving the opportunity for professionals to

exchange expertise and learn about the latest developments in this area."

On this occasion, Al-Sayer Medical Company designated a big booth to display its wide collection of the latest dentistry products by leading global medical companies. Al-Sayer's booth attracted large number of visitors who inquired about the company's products and services. A professional team representing Al-Sayer Medical Company assisted the visitors with regard to the technical information and details of the displayed products.

Dr. Ali Al Obaidi H.E. Minister of Health visited Al-Sayer's

booth and Dr. Hossam Afify escorted him on a tour to introduce and explain the displayed products.

"Our participation in this conference is part of Al-Sayer Medical Company commitment to provide integrated medical solutions through our partnership and representation of many world's leading medical companies, which was represented in our booth this year in the conference, by dedicating a place for workshops for our visitors of doctors to practically experience the latest equipment and displayed products under the supervision of a specialized global team from our principals" Dr. Afify added.



GUST'S GLOBAL STUDIES CENTER HOSTS SEMINAR ON THE GEOPOLITICS OF FOOD SECURITY

Gulf University for Science and Technology's (GUST) Global Studies Center (GSC), in coordination with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS), hosted a seminar titled "The Geopolitics of Food Security: New Players in Global Value Chains and what it Means for Food Importers in the Middle East". The session was led by Prof. Eckart Woertz, a scientific advisor to the Kuwait Chair at Sciences Po in Paris, and was attended by students, faculty, and the general public.

The purpose of the seminar was to provide a Middle Eastern frame of reference to the Gulf food system and the way their societies are situated within the global food-production economy. This included going through earlier Gulf investment attempts in the 1970s, and how they fit in the newly emerging geo-economic landscape of global food markets. Dr. Eckart then related this to the wake of the global food crisis of 2008, where Middle Eastern oil producers announced multi-billion dollar investments to secure food supplies from outside the region. He also highlighted the controversy of these investments at the heart of the global food security challenge that put the Middle East in the spotlight of simultaneous global crises in the fields of food, finance, and energy.

Speaking ahead of the lecture, prof. Woertz said, "The Middle East is not only the world's largest oil exporter, but

also its largest importer of food. Global food value chains and a sustainable management of the water-energy-food nexus are crucial for its future."

The lecture, which lasted for 45 minutes, was followed by a Q&A session where attendees had the chance to question and discuss Prof. Woertz's arguments.

The GSC was founded in 2015 year in partnership with the National University of Singapore, and aims to conduct cutting-edge research on cross-national political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues of critical importance, and share research output and information regionally and globally. It seeks to foster public understanding of global issues and support the policy-making processes of concerned states.

Previous events hosted by the GSC include a discussion to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, sponsored by the US Embassy in Kuwait, a lecture by Dr. Peter Sluglett, an expert on Middle Eastern history and Director of the Middle East Institute at NUS, entitled: "An Improvement on Colonialism? The 'A' Mandates and their Legacy in the Middle East", and one by Dr. Daniel Brumberg, the Kuwait Program Visiting Professor at the Paris School of International Affairs, on US-Arab Relations in a Time of Crisis.



JW MARRIOTT KUWAIT HOLDS A DINNER FOR LA CHAINE DES ROTISSEURS

JW Marriott Kuwait held a casual dinner for La Chaîne des Rotisseurs Bailliage du Koweit Members to celebrate the opening of its new restaurant 'Crossroads'.

The dinner was kicked off by a speech given by the Cluster General Manager of Kuwait Marriott Hotels, Mr. George Aoun, in which he thanked the Chaîne members for attending the dinner and explained the concept of the new restaurant 'Crossroads'.

Guests were treated to an exquisite buffet featuring dishes from all over the world, including Italian, Indian, Asian and Mediterranean delicacies. The restaurant also offers extensive a la carte menus with regional and international dishes such as latin churrasco, five-spice rosemary bbq'd ribs, Sicilian style seabass, pan-roasted salmon and cilantro prawns.

In addition, the menu features decadent desserts, including bitter chocolate mousse cake, exotic fruit platters, crême brûlée and the famous New York cheese cake. And for beverages, the menu provides an array of exotic fruit and vegetable drinks.

One of the restaurant's unique features is the open kitchen, which enables guests to see and smell their food choices while chefs are preparing them. Furthermore, the different food stations at Crossroads are seamlessly fused within the large and elegant dining space, to allow guests to enjoy an exciting and fun experience.

Cluster General Manager of Marriott Hotels in Kuwait, Mr. George Aoun said 'with this new addition, we are looking to move away from the traditional dining concept and provide guests with a more enjoyable dining experience.





CONSTITUTION DAY PROGRAM HELD IN THE INDIAN EMBASSY AUDITORIUM

The benevolent presence of His Excellency Sunil Jain, the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, distinguished guests, and the large audience including teachers, students and parents added the sparkling light in the Constitution Day program held in the Indian Embassy auditorium. This event was conducted as part of the year-long nationwide celebrations to mark the 125th birth anniversary Dr Ambedkar, the chairman of the historic drafting committee of Indian Constitution.

A.K. Srivastava, Second Secretary - Community Welfare welcomed the gathering. The Ambassador and officials paid floral tribute to Dr B.R. Ambedkar.

Pani J Anthony, Recipient of Dr Ambedkar National Award, MUN Speaker and HR Manager, in his inspiring speech on Indian Constitution and National integration, thanked the Embassy for their good efforts in arranging such awareness program, and for the Good Samaritan role played for the people irrespective of seasons and situations, it won a thunderous applause from the audience. His sudden quizzing was answered by Naman Singh, student of Indian English Academy School, Salmiya.



DOUHA HAYBA TO HEAD THE MARKETING & PR DEPARTMENT AT MOVENPICK HOTEL & RESORT AL BIDA'A

Movenpick Hotel & Resort Al Bida'a has announced its appointment of Douha Hayba as the hotel's Marketing & PR Manager.

Prior to her appointment, Douha was a valuable member of the hotel's Meetings & Events sales team where she has joined in 2014 and had a remarkable track record and accordingly was promoted to Meetings & Events Sales Manager.

Due to her diligence and excellence in the field of Marketing and Public Relations, she has been selected by the hotel management to take over the post of Marketing & PR Manager and spearhead the department's operation.

Mr. Maged Gubr, the hotel's General Manager, has congratulated Douha on her appointment and stressed on his confidence of her ability and skills to further develop the hotel's Marketing Department.



MARC GUENTHER APPOINTED AS THE NEW GENERAL MANAGER AT THE REGENCY HOTEL KUWAIT

Marc brings to The Regency Hotel Kuwait more than 20 years of high standards hospitality experience across Europe, Asia and the Middle East, with a strong emphasis on Food & Beverage operations.

He has enjoyed successful tenures with established global hotel chains such as Kempinski Hotels, Hilton Worldwide and other luxury hotels in numerous countries including the UAE, Jordan, Indonesia, Germany and Russia. "I believe his broad range of expertise will be valuable to The Regency Hotel Kuwait thus we continue positioning ourselves as the leading hotel in Kuwait and Marc will play a distinguished role when it comes to our many extension and enhancement projects that will maintain the position of The Regency Hotel at the forefront of ultra-luxury hotels in Kuwait and the Middle East" said Jameel Al Sane, Chairman and CEO, Abdul Razzaq Al Sane & Sons Group.

"Kuwait is an exciting country and I got fascinated at my first step inside the hotel premises. It is a splendid property with an opulent heritage, since its initial opening back in 1981 and re-opening in 2009. I am delighted and proud to join the team and

unveil my experience for the mutual success and to keep this property at the leading board of luxury hotels" said: Marc Guenther, General Manager- The Regency Hotel Kuwait.



SIF-Kuwait successfully conducts Second Kuwait Children's Science Congress



The second Kuwait Children's Science Congress (KCSC) was organized by Science International Forum (SIF) - Kuwait on 18 November at the Smart Indian School was a resounding success. Student teams from different Indian schools in Kuwait competed and proudly showcased their inventive and unique scientific projects to a large crowd of parents, teachers and well-wishers.

Students formed five-member teams to undertake a project based on this year's theme 'Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable development'. The teams had to present a solution to overcome the specific challenges presented by their chosen project.

This year's KCSC saw the participation of around 150 enthusiastic young scientists from all the major Indian schools in Kuwait. They were divided into two categories, Seniors and Juniors, with a total of 15 senior and 17 junior teams taking part in the competitions. A distinguished panel of judges, which included

scientists from Kuwait Institute of Scientific Research, judged the competitions. The judging panel included Dr. Narayana R. Bhat, Dr. S Neelamani, Dr. Mohan Rana, Dr. K Ravindranath, Dr. Krishnakumar Sukumaran, Dr. Vinoba Mari, Dr. Jayasree Chakkamalayath and Dr.

Sreekanth K. J. At the end of the day, four teams, two each from the senior and junior categories, walked away with the top honors and were graded with A+ ranking. This high ranking qualified the winning teams to participate in this year's

All India National Championships. The winning teams of this year's KCSC were: **Seniors:** Indian Educational School (Bhavans) represented by K.S. Abhinaya, Natasha, Raebel Christo, Sandra Prathap and Sarvesh Rajkumar, with the guidance of their teacher Sindhu Ashok.

Indian Learners Own Academy represented by Vaishnav Sathesh, Arjun Biju, Monika Sunil, Diya Raj Nair and Nikita Rajesh, under the guidance of teacher Annie.

Juniors: Indian Educational School (Bhavans) represented by Ethan Bobby Kurien, Lakshmi Sahiti Vallabhaneni, Rhea Pinto, Saima Mageshvaran and Vinayak Anilkumar, presented their project under the supervision of teacher Mary Gomez.

The members of the Indian Learners Own Academy were Allan Anilson, Anish Mathew Jose, Farhan Shakkel, Ruth Rose Lulu and Yusra Asad Khan, with the guidance of their teacher Srividhya.

On the sidelines of the prestigious exhibition were three spot competitions in which several hundred students enthusiastically participated.

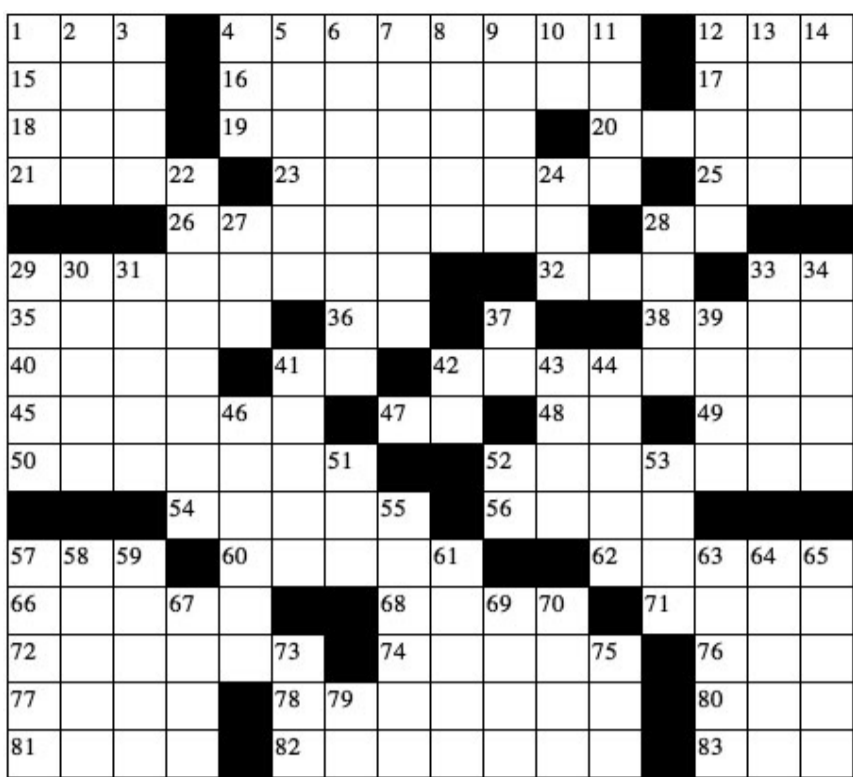
Adding to this, SIF-Kuwait also held the IGNITE Science Writing Award Ceremony, which awarded winners of IGNITE Science Writing Contest 2016. The theme for this year's contest was 'Transformation using Technology'.

The contest witnessed the participation of several hundred participants from Sub Junior (class 5,6,7), Junior (class 8,9,10), Senior (class 11,12), and Adult (Age 18 and above) categories.

SIF-Kuwait, which aims to ignite the minds of the young with a scientific temperament, was formed in 2014 when a group of professionals from the field of education, science and technology launched a platform for the Indian student community in Kuwait. This year's competition was held in association with The Times Kuwait and Mughal Mahal.



CROSSWORD 1447



ACROSS

1. Inquire about.
4. A town in southeastern New Mexico on the Pecos River near the Mexican border.
12. Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to but larger than a mouse.
15. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
16. A large group of islands in the south Pacific including Melanesia and Micronesia and Polynesia (and sometimes Australasia and the Malay Archipelago).
17. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
18. Thigh of a hog (usually smoked).
19. Oriental moth that produces brownish silk.
20. A Russian peasant (especially prior to 1917).
21. Type genus of the Anatidae.
23. A member of an Indian people formerly living along the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
25. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
26. An aircraft that is supported in flight by unpowered rotating horizontal wings (or blades).
29. Any of various ferns of the genus Dryopteris.
32. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
35. Scale-like structure between the base of the wing and the halter of a two-winged fly.
36. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
38. Wading birds of warm regions having long slender down-curved bills.
40. Memorization by repetition.
45. Small genus of dioecious tropical aquatic plants.
47. A small pellet fired from an air rifle or BB gun.
48. The azimuth of a celestial body is the angle between the vertical plane containing it and the plane of the meridian.
49. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
50. Large hardy shrub with showy and strongly fragrant creamy-white flowers in short terminal racemes.
54. A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trademarks Aleve and Anaprox and Aflaxen).
56. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
57. Fleshy folds of tissue as those surrounding the mouth.
60. Using the voice.
62. The Mongol people living the the central and eastern parts of Outer Mongolia.
66. Fragrant resin obtain from trees of the family Burseraceae and used as incense.
68. A large indefinite number.
71. A branch of the Tai languages.
72. (archaic) The emperor of Japan.
74. A group of southern Bantu languages.
76. A master's degree in business.
77. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
78. Experiencing or manifesting pleasure.
80. Tag the base runner to get him out.
81. An inflammatory disease involving the sebaceous glands of the skin.

DOWN

1. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
2. The act of scanning.
3. God of love and erotic desire.
4. A sheath worn to protect a finger.
5. Ending in a sharp point.
6. Brought back to original condition.
7. Baked dish of layers of lasagna pasta with sauce and cheese and meat or vegetables.
8. Resembling a serpent in form.
9. A state of northeastern India.
10. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
11. Fallow deer.
12. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
13. A blue dye obtained from plants or made synthetically.
14. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
22. Low tree ferns with large fronds.
24. Chiefly perennial grasses of cool temperate regions.
27. A city in the European part of Russia.
28. Being three more than fifty.
30. An informal word (abstracted from words with this ending) for some unidentified branch of knowledge.
31. Being on the outside or further from a center.
33. Of a pale purple color.
34. The fourth month of the Hindu calendar.
37. Half the width of an em.
39. Cheese containing a blue mold.
41. Glazed yeast-raised doughnut-shaped roll with hard crust.
42. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
43. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
44. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
46. Adorned by inlays.
51. 100 avos equal 1 pataca.
52. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
53. By bad luck.
55. Normal relaxed breathing.
58. (anatomy) Of or relating to the ilium.
59. Large dark brown North American arboreal carnivorous mammal.
61. (Mesopotamia) God of agriculture and earth.
63. A genus of Lamnidae.
64. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
65. Jordan's port.
67. Female equine animal.
69. A persistently annoying person.
70. Hinge joint in the human leg connecting the tibia and fibula with the femur and protected in front by the patella.
73. (Roman mythology) Goddess of abundance and fertility.
75. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
79. A radioactive transuranic element synthesized from californium.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

It is important to take all the time you need in order to get clear about your situation in the workplace. You may want more flexibility or you may want less. Whatever the situation, now may be the time to look within the company for which you work and find a new and perhaps, more suitable job for yourself. You want to be able to change with the times and much of your desire comes from the new technological developments. Don't be caught sleeping at the switch, thinking things will remain the same. They will not, and if you do not prepare yourself to deal with change you could find the rug pulled out from under you! Now is a time to gather and exchange information that prepares you for staying on top of things.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Before work begins today you may enjoy breakfast at a bagel shop near your office. Money, sex, health and travel may be the many topics of discussion. There could be a lot of fun conversations. You show off your ideas for the workplace. The ability to communicate with superiors comes easily. Practicality and clarity are most important to you at this time. Breakthroughs in your career could open up now, making it possible for you to solve problems and reach new levels of accomplishment. Improved solutions and insights make this an opportunity not to be missed. Take care of the necessary underpinnings of life-health, work and such. Being with somebody that has the same thinking as you is fun this evening.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Today may bring opportunities to change your professional position in the workplace. There could also be a turning point that may require some careful thought on your part. Be open to the ideas and feelings of others. There is a need for new information and fresh opinions. You can make great headway with whatever you are involved with just now. This could be in personal life and in business. Projects you have not been giving much attention to lately may be completed this afternoon. It looks as if you could receive the help you have been wanting at home. Be attentive, there is a need to take plenty of time with tools on the home front this evening. Pay attention to what you are doing. Acting on impulse can lead to false starts. Relax to music.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your goals stand in stark contrast to the goals of others now: adjustments and compromises must be made in the interest of harmony. Failure to take such steps can increase tension between you and others-especially those closest to you. Now is the time to act, because it does not get easier if you let the moment slip away. Women play an important role in making your business or professional life more lucrative. A business social is where you can talk with people in the business world that has ideas of places to apply for a new job or job change. Your home and family environment is likely to be the scene of a few challenges. It is important to take action aimed at dealing with changes of this sort-otherwise, a sense of insecurity can develop.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You put a lot of pleasure into being single, and then on the other hand, you think you might be content in a couple relationship. This is the kind of thinking that fills your mind. It could be that it has been a long time since you have seriously dated. Someone special may be pushing you for an answer with regard to marriage. Whatever the case, couple-hood is on your mind. You may find yourself asking questions of your co-worker friends and sizing up people that seem happy in a relationship. New means of self-expression and communication are possible at this time-there is new technology to learn. You may find yourself wanting to change your appearance today. In-depth discussions find you at your mental best.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Do not be tempted by easy ways to make money or become involved in risky ventures. Someone will try to get you to invest or purchase a product that is questionable for a very tempting price. Good results happen if you check credentials, seek financial advice or compare products. Any plans made today that include ways in which you could increase your income will be productive. This could include teaching, consultation or part-time work. There is clear insight into your own plans and methods of working this afternoon. This is a good time to make decisions in your own professional life or to create a presentation or proposal that will show your superiors a way to help improve business. Some form of social entertainment is enjoyed this evening.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Acting on impulse can lead you in the wrong direction this wednesday, so watch for the tendency to become rushed: you could regret your response. Now is not the time for you to initiate any big changes. Continue with your hard work and pay attention to the details-you will see great results. You may have to take more time with a particular customer or project today as complications or delays are sure to happen. A new energy shift and whatever you do in the professional realm will have positive results but it won't come without effort. Making friends is easy for you. You extend a hand in kindness today-perhaps to a new co-worker. A get-together with friends after work is valuable if work issues are not in any of your conversations.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Moody, even dreamy, describes the emotions most of this day. A practical way of thinking may be hard to find. You set your mind to completing your work and by making sure to take your breaks-you do well as the day proceeds. This is a time when you desire material success and are looking to receive a considerable monetary gain. An unfocused mind can be just as bad as a stress-filled day so keep a notepad handy for your stray thoughts, let them go and then get back into a steady flow of work. Your psychic and intuitive nature is very strong. You feel and sense things that others do not. Tonight you will be able to create a balance as you read your own horoscope or perhaps you will order a horoscope for an upcoming new birth in your family.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 19)

You listen to the viewpoints of others and you can be most patient when you really feel like plunging ahead. Today, you are an expert at saying no without saying the word, "no," you prosper by following your own principles at this time. You know what is best for you and you keep to your own path. Many of your challenges for the remainder of this year will only come when you stray from the plans you have already made. You work well in group settings. You will be able to help the group stay on-path. Higher-ups are watching-they see the management capabilities you exhibit. A healing between friends takes place tonight. You will enjoy the celebrations this evening! Surprises come from everywhere.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

This is a great workday. Much can be accomplished. You may be sought after as just the person to enter into a problem-solving exercise. Your directional abilities, plus the talent of getting to the core of a situation, are in high focus. This is a progressive day in which plans can be made and finding your way through just about any problem ends positively-you feel successful. Good advice from a guide or older person is available if you need it. This is a time to expand your expectations both intellectually and spiritually. Education, publishing, broadcasting, the law, politics and advertising offer opportunities, if you are on the lookout for them. Discussions of travel prevail tonight. Perhaps some solid plans can be made about direction and expenses.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Ideas and communication with others about your ideas help you to adjust your own plans. You may find yourself moving toward a different job identification because of some newly discovered talent. Information that you have been examining and thinking about will now begin to take shape. This next period is one of embarking on new projects. You will feel more confident and outgoing. Social relationships are a special focus now. Travel and animated discussions play a part in this and could be less than satisfying in some respects. Important financial decisions require more information than you realize just now. It's important to gather all the facts necessary to give you a realistic idea of what you are getting into, particularly in owning property.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Careful today-your drive and passions may put you at odds with authority figures. There is a tendency just now toward clashes and emotional confrontations. Put your investigative techniques to work and look for the opportunity to improve-not necessarily to report or complain. You have a lot of ideas for improving a variety of life situations. Now is the time to express yourself. A clear-minded insight into new plans and methods is available to you this afternoon. All of us play the role of the caregiver from time to time. It is just as important to give love as it is to receive it. Today, you teach the people you care for to share their competence and strength as well as their problems and vulnerability. You encourage communication.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Hip-Hop Artists

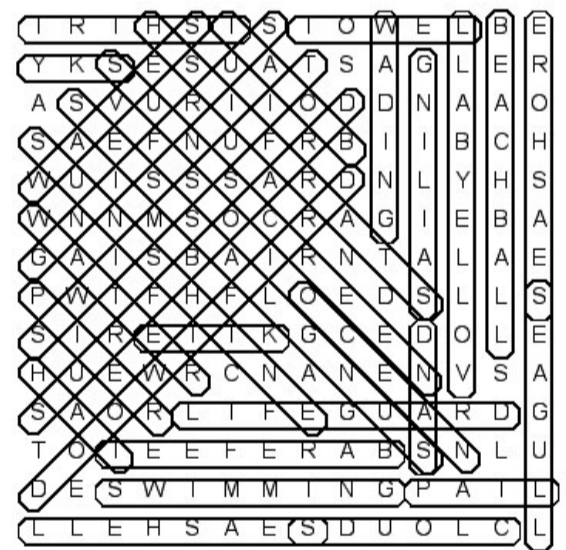
Find and circle all of the Hip-Hop Artists that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of a Lauryn Hill song.

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

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| BRAND NUBIAN | GANG STARR | MUGGS | THE FAT BOYS |
| BUSTA RHYMES | GRANDMASTER FLASH | NATURE | THE FUGEES |
| COOLIO | HEAVY D | NOTORIOUS B.I.G. | THE PHARCYDE |
| CORMEGA | KANYE WEST | ONX | THE ROOTS |
| CRAIG MACK | KILLARMY | QUEEN LATIFAH | TLC |
| DE LA SOUL | KURTIS BLOW | REDMAN | WILL SMITH |
| DJ SHADOW | LAURYN HILL | SALT N PEPA | WU-TANG CLAN |
| ERICK SERMON | LL COOL J | SPOONIE GEE | WYCLEF JEAN |
| FAT JOE | MASTER P | STETSASONIC | |

Yesterday's Solution

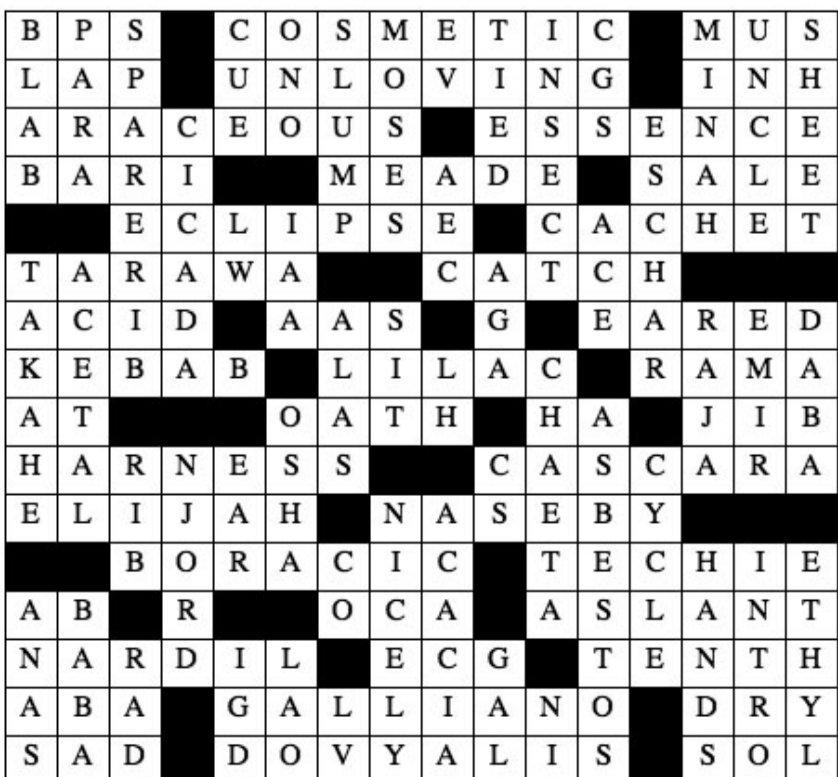
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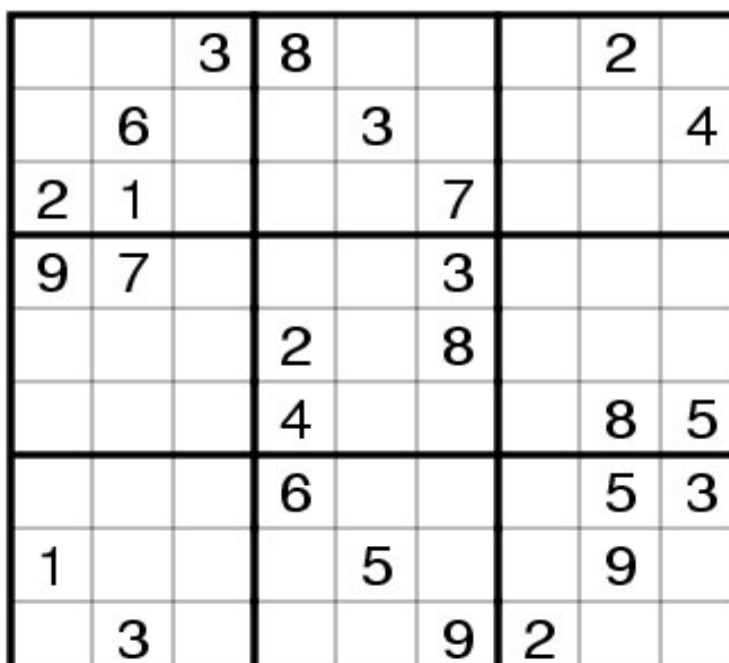
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| DRIFTWOOD | SEASHORE | T SHIRT |
| HAT | SKY | TOWEL |
| KITE | STARFISH | VOLLEYBALL |
| LIFEGUARD | SUNGLASSES | WADING |
| OCEAN | SUNSCREEN | WATER |
| PAIL | SUNSHINE | WAVES |
| PIER | | |

The hidden message is: SANDCASTLE

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





Carrie Fisher refused to accept her bipolar diagnosis

Carrie Fisher took four years to accept that she had bipolar disorder. The 60-year-old actress - who is best known for portraying Princess Leia in the 'Star Wars' franchise - was diagnosed with the mental health condition, that is marked by sharp mood swings at the age of 24, but she was initially unwilling to accept the situation. She shared: "I was told that I was bipolar when I was 24 but was unable to accept that diagnosis until I was 28 when I overdosed and finally got sober. Only then was I able to see nothing else could explain away my behavior." Carrie subsequently started attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as she finally came to terms with her own troubles. Acting as an agony aunt for readers of The Guardian newspaper in a feature dubbed 'Advice from the dark side', she spilled: "Going to AA helped me to see that there were other people who had problems that had found a way to talk about them and find relief and humor through that." Carrie was initially reluctant to attend the AA meetings, but she soon came to see the value in them as she bat-

tled bipolar disorder. She explained: "Initially I didn't like the groups. I felt like I had been banished to sit with a group of other misfits like myself to sit still for an hour. But then someone said, 'You don't have to like these meetings, you just have to go, go until you like them.' That took me by surprise. I didn't have to like something I did? Wow, what a concept. I thought I had to like everything - so I would wait to be OK with something and if I didn't get there it was permission to give up. "But if I didn't have to like it - if I just had to effectively put my head down and move through some uncomfortable feelings till I got to the other side - what a notion! "My comfort wasn't the most important thing - my getting through to the other side of difficult feelings was. However long it might seem to take and however unfair it might seem, it was my job to do it."



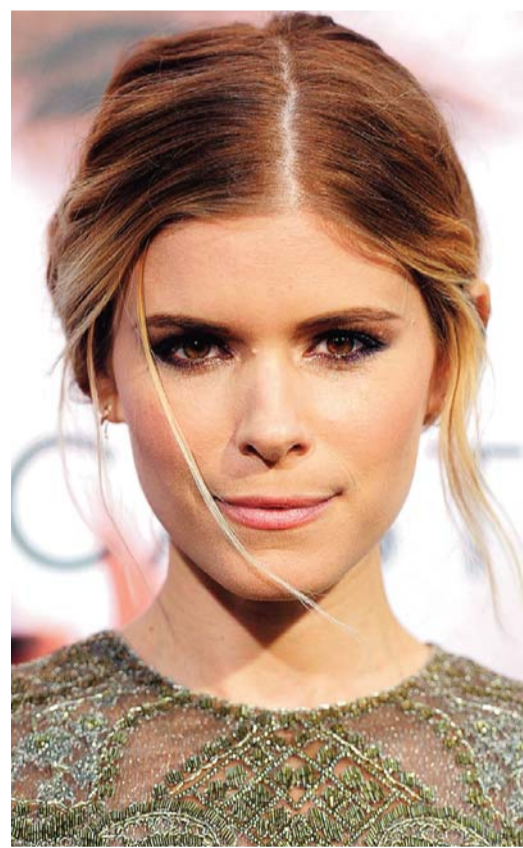
Yolanda Hadid teaches Bella Hadid how to pose

Yolanda Hadid taught daughter Bella Hadid how to pose for Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. The 52-year-old parent - who is the daughter of supermodels Bella and Gigi - has been praised by her youngest child as an "emotional angel" because she has been supporting her brood prior to their appearance on the catwalk yesterday and has advised her on the best way to stand when she hits the runway. Speaking to PEOPLE, the 20-year-old catwalk icon said: "[Yolanda is] my emotional angel. "She always makes me feel so much better. Just like any mother would. "She's just like, 'Shoulders back, be confident and walk strong.'" The 'Real Housewives of Beverly Hills' star has revealed she is "so excited" to see her daughters modelling alongside one another in the lingerie giants showcase today. The proud parent shared a picture of Gigi and Bella cuddling up to Lady Gaga, who will be performing at the event, which she captioned: "I am so excited to see you girls tomorrow night..... #Paris# VictoriaSecret #MyGirls @gigihadid@bellaha-

did @LadyGaga #Sisterhood (sic)." And the brunette beauty has revealed she is set to have two costume changes during the fashion extravaganza, which will take place in Paris, France, which will see her adorn an embellished top made of 6000 crystals. However, Bella believes her sparkly attire makes her look like a "disco ball". Speaking about her costume, she said: "I look like a disco ball. It's so beautiful and shiny." Meanwhile, Bella has revealed she "can't believe" she will be modelling alongside her older sibling and "best friend" Gigi in her debut catwalk show for the fashion house. The brunette beauty took to social media to share her excitement, which saw her share a picture of her and the 21 year old merrily skipping along hand in hand. She captioned the Instagram post: "can't believe I get to experience all of this with my best friend! I LOVE YOU! (sic)." And the

Kate Mara dumped boyfriend for Super Bowl trophy

Kate Mara dumped her boyfriend after he dented her family's Super Bowl trophy. The 33-year-old star's uncle John Mara owns the New York Giants American football side and after they won the NFL tournament in 2008 she took her then-boyfriend, who she hasn't named, to her parents' house to see the famous Vince Lombardi Trophy, but he dropped the silverware and booted it with steel-capped footwear. Kate - who has previously dated British stars Charlie Cox and Max Minghella, and is currently in a relationship with Jamie Bell - said: "My parents, my mom specifically, was very excited about this. And she said [to Kate's ex], 'Would you like to see it? Would you like to hold it?' "He was a very enthusiastic man and he put on the gloves and then he went to lift up the trophy, but he lifted it up from the base, which we didn't know wasn't connected to the trophy, and it fell. "In slow-motion I saw, he was wearing these steel-toed boots, he was a pretty good soccer player and he kicked his foot up and caught the trophy with his boot and then caught it in his hands. "And he dented, just a tiny part. It never hit the ground though and I look over at my dad who is in the kitchen just watching the whole thing happen." Kate's father Timothy was formerly vice president for player evaluation for the Giants, but she also has an allegiance to NFL side Pittsburgh Steelers. Her mother Kathleen's side of the family, the Rooney's - which is where her sister Rooney Mara gets her stage name from - are the owners of the club. The Steelers are set to take on the Giants on Sunday but Kate admits it is a win-win situation for her. Speaking on talk show 'Conan', she added: "The good news is we always win. Someone's always happy."



Kim Kardashian wants Kanye home for Christmas

Kim Kardashian West wants "nothing more" than to have Kanye West home for Christmas. The 36-year-old reality TV star is desperate to spend the festive period with her rapper husband and their kids, rather than him be in a hospital bed at the UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, where he was admitted for treatment for exhaustion and sleep deprivation last week. A source said: "Even if Kanye is recommended by the doctors to stay in the hospital for the foreseeable future, Kim still wants him to be home for Christmas. "She would be happy for him to return to the hospital afterwards, but Kim wants nothing more than to be with her kids and Kanye in the comfort of their own home and not in the confines of a hospital bed for Christmas." Kim - who has children North, three, and 11-month-old Saint, with the 39-year-old star - is said to be hoping "no matter what" that he will be allowed out in time for

Christmas Day. The source added to HollywoodLife.com: "It is her current hope and frame of mind and she is looking to make it happen no matter what." It was previously thought Kanye - who had to cancel the remaining dates of his 'Saint Pablo Tour' as a result of his hospitalization - could be getting out of the medical facility last Monday but now it is not known when he might be allowed home with his family. When he is released, the 'Flashing Lights' hitmaker's personal doctor will take care of him. Kim has been visiting him as much as possible in hospital and will continue to help him as much as she can when he has released. A source recently said: "Kim has been amazing. She knew he couldn't keep going the way he was. She has been by his side through all of this, helping to feed him and laying by his side."

Sarah Jessica Parker to open first-ever store

Sarah Jessica Parker is set to open her "first" SJP Collection store. The 51-year-old actress has revealed after "many trips" to Washington DC where she has been discussing her designs and construction visits she will be unveiling her debut shop on December 8, and the fashion



designer has hinted she can't "actually believe" it is all coming true. Alongside a picture of the golden haired beauty - who founded her footwear line in 2014 - wearing a high visibility jacket and hard hat consulting her team about her plans, which was shared to her Instagram account, she wrote: "Today I reveal every detail of our long held secret! After many trips on @amtrak to DC, on-site construction visits, meetings on design and curating a very special collection we are opening our first standalone @sjpcollection store inside the brand new @mgmnationalharbor. The big launch is on December 8th and I'm counting down the hours, minutes and seconds until we officially open the doors. Because perhaps then I will actually believe it's real. Follow @sjpcollection to learn more over the coming weeks and months. X, Sj (sic)." Meanwhile, the 'Sex and the City' star has revealed her daughters, Marion and Tabitha - who she has with her husband Matthew Broderick - are already thinking about ways to take over her empire because they have "designs" thought out that they're itching to put into practice to boost the company's success. Speaking previously, she said: "Apparently one of my daughters is plotting to take over mama's company. She has designs." However, Sarah isn't overly surprised as one of the twins is obsessed with fashion. She explained: "I think she really likes being bossy. No... I think she likes organizing things and kind of putting things into action. If I walk on the stairs or they see me getting dressed, they have opinions about what I'm wearing. They don't offer up design ideas yet, but I'm sure that's all moments away." — Bang Showbiz



UK former first lady Samantha Cameron launches fashion line

Nearly five months after leaving Downing Street, Britain's former first lady Samantha Cameron has launched a fashion label-revealed, naturally, in British Vogue magazine. The 45-year-old wife of former Conservative prime minister David Cameron won many fans for her smart but modern style during his six years in office, drawing comparisons with US first lady Michelle Obama. Art school educated, Cameron was formerly the creative director of luxury leather goods and stationery firm Smythson, where she remains a creative consultant, and has also been studying pattern-cutting. Free from the constraints of public life, she has now come up with her own collection of 40 pieces which will go on sale early next year. "I felt that there was a lot of American and French brands out there that fit that bracket of designer contemporary with the right price point and the right styling, but there aren't that many British brands which fill that space," she told Vogue. She added: "I've spent a lot of time trying stuff on my friends." The brand name, Cefinn, is reportedly derived from her children's names- Elwen, Florence, Ivan and Nancy. Alexandra Shulman, editor-in-chief of British Vogue, was quoted in The Times as saying that the collection had a broad appeal, predicting that it would be popular as workwear. "Like all designers Samantha has reflected her own taste in the clothes-they are quite simple well-cut shapes, hard-wearing with a lot of concentration on the fabrics so that they won't look rubbish by the end of a busy day and there are a lot of separates," she said. She added: "The collection is above your average high street price but not anywhere near international designer prices. "This slot in the shopping market is actually doing very well at the moment so it's a good time for her to be launching." David Cameron resigned after the vote to leave the European Union, which he had opposed, and was succeeded by Theresa May on July 13.

MUSIC & MOVIES

'WESTWORLD' ACTRESS REVEALS SHE WAS RAPED TWICE



This file photo shows actress Evan Rachel Wood arriving for the Gala In The Garden honoring musician Joni Mitchell and artist Mark Bradford at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, California. — AP

US actress Evan Rachel Wood, who plays one of the leading characters in the new hit TV series "Westworld," has spoken out about being raped twice in an open letter she posted on Twitter. The 29-year-old said she had revealed the attacks in an interview with Rolling Stone magazine and decided to also share her story on social media as she did not want to "stay silent any longer." The actress said she had been raped by a "significant other" and then by the owner of a bar.

"The first time I was unsure that if it was done by a partner it was still in fact rape, until too late," Wood wrote. "Also who would believe me. "And the second time, I thought it was my fault and that I should have fought back more, but I was scared." She said the attacks took place "many, many years ago" and that she had come to understand that she was not at fault. The star added in her Twitter posting as well as the Rolling Stone interview that she believes the assaults were "one of the many factors" that played a part in an attempt to commit suicide at age 22.

The actress, who is bisexual, said she had hesitated about coming forward in the past for fear of being accused of seeking attention or being told "it wasn't a big deal or that's not really rape." "I don't believe we live in a time where people can stay silent any longer. I certainly can't," she wrote. "Not given the state our world is in with its blatant bigotry and sexism." Wood said although she was happy in her life, she was "still not ok."

'You are not alone'

"I think it's important for people to know that, for survivors to own that, and that the pressure to just get over it already, should be lifted," said the star, who was briefly married to actor Jamie Bell and had a son with him in 2013. The actress also defended her past controversial relationship with the rock star Marilyn Manson in the Rolling Stone interview, saying she was "craving danger and excitement" when she met him at age 18 in Los Angeles. He was 36 at the time and mar-

ried to burlesque star Dita Von Teese.

"I met somebody that promised freedom and expression and no judgments," she told the magazine. Wood plays Dolores, an android in the sci-fi series "Westworld" based on the 1973 movie of the same name about a Western theme park of the future. In the first episode, her character is shown being dragged off to be raped. The actress posted a message on Twitter on Tuesday, several hours after sharing her letter, saying that she would be taking a break from social media.

"Thank you for all your support and courageous stories. You are not alone. xo," she tweeted. Fans posted encouraging messages on her Twitter feed, hailing her as a role model and vowing support. "We'll be here when you come back!" one fan tweeted. — AFP

Dolly Parton heartbroken by wildfires torching her hometown

Country music icon Dolly Parton says she's heartbroken about wildfires that tore through the Tennessee county where she grew up but spared the Dollywood theme park that bears her name. In a statement released Tuesday by her publicists, Parton said she's been watching the "terrible fires" in the Great Smoky Mountains. At least 14,000 people have been forced to evacuate the tourist area of Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Three people were killed in the wildfires, and more than a dozen others were injured, authorities said. "I am praying for all the families affected by the fire and the firefighters who are working so hard to keep everyone safe," she said.

In a video released just hours before the wildfires engulfed Gatlinburg and areas around Pigeon Forge, Parton urged people to prevent forest fires. Parton appears with Smokey Bear in the 30-second video released Sunday by Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She tells people to avoid burning leaves and parking vehicles on dry grass, and warns that even a campfire can spark a wildfire. Dollywood officials said the theme park itself

wasn't damaged but more than a dozen cabins operated by the park were damaged or destroyed by the wildfires.

Parton is scheduled to appear on NBC's "The Voice" on Tuesday night, her representatives had previously announced. She will perform her 1973 hit song "Jolene" with Miley Cyrus and Pentatonix. Parton is a native of Sevier County, Tennessee, which includes both Gatlinburg and nearby Pigeon Forge, according to historical documents on the park's website. In the mid-1980s, Parton partnered with the Herschend family who ran the park, then known as Silver Dollar City. It opened under the new name of Dollywood in 1986. — AP

In this file photo, Dolly Parton poses in the press room with the Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award during the 50th annual CMA Awards in Nashville, Tenn. — AP



Preacher turns unlikely rocker with Broken Bones

With a rich, soulful voice that soars high and deep, Paul Janeway has commanded growing crowds as the frontman of his band St Paul and The Broken Bones. But Janeway has little interest in the rock 'n' roll lifestyle. The affable 33-year-old said he learned how to lead the enthusiastic audiences at rock venues from spending his teenage years training as a preacher. "In church, there were moments when you thought you were connecting as a people, and I think music has the ability to do that," Janeway, sipping a bottle of cola, said in the drawl of his native Alabama as he prepared to play a sold-out show before 3,000 people at New York's Terminal 5 club.

"With any great public speaker, there is a rhythm to the way they speak, and the tone—the high and low, being captivated, keeping someone's attention, understanding valleys and peaks," he said. "That's how we write a set-list. We'll take 'em all the way up here and take 'em down—kind of an emotional roller-coaster in a way." The bespectacled Janeway, who still looks more like a Bible student than a rock star—went to church for as long as he knew and at 11, a pastor took him under his wing, letting him preach—or "perform," as Janeway also described it—on select days. Janeway's faith eventually grew complex. He embraces the power of religious experience, but is no longer observant in the way of his youth.

"I thought that was what I wanted to do—I wanted to be a preacher for the rest of my life. And then I got to be 19 or so, and I just kind of fell out of love with it," he said. Janeway grew up with limited exposure to rock, with his mother strictly controlling the music at home. "I could listen to Gospel music, of course, and any sort of religious music and then a little bit of soul," he said, explaining with a grin: "Marvin Gaye pre-'Let's Get It On.' A little safer!"

More bank teller than rock star

Janeway's voice—graceful but erupting into forceful, brassy fermatas—calls to mind not only Baptist preachers but also soul masters such as Al Green and the late Otis Redding. Janeway, who is white, tackles his conservative state's political and racial fault-lines through the music, but with the subtlety of a reflective religious scholar. On "Sea of Noise," the second album by St. Paul and The Broken Bones which was released in September, Janeway bends gender on "I'll Be Your Woman" and repeatedly muses on questions of faith.

"All the people they are praying / But there ain't love no more / Just bullets and hate," he sings on "Waves." With a band with roots in soul but also R&B and rock, St Paul and The Broken Bones has drawn inevitable parallels to Alabama Shakes, a fellow group from the Southern state that has quickly won success through acclaim for a gifted singer. Yet Janeway, who in January will lead his band on its latest tour of Europe, is strikingly fatalistic about his rising fame. "This was not a dream realized," he said of his music career. "It was a realization just that this was what I was supposed to be doing."

"In my family, you work hard and you put your head down," he said. "I was a bank teller for a little while. I approach it in the same way." Janeway demands little on tour except plenty of water to preserve his voice. After each show, Janeway, who is married, said he generally returns to his hotel room and reads a book. "I never drank alcohol and I never smoked a cigarette. I don't participate," he said with a laugh. "I have bad language, but that's about it. — AFP

INDIAN COURT ORDERS CINEMAS TO PLAY NATIONAL ANTHEM

All cinemas must play the national anthem before screening movies and audiences should stand for it, India's highest court ruled yesterday, drawing angry accusations of an assault on civil liberties. The Supreme Court panel said cinemas should display the national flag on the screen as the anthem was played, and that making people stand up would instill a sense of patriotism. "The national anthem has to be played in cinema halls before the feature film is played with the national flag displayed on the screen," said

Abhinav Shrivastava, the lawyer for the private plaintiff in the case.

Many cinemas already play the national anthem before screenings, but only the western state of Maharashtra has made it mandatory to do so, and the issue of whether audiences should be made to stand has long been the subject of debate. "When the national anthem is played it is imperative for everyone to show honor and respect," the judges said, according to the Livelaw news website, a comment Indian media said meant audiences

should stand.

Playing the national anthem "would instill a sense of committed patriotism and nationalism," they said. The ruling drew sharp criticism, with many saying it was a violation of civil liberties. "It is bad enough for the Supreme Court to scorn individual freedom. To do so on an issue as unserious and arbitrary as what should be done at cinema halls is terrible," wrote Nitin Pai, founder of the Takshashila Institution think tank, in a blog post. The issue has long been controversial in India, where some liberals say freedom of speech is being stifled by the right-wing nationalist government currently in power. Last month a disabled man described how he was attacked in a cinema in western India for failing to stand for the anthem.

And in January a Bollywood scriptwriter was heckled inside a cinema in Mumbai after he refused to stand for the song. C Kalyan, vice president of the Film Federation of India, said producers favored the ruling as it would end the confusion. "We played it in some states, but now the court ruling is clear," Kalyan told AFP. Shekhar Kapur, the Indian film maker behind "Elizabeth" and "Bandit Queen," said he hoped the court would also order the parliament to sing the national anthem. "Often its drama too is movie-like," he tweeted. — AFP



In this photograph taken on October 7, 2011, movie theatre hall watchman Mahendra Pratap Rai, 65, sits at the Eros theatre in Mumbai. — AP



In this file photo Paul Janeway, lead singer of the US soul band St Paul and The Broken Bones, performing on stage during the Rock-en-Seine music festival in Saint-Cloud near Paris, France. — AP

In 'Jackie,' a fractured Kennedy fable

Review

History, lately run amok, is ordered with such tidy, forceful finesse by Natalie Portman's Jacqueline Kennedy in the piercing "Jackie." Summoning a journalist to Hyannis Port in 1963, not long after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, she coolly sets the record for her late husband's legacy, coining "Camelot" and shaping the mythology. Some details that don't fit the narrative she simply crosses out. "I don't smoke," she tells the Life magazine reporter (Billy Crudup), with a cigarette dangling between her fingers. Pablo Larrain's "Jackie," a work of probing intimacy and shattered stereotype, is an electrifyingly fractured portrait of the former First Lady. Gone is the image of the wan, serene Jackie.

Here, instead, is a savvy public-relations operator, a steely widow in grief and a woman redefining herself amid tragedy. "I'm his wi-" she begins saying after Dallas. "Whatever I am now." The more complicated view of the mysterious Kennedy is inspired partly by the revelatory private interviews conducted by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and released in 2011. She was not purely her pillbox-wearing public image, not merely a totem of grace, the candid tapes revealed. Throughout "Jackie," we feel her discomfort at playing a starring role in an American fairy tale turned nightmare. The disharmony, sounded by Mica Levi's knotted, gloomy score, is always there between persona and person.

Before the assassination

"We're the beautiful people, right?" she sarcastically quips. Exiting Air Force One, she deadpans to her husband (Caspar Phillipson), "I love crowds." In Larrain's hands, Kennedy's



This image released by Fox Searchlight shows Natalie Portman as Jackie Kennedy in the film, "Jackie." — AP photos

pained public performance is a kind of sacrifice. "Jackie" is at once a deconstruction of the Jackie Kennedy fable and a dramatization of its making. Penned by Noah Oppenheim ("The Maze Runner"), "Jackie" evades the traditional biopic format like a disease. It's organized around the Hyannis Port interview with flashbacks to events large and small before the assassination, during it and after. Many of the scenes, quiet and empty, are shot less like flashbacks than like Kennedy's own splintered, haunted memories. Some, like her televised

White House tour (recreated with black-and-white precision), are familiar. Others are strikingly surreal. Kennedy silently marching through a vacant White House, her pink suit bloodied from the shooting, is an unshakable image that feels straight out of Kubrick.

And then there's Kennedy stomping through rainy Arlington, her heels digging into the wet ground. Seeking a spot for what will be the Eternal Flame, she is, through force of will, staking a plot in history for her husband. "Have you read

what they've been writing?" she first greets the reporter. "It's no way to be remembered." Portman's Kennedy is, from the start, probably thornier and more uneasy than the woman ever was. Portman and Larrain have sharpened her and superimposed her story on a rigorously crafted but resolutely cold surface. "Jackie," though endlessly fascinating, can feel like a character study conducted on a surgical table.—AP



This image released by Fox Searchlight shows Natalie Portman as Jackie Kennedy in a scene from the film, "Jackie."

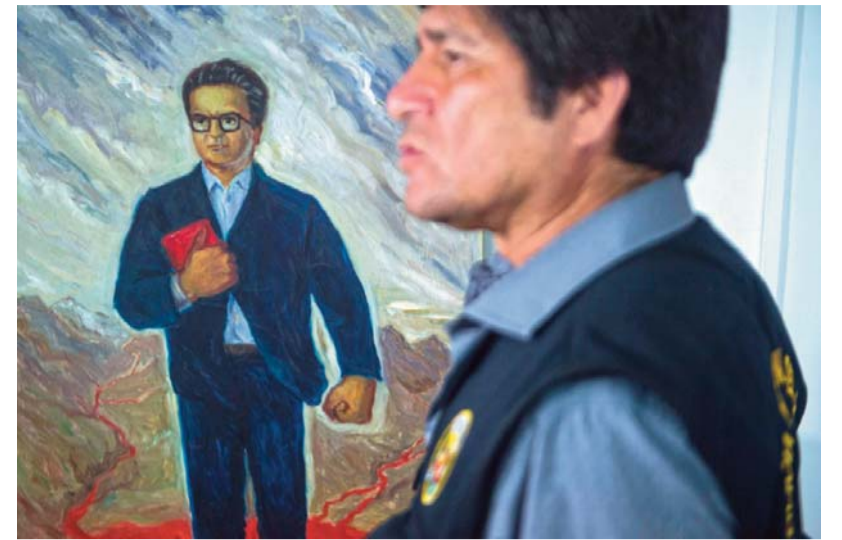
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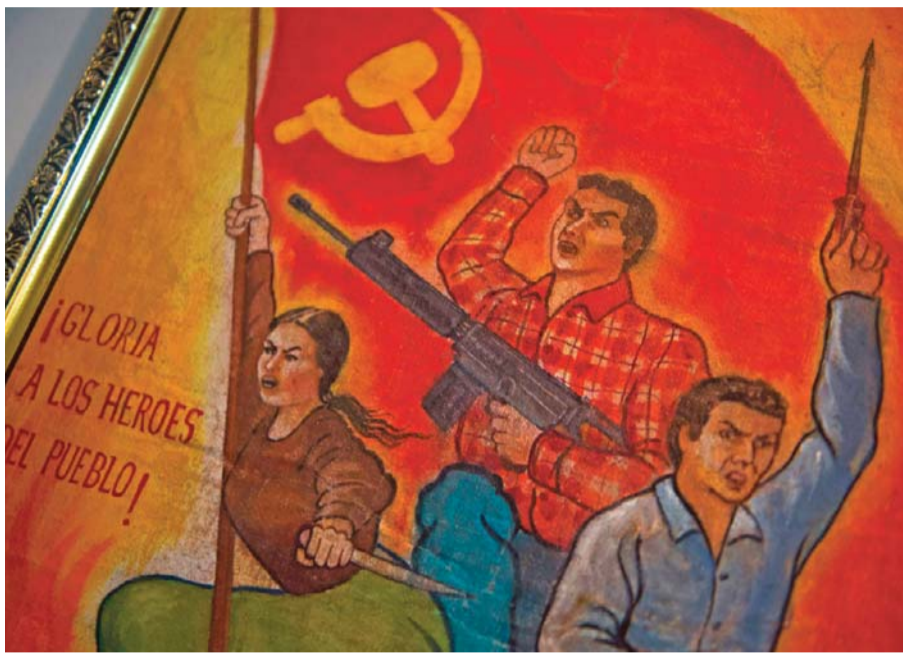
Personal belongings of the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman, and other stuff related to the group, are displayed in a small museum at the anti-terrorist direction Dircote dedicated to Guzman and his guerrilla, in Lima. — AFP photos



A dummy behind bars representing the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and Abimael Guzman is displayed.



A police officer stands near a painting depicting the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path).



Personal belongings of the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman, are displayed.



Personal belongings of the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and Abimael Guzman is displayed.



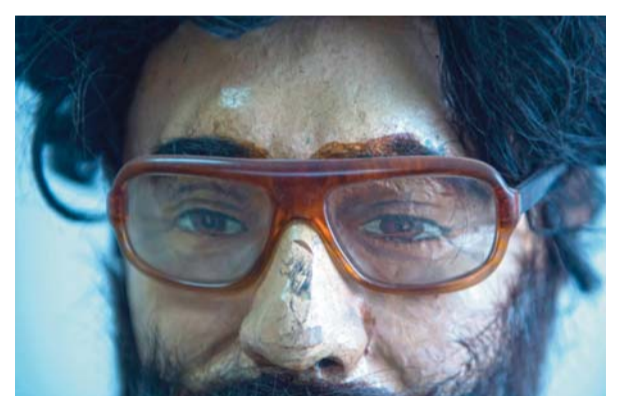
A booby trap used by the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) is displayed.



Picture taken at a museum at the anti-terrorist direction Dircote that keeps some personal belongings of the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman, and other stuff related to the group.



Books on Chinese communist revolutionary Mao Tse-Tung that belonged to the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), are seen in the small museum at the anti-terrorist direction Dircote dedicated to the group's leader Abimael Guzman.



A dummy representing the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman is displayed.

Peru museum of Maoist rebels bears warning for future

In a gloomy room in Peru's anti-terrorism police headquarters lies a trove of old red flags and books of Marx, seized from jailed communist rebel leader Abimael Guzman. Now the police officers who curate this mini-museum in Lima fear a new generation could be dusting off the legacy of the leader of the dreaded Shining Path guerrilla force. In one corner, dressed in striped convict's overalls with his trademark brown sunglasses and bushy black beard, stands a lopsided effigy of Guzman himself in a cage. That is how many Peruvians prefer to think of the insurgent, who turns 82 on Saturday. His fighters waged a two-decade fight against the Peruvian state that authorities say left 70,000 dead.

Bloody history

Among the collection—open for visits only by appointment—are personal effects taken from other Shining Path followers who were jailed over the years. Peru turned a page on a dark, bloody period in its history when Guzman was captured in 1992 and handed a permanent life sentence. But officials warn that now two political groups are trying to revive his legacy. The Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights (MOVADEF) is a group of families of imprisoned guerrillas, considered by police to be the Shining Path's political wing.

Another allied group is also active, police say: the People's Unity and Defense Front (FUDEPP). "The aim of the museum is to show that the message of Guzman's cult was one of death and destruction," says Jorge Luis Pinzas, the retired police colonel who looks after the museum. "That is something that the young people who did not live through the time of terrorism have to learn, now that MOVADEF is trying to recruit them."

Preying on poor

Peru has enjoyed a relative economic boom in recent years, but millions still live in poverty. And now growth is slowing. Pinzas says the Maoist political groups are preying on the young and poor to revive Guzman's fundamentalist message: that society should be rebuilt through violent struggle. "Both groups are like wolves in sheep's clothing," says Pinzas. "They do not want a new society. They want to destroy it."



Personal belongings of the leader of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman, and other stuff related to the group, are displayed in a small museum.

Political path

MOVADEF and FUDEPP have tried to run for office in elections but have met with legal obstacles. Authorities fear their political efforts are a prelude to more violence. In September, a court barred them from seeking office until they formally renounce Guzman's teachings of violence. Authorities estimate some 400 members of what remains of Shining Path are engaged in drug trafficking in the remote southeast.

The two political groups meanwhile have some 2,500 members — 70 percent of the students, police say. They demand a general amnesty for all who took part in the conflict on both sides—including Guzman. His lawyers meanwhile have tried unsuccessfully in the courts to reclaim his book collection. The library occupies the walls of a whole room and includes books by Karl Marx, Mao, Lenin and more. The books offer a tour through the political mind of the philosophy professor turned guerrilla. There is even an old travel guide: "How To Travel Through Europe On Five Dollars a Day." — AP

Giving chains: Holiday customers enjoy paying it forward

Lisa Ludwinski expects to sell more pie at her Detroit bakery during the holiday season, and not just to people enjoying it themselves. She anticipates that customers will buy pieces of pie for strangers through the shop's "Pie-it-Forward" program. Ludwinski, owner of Sister Pie, launched the program last fall. Shoppers buy a coupon for a free slice of a pie, and the coupons get hung on a wall. Anyone who visits can take one down to get some pie.

"It's a way to provide pie for a variety of people — people who are hungry or people who have never been to our pie shop before," said Ludwinski, whose specialties include Salted Maple and Cranberry Crumble. Although the program runs year-round, Ludwinski has found that customers are more enthusiastic about it during the holidays.

Pay-it-forward programs seem to gain momentum around Christmas. Customers at Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts around the country have made headlines in recent Decembers by buying coffee for the person behind them in line — leading to chains of hundreds of free drinks in streaks that can last for hours. Most people — even those who don't donate to charity — value generosity, and paying for someone's coffee is an easy way to express that, said Patricia Snell Herzog, an assistant professor of sociology and criminal justice at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville who co-authored "American Generosity: Who Gives and Why" (Oxford University Press, 2016).

"It just makes you feel good," she said. "It's like smiling at someone. You're passing on visible goodness." Also, nobody wants to be the person who breaks the chain, she said. "It's put right in



This photo provided by Lisa Ludwinski shows the Pie-it-Forward wall at Sister Pie in Detroit, Mich. — AP photos

front of you. This person in line is being really generous. It makes you feel called to respond," she said. MaryJo Dunn was amazed when an anonymous gift that she made in honor of her late son became a pay-it-forward phenomenon at the First and Last Tavern in Glastonbury, Connecticut. On Feb. 20, what would have been Luke's second birthday, Dunn bought a gift card

and asked the manager to give it, along with a note explaining the date's significance, to a family having lunch at the restaurant.

National media

The family that was chosen was celebrating their son's birthday; they insisted on reloading the card and giving it to another family, said



Molly Shanahan, creative director for the restaurant. Diners continued to load the card through the next day. "It took off," said Shanahan. "It created this energy. It inspired people. It was a flame that ignited the whole place."

For Dunn, whose son died of cancer in 2015, the outpouring made a bad day more bearable. She and her husband, Shane, routinely buy cof-

fee and doughnuts for others and give the recipients printed cards asking them to "pay it forward in memory of Luke." They find that these small gifts not only keep Luke's memory alive but inspire others to perform "random acts of kindness," she said. "We are so happy that people continue to do this. It definitely lightens our hearts."

Mason Wartman also has seen how powerful pay-it-forward opportunities can be. He has given away more than 70,000 slices of pizza paid for by the customers of his Philadelphia restaurant, Rosa's Fresh Pizza. The effort started a couple of years ago when a customer learned that homeless people occasionally visited the eatery, which sells pizza for \$1 a slice. The customer offered to pay in advance for a slice to be given to someone in need. He also told Wartman about an Italian custom called "caffè sospeso," or suspended coffee: Someone who has had good fortune pays for an extra cup of coffee to be given later to someone down on his luck.

Wartman decided to keep track of the prepaid slices with sticky notes, which soon covered the walls of his restaurant. After the pay-it-forward program was featured on local and national media, the sticky notes became unwieldy and Wartman created a button on the cash register to record the free slices. Customers like the program because they can see it helping others, he said. "It's very transparent," he said. "My employees never ask, would you like to donate today? It's just out there. Everyone knows what we do." — AP



This picture shows the site of the giant Buddha statues, which were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 in Bamiyan province. — AFP photos

Rebuilding history? Debate rages over lost **Afghan Buddhas**

For centuries they stood, two monumental ancient statues of Buddha carved into the cliffs of Bamiyan, loved and revered by generations of Afghans -- only to be pulverized by the Taliban in an act of cultural genocide. It felt like the loss of family for many who live and tend their crops nearby-but some 15 years on they are hopeful these awe-inspiring relics can be reconstructed. But experts are divided on the value of rebuilding the artefacts, with some insisting it is more important to preserve the remains of the entire crumbling site.

Archaeologists and restorers, mostly Afghan, German, Japanese and French, working in the Bamiyan Valley in central Afghanistan will meet from December 1-3 in Munich, Germany. There they will try to move forward on the issue, as much a matter of the conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site as of the memories and culture of a brutalized community. All Afghans, especially the peasants tending potatoes at the front of the cliffs, mourn the loss of the tutelary silhouettes-the largest, the Salsal, was 56 meters high; its feminine version, the Shamama, 38 meters.

They were blasted in April 2001 by the Taliban, who had taken control of the province and killed thousands of Hazara civilians, a Shiite Muslim minority in Bamiyan. "For us, they were like parents," said Hakim Safa, the 27-year-old representative from the Afghan culture ministry selling tickets at the site. "I feel as though I had lost family." "In the villages local people very much want the Buddhas to be rebuilt... They are always asking us, when will you be ready to begin?" says Rassoul Chojai, professor of archeology at the University of Bamiyan.

But the statues were so thoroughly destroyed that it is not even clear if they ever could be reconstructed. UNESCO and the archaeologists have gathered fragments, a clutter of rocks and stones of various sizes. But the bulk of the monuments has simply vanished, reduced to dust. "The destruction of the great Buddhas is total," confirms Julio Bendezu-Sarmiento, director of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA) and member of the committee for the preservation of Bamiyan which will meet in Germany.

The cliff, he says, is "pierced with thousands of decorated caves, connected by stairs, corridors, used in the past by monks and hermits" until the slow arrival of Islam from the 8th to the 11th cen-

tures. It was the Buddhist history of the area that the Taliban wanted to erase in the name of Islam, when they blew the statues up in 2001. The explosions left deep cracks along the niches, which over the years have expanded, weathered, the rock crumbling against the elements.

Greatly weakened the cliff threatens collapse, Julio Bendezu-Sarmiento adds. "The focus for UNESCO is to preserve the remains of the statues," said Ghula Reza Mohammadi, representative of the UN agency in Bamiyan. UNESCO has reinforced the niche of the Shamama with the help of Japanese funding, and is now working on that of the Salsal, enmeshed in giant scaffolding."Since 2001, German researchers have also worked on protecting the wall murals-there are more than 4,000 caves in Bamiyan and all of them have designs and were painted," says Ghula Reza.



Photo shows the site of the giant Buddha statues.

German restorers, in favor of reconstructing the statues, have already rebuilt the feet of the smaller Buddha, nearly ten meters long. "We have some fragments of the original Buddhas," says Bert Praxenthaler, a Bavarian art historian who has worked in Bamiyan since 2003. "It would be a kind of statue with a lot of gaps and holes of course, but this is the first honorable approach to the history," he argues. "If we have a really good funding, we could do it in a period of about five years."

Prevent another Palmyra

But why bother, wonders Bendezu-Sarmiento: "In history so much has disappeared yet we have still kept the memory, the Buddhas will remain in the collective memory even so," he says. "Leaving aside nostalgia, the urgency is rather to prevent it from happening again," he concluded, citing Palmyra, the Greco-Roman oasis in the Syrian desert devastated in 2015 by the Islamic State group. The debate surrounding the Buddhas is not only technical, says Masanori Nagaoka, director of cultural heritage at UNESCO in Kabul, arguing that consideration must also be given to ethical, humanitarian and human rights points of view.

"Statues are not just a physical representation... they have meaning for people, to represent their history and their diversity of culture or in depth respect for religious dialogue. "So if the reconstruction of the Buddha statues would contribute to revitalizing such memories or dignity, this has to be (considered)," he added, describing a rebuild as a potential "contribution to a peaceful world." The debate will not be decided in Munich, where experts will simply agree on the work to preserve the site-or in Abu Dhabi, where Afghan President Ashraf Ghani will attend a separate conference on safeguarding cultural heritage this weekend. But the question is already on the agenda of an international conference on Bamiyan next autumn in Tokyo. — AFP



Afghan men walk at the site of the giant Buddha statues, which were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 in Bamiyan province.



An Afghan Hazara boy carrying a canister heads out to fetch water in Bamiyan province.



Afghan Hazara women walk along the road in Bamiyan province.



Afghan Hazara children stand in front of the cave where they live with their family in Bamiyan province.



This picture shows the site of the giant Buddha statues.

Bradley Cooper to Star in World War II Drama 'Atlantic Wall'

Bradley Cooper has signed on to star in the World War II drama "Atlantic Wall" as an American paratrooper operating behind enemy lines. Gavin O'Connor will direct from a Black List script by Zach Dean. Producers are Imperative Entertainment's Dan Friedkin and Bradley Thomas, along with Madhouse Entertainment's Adam Kolbrenner. The movie will center on a paratrooper, stranded behind enemy lines hours before D-Day and tasked with delivering intelligence critical



Bradley Cooper

to the outcome of the war. He's also compelled to fulfill a promise to protect the young son of a murdered ally.

Related Lady Gaga-Bradley Cooper's 'A Star Is Born' Gets 2018 Release Date "We're thrilled Imperative is bringing 'Atlantic Wall' to life on screen with a talented filmmaker like Gavin," Friedkin said. "Bradley's phenomenal track record speaks for itself. He's perfect to portray our complicated, often reluctant hero. We can't imagine better creative partners." Cooper starred as a marksman in "American Sniper," and is toplining and directing the remake of "A Star Is Born" with Lady Gaga. O'Connor directed Ben Affleck in the thriller "The Accountant."

Cooper will exec produce "Atlantic Wall" with Joint Effort producing partner Todd Phillips. Imperative said it plans to co-finance the film and is in talks with Warner Bros. to come on as a financial partner. Imperative also said it plans to shoot on location in Normandy. Cooper is represented by CAA, and O'Connor is repped by WME. Dean is repped by WME, Madhouse, and attorney Andrew Hurwitz. The news was first reported by Deadline Hollywood. — Reuters



Jessica Rothe to star in MGM's 'Valley Girl' musical

MGM has tapped Jessica Rothe ("La La Land") as the female lead in the 1983 comedy "Valley Girl." The new "Valley Girl" is produced by Matt Smith. Rachel Lee Goldenberg came on two weeks ago to direct from a script by Amy Talkington. Clay Weiner had been attached to direct the project several years ago. Nicolas Cage and Deborah Foreman starred in the original movie, which was directed by Martha Coolidge in a story of Foreman's Valley Girl falling in love with Cage's punk-rock character. The film, which cost only \$350,000 to produce, was a solid performer at the box office with \$17 million.

The movie was released in the wake of the success of Frank Zappa's "Valley Girl" song, in which his 14-year-old daughter Moon Unit Zappa mocked the unique speech patterns of teenage girls from the Valley. The soundtrack for the original "Valley Girl" featured songs from the Plimsouls, Josie Cotton, Bonnie Hayes, Modern English, and the Payolas. Rothe

portrayed the Alexis character in Lionsgate's upcoming musical "La La Land," as one of the roommates of Emma Stone's character. The film, directed by Damien Chazelle, will open in limited theatrical release on Dec 9.

Variety reported in October that Rothe was starring in Blumhouse's horror movie "Half to Death." Rothe just wrapped the indie feature "Forever My Girl." Her other credits include Gabriele Muccino's "Summertime," "The Disaster Artist," and "Please Stand By" with Dakota Fanning and Toni Collette. She also appeared in the web series "High Maintenance," which recently sold to HBO, and currently stars in MTV's comedy "Mary + Jane." Rothe is repped by Gersh, Principato Young and Hansen Jacobson. The news was first reported by Deadline Hollywood. — Reuters

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2016

Rebuilding history?
Debate rages over
lost Afghan Buddhas

39



A gull tries to land on an occupied pole at the river Main in Frankfurt, Germany. — AP

Exhibit offers rare glimpse at Bunny Mellon's botanical art

She started gardening at age 5 and became a consummate horticulturalist and art collector, particularly of botanical art. But until now, Rachel "Bunny" Mellon's vast collection could be seen by invitation only at her Oak Spring Garden estate and library, just outside Washington, D.C. In what is being billed as a coming-out party for the Mellon collection, more than 50 works, most never before shown in public, are now on view at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx.

The show, "Redoute to Warhol: Bunny Mellon's Botanical Art," will remain on view at the garden's Lester T. Mertz Library through Feb 12. Mellon - who designed the present Rose Garden at the White House and restored a "potager" garden at Versailles, in France - had, by the time of her death in 2014 at age 103, amassed thousands of works of botanical art. They included engravings, watercolors, works on paper and canvas, and more than 10,000 rare and scholarly books. All were housed at Oak Spring, in Upperville, Virginia.

"The collection certainly traces the history of gardening and horticulture... but also the evolution of our interaction with plants, from some of the earliest books on the cultivation on plants," said Sir Peter Crane, president of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation. "This is the first public glimpse" of the collection, he said, "and it's the tip of the iceberg." The New York show begins in the library's rotunda with reproductions of enormous, trompe l'oeil panels by French painter Fernand Renard, commissioned by Mellon for the walls of her greenhouse. They feature objects meant to represent her life and passions. Although there is no garden component of this winter show, the rotunda does feature



Photo provided by the New York Botanical Garden shows Jan van Kessel the Elder's "Still life study of plants, insects, arachnids, mollusks, and reptiles," 1653-58, Oil on copper.

some of Mellon's own living topiary trees from Oak Spring. "In addition to being an avid collector of art, she trained her own topiaries," said Susan Fraser, vice-president and director of the botanical garden's library. Organized chronologically and by theme, the exhibit begins with 14th century drawings from books pertaining to gardening and agriculture. Another section shows gorgeous images of tulips from the 17th century, when the demand for rare bulbs became so intense that some tulip varieties cost more than a house. "They needed artists at that

time to document what kinds of tulips were available," Fraser said. "And at one point, Mellon bought up bunches of these very rare tulip illustrations."

The show also includes hand-colored engravings by French artist Jacques LeMoigne de Morgues; floral works by artists in the French royal court for King Louis XIV; and 18th century watercolors on vellum by German artist Georg Dionysius Ehret. A voluptuous 1737 Ehret painting of a Southern magnolia stands out for its painstaking detail. In another section is a wall of 17th century studies of plants, insects, spiders, mollusks and reptiles by Jan Van Kessel the Elder.

"The Van Kessels are my favorites," Fraser said. "We suspect they were originally built into a 'Cabinet of Curiosities' and were later framed in this way. They record what was probably a real collection and are so beautifully rendered." There are also 19th and 20th century works on paper and canvas by artists including Henri Rousseau and Pablo Picasso. One of the more recent works in the show is an Andy Warhol illustration - and handwritten recipe - for a cookbook. Entitled "Vine Leaf Marinade," it's a 1959 ink and watercolor on paper.

Although there is no immediate plan for the exhibit to travel beyond New York, Crane said an increasing number of works from the collection will be loaned to other exhibits around the country. A small selection is to be exhibited at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, Connecticut, starting in February. — AP



This undated photo provided by the New York Botanical Garden shows Andy Warhol's 'Vine Leaf Marinade,' ca. 1955, ink and watercolor on paper. — AP photos



This undated photo provided by the New York Botanical Garden shows Georg Dionysius Ehret's 'Magnolia grandiflora (Southern Magnolia),' bodycolor on vellum, ca. 1737.



This undated photo provided by the New York Botanical Garden shows Jacques LeMoigne de Morgues' 'A Young Daughter of the Picts,' ca. 1585, watercolor and gouache, touched with gold on parchment.

YUMMM!: A SCULPTURE MADE FROM PEEPS AT A BALTIMORE MUSEUM

The American Visionary Art Museum is known for highlighting the work of self-taught artists, as well as mechanical devices, toys and whirligigs with colorful moving parts. But through Sept 3, visitors can see an exhibit titled "YUMMM! The History, Fantasy, and Future of Food," which examines the human relationship with food. It includes a 6-foot tall sculpture by Christian Twamley called "Sweepish Chef," which is made out of candy Peeps. The exhibit begins with a 10-foot motorized food mandala by Wendy Brackman, complete with bee pollinators that bob as the wheel turns. Flaming Lips frontman Wayne Coyne has a life-sized Gummy Bear self-portrait in the exhibit, which runs through Sept 3.

The museum will be showing "Matt Sesow: Shock and Awe" through May 28. The exhibit includes about 150 works, including many of the artist's colorful and fantastical depictions of animals and autobiographical paintings with his personalized symbolic icons that recur throughout his work. The permanent collection includes Vollis Simpson's 3-ton whirligig, which invitingly rotates outside the museum. The wind-powered sculpture, part of the museum's permanent collection, is 55 feet tall. Simpson, a farmer, mechanic and artist, was 76 years old when he made it as a salute to nearby Federal Hill and life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Simpson, who died in 2013, built his first whirligig to power a washing machine while he was stationed on Saipan in the Marianas Islands in World War II. The museum includes three renovated industrial buildings on about 1 acre. — AP



This undated photo provided by the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore shows 'Brackman's Botanical Bonanza!' by Wendy Brackman. — AP