

Deep roots: How plants play an important role in Kuwait history



Brazil mourns fallen football team in pouring rain



Costa keeps Chelsea flying as Man City lose their cool



Ramos rescues Real in El Clasico stalemate



NEW FUND SET UP TO PROTECT ENDANGERED HERITAGE SITES

FRANCE PLEDGES \$30M TOWARDS \$100M INITIATIVE

ABU DHABI: Representatives of around 40 countries yesterday approved plans to establish a fund to protect heritage sites in war zones and a network of safe havens for endangered artworks. A closing statement issued after two days of talks in Abu Dhabi did not specify the total amount pledged for the fund but French President Francois Hollande said a target of \$100 million remained achievable. The meeting, co-sponsored by France and the United Arab Emirates, was spurred by the systematic destruction and looting of archaeological treasures in Iraq and Syria by the Islamic State group.

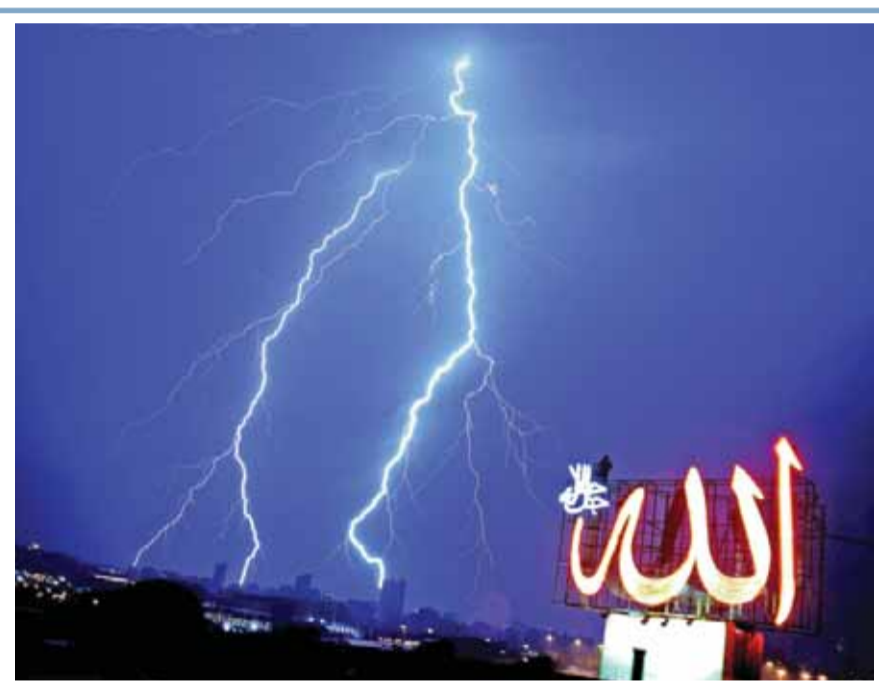
The world watched in dismay as the militants systematically destroyed temples and tower tombs in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra last year. In Iraq, videos showed IS using bulldozers and explosives to destroy Nimrud, a jewel of the Assyrian empire, and ransacking pre-Islamic treasures in the Mosul Museum. "This is the first time that countries, organizations, experts and donors have come together to protect the property of humanity and to provide the means to achieve it," said Hollande.

But proposals for ancient artifacts to be taken abroad for safekeeping met with reservations from some countries - notably Greece and Egypt - which saw treasured artworks removed for display in museums in Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Participants in the meeting, who also included

Continued on Page 13



ABU DHABI: (From right) HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, French President Francois Hollande and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum pose for a group picture during the closing ceremony of an international conference on protecting the world's cultural heritage yesterday. — AFP



KUWAIT: Lightning strikes in the sky over Salmiya early yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 5)



ABU DHABI: Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz (left) and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE armed forces Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan arrive for a reception at the presidential airport yesterday. — AFP

SAUDI KING STARTS GULF TOUR WITH VISIT TO UAE

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's King Salman yesterday arrived in the United Arab Emirates to begin a regional tour aimed at strengthening relations with four neighboring Gulf allies. The UAE visit will be followed by stops in Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait in the days ahead. It's his first Gulf tour since taking power in Jan 2015. The seven-state Emirates federation includes the Mideast commercial hub of Dubai and the oil-rich capital Abu Dhabi. It is the second-largest Arab economy after Saudi Arabia.

King Salman was welcomed by UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme

Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, the UAE's official news agency (WAM) reported. An official reception was held for King Salman at the airport, and the Saudi national anthem was played, along with a 21-gun salute, it said.

Commenting on the tour, the Saudi royal diwan said in a statement the Saudi king is keen to communicate with GCC leaders in serving the GCC peoples and enhancing brotherhood bonds among Saudi Arabia and other GCC states. During the Gulf tour, the Saudi king is expected to meet GCC leaders and senior officials to review relations and ways of enhancing them in all fields as well as to discuss regional and international issues of common interest, the diwan said. — Agencies

CHINA IRKED BY TRUMP TAIWAN CALL

DUTERTE: TRUMP HAILS PHILIPPINE DRUG CRACKDOWN

9 DEAD, MANY MISSING AFTER US PARTY FIRE

OAKLAND, California: At least nine people were dead and about 25 were unaccounted for after a massive fire broke out during a late-night party in a warehouse in Oakland, California, the city's fire chief said yesterday. Fire officials were still trying to determine how the blaze started at about 11:30 pm on Friday, said Chief Teresa Deloach-Reed. The roof of the two-storey warehouse in the city's Fruitvale district collapsed during the fire, complicating efforts to recover bodies, she told a press briefing.

Officials did not know if any of the 25 missing people were among the nine confirmed victims. "There is a large majority of that building that has not been searched," Deloach-Reed said during a press briefing. "We are hoping that the number nine is what there is and that there are no more," the fire chief said, referring to the number of known fatalities.

Deloach-Reed said some of those who were missing may have brought themselves to the hospital or elsewhere. She said she did not know how many people were at the party. The warehouse housed units where people lived and worked - makeshift artist studios carved out with partitions, the fire chief said. "A flea market of items" were inside, she said. A Facebook event page showed 176 people planned to attend the party, which featured a performance by the electronic music act Golden Donna. The page, which listed 355 others as interested in going, carried posts from people who were either missing or accounted for. — Reuters

NEW YORK: US President-elect Donald Trump broke with decades of foreign policy to speak with the president of Taiwan, prompting Beijing yesterday to accuse Taipei of a ploy but saying the move would not affect US-China ties. It was not immediately clear whether Trump's telephone call with President Tsai Ing-wen marked a deliberate pivot away from Washington's official "One China" stance, but fuelled fears he is improvising on international affairs.

China regards self-ruling Taiwan as part of its own territory awaiting reunification under Beijing's rule, and any US move that would imply support for independence would likely trigger fury.

During Friday's discussion, Trump and Tsai noted "the close economic, political and security ties" between Taiwan and the United States, according to the president-elect's office. "President-elect Trump also congratulated President Tsai on becoming President of Taiwan earlier this year," it said.

China - the target of much bombastic

rhetoric during Trump's election campaign - labeled the call a "ploy by the Taiwan side that simply cannot change... the One China framework" "I do not think it will change the one-China policy that the US government has insisted on applying over the years," Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Hong Kong's Phoenix TV, in a muted response. "The One China principle is the cornerstone of the healthy development of Sino-US relations, and we do not want any interference or disappearance of this political foundation."

As he came under fire for the move, Trump defended his decision to speak with Tsai, saying the island's president initiated the call and brushed off the resulting criticism. "Interesting how the US sells Taiwan billions of dollars of military equipment but I should not accept a congratulatory call," Trump tweeted.

President Barack Obama's White House said the outgoing US administration had not changed its stance.

Continued on Page 13



(Left) Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen speaks with US President-Elect Donald Trump through a speakerphone in Taipei on Friday. (Right) Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte gestures as he talks to Trump on the phone at Legaspi Suites in Davao City. — AP/AFP

SYRIAN ARMY RETAKES OVER HALF OF REBEL EAST ALEPPO



ALEPPO: A general view taken from the government-held side of the city shows smoke billowing during fighting between Syrian regime forces and rebel fighters in east Aleppo yesterday. — AFP

ALEPPO: Syria's army advanced deeper into east Aleppo, where by yesterday it controlled more than half of the former rebel stronghold after a fierce assault that has sparked an international outcry. Tens of thousands of civilians have fled eastern neighborhoods of the battered city since President Bashar Al-Assad's regime began its latest offensive in mid-November. Overnight, government troops and allied forces seized the district of Tariq Al-Bab where heavy fighting had raged a day earlier, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Yesterday, regime forces also secured a zone around the road from regime-held western Aleppo to the international airport just east of the city, taking two whole districts while fighting continued in a third. The government has now recaptured around 60 percent of eastern parts of the city that the rebels overran in mid-2012, the monitor said. The advance opens the road leading from the government-controlled west of the city to the international airport just outside Aleppo to the east, which is also held by the regime. It has prompted more civilians to flee, heading either further south into remaining rebel-held districts or crossing

into areas under regime or Kurdish control.

Assad's forces have made swift gains in east Aleppo, and its loss would be the biggest blow yet to Syria's opposition in the more than five-year-old war. More than 300,000 people have been killed since the conflict started with anti-government protests in March 2011, and over half the country's population has been displaced. The government has trumpeted its advances, and state television yesterday showed buses full of residents going from west Aleppo back to their homes in neighborhoods retaken by the army.

More than 310 civilians have been killed in the government's assault on east Aleppo since November 15, the Britain-based Observatory says. Nearly 69 civilians have been killed in the same period by rebel fire on west Aleppo, including nine on Friday, it says. Rebels have struggled to hold back government ground forces, who have advanced backed by air strikes, barrel bombs and artillery fire. On Friday, they rolled back some regime gains in the Sheikh Saeed district on Aleppo's southeastern outskirts, but it was unclear how long they could hold that line. — AFP

In Brief

AMIR THANKS HOLLANDE

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable to the French President Francois Hollande. His Highness the Amir expressed deep pleasure for the President's participation in the concluding session of the "Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage" conference in Abu Dhabi, sponsored by the UNESCO. — KUNA



RECEPTION RESCHEDULED

KUWAIT: Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah apologized for not receiving guests at his diwaniya on Tuesday, December 6, 2016. The reception will be rescheduled and a new date will be announced later, said a statement released by the governor's office yesterday.



ASIAN ART

KUWAIT: Kuwait is taking part in Bangladesh's 17th Biennial for Asian Art, which features 127 artists from 54 countries, with the host country winning awards for eight paintings. Kuwait is joining other countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, the US and Canada, said Dr Bader Al-Duweesh, Assistant Secretary General for Arts in the National Council for Culture, Art and Letters (NCCAL). —KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A general view shows lightning striking in the sky over Kuwait City before a rainstorm early yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT RECEIVES WIDESPREAD PRAISE FOR AMIR JABER PRIZE AT UNESCO

PARIS: Kuwait is given widespread praise and commendation Friday for its commitment to helping the disabled on occasion of the awarding of late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah prize for 'Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.'

In a ceremony at UNESCO headquarters, Kuwait's long-term contribution to this event and its persistence in helping to facilitate and improve life for the disabled was highlighted by UNESCO officials and other participants.

The award ceremony was attended by Amir Jaber's own son, Sheikh Mubarak Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who conveyed the greetings and support of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti government, which was represented by Education Undersecretary Haiitham Al-Athari. Also in attendance were Kuwaiti Ambassador Sami Al-Sulaiman and UNESCO Ambassador and Permanent Delegate Dr Mishal Hayat.

Encouragement

Sheikh Mubarak underlined that disabled people needed encouragement and support, hailing efforts to help them transcend obstacles to their development. He noted that "one billion people are handicapped in the world, and 15 percent of kids are handicapped." "They have a right to training," he remarked, noting that "all information can now be transmitted through digital technology."

Speaking on behalf of UNESCO, Director for Communication and Information Sectors Indrahit Banerjee stressed the importance of Kuwait's contribution to helping promote "significant improvements in technology" destined to help those with disabilities. "This prize highlights the value of Kuwait's role and the mobilization for people with disabilities," Banerjee told participants. Kuwaiti Ambassador to UNESCO, Dr Mishal Hayat, pointed out that Kuwait has "sponsored this prize since 2002 and it is awarded every two years." He further stated that it was now decided to extend the prize "for another six years" and that "it has been extended to cover all disabilities," and not just mental health issues.

\$40,000

The Amir Jaber award is valued at \$40,000 and is split equally between an individual and an NGO, or Association. This year, the award was given to Dr Alireza Darvishy, a visually-impaired Swiss



PARIS: Kuwait is recognized by the UNESCO for the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah prize for 'Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.' —KUNA

researcher, who has developed a digital application to permit blind people "knowledge access" through an inclusive digital system that has proven its usefulness and looks certain to have a broad dissemination. In accepting the \$20,000 award, Darvishy said he is "willing to work with all countries" to help others and implement his application.

The second recipient was the 'Tiflonexos Association', an Argentine association that has constructed a massive library that is accessible to the blind. The Argentine NGO has compiled 7,000 books for its library and has linked up 300 other organizations on its network. All prize recipients thanked Kuwait for its generosity and encouragement and said that the award was a boost to their work to help the disabled.

UNESCO's Deputy Director-General Edouard Matoko expressed to Kuwait the gratitude of his organization and the appreciation of Director-General Irina Bokova, who was unfortunately not able to attend because of a commitment abroad.

Recalling that the Amir Jaber prize has been awarded since 2002 and was an important event on the calendar, he also said that Kuwait was a nation that has "championed many causes" to help the disadvantaged.

Only prize

Dr Hayat underlined the uniqueness of the Amir Jaber prize, noting "it is the only prize of its kind in the UNESCO, and even the United Nations system,

coming after the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and which seeks to help the integration of handicapped in society."

The Kuwaiti award coincided with the 10th anniversary of the UNCRPD and also comes at the same time as the International Day for Persons With Disabilities, which fell yesterday. Dr Hayat said the objective now was "to use digital, electronic means to facilitate equality between disabled and normal people."

Using these modern means is a tool to help in "knowledge acquisition," the Kuwaiti official added. "Knowledge is very important and that is why we try to use the most modern means via the structure of communications here at UNESCO," he added.

He pointed out that Kuwait also wanted more broadly to sensitize people to the question of disabilities and how to best help handicapped people. "The question of disabilities in Kuwait is something we have been working on for many decades and we have many rules and laws to protect handicapped people and we have passed new laws in the past couple of years to give incentives and even oblige both the public and private sector to hire handicapped persons," he indicated. "It is very important when we consider male-female equality, we have to also integrate the handicapped into society and treat them like normal people because they have abilities better than many others," the Kuwaiti official stated. — KUNA

MOH CARES FOR OVER 41,000 WITH DISABILITIES



Khaled Al-Sahlawi

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health offers due services to all persons with disabilities in Kuwait, who hit 41,330 till the first quarter of 2016, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health Khaled Al-Sahlawi, citing statistics of the Public Authority for Disabled Affairs (PADA). Disabilities are various, mental, physical, visual and auditory, Al-Sahlawi added in a press statement yesterday as the ministry marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The theme adopted by the ministry this year is 'Achieving 17 goals for the future we aspire to,' he said, apparently referring to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the UN 2030 Agenda. Choosing the motto aims to encourage removing obstacles hindering merging the persons with disabilities into the society, the senior official said, noting that the ministry offers due health care to the disabled through specialists of medical and

rehabilitations assistance.

Sahlawi stressed the vital necessity of pre-marriage medical tests to discover cases with genetic predisposition to produce potentially children with disabilities. The ministry has designed a program to examine newly born babies for 22 diseases that include hereditary and genetic ones, together with some cases of hormonal imbalances that may lead to mental disabilities on the long-term, he noted. — KUNA

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ABU DHABI: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, heading an official Kuwaiti delegation attended yesterday the 'Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage' conference in the Emirates' capital Abu Dhabi. Participants in the conference reaffirmed their common determination to create an international fund to safeguard the endangered cultural heritage of all peoples. His Highness the Amir returned to Kuwait after attending the conference, and was received at the airport by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other senior state officials. — KUNA

THE PROTEGES' 6TH EDITION DISCUSSED AT KIPCO TOWER

'JOB SHOP' WORKSHOP OPENED

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO) held a press conference yesterday at KIPCO Tower to discuss the sixth edition of The Proteges program and its Waseelah project. "The Proteges has proved its success through its great projects, and I am impressed by its quality and work," said Abeer Al-Omar, Corporate Communications Manager at KIPCO, the main sponsor of Generation 6. Omar noted that KIPCO is keen to invest in Kuwaiti youth and the development of their skills.

Omar announced the renewal of its partnership with The Proteges, a youth mentorship program, for the next seven years. She added KIPCO will host a 'Job Shop' workshop at KIPCO Tower where Kuwaitis will have the chance to learn more about KIPCO and its subsidiaries and get exclusive one-on-one time with representatives of each company for job opportunities. Job Shop, which opened later yesterday, was established by Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Youth Affairs.

Passionate and motivated

Rana Al-Khaled, Proteges' Mentor, said she is proud of the abilities of young Kuwaitis. "It has been a pleasure to know these passionate and motivated young people, and I am eager to see what they will achieve in the future. We are continuing with the Proteges project because we see hope in them every year. They are changing for the better and so are we, and this is why we make sure to develop our ideas as well as our workshop," she said.

She affirmed that The Proteges program will continue because of KIPCO's commitment and its group companies that are supporting young Kuwaitis as contributors to the society and as the country's future leaders. "Waseelah is a platform that strives to raise awareness that all talents are influential, and motivate the general public to express themselves through various forms of art," said Maha Shehab, Waseelah Coordinator.

Shehab noted that her generation decided to set up this project to develop the youth's talents. "Everyone has fears and inner doubts about themselves. This suppresses their potentials and abilities to flourish in the outside world and make a positive impact in the society in their own way. "Waseelah" will help them prosper," she said. "Waseelah held a play at Shamiya Theater that was a mix of all art forms, which satisfied the goal of Waseelah." The play, titled "The Key of Life", is considered a first-of-its-kind in the Arab region to revolve around the main maqamat (keys) in Arabic music that was portrayed in a way that deliv-



KUWAIT: (From left) Maha Shehab, Waseelah Coordinator, Abeer Al-Omar, Corporate Communications Manager at KIPCO and Rana Al-Khaled, Proteges' Mentor attend a press conference at KIPCO Tower yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Youth Affairs (second from left) joins in cutting a cake dedicated to the 'Job Shop' workshop.

ered a self-expressive message.

Mentorship program

The Proteges is a mentorship program designed to positively influence the youth and push them towards realizing their own potential. It is an all-inclusive program that combines workshops, lectures and games; all guided by a group of the most talented experts and influential figures across multiple fields in Kuwait.

It is a program designed to influence the youth of Kuwait to discover their passions. It includes a wide range of engaging activities

such as travel, lectures, collective teamwork and challenges. The Proteges aims to discover extraordinary potential in the youth and develop it through this once-in-a-lifetime experience. They offer these bright young minds the chance to master their skills and techniques that are necessary to meet their goals. The Proteges selection is based on a thorough screening process ensuring that they meet high standards of excellence. Applicants must meet the following criteria: Age 16 to 24; charismatic, social, disciplined, tolerant, moral, eager to learn, hardworking and demonstrate superiority to peers by successful achievements.

KUWAIT FIRST IN ATTRACTING BANKS

RIYADH: Kuwait has ranked first among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries attracting commercial banks from fellow member states to open branches in the country, a statistical report revealed yesterday. Kuwait is hosting eight branches of GCC commercial banks, followed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia, with six branches each, three in Bahrain and two in each of Oman and Qatar, the report, prepared by the information sector at the GCC Secretariat and announced Saturday, stated.

It pointed to a rise in capitalizing on GCC's resolution allowing commercial banks to open branches in other member states over the past ten years, as they increased from 14 in 2005 to 27 branches in 2015. According to the report, the UAE's commercial banks are the most prevalent in the GCC states compared with eight branches, followed by Bahrain with six, as Qatar

and Kuwait each has four.

Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in taking advantage of GCC Economic Nationality and Common Market resolutions, that allowed GCC citizens free practice of economic activities in any of the member countries, the report said. Accumulated licenses offered till the end of 2015 hit 76,991, compared with 16,215 at the end of 2006, marking a rise of 375 percent.

Until the end of last year, the UAE has offered accumulated 67,564 licenses, about 88 percent of the total figure, followed by Oman with 3,538 (4.6 percent), then Kuwait with 3,453 licenses (4.5 percent, Saudi Arabia with 1,900, Bahrain 280 and finally Qatar with 256. In 1982, the GCC took a resolution that opened the door for citizens from the bloc's countries to launch businesses in other members. — KUNA

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Special Report



The Talha tree.



The arnebia plant.



The arta plant.



The arfaj plant.

Deep roots: How plants play important role in Kuwait's environment, history

Researcher talks about flora's impact on Kuwait's ecosystem, cultural influence

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Plants are the basis of life for humans and other creatures on earth. Plants are of great value for the environment too. Every plant has a history and some have stories that have become part of heritage. Kuwaitis in the past were strongly attached to the environment and particularly plants, and they named many old areas after them.

Nouf Al-Hashash is a researcher at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) and rapporteur of the wildlife protection committee at the Kuwait Environment Protection Society, with a specialization in the natural flora of Kuwait. There are over 400 native plant species in Kuwait. "About 70 percent of them are annuals, while the rest are perennials. Annuals are seasonal plants that grow after rains, so their lifecycle is short - less than two years - while the perennials live longer," Hashash told Kuwait Times.

started in 1907, but most of those conducting them were amateurs. "Professional studies started in the 1940s, when some experts working at a research institution studied plant communities and their locations in Kuwait. Violet Dickson (wife of British colonial administrator H R P Dickson) adored plants, and sent plant species she didn't recognize to the Royal Botanical Gardens in London to classify them. She was the first to discover a kind of lavender plant (khuzama) in Kuwait that wasn't known yet, so it was named *Horwoodia dicksoniae* after her," she pointed out.

Some Popular Native Shrubs in Kuwait

Rhanterium epapposum (arfaj) is the national flower of Kuwait. "Unfortunately, this popular plant that was widespread all over Kuwait has disappeared from many places due to human activities and overgrazing. Today, it's a rare plant that can mostly only be seen in protected areas,

about 50 years ago, then spread in Kuwait and became one of the local plants. Most probably it came with manure and then spread quickly, as its seeds are light and can be carried by wind. It can be planted in any soil, so it's found in many countries," explained Hashash.

In the 1980s, an Amiri decree by Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was issued that forbade plucking or cutting arfaj flowers. "Many people think that the nuwair is the national plant of Kuwait, but in fact it's the arfaj. This is due to the importance and strength of the arfaj, which can't be uprooted from the soil even during gusts, as its roots are firmly attached to the land. Also, it lives for long, usually more than 25 years, has a nice smell, medicinal benefits in curing some diseases, and was used for cooking and dyeing fabrics," she added.

Plants Facing Extinction

Many plants in Kuwait are facing the danger of extinction. "Besides the previously mentioned talha tree, the *Calligonum comosum* (arta) is a plant that is endangered. It has a strong and nice fragrance that can be smelled from meters away. When blooming, it turns red, so it can be used for beautification purposes. The problem is that it completely dries out in summer as if it is dead. But in winter, when it rains, it turns green again. This plant has disappeared and can now only be found inside protected areas," Hashash noted.

Ephedra alata (alanda) is another endangered plant. "It is one of the very rare and few plants that have distinct male and female parts (dioecious). It is only found in two locations - the Sabah Al-Ahmad Nature Reserve and the northern borders near Iraq. PAAAFR is currently working on its reproduction, but it's very difficult. It has medical value as well," Hashash told Kuwait Times.

Cakile arabica (suleih) is another native annual plant that can be found in the desert where people are not camping. "Arnebia is yet another native plant, which has four subtypes in Kuwait. It has a strong red dye in the root, so it was used in dyeing textiles and in cosmetics for coloring lips and cheeks. Some of its kinds are rare, while others are widespread. Now there are studies being conducted on it to take extracts for treating cancer," she said.

Some plants are used in cooking and most plants are nutritious for animals. "They also have an aesthetic value, which is very important for the quality of human life. Unfortunately, we don't have a red list of plants that are in danger of extinction. We only have estimations from our visits that they may be endangered. If we continue with urbanization and other human activities, the plants will become extinct. As a result, insects will die out, then the animals. Plants are the first link of the chain," Hashash noted.



KUWAIT: Nouf Al-Hashash, Researcher at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources.

— Photo by Joseph Shagra

"Also, many hobbies are based around nature - artists, photographers and even fashion designers are inspired by nature, and if it disappears, art will disappear. Most plants are also used in medicines. Many desert plants have genes that help them sustain high temperatures, salinity and drought. These properties can be added to certain kinds of crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers and other plants, so these plants will consume less water, thrive in saline conditions and can be planted in any soil," stated Hashash.

Kuwait recently signed an agreement banning exporting any plant outside Kuwait. They can only be exported for biological diversity and gene exchange, which helps protect native plants. In 2014, law no. 42/2014 on environmental protection was issued. This law sets sanctions and large fines for those who destroy, uproot or cut plants. "I advise and remind people that any plant they see in the desert is a living creature, and other creatures depend on it. If we lose it, we lose our genes along with it, which guard us from present and future diseases," she concluded.

- Over 400 native plant species in Kuwait
- 'Talha' is the only native tree in Kuwait
- 'Arfaj' is the national flower of Kuwait
- Plucking or cutting arfaj flowers became illegal in 1980
- Many old areas were named after plants
- Many plants in Kuwait face extinction

Native plants

"There is only one native tree in Kuwait - the 'talha'. It's a kind of acacia, and it's only found naturally in the Sabah Al-Ahmad Nature Reserve. There is only one of these trees standing, and it's over 150 years old. PAAAFR and the Kuwait Institution for Scientific Research are working on reproducing this tree, but it's very difficult," Hashash explained.

"It's possible that it was present in other areas of Kuwait, but is now extinct due to overgrazing, the urban sprawl and other human activities. This tree was discovered at the reserve and was protected with a fence. The area was called Talha after this tree. It is also found in Saudi Arabia, and it's listed on the Red List (of endangered species)," she added.

According to Hashash, vegetation studies in Kuwait

while in the past it was the most common plant. The area of Arifjan was named after this plant. It has historical and medicinal value, and was used in cooking. Its yellow color was used to dye fabrics like sadu. PAAAFR is reproducing and distributing hundreds of thousands of arfaj seedlings to various farms and reserves to rehabilitate the Kuwaiti environment," stressed Hashash.

Haloxylon salicornicum (remth) is another native popular shrub. "The area of Rumaithiya was named after this shrub. It has almost disappeared from this area due to urbanization. It is a kind of perennial and has many benefits. It is a rare plant in Kuwait due to overgrazing and logging," she said.

One of the most popular flowers in Kuwait is the senecio (nuwair). "In the past, Kuwaitis used to call any yellow plant nuwair, so this is how this plant got this name. This is not a native plant, but was brought from abroad



The senecio plant, commonly known in Kuwait as 'nuwair'.



Overgrazing remains one of the main problems that Kuwait's flora faces.

Local spotlight

ABUSE FOR FUN



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Two shameful incidents involving animal abuse and violence against people occurred in Kuwait last week. Both crimes reflect ugliness and cruelty that should not be taken leniently. The first incident occurred when a former MP wanted to express happiness over the results of the elections in Kuwait. He slaughtered camels and sheep and broadcasted it on social media, claiming that the creepy videos were dedicated to the Kuwaiti people.

I don't understand the connection between this purely insane act and the Kuwaiti people. The views indicate that everyone including children and teenagers watched this video, and probably think that it is OK to abuse animals for fun. To me this is murder and not entertainment.

Another incident occurred when a Kuwaiti justified his actions as fun after he ran his car over a Bangladeshi man to entertain his friend riding with him. The victim was waiting for a bus when he was hit. He was injured with fractures in his pelvis and right leg. The accused said he only wanted to intimidate the man for fun and not kill him.

The victim saw the car coming out of nowhere and froze. So basically, the accused wanted to have fun at the cost of someone's life, as he had nothing better to do with his own. He found pleasure in scaring the victim, whose misfortune led him in the path of this abuser. The criminal is in police custody, and hopefully no wasta will set him free.

The report did not mention details about the offender's age. I hope to see his picture published, because his hobby of targeting expats for fun can cost them their lives. These expats have come to Kuwait to work and are already living under poor conditions. Regrettably, the offender showed no guilt and claimed that his greatest desire was to have fun. Fun cannot be achieved by hurting innocent people.

In the West, violence is often associated with alcohol and drugs, but these incidents that occur in broad daylight in Kuwait show no signs of being influenced by drugs or alcohol. Both the suspects were conscious of their crimes, and happy and proud of what they did. The animal abuser even documented his terrible crime, in which he was covered with the animals' blood.

Both cruelty towards animals and humans have common characteristics. Their main aim is to hurt the living, or worse kill them. Several studies on violence confirm that such crimes are perpetuated by people who were subjected to violence at a young age, but this is no justification for their crimes. I believe the society bears great responsibility in opposing violence against women, children and animals, and should not try to validate it for any reason.

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei has urged leaders of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to turn the council into a confederation. In a tweet, Tabtabaei said that in view of threats and major challenges, GCC leaders have to turn it into a confederation in which each state has its own domestic political system, with joint foreign affairs and defense policies. Tabtabaei also said he would support any



MP Waleed Al-Tabtabaei

consensus candidate for the speakership, be it Shuaib Al-Mowaziri or Abdullah Al-Roumi. He also noted that he would support any decision taken by the committee formed during the MP Mohammad Al-Mutair's Diwan meeting.

In addition, Tabtabaei urged the government to immediately issue a general amnesty for all political opinion prisoners, especially "the freedom fighter Musallam Al-Barak", as he described him, because "he and honest people like him should not be in jail". Moreover, Tabtabaei stressed that the reappointment of ministers accused of financial or administrative violations will not be accepted and that the parliament would hold some officials at the investment authority accountable for favoring some employees and paying them four times as much as others.

North Zour

The Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) is expected to announce the date of bidding for the first phase of the North Al-Zour power plant project. The authority will also appoint an advisor within the next few days to handle distributing shares between investors, the government and citizens. Notably, the Ministry of Electricity and Water announced that the investor had

completed the experimental phase of the plant, adding 1,539 megawatts of electricity and 107 million imperial gallons of water.

Work transfer

Acting Director of the Public Authority for Manpower Abdullah Al-Motoutah said the supreme committee for individual disputes had approved 48,408 transfers for work for the private sector since its establishment in Nov 2015 and rejected only 208. Motoutah added that the committee also held 65 meetings during the same period to discuss transfer applications filed at least six months after the issuance of a work permit.

Ambulance bikes

The Ministry of Health's assistant undersecretary for medical support services Dr Jamal Al-Harbi announced that medical emergency services would soon start using motorbikes as ambulances. Harbi added that such type of ambulance services would be very handy in congested places and that the bikes would be fully equipped with the latest first aid equipment to help paramedics tend to cases much faster, before a vehicular ambulance arrives at the scene.

AUTHORITIES LAY OUT SAFETY MEASURES DURING HEAVY RAIN

'DON'T USE PHONE DURING THUNDERSTORMS'

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's relations and security media department and Kuwait Fire Service Department (KFSD) urged all citizens and expats to be very careful during heavy rain and thunderstorms, during which the following safety measures should be fully observed:

- Keep updated about weather forecasts issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation by following various media or through smartphone applications.
- In case of heavy rain while driving, drive away from low-lying and flooded areas to avoid breakdowns and drowning.
- In case a vehicle breaks down during a flood, abandon it and take shelter in a safe spot.
- In case of lightning, avoid open

areas and stop using mobile phones or the vehicle's radio while driving.

- If you have a basement in your house, make sure you have a functioning drainage pump.
- In case the basement drainage pumps breaks down and water level rises, immediately disconnect power supplies and climb to higher floors from where you can call 112.
- It is advisable not to use elevators during heavy rain unless they are equipped with automatically opening doors when power is disconnected.
- Avoid driving vehicles in water ponds formed in desert areas.

Fire

A fire broke out in a fourth-floor apartment in a Salmiya building, said security sources, noting that firemen rushed to the scene and managed to res-



A fireman is seen after tackling a blaze in a Salmiya apartment yesterday

cue two people who were trapped behind flames. The entire building had to be evacuated during the process.

Waste management

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmed

Al-Manfouhi stressed the significance of utilizing scientific waste management methods and following the steps of advanced countries on recycling and protecting natural resources. Speaking on the occasion of taking part in a training program of waste management in Spain, Manfouhi added that recycling waste can turn it from a burden into an economic resource. He also noted that the municipality intends to build the first-of-its-kind factory in the Middle East to annually process about one million tons of solid waste safely and use it in generating electricity. Meanwhile, deputy director for projects Nadia Al-Shereeda said that the municipality delegation visited a number of recycling factories in Spain to witness Spanish efforts in the field and make use of them in building similar plants in Kuwait.



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القباس

Al-Qabas

WHO WILL TASTE THE BITTER DRINK OF REALITY?

By Abdellatif Al-Duaij

The structure of the National Assembly is just the same, just like the nature and direction of the voters who produced this assembly, as these results are the selections of the Kuwaiti voters. There is no doubt that the new faces seem to be promising, and that there are seasonal parliamentary experts such as Abdullah Al-Roumi, Walid Al-Tabatabaei and Jamaan Al-Harbash, despite the disagreement between the views of the latter two and the democratic system, but there still remains populism, the dominant trait of the new assembly.

It is true, that we do not know anything about the new MPs, and it is not our right to describe them as populists, but this description is not an imagination or a false accusation, rather it is a natural assumption that we can assume judging from the circumstances surrounding the elections and

Voters replaced members of the last assembly and selected those who they think will preserve their 'welfare gains'

the reasons by ex-MPs were not reelected. The Kuwaiti voters replaced members of the last assembly and selected those who they think will preserve their 'welfare gains', or those who promised to preserve and not compromise them. This means the current assembly is a populist one, which will definitely clash with the government, and will no doubt end due to lack of cooperation.

The expected lack of cooperation means dissolving of the National Assembly, and this matter has been repeated in the past few years in a way that makes it almost like a boring routine. So, dissolving the National Assembly does not seem to be an easy decision or an available option as it was in the past years. This leads to two things: either the government gives in to the populist demands and continues the current welfare prosperity system, which means continued dependence on oil and squandering of the national wealth, or having the nation's deputies feel the danger, and choose to bow to the bitter reality instead of bowing to the wishes of their voters.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



الجريدة

Al-Jarida

IS LIFE BLACK OR WHITE?

By Arwa Al-Waqian

I'm currently in the Dark Continent; in Benin covering Kuwait's humane charity projects there. The tour might further go to Tanzania and Djibouti. It is amazing to witness how people like us have managed to reach the remotest, smallest and most inaccessible villages on the continent, thanks to the donations they make to the Direct Aid Society. It gives me great joy to emphasize that the Kuwaiti people, who are known to adore luxury, are at the same time keen on donating and volunteering to lend hands of benevolence to the poor and needy.

It was great honor to watch Kuwait's flag being hoisted in the most remote and underprivileged villages. The Kuwaiti donors helped provide electricity and developmental projects in these villages. This shows how well-off people, as we are known worldwide, do understand and realize the

needs of the poor. In fact, I am experiencing a major paradox here. While surfing on Instagram, one can find different forms of excessive consumption and showing off. This shows a major contradiction between charity and luxury. I find myself perplexed whether life is black or white.

It was great honor to watch Kuwait's flag being hoisted in the most remote and underprivileged villages

An underprivileged village where inhabitants are happy with small and simple means of living, or a person who shows off his expensive possessions - who is happier in real terms? It seems like this is just another night full of inquiries. On seeing the Direct Aid projects in the poorest African villages, I realized that our late Dr Abdul Rahman Al-Sumait, an icon of humanitarian work in Kuwait, was an unrivalled man equal to an entire nation!

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

COUPLE TRADE ASSAULT CHARGES

KUWAIT: A citizen and his Iraqi wife rushed to Hawally police station with medical reports of injuries they sustained while fighting at the family house over some disputes. Initial investigations showed that the fight started after the man caught his wife going through his mobile phone. Two cases were filed.

Scam

An elderly Syrian man reported that he had been swindled by someone who spoke in an Egyptian dialect, who charged him KD 150 for an alleged umrah trip by plane, said security sources. The man explained that after seeing an online ad about the trip, he called the suspect, who came to his house, collected the money and gave him a receipt and a flight ticket, which he later found was fake.

Accidents

A citizen sustained various injuries after he drove his vehicle through sand dunes along Salmi highway, lost control and the vehicle turned over. Separately, a citizen in his twenties was killed in a collision in Jahra. Meanwhile, an Asian man sustained serious injuries and was rushed to hospital in a critical condition after he was run over by a speeding vehicle while crossing the road between Sabah Al-Nasser and Ferdous.

Reckless drivers

As usual during the rain, some reckless drivers gathered in Oyoon in Jahra and started driving their vehicles dangerously, endangering their own lives and those of others. Security sources said policemen rushed to the scene, and on spotting police patrols approaching, both the drivers and the spectators dispersed and vanished.

Fugitives caught

Two citizens, a man and a woman, were arrested in Farwaniya, said security sources, noting that on checking on the suspects, the man was found wanted and had a criminal record over drugs, while the woman was found wanted for a KD 600 financial claim. Detectives also found a bag of ice and hashish in the man's vehicle. In another case, a citizen who had been wanted for a KD 8,100 financial claim was arrested in Riggae. Separately, an Iranian man who had been wanted for a KD 5,600 financial claim was arrested in Farwaniya.

Contrabands

Three Asians were arrested with 80 homebrewed liquor bottles ready for sale in Ahmadi. In the meantime, a citizen was arrested in Mubarak Al-Kabeer with illicit pills. — Al-Rai and Al-Anbaa



EQUATE DISCUSSES ENERGY CONSERVATION WITH ELECTRICITY AND WATER MINISTRY

KUWAIT: EQUATE Petrochemical Company, a global producer of petrochemicals, discussed energy conservation strategies with the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW). During a visit to EQUATE's industrial complex, head of MEW's public and private conservation team Iqbal Al-Tayyar highlighted Kuwait's strategy and plans for con-

serving and properly utilizing energy sources, such as electricity and water.

Later on, EQUATE Utilities Operations Leader Mohammad Al-Ali presented the company's overall approach towards energy conservation through a number of initiatives and campaigns as part of EQUATE's Sustainability Program.

EQUATE Engineering and Construction Leader Sulaiman Albader explained the added-values of the company's plant water recycle project, which is considered the first of its kind in the Middle East. By recycling and re-using water utilized in industrial operations for the first time in the region, the project enables EQUATE to considerably reduce water consumption, save natural resources and protect the environment. Furthermore, in line with our focus on sustainable energy, EQUATE's new headquarters, to be completed during 2017, is compliant with Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) in a number of areas. Such an achievement is truly a source of pride for all of us, noted Albader.

In addition, EQUATE's sustainable energy projects have included Kuwait's first seawater cooling towers aimed at water conservation and protecting the marine life. As part of the visit, attendees toured EQUATE's industrial complex to view the different facilities, such as production and the two sustainable energy projects.

In recognition of their efforts, MEW and EQUATE exchanged tokens of appreciation. Both sides have agreed to share their experience and achievements during the next meeting of MEW's conservation team. EQUATE has been an active member of MEW's various committees, teams and initiatives throughout a number of years.

In addition to Al-Tayyar, Al-Ali and Albader, the meeting was attended by electrical engineers Ali Al-Ruai and Husain Bu Hamad from MEW. Other attendees included EQUATE Utilities Leader Mohammad Al-Mutairi, as well as members of EQUATE Sustainability Committee members Shirin Kamshad and Zaid Al-Saad.



KIB SPONSORS 'EXPAND YOUR SUCCESSES' FEMALE EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE

KUWAIT: In line with the Bank's efforts to promote female empowerment across all sectors, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently sponsored Safira CSR Company's Conference entitled 'Expand Your Successes: Common Factors of Successful Women'.

Focusing on female empowerment, the conference was designed to provide a platform for industry-leading successful women to share their personal experiences, in an effort to highlight how talented women can grow and excel in their fields of choice. It also aimed to encourage talented young women to pursue their professional goals and ambitions across all sectors and industries.

The conference featured the participation of a number of high-profile, influential female figures from both Kuwait and the region. Keynote speakers included Hind Al Sabeeh, Minister of Planning and Social Affairs, and Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs, in addition to a number of notable business leaders, entrepreneurs, and activists.

"KIB has always endeavored to lend its support to local initiatives and programs that aim to promote female empowerment within our community. This stems from our

deep-rooted belief that women play a vital role in promoting the economic development and overall advancement of the country, and it is crucial that we as a society offer them all the support and encouragement they need in order to best carry out this role," said Nawaf Najia, Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB.

He further added: "As a national institution, we are extremely proud to have witnessed the great accomplishments Kuwaiti women have achieved over the past few years. We are also supremely confident that young female talents in this country are poised to realize even greater levels of success and excellence in the business world, and in any field or industry they choose to enter."

KIB's sponsorship of the 'Expand Your Successes' Conference comes under the umbrella of the Bank's extensive and inclusive social responsibility program. The industry-leading program aims to support and sponsor activities and initiatives which aim to promote development across all areas in Kuwait. The bank is especially focused on encouraging and fostering young local talents, providing them with the support they need to achieve their ambitions and goals, and enabling them to play an active and positive role in national development.





Le Pen victory would be 'blow' to EU

MASS PROTEST DEMANDS OUSTER, ARREST OF S KOREA PRESIDENT



CHAPECO: People attend under heavy rain the passage of the funeral cortege with the coffins of the members of the Chapecoense Real football club team killed in a plane crash in Colombia. —AFP

BRAZIL MOURNS FALLEN FOOTBALL TEAM

CHAPECOENSE REAL, CUT DOWN AT THE HEIGHT OF ITS GLORY

CHAPECO: The bodies of 50 players, coaches and staff from a Brazilian football team wiped out in a plane crash in Colombia arrived home yesterday for a massive funeral. Fireworks lit up the sky over the stadium in Chapeco as two Brazilian Air Force planes transporting the team's coffins touched down at the southern city's airport in pouring rain.

The coffins, draped in the green flag of the club, Chapecoense Real, were unloaded onto a red carpet under military escort as victims' family and friends watched with a mix of sobs and cheers. They were then lined up on the back of four large trucks and began a slow procession to Conda Arena, the stadium where just 10 days ago the Chapecoense players were thrilling their fans.

The city is holding a huge funeral to honor its little team that could, cut down at the height of its glory. The unsung club was having a fairytale season until the charter plane flying it to the biggest match in its history ran out of fuel and smashed into the mountains outside

Medellin on Monday night, killing 71 people. The city is expecting some 100,000 people-half its population-to attend. There was imposing silence at the stadium as the funeral cortege got under way, broken only by cheers of "Champions!" whenever the screens showed images of the procession.

Soaking wet from the rain, his eyes red from crying, mechanic Rui Alonso Thomas was there with his 10-year-old daughter, who was draped in the Chapecoense banner. "We would have been here rain or shine. Our dream was finally becoming reality. It was so close. There's just no explaining it," he said, choking back tears. "Chapeco will take a long time to get over this. But I plan to keep coming to the stadium." "Chapecoense is in our hearts. It's our family," said Patricia Carraro, a 32-year-old cashier.

The arrival was delayed by an outpouring of emotion at a refueling stop along the way, when locals in the Amazon city of Manaus flocked to the airport to pay tribute to the crash victims. Brazilian President Michel Temer met the

planes on arrival and will attend the memorial at the stadium. The coach of the Brazilian national team, Tite, and FIFA chief Gianni Infantino will also attend. The latter canceled a trip to Australia to be there.

'My son was all passion'

The crash has left the football world in mourning. A minute's silence for the team will be held before every Champions League and Europa League game next week. In Brazil, other clubs have offered Chapecoense players so it can continue competing. Chapecoense had been on their way to Medellin for the finals of the Copa Sudamericana, South America's second-biggest club tournament.

Inside their stadium, a single set of goal posts remains-the one star goalkeeper Marcos Danilo Padilha, 31, defended in the semi-final match with a heroic last-minute save that sealed Chapecoense's trip to the finals. "It's a horrible feeling, seeing this and knowing my son will arrive here in a coffin," said his mother, Ilaide Padilha. "It's very sad

remembering not only that stop (against Argentina's San Lorenzo), but also... him running across the grass with his arms wide open. My son was all passion."

Overflow crowd

The stadium has capacity for just 19,000 people. Soldiers unloaded the coffins when they arrived at the stadium. Two giant screens were set up outside for the overflow crowd. Tents were put up on the pitch for some 2,000 family members and close friends of the team. The other victims-Brazilians, Bolivians, a Paraguayan and a Venezuelan were flown home Thursday and Friday.

Six people miraculously survived the crash, and are being treated in hospitals. Authorities are still investigating the crash. Colombia's civil aviation safety chief said the crew of the British Aerospace 146 jet had disregarded international rules on fuel reserves. The Bolivia-based charter company, LAMIA, had its permit suspended Thursday. —AFP

UK SUPREME COURT SET FOR HIGHLY-CHARGED BREXIT CASE

LONDON: Britain's Supreme Court will Monday begin hearing the government's appeal against a ruling it must obtain parliamentary approval before triggering Brexit, in a constitutional showdown that has further inflamed political tensions. The High Court dramatically ruled last month that Prime Minister Theresa May's government did not have the power to invoke Article 50 of the European Union's Lisbon Treaty, the formal procedure for leaving the EU. The judgment prompted fury amongst Brexit supporters who fear that lawmakers, who are overwhelmingly in favor of staying in the EU, may seek to delay or soften Britain's withdrawal. They have warned of a potential "constitutional crisis" as the judges rule on the limits of executive power.

Following a heated and divisive campaign, Britons voted by 52 percent to leave the EU in the June 23 referendum. But the act legislating the vote did not make the result legally-binding, meaning either the government or parliament still has to pull the trigger. In the shadow of the Houses of Parliament, all 11 Supreme Court judges will on Monday begin four days of appeal hearings, with a decision due in January. Despite the complexity of the issues involved, they will be under pressure to make a swift ruling, as May has promised EU leaders she will invoke Article 50 by the end of March.

Resounding defeat

May argues that as head of the government she has constitutional authority over foreign affairs, including the right to withdraw from treaties, under so-called "royal prerogative" powers. But the claimants in the case, led by investment fund manager Gina Miller, counter that Brexit would nullify some domestic laws and strip citizens of certain rights-actions that only parliament can carry out.

The High Court ruling against the government was cheered by opponents of Brexit, who hope that pro-European lawmakers may be able to use a parliamentary vote to ease the terms of the divorce, for example by keeping Britain in the single market. But the decision prompted personal attacks on the judges from members of May's Conservative party and in the eurosceptic media, with one tabloid calling them "Enemies of the People".

An added complication in next week's hearings will be the presence of representatives from the devolved Scottish and Welsh governments, who are expected to argue that Article 50 also needs to be approved by their devolved parliaments. Such a ruling could derail May's timetable further and, given that Scottish lawmakers are opposed to leaving the EU, set up a stand-off between the nations. —AFP

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YEMEN FORCES PREPARE ASSAULT NEAR KEY STRAIT

ADEN: Yemeni government forces have sent reinforcements to the Red Sea coast to drive Iran-backed rebels away from a key global shipping route, military officials said yesterday. Shiite Houthi insurgents and their allies, forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, control most of the country's Red Sea coastline.

That includes Dhubab, just 30 kilometers from the strategic and busy Bab Al-Mandab strait linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Two US warships and an Emirati vessel in the Red Sea came

under missile attack from rebel-held territory in September and October. The government now aims to "push back the rebels away from the western coast and Bab Al-Mandab, and to secure maritime navigation in the southern part of the Red Sea," a military official said.

Pro-government forces have been sent to the area, backed by tanks, other armored vehicles and Katyusha rocket launchers, military officials said. They said the offensive aimed to wrest back control of the coast from Dhubab as far

north as Al-Khukha 90 kilometers farther north. Troops were also sent by the Saudi-led Arab coalition which intervened in March 2015 to prop up the government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.

Pro-government troops seized Dhubab in early October 2015, giving them effective control of Bab al-Mandab. The rebels managed to recapture the area in February. Hadi ordered the assault ahead of meeting UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in

southern port city and temporary capital Aden on Thursday. Ould Cheikh Ahmed was there to discuss a new attempt to end the country's conflict.

The government-run sabanew.net website said Hadi handed him a letter reiterating the government's rejection of a roadmap the envoy presented in October, which would see the president eased out of power. Hadi, who has spent most of his time in Riyadh since the conflict broke out, flew to Aden last Saturday on a surprise visit. Thursday's meeting

was his first with the UN envoy to take place in Aden.

Clashes raged on Friday in several areas in northern Yemen, along the border with Saudi Arabia, military officials said, as coalition warplanes pounded rebel positions. Air strikes targeted rebels in Nahm, east of Sanaa, and in Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea. More than 7,000 people have been killed and nearly 37,000 wounded since the conflict escalated after the Saudi-led military coalition intervened in March 2015 to support Hadi. — AFP



KIRKUK: Arab residents sit amid their destroyed home in Kirkuk's Huzeiran neighborhood. — AP

RUINS OF KIRKUK HOMES A SIGN OF DIVISIONS TO COME IN IRAQ

DANGEROUS DIVISIONS THREATEN TO BURST OUT

IRBIL: All along the street, houses have been reduced to rubble in the central Iraqi city of Kirkuk. The work of Kurdish security forces retaliating against Sunni Arabs after a recent Islamic State group attack, residents say. Kurdish security forces moved in with bulldozers and excavators and demolished at least 100 homes in the Huzeiran neighborhood of Kirkuk in the week after a deadly suicide bombing in October, according to residents interviewed by The Associated Press and a report by Human Rights Watch.

The destruction points to the dangerous divisions that threaten to burst out now that the IS "caliphate" appears on the verge of collapsing with the assault on its bastion Mosul further north. Oil-rich Kirkuk, in northeastern Iraq, is a particular flashpoint: It is split between Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen populations, each of which have historically claimed it as its own. During the fight against IS, the Kurds seized control of the city and have said they will keep it, opening a likely dispute with the central government and the other local populations.

Broken home

"This is my house and this is my tragedy," said one Arab resident of Huzeiran. The building that was once her family home now lies in ruin. She said Kurdish security forces came into the neighborhood, labeled her building "confiscated" and ejected her family. They also took their identification documents, she said, speaking on condition she only be identified by her nickname Umm Ahmed for fear of retaliation.

Associated Press video from the neighborhood showed dozens of destroyed buildings

along several streets. New York-based Human Rights Watch documented at least 100 homes demolished there on October 23 and 24 by Kurdish security forces, displacing more than 300 families. Lying on the southern edge of Kirkuk proper, in addition to the neighborhood's residents, the area was also hosting mostly Sunni Arabs who fled villages around Kirkuk that were overrun by IS in 2014.

"We want to ask the joint forces and the government forces who demolished our houses, why they did it," said another Kirkuk resident whose house was destroyed and identity documents confiscated. He also asked to only be identified by a nickname Abu Abdullah due to concerns for his safety.

Kirkuk Governor Najmiddin Karim, a Kurd, has repeatedly denied in comments to Iraqi media that forcible displacements are taking place in the province. The Associated Press sought comment from Kurdish security officials and the governor but received no response. But Rakan Said Al-Jibouri, the deputy governor and head of the Arab council of Kirkuk, confirmed the destruction. "We consider this wrongful behavior and a racist attack by the security forces and the political parties behind them," he told the AP. He said the destruction has forced many of Kirkuk's Arab residents to scatter, taking refuge with relatives. The oil-rich city of Kirkuk is claimed by both Iraq's central government and the largely autonomous Kurdish region.

IS control

When IS overran Mosul and much of the north and pushed through central Iraq toward Baghdad in the summer of 2014, Kurdish security forces

moved in and assumed full control of Kirkuk. They said the move was to protect it from IS after the collapse of the military. But Kurdish officials have said since that they will keep the city.

The October attack by the Islamic State group in Kirkuk came just a week after Iraqi forces launched the operation to retake Mosul. In a complex attack carried out by at least 100 fighters, gunmen and suicide bombers targeted different parts of Kirkuk nearly simultaneously, killing dozens. It took nearly 24 hours to subdue them. Security officials in Kirkuk warned that the attack demonstrated the threat IS will likely pose long after Mosul falls. Kurdish officials were quick to blame Sunni Arabs displaced from IS-held areas for the attack. Kurdish authorities have previously been accused of "deliberate mass destruction" to Arab villages in Iraq's north, according to a January 2016 report from Amnesty International.

The Amnesty report cited satellite images to support claims that Kurdish forces bulldozed, blew up and burned down thousands of homes in an effort to uproot Arab communities as revenge for their perceived support of IS. Largely with the help of US-led coalition airstrikes, Kurdish forces fighting IS have taken territory that has expanded their recognized autonomous zone by 50 percent. Al-Jibouri, Kirkuk's deputy governor, said destroying Arab villages and demolishing homes will likely stoke tensions between Iraq's Kurds and Arabs in the country's north and only lead to further violence. He said he had asked the parliament for compensation for those who lost their houses but so far had not received a response. The destruction "will not serve the security or peaceful coexistence of the people of Kirkuk," he said. — AP

BAHCELI: ENIGMATIC NATIONALIST THE CRUX OF ERDOGAN'S VISION

ISTANBUL: When Devlet Bahçeli became chairman of Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) back in 1997, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was mayor of Istanbul and an up-and-coming local politician. Nearly two decades on, Bahçeli's right-wing party is only the fourth-largest faction in the Turkish parliament and has seen its support erode in successive elections. But in the wake of the failed July coup, Bahçeli has been a regular visitor to the palace of Erdogan and the offices of Prime Minister Binali Yildirim as the Turkish strongman eyes a historic constitutional change to a presidential system. The reason is simple: The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) needs the votes of the MHP lawmakers to secure a super-majority in parliament and enable it to call a referendum on the legislation.

The second and third opposition parties—the Republican People's Party (CHP) and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) — both oppose the change, fearing it could take Turkey to one-man rule. This means that Bahçeli, 68, described by analysts as an enigmatic and even inscrutable figure, is exerting considerable influence on the make-up of the final constitution and Turkish policy as a whole.

'Accommodative to MHP'
"From what we have seen, the government is likely to be quite accommodative to the MHP in order to be sure that the presidential system goes through," said Iltter Turan, professor of political science at

Istanbul's Bilgi University. "No constitutional change is possible without the support of the MHP—if you add up the numbers the AKP simply does not have enough votes in the parliament." Turan said it remained unclear exactly what Bahçeli want-

ed, with the wily veteran politician issuing contradictory signals. "Bahçeli pursues a rather enigmatic behaviour that is very difficult to interpret," he said.

The MHP regards itself as the guardian of Turkey's ethnic identity as a Turkish state and traditionally has vehemently opposed any compromise in the war with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Bahçeli's influence is likely to ensure there is no let-up in the fight against the PKK and also the current controversial crackdown against journalists, intellectuals and politicians deemed by the authorities to be linked to the rebel group. Turkish officials have said that the post of prime minister is likely to be scrapped under the new system and replaced by two vice presidents who, according to media reports, could be Yildirim and Bahçeli.

"The MHP will support him (Erdogan) given the collective interest in militarizing the Kurdish issue," said Roy Karadag, political science professor at the University of Bremen. "Bahçeli will surely present himself as the second statesman of the country, who has maintained the 'indivisibility' of the Turkish nation," said Karadag. — AFP



ANKARA: This file photo taken on July 19, 2016 shows Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli speaking during the AKP Party's group meeting at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM). — AFP

ISRAELI TV JOURNALIST BECOMES A THORN IN NETANYAHU'S SIDE

JERUSALEM: After a series of embarrassing reports about Israel's first family, an investigative journalist has become a particular target of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Raviv Drucker of Channel 10 TV has been a longtime thorn in Netanyahu's side, exposing several scandals about the Israeli leader. In return, Netanyahu has berated him, sued him and even reportedly tried to get him fired. But Drucker has kept at it, and two of his recent stories have triggered police investigations. First, he broke the story that Netanyahu's personal attorney had represented a German company involved in a \$1.5 billion sale of submarines to Israel, raising questions about the prime minister's possible involvement.

Then, he reported that Australian billionaire James Packer has lavished Netanyahu's college-aged son, Yair, with gifts that included extended stays at luxury hotels in Tel Aviv, New York and Aspen, Colorado, the use of his private jet and dozens of tickets for concerts by Packer's former fiancée, Mariah Carey. Packer, who also owns a home next to Netanyahu in the prosperous coastal community of Caesarea, is reportedly seeking Israeli residency status for tax purposes.

Netanyahu did not dispute any of the facts but insists he has done nothing wrong. The reports led the prime minister, who frequently complains about media

coverage of him and his family, to accuse Drucker of waging an ideologically driven smear campaign.

"The desperate, pathetic attempt of the politician Raviv Drucker to slander the prime minister with a never-ending drip of lies and brainwashing is aimed toward a character assassination of the prime minister and his family. This is nothing new for Raviv Drucker," the statement from Netanyahu said. Drucker denies any political motivation and insists he is only doing his job.

Now in his fourth term, Netanyahu has repeatedly tried to curb his many detractors in the media, which he considers biased against him and whose numerous investigations have failed to land him in any significant legal or political peril. He has forgone press conferences and interviews, and has tried to reshape the media landscape in Israel. Like US President-elect Donald Trump, he has taken to social media to lambast the press.

Media regulation

Netanyahu encouraged the establishment in 2007 of Israel Hayom, a free daily financed by billionaire Sheldon Adelson that largely serves as his mouthpiece. He has appointed himself minister responsible for media regulation and ordered his coalition partners not to float any media-related bills without his approval. — AFP



RAMALLAH: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (C) casts his vote at the Muqataa, the Palestinian Authority headquarters. — AFP

FATAH PICKS PARTY OFFICIALS AMID TALK OF SUCCESSION

RAMALLAH: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party yesterday held a vote for members of its ruling bodies that could give clues to a possible successor to the ageing leader. Fatah, the oldest Palestinian party, is holding its first congress in seven years at a time when Abbas is seeking to quell dissent in the face of internal rivalries. The 81-year-old leader has not publicly designated a successor and yesterday's vote will be an indicator of the strengths and weaknesses of the various factions in Fatah.

According to a recent poll, two-thirds of Palestinians are dissatisfied with Abbas and want him to resign. The congress comes with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process at a standstill since a US-led initiative collapsed in April 2014. The 1,400 delegates voted at Abbas's Ramallah headquarters in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and also in the Gaza Strip where several dozen were stranded after Israel refused them passage through its territory to Ramallah.

They are to choose 18 members of the party's Central Committee, its highest body. Abbas will appoint another four. The congress will also elect 80 members of the Fatah Revolutionary Council the party's parliament. Another 40 council members are directly appointed. Results should emerge today.

Fatah, founded in 1959, is the backbone of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) which the international community considers the representative of all Palestinians. Analysts say the party's rival factions include supporters of Abbas's longtime rival Mohammed Dahlan, currently in exile in the United Arab Emirates. Abbas was elected president in 2005 for what should have been a four-year term. But there have been no elections since then and with his hold on power drawing increasing internal dissent, observers say he is seeking to ready a successor.

'A different voice'

Social networks and some local news media have during the week published

names of candidates in Saturday's vote who they say have prior approval from Abbas and were therefore guaranteed election even before polling opened. Congress spokesman Mahmoud Abu Al-Hija denied the allegations. At the opening session on Tuesday members re-elected Abbas party head by consensus.

Observers see the reduced number of delegates eligible to vote-down from more than 2,000 in 2009 — as part of a move to exclude Dahlan supporters. Dimitri Diliiani, elected to the Fatah Revolutionary Council in 2009, has said he was not invited to the congress like dozens of others because "we bring a different voice".

He said a planned press conference at a refugee camp near Ramallah on Tuesday with those recently dismissed from the party had been called off after threats "from the security services," including death threats. The previous congress in 2009 brought into the ruling bodies veterans of the Palestinian security services such as Dahlan, Jibril Rajoub and the hugely popular Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison.

This year Barghouti is running again as well as Rajoub, who as head of the Palestinian Football Association is active on the international stage. So too is Saeb Erakat, Abbas's number two in the PLO hierarchy. Dahlan and his backers have been thrown out of Fatah. Abbas told the congress on Wednesday he remained committed to dialogue with Israel but that it would not come at the expense of Palestinian principles.

"We are saying to the Israeli people that we want peace that conforms to international resolutions, but it is your government who does not," he said. Israel must "recognize that settlements are illegal", he said, adding "our hand will remain extended for peace." That policy enjoys consensus support in Fatah, which renounced violence several years ago unlike the rival Hamas Islamist movement which controls the Gaza Strip and follows a policy of armed conflict with Israel. — AFP

CAMPUS ATTACK COULD BE LATEST TERROR CASE IN HEARTLAND STATE

CINCINNATI: Authorities are investigating terrorism as a possible motive in the car-and-knife attack on the Ohio State University campus, the latest in a series of cases involving young men who apparently became radicalized in the heartland state.

They are still piecing together information on the activities of Abdul Razak Ali Artan, the Ohio State student killed Nov 28 by a police officer after he ran his car into others and began slashing with a butcher knife.

Among other recent cases that left people close to the suspects stunned, one man has been sentenced to 20 years in prison, another will be sentenced Monday and another was arrested last month. Their cases have similarities, but also differences, underscoring the challenges to understanding what causes someone to embrace Islamic State calls to violence and how to spot homegrown terrorists.

"The fact is, anybody can be a terrorist," said James Forest, director of the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. The professor said research has shown a broad spectrum for how long it takes someone to become radicalized. Someone living a seemingly normal life can be "derailed" in a matter of days or weeks.

Citing Artan, whose act apparently had little foreshadowing, Forest said: "How could you identify this person on the street as a potential threat?" Christopher Lee Cornell, 22, faces sentencing Monday for a plot to assault the US Capitol in support of the Islamic State group. Munir Abdulkader, 22, of the Cincinnati suburb of West Chester Township, was sentenced Nov. 23 to 20 years for an IS-involved plot to kill a military veteran and attack a police station. In Columbus, Aaron T Daniels, 20, was arrested in early November at the airport on his way, authorities said, to fly to Libya to fight for the Islamic State. A look at the recent cases:

The alleged plots

Cornell wanted to go into the Capitol building during President Barack Obama's 2015 State of the Union address and shoot the president and others including members of Congress, according to court documents. Abdulkader wanted to behead a military veteran while taping for a propaganda video, then storm a police station with guns and Molotov cocktails. Daniels planned to go to Libya to fight to help establish an Islamic State caliphate there, prosecutors have said.

Backgrounds

Artan was born in the eastern African nation of Somalia, lived with his family seven years in Pakistan and resettled with them in Dallas in 2014 and then Columbus. He was raised as a Muslim. He graduated with honors from Columbus State Community College, and was in his first semester at Ohio State. Cornell is a Cincinnati-area native who lived with his parents and brother in a Green Township apartment. After graduating high school, he began identifying as a Muslim; growing his beard long, wearing traditional garb and calling himself Raheel Mahrus Ubaydah. Abdulkader was born in the tiny east African nation of Eritrea. Raised in suburban Cincinnati as a Muslim, he studied chemistry at Xavier University.

Daniels had graduated from Early College Academy, after attending an alternative high school in Columbus. His mother told The Columbus Dispatch the family wasn't Muslim, but he had become interested in Islam years ago.

Influences

Artan reportedly posted on Facebook about the treatment of Muslims, such as the killing of minority Muslims in the southeast Asian nation of Myanmar, and warning that the United States should leave their countries alone. Investigators say they haven't yet found any direct connection to the Islamic State extremists. "We only believe he may have been inspired" by the group, said FBI special agent Angela Byers. Artan also might have been influenced by Anwar Al-Awlaki, a US-born cleric with a leadership role in Al-Qaeda before dying in a 2011 US drone strike in Yemen, Byers said.

Cornell's attorneys say he self-radicalized and lived a fantasy life on his computer, reading ISIS propaganda and conspiracy theories online. They say he was steered in his violent plotting by an FBI confidential informant. Abdulkader began posting messages of support for extremists on social media in 2014, and communicated with Junaid Hussain, an IS recruiter reported killed last year in Syria in a U.S. drone strike. Authorities say Hussain helped him develop his plot, although his attorney also blamed an FBI confidential informant for pushing him.

Daniels began in 2015 posting social media messages in support of jihad and insurgency in Afghanistan and against Russian-Iranian involvement in Syria, federal authorities said. They said Daniels was encouraged by an Islamic State recruiter, Abu Isa Al-Amriki, who was killed in May by an airstrike in Syria. An undercover agent helped intercept Daniels, authorities said. — AFP

RUSSIA SEES PRESIDENT TRUMP AS 'A' CONDUIT FOR EASED SANCTIONS

'IT'S MORE ABOUT INSTITUTIONS, NOT PERSONALITIES'

WASHINGTON: Russia's government denies that it tampered in the US election or even took sides. But now that the results are in, members of President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party aren't holding back. "It turns out that United Russia won the elections in America," Viktor Nazarov, the governor of Omsk, Russia, declared in a radio interview.

Long before Donald Trump was on the radar of American voters, Russia had deep interests in the outcome of elections around the world. But 2016 presented a unique window. Motivated by years of crippling economic sanctions and decades of post-Soviet setbacks, the Russians were keener than ever to pounce; the race for the White House, plagued by party infighting and scandal, was easy bait.

For Putin, sanctions relief is a gateway to the ultimate goal of establishing Russia as the political and economic equivalent of the United States. Trump, who has extolled Putin's leadership and called for a tempered approach to US-Russia relations, may be a conduit to achieving that. "It's much more about institutions, not about personalities," said Robert Amsterdam, an international attorney who has a number of high-profile Russian clients. Putin "was seriously impacted by the sanctions because it targeted his closest friends and now they think Trump is going to change that."

US intelligence agencies said in October they are confident that the Russian government hacked the e-mails of US citizens and institutions, including political organizations, and handed them over to DLeaks.com and WikiLeaks for distribution. Hacked Democratic National Committee emails in July, indicating that DNC leaders were favoring Hillary Clinton over Sen. Bernie Sanders in the primaries, prompted the resignation of chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

Breaking the shackles

"Weaponizing information is really about who gets to write the truth, who gets to write the narrative and who benefits from that narrative - and that is incredibly powerful," said Laura Galante, director of intelligence analysis at cybersecurity firm FireEye, Inc. Russia has sought to put itself on an equal footing with the US since the collapse of the Soviet Union, extending its territory where it can, countering US military action and positioning itself as a rival to the world's biggest economy.

But its ambitions suffered a setback in 2014 when the Obama administration authorized sanctions against sectors of the Russian economy, including financial services, energy, mining and defense. The administration also sanctioned people in Putin's inner circle accused of undermining peace in Ukraine. Add to that falling oil



CINCINNATI: In this Dec 1, 2016, photo, President-elect Donald Trump gestures as he speaks during a "USA Thank You" tour event. — AP

prices and a weak ruble, and Russia's economy was shackled. The impact has been extensive. Russia's sovereign wealth fund had \$87 billion in assets in December 2013, according to the Russian Finance Ministry. As of June 1, it was down to \$38 billion, following sell-offs by the Russian government to make up for budget deficits. US trade with Russia tumbled to \$23 billion in 2015, from about \$34 billion the previous year. Sanctions that impede Russia's ability to acquire equipment for Arctic offshore drilling are of particular concern because they hold the key to Russia's rapid expansion in that sector.

"Lifting restrictions on exports of technology, software, things that really help their energy industry extract oil and gas" would be the top priority, said Boris Zilberman, a Russia expert at the Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. "Production is dwindling over time, so they're going into new, offshore, deep-water drilling in the Arctic and so on, and to do that, they really need Western technology," he said.

Sanctions relief is important to Russia's broader objective of superpower status, shown by its bullish Syria policy. Syria's Russian-backed military made major gains in rebel-held eastern Aleppo in recent days and rebel resistance appeared to be crumbling. While Moscow and Washington are continuously at odds over Syria, the Obama administration has not imposed any Syria-related sanctions.

Closer cooperation

Trump's promise of closer cooperation with Russia has created worries that the US will have diminished leverage. He said during the campaign that under his leadership the US might not come to the defense of some NATO members if Russia were to attack them, indicating he would make that decision based on whether those Baltic republics "have fulfilled their obligations to us."

But Trump's positions are hard to assess because he's often stepped away from his more controversial proposals. Trump's choice as defense secretary, retired Gen James Mattis, has called Russia's aggression in Ukraine a problem "much more severe, more serious" than Washington and the European Union are treating it. Putin and Trump spoke soon after his victory and a statement from Trump's transition team said the president-elect told Putin he looked forward to "a strong and enduring relationship." Observers caution that Putin's interests are self-motivated and Russia's incentive to interfere in US politics won't go away with Trump's victory. "It's not that Putin is against the Democratic Party," Zilberman said.

"He's more against the United States and (for) whatever may push Russian interests." He added: "There's nothing saying that next time they won't hack Republicans and expose Trump administration emails if it benefits them." — AP

CASTRO'S ASHES TAKEN TO CRADLE OF REVOLUTION

SANTIAGO DE CUBA: The convoy carrying the ashes of Cuba's late communist leader Fidel Castro ends an island-wide journey in the cradle of his revolution for a big ceremony before his burial. The flag-draped cedar urn left Havana on Wednesday, passing roads lined with people chanting "I am Fidel!" and making daily stops on the way to Santiago de Cuba in the eastern end of the country.

President Raul Castro, who took over when his brother fell ill in 2006, will deliver a much-awaited speech during a massive tribute with foreign

dignitaries on Saturday evening. Capping a nine-day mourning period, the remains will be interred during a private ceremony on Sunday at the Santa Ifigenia cemetery, where 19th century independence hero Jose Marti is buried.

Fidel Castro's death on November 25 at age 90 has fueled discussions about his divisive legacy and the direction that the country may take without the omnipresent leader who ruled for almost half a century. Tearful supporters have cheered Fidel Castro for the free education and health care

he spread in the island, while detractors call him a brutal dictator who imprisoned dissidents and ran the economy to the ground.

'Farewell, comandante'

People put up posters of Castro as Santiago prepared to greet the convoy. "He has been the father of all Cubans and all the people in need in the world," said Margarita Aguilera, the 54-year-old director of a state tobacco company who painted the words "farewell, comandante" on stone.

Enediel Rodriguez, 50, was helping to make preparations Friday in a public hall where people will be able to watch the arrival of the jeep with the ashes before they go out on the street. "He will rest in Santiago de Cuba because Marti is our national apostle and this was his idea, to rest here next to him," Rodriguez said. The government had already led a huge rally with two dozen foreign presidents in Havana on Tuesday, but Santiago holds a special place in Castro's life.

On July 26, 1953, the Castro brothers launched a failed attack on the Moncada military barracks in the city, some 900 kilometers east of Havana. While the rebels were jailed, it put Castro on the map and he would eventually go into exile in Mexico. "Condemn me, it does not matter," the trained lawyer had famously said at his trial. "History will absolve me." — AFP



BAIRES: A woman holds a portrait of Fidel Castro after his ashes passed through the eastern Cuba town. — AP

SAN BERNARDINO RECALLS TERROR ATTACK WITH SILENCE, SPEAKERS

SAN BERNARDINO: Exactly a year to the moment that a pair of shooters unleashed a terrorist attack on San Bernardino, a bell rang 14 times Friday at the city's Inland Regional Center in honor of the people who died there. "We will never forget that day or the victims of this senseless act of violence. We strive to move forward and search for the good that is in us all," said Lavinia Johnson, the center's executive director.

During the ceremony outside the center, employees of nearby businesses who sheltered people during the chaos were also thanked by Keith Nelson, the center's chairman. In all, 14 people were killed and 22 wounded. Among those attending the ceremony was Zen Martensen, 56, a clerical supervisor for San Bernardino County. While she didn't know the victims who had gathered at the center for a county event that day, she said all county employees are like family. "This affects everybody and I think it's just really important that terrorism doesn't win," she said. "We can't let it win."

The ceremony was just one of a series of events scheduled in the hardscrabble city of 216,000 people east of Los Angeles to mark the anniversary of the Dec 2, 2015, attack by husband-and-wife assailants on a holiday luncheon for county health employees. Investigators say the attackers were inspired by the Islamic State group. Earlier, cyclists conducted a 14-mile bike ride - one mile for each person who was killed.

Choking up

Friday evening some 500 people gathered at California State University, San Bernardino's, Caussoulis Arena for a somber memorial for the victims. Among the numerous speakers, which included the city's police chief and mayor, was Julie Swann-Paez, who was gravely wounded by the shooters. Swann-Paez, whose pelvis was shattered by a bullet, spoke warmly, and sometimes humorously of each of those killed. Still, she choked up from time to time, while some in the audience wept. — AFP



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MEDIA SILENCE ACROSS ITALY ON EVE OF CRUNCH REFERENDUM

ROME: With campaigning over, media silence was imposed across Italy yesterday on the eve of a constitutional referendum seen as crucial to the future of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. In the frantic final round of campaigning which ended on Friday, Renzi's domestic rivals vowed to knock down referendum proposals to streamline parliament and force the centre-left leader out of office.

The prime minister is hoping for a last-minute turnaround in voter sentiment in favour of a "Yes" vote when Italy goes to the polls today. With #silenzioelettorale (electoral silence) widely in evidence on Twitter, most Italians online were rejoicing at the end of a highly-charged campaign. Politically and economically, the stakes are high.

After Britain's vote to leave the EU

and Donald Trump's presidential triumph in the United States, Renzi is being portrayed as next in line to suffer a populist backlash from fed-up and forgotten voters. His pledge to quit if he loses the vote has focused the campaign on his record, exacerbating fears of political instability and economic turbulence in the eurozone's third-biggest economy should he be forced out.

Protest vote

At stake today is whether to slash the size and powers of the second chamber Senate and transfer other powers from the regions to the national government. Renzi says this will mean more effective leadership of a country that has had 60 different governments since the constitution was approved in 1948. But it seems certain

some disgruntled voters will vote "No" as a protest—either against Renzi or the years of economic stagnation. The proposals have come under fire from opponents who see them as ill-considered and potentially opening the door to the kind of authoritarian rule the constitution is designed to prevent.

Some 50 million Italians are eligible to vote, with opinion polls showing many people still undecided. The last permitted polls, published on November 18, gave the "No" camp at least a five-to-eight-point lead, with more than a quarter of voters undecided.

'Could undermine democracy'

In the Mercato Trieste, a food hall in a leafy middle-class neighborhood of northern Rome, most of traders and shoppers on Saturday morning appeared to be either opposed to the

reform or yet to make up their minds. Egg seller Emanuela Carosi, wrapping free range eggs in bundles of newspaper, said she would definitely vote "No". "The Constitution was written by chosen people, luminaries, not politicians like we have today. They are not up to it. And I'm worried that it could undermine our democracy."

Slicing Wagyu beef steaks at an upmarket meat counter, butcher Antonio Canestri said he also opposes the reform but may vote for it for fear of the consequences. "I am afraid about what happens in the event of a 'No'. We know what we have now, we don't know what we will find with the reform, but I am worried about the possibility there could be economic chaos if the 'No' wins." A large majority of the political class, from the far-left to the extreme right, have warned about

the risk of concentrating too much power in the government's hands.

48 crucial hours

Former premier Silvio Berlusconi initially gave his blessing to the proposed reform but switched sides as the rising tide of opposition put Renzi's job on the line. "Go out and vote so that Renzi doesn't become our boss and the boss of Italy," he said late on Friday. At the same time Renzi, was campaigning in Florence, where he was formerly mayor, urging supporters to convince the undecided. "There are so many of them and we must go and seek them out, one-by-one, because everything will be decided in these 48 hours," he said. The possibility that it could turn into a tight race has energized Italians abroad, for whom voting ended on Thursday. — AFP

LE PEN VICTORY WOULD BE 'BLOW' TO EU: CAMERON

'QUITE EXTREME POLITICAL PARTIES'

NEW DELHI: Britain's former premier said yesterday the election of France's Marine Le Pen would be a "big body blow" for Europe, saying he hoped for the victory of a mainstream party. David Cameron said the recent rise of "anti-system, populist" and "quite extreme political parties" in Western Europe did not mark the end of globalization, but warned of the immediate need to make a "major course correction" to address related economic and cultural challenges.

"If France were to elect Marine Le Pen, that would be obviously a very big body blow for the European project," he said at a Hindustan Times

organized conference in New Delhi, hoping for a victory of "a mainstream party that can unite people behind their candidacy". He said the demand for and benefit of free trade, travel, specialization, technology, innovation were not going away.

"But we do need to understand very profoundly the things that have happened, that have caused the events you have seen in Europe and the wider world in the last one year," he added. Cameron resigned as prime minister in June after he-a supporter and campaigner for Britain to remain in the European Union—lost a high-stakes national referendum on the very

issue. He defended the merits of having Britain stay in the bloc. "I still believe it would have been better for Britain to remain inside the EU," he said in the Indian capital. "Our neighbors, our partners, our friends and our allies and I wanted us to stay in the room with them when they make decisions that affect us and our continent," Cameron added.

Hollande vows to fight for weakest

Meanwhile, French President Francois Hollande vowed yesterday to spend the final months of his presidency fighting to protect the rights of the most vulnerable in society and the world. Speaking on his first foreign trip since announcing he would not stand for re-election, the socialist president also hit out at the policies of the conservative candidate who is now favorite to succeed him in May.

"My decisions as president have been based first and foremost on protecting," Hollande said, adding that he had always sought to look out for the "most vulnerable" and "civilian populations threatened by wars and terrorism." "This will be my task until the month of May."

Hollande took issue with a campaign pledge by conservative frontrunner Francois Fillon to shed 500,000 public sector jobs if he becomes president. "When you have no civil servants, you have no state, and when you have no state, you have no France," he told members of the French expatriate community in Abu Dhabi. Hollande was in the United Arab Emirates capital to attend a conference on protecting the world's cultural heritage against the threats of extremism and conflict. He also visited the site of the new Louvre Abu Dhabi, which is expected to open in 2017 after much delay. Faced with record low approval ratings, Hollande announced on Thursday that he would not put his name forward to stand as socialist candidate in next year's presidential election. Opinion polls suggest that Fillon and far-right candidate Marine Le Pen will win the first round in April and face each other in a runoff the following month. — Agencies



VIENNA: Alexander Van der Bellen addresses his last election campaign rally. — AFP

LONG, UGLY AUSTRIAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO A CLOSE

VIENNA: Austria's long and ugly presidential campaign drew to a close yesterday, with a confident far-right aiming to emulate Donald Trump and Brexit campaigners by dealing a hammer-blow to Vienna's centrist establishment. A victory today for Norbert Hofer from the anti-immigration and EU-critical Freedom Party (FPÖ) would make him Europe's first far-right elected president since 1945.

The Austrian presidency is largely ceremonial but it would be another triumph for populist politics a month since Donald Trump's US election victory and five months after the British chose to leave the European Union. The election comes on the same day as a closely-watched referendum in Italy and ahead of elections next year in France, Germany and the Netherlands where anti-mainstream and anti-immigration forces are forecast to do well too.

"That a far-right candidate for a party founded partly by Nazis and with a history of anti-Semitism could be so close to power at the heart of Europe is self-evidently troubling," a Financial Times editorial said this week. "But it should be a wake-up call to mainstream politicians rather than a cause for despair."

One voter, Helwig Leibinger, told AFP at Hofer's final rally in Vienna on Friday that "we hope that Hofer can ensure that our borders remain closed, that we have controls, that we have security." "We want a commander-in-chief of the armed forces who can give the right orders," he said. "There are new parties representing different points of view on the rise... We want to be part of the EU but not to lose our identity." The FPÖ is the "xenophobic face of Austria," Vienna's centre-left Mayor Michael Haeupl. "The country doesn't need someone who will 'bring shame on Austria'."

'Election of Hate'

Polls suggest that the contest between gun enthusiast and former aircraft engineer Hofer, 45, and independent Alexander Van der Bellen, 72, a former head of the Greens and economics professor, is too close to call. Hofer won the first round in

April, knocking out candidates from the centre-right and centre-left that have dominated national politics since World War II.

Van der Bellen won a May runoff by just 31,000 votes but the FPÖ got the result annulled due to irregularities. This time there are 20 percent fewer postal votes, which might benefit Hofer, experts say. The campaign, which has lasted 11 months including the first round in April, has become increasingly bitter. A final TV debate on Thursday saw Hofer call Van der Bellen a liar 24 times, vice versa three times.

Hofer posters have been defaced with Hitler moustaches, Van der Bellen's with dog excrement. Hofer has called his challenger a "communist" and a "fascist green dictator", while Van der Bellen has labeled Hofer a "demagogue". The Die Presse daily dubbed the final debate a "key scene in the screenplay of the slow decline of Austria's political culture". The Oesterreich tabloid's front page headline yesterday was "Hass-Wahl" ("Election of Hate").

Government collapse?

Populist groups across Europe, on the right and the left, have benefitted from a growing sense of unease about globalisation, multiculturalism, growing inequality and austerity cuts. "There is huge frustration," political analyst Thomas Hofer (no relation) told AFP. Voters are "flocking to populist movements and the easy answers that are offered by those parties."

What a Hofer victory might mean is unclear. He says he wants more referendums, including on continued EU membership if Turkey joins or if the bloc becomes more centralized. Hitherto unused presidential powers could, in theory, allow him to fire centre-left Chancellor Christian Kern's government. "You'll be amazed by what's possible," Hofer said before the first round, a comment made much of by Van der Bellen and which Hofer says he regrets having uttered. More realistically, though, his victory could prompt Kern and the centre-right to pull the plug on their unhappy coalition and call early elections. And leading the polls right now? None other than the FPÖ. — AFP

MERKEL: FROM AUSTERITY QUEEN TO 'LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD'

BERLIN: A pastor's daughter raised behind the Iron Curtain, Germany's Angela Merkel has defied predictions to become Europe's most powerful politician and, some argue, the new "leader of the free world". As the West is badly shaken by Donald Trump's White House win, the Brexit vote and the rise of shrill populism, many see the pragmatic, no-nonsense chancellor as the last voice of reason on a chaotic global stage. The unruffled, some say bland, style of the trained physicist has seen Merkel, 62, lead Europe's top economy through the storms of the eurozone crisis, tensions with Russia and a historic refugee influx.

During her marathon 11 years in power she has seen world leaders come and go, including George W. Bush, Tony Blair, David Cameron, Jacques Chirac, and soon Barack Obama and Francois Hollande. Next year she will seek another four-year term in office. Once derided as Europe's "austerity queen", she recently earned kudos when she reminded Trump that cooperation must be based on "democracy, freedom and respect for the law and the dignity of man".

International newspapers declared Merkel the new torch-bearer of liberal

democracy, and outgoing US President Obama called her his closest partner saying: "If I were German and I had a vote, I might support her." In a signature show of modesty, Merkel waved off the many accolades as "grotesque and absurd." Days later, she told her centre-right CDU party she was up to the challenge of running again, declaring dutifully that "many people would not be very understanding if I failed to use all of my experience to do my duty for Germany".

Behind the Wall

With a doctorate in quantum chemistry, Merkel is known for a methodical approach to problem-solving, rather than for soaring oratory or big-vision statements. Seemingly devoid of vanity and indifferent to the trappings of power, she lives in a Berlin flat with her media-shy scientist husband Joachim Sauer, shops in a local supermarket and spends holidays hiking in the Alps. Germans seem to like it that way, given how past ideologues have plunged the country into catastrophe, and have re-elected "Mutti" (Mummy) twice since 2005. Merkel was born Angela Dorothea Kasner in 1954 in the port city of Hamburg. — AFP



PARIS: French far-right Front National (FN) party president, member of European Parliament and candidate for France's 2017 presidential election, Marine Le Pen (C) addresses journalists during a visit at a horse fair. — AFP

ETHNIC KILLINGS RAMPANT IN ONCE-PLACID S SUDAN TOWN

KOBOKO, Uganda: Isaac waited as soldiers came to take away his cellmates, one by one, fearing the worst as the uniformed men returned alone and spattered in blood. A day earlier the 24-year-old pharmacy assistant was detained by soldiers from South Sudan's majority Dinka tribe, while taking medicine to his sick father outside the southwestern town of Ye.

Searching his bag, the soldiers discovered the medicine and knew by his language that he was a member of the Kakwa ethnic group. They accused him of trying to supply medicine to anti-government rebels—many of them Kakwahiding in the bush and took him to the small room on a military base that was to be his prison. Four others shared the cell overnight. A man named James was the first to be called out.

"They said he was going to fetch water. But we waited all evening, that guy was not back until now," said Isaac, who spoke to AFP in a refugee camp in northern Uganda and did not want to give his last name. Later, when the soldier returned, "his chest was bloodied even the legs was full of blood." A second man was called out. Fearing for their lives Isaac and his remaining cellmate began to pray and cry out. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is dominated by Dinkas but includes other tribes from the Equatoria region where Ye is situated. Five soldiers responded to their shouts.

Soldiers caned by comrades

Hearing that two Kakwa prisoners had disappeared, the Equatorian soldiers went to their Dinka commander. "He said that's not their concern," said Isaac. From the window of his cell Isaac could see what happened next. At the order of the commander, the five Equatorian soldiers were made to stand in the sun and each was caned 50 times. Hours later those soldiers turned their guns on their officers and demanded the prisoners be released.

The cell door was opened and Isaac fled. Days later he was on the road with his family walking to Uganda. Ethnic violence has characterised South Sudan's political crisis since conflict erupted in 2013, and refugees fleeing Ye have described a disturbing pattern of targeted killings in the town that was once a haven of peace in the war-torn country. The conflict initially pitted Dinka and Nuer supporters of President Salva Kiir and his former vice-president Riek Machar against each other.

However observers say it has metastasised with other tribes joining one side or the other, often with the hope of getting an upper hand in local conflicts over land and other issues. In Ye, violence has surged since the collapse of an August 2015 peace deal between Kiir and Machar led to an outbreak of violence in the capital Juba, sending thousands fleeing to Uganda.

Dead piled into lorries

Refugees told AFP how SPLA forces went door to door, killing civilians from tribes they accuse of supporting the rebels. "At night they don't shoot guns because people will realise there's a problem... they will call you to come out and use knives," said Isaac, who said many of his former school mates fight with the rebels. He said he once saw the dead piled into a convoy of three lorries and taken away.

"You see blood on the vehicle, blood flowing, that's when you realise there are dead bodies going. They take them to the barracks and they have that vehicle for making holes then they

dump them there." However both sides have been accused of atrocities. "Now only Equatorians are being killed but when the rebels enter the town that's when you find that the Dinka are being shot," said Isaac. His story echoes those told by over 20 refugees interviewed by AFP.

Government 'targeting civilians'

Irene, from the Luo ethnic group, fled Mamba in Ye River State when Dinka men raided her house and called for her husband by name. Irene said she knew they were Dinka from the distinctive traditional facial scars. "The person who shot him just knocked at the door and called by name. When he heard that he pushed me under the bed with the children," said the 28-year-old. The soldiers burst in, shone a torch around and shot her husband.

Irene fled with her children but while walking through the bush to Uganda she and the group she was with encountered another group of armed Dinka men. "Two women were trapped and raped by the men. — AFP



JUDA: This file photo taken on November 28, 2016 shows Francesca Saïda (2L) and Shuvai Myoni (3L), members of the UN Human Rights Office, meet with displaced civilians at a community centre of the UN Protection of Civilians (POC) site. — AFP

MODI DEFENDS DEMONETIZATION

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday defended his crackdown on the cash economy that has left businesses, farmers and families suffering, saying it was necessary to keep inflation in check and ensure basic amenities for all. Modi's decision last month to scrap 500 rupee and 1,000 rupee banknotes as part of a crackdown on tax dodgers and counterfeiters has caused a currency crunch in a country where most people are paid in cash and buy what they need with cash.

With a small stock of smaller notes available and new bills of 500 and 2,000 rupee in short supply, Indians are being forced to stand in queues outside banks and cash machines to change their old notes. Addressing his party's election campaign rally in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Modi said: "Please support me in curing the disease that has been afflicting this country for the last 70 years. 'I have put you all in a queue. But this is the last queue to end all the queues.'"

While Modi has been praised for his intentions, he is facing flak from political

opponents as well as prominent economists such as Amartya Sen and Paul Krugman for sucking 86 percent of the currency out of circulation virtually overnight. Nobel laureate Krugman on Friday said Modi's decision was "highly disruptive" and would result in "significant" temporary cost for the economy without producing major gains in the long-run.

Officials expect some illicit cash never to be returned and to expire worthless, while other money that is deposited will remain in the banking system. The government's goal is to encourage the use of cashless forms of payment, a challenge for most Indians who live and work in the informal economy. The fallout from the decision is widely expected to impact economic growth this quarter and for several quarters to follow. Opinions, however, vary on the scale of the damage. Modi called for patience until Dec 30, by when he has promised the cash situation would stabilize, and urged people to shift to electronic transactions. "I will not let your sacrifice and hardship go waste," he said. — Reuters

US: MYANMAR CRACKDOWN MAY RADICALIZE ROHINGYA

RELIGIOUS TENSIONS HIGH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

WASHINGTON: It's a scene straight out of Myanmar's dark past: a military offensive waged beyond world view that forces ethnic minority villagers from the smoldering ruins of their homes. The US government, a key sponsor of Myanmar's democratic transition, says a security crackdown that has displaced tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims and left an unknown number dead risks radicalizing a downtrodden people and stoking religious tensions in Southeast Asia.

The military moved in after armed attacks by unknown assailants on police posts along the border with Bangladesh in October. The attacks in Rakhine State were a possible sign that a small number of Rohingya were starting to fight back against persecution by majority Buddhists who view them as illegal immigrants although many have lived in Myanmar for generations.

The top US diplomat for East Asia, Daniel Russel, is critical of the military's heavy-handed approach and says the escalation of violence risks inciting jihadist extremism in the country also known as Burma. He is also calling on neighboring countries, such as Muslim-majority Malaysia and Indonesia, to resist the urge to stage protests that could further stir religious passions. Assistant Secretary of State Russel told The Associated Press that, "if mishandled, Rakhine State could be infected and infested by jihadism which already plagues neighboring Bangladesh and other countries."

Attack plans

The plight of the Rohingya, once characterized by the UN as the world's most friendless people, has attracted the attention of Muslim extremists since a spike in intercommunal violence in Rakhine in 2012 that left hundreds dead and forced more than 100,000 into squalid camps. The Somali-born student who launched a car-and-knife attack at Ohio State University this week reportedly protested on his Facebook page about the killing of minority Muslims in Myanmar. And last weekend, Indonesian authorities arrested two militants who were allegedly planning to attack the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta.

It has also raised hackles in the political mainstream. Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak, facing domestic pressure over an investment fund scandal, is reportedly planning to attend a protest in his religiously moderate country this weekend condemning the military operation in Myanmar. Daniel Sullivan at the advocacy group Refugees International said increasing numbers of Rohingya are fleeing across the land border to Bangladesh, and the spike in violence could set off another exodus by sea.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled by rickety boats in recent years to countries like



JAKARTA: In this Nov 25, 2016, file photo, a Muslim woman wears a mask of Myanmar's Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi during a rally against the persecution of Rohingya Muslims, outside the Embassy of Myanmar. — AP

Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, but those routes have been blocked since a crisis in 2015 when thousands were stranded at sea. The US and other nations have called for an independent investigation into the latest violence in Rakhine. Estimates of the death toll range between dozens and several hundred. Human Rights Watch said Nov 21 that satellite imagery showed at least 1,250 buildings have been destroyed.

With journalists barred from the affected area, it's been near-impossible to substantiate reports of rapes and killings by Myanmar soldiers - the kind of conduct that has long blighted the military's reputation in ethnic conflicts. Adama Dieng, UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, said this week that if reports of excessive use of force in Rakhine were true, "the lives of thousands of people are at risk."

Annan comes to aid

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was appointed by Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in August to find ways to help resolve the communal tensions. On a fact-finding visit Friday, he said that security operations

must not impede humanitarian access. That's been a repeated demand from the international community, including the United States, but it's made little impact.

The UN World Food Program said Friday that since Oct 9 it has been able to deliver food or cash to only 20,000 of the 152,000 people who usually receive assistance, and to about 7,000 newly-displaced people. The Obama administration has diminished leverage. It was instrumental in ending the former pariah state's diplomatic isolation as it shifted from five decades of military rule but the last US sanctions were lifted in October.

The military's crackdown in Rakhine has also exposed the limits of Suu Kyi's power. The Nobel laureate's party won elections a year ago, but the military still controls key levers of government power, including access to sensitive border regions. Human rights activists who once lionized Suu Kyi now criticize her for failing to defend the stateless Rohingya, but Russel defended her. "We all should have confidence in her judgment and not fall prey to the idea that she does not get it and she does not care. She does get it, and she does care," he said. — AP

THAI POLICE ARREST SUSPECT IN PAKISTAN FACTORY FIRE

BANGKOK: A Pakistani man suspected of starting a devastating factory fire in Karachi four years ago that killed 255 people has been arrested in Bangkok, Thai police said yesterday. Abdul Rehman, 46, was detained at a hotel in the red light district Nana area of the capital on Friday evening, said Thailand's Interpol chief.

"Thai Interpol tracked this suspect following an arrest warrant sought by the Pakistani authorities," Major General Apichart Suriboonya told AFP. "He will be repatriated as soon as Pakistan is ready," he added. Apichart said Rehman was suspected of being part of a criminal gang that was extorting the owners of a Karachi garment factory.

The gang burned down the factory when the owners refused to pay seven million baht

(\$200,000), he said. The fire at the Ali Enterprises factory in September 2012 was one of Pakistan's worst industrial disasters. A judicial probe into the blaze was damning, pointing to a lack of emergency exits, poor safety training for workers, the packing in of machinery and the failure of government inspectors to spot any of these faults. Initially the fire was believed to be an accident. A murder case was registered against the factory owners, but it never came to trial.

Earlier this year police said they now believed an extortion gang was behind the blaze, naming Abdul Rehman as the suspect who allegedly lit the fire. Much of the factory's garment output went to the German company KIK, who have paid out nearly two million dollars in compensation to the victims' families. — AFP

TEARGAS FIRED OUTSIDE SRI LANKA PARLIAMENT

COLOMBO: Police fired teargas and water cannon to disperse thousands of opposition-backed protesters outside parliament yesterday as law makers debated the annual budget. Demonstrators led by loyalists of former president Mahinda Rajapakse held up traffic and blocked the main access to the parliament complex for several hours in the capital.

Opposition lawmaker Ranjith Soysa said protesters were demanding local elections which were due last year, but postponed to devise a new electoral system. "Police unleashed a vicious teargas attack and 10 opposition MPs, including myself, were hit," Soysa said in parliament while pointing to his drenched clothing. — AFP

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INDIA, AFGHANISTAN PLANNING CARGO SERVICE OVER PAKISTAN

AMRITSAR: India and Afghanistan are likely to announce an air cargo service to help increase trade that both say is stymied because of their tense political relations with Pakistan that lies between them. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi were meeting in the northern Indian city of Amritsar, a short distance from the Pakistan border, for the Heart of Asia conference aimed at stabilising Afghanistan.

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan have gone to war three times and remain bitter foes while ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan have become strained despite their shared religious and cultural identities. Officials say the focus of the air cargo service is to improve landlocked Afghanistan's connectivity to key markets abroad and boost the growth prospects of its fruit and carpet industries while it battles a deadly Taliban insurgency.

Afghanistan depends on the Pakistani port of Karachi for its foreign trade. It is allowed to send a limited amount of goods overland through Pakistan into India, but imports from India are not allowed along this route. Afghan director general for macro fiscal policies Khalid Payenda said the potential for trade with India, the largest market in the region, was far greater than allowed by land and so the two countries had decided to use the air route.

"That would be air cargo between Afghanistan and India. We have a lot of potential for trade on both sides. On our side, it's mostly fruit and dried fruit and potentially through India to other places for products like carpets and others." He said that a joint venture involving an Afghan and an Indian cargo firm would be set up and that the two governments were working to set up infrastructure at Kabul and Delhi airports.

Deteriorating ties

An Indian government source attending the meeting in Amritsar said air cargo route details were still being worked out and could include Kandahar as a point of origin for shipping fruit directly to India. Indian foreign ministry official Gopal Baglay, who oversees Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, said several proposals were being discussed to improve Afghanistan's trade and transport links. "There have been very many ideas on how to enhance connectivity, overcome current challenges and also expand the trade basket," he said.

Pakistan's top foreign policy adviser, Sartaj Aziz, will be attending the conference today. Ties with India have deteriorated further in recent months after a series of attacks on Indian military bases in the disputed region of Kashmir, which New Delhi says have either been carried out by militants sneaking in from Pakistan or orchestrated by groups based there.

Pakistan denies stoking violence in Kashmir and says India must open talks on the future of the revolt-torn Muslim majority region. Indian officials said no talks with Pakistan were scheduled on the sidelines of the Amritsar conference. Afghanistan's ties with Pakistan have also become strained after a series of violent attacks, several of them in the capital Kabul, that it said showed Pakistan had failed to rein in the militant groups operating from its soil.

"Unless we take a collective measure to fight terrorism, to fight the breeding ground for terrorism, the safe sanctuary, we will not be able to bring peace and stability either to Afghanistan or to anywhere else in the region, including India," said Afghan ambassador to India Shaida M Abdali. Pakistan says it is itself a victim of terrorism and says India is using its close ties with Afghanistan to stir trouble in its restive Baluchistan province. — Reuters



SEOUL: Protesters shout slogans near a cutout of South Korean President Park Geun-hye as they march toward the presidential house during a rally calling for South Korean President Park Geun-hye to step down. — AP

MASS PROTEST DEMANDS OUSTER, ARREST OF S KOREA PRESIDENT

ORGANIZERS CLAIMED A TURNOUT OF 1.5 MILLION

SEOUL: Hundreds of thousands of protesters marched in Seoul for the sixth-straight week yesterday to demand the ouster and arrest of scandal-hit President Park Geun-Hye ahead of an impeachment vote in parliament. Organizers claimed a turnout of 1.5 million for the candlelight rally in the South Korean capital, while police put the number at 220,000. It was the latest in a series of massive anti-Park demonstrations and came just hours after opposition parties filed an impeachment motion that will be put to a vote by lawmakers on Friday.

Whether the motion is adopted or not, Park is firmly on course to become the first democratically-elected South Korean president not to complete a full, five-year term. The 64-year-old stands accused of colluding with an old friend who has been formally indicted for attempted fraud and abuse of power. Along with the now-normal slogans for Park to step down, there were growing calls at yesterday's rally for her to face criminal charges, arrest and imprisonment. Dozens of life-size cardboard cut-outs of the president showed her wearing jail uniform and bound by ropes.

While the protestors want her out immediately, the political establishment is struggling to find a similar unity of purpose. The impeachment motion introduced in the early hours of yesterday morning carried 171 signatures-accounting for every legislator from the three opposition parties and independents. In order to secure the

two-thirds majority required for impeachment in the 300-seat national assembly, it will need the support of more than two-dozen lawmakers from Park's ruling Saenuri Party.

Shifting alliances

Just a week ago, the backing of enough Saenuri rebels seemed assured, but a rather confused resignation offer by Park on Tuesday strengthened the hand of her loyalists who insist she be allowed to step down voluntarily. The party has since proposed she resign in April-a timeline it justifies as more conducive to a calm and steady preparation for an early presidential election. Observers say the Saenuri rebels are likely to fall in line with the proposal and vote against the motion on Friday.

The prospect of an April departure for Park will do little to assuage the public anger that has driven the mass street protests of recent weeks. "I no longer believe a word the president or her party says," said bank employee Kim Hak-Won who was marching Saturday with his teenage daughter. "How can we tell our children to respect the law when our own president refuses to do so?" Kim said. And there was widespread anger with the Saenuri party over what were seen as its efforts to block the impeachment process. "I am so full of rage right now, I could set fire to the party headquarters," said 30-year-old office worker Park Sung-Jin.

Lengthy process

But even if impeachment were approved by the assembly on Friday, Park would likely remain in office for some considerable time. An adopted motion would still require approval of the Constitutional Court a process that could take up to six months.

Yesterday's mass rally culminated in a march to the presidential Blue House, led by 50 protestors holding flaming torches. Following a court order, police allowed the marchers within 100 meters of the complex housing Park's residence and offices. As well as the huge crowd in Seoul, there were reports of large rallies elsewhere including 40,000 people in the southeast city of Daegu-considered a staunch Park stronghold.

The scandal that has engulfed Park and paralyzed her administration has focused on her friendship with long-time confidante Choi Soon-Sil. Choi has been charged with meddling in state affairs and using her Blue House connections to force dozens of conglomerates to donate around \$70 million to two foundations she controlled. In a first for a sitting South Korean president, Park has been named a "suspect" by prosecutors investigating Choi. As president, Park cannot be charged with a criminal offence except insurrection or treason, but she would lose that immunity once she steps down. — AFP

MALAYSIA SLAMS MYANMAR OVER ITS 'ETHNIC CLEANSING'

MAUNGDAW: Malaysia accused Myanmar of engaging in the "ethnic cleansing" of its Rohingya minority yesterday, as former UN chief Kofi Annan visited a burned out village in strife-torn Rakhine state. Tens of thousands of Muslim Rohingya have fled their homes since a bloody crackdown by the Myanmar army in the western state of Rakhine sparked by a string of deadly attacks on police border posts in early October. "The fact that only one particular ethnicity is being driven out is by definition ethnic cleansing," Malaysia's foreign ministry said in an unusually strongly-worded statement.

Myanmar has balked at such criticism, saying the Rakhine crisis is an internal issue, but international pressure on the country is mounting. Malaysia's statement noted that hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled to neighboring countries in recent years-including some 56,000 to Muslim-majority Malaysia. That, the statement said, "makes this matter no longer an internal matter but an international matter".

Yesterday morning, a convoy carrying the former UN chief arrived outside the Rohingya village of Wapeik, which has seen significant damage from fire. Non state media journalists were stopped by police from coming close to the convoy or entering the village, an AFP photographer on scene said. Annan is not expected to brief the media until Tuesday-after his visit to Rakhine ends.

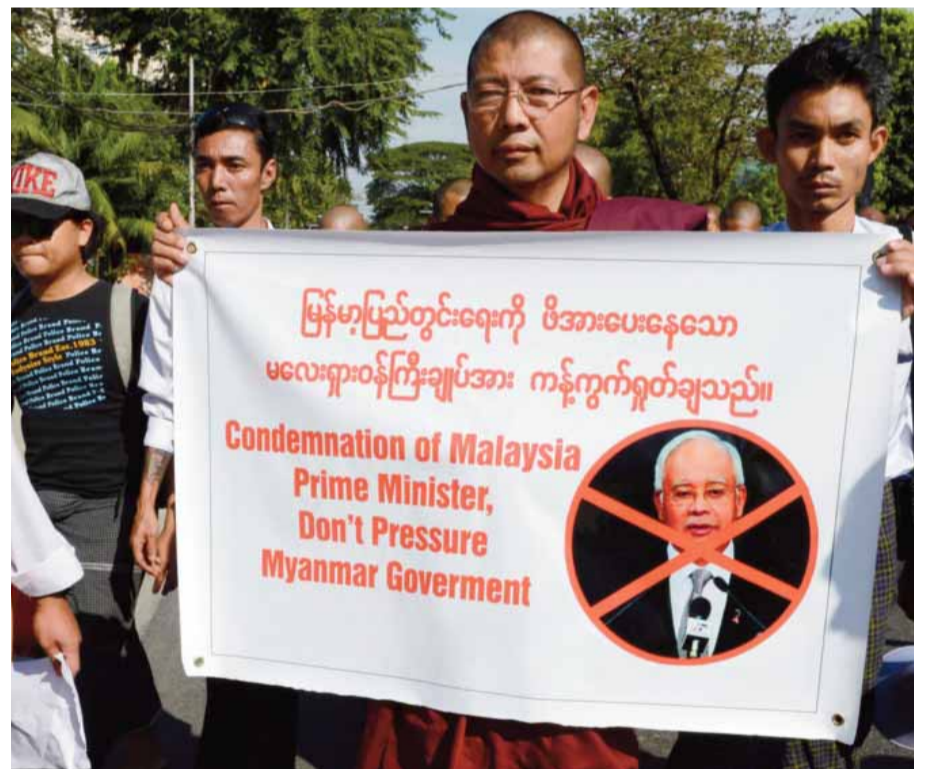
Restricted access

Myanmar has restricted access to the northern part of the state and says its mili-

tary is hunting down the militants behind the attacks. But rights groups and Rohingya refugees who have made it to Bangladesh have accused the military of killing civilians and razing entire villages as a form of collective punishment. The Rohingya have long faced persecution and government restrictions on movement that many have likened to apartheid.

Much of Myanmar views the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh even though many have lived there for generations. Before the latest violence broke out, Myanmar's de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi formed a commission tasked with trying to solve the Rakhine crisis, headed by Annan. That task has been made considerably harder since fighting broke out. The Nobel Peace Prize winner has also been criticised for not defending the Rohingya.

Since winning a historic election last year, she has rarely spoken out on the issue. But during a trip to Singapore this week she gave a rare interview in which she hit out at international criticism. "I would appreciate it so much if the international community would help us to maintain peace and stability, and to make progress in building better relations between the two communities, instead of always drumming up cause for bigger fires of resentment," Suu Kyi told the state-owned Channel News Asia. Her hands are somewhat tied by Myanmar's notoriously abusive military. Under the country's junta-era constitution, the army still controls the key Home, Border and Defence ministries and has a parliamentary veto. — AFP



YANGON: A group of Myanmar Buddhist monks stage a protest outside the Malaysian embassy in Yangon to denounce Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak's support for the persecuted Muslim Rohingya minority. — AFP

INDONESIAN POLICE PLANE GOES MISSING

JAKARTA: A twin-engine Indonesian police plane went missing yesterday with 15 people on board en route to the island of Batam, south of Singapore, police and rescue authorities said, as search teams scoured the area. The plane, which took off from Pangkal Pinang on the island of Bangka at around 9.30 am is thought to have crashed between the islands of Mensanak and Sebangka or Gentar, a police report seen by Reuters said.

A search team recovered items apparently identified as being from the missing aircraft, including seats, luggage and documents, the report said, noting that according to the manifest there were 15 people on board. According to Indonesia's Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS), items belonging to passengers had also been found. "We found debris," BASARNAS chief Bambang Soelistyo told Reuters, adding his team were searching in a 200 square nautical mile area.

Soelistyo said it was too soon to assume there were no survivors and that no remains of those aboard had been found, although there were no reports of survivors. Up to four police vessels were searching the area, he said, along with navy vessels. According to a statement from the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), the last known radar position of the aircraft was about 40 nautical miles southeast of Tanjung Pinang. "With clearance from the Indonesian authorities, one SuperPuma helicopter and one Fokker 50 are currently on-scene supporting the Indonesians to locate the aircraft," the statement said. "Two ships are awaiting clearance by the Indonesian authorities to assist in the search and rescue efforts." — Reuters

RUSSIA AND JAPAN 'STRIVING TO RESOLVE' ISLAND DISPUTE

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday ahead of a visit to Japan by President Vladimir Putin that the countries' leaders are pushing to end a territorial row dating back to World War II. Relations between Moscow and Tokyo have been strained for decades over the status of four Pacific islands near Japan's north coast, known as the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan.

"The main area where our positions concur is the clear-cut political striving of our leaders for a mutually acceptable resolution," Lavrov said after talks with his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida in Moscow. Japanese President Shinzo Abe is due to meet Putin on December 15 in the city of Yamaguchi in western Japan with the aim of making progress on the territorial dispute. It will be Putin's first such visit since 2005. "We have an interest in resolving this protracted problem," Lavrov said, while admitting: "it's clear that it's not simple to bring the two sides' positions closer."

Kishida said the talks were "meaningful, important and useful" ahead of a visit he called the most important event in the countries' relations this year. The row dates from the end of World War II when Soviet troops seized the southernmost islands in an archipelago off the northeast coast of Hokkaido just after Japan surrendered. The seven-decade dispute over the islands' ownership has kept Moscow and Tokyo from signing a post-war peace treaty and hindered trade and investment. Russia prompted protests from Japan last month by deploying coastal missile systems to boost its military presence on the islands.

"On the question of the peace treaty, we would like to reach a result that would be welcomed by the people both of Japan and Russia," Kishida said in comments translated into Russian. He said he wanted "energetic talks" to "finally resolve the sovereignty of the four islands in a

mutually acceptable form and conclude a peace treaty." Lavrov said the diplomats "expressed mutual readiness to try to move forward in resolving practical questions." He

said they agreed "to continue the line that our leaders agreed on the utmost all-round development of our relations in all spheres without exception." — AFP



AMGAON: An Indian villager prays by the carcass of a wild Asiatic male elephant at Amgaon, near Gauhati, the capital of the northeastern Indian state of Assam. According to forest officer RK Das, the elephant died after it was electrocuted by a high tension electric wire when it was searching for food on the border of Amchang wildlife sanctuary on Friday night. — AP



A tow boat travels along the Ohio River just before sunrise near Paducah, Kentucky on Friday. — AP

NEW FUND SET UP TO PROTECT ENDANGERED...

Continued from Page 1

representatives of international organizations and private institutions, pledged "to safeguard the endangered cultural heritage of all peoples, against its destruction and illicit trafficking".

The Geneva-based fund they set up will be charged with safeguarding cultural heritage endangered by conflict, financing preventive and emergency operations, combating the illicit trafficking of artifacts and helping restore damaged cultural property. "The creation of this fund breaks new ground," UNESCO director Irina Bokova said. "I see this as the starting point of something... global."

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan urged all countries to "cooperate and coordinate to control the trafficking of cultural property... especially in some Arab countries that have suffered from the dangers of violence and terrorism." France is to contribute around \$30 million to the fund. "Our objective is to collect at least \$100 million, and we can reach this," Hollande said. Participants hope the international network of safe havens will be used to temporarily store cultural property endangered by conflicts or extremism. Countries such as Bosnia and Senegal offered to host endangered artworks, a delegate told AFP.

But with sovereignty a sensitive issue, ancient artifacts would only be moved out of a country at the request of its government, a participant in the meeting told AFP. Works of art would first be moved to a safe place within the country concerned. Safeguarding them in a neighboring country would be the next option while moving them elsewhere would be a last resort. Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras told participants it should be the "last option" and there should be "guarantees for the safe return" of cultural property removed for safekeeping.

Greece has long sought the return from Britain of ancient sculptures that once decorated the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis in Athens but were taken by British diplomat Lord Elgin two centuries ago. Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani said that "establishing the fund is an excellent idea and has our full support but such a fund will only work if people in countries such

as ours have the training and commitment to work with agencies managing the fund." Participants at the UNESCO-backed conference called on the UN Security Council to support the initiative. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will oversee the safeguarding operations. The meeting coincided with an announcement by Swiss authorities that they had seized cultural relics looted from Syria, Libya and Yemen that were being stored in Geneva's free ports. Swiss representatives told the meeting of the country's experiences in providing safe haven for art works during the conflicts of the 20th century. A follow up conference will be held in 2017 to assess the implementation of plans and the first projects to be financed by the international fund.

The conference was the centerpiece of Hollande's two-day visit to the Emirates. He arrived Friday, a day after surprising France by announcing he would not seek a second term as the Socialist candidate in next year's presidential election. France has built increasingly strong ties to the seven-state Emirates federation over the years. Cultural outreach is a key pillar of that effort, including the establishment of a satellite campus of the renowned Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi a decade ago.

Workers are still putting the finishing touches on a much-hyped branch of the Louvre art museum, which will be the centerpiece of an ambitious cultural district on Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat Island. The project has faced repeated delays that have pushed its opening back by years, and it has attracted criticism from human rights campaigners over the treatment of migrant workers involved in its construction. It is now expected to open sometime next year.

Hollande paid a visit to the Louvre site yesterday morning before meeting with French expatriates based in the Emirates. He briefly addressed his decision to not seek re-election at the latter stop, saying he would continue to drive France forward "within the framework of its ideals and values" until he steps down in May. Hollande was also meeting with French troops during his trip. — Agencies

CHINA IRKED BY TRUMP TAIWAN CALL

Continued from Page 1

"There is no change to our longstanding policy on cross-strait issues," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne told reporters. "We remain firmly committed to our 'One China' policy," she added. "Our fundamental interest is in peaceful and stable cross-strait relations."

Washington cut formal diplomatic relations with the island in 1979 and recognizes Beijing as the sole government of "One China" - while keeping friendly, non-official ties with Taipei. But since coming to office this year, Tsai has refused to accept the "One China" concept, prompting Beijing to cut off all official communication with the island's new government.

Even before the call with Taiwan, Trump's unorthodox diplomatic outreach has raised eyebrows. Until Thursday, State Department officials told reporters that Trump had not asked for official briefing on current policy from US diplomats before making the contacts. On Friday, department spokesman John Kirby said the outgoing US administration has now helped with "some foreign communications that the transition team has gone forward with".

But he referred reporters to Trump's office for details and would not say whether the president-elect himself had requested any background briefings before making or taking any calls. Asked whether Trump was among those on the transition team who received such help, a senior US official would only say that Vice President-elect Mike Pence has also made foreign calls.

The incident comes as Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte said Trump approved of Manila's ongoing deadly drug war, saying the crackdown in which some 4,800 people have been killed was being conducted in "the right way", in stark contrast to the criticism he received from Obama. The Philippine president called Trump late Friday evening to congratulate him on his election victory with Trump wishing him "success" in his controversial anti-crime crackdown, according to Duterte.

"He was quite sensitive also to our worry about drugs. And he wishes me well... in my campaign and he said that... we are doing it as a sovereign nation, the right way," Duterte said in a video released by his office yesterday. "He was wishing me success in my campaign against the drug problem." Duterte, 71, launched an unprecedented war on drugs that drew a wave of global criticism with Obama urging the leader in September to conduct his campaign "the right way" following concerns over alleged extrajudicial killings. Trump's office released a brief statement following the conversation, saying Duterte had congratulated Trump and the two agreed to work together closely.

Duterte won presidential elections in May after pledging to kill tens of thousands of drug suspects, warning that otherwise the Philippines would turn into a narco-state. Since assuming office, he has called on police and even civilians to kill drug users. Duterte also said he would be "happy to slaughter" three million drug addicts, and likened his campaign to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler's efforts to exterminate Jews in Europe.

In October Duterte announced a "separation" from the United States and had called for the withdrawal of American troops from his country, putting into question Manila's 70-year-old alliance with Washington. But yesterday, Duterte said he "could sense a good rapport" with an "animated" Trump. Duterte's spokesman said the "understanding" between the two leaders signalled better Philippine-US ties. "We can say at this stage that our relationship with the US is improving," Ernesto Abella said.

Video released by Duterte's office showed the Philippine leader laughing as he chatted on the phone, later saying Trump would be "a good president for the United States of America". Duterte said the president-elect invited him to visit New York and Washington DC and he returned the favor by asking Trump to attend a regional summit that the Philippines is set to host next year. "If I'm around, he wants to be notified of my presence," Duterte said.— Agencies

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Kuwait Times

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Focus

US ALLIES HOPING
FOR BEST AS THEY
REACH OUT TO TRUMP

America's closest partners are putting a brave face on Donald Trump's surprise election win while reaching out to try to shape his worldview and to preserve traditional alliances. Allies were rattled by Trump's nationalist campaign rhetoric and by the haphazard way he has approached his first round of calls with world leaders since becoming president-elect. But they are not panicking. Trump may have no foreign policy experience, but he does not appear to have any deep-rooted ideology either, and seems open to discussion.

And, despite Trump's threats to tear up trade deals and his vaguely worded calls for warmer ties with Russia, Washington's closest partners believe a crisis can be avoided. "The US alliance system is one of the crown jewels of America's national security," said John Hannah of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, who served as a senior foreign policy adviser to three US administrations. While Russia and China have increasingly sophisticated militaries, they cannot match Washington's network of allies.

And, Hannah told AFP, any president "should think not once, not twice, but 100 times before taking steps that might undermine or jeopardize" those friendships. This week, envoys from America's most important allies in the Pacific and the Atlantic, respectively - Japan and Britain - said they were keen to engage with Trump's team.

Brutal Dismissal

Concerns were raised in Japan during the US campaign when Trump suggested America's military allies are not pulling their own weight and might be left to face foes on their own. And Trump's brutal dismissal of the "terrible" Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade deal did not bode well for ties with America's premier friend in Asia. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had made TPP a key plank of Japan's economic policy, and he was the first world leader to rush to meet the US president-elect in New York.

Trump received no briefing from the US State Department ahead of the informal talks, and was accompanied by his daughter Ivanka, a business executive with no official role. But, according to Japan's Ambassador Kenichiro Sasae, Abe's team left the meeting reassured that the US-Japan alliance is important to Trump and could even be strengthened. "I'm given to understand that the president-elect is different when there is a person-to-person talk," the envoy said, playing down the "high tone" of Trump's campaign speeches. "We got the impression that he's a good listener. He listened to a lot of views and tried to digest them." So, while the TPP remains a dead letter - "meaningless", in Abe's view, without US support - Japan is not ready to abandon the general principle of a multilateral pact. And once Trump takes office in January and assembles a team of experts to advise him, something may be salvaged. "I don't think many Americans read the text of this agreement, to be honest," Sasae said, at an event promoting the "Value of Strong Alliances" at the Heritage Foundation think tank.

Ruffled Feathers

Trump has yet to nominate anyone to act as his secretary of state, and in the weeks since he won the election, he has ruffled diplomatic feathers on several occasions. Britain, supposedly the proud owner of a "special relationship" with Washington, has found itself embarrassed. In his first call with Prime Minister Theresa May, Trump - rather than inviting her to Washington - breezily suggested that if she comes over, she should "get in touch".

And in a stark breach of protocol, Trump suggested on Twitter that the British ambassador be replaced by his euroskeptic friend Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence Party. Britain's actual ambassador, Kim Darroch, nevertheless insists that ties between Trump Tower and Number 10 are off to a better start than they may seem to be on the surface. Appearing alongside his Japanese colleague, Darroch said May has now spoken twice to Trump and that a formal visit is being arranged for "very soon" after his January inauguration.

Closest Cooperation

He acknowledged the challenge of keeping up with any US administration in transition - some 4,000 officials will be replaced, and 1,200 face Senate confirmation hearings. But he said Britain would continue to seek the closest cooperation - while still making its own views known. Britain is keen that the United States maintain Western solidarity in the face of aggression from Vladimir Putin's Russia - despite Trump's warm words for the strongman. "That's one of the things we will cover when we talk to his foreign policy team," Darroch said, noting Russia's annexation of part of Ukraine and role "in the carnage" in Syria. Darroch said Washington and other western capitals talk to the Kremlin and "as long as we're all expressing similar views on the challenge we face, I think that's a good thing." —AFP

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Washington Watch

SENATE PASSES A DUMB AND DANGEROUS BILL

By Dr James J Zogby

This week, without debate or an actual vote, the US Senate stealthily passed a disturbing and dangerous piece of legislation introduced by Senators Tim Scott (R-SC) and Bob Casey (D-PA). Called "The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016" (AAA), the Scott-Casey bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to apply the State Department's (DOS) definition of anti-Semitism in evaluating complaints of discrimination on US campuses.

The DOS definition of anti-Semitism and guidelines on anti-Semitism were designed to help US officials monitor anti-Semitism abroad. They were not intended to be applied to police speech on college campuses here in the US. In developing their definition and guidance, the DOS adopted language used by the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

"Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious institutions".

This description of anti-Semitism is both correct and instructive, as are several examples of contemporary anti-Semitism mentioned in the DOS guidance, including: "accusing Jews, as a people, of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, the State of Israel, or even for acts committed by non-Jews"; or "making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews - or the power of Jews - as a collective". These and other examples cited in the guidance are objectively anti-Semitic and patently wrong.

Where the DOS guidance goes "off the rails" is when they try to expand the definition to include "anti-Semitism relative to Israel", citing, as examples, speech that demonizes or delegitimizes Israel or that applies a double standard to Israel. The example given for applying a "double standard for Israel" is "requiring...behavior [of Israel] not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation". With this

expansion of the definition of anti-Semitism, the guidance becomes both subjective and open to dangerous abuse by those who would use it to silence criticism of Israel.

This language is so vague and open to interpretation that when the University of California Board of Regents was being pressed to apply the DOS guidance to California campuses, the lead author of the EUMC definition of anti-Semitism objected, pointing out the dangers this would present to free speech, saying that "enshrining such a definition on a college campus is an ill-advised idea that will make matters worse, and not only for Jewish students; it would also damage the university as a whole".

In short remarks introducing their bill, the two senators presented it as an effort to protect Jewish students from the scourge of anti-Semitic harassment. They told stories of pro-Israel Jewish students living in fear on their campuses. Interestingly, however, when the DOE's civil rights unit investigated reports of widespread anti-Semitism creating a hostile environment on specific campuses, the DOE teams found the charges largely baseless.

Sinister Intent

If the bill is dangerous and even unnecessary, then why did Scott and Casey do it? And why did they rush to pass it without debate or discussion? Reading the "fact sheet" Scott and Casey attached to their legislation reveals the AAA's sinister political intent - and that is, silencing campus student movements and activities that are critical of Israel, in particular the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction movement (BDS). Seen in this light the AAA is but an extension of other legislative efforts in Congress and, at last count, 22 state legislatures to either ban or penalize individuals or entities that participate in any forms of BDS against the State of Israel.

All of this is wrong on so many levels. It has the US government unfairly influencing a necessary debate that is taking place on college campuses weighing in to support one side, while threatening the other side if they cross an undefined and arbitrary line.

These efforts tell Palestinian and progressive Jewish students that their speech will be policed and that

they may be subject to penalties. If students were to call Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu "a monster" or accuse him and the Israeli military of "a barbaric assault on Gaza" - would they be accused of "demonizing"? Or what if students spoke about Israel's 1948 "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians or focused their political work on criticizing Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, but said nothing about (or maybe didn't even care to know about) Turkey's occupation in Cyprus or Russia's in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine - could they be charged with delegitimizing Israel or applying a "double standard"?

At the same time that these efforts will act to intimidate and silence pro-Palestinian activity on campuses, they will also serve to embolden pro-Israel student groups to file repeated complaints against BDS and pro-Palestinian organizations.

What I am most ironic here is the degree to which this entire discussion has turned reality upside down. I understand awful and hurtful things have been said and that some pro-Israel students may feel "uncomfortable" in some instances, or that the BDS debate on their campuses may make them feel like they are in a "hostile" environment. But it is inexcusable to ignore the harassment and threats and defamation endured by any students who are advocating for Palestinian rights. Oftentimes, they are the ones operating in a hostile environment. They are the ones targeted by well-funded campaigns and subjected to threats and harassment. And when Arab Americans write opinion pieces in school newspapers, the comments' sections are filled with bigotry and hate.

The bottom line is that there are times when the debate has become ugly and students on all sides have crossed the line. When this occurs, what universities should be addressing the need for greater civility in our political discourse and helping to create an environment that encourages openness to debating controversial issues. That's what we need. What we don't need is a ham-fisted effort by senators to silence debate which will only create more hostility and less civility.

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

SINGAPORE MAY PROVE TOUGH NUT FOR CHINA

As the impounding of Singaporean troop carriers in Hong Kong exposes rising tensions between China and Singapore, the Lion City is unlikely to budge on core security interests concerning Beijing - its military relationship with Taiwan, worries over the South China Sea and its hosting of the US military. Singaporean officials, retired military officers and analysts stress that even while Singapore publicly plays down the spat, its leadership will not easily give in to what it sees as intimidation on matters of national importance.

All three points - Taiwan, the South China Sea and its deepening relationship with the Pentagon - reflect positions refined over decades as the tiny island state seeks to secure itself in a region now undergoing historic strategic shifts amid China's rise. But those shifts mean the pressure is intensifying and Singapore risks being isolated as neighbors including the Philippines, a US ally, and Malaysia tilt towards Beijing.

"Singapore will not be bullied and backed up against a wall," said Tim Huxley, an expert on Singapore's military at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "(It) will take a determined stand on issues that it sees as important - and the importance of the issues at hand should not be underestimated." Hong Kong customs last week seized nine armored troop carriers being shipped from Taiwan to Singapore after military exercises, prompting warnings from Beijing about maintaining ties with an island it regards as a breakaway province.

'Vanguard of Anti-China Coalition'

The dispute has erupted at a period of apparent vulnerability for Singapore, with its economy slowing and questions over the trade and security policies of incoming US President Donald Trump. Singapore has enhanced its long standing security relations with Washington over the last 18 months, and now hosts revolving deployments of vessels and US P-8 surveillance planes that regional military sources say routinely target Chinese submarines.

While not a formal US alliance partner, regional diplomats say it has become Washington's most important military relationship in Southeast Asia - more so since President Rodrigo Duterte's Philippine election win. The shift has not gone unnoticed in Beijing. "Singapore has gone from being seen as a useful facilitator of US-China relations to being in the vanguard of an anti-China coalition, particularly on the South China Sea," said Zhang Baohui, a mainland security scholar at Hong Kong's Lingnan University. "The days of Beijing comfortably seeing Singapore have vaguely neutral are over, and it is reacting accordingly."

China will find Singapore harder to crack than other countries in its orbit, however, as it less beholden to Chinese security or economic pressure, given its advanced market status and international security relationships, including with the United States, he said. "China will find Singapore defiant and able to withstand pressure, but Singapore will find itself losing influence and more isolated

within Southeast Asia as countries increasingly look to China," Zhang said.

Other Issues at Play

Since the seizure of the armored vehicles, Beijing has stressed its opposition to any form of official contact with Taiwan. The influential state-run tabloid, the Global Times, has been more strident, suggesting the carriers should be "melted down". While other state media have run commentaries critical of Singapore through the year, they have been quiet on the troop carrier impounding.

Singapore has discreetly circulated thousands of troops a year through Taiwan since 1975 - a presence that survived formalizing ties with Beijing under a "one China" policy in the early 1990s. While Singapore increasingly exploits facilities in Australia and India, as well as sending troops to Brunei and Thailand, Taiwan remains an important to Singapore given the depth of military links and diverse training options, experts and retired Singaporean officers say.

Singapore has also played a role as a diplomatic bridge between the two sides, most recently hosting the historic meeting between outgoing Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Nov 2015. Singapore's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan this week sought to play down the seizure, saying it was "not a strategic incident" and that Singapore's relationship with Taiwan was known to

China. But behind the scenes, regional diplomats say their Chinese counterparts are also making clear their rising concern at US surveillance activities off coasts from assets stationed around the region.

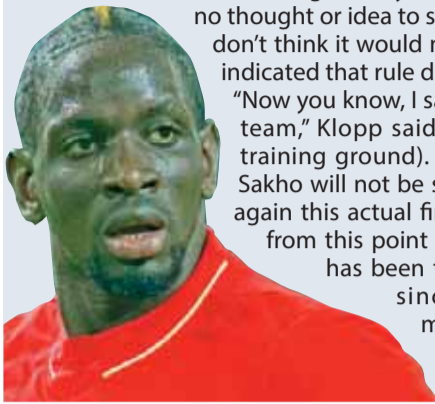
Advanced P-8 aircraft especially are viewed by Chinese strategists as a threat to Beijing's evolving nuclear deterrent, centered on ballistic missile submarines stationed on Hainan Island. "They are relentless on this point," one Western diplomat said. "They don't want to accept it as normal in any way."

Chinese officials and state media have accused Singapore of internationalizing matters in the South China Sea, where it is not a claimant. While Singapore insists it does not take sides in the disputes, it has stressed the importance of freedom of navigation and international norms. As negotiations continue over the fate of the troop carriers, Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large Bilahari Kausikan made clear the issues went deeper than military materiel.

Contemporary China was "curious mixture of assertiveness and insecurity", Kausikan wrote on Facebook this week, adding he believed its leaders wanted to preserve the broader relationship. "We are a small country and larger countries - not just China - routinely try intimidation. But because China wants us to accept the appellation of 'Chinese country' and because so many Singaporeans are of Chinese descent, their actions have a special resonance." — Reuters

KLOPP HINTS
AT SAKHO SALE

LONDON: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has hinted he could sell exiled Mamadou Sakho in January after admitting the French defender is no longer in his first-team squad. Klopp was quizzed about his plans for the January transfer window this week and insisted he had no intention of selling England striker Daniel Sturridge or any other first-team player. "There is absolutely no thought or idea to sell any player from the first team squad. I don't think it would make sense," Klopp said. But the German indicated that rule does not apply to the out of favour Sakho. "Now you know, I said it: he is not in these plans for the first team," Klopp said. "The first-team squad is here (at the training ground). Do you really think I would have said Sakho will not be sold in winter? Nothing changed. "Once again this actual first-team squad is in this dressing room, from this point of view nobody will be sold." Sakho, 26, has been training with the club's under-23 squad since September, when he used social media to dispute Klopp's comments about his fitness.—AFP

KENYA SEEK SAFARI
RALLY RETURN

NAIROBI: Kenya is in talks with motorsport's ruling body the FIA over returning the Safari Rally to the world rally championship after an absence of 14 years. Kenyan Motorsports Federation chief Phineas Kimathi is in Geneva to brief the FIA about the government's commitment to stage Africa's only leg of the championship from 2019. Scottish rally legend Colin McRae, who died in 2007, won the event the last time it figured on the WRC calendar in 2002 - his final WRC win. "The Kenya Government will offer all forms of guarantees including financial obligations towards the event," Kenyan sports minister Hassan Wario promised in a letter to WRC managing director Oliver Ciesla. "As a priority, the government shall put in place the necessary structures leading towards a full WRC Safari in 2019 after running a candidate event in 2018, and 2017 Africa Rally Championship event as a dry run WRC Safari," Wario wrote. The Kenyan classic was dropped from the WRC calendar 14 years ago due to lack of financial and organisational support from the government.—AFP

TURKISH WEIGHTLIFTER
LOSES DOPING APPEAL

LAUSANNE: Turkish weightlifter Sibel Ozkan has lost an appeal against a doping sanction which cost her a silver medal from the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Ozkan, who finished second in the women's 48-kilogram class in Beijing, tested positive for the steroid stanozolol in a reanalysis of her urine sample this year and was retroactively disqualified by the IOC. Ozkan contended in her appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport that her positive test resulted from a contaminated protein supplement. CAS arbitrator Michael Beloff ruled there was "no evidence of the contamination" and that even if her claim were true, Ozkan had shown "no due diligence" in dealing with a supposedly contaminated supplement. CAS says Ozkan also offered "sensitive information about the Turkish Weightlifting Federation in exchange for a possible agreement with the respondent to dispose of this case." If the IOC decides to reallocate the medals, Taiwan's Chen Wei-Ling would receive silver, with bronze going to Im Jyoung-Hwa of South Korea.—AP



LAS VEGAS: Eddie Vedder, left, and Tony Stewart stand on the stage during the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series auto racing awards Friday, in Las Vegas. — AP

JOHNSON, STEWART AND EARNHARDT
HONORED AS NASCAR CLOSSES 2016

LAS VEGAS: Jimmie Johnson called winning a record-tying seventh NASCAR Sprint Cup title "insane" Friday night, while Tony Stewart was sent off into retirement and Dale Earnhardt Jr. told his adoring fans at the season-ending banquet that he'll be ready to race in 2017.

Johnson's dramatic victory in the finale last month at Homestead moved him into a tie with Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt for the most series championships. Johnson was introduced by 23-time Olympic gold medalist swimmer Michael Phelps at the Wynn Las Vegas.

"I've won as many championships as Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt, but I'll never be the King or the Intimidator," Johnson said. "I'm just a guy from California who always wanted to race."

NASCAR honored Stewart, who retired after an 18-year career that included three series championships, with a video poking fun at his coarse language, weight and temper and with a surprise appearance by Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder.

Car owner Rick Hendrick then announced a \$1.8 million donation by the motorsports industry to Vedder's children charity in Stewart's name.

"Totally caught off guard," Stewart said. "But really honored that Eddie Vedder would come here for this and I'm so excited the racing community raised that kind of money to help that charity."

Earnhardt Jr. was voted most popular driver by fans for a record 14th time despite missing the second half of the season following at least the fifth concussion of his career. While not announcing the date or track, he intends to drive a test session this month, the final hurdle before he'll be cleared to return.

"It made the bad days better," Earnhardt said of the unending fan support. "Once I started feeling good about coming back, it gave me a lot of motivation and maybe a reminder of why I want to be back in the car. You race to have fun and win races, but it wouldn't be worth even making the trip if the fans didn't show up."

The unflappable Johnson was in his tuxedo more than two hours before the red carpet ceremony smiling for numerous photo shoots. He knows how the process works as the 2016 title secures his spot

atop the sport's hierarchy. "This was an emotional one," Johnson said, adding the final laps at Homestead were "the most spiritual experience that I've ever had in my life." Stewart enjoyed his final awards week before becoming just a NASCAR team owner. His boyhood hero, A.J. Foyt, made a surprise appearance at a Thursday fan event that turned into an impromptu Stewart roast as the sport said goodbye to one of its strongest characters.

"It's just been one hell of a journey, a lot of fun," Stewart said. "Everybody keeps saying I'm retiring, but I'm still going to be the same pain in the (rear) with all the NASCAR officials. I'm certain there's already a pool going on back there at the NASCAR officials' table on what the over-under is for me getting called to the trailer as an owner."

Earnhardt sustained a concussion in a June 12 wreck at Michigan. His last start was July 9 at Kentucky as he continued to suffer serious aftereffects that included balance and vision problems.

Earnhardt, who missed the final 18 races, stopped taking medication in October. He's confident he'll be healthy for drive the No. 88 Chevrolet in the Daytona 500 on Feb. 26. His busy offseason will include getting married on New Year's Eve and also participating in January's testing session at Phoenix.

"We'll get out there and spend half a day somewhere running some long runs and getting a good idea if I'm ready to go," Earnhardt said. "I feel 100 percent. I don't think there will be any issues."

Xfinity Series champion Daniel Suarez and Craftsman Truck Series winner Johnny Sauter were also recongnized at the black tie banquet that included a musical performance by Sting and was hosted by comedian Jay Mohr for the sixth time.

"Sorry it's not seven," Mohr told Johnson.

It also marked the final event sponsored by Sprint in NASCAR's top series. Sprint's yellow and black logo, splashed all over the casino ballroom and above the red carpet, will be replaced by Monster Energy's green-clawed 'M' in 2017.

Sprint and the company it merged with, Nextel, sponsored the series since 2004.

"That's 13 years, kindergarten through 12th grade," Sprint corporate marketing chief Steve Gaffney said. "Thank you."—AP

'MISSION ACCOMPLISHED'
FOR EMOTIONAL ROSBERG

VIENNA: Nico Rosberg said it was "mission accomplished" as the German star received his Formula One world championship trophy on Friday, just hours after he stunned sport by deciding to quit. The 31-year-old paid tribute to longtime friend and Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton, the outgoing world champion, as well as his father Keke Rosberg who won the F1 title back in 1982.

"It's mission accomplished as far as I am concerned," the German told the FIA prize giving ceremony at a star-studded event in Vienna. "I'm so proud to be here. It's been a pretty intense period but it was my childhood dream."

"When I saw this trophy for the first time today, I immediately went and found where my dad's name was on it. It's very special and emotional to share with him what he did 34 years ago." Rosberg admitted that had he come up short in the championship this year, he would have carried on in 2017. "When I was six, I wanted to be world champion and I have done it. Now on to other things-family first, see what the future holds and just follow my heart."

Rosberg edged Hamilton to the title but he paid generous tribute to the Briton.

"Lewis was awesome so to take the title away from him is very special," added Rosberg who admitted that winning the title was the second most intense thing he has done.

"Well, watching my wife give birth, that was pretty intense." Dutch driver Max Verstappen won the award for FIA Personality of the Year and FIA Action of the Year.

The colourful Red Bull driver became the youngest winner of a Grand Prix when he triumphed at the Circuit de Catalunya in Spain at the age of 18 years and 228 days.

It was one of only two races not won by a Mercedes driver in 2016 — the other went to Verstappen's team-mate Daniel Ricciardo in Malaysia.

Meanwhile, the world rally championship trophy was presented for the fourth successive



VIENNA: Nico Rosberg, 2016 F1 World champion, right, arrives with his wife Vivian Sibold at a FIA gala at Hofburg palace in Vienna, Austria, Friday. Current Formula One World Champion Nico Rosberg announced Friday that he will retire from Formula One racing. — AP

time to Sebastien Ogier and co-driver Julien Ingrassia.

But it was an emotional night for Ogier whose Volkswagen team revealed last month that 2016 was to be their last season in the championship.

"The whole story of the last four years has been amazing—the time of our lives," said Ogier. "It has come to an end and we are looking to

the future and thinking about new challenges. We are confident that we can still be part of the next championship."

Ogier was cheekily asked if he'd be interested in filling the vacancy created by Rosberg at Mercedes in next year's Formula One world championship. "Well, my heart's in rallying and I'd need to get a super-licence," he said. "But it would be a great story, no?"—AFP



LAKE LOUISE: Ilka Stuehec, of Slovenia, skis during the women's World Cup downhill ski race at Lake Louise, Alberta, Friday. — AP

STUHEC WINS SEASON-OPENING DOWNHILL

MONTREAL: Slovenia's Ilka Stuehec won the season-opening ladies downhill at Lake Louise on Friday with the first World Cup victory of her ski racing career.

The 26-year-old Stuehec stunned the favorites by clocking a winning time of one minute, 45.48 seconds to claim the first of two downhill this weekend at the mountain resort in the Canadian Rockies. "I knew I could ski fast and I just needed to put it in a race and I did," said Stuehec, whose best previous result on the World Cup circuit was a fourth place in the 2013 super-G in Beaver Creek, Colorado.

The second downhill is slated for later followed by a super-G race today.

Italy's Sofia Goggia was second with a time of

one minute, 45.70 seconds, while Sweden's Kajsa Kling finished third with one minute, 45.79 seconds. The pre-race favorite, Lara Gut of Switzerland, settled for a time of one minute, 46.17 seconds and a fourth place finish.

Gut, who failed to earn a single World Cup point during last week's races in Vermont because of a bad fall, now sits in sixth in the overall race with 150 points.

Stuehec was a surprise winner Friday after starting from the 29th position.

"I had a feeling that I could show some more than just average results around 10th to 15th place, that I could ski good and I could ski fast and apparently, today, the fastest," Stuehec said.

American Mikaela Shiffrin is in first place in

the overall with 338 points. She tied for 18th in Friday's downhill with a time that was almost two seconds slower than Stuehec. But this is the first World Cup downhill for Shiffrin who has dominated in slalom the past few seasons.

"It wasn't bad at all," said Shiffrin of her downhill debut. The 21-year-old American had a lengthy wait in the starting gate after the skier before her crashed.

"I struggled a little with the course hold, but it was a clean run-cleaner than previous days," she said. "I'm sure we'll see a couple things in video and then I'll try and make adjustments for tomorrow. But right now, I'm alive and everything's good." The top Canadian was Valerie Grenier who finished in 28th.—AFP

VERSTAPPEN A DOUBLE
WINNER AT FIA AWARDS

VIENNA: Dutch Formula One driver Max Verstappen collected two special awards for the second year in a row at the International Automobile Federation (FIA)'s gala prize-giving ceremony on Friday.

The 19-year-old won the Personality of the Year, while his overtake of Nico Rosberg's Mercedes in the wet at the Brazilian Grand Prix was judged Action of the Year across all FIA-sanctioned series.

The personality award was voted for by the international media.

Verstappen, who became the youngest ever grand prix winner in Spain in May and is now the hottest young talent in the sport, has now won the Action of the Year award for three successive years.

He won it last year for a daring move on Brazilian Felipe Nasr around the outside at Blanchimont at the Belgian Grand Prix. In 2014, while in European F3, his last lap overtake of Italian Antonio Giovinazzi was the winner.

"I'm very happy with my second season in F1," said the Red Bull driver. "When it started, I didn't think it was going to be this good... hopefully we can be even more successful next year." Rosberg, who won the championship in Abu Dhabi last Sunday, was handed his trophy at the ceremony-hours after he stunned Formula One by announcing his retirement.

"It's mission accomplished for me. I've done it. That's the dream come true," said the German, son of 1982 world champion Keke. "When I saw this trophy for the first time straight away I had a look at where my dad was. So I found my dad down there and for me that's one of the most emotional things about all this that I managed to achieve what he did 34 years ago and share that with him," he added.

Rosberg also said he would have continued for another year had he come second in the championship to team mate Lewis Hamilton, instead of beating him.—Reuters

JOHNSON AND MATSUYAMA TIED FOR LEAD IN BAHAMAS

NASSAU: Dustin Johnson wasn't even expecting to be in the Bahamas for the Hero World Challenge. He was tied for the lead Friday with Hideki Matsuyama, who has reason to expect being at the top of any tournament he plays. Six shots behind was Tiger Woods, who shot a 7-under 65 without anyone in his way. Johnson ran off three straight birdies early in his round, moved into contention with an eagle and closed with a fearless drive down the middle of the water-lined 18th fairway at Albany that set up a birdie for a 66. Matsuyama had the lead to himself until a bogey from the bunker on the par-3 17th. He shot a 67 to tie Johnson at 12-under 132.

They were two shots ahead of Louis Oosthuizen and Matt Kuchar, who each shot 67. No one knows winning like Matsuyama over the last few months. He has three victories in his last four starts around the world - the other was a runner-up finish in Malaysia - which includes his first World Golf Championship title at the HSBC Champions.

Johnson was scheduled to play an exhibition against Rory McIlroy in the Philippines on Tuesday, and while he thought about a trip halfway around the world to get to the Bahamas on time, he was resigned to sitting this one out. But he never withdrew in case the exhibition fell through, and it did.

Woods made two super par saves, from next to a bush on the par-3 eighth and with a 25-foot putt on the 16th. He was practically flawless for a seven-hole stretch in the middle of his round and tied for ninth. Plus, it took just under three hours. Woods played as a single when Albany resident Justin Rose withdrew because of back problems.

AUSTRALIAN PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

Andrew Dodt shot a 5-under 67 to take a two-stroke lead over fellow Australian Ashley Hall in the Australian PGA Championship.

Dodt had a 12-under 132 total at Royal Pines Resort. Hall shot a 69.

Australian star Adam Scott (6) and New Zealand's Ryan Fox (69) were 8 under. American Harold Varner III (72) was 7 under.

ALFRED DUNHILL CHAMPIONSHIP

South Africa's Brandon Stone closed with an eagle to take the Alfred Dunhill Championship lead after needing treatment for a back injury midway through the round. Stone shot a 6-under 66 to reach 11-under 133 at Leopard Creek.

Defending champion Charl Schwartzel of South Africa and Chris Hanson of England were second. Schwartzel had a 68m and Hanson shot 65.

LPGA TOUR Q-SCHOOL

Japanese teen Nasa Hataoka shot a 3-under 69 to take a one-stroke lead after the third of five rounds in the LPGA Tour qualifying tournament. The 17-year-old Hataoka had four birdies and a bogey on the Jones Course to reach 14-under 202 at LPGA International. She won a Japan LPGA major in October.

The top 20 will earn full cards and the next 25 and ties will get conditional status. Jaye Marie Green was second after a 67 on the Jones Course. The American won in 2013 at LPGA International at a record 29 under. Iceland's Olafía Kristinsdóttir was 9 under along with American Sadena Parks, Taiwan's Ssu Chia Cheng and Latvia's Krista Puisite. Kristinsdóttir had a 67 on the Hills Course. Parks shot 67, Cheng 69, and Puisite 70 - all on the Jones Course.

PGA TOUR CHAMPIONS Q-SCHOOL

Phillip Price and Scott Parel shared medalist honors in the PGA Tour Champions qualifying tournament to top the five fully exempt qualifiers. Price, from Wales, shot a 4-under 68 to match Parel (69) at 13-under 275 on Disney's Magnolia Course. Bobby Gage was third at 11 under, birdieing the final three holes for a 67.

Fran Quinn and Skip Kendall got the last two spots, beating Gibby Gilbert III in a play-off. Quinn shot 68, Kendall 72, and Gilbert 67 to reach 9 under. Nos. 6-30 and ties received associate membership and will have access to event qualifying while bypassing pre-qualifying. — AP



MONACO: Prince Albert II of Monaco, right, and President of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Sebastian Coe, left pose with Kenyan former marathon world record-holder Tegla Loroupe who was presented with the 2016 President Award, during the 2016 World Athletics Gala Awards, Friday in Monaco. — AP

CORRUPTION-HIT IAAF ADOPTS COE'S REFORMS

MONACO: The IAAF yesterday unanimously adopted a reform package drawn up by president Sebastian Coe in a bid to end "grotesque" corruption that has rocked track and field's governing body.

In a Special Congress in Monaco, 182 member federations voted for the reforms, with 10 against and five invalid votes. Some 197 of the IAAF's 213 member federations were present.

"Let me thank you for the confidence that you have shown the Council today in the reform proposals that you have agreed to. This is a very important moment in the history of our sport," said Coe. Coe's reforms, with a nod to disgraced predecessor Lamine Diack's abuse of the presidency, include stripping himself of some powers, with the president and IAAF Council not allowed to serve more than 12 years and with more checks put in place.

They also push for gender balance, handing athletes a greater voice and crucially establishing an independent integrity unit that would manage all anti-doping matters and be responsible for greater intelligence gathering.

Since Coe took office in August 2015, the IAAF has been mired in the fall-out from the presidency Diack, at the centre of a corruption scandal in which several former senior IAAF officials were found to have bribed Russian athletes to keep quiet over positive doping tests.

Coe admitted that the reforms had not been to everyone's taste, all the while praising the "civilised discourse" and the "clarity and honesty of dialogue".

"The fundamental principles, I believe, have broad support," said the Briton, a two-time Olympic 1500m gold medallist. "On gender balance, a number of areas told me they needed more time - you've got it. I want checks and balances in place... I don't want to be in an office choosing carpets and signing off expenses. I would not ask for change if I didn't think we needed it."

BOLD STANCE

Coe's bold stance on gender equality envisages the 26-member Council transitioning to half-men, half-women by 2023. At the 2019 Council election, he wants a minimum of nine of each gender elected including two vice-presidents of each gender.

Indicative of the ground shift that will entail was that just three of the 42 member federations who addressed the Congress before the vote were women, notably Paula Radcliffe representing Britain and also including representatives from the Cook Islands and the Turks and Caicos.

Notable voting against the reforms were Saudi Arabia while Qatar, the host of the 2019 World Athletics Championships and 2022 Football World Cup, voted for.

Abstainers included Lamine Diack's Senegal, vice-president Sergey Bubka's Ukraine and track powerhouses Jamaica, despite Usain Bolt picking up a record sixth IAAF Athlete of the Year award

on Friday and throwing his weight behind Coe. "I know that Seb Coe is trying to make track and field more transparent to everyone so they can see what shape it is in and to make sure there is not one person fully in control," said Bolt. "That's a bold move from him as IAAF president." That's also helped the sport to make people more confident and to trust the sport more. — AFP



NASSAU: Dustin Johnson watches his tee shot on the 16th hole during the second round at the Hero World Challenge golf tournament, Friday, in Nassau, Bahamas. — AP

AUSTRALIA'S MAXWELL FINED FOR 'DISRESPECTFUL' TEAMMATE COMMENTS

SYDNEY: Australia allrounder Glenn Maxwell was yesterday fined by his team for his "disrespectful" comments about teammate Matthew Wade on the eve of their opening one-day international with New Zealand in Sydney.

Maxwell said on Thursday he felt as though batting below Wade at No.6 for Victoria in the domestic Sheffield Shield cricket hurt his selection chances for Australia's third Test against South Africa in Adelaide last week.

Captain Steve Smith and Australia's leadership party fined Maxwell for what they termed his "disrespectful" comments towards his state skipper and ODI teammate Wade.

Head Coach Darren Lehmann said Maxwell's words in a media conference were "disappointing" leading to Smith and

Australia's senior members to impose a fine on the 28-year-old.

"Everyone was disappointed in his comments," Smith told reporters yesterday. "I've expressed that to him myself and spoke to the team.

"One of our values is respect and having respect for your teammates, opposition, the fans, the media.

"I thought what he said was very disrespectful to a teammate and his Victorian captain. "The leadership group got together and we decided to fine Glenn. We thought that was a sufficient punishment." Although Maxwell was fined he is available for selection for Sunday's opening match in the three-game Chappell-Hadlee Trophy ODI series at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Smith said Maxwell was "shattered" when he heard his punishment. — AFP

WIGGINS MUST RESOLVE STEROID CONTROVERSY

LONDON: Five-time Olympic cycling champion Bradley Wiggins has to clear up the question marks remaining over why he was granted therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) for a steroid, his former team-mate Chris Froome says. Wiggins, 36, had his medical records leaked by presumed Russian hackers The Fancy Bears earlier this year. They revealed he'd been granted the TUEs to take the banned triamcinolone to treat a pollen allergy including just before the 2012 Tour de France when he went onto become Britain's first winner.

Froome, who was his faithful lieutenant on Team Sky that year and has won it himself three times since, told The Times that Wiggins' denials since and responses to the questions have not resolved the matter. "People ask me, 'Do I think it's tarnished his (Wiggins) image?' I certainly think it's raised a few questions, that's for sure," he told the paper by phone from Australia.

"A lot of people have said it's taken the shine off his performances back in 2012."

Kenya-born Froome, who will attempt the rare feat of doing a Grand Tour double next year having failed in his bid this season, said he still did not know what was in a package delivered to Team Sky during the 2011 Criterium du Dauphine, which Wiggins won.

"I am completely in the dark on that," he says. "I have asked the question. Hopefully we will find out at the end of the investigation."

"Those are questions for Brad to answer about what happened back then. In terms of who did what at the time, I still don't know all the answers myself." Froome, 31, says he couldn't fault the present Team Sky regime for being totally transparent and felt this had filtered through to spectators at the Tour de France whose attitude had changed between the

angry and hostile one of 2015 towards him and his team-mates and this year. "I can only deal with what I do know. From what I have seen for myself [at Sky], it's been completely above board. It's been clean. I've laid all my cards on the table. Everything has been out there for a while in terms of my TUEs," he said.

"We have worked really hard to try to show we are being as transparent as possible. I feel we have made a lot of headway this year, especially on the roads of the Tour.

"I felt a genuine change in mentality of the French fans, a much warmer reception than it has been in the past." — AFP



Chris Froome

AECK, TEC, TKM JOIN KEA IN SEMI-FINALS

KUWAIT: The last round of league matches of Prof Ramachandran Memorial Cricket Tournament conducted by College of Engineering Trivandrum Alumini Association (CETAA) was held on Nov 25 at the South Khaitan cricket grounds. AECK, TKM and TEC joined KEA in the semi finals after today's matches.

Day's first match between TKM and NSS was a "winner takes all" clash with the prize of a semi-final berth awaiting the winner. So a keen contest was expected. Unfortunately, NSS batting first lost 4 wickets for only 12 runs by the 4th over and all seemed lost bar the shouting. But a liberal dose of extras (19) conceded by TKM along with the plucky display by the lower order enabled NSS to finish on 47 for the loss of 8 wickets in their 12 overs. For TKM Anfar 2 for 9 with good support from Mukesh, Sreekumar and Ziad (1 wicket each) restricted NSS to a reasonable score. In reply, TKM lost Anfar early but a second wicket partnership of 31 runs between Mukesh (18- man of the match) and Ziad took them to the verge of victory. Even though both fell in quick succession, victory was never in doubt and TKM won easily by 7 wickets in the 9th over to earn the 2nd semi-final spot from Pool A.

In the second match, MACE had to win against AECK to stay in contention for a semi-final spot. Batting first, MACE showed they



Rajesh Panicker, President, TKMCE giving away the man of the match trophy to Mukesh (TKM).

were up to the task with opener George in fine nick. After the quick exit of Delvin, George (22) found an able partner in Jayesh (14) and the two took MACE to 45 by the 8th over with attractive stroke play. Their exit in quick succession slowed the innings but short cameos from Roy and Dileep took MACE to a fighting 67 for 9 wickets in their 12 overs. Shameer (4 wickets) and Shabeer (3) took a spate of wickets in the last 4 overs to restrict MACE. In reply, Shameer (32 no - man of the

match) and Nithin (13) put on 27 for the 1st wicket by the 5th over. After Nithin's exit, Rayees (18 no) accelerated the scoring with Shameer to put the result beyond any doubt and AECK won comprehensively by 9 wickets with more than 3 overs to spare. Jayesh took the only wicket to fall for MACE.

In the last match of the league phase, KEA put the CET bowling to the sword with exquisite stroke play by the openers Govind (58 no-7x4, man of the match) and Tibish (41- 5x4



Arun Davidson, GC (elect) giving the man of the match award to Govind (KEA).

who put on 98 runs for the 1st wicket. Tibish was particularly impressive with his well timed drives on the offside. After his exit, Ajin joined Govind and made a quick fire 26 no off 10 balls to help KEA to a mammoth total of 138 for 1 wicket of their 12 overs. Arun took the only wicket to fall foxing Tibish with a slower one. In reply, Skipper Daniel (27) tried to break free with some robust hits but could not pierce the well set field. 2 down Zakir gave good support to Daniel adding 29 runs

for the 3rd wicket but the other batsmen perished in their attempt to force the pace. In the end CET had to be satisfied with a score of 50 for 8 wickets of their 12 overs leaving KEA overwhelming winners by 88 runs. Sreejith (2 wickets) and Remy, Ajin, Govind, John (1 wicket each) completed the formalities for KEA.

Mrs Sally Roy, GS, MACE, Arun Davidson, GC (Eect) and Rajesh Panicker President, TKM-CE were the chief guests and gave away the trophies.

Sports

'Mission accomplished' for emotional Rosberg



Chelsea beat Man City for 8th straight win



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

CORRUPTION-HIT IAAF ADOPTS COE'S REFORMS

Page 16



BARCELONA: Real Madrid's Costa Rican goalkeeper Keylor Navas (CL) clears the ball past Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi during the Spanish league football match FC Barcelona vs Real Madrid CF at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona yesterday. — AFP

RAMOS RESCUES REAL IN EL CLASICO STALEMATE

BARCELONA: Sergio Ramos's stoppage-time equaliser maintained Real Madrid's six-point lead at the top of La Liga as the European champions salvaged a 1-1 draw at Barcelona in yesterday's El Clasico. Luis Suarez looked to have breathed new life into the title race when he headed home the opener from Neymar's free-kick eight minutes into the second half.

Neymar and Lionel Messi then passed up huge chances to add to Barca's advantage, and the hosts were made to pay when Real captain Ramos met Luka Modric's free-kick with a powerful header to stretch Madrid's

unbeaten run in all competitions to 33 games. Before kick-off both sides came together to pay homage to the 71 victims that wiped out almost the entirety of Brazilian side Chapecoense's squad in a plane crash in Colombia earlier in the week.

However, once the action got underway old hostilities were renewed as Madrid screamed for a penalty less than two minutes in. Lucas Vazquez went down under Javier Mascherano's challenge, but referee Carlos Clos Gomez waved play on.

Barcelona enjoyed the majority of possession, but with captain Andres Iniesta left on

the bench on his return from a two-month injury layoff, lacked the creativity to break down Madrid before the break. Sergi Roberto's shot was deflected behind by Raphael Varane before Messi's harmless free-kick was easily handled by Keylor Navas.

At the other end the spotlight was on Cristiano Ronaldo more than ever in the absence of the injured Gareth Bale and following allegations of grand scale tax avoidance published by a series of European media organisations on Saturday. The Portuguese came to life towards the end of the first-half as he had Madrid's first shot on target that was

turned behind by Marc-Andre ter Stegen eight minutes before half-time and the German stood firm to deny another driven Ronaldo effort moments later. Varane also headed straight at Ter Stegen as Madrid looked the more likely to break the deadlock as half-time approached.

However, Barca got the goal they badly needed to kickstart their title defence when Neymar's free-kick from the left found Suarez somehow unmarked to head home from point blank range. Iniesta was then introduced to a hero's welcome and teed up Neymar for a huge chance to seal the three points 21 minutes from time. The Brazilian skipped past Dani Carvajal, but blasted over the bar with the goal at his mercy.

Madrid substitute Casemiro then made a brilliant block to deny another goalbound Neymar shot. Iniesta produced a sublime pass to lay the chance Messi had been waiting for all afternoon on a plate, but the Argentine pulled his effort wide of the far post with just Navas to beat. And Barca were made to pay for their profligacy as Ramos rose unmarked to power home Modric's free-kick as the game entered stoppage time to silence the Camp Nou. — AFP

SANCHEZ TREBLE FIRES SWAGGERING ARSENAL



LONDON: Alexis Sanchez fired a 14-minute hat-trick as Arsenal rose to second in the Premier League with an irresistible 5-1 victory at West Ham yesterday.

Chile forward Sanchez was the star of the show in east London as Arsenal moved above Liverpool and Manchester City with a triumph that was every bit as emphatic as the scoreline suggests. After setting up Mesut Ozil for the opening goal in the 24th minute, Sanchez then made the match his own.

He danced away from two defenders to make it 2-0, fired home from the edge for 3-0 and, after the sides had traded goals from Andy Carroll and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, respectively, impudently lobbed West Ham keeper Darren Randolph to seal the one-sided win.

It was hard to escape the feeling that here were two London clubs travelling in opposite directions. Arsenal, now just three points behind leaders Chelsea, were superior in every department. With space in which to operate with freedom in front of the West Ham back four, Sanchez and Ozil danced to their own tune.

On the other hand, fourth bottom West Ham appear to be having the breath sucked out of them by the twin failures of adapting to their new home and recapturing last year's compelling form. The visitors moved forward at will.

Ozil and Sanchez exchanged passes in the 13th minute before a low cross from the overlapping Nacho Monreal was poked out of the path of the incoming Sanchez by Winston Reid.

Next, from an inswinging Monreal corner, Shkodran Mustafi's downward header just evaded the outstretched leg of Laurent Koscielny.

DELIGHTFUL

By then, West Ham had already suffered the disruption of losing James Collins to a muscle injury in only the seventh minute.

The home side finally roused themselves after 18 minutes when Dimitri Payet played a delightful pass through the Arsenal defence to Manuel Lanzini, who dallied too long before shooting when the angle became too acute to beat Petr Cech in the Arsenal goal.

That was no more than an interlude in the game's motif and it came as no surprise when Arsenal took the lead. Angelo Ogbonna's pass out of defence was cut out by Francis Coquelin. The ball fell into the path of Sanchez who skipped past a West Ham defender before squaring for Ozil to side-foot home. Chances came and went for Arsene Wenger's side, firstly for Oxlade-Chamberlain who then slipped Sanchez into space only for the Chilean to take an uncharacteristic heavy touch as he attempted to go round Randolph. If the second half began at a slower pace which offered West Ham some hope, their best chance fell to Ashley Fletcher whose shot flew inches past the post.

Normal service was resumed when Monreal raced to the byline and cut the ball back for Arsenal substitute Aaron Ramsey, whose close-range shot was kicked away by Randolph.

It set the stage for Sanchez who, with the ball



Arsenal's Alexis Sanchez celebrates after scoring a goal during the English Premier League soccer match between West Ham United and Arsenal at The London Stadium in London, yesterday — AP

glued to his feet, turned Arthur Masuaku then sprinted away from him into the box and as Ogbonna stood off him, drilled a low shot across Randolph and into the far corner.

Eight minutes later he took his chance with a low shot from the edge of the box when the West Ham defence backed off him and Randolph went down too late to stop it.

That was part of a crazy finale. Within the space of 60 seconds, West Ham pulled one back when substitute Carroll reacted quickest to head home after a Payet free-kick had bounced down from the bar and then Oxlade-Chamberlain curled home from 20 yards to make it 4-1.

That only left Sanchez to seal his virtuoso display by latching on to an Oxlade-Chamberlain pass and lifting the ball over Randolph for his hat-trick. — AP

WEST BROM SET PIECES TO BEAT WATFORD 3-1



WEST BROMWICH: Coach Tony Pulis ended a bad week on a high note as West Brom beat Watford 3-1 to move above Manchester United in the Premier League yesterday.

Pulis was criticised by a judge this week and ordered to pay back a hefty bonus to ex-club Crystal Palace, but West Brom fans won't mind the blemish on his reputation with three wins from the last five games.

The victory at the Hawthorns moved West Brom above United, in action on Sunday, into sixth on goal difference.

Their opener came on 16 minutes as Chris Brunt's corner dropped at the far post where Northern Irishman Johnny Evans rose to plunge home a towering header against the run of play.

Just after the half hour things got worse for Watford, who under Italian coach Walter Mazzarri are enjoying their best start to a season for decades.

Watford defender Camilo Zuniga was loitering near the wall at a free-kick when he deflected Brunt's hard low shot so badly it wrong-footed a horrified

Huerelho Gomes as he dived the wrong way.

For all Watford's good build up play home keeper Ben Foster didn't have to make a save in the first half.

But the visitors dug deep and pulled a goal back after some intense pressure on the hour when Christian Kabasele finally delivered with a close range side-foot.

It was the stand in defender's first goal for the club since joining from Genk after his summer adventure with Belgium at the Euros.

The goal followed hot on the heels of a previous chance Foster tipped over the bar when West Brom defender Gareth McAuley was panicked into firing at his own goal.

But with the game in the balance things swung in the home side's favour as Watford's Roberto Pereyra was sent off after a mass brawl.

The Argentinian reacted furiously to being run into whilst on the ground to spark the melee. In injury time Matty Phillips then took advantage of some more dreadful defending to make it 3-1 and secure another win as Pulis's record for turning things round at crisis clubs continues.

Pulis' behaviour while coaching at Crystal Palace was described by a judge this week as 'disgraceful by any standards', as the coach lost a £3.7 million (\$4.6 million, 4.3 million euros) legal action the London club. — AFP



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Our pasta does the rest

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Kuwait Times ⁵⁵ Anniversary BUSINESS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

Kuwait's corporate results show positive momentum

Page 22

Kuwait may post KD 5bn deficit in FY 2016/17

Page 25



All-new Mazda CX9: New definition for 3-row crossovers

Page 23

ARAB AVIATION SUMMIT ANNOUNCES SPEAKERS FOR 2016 EDITION

Page 26



COSTA MESA: Eric Denker and his wife Jalen Denker of Irvine take advantage of sales to buy suits for business school interviews at South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa, California. The US government issued the November jobs report on Friday.—AP

TRUMP TO INHERIT SOLID BUT UNEVEN ECONOMY

HIRING SOLID, JOBLESS RATE LOW, BUT LONG-TERM WOES PERSIST

WASHINGTON: The US jobs report on Friday made one thing clear: President-elect Donald Trump will inherit the same two-track US economy that bedeviled his predecessor.

Hiring is solid and the unemployment rate low. But longer-term problems persist - especially a stubbornly high number of men who are out of work and have given up looking. Many are likely frustrated former manufacturing workers who voted for Trump over Hillary Clinton.

Employers added 178,000 jobs in November, the government said, extending the longest streak of hiring since World War II. And the unemployment rate sank from 4.9 percent to a nine-year low of 4.6 percent. Yet the jobless rate dropped mainly because many of those out of work gave up on their job hunts and were no longer counted as unemployed. A key challenge for the Trump administration is to extend the benefits of job growth to include many of those who feel left out. The job market's durability will help to some extent. Eventually, low unemployment should compel employers to offer higher pay to

attract more workers. That, in turn, could persuade more Americans to resume their job hunts and find work.

"With the unemployment rate this low and wages rising, now is the real test of whether a stronger economy can bring people back into job market," said Jed Kolko, chief economist at job hunting website Indeed. Aside from the longer-term challenges, recent data suggest that the economy is in decent shape. Americans bought homes in October at the fastest pace in nearly a decade. They're also more confident in the economy than at any other point in the past nine years and are spending more.

Those trends are keeping the Federal Reserve on track to raise short-term interest rates at its next meeting in less than two weeks. "For the Fed, barring a very adverse ... development, a hike at the Dec. 14 meeting appears to be a done deal," said Michael Feroli, an economist at JPMorgan Chase.

Two measures illustrate the mixed nature of the economic recovery: The unemployment rate is now back to where it was in August 2007 - four

months before the Great Recession began. That suggests that the economy has fully recovered.

Yet the percentage of all adults with jobs is still 3 percentage points below where it was in August 2007. Some of that decline has been driven by retirements among the aging baby boom generation. But for men age 25 through 54 years old - prime working years - the proportion who have jobs remains substantially below its pre-recession level. That translates into millions of men who are neither working nor looking for work.

Why have so many men dropped out?

Kolko says that is "probably the biggest question facing the labor market today." Many men who aren't working blame mental or physical health problems. Alan Krueger, an economist at Princeton and a former top adviser to President Barack Obama, has found that nearly half of men ages 25 through 54 who are outside the workforce take pain medication.

The nation has lost nearly a third of its manufacturing jobs since 2000, and

many who once held those positions have struggled to find work that pays as well. But Nicholas Eberstadt, an economist at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute, notes that most European countries also lost manufacturing jobs, yet haven't seen a similar decline in male employment.

Instead, Eberstadt points to high levels of incarceration over the past three decades. That's left millions of men with criminal records that can make it hard for them to find work even years after they've completed their sentences. Randy Shacka, president of Lansing, Michigan-based moving firm Two Men and a Truck, says job applicants have had a harder time passing drug tests in recent years, particularly in states that have eased marijuana laws.

The company hopes to add 3,000 to its 8,000-person staff by June, when moving season heats up. But with unemployment down and the economy growing consistently, the company has had to try harder to find qualified applicants. It recently introduced a 401(k) plan and has ramped up training, Shacka said. Sluggish pay gains have been a chronic problem for the economy and have provided less incentive for those who have dropped out to resume job hunts. Average hourly pay slipped in November and has risen just 2.5 percent in the past year. Wage increases remain below the level consistent with healthy growth.

The economy "is fundamentally underperforming, and needs structural fixes to improve its long-term growth rate," said Douglas Holtz-Eakin of the conservative American Action Forum and former director of the Congressional Budget Office. Holtz-Eakin said the Trump administration's plans to cut corporate and individual taxes and lift many regulations should enable companies to invest in machinery and other equipment. That, in turn, could make workers more productive and boost pay.

Dave Arndt, chief executive of Pentaflex, a manufacturer in Springfield, Ohio, hopes Trump will also follow through on his promise to boost spending on roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

Pentaflex makes axles, exhaust systems and other parts for long-haul trucks. It's had to cut jobs in the past year as truckers have shipped less freight. More building would mean more shipping of construction materials. "Anything that puts more trucks on the road is good for business," Arndt said.—AP

HAPPY BREXIT CHRISTMAS! PRICES STAY EVEN, FOR NOW

LONDON: The bill for Christmas dinners in Britain is mostly unchanged from last year, experts said, even though the higher price of imported raisins will hike the cost of Christmas puddings by 21 percent. But the respite may be short-lived as supermarkets, which are locked in a bitter price war, are likely only delaying until next year Brexit-induced increases due to the plunging pound, they warned. "The overall cost of our favorite meal is set to be more expensive, up by 1 percent year-on-year, but still lower than in 2013 and 2014," a study by British market research firm Mintec found this week.

Since Britain voted in June to leave the European Union, there has been an 18 percent fall in the value of the pound against the euro and dollar, leading to an increase in the cost of imports. So far supermarkets are taking the hit, with the price of celebratory drinks such as Champagne from France and Prosecco from Italy staying stable. "There hasn't been much impact so far despite the falling exchange rate," says Toby Magill, an alcohol expert at market research company IRI. "The retailers haven't put up their prices."

Pricey Christmas pudding

With desserts, the plummeting pound has seen the cost of British-made Christmas pudding soar by 21 percent. The increase is due to the higher cost of ingredients: raisins, butter, flour and sugar, according to the study. But the centerpiece of a traditional Christmas dinner—the turkey—has seen a 2-percent price fall since last year when prices were higher on the back of fears over avian flu, it said. Food retailers are expected to see sales growth of 2 percent during the festive season compared to last year, an analysis by Fung Global Retail and Technology predicted. According to the October report, the sector has registered "five consecutive months of positive growth... and growth has strengthened sequentially over the most recent three months." "We anticipate no drag on retail sales this Christmas from the Brexit vote in June," the report adds.

Campaign for Christmas

Such a scenario could benefit national producers who are trying to take advantage of the fall in the pound, by promoting local foodstuffs produced and sold in sterling. The National Farmers Union has launched a campaign calling on citizens to support British products, perhaps tapping into an uptick in patriotism brought on by the Brexit referendum.

The Union is ready to direct Britons towards nearby turkey farms, as well as local producers of cheese and sparkling wine. Brussels sprouts recipes are also provided as part of the guidance to have the best "100 percent British" Christmas. But once the last crumbs of the Christmas pudding have been cleared, Magill said the start of the new year could see an end to the price war and all supermarkets increasing prices. "They will get through Christmas and the price rises will happen next year," he said, sharing the government's view that the post-Brexit economic hit will be unavoidable in 2017.—AP

OPEC DEAL COULD LEAD TO US SHALE SURGE

NEW YORK: With this week's deal to cut output, OPEC is creating incentives for American shale producers to boost output just as the incoming Trump administration vows measures to promote US oil development. The deal, announced Wednesday by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, will cut the cartel's output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd).

Oil prices shot up on the announcement, which was more muscular than many analysts expected, boosting prices by nearly 10 percent Wednesday and lifting the US benchmark contract to above \$50 a barrel Thursday. OPEC's planned production cuts are nearly the same amount US producers trimmed in the wake of a two-year skid in prices.

US output has fallen to 8.5 million a day, down from a peak of 9.6 million barrels a day in April 2015 following cutbacks in West Texas and other key shale-producing regions. Some believe the OPEC deal to boost prices could sow the seeds of its undoing as more US companies boost output in response, which in turn would push

prices lower. US "production could surprise to the upside," Morgan Stanley said in a note Thursday. "Surprisingly, when asked about this possibility during the press conference it appeared the oil ministers were unconcerned."

Morgan Stanley predicted it would take six to nine months for the price increase to prompt a supply response in the US, around the same time OPEC producers also are expected to ramp up.

'America First' and energy

The OPEC meeting this week also came amid a sea change in US politics as the world's biggest economy transitions to President-elect Donald Trump, who vowed in the campaign to free the petroleum industry from burdensome restrictions. During the campaign, Trump promised to open new US lands to petroleum production, approve new pipelines, encourage offshore development and cut regulations on the industry. That cocktail of domestic policies "could depress oil prices markedly given Trump's promise," Oxford Economics said in a research note. Harold Hamm, the chief executive of shale producer Continental Resources who advised

Trump on energy during the campaign, acknowledged the possibility the OPEC deal could pose problems for US producers if they restore too much production.

"We have the ability to oversupply the market," Hamm told CNBC on Thursday.

The key is not to. Hamm said limited US refining capacity has pinched the industry, in part because foreign oil companies from Saudi Arabia and Venezuela own refineries in the US and are biased towards imported crude. But it is not clear if Trump will take on foreign ownership of refineries.

Trump's full intentions on environmental policies also remain unclear. The president-elect described climate change as a hoax during the campaign, but suggested in a recent interview with the New York Times that he was open to climate mitigation policies.

Carl Larry of consultancy Frost & Sullivan predicted US shale producers would be prudent. "We'll see an increase at a slower pace," he told AFP. "I think producers will be very, very careful not to go too far too fast." — AFP



NEW DEFINITION FOR 3-ROW CROSSOVERS

ALL-NEW MAZDA CX9

KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Co along with Mazda launched its long-awaited the second-generation CX-9 crossover. It delivers a comprehensive interior and exterior overhaul, blessing the CX-9 with a powerful, efficient Skyactiv powertrain, and instilling even more of the sporting character that makes Mazda's so darn charming.

Yousef Al-Shaya, CEO, KAICO elaborated on the strong historic bond between KAICO and Mazda and Mazda's core values. He expressed his gratitude to all Mazda customers who supported KAICO in the last 47 years. He also emphasized that Mazda, with its new CX-9, pushed the boundaries of tradition to achieve the unachieved. This new CX-9 flagship is a perfect example of Mazda's growing design

Ashish Tandon, GM, Kaico added that with the new CX-9, engineers sought to instill driving dynamics befitting of a Mazda-agile handling, tight steering and a responsive, controllable powertrain. To do this, they found smart solutions to keep CX-9's structure light, yet rigid, with SKYACTIV Technology. They developed a new turbocharged SKYACTIV-G 2.5T engine that delivers instant throttle response, class-leading torque and an estimated around 20-percent increase in fuel-efficiency.

As is so often the case, it's not so much the style but the choice of materials that stands out. Nappa leather paired with real Japanese rosewood and aluminum accents to craft a cabin that feels far more expensive than what you might expect from Mazda.

Premium Styling

The all new CX-9 sets itself apart from other 3 row cross overs. CX-9 carries shorter overhangs on both ends, lengthening its hood and adding a sense of strength through proportions. Housing large wheels- 18 and 20-inch wheels-CX-9's tapered fenders are pushed to the edge of its body, giving the vehicle a wide, trapezoidal stance.

The smooth lines start up front with a bold, five-point grille with double bars. They're flanked on either side by standard low- and high-beam LED headlights. The bold grille introduces a strong lower body and sleek upper body that elevates KODO, introducing sleek curves that provide a premium appeal in a segment awash with convention. Covered in the eerie glow of Machine Gray paint, it looks expensive enough to wear a luxury-brand badge. Material quality is excellent throughout. Many of the plastics are so finely grained and soft to the touch that they appear to be bovine based. The overall effect is one of purity, simplicity and Japanese beauty.

The Tech Savvy Cockpit

New CX9 is equipped with all the latest gizmos, blind-spot monitoring, a power liftgate, an auto-dimming rearview mirror, an 8.0-inch touchscreen, 12-speaker Bose stereo, rain-sensing wipers, satellite radio, sunroof, a head-up display, lane-departure warning, lane-keeping assist, adaptive cruise control with forward-collision warning and automated emergency braking, automatic high-beams, and aluminum interior trim.

More from Four - Turbocharged SKYACTIV-G 2.5T Engine

Another major difference between the CX-9 and its competition is under the hood. While most in this class offer V-6 power, the CX-9 comes only with a turbocharged four-cylinder. The engine displaces 2.5 liters and makes 250 horsepower on premium fuel and 227 horsepower on regular. In the real world, these drivers spend most of their time at about 2000 rpm. So, to provide punch where owners want it, the CX-9's engine makes 310 lb-ft of torque at 2000 rpm regardless of octane.

To combat turbo lag, the engine has what Mazda calls the Dynamic Pressure Turbo System that combines the advantages of variable-vane and twin-scroll turbocharger technologies in one small part. There are three butterfly valves positioned in the exhaust manifold at the entrance to the turbocharger. Below 1620 rpm, these valves are closed, forcing exhaust gases through restricted paths, there-

by raising the pulsation energy of the exhaust impacting the turbine wheel (like a thumb over a water hose). At 1620 rpm, when the exhaust volume is large enough, the valves open, and the turbo operates normally. Therefore the Dynamic Pressure Turbo System gives better & sustained at torque even at lower RPM.

i-ACTIV AWD Predicts Road Conditions for Maximum Stability

i-ACTIV AWD upped the ante, implementing a host of other sensors that were already integrated into vehicles for other functions and channeling the information they presented such as ambient temperature, steering wheel angle, longitudinal grip, brake fluid pressure and even windshield wiper movement. In all, i-ACTIV AWD brings 22 different sensors together to paint a picture of road conditions and direct torque to the rear wheel as necessary, predicting what the driver may face on a slick road in the winter or in heavy rain.

i-ACTIV AWD measures road conditions 200

times every second and can adjust power distribution to account for wheel slip even in dry conditions. It can even route power to limit understeer during spirited driving, sending as much as 50 percent of CX-9's power to the rear wheels through Mazda's proven six-speed SKY-ACTIV-DRIVE automatic transmission.

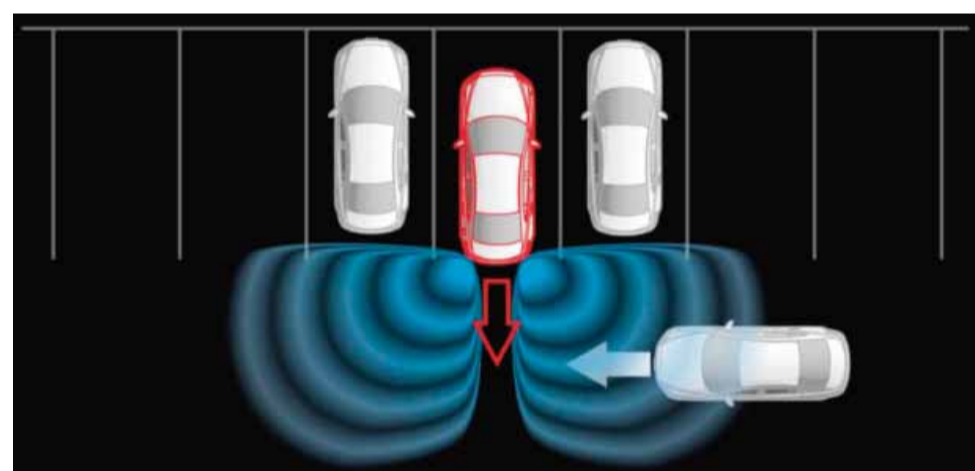
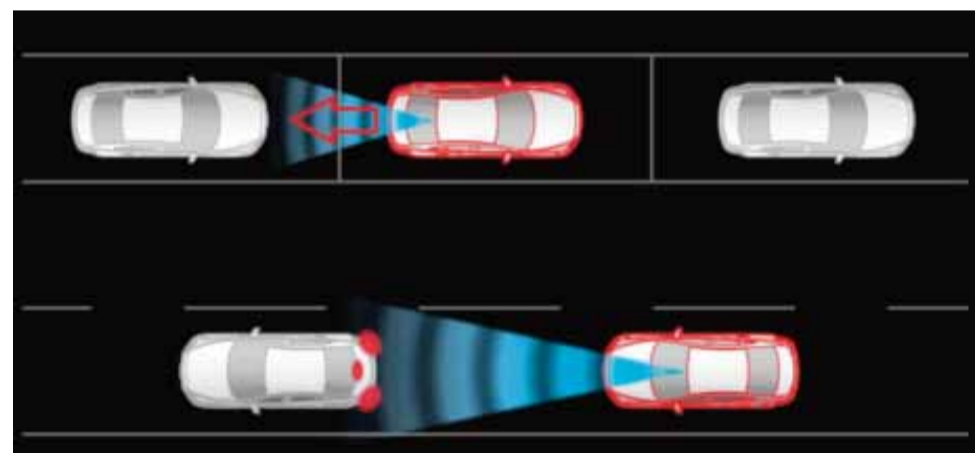
Beat the Fuel Price Increase

Word of the day is Fuel efficiency and Mazda has kept its promise to customers. The downsized engine and lighter weight help boost Fuel efficiency in city/highway, even better from its predecessor the 3.7L V6 Skyactiv engine. New turbocharged SKYACTIV-G 2.5T engine delivers 20-percent increase in fuel-efficiency.

It is not just the car, KAICO has introduced All New CX9 2017 MY at very special price and is now on display in Kuwait Automotive Import Co's Mazda showroom. Visit to test drive and acknowledge the zoom-zoom experience of All-new Mazda CX9.



proress.



LAGOS POOR LEFT HOMELESS BY RUTHLESS MODERNIZATION BID

LAGOS: Efforts by Lagos authorities to turn Nigeria's chaotic commercial capital into a modern megacity have run into controversy after the demolition of an impoverished waterfront neighborhood left 30,000 people homeless.

With swanky private estates and a glittering new city under construction on land reclaimed from the Atlantic Ocean, housing for some of the 20 million people living in notoriously-dysfunctional Lagos appears to be getting better. But as the city undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis, many are experiencing the brutal reality of rapid urbanisation. The latest casualty was Otodo Gbame, a poor fishing community close to the upmarket southeastern district of Lekki, which was completely razed in early November as part of a growing drive to remove shanty towns.

Between November 9 and 11, the district was set alight then bulldozed, reducing tens of thou-

sands of homes to piles of smouldering wood and corrugated iron. At least three people died when armed police moved in with bulldozers, setting fire to the area and chasing some residents into the nearby lagoon, locals said. They say they were given no warning.

Now homeless but with nowhere else to go, residents huddle together miserably under makeshift structures built out of rubble. Mostly from the ethnic Egun tribe, they trace their roots to Benin but say they have been living in Lagos for over a century.

But like the vast majority of the city's poor, they do not have title deeds to prove it.

'We will fight this'

They accuse the state authorities of conspiring with a prominent Lagos family to seize the land and sell it to the highest bidder.

"They are not happy that we the poor are living close to them.

"Each time, they look through the windows of their mansions and see us, their anger rises," Toshiu Pascal, a pastor in the community, told AFP. "We are going to fight this injustice with the last drop of our blood." Otodo Gbame used to lie between upscale neighbourhood Lekki Phase 1 and Elegushi housing estate, an exclusive area where residents drive Mercedes cars and Range Rovers.

Pascal said more than 20 residents, including the community leader, had been detained for weeks "for instigating the violence." But Lagos authorities dismissed accusations they ordered the demolitions, claiming a fight between the Egun and their Yoruba neighbours caused the fire which burnt down the community. They said police only arrived on the scene to restore order and ensure that "the arson did not spread."

'Deliberately torched'

Governor Akinwunmi Ambode had in October hinted at a plan to demolish waterfront shanties in a move to rid the city of criminals, who hide there. But Amnesty International warned that such a move would risk leaving tens of thousands of people homeless.

And after the fires, the London-based watchdog said the community was "deliberately set alight", demanding an independent inquiry into the "forced evictions". "Lagos State Government is trying to evade its responsibilities to Otodo Gbame residents by denying involvement in the state's biggest forced evictions in recent times," Amnesty said, insisting that those responsible be prosecuted. Lagos has a history of demolishing entire neighborhoods. In 1990, the authorities demolished Maroko, a shanty town in the well-heeled suburb of Victoria Island, forcing some 300,000 out of their homes. On the site where it once stood, there now stands a popular South African shopping mall with international chains that caters to the city's elite. — AFP

VENEZUELA TO ISSUE BIGGER NOTES 'VERY SOON' AS INFLATION SURGES

CARACAS: President Nicolas Maduro said on Friday Venezuela would issue higher denomination bills "very soon" as soaring inflation and a crumbling currency leave the crisis-stricken country's largest note worth just 2 US cents on the black market.

Still, the long-awaited entry of 500 and 5,000 bolivar notes will only bring a brief respite amid rapid money printing and a weakening currency. Today 5,000 bolivars buy just over \$1 on the black market, which exists because Venezuela introduced currency controls in 2003 but does not offer enough dollars to meet demand. Venezuela is believed to have the world's highest inflation, although no data has been published for 2016. Money supply rose 12 percent in the last two weeks while the bolivar weak-

ened 65 percent in the last month.

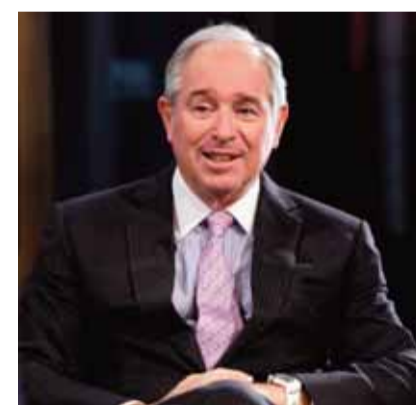
As a result, Venezuelans often carry backpacks full of bills and cash machines frequently run dry due to long queues. "Several million bills of 500 bolivars and then several million bills of 5,000 bolivars will enter circulation very soon," Maduro said in a televised address, noting that the central bank would provide details today and tomorrow.

Adding to the currency chaos, Venezuela's credit card readers, already shaky, suffered chronic malfunctions on Friday. Unable to process transactions, stores had to ask clients to use cash, transfers, or pay later. Maduro blamed a "cyberattack" and said he was sending the Segin intelligence service to Credicard, a payment processor, to take "all legal actions." — Reuters

TRUMP FORMS AN ADVISORY GROUP OF CEOs FOR INPUT ON JOBS

NEW YORK: President-elect Donald Trump on Friday announced the formation of an advisory group of more than a dozen CEOs and business leaders who will offer input on how to create jobs and speed economic growth. The President's Strategic and Policy Forum will hold its first meeting at the White House in the first week of February, shortly after Trump takes office on Jan. 20.

Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of the Blackstone Group investment firm, will lead the group. Trump has vowed to keep manufacturing jobs from leaving the country, and set a goal of growing the economy at 4 percent a year, about twice the average of recent years. "This forum brings together CEOs and business leaders who know what it takes to create jobs and drive economic growth," Trump said in a statement. "My administration is committed to drawing on private sector expertise and cutting the government red tape that is holding back our businesses from hiring, innovating, and expanding right here in America." — AP



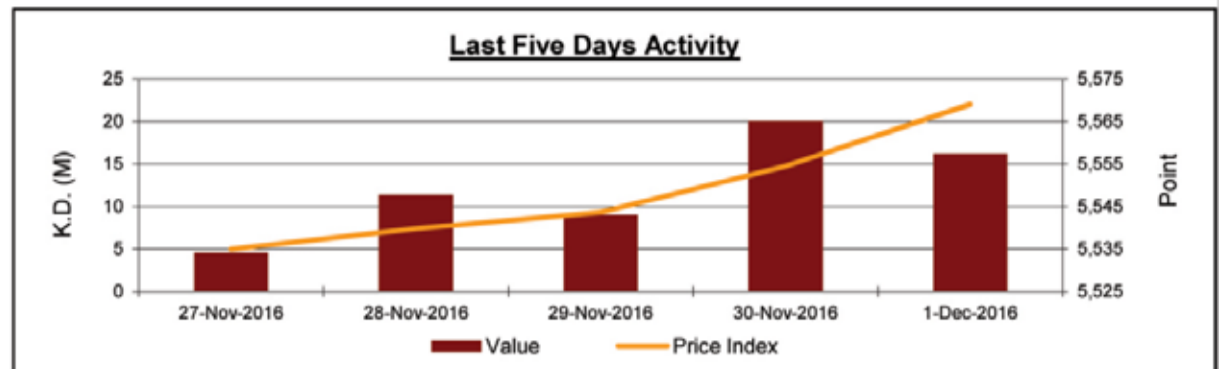
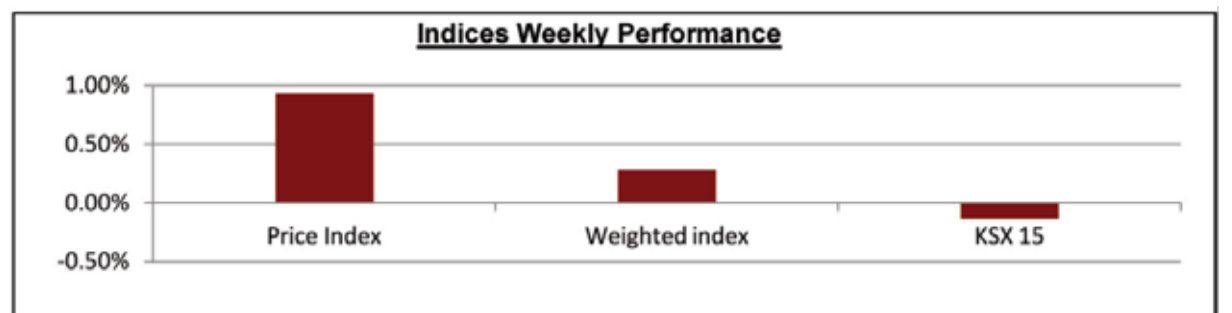
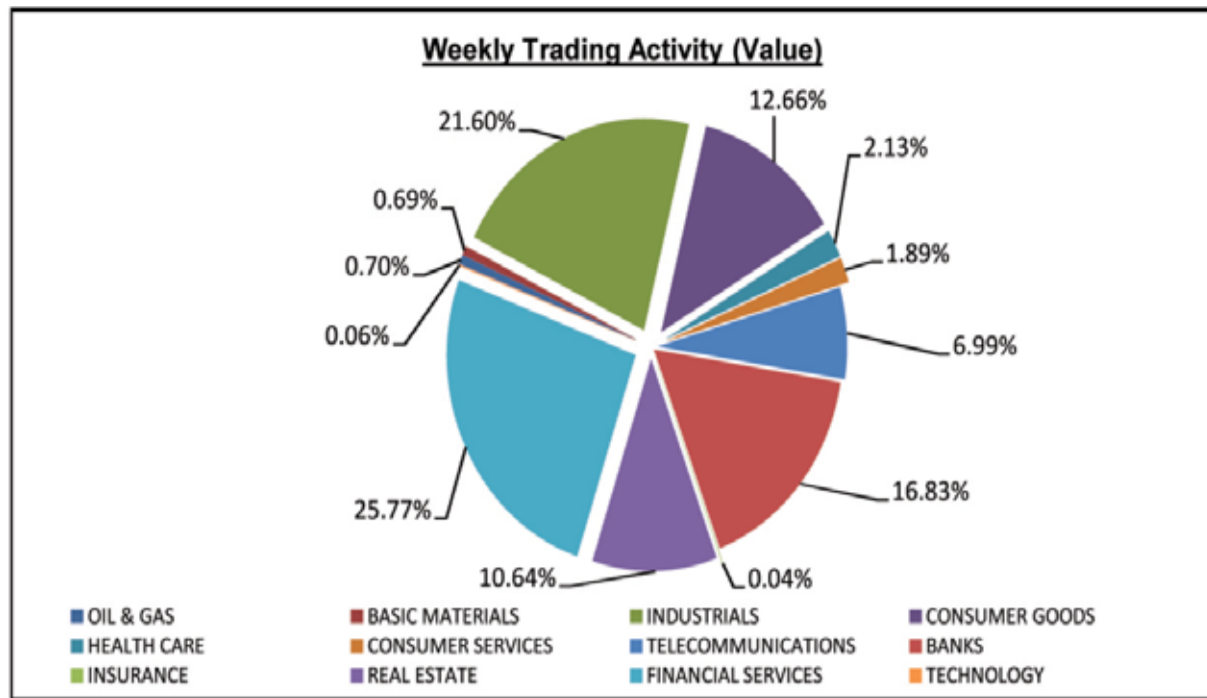
NEW YORK: Blackstone Group CEO Stephen Schwarzman is interviewed by Maria Bartiromo during her "Opening Bell with Maria Bartiromo" program, on the Fox Business Network, in New York. President-elect Donald Trump on Friday announced the formation of an advisory group, led by Schwarzman, of more than a dozen CEOs and business leaders who will offer input on how to create jobs and speed economic growth. —AP

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BOURSA KUWAIT STOCKS REMAIN MIXED

BAYAN WEEKLY MARKET REPORT

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait ended last week with mixed zone. The Price Index closed at 5,569.0 points, up by 0.94 percent from the week before closing, the Weighted Index increased by 0.28 percent after closing at 369.61 points, whereas the KSX-15 Index closed at 862.41 points down by 0.13 percent. Furthermore, the week's average daily turnover decreased by 15.45 percent, compared to the preceding week, reaching K.D. 12.24 million, whereas trading volume average was 102.52 million shares, recording a decrease of 20.48 percent.

The Price Index was able to record good gains and close in the green zone for the sixth consecutive week, in light of the speculative operations executed on the small-cap stocks especially the ones being traded under its book or par value. Also, the Weighted Index was able to end the weekly trading activity in the green zone as well, supported by the purchasing powers that were active on some leading stocks, especially the ones that recorded decreases in its prices during a week earlier. The KSX-15 Index however went against the current and ended the week with limited losses due to the profit collection operations executed on some leading stocks especially in the Banks sector.

As far as the daily activity; Boursa Kuwait indicators initiated the first session of the week with mixed closings, whereas the Price Index was able to realize increase supported by the active speculative operations that included some small-cap stocks, while the selling pressures witnessed by some leading stocks pushed the Weighted and KSX-15 indices to end the session in the losses area. Such performance came in light of a steep decline in the pumped liquidity into the market, where it dropped by more than 70 percent to reach K.D. 4.5 million, its lowest level in a month and one half month. Thereafter, the Boursa was able on Monday's session to increase as for all its indices, supported by the return of the purchasing operations executed on the leading stocks, on contrary with a noticeable increase in the trading levels,

MARKET ACTIVITY			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Ch. %
Volume	512,575,762	644,581,660	-20.48%
Value (K.D.)	61,222,674	72,411,492	-15.45%
Deals	12,501	15,402	-18.84%

MARKET CAPITALISATION (K.D.)			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Weekly Ch. %
	25,056,419,488	24,811,223,822	0.99%
			-0.83%

TOP GAINERS OF THE WEEK				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (fils)	Ch. %
OSOUL	60.00	50.00	10.0	20.00%
ALIMTIAZ	104.00	89.00	15.0	16.85%
IFAHR	150.00	130.00	20.0	15.38%
YIACO	435.00	380.00	55.0	14.47%
HUMANSOFT	2,160.00	1,900.00	260.0	13.68%

TOP LOOSERS OF THE WEEK				
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (fils)	Ch. %
OSOS	164.00	214.00	-50.0	-23.36%
BIHC	19.00	21.00	-2.0	-9.52%
SANAM	27.50	30.00	-2.5	-8.33%
SPEC	76.00	82.00	-6.0	-7.32%
ALDEERA	31.00	33.00	-2.0	-6.06%

where the volume grew by 117 percent and the value increased at the end of the session by 151 percent.

On the mid-week session, the three market indices returned to fluctuate once again, where the Price Index was able to continue its positive performance and closed the session in the green zone, supported by the continued speculative operations on the small-cap

stocks, especially the ones being traded below its book and par value, while the Weighted and KSX-15 indices recorded some losses by the end of the session under the influence of the profit collection operations executed on few leading stocks. The Boursa performance was not much different on the next session, as the three stock indices witnessed fluctuation as a result to the different traders' preferences,

BOURSA KUWAIT INDICES			
	Price Index	Weighted Index	KSX 15
Weekly	Last week	5,569.00	369.61
	Previous week	5,517.38	368.56
	Change (Point)	51.62	1.05
	Change (%)	0.94%	0.28%
Annual	Last year	5,615.12	381.70
	Change (Point)	-46.12	-12.09
	Change (%)	-0.82%	-3.17%
			-4.22%

amid a noticeable growth in the traded liquidity to reach KD20 million, up by 122 percent compared to Tuesday's session.

By the end of the week, the three market indices were able to realize gains in light of the purchasing trend that hit many previously traded stocks, especially the leading ones of which performance was reflected on all market indicators' performance especially the Weighted and KSX-15 indices, the most increasing ones by the end of the session.

At the end of last week, the market capitalization for the listed companies in the primary market reached K.D. 25.06 billion, up by .99 percent compared to its level in a week earlier, where it reached then K.D. 24.81 billion. On an annual level, the decline in the market cap for the listed companies contracted to reach 0.83 percent from its value as at end of 2015, where it reached then K.D. 25.27 billion.

As far as Boursa Kuwait annual performance, the price index ended last week recording 0.82 percent annual loss compared to its closing in 2015, while the weighted index decreased by 3.17 percent, and the KSX-15 recorded 4.22 percent loss.

Sectors' Indices

Nine of Boursa Kuwait's sectors ended last week in the green zone, while the other three recorded declines. Last week's highest gainer was the Basic Materials sector, achieving 4.37 percent growth rate as its index closed at 959.14 points. Whereas, in the second place, the Health Care sector's index closed at

1,267.54 points recording 2.87 percent increase. The Industrial sector came in third as its index achieved 2.38 percent growth, ending the week at 1,269.86 points.

On the other hand, the Technology sector headed the losers list as its index declined by 14.17 percent to end the week's activity at 699.03 points. The Banks sector was second on the losers' list, which index declined by 1.02 percent, closing at 821.54 points, followed by the Consumer Goods sector, as its index closed at 1,114.58 points at a weekly loss of 0.07 percent.

Sectors' Activity

The Financial Services sector dominated a total trade volume of around 225.14 million shares changing hands during last week, representing 43.92 percent of the total market trading volume. The Real Estate sector was second in terms of trading volume as the sector's traded shares were 24.51 percent of last week's total trading volume, with a total of around 125.61 million shares.

On the other hand, the Financial Services sector's stocks were the highest traded in terms of value; with a turnover of around KD 15.78 million or 25.77 percent of last week's total market trading value. The Industrial sector took the second place as the sector's last week turnover was approx. KD 13.23 million representing 21.60 percent of the total market trading value. —Prepared by the Studies & Research Department, Bayan Investment Co.

SECTORS' WEEKLY TRADING ACTIVITY				
Sector	Volume	To Market %	Value	To Market %
OIL & GAS	10,791,946	2.11%	430,138	0.70%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,544,553	0.30%	422,075	0.69%
INDUSTRIALS	80,952,527	15.79%	13,225,753	21.60%
CONSUMER GOODS	7,668,477	1.50%	7,751,176	12.66%
HEALTH CARE	3,042,273	0.59%	1,303,791	2.13%
CONSUMER SERVICES	9,336,041	1.82%	1,154,947	1.89%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	15,188,389	2.96%	4,279,410	6.99%
BANKS	32,333,540	6.31%	10,301,354	16.83%
INSURANCE	716,785	0.14%	25,529	0.04%
REAL ESTATE	125,606,840	24.51%	6,512,097	10.64%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	225,140,964	43.92%	15,777,841	25.77%
TECHNOLOGY	253,427	0.05%	38,564	0.06%

SECTORS INDICES PERFORMANCE				
Sector	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Weekly Ch. %	Annual Ch. %
OIL & GAS	781.41	778.08	0.43%	-4.56%
BASIC MATERIALS	959.14	918.97	4.37%	-2.76%
INDUSTRIALS	1,269.86	1,240.39	2.38%	21.75%
CONSUMER GOODS	1,114.58	1,115.31	-0.07%	1.80%
HEALTH CARE	1,267.54	1,232.21	2.87%	36.98%
CONSUMER SERVICES	920.44	912.42	0.88%	-8.75%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	625.83	616.15	1.57%	4.54%
BANKS	821.54	829.97	-1.02%	-9.43%
INSURANCE	956.17	946.16	1.06%	-15.16%
REAL ESTATE	833.76	822.08	1.42%	-11.37%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	574.59	568.98	0.99%	-3.49%
TECHNOLOGY	699.03	814.40	-14.17%	-14.77%

RALLY EBBS AS INVESTORS SEEK SAFETY AFTER WEAK WAGE DATA

WALL STREET WEEKLY REPORT

NEW YORK: Investors made a small move back to safer assets Friday afternoon after the government's November jobs report showed continued hiring, but weak wages.

Indexes finished little changed as real estate and household goods companies rose, but banks, which have soared since the presidential election, took losses. Most stocks finished higher, and the biggest gains went to companies that pay big dividends, similar to bonds. Investors also bought bonds, and prices rose and yields fell.

The dollar also weakened as investors expected less inflation. Thanks to a loss from Goldman Sachs, which closed at a nine-year high on Thursday, the Dow Jones industrial average dipped after closing at a record high a day ago. The jobs report called into question some of investors' hopes about the state of the economy, and they reversed some of the moves they've made since the presidential election three weeks ago.

"It suggests that inflationary pressures may be aren't building as quickly, at least on the wage side, as some had supposed," said Russ Koesterich, head of asset allocation for

BlackRock's Global Allocation Fund. He said investors want to see a combination of strong wage growth and stimulus spending to boost the economy in 2017. The weak wage figures throw that into doubt.

"You're less likely to see inflation build if people aren't getting paid more because they can't afford to spend more," said Koesterich. The Dow lost 21.51 points, or 0.1 percent, to 19,170.42. The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 0.87 points to 2,191.95. The Nasdaq composite added 4.55 points, or 0.1 percent, to 5,255.65.

The weak finish appeared to mark an end, at least for now, of the post-election rally for US stocks. The S&P 500 and Nasdaq fell this week after a three-week rally took them to record highs. The Dow finished little changed.

The Labor Department said US employers added 178,000 jobs in November as hiring remained steady. Investors have long expected that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates later this month, and the jobs report did nothing to dispel that notion. But fewer people looked for work and hourly wages slipped.

Bond prices, which have been falling sharply since the presidential election, rose. The yield

on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 2.30 percent from 2.45 percent. Lower bond yields pushed investors to buy utility and real estate companies and consumer goods makers, which are often compared to bonds because of their big dividend payments. When bond yields fall, those stocks become more appealing to investors seeking income. General Growth Properties rose 62 cents, or 2.5 percent, to \$25.46 and Exelon rose 84 cents, or 2.6 percent, to \$33.01. PepsiCo climbed \$1.57, or 1.6 percent, to \$100.60.

The drop in bond yields also affected banks because yields are linked to long-term interest rates. Lower interest rates mean banks can't make as much money from lending. Goldman Sachs fell \$3.27, or 1.4 percent, to \$223.36 and Citigroup gave up \$1.25, or 2.2 percent, to \$56.02.

The financial sector of the S&P 500 is the highest it's been since 2008, up 13 percent since the presidential election. Benchmark US crude added 62 cents, or 1.2 percent, to \$51.68 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, the standard for pricing international oils, picked up 52 cents, or 1 percent, to \$54.46 a barrel in London. The



NEW YORK: Trader Peter Costa (left) works at the post that handles Salesforce on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Friday. —AP

price of oil surged 12 percent this week after OPEC countries agreed to trim the production of oil next year. That was the biggest weekly rise in oil prices since February 2011.

The dollar fell to 113.67 yen. The euro rose to \$1.0660 from \$1.0645.

Starbucks shares slid \$1.30, or 2.2 percent, to \$57.21 after the coffee chain said Howard Schultz will step down as CEO in April. He will remain chairman, and Starbucks said he will focus on new ideas like high-end shops.

President and Chief Operating Officer Kevin Johnson will become CEO. Schultz gave up the CEO title in 2000, and investors feel Starbucks struggled until he became CEO again in 2008.

Human resources software company Workday gave a weak forecast. CEO Anel Bhusri said some customers have recently delayed completing large deals, partly because of "global uncertainties such as Brexit, the US presidential election, and pending elections in other G8 countries." —AP

ARAB AVIATION SUMMIT ANNOUNCES SPEAKERS FOR 2016 EDITION IN JORDAN

SHARJAH: Top executives from the regional aviation and tourism sector will gather in Jordan next week to explore latest industry developments and future trends at the Arab Aviation Summit, the most prominent aviation event in Middle East and North Africa (MENA), to be held on December 5th at the Dead Sea, Jordan. Taking place under the patronage of Her Excellency Lina Annab, Minister of Tourism and Antiques, Jordan, the Summit's agenda this year will focus on the theme 'Linking Cultures, Driving Economies'.

Amongst the line-up of aviation and tourism thought leaders participating in the event are Dr Bandar Fahad Al-Fehaid, President, Arab Tourism Organization of the Arab League, Abdel Wahab Teffaha, Secretary General, Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO), Marwan bin Jassim Al-Sarkal, CEO, Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), Aqel Biltaji, Mayor of Amman and Fouad Attar, Managing Director of Airbus Middle East amongst many others. Full agenda and speakers can be viewed on www.arabaviationsummit.com.

In addition, a number of prominent industry figures will join the summit to discuss trends that have influenced the



sector, and propose ways for better collaboration to propel aviation and tourism towards greater and sustained growth. 'The role of the private sector in developing Arab aviation and tourism' is one such panel discussion geared towards tapping into contributions from private enterprises in a sec-

tor driven by public funding. Panel engagements at the day-long Summit will be moderated by Richard Dean, Co-host of The Business Breakfast show on Dubai Eye 103.8 FM radio.

In addition, conversations will revolve around the role of tourism in promoting culture and diversifying the

economy of popular destinations, the need to review industry policies in the region and the future of aviation and tourism in the light of innovations in technology and social media.

"Airbus Middle East is on the front lines in helping sustain and drive the future growth of the regional aviation

industry. Being part of the Arab Aviation Summit offers us an ideal platform to engage with industry peers, contribute to the ongoing conversation and create new thought leadership initiatives that promotes the growth of the industry as a whole," said Fouad Attar, Managing Director of Airbus Middle East.

The event will also witness the inauguration of 'Airbus Little Engineer' Workshop - an award-winning initiative dedicated to nurturing young minds and enhancing public understanding of science, technology, engineering and mathematics through interactive and tailored programs.

Hailed as the 'voice of the industry', Arab Aviation Summit is an industry initiative organized annually to shed light on trends, insights and opportunities driving the continuous growth and development of the Arab aviation and tourism industry.

Key findings and outcomes from the summit are compiled and developed into a white paper report, which is later presented to regulators and decision makers from both public and private sectors, and followed up by a course of action.

KFH WINS 'BEST ISLAMIC BANK 2016' AWARD

GLOBAL ISLAMIC FINANCE AWARDS GIFA

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) won "Best Islamic Bank 2016" award by the awards committee of Global Islamic Finance Awards GIFA in recognition of its instrumental role in consolidating the pillars of sustainable growth of Islamic finance industry, yet an acknowledgment of the pioneering position of the bank in offering innovative sharia-compliant products and services.

Yousef Alghusain, Senior Manager Strategic Business Coordination received the award in the awards ceremony held in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. The award affirms KFH's success in offering an integrated system of technical, financial, and banking services, not to mention meeting the expectations of its clients. The bank has vast experience in balancing Sharia requirements with the latest banking technology. KFH's leadership in the field of Islamic banking, since it was the first



Yousef Alghusain receiving the award

Islamic bank in Kuwait, highlights the bank's fruitful efforts in expanding in various markets, which allowed it to become the best Islamic bank in the world.

KFH continues its outstanding performance across the Group banks in Bahrain, Turkey, Germany, Malaysia and Saudi with focusing on its businesses in Kuwait. KFH's

global success would have never been attainable, if the bank did not have a solid platform and high level of professionalism.

KFH has an impeccable record in arranging sukuk deals and leading financing for development projects in several vital sectors, which contributes in boosting the national economy.

It is noteworthy that Global Islamic Finance Awards are part of prestigious awards program to celebrate the success of Islamic financial services, yet to honor the best practices of Islamic finance industry in a bid to motivate the consistency of businesses with Shariah provisions and meeting customer expectations.

KFH was established in Kuwait in 1977 and is enlisted in the Kuwait Stock Exchange. KFH Group is a global pioneer in the field of Islamic banking services, where it offers a wide array of Islamic products and services, not to mention a high standard of innovation and client service.

KFH manages its operations in the GCC, Asia, and Europe through over 446 branches, including KFH-Turkey, in order to offer services for the bank's clients in Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Germany, Jordan, and Dubai.

KFH's mission is to achieve highest levels of excellence and innovation in the field of client service, while developing common interest for all those concerned with the financial institution. KFH's vision is to spearhead the global development in Islamic financial services, and to upgrade the bank into the level of becoming the most sustainable profitable Islamic bank in the world.

KFH's values include cementing leadership through all its businesses, including leadership in the Islamic banking services worldwide, through innovation and in client service and the development of its employees. In addition, KFH is committed to all its procedures, and to setting up long-life partnerships with the concerned authorities.



ETIHAD AVIATION GROUP MARKS 45TH UAE NATIONAL DAY

ABU DHABI: More than 2000 staff, their families and friends have joined a street festival at the home of Etihad Aviation Group as part of UAE National Day celebrations. Etihad Airways' guests are also in for a special National Day treat with chocolates being handed out on flights leaving Abu Dhabi on 2 December. The Abu Dhabi Police Music Band set the tone for a marquee event outside the group's Head Office by playing the UAE national anthem ahead of attendees enjoying Emirati dancing, a UAE themed photographic exhibition and traditional Emirati cuisine.

Hareb Almuhaury, Etihad Aviation Group's Senior Vice President, Corporate and International Affairs, said: "As we near the 45th anniversary of the UAE, it is a time to remember the founders of the country and to draw inspiration from the 'Spirit of the Union'. This country means so much in so many different ways to its diverse population."

Almuhaury added: "As the national airline of the UAE, Etihad Airways has worked closely with the government to help develop the country into a hub for aviation, hospitality, culture and commerce. UAE National Day is about celebrat-

ing these colossal achievements and looking forward to the exciting times ahead."

Food trucks and stalls were set up to add to the festival atmosphere and Etihad Airways Nursery took care of a children's play area with activities and games throughout the day. The festival also had a business component where local businesses were given the opportunity to display their products and services - alongside The Abu Dhabi Business Women Council and other entrepreneurs.

To provide an historical perspective, Emirates Heritage Club brought falcons, camels and horses to the event and representatives from the UAE General Women's Union were present, assisting women to display their home made perfumes and woven goods. Many of the Etihad staff had recorded messages for a "Thank You UAE" video, which was screened, in which people shared thoughts on what the country means to them.

On 2 December, guests on more than 140 Etihad Airways flights departing Abu Dhabi will be handed special National Day Patchi chocolates in recognition of the 45th anniversary. On long-haul flights, the airline's Flying Nannies will be on hand for face-painting the UAE flag.

Guests in Business and First Class arriving in Abu Dhabi on 2 December from GCC destinations can expect a special gift box incorporating traditionally-inspired perfumes from Mohamed Hilal Group. Dedicated National Day content will also appear in Aspire, the in-flight magazine for premium guests. Additionally, guests will be greeted by a National Day message on the inflight entertainment system and will notice a National Day theme running through the airline's social media channels.



ABU DHABI: Left to right opening the UAE National Day street festival at Etihad Aviation Group are: Sultan Mohamed Al Mahmoud, Vice President - Chairman's Program Management Office; Fatma Al Sahlawi, Head of UAE National Development; Ray Gammell, Group Chief People & Performance Officer; Ali Al Shamsi, Vice President Emiratisation Strategy; Mohammad Al Bulooki, Vice President Commercial UAE & GCC; Humaid Ibrahim Abdulla, Head of Government Relations.

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X-CITE LAUNCHES BIGGEST CAMPAIGN 'RUN FOR IT BEFORE IT RUNS OUT!'

KUWAIT: X-cite by Alghanim Electronics, the largest electronics retailer in Kuwait, is proud to announce its biggest campaign of the year, offering amazing savings and unbeatable prices that customers won't find anywhere else.

Loyal to its tradition of giving back to its esteemed customers by launching the most gratifying promotions, such as giving away more than "half a million dollars cash," X-cite is stepping it up by offering direct rewards to all customers with unbeatable offers unseen in Kuwait and discounts on a wide range of electronics and home appliances from the world's most beloved brands. Not to mention daily killer deals with crazy discounts up to 50 percent off.

The main challenge will be keeping track of the incredible offers available throughout X-cite's 18 showrooms and online store. Customers who don't want to miss those deals should follow their website xcite.com and social media channels where the daily deals will be announced; @xcitealghanim on Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat and Facebook: XcitebyAlghanim.

This exceptional campaign will run during the full month of December 2016, so customers are highly encouraged to use this window of opportunity by fulfilling their electronic needs while benefiting from outstanding savings and exclusive deals.

Run for it before it runs out!

GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 27 November 2016 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 20 November - 24 November 2016. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws each and every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.

The winners are:
(Sunday 20/11): Salah Sulaiman Othman Al-Nasralla, Safeeah Habib Abbas Mandani
(Monday 21/11): Ali Atiya Ariabi Khabat Al-Shemmari, Ali Abdulhasan Mada

(Tuesday 22/11): Sakina Faraj Fairouzi, Ali Khaled Yousef Al-Qabandi

(Wednesday 23/11): Hussain Ghazy Shahbaz, Saad Lafi Muhammad Naser Abdullah Al-Mutairi

(Thursday 24/11): Saadon Khalid Saadon Al-Rashedi, Munahi Sultan Rafaa Al-Mutairi

Gulf Bank's Al Danah 2016 draw line-up includes daily draws (2 winners per working day each receive KD1000). The final Al-Danah draw for KD1 million will be held on 5 January, 2017 whereby the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced. Open an Al-Danah account now or deposit more to increase your chances of winning the millionaire draw!

Five reasons why the Al Danah account is the Best:

- 1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million
- 2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000
- 3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day
- 4) The most chances to win
- 5) Only bank that transfers your chances to win from year to year

Only Al-Danah makes millionaires. Al-Danah also offers a number of unique services including: the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers who open an account and/ or deposit more will enter the draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2016 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must have an Al-Danah account containing at least KD 200; customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, transfer on line, or call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805 for assistance and guidance.

US MOVES TO BLOCK CHINESE PURCHASE OF GERMAN TECH FIRM AIXTRON

WASHINGTON: US President Barack Obama on Friday moved to block a Chinese company's purchase of German semiconductor equipment maker Aixtron by rejecting the inclusion of Aixtron's US business in the deal.

The US Treasury Department said a review by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) chaired by Obama found the risks posed by the deal, which could place sensitive technology with potential military applications in Chinese hands, were too great. "CFIUS and the president assess that the transaction poses a risk to the national security of the United States that cannot be resolved through mitigation," the Treasury said in a statement.

It said publicly traded Aixtron SE's expertise in technology key to making advanced compound semiconductors used for LED lighting, lasers and solar cells also has military applications. Washington does not want to see such

technology end up in the hands of the Chinese government-backed company which wants to buy Aixtron, Grand Chip Investment.

The Treasury said Aixtron's US business is an important contributor to that technology. In late October, the German government withdrew its initial approval for the 670 million euro (\$714 million) takeover after Washington raised security concerns. Citing German intelligence sources, Handelsblatt daily reported that the United States had expressed fears that China could use Aixtron technology to bolster its nuclear program. After receiving the information, the German economy ministry said on October 24 that it would reopen its review of the deal.

Chinese government role cited

The US Treasury said Friday that Grand Chip is a German company expressly set up for the deal and is "ultimately owned by investors in China,

some of whom have Chinese government ownership." It added that the deal would be financed by a unit of China IC Industry Investment Fund, a Chinese government-supported industrial investment fund designed to support the country's integrated circuit industry.

The Treasury statement did not say what military application of the German company's technology had concerned US officials. Aixtron's specialty is a technology for depositing thin layers of atoms on semiconductor wafers that are used in electronic devices and systems that produce, control and convert light. It is popularly used in making solar cells.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang warned against interference, in comments to AFP. "This acquisition you mentioned is a normal business activity," he said. "Since it's a normal commercial acquisition, it should follow the normal principles and the rules of the market. We hope that there will not be an

excessive political interpretation on this acquisition or political interference in it."

There was no immediate reaction from Aixtron or Grand Chip. In a November 21 US securities filing, the two said they were awaiting the US presidential review and that they "plan to continue to actively engage in further discussions to explore means of resolving the US national security concerns identified by CFIUS."

If the US rejected the deal, they said there were no assurances that they would be able to proceed with the transaction. CFIUS reviews foreign investments in US companies, and has both approved and turned down a number of Chinese takeovers in recent years.

In 2005 it blocked China National Offshore Oil Corporation's bid for Unocal, and in 2008 electronics giant Huawei dropped its offer for US communications company 3Com before an expected rejection by the committee. In 2014 it

approved Lenovo's purchase of IBM's computer server unit, but early this year its concerns led to Dutch electronics giant Philips dropping a planned \$2.8-billion majority share sale of its Lumileds lighting unit to Beijing-based GO Scale Capital.

Also early this year Chinese tech firm Unisplendour Corp dropped its \$3.8 billion offer for 15 percent of US hard disk maker Western Digital before a CFIUS review. But in August the committee gave its OK for state-owned China National Chemical Corp's \$43 billion takeover of Swiss pesticide and seed giant Syngenta.

The Treasury statement Friday said the CFIUS panel was not opposed to foreign investment and was only focused on national security issues. "The president's decision is specific to this transaction and is not a determination with regard to any other foreign direct investment from China or any other country," it said. —AFP

FCC: AT&T, VERIZON SHOULDN'T EXEMPT OWN APPS FROM DATA CAPS

NEW YORK: US regulators are calling out AT&T and Verizon for exempting their own video apps from data caps on customers' cellphones. This may not result in any changes in how the wireless carriers operate, however, as agency leaders appointed by Donald Trump, the incoming president, are expected to look more favorably on such practices.

The Federal Communications Commission sent letters to the country's biggest wireless carriers Thursday saying the way they handle the practice, known as "zero rating," can hurt competition and consumers. The agency had warned AT&T in November and said in its Thursday letter that AT&T's response did not ease its concerns.

Other services - say Hulu or Netflix - can pay Verizon and AT&T so that consumers could also use those apps without eating up cellphone data. The FCC says that could harm the market for streaming services as it makes it more expensive for internet companies to compete with video services that are owned by the carriers.

For example, the FCC estimates that a video service provider would have to pay AT&T \$16 a month for a customer who streamed video for 10 minutes a day without using up his data on the cellular network, or \$47 a month for a user watching a half-hour a day.

Adding in those costs makes it difficult for a rival to compete on price with AT&T's new online TV app, DirecTV Now, whose cheapest bundle costs consumers \$35 a month, wrote Jon Wilkins, the head of the

FCC's wireless bureau. Competing video providers would also be at a disadvantage if they didn't zero-rate their services at all, as consumers could need to pay for more data to watch.

AT&T Inc. said Friday that exempting apps like DirecTV Now from data caps saves customers money, and the FCC shouldn't put a stop to that. Verizon Communications Inc. said its practices are good for consumers and comply with regulations. Verizon lets wireless customers watch its go90 video app and NFL football, for which it has exclusive mobile rights, without using up data.

The warnings come in the final days of the FCC under President Barack Obama's administration, which has enacted regulations intended to prevent cable companies from playing favorites with internet services.

The agency under Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress are expected to roll back or enforce more leniently such measures. Ajit Pai, a Republican commissioner at the FCC who is seen as a candidate to be the next FCC chairman, underscored that point in a statement Friday. He said the FCC's zero-rating warnings were "yet another broadside against free data for consumers" and warned that actions taken by the FCC now could be undone by a newly staffed FCC after Trump takes office.

The FCC still has to make a final finding on whether the zero-rating practices of AT&T and Verizon are a problem. The companies could appeal that. —AP



WASHINGTON: In this Feb. 17, 2016, file photo, President Barack Obama, joined by from left, Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker, former IBM CEO Sam Palmisano, former National Security Adviser Tom Donilon, and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, talks to media in the Oval Office of the White House. —AP

PANEL URGES BETTER CYBERSECURITY TO PRESIDENT-ELECT TRUMP

OBAMA'S MIXED LEGACY ON CYBERSECURITY IN QUESTION

WASHINGTON: A presidential commission on Friday made 16 urgent recommendations to improve the nation's cybersecurity, including creating a nutritional-type label to help consumers shop wisely and appointing a new international ambassador on the subject - weeks before President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The release of the 100-page report follows the worst hacking of US government systems in history and accusations by the Obama administration that Russia meddled in the US presidential election by hacking Democrats.

The Presidential Commission on Enhancing National Cybersecurity urged immediate action within two to five years and suggested the Trump administration consider acting on some proposals within its first 100 days.

The commission recommended that Trump create an assistant to the president for cybersecurity, who would report through the national security adviser, and establish an ambassador for cybersecurity, who would lead efforts to create international rules. It urged steps, such as getting rid of traditional passwords, to end the threat of identity theft by 2021 and said Trump's administration should train 100,000 new cybersecurity workers by 2020.

Other ideas included helping consumers to judge products using an independent nutritional-type label for technology products and services. "What we've been doing over the last 15 to 20 years simply isn't working, and the problem isn't going to be fixed simply by adding more money," said Steven Chabinsky, a commission member and the global chair of the data, privacy and cybersecurity prac-

tice for White & Case LLP, an international law firm.

He said the group wanted the burden of cybersecurity "moved away from every computer user and handled at higher levels," including internet providers and product developers who could ensure security by default and design "for everyone's benefit."

Transition memo

The White House requested the report in February and intended it to serve as a transition memo for the next president. The commission included 12 of what the White House described as the brightest minds in business, academia, technology and security. It was led by Tom Donilon, Obama's former national security adviser.

The panel studied sharing information with private companies about cyber threats, the lack of talented American security engineers and distrust of the US government by private businesses, especially in Silicon Valley. Classified documents stolen under Obama by Edward Snowden, a contractor for the National Security Agency, revealed government efforts to hack into the data pipelines used by US companies to serve customers overseas.

One commissioner, Herbert Lin of Stanford University, said some senior information technology managers distrust the federal government as much as they distrust China, widely regarded as actively hacking in the US.

Additional action

President Barack Obama said in a written statement after meeting with Donilon that his administration will take additional action "wherever possible" to build on its efforts make progress before he leaves office next month. He urged Trump and the next

Congress to treat the recommendations as a guide.

"Now it is time for the next administration to take up this charge and ensure that cyberspace can continue to be the driver for prosperity, innovation, and change both in the United States and around the world," Obama said.

It was not immediately clear whether Trump would accept the group's recommendations. Trump won the election on promises to reduce government regulations, although decades of relying on market pressure or asking businesses to voluntarily make their products and services safer have been largely ineffective.

Trump's presidential campaign benefited from embarrassing disclosures in hacked emails stolen from the Democratic National Committee, Hillary Clinton's campaign staff and others, and Trump openly invited Russian hackers to find and release tens of thousands of personal emails that Clinton had deleted from the private server she had used to conduct government business as secretary of state. He also disputed the Obama administration's conclusion that Russia was responsible for the Democratic hackings.

Though Trump is a prolific user of online social media services, especially Twitter, he is rarely seen using a computer. His campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, tweeted a photograph Monday of Trump working on an Apple laptop inside his office at Trump Tower. He testified in a deposition in 2012 that he did not own a personal computer or smartphone, and in another deposition earlier this year said he deliberately does not use email.

Trump has already promised his own study by a "Cyber Review Team" of

people he said he will select from military, law enforcement and private sectors. He said his team will develop mandatory cyber awareness training for all US government employees, and he has proposed a buildup of US military offensive and defensive cyber capabilities that he said will deter foreign hackers.

The new report suggested that the government should remain the only organization responsible for responding to large-scale attacks by foreign countries.

Obama has a mixed legacy on cybersecurity.

Under Obama, hackers stole personal data from the US Office of Personnel Management on more than 21 million current, former and prospective government employees, including details of security-clearance background investigations for federal agents, intelligence employees and others. The White House also failed in its efforts to convince Congress to pass a national law - similar to laws passed in some states - to require hacked companies to notify affected customers.

But the Obama administration also became more aggressive about publicly identifying foreign governments it accused of hacking US victims, arrested some high-profile hackers overseas, successfully shut down some large networks of hacked computers used to attack online targets, enacted but never actually used economic sanctions against countries that hacked American targets and used a sophisticated new cyber weapon called Stuxnet against Iran's main nuclear enrichment facilities.

Congress passed a new law in late 2015 to encourage companies and the government to share information about online threats. —AP



PHILADELPHIA: In this Oct. 17, 2012, photo, an AT&T logo is displayed on an AT&T Wireless retail store front. —AP

GERMAN PARLIAMENT CHIEF TO OK PROBE OF WIKILEAKS DOCUMENTS

BERLIN: The speaker of the German Parliament is planning to approve a criminal investigation into the leak of confidential documents relating to US intelligence activities in the country.

The documents, posted online Thursday by WikiLeaks, came from a parliamentary committee's inquiry into the relationship between German authorities and the National Security Agency. The inquiry was launched a year after former NSA contractor Edward Snowden revealed

details of secret US eavesdropping programs in 2013.

Parliamentary officials Friday confirmed German media reports that Speaker Norbert Lammert would give prosecutors permission to investigate the leak of some 90 gigabytes of data. Patrick Sensburg, who chairs the panel and is a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's party, was quoted by Funke Media Group as saying that a "foreign hacking attack can't be ruled out." —AP

1ST US OFFSHORE WIND FARM TO BEGIN PRODUCTION WITHIN DAYS

PROVIDENCE: There has been a hiccup at the nation's first offshore wind farm as it prepares to start delivering power.

Deepwater Wind, which owns the five-turbine farm off Block Island, Rhode Island, says one turbine is not turning. But spokeswoman Meaghan Wims said Friday that will not delay the start-up and the other turbines will begin delivering power for the grid within days.

The company built the wind farm to power about 17,000 homes. The project costs about \$300 million, according to the company. "We're truly proud of the wind farm's performance to date and to have completed a successful test phase," Deepwater Wind CEO Jeffrey Grybowski said in a statement. "The

wind farm's performance has been exceptional, even in some of the harshest weather conditions offshore."

Wims said that since the four months of testing is complete, commercial operations can begin soon. She said the turbine's generator was damaged by a drill bit left inside, which was discovered during recent tests. She said it will be repaired and working "in the near term."

The damage was first reported by ecoRI News. Deepwater Wind planned to open the wind farm last month, but said it was still finalizing approvals. Wims said it's not unusual to take a turbine offline, and that one or more turbines will be turned off during maintenance and repairs from time to time, while others are operating. —AP

APPLE FOUNDER STREET NAME SHAKES PARIS SUBURB TO THE CORE

PARIS: He changed technology and how the world communicates. Now, five years after he died, Apple founder Steve Jobs may be remembered in another way - on a Paris street. "Rue Steve Jobs" is among names shortlisted for one of the new roads in the French capital's southeastern 13th arrondissement that will lead to a new incubator for hi-tech start-ups.

The tech titan's name was put forward by the district's socialist mayor who credited Jobs-whose company altered the face of computing, revolutionised music with the iPod and

launched the iPhone and iPad with "changing our daily lives". But the mayor, Jerome Coumet, has faced a backlash from elected Communists, who in a statement said "the reality of the legacy" of Jobs was "insufficient wages" and "forced overtime" for Apple subcontractors.

They also hit out at what they alleged was the technology giant's "use of illegal tax arrangements" across the globe. Coumet said he was not seeking controversy. "I wanted a name that speaks to as many people as possible," he said.

Among other suggestions was Alan Turing, in memory of the British mathematician and computer scientist whose wartime work allowed the allies to crack German codes and defeat Nazism. Grace Murray Hopper, an American computer scientist and former Navy rear admiral who pioneered coding, is also proposed.

Currently dubbed Station F, names for the start-up hub are to be discussed by Paris council officials in December, before it opens in March next year. —AP

SUPREME COURT TAKES UP HOSPITAL PENSION DISPUTE

WASHINGTON: The Supreme Court will decide whether some of the nation's largest health providers can rely on their church affiliations to avoid complying with federal laws covering pension benefits for workers.

The justices agreed Friday to take up cases involving three nonprofit hospital systems being sued for underfunding their employee pension plans. Lower courts ruled against the hospitals Dignity Health, Advocate Health Care Network and Saint Peter's Healthcare System, saying their pensions do not qualify as "church plans" exempt from the law. That could force them and other hospitals to spend billions to make up funding shortfalls.

The hospitals argue that several federal agencies for years have assured them that they are in fact exempt. Workers have filed dozens of similar lawsuits over pension management across the country against hospitals affiliated with religious groups. The lawsuits argue that the hospitals are shirking legal safeguards that could mean losses of retirement benefits for tens of thousands of workers.

Narrow exemptions

Pension plans must be fully funded and insured under federal law, but Congress carved out narrow exemptions for churches and other religious organizations. In the three cases taken up Tuesday, appeals courts in San Francisco,

Chicago and Philadelphia have all ruled that the exemption applies only to plans that were established by a church.

The hospitals claim the law also exempts plans associated with or controlled by a church, whether or not a church itself created the plan. The Supreme Court in September temporarily blocked the ruling against Dignity Health from taking effect while justices decided whether to review the case. Workers suing the hospital say the pension plan is underfunded by \$1.2 billion.

Dignity Health is the fifth-largest provider of health care in the country, employing more than 60,000 people. It formed from the merger of two Catholic hospital systems in California in 1986.

Advocate Health Care Network is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Church of Christ. It employs about 30,000 people at twelve hospitals and more than 250 inpatient and outpatient health care sites in Illinois.

Saint Peter's is owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, and runs a hospital and other health care facilities employing more than 2,800 people. The cases are Advocate Health Care v. Stapleton, 16-74, Saint Peter's Healthcare v. Kaplan, 16-86 and Dignity Health v. Rollins, 16-258. They will be argued in the spring.

This story has been corrected to note that the full Supreme Court, not only Justice Anthony Kennedy, temporarily blocked the Dignity Health ruling. — AP



KANSAS CITY: In this Sept. 29, 2015 file photo, people participate in a rally to show support for Planned Parenthood, organized by MoveOn and called "Pink Out Kansas City," as an anti-abortion demonstrator stands amongst them, at the Country Club Plaza. — AP

OHIO PULLS LICENSE OF 1 OF STATE'S LAST FEW ABORTION CLINICS FAILED TO OBTAIN A REQUIRED TRANSFER AGREEMENT

COLUMBUS: Ohio has revoked the operating license of one of the state's few remaining abortion clinics on the grounds that it failed to obtain a required transfer agreement with a nearby hospital for emergencies.

Women's Med Center of Dayton has 15 days to appeal the order, which was signed Wednesday by Rick Hodges, the director of the Department of Health. The clinic said it will do so. Hodges said the license is being revoked because the facility failed to name an adequate number of physicians to provide the backup care necessary to qualify for an exception to the hospital rule. His order fell in line with the recommendations of an independent hearing officer.

Ohio Right to Life spokeswoman Katie Franklin said the state's largest anti-abortion group is grateful to Hodges and the department for holding Women's Med accountable. Right to Life and its local affiliate called last week for the state medical board to reopen its investigation into the case of a woman there who the state found had her pregnancy terminated without proper consent. "We're very grateful to see that action is being taken on this facility, and we are hoping it will spare thousands of lives in Dayton

in the long run," Franklin said.

NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio deputy director Jaime Miracle said that the group will stand behind the Dayton center and the medical services it provides to local residents and that it will go to court if necessary. "We will not let politics get in the way of health care," Miracle said. Ohio requires ambulatory surgical facilities to have emergency backup agreements with nearby hospitals or to obtain a variance from that requirement.

Intimidated by abortion opponents

Public hospitals may not participate in transfer agreements and Dayton-area obstetricians have been intimidated by abortion opponents as the clinic sought additional backup doctors.

That and other restrictions have prompted closures of clinics around Ohio. An Associated Press review last year found that the number of abortion providers in Ohio had shrunk by half amid changes to the law over the previous four years. Nine clinics, mostly in big cities, now provide complete abortion services, and two others offer limited options to women seeking the procedure.

Jennifer Branch, the clinic's attorney, said

the state Health Department allowed Women's Med to operate with two backup doctors for emergencies for many years. In 2015, the department requested three doctors and the clinic complied. Weeks later, she said, they said four would be required.

The anti-abortion group Created Equal had launched a campaign aimed at calling out doctors involved in abortions, which included posters, mailers and vehicles circulating through the doctors' neighborhoods publicizing their names.

"Other ob/gyn's in the community saw what was going on and didn't want to be part of it," Branch said. "Since then, they've operated with three back-up doctors and haven't had any problems."

Hodges' journal entry said the transfer agreement requirement is intended to provide for "the safe and immediate transfer of patients when medical care is needed beyond that which can be provided in the facility."

This story has been corrected to show the name of the clinic is Women's Med Center of Dayton, not Women's Medical Center of Dayton, and to show that two, not three, Ohio facilities offer limited abortion services. — AP

POLL: ONLY ABOUT 1 IN 4 WANTS TRUMP TO REPEAL HEALTH LAW

WASHINGTON: Only about 1 in 4 people in the United States wants President-elect Donald Trump to entirely repeal his predecessor's health care law that extended coverage to millions, according to a poll.

The postelection survey released Thursday by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation also found hints of a pragmatic shift among some Republican foes of President Barack Obama's law.

While 52 percent of Republicans say they want the law completely repealed, that share is down from 69 percent just last month, before the election. More Republicans now say they want the law "scaled back" under Trump and the Republican-controlled, with that share more than doubling from 11 percent before the Nov. 8 election to 24 percent after.

Kaiser CEO Drew Altman said the foundation's polling experts aren't quite sure what to make of that finding. The organization is a clearinghouse for information and analysis about the health care system.

It could be that some Republicans "got a protest vote off their chests, and they're done with that," Altman said. "They now have a more moderate position."

Trump called the Affordable Care Act a "disaster" during an election campaign that saw big premium increases announced in its closing days. After the vote, Trump has been saying he'd like to keep parts of the law.

Open enrollment

With open enrollment underway, no changes are expected next year for the more than 10 million people currently covered through HealthCare.gov and state markets that offer subsidized private insurance. An additional estimated 9 million low-income people covered by Medicaid in states that expanded the program are also safe for now.

HealthCare.gov sign-ups are running a little higher than last year - 2.1 million through last Saturday, as compared with about 2 million. But the share of new customers is down, 24 percent this year versus 35 percent last year at about the same time. The markets need an influx of younger, healthier consumers to help keep premiums in check.

On Capitol Hill, Republican leaders want to quickly repeal the law before an interlude and segue to a replacement. That approach carries political risk because the replacement legislation could bog down and

there's no guarantee of success. The uncertainty could disrupt coverage for millions by destabilizing fragile insurance markets.

The poll found some skepticism about that approach. Forty-two percent of those who want the 2010 law repealed said lawmakers should wait until they figure out the details of a replacement plan before doing so.

Overall, 30 percent said the new president and Congress should expand what the law does, and 19 percent said it should be implemented as is. On the other side, 26 percent said the law should be entirely repealed and 17 percent called for it to be scaled back.

Among Trump voters, 8 in 10 viewed the health care law unfavorably, and half wanted it entirely repealed.

As Republicans start to make changes in health care, potentially revamping Medicare and Medicaid as well, the politics of the issue could turn against them, Altman said. "They are going to go from casting stones to owning the problem," he said.

The poll found majorities across party lines support many of the health care law's provisions, but not its requirement that individuals have coverage or risk fines, and its mandate that medium-to-large employers pay fines if they don't offer health insurance.

Among the provisions with support across party lines:

- Allowing young adults to stay on a parent's insurance until age 26.
- No copayments for many preventive services.
- Closing the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap known as the "doughnut hole."
- Financial help for low- and moderate-income people to pay their insurance premiums.
- A state option to expand Medicaid to cover more low-income adults.
- Barring insurance companies from denying coverage because of a person's medical history.
- Increased Medicare payroll taxes for upper-income earners.

The telephone poll was conducted from Nov. 15-21 among a nationally representative random digit dial sample of 1,202 adults, including people reached by landlines and cellphones. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for the full sample. For subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. — AP

HOUSE OKS BILL BOLSTERING MEDICAL RESEARCH, DRUG APPROVALS

WASHINGTON: The House easily approved a sweeping biomedical bill Wednesday that would help drug and medical device companies win swifter government approval of their products, boost disease research and drug-abuse spending and revamp federal mental health programs.

The compromise, which envisions spending \$6.3 billion over the next decade, was condemned by consumer groups and some Democrats as a present to drugmakers that promised only paltry spending increases for underfunded federal programs.

But their objections were overwhelmed by an alliance among Republicans, many Democrats and the White House for a 996-page measure that bore wins for both parties. The Senate's expected final approval next week would mark an uncommon episode of cooperation between the GOP-run 114th Congress - which plans to adjourn next week - and President Barack Obama in their dwindling days in office.

The vote was 392-26

"We are on the cusp of something special, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform how we treat disease," said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and an author of the legislation.

Not everyone agreed

Rep. Rose DeLauro, D-Conn., said that while the bill contained "noble goals that I share," its relaxation of some standards for federal drug approvals was dangerous and "neglects the very people clinical trials are meant to help, that is the patients."

No. 2 Senate Democratic leader Richard Durbin of Illinois said he was "totally underwhelmed" by the bill's extra money, and said its cuts in a disease prevention fund created under



MACKINAC ISLAND, Michigan: In this Sept 19, 2015, file photo Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., is seen during a congressional panel at the 2016 Mackinac Republican Leadership Conference. — AP

Obama's health care law to finance new medical research displayed "a warped sense of justice."

But Democratic hopes - and leverage - for winning more money and consumer protections faded with Republican Donald Trump's presidential election triumph. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., flatly said his chamber will send the measure to Obama, and Durbin said he expected Senate passage.

'Not Perfect'

In a written statement, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the bill "is not perfect" but contains "advances in health that far outweigh these concerns." He said the Senate should approve it quickly.

The bill includes an additional \$4.8 billion

over the next 10 years for the National Institutes of Health. The medical research agency spends around \$32 billion annually, and supporters complain that spending cuts imposed by Congress and rising research costs mean its budget has eroded in value since the early 2000s. "A couple billion dollars doesn't go very far in cancer research" over 10 years, said Lisa Plymate, a director of the liberal-leaning National Physicians Alliance. Much of the NIH money would be for Obama's precision medicine initiative, aimed at tailoring drugs for people's genes and lifestyles, and research on cancer, a focus of Vice President Joe Biden, whose son Beau died of the disease in 2015.

The bill would also sharpen the federal focus on mental health efforts, such as creating new posts for government officials who would coordinate such initiatives. But it has little new money for those programs. "We didn't get everything we needed," said Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Pa., sponsor of those provisions. "We'll keep pushing that."

The measure included funds and an accelerated Food and Drug Administration approval process for techniques aimed at regenerating cells. McConnell has supported those provisions, but critics have condemned the treatments as ineffective.

The Food and Drug Administration would get \$500 million to streamline approval processes for drugs and medical devices. States would get \$1 billion over the next two years for preventing and treating abuse of addictive drugs like opioids, a problem that is surging in GOP and Democratic represented communities around the country. "The No. 1 thing we can do right now is to make sure we're dedicating resources to expand access to treatment all across the country," Michael Botticelli, director of the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy, said in a conference call with reporters. — AP



WASHINGTON: In this Oct 24, 2016, file photo, the HealthCare.gov 2017 web site home page. — AP

OBAMA: HEALTH CARE ACT IS LAW, US CAN'T GO BACKWARD

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama is urging the public to help save his health care law, which is in serious danger of being repealed under President-elect Donald Trump.

In a Facebook Live appearance, Obama says the Affordable Care Act has improved millions of lives over the six years it's been the "law of the land." He says the country can't go "backward." Obama is also encouraging viewers to

tell Republicans in Congress "we want to build on the progress we've made, not abandon it."

Congressional Republicans have tried for years to repeal the law. The chances of success increased with Trump's election. He's called the law a disaster. Obama is also urging people who want to have health insurance on Jan. 1 to sign up at www.healthcare.gov by the Dec. 15 deadline. — AP

LONDON MAYOR ISSUES AIR POLLUTION ALERT FOR 1ST TIME

LONDON: London's mayor has issued air quality alerts across the capital for the first time because of high pollution levels. The alerts are being displayed Thursday at 2,500 bus stop and river pier information signs and at the entrances of all 270 subway stations. Dozens of signs next to the busiest main roads into London instruct drivers to switch engines off when stationary to reduce emissions.

The air quality forecast was provided by King's College London, which said an area of high pressure over Britain has led to poor pollutant dispersal. It said a "high" pollution level meant anyone experiencing sore eyes, cough or sore throat should reduce their outdoor activities.

It was the first time the alerts were issued since Mayor Sadiq Khan announced the initiative in August. — AP

US HEALTHCARE TAB HITS \$3.2TN; FASTEST GROWTH IN 8 YEARS

WASHINGTON: The nation's health care tab grew at the fastest rate in eight years in 2015, driven by the coverage expansion in President Barack Obama's law and by costly prescription drugs, the government said Friday. The growth of 5.8 percent in 2015 boosted total health care spending to \$3.2 trillion. That's an average of \$9,990 per person, although the vast share of that money is spent caring for the sickest patients.

Health spending grew about 2 percentage points faster than the overall economy in 2015, said the report from nonpartisan economic experts at the Department of Health and Human Services. That's a problem because it makes it harder for government programs, employers, and individuals to afford the level of health care that Americans are used to having.

The report was disappointing news for the outgoing Obama administration, which had enjoyed a long stretch of historically low increases in health care spending, and had sought to credit its 2010 health care overhaul for taming costs. It's a reality check for President-elect Donald Trump, who did not focus much on health care during his campaign and implied that problems could be easily fixed.

Struggled for decades

America has struggled for decades to balance health care cost, access, and quality. Obama's law made significant strides to expand access, and the report found nearly 91 percent of US residents now have coverage. But the problem of costs has re-emerged. That's partly because people with health insurance use more medical care than the uninsured, who tend to postpone going to the doctor. Some of the newly insured turned out to be sicker than those who were already covered.

The report "casts further doubt on the extent of a permanent slowdown in health cost growth," said economist Eugene Steuerle of the nonpartisan Urban Institute.

In a milestone for data-watchers, the report found that the federal government became the largest payer for health care in 2015. Washington accounted for 29 percent of overall spending. That was followed by households (28 percent), businesses (20 percent), and state and local governments (17 percent). In doing the analysis, the HHS experts count the employee share of premiums for job-based insurance as spending by households.

Spending by private health insurance plans increased by 7.2 percent in 2015, and Medicaid spending grew by 9.7 percent. In both cases, the health care law was a driver. Nine million people had private insurance through the health care law's subsidized markets, and nearly 10 million had Medicaid coverage as a result of the law. Increases in Medicaid spending will be a problem for states. Starting next year, states that expanded the program under the health law must gradually pick up a share of the costs.

Spending on prescription drugs dispensed through pharmacies increased by 9 percent in 2015. Although that rate of growth was less than in 2014, the report said drug spending grew faster than any other category, including hospitals and doctors. It wasn't only pricey new drugs for hepatitis C infection driving the trend, but also new cancer drugs and price increases for older brand-name and generic drugs.

Bright spot in the report

Medicare was a bright spot in the report, growing only by 4.5 percent, despite roughly 10,000 baby boomers a day reaching eligibility age. Calculated on a per-beneficiary basis, Medicare spending grew by just 1.7 percent.

Former White House official Ezekiel Emanuel said that's partly due to the Obama administration's stewardship. Not only did the health care law cut payments to service providers, it set in motion a series of initiatives that aim to reward quality, improve coordination and penalize poor performance. — AP

KEY HOUSE CHAIRMAN: GOP WILL CHANGE MEDICARE, TO 'SAVE' IT 'MEDICARE GUARANTEE'

WASHINGTON: The chairman of a key House committee is pledging that congressional Republicans will change Medicare in order to save it.

GOP Rep. Kevin Brady of Texas, head of the Ways and Means Committee, insisted Thursday that Republicans won't be deterred by the politics, even though Donald Trump won election as president on promises to protect the popular health care program for older Americans, and Democrats are already warning of a "war on seniors."

"Democrat tactics of 'Medicare' have been around a long time. They've stopped working," Brady told The Associated Press in an interview in the Capitol. "Voters have figured out Republicans want to save Medicare for the long term, and they know that those who say everything's just fine with it aren't leveling with them."

But Brady also said the GOP will move cautiously on Medicare, starting with smaller changes. And he declined to say when the party might try to pass "premium support," the controversial approach that would, over time, remake Medicare into a voucher-like program that would force seniors to buy health insurance on the open market.

'Medicare guarantee'

Critics say such coverage would take away the "Medicare guarantee" and give seniors subsidies whose value won't keep up with inflation. "I think it's important, especially in health care, to take this step by step," Brady said. "Whether it's the replacement of the Affordable Care Act, how we make Medicaid work better, how we save Medicare for the long term."

"So I envision 2017 as taking steps, small, in preparing for larger steps to save Medicare for the long term," he said, mentioning early reforms in the areas of post-acute care - nursing homes, home health care agencies and rehabilitation facilities. "I'm absolutely confident, in fact I'm optimistic, that by focusing on quality and innovation in Medicare that we can save that program for the long term in a very positive way," Brady said.

Democrats have already made clear that they view the GOP focus on Medicare as a ripe political target. The incoming Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer of New York, fired an opening salvo earlier this week when he declared at a news conference: "It's clear that Washington Republicans are plotting a war on seniors next year. Every senior, every American should hear this loudly and clearly: Democrats will not let them win that fight."

"We say to our Republicans that want to privatize Medicare, go try it, make our day," Schumer said.

Democrats have had political success in the past by attacking GOP plans to overhaul entitlements. Right after getting re-elected in 2004, President George W. Bush held a news conference in which he claimed a mandate for change - and that meant entitlements. The ongoing Iraq war and that push on Medicare and Social Security cost the GOP control of the House and Senate in 2006.

Now, with Republicans in control of both chambers of Congress and the White House next year, Democrats clearly view those same issues as their path back into the majority.

The lesson is not lost on Republicans, and several Senate Republicans said this week that they would not be eager to make Medicare changes their top priority, especially given their plans to move quickly to repeal President Barack Obama's health care law. "I think the first priority is Obamacare and that's going to take most of the oxygen out of the room," said Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. "The Medicaid issue, Medicare is very controversial. We were committed to repealing Obamacare, and that's what we've got to do first." Medicare, in place more than a half-century, is



WASHINGTON: House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas., speaks during an interview with The Associated Press on Capitol Hill on Thursday. — AP

considered the government's flagship health insurance program. It covers about 57 million people, including 48 million seniors and 9 million disabled people. Medicare has strong public support across party lines and generations.

Adding to the political complications for the GOP, Trump campaigned as a protector of Medicare, saying in an interview with The Daily Signal last year: "I'm not going to cut Social

Security like every other Republican and I'm not going to cut Medicare or Medicaid. Every other Republican is going to cut."

But Trump already appears to be shifting. His transition website mentions modernizing Medicare, though without details, and his nominee for secretary of Health and Human Services, GOP Rep. Tom Price of Georgia, has also backed the premium support idea. — AP

'MAGIC MUSHROOM' PSYCHEDELIC MAY EASE ANXIETY, DEPRESSION

NEW YORK: The psychedelic drug in "magic mushrooms" can quickly and effectively help treat anxiety and depression in cancer patients, an effect that may last for months, two small studies show.

It worked for Dinah Bazer, who endured a terrifying hallucination that rid her of the fear that her ovarian cancer would return. And for Estalyn Walcoff, who says the drug experience led her to begin a comforting spiritual journey.

The work released Thursday is preliminary and experts say more definitive research must be done on the effects of the substance, called psilocybin (sih-loh-SY'-bihn). But the record so far shows "very impressive results," said Dr. Craig Blinderman, who directs the adult palliative care service at the Columbia University Medical Center/New York-Presbyterian Hospital. He didn't participate in the work.

Psilocybin, also called shrooms, purple passion and little smoke, comes from certain kinds of mushrooms. It is illegal in the US, and if the federal government approves the treatment, it would be administered in clinics by specially trained staff, experts say.

Don't self medicate

Nobody should try it on their own, which would be risky, said the leaders of the two studies, Dr. Stephen Ross of New York University and Roland Griffiths of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Psychedelic drugs have looked promising in the past for treating distress in cancer patients. But studies of medical use of psychedelics stopped in the early 1970s after a regulatory crackdown on the drugs, following their widespread recreational use. It has slowly



NEW YORK: In this Monday, Nov 28, 2016 photo Dinah Bazer poses at her home. Bazer found relief from cancer anxiety by being treated with a dose of psilocybin administered by a New York University study. — AP

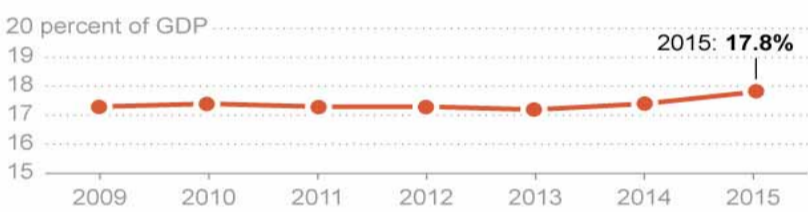
resumed in recent years.

Griffiths said it's not clear whether psilocybin would work outside of cancer patients, although he suspects it might work in people facing other terminal conditions. Plans are also underway to study it in depression that resists standard treatment, he said. The new studies, published in the Journal of Psychotherapy, are small. The NYU project, which also included psychotherapy, covered just 29 patients. The Hopkins study had 51. — AP

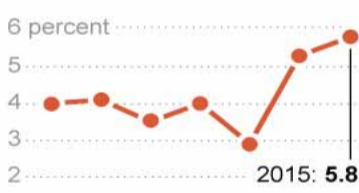
Health costs on the rise

U.S. health care spending rose by 5.8 percent last year to more than \$3.2 trillion, according to a new federal report.

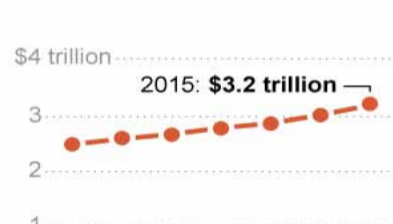
National health expenditures as a percentage of U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP):



Annual growth in national health expenditures:



Total health spending:



SOURCE: Department of Health and Human Services

AP

Chart shows health spending figures; 2c x 4 inches; 96.3 mm x 101 mm. — AP

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SENATE GOP SHIES FROM FIGHT OVER MEDICARE

57 MILLION COULD BE AFFECTED

WASHINGTON: Congressional Democrats are warning that Speaker Paul Ryan and President-elect Donald Trump are gunning for Medicare and they are rubbing their hands with glee at the prospect of an epic political battle over the government's flagship health program that covers 57 million Americans.

It turns out that Republicans, especially in the Senate, are not spoiling for a fight. "We are not inclined to lead with our chin," said No. 2 Senate Republican John Cornyn of Texas. "And right now, we've got a lot on our plate."

Ryan, R-Wis., is the most powerful advocate in

President Barack Obama's signature Affordable Care Act law would necessarily include cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. "Obamacare rewrote Medicare, rewrote Medicaid, so if you're going to repeal and replace Obamacare, you have to address those issues as well," Ryan told Fox News. "Those things are part of our plan to replace Obamacare."

Alarm bells

Ryan's comments set off alarm bells, as did recent remarks by Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga. - made before becoming Trump's nominee to head the

ference next week with liberal groups to deliver more than 1 million signatures demanding that Republicans "keep their hands off" Medicare. Over the last couple of weeks, however, it's become clear that even House Republicans aren't gunning for a big fight on Medicare this year. "I envision 2017 as taking steps, small, in preparing for larger steps to save Medicare for the long term," House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady, R-Texas, said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday.

Reaction among Senate Republicans at the prospect of major Medicare cuts, meanwhile, was almost one of bemusement. "When you take a look at the menu, that's probably one of the last courses," said Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis.

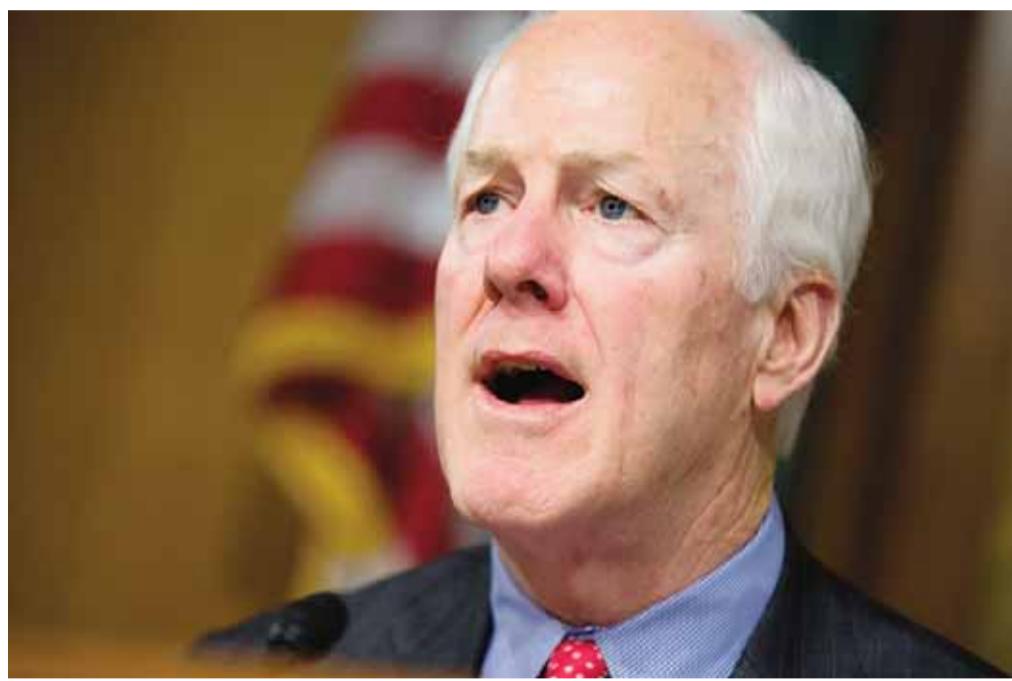
Medicare is exceptionally popular, but faces major fiscal problems from an incoming wave of baby boomers. While there is widespread agreement that changes are needed to shore up the program, Medicare has an outsized reputation as a "third rail" political issue - touch it and you die.

Medicare cuts were used by Democrats to help finance the Affordable Care Act and they are a big part of GOP promises to balance the budget. But House Republicans have never pushed Medicare privatization beyond assuming it in their annual - but mostly symbolic - balanced budget plan. Senate Republicans have never shown much enthusiasm for the idea and it's not even clear that the House could actually pass it.

"Paul Ryan, who I admire tremendously, he's a big thinker. He's a big idea guy. I'm actually trying to figure out, 'How do we get it passed?'" added Cornyn, the top GOP vote counter. "The first test would be, 'Can it pass the House?'"

Ryan's post-election comments were especially striking because Trump made clear in the campaign that he wasn't interested in cutting Medicare. And Ryan said on Thursday that he hasn't discussed Medicare with Trump himself.

"As far as what our plans are with reforming and preserving (Medicare), that's just something we haven't discussed yet with the administration and we'll do it as the year goes on," Ryan told reporters. "I think it would depend entirely on how committed the administration was to pushing some sort of reforms," added Sen. John Thune, R-S.D. "I do think there are reforms that you could get north of 50 (votes) on here. But I don't know if what's being talked about (vouchers) is among those." —AP



WASHINGTON: In this June 7, 2016, file photo, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas speaks on Capitol Hill. —AP

Washington for a premium-support approach that would, over time, remake Medicare into a voucher-like program that could force some seniors entering the program to buy health insurance on the open market instead of getting coverage through the traditional open-ended program. Critics say such coverage would take away a Medicare guarantee and give seniors subsidies whose value won't keep up with inflation.

Medicare covers 48 million seniors and nine million disabled people. Ryan, just days after the election, said any legislation to replace

Department of Health and Human Services - suggesting that House Republicans are eyeing major Medicare cuts as early as the summer. "Speaker Ryan has pushed to privatize Medicare for years and the President-elect has nominated a champion of that effort," said incoming Senate Democratic leader Charles Schumer of New York. "The people who are genuinely and rightly scared are millions of American seniors who don't believe privatization of Medicare will be in their interest."

Schumer on Friday announced a news con-

HEAVY TEENAGE DRINKING LINKED TO ABNORMAL BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

FINLAND: Teens who drink heavily are more likely than their peers to have less gray matter, an important brain structure that aids in memory, decisions, and self-control, according to a Finnish study.

The study was observational, so it is impossible to say whether heavy drinking caused this stunted brain development. People may have less brain matter due to genetic factors, and this abnormality may make them more likely to abuse alcohol, the researchers write in the journal *Addiction*. "Substance use has been found to be connected to social exclusion, mental health problems and lower educational attainment," said lead author Noora Heikkinen of the University of Eastern Finland.

Having less gray matter may cause similar problems, as gray matter contains most of the brain's neurons and plays an important role in memory, emotions, decision-making, and self-control. "Brain structural changes might be one factor that contributes to the social and mental

problems among substance-using individuals," Heikkinen told Reuters Health by email.

To explore the effect of alcohol use on developing teenage brains, the researchers studied 62 young adults who were participating in the Finnish Youth Wellbeing Study. Between 2013 and 2015, the participants filled out questionnaires, answering questions about how often they drank and how many drinks they consumed.

Test subjects

The participants had all completed similar questionnaires five and 10 years earlier, starting at age 13. As teens, 35 of the participants fell into the category of heavy drinkers. For example, they drank four or more times a week, or they drank less often but when they did, they drank heavily. The other 27 young adults in the study were considered light drinkers.

No one in either group showed symptoms of depression or other serious mental illnesses. Heavy and light drinkers had similar rates

of anxiety, personality disorders, and drug use. Heavy drinkers were significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes than light drinkers, however.

But when participants underwent brain scans to look at gray matter and other brain structures that may be affected by alcohol use, the heavy drinkers had smaller volumes of gray matter in several brain areas when compared with the light drinking group.

Specifically, those areas are known as the bilateral anterior cingulate cortex, the right orbitofrontal and frontopolar cortex, the right superior temporal gyrus and the right insular cortex.

The frontal section of the brain, which helps people plan and make decisions, continues developing until people reach their early 20s, said Samantha Brooks, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town in South Africa who studies the effects of drinking on adolescents.

During this period of brain development, teens are in a "vul-

nerability window" where they may be more likely to develop substance use problems, said Brooks, who was not involved in the study.

In addition, if teens drink heavily during this sensitive time, they may cause damage to their brains that can make their drinking behavior worse and cause other problem behaviors like missing school or having unsafe sex, Brooks said. "Parents and teachers must be alert to the vulnerability window during adolescence, and seek help as early as possible, to prevent more serious damage to the brain," Brooks said by email.

Stopping alcohol use can increase gray matter volume when it is done early enough, Heikkinen noted. "However, when alcohol use has continued for a long time, some structural changes become irreversible," Heikkinen warned. "Teenage years are very important for brain development, and alcohol can tamper with this process," Heikkinen said. —Reuters



OAKLAND: In this Oct. 25, 2016, file photo, Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr reacts during the team's NBA basketball game against the San Antonio Spurs. —AP

KERR TELLS COMCAST SPORTSNET BAY AREA HE SMOKED POT FOR PAIN

OAKLAND: Steve Kerr, the reigning NBA Coach of the Year with the Golden State Warriors, acknowledged he tried marijuana twice in the past 18 months while dealing with debilitating back pain.

Kerr told Comcast SportsNet Bay Area's Warriors Insider Podcast with Monte Poole on Friday that he used medicinal marijuana but it didn't help - but painkillers have been worse. "I have no idea if I would, maybe I would have failed a drug test, I don't even know if I'm subject to a drug test or any laws from the NBA," Kerr said. "I tried it and it didn't help at all."

The 51-year-old Kerr missed the first 43

games last season and the team's record 24-0 start while on a leave of absence following complications from two back surgeries. A spinal fluid leak led to terrible headaches, nausea and neck pain among other symptoms that left him feeling frustrated and down.

Kerr noted, "athletes everywhere are prescribed Vicodin like it's Vitamin C, like it's no big deal." He said he hopes sports leagues "are able to look past the perception" and that it's only a matter of time to change rules. He also was just selected the Western Conference Coach of the Month for November. —AP

DRIVING HOME FROM NIGHT SHIFT MAY BE SAFER WITH LIGHT THERAPY

BRITISH COLUMBIA, Canada: To test the effect of light therapy on driving, researchers did a series of three experiments with 19 adults. In two scenarios, participants spent a night being sleep-deprived in a lab and then spent 45 minutes in dim or bright light before a driving test. For a third test, people got a good night's sleep at home and then went to the lab for 45 minutes of bright light exposure before a driving test.

After sleep deprivation in the lab, five people exposed to dim light therapy got in car accidents during the driving simulations. None of the people who slept at home crashed, and neither did any of the sleep-deprived people who got bright light therapy before getting behind the wheel, the study found.

"We experience severe sleepiness toward the end of the night shift, and this may overlap with our commute time," said senior study author Dr. Ralph Mistlberger of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada.

"Sleep deprivation makes this worse of course, and together with the clock, this conspires to impair our ability to sustain attention to task (e.g., driving), and avoid distraction, and react quickly to external stimuli like traffic lights, brake lights in front of you, road signs, etc.," Mistlberger added by email. "Bright light is alerting," Mistlberger said.

Risk factor

Sleepiness is a leading risk factor for automobile accidents because it can make drivers less vigilant, slow reaction times and dull cognitive abilities, researchers note in *Sleep Medicine*.

Shift workers with chronic sleep deprivation also face an increased risk of accidents. Strategies, like drinking coffee or soda, napping before a drive or blasting music or rolling down the windows in the car, may help increase alertness behind the wheel, but none of these strategies is foolproof.

For the current study, researchers want-

ed to see if bright light might help reduce driving impairments related to sleep deprivation. They found participants had lower body temperatures after spending a sleep-deprived night in the lab, as well as longer reaction times and increased sleepiness. Exposure to bright light didn't appear to improve reaction times or sleepiness. But the light was associated with better driving.

Beyond its small size, other limitations of the study include the reliance on lab conditions for sleep deprivation and light exposure, which may not match what shift workers would experience on the job, the authors note.

"There is evidence that the use of bright light at the office (or even at home directly prior to beginning the work shift) may be beneficial in preventing sleep deprivation-related motor vehicle collisions," said Russell Griffin, a researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham who wasn't involved in the study. "That said, there is not enough evidence to date to fully suggest the use of bright light therapy avoid a collision," Griffin added by email.

The proven way to avoid the effects of sleepiness on the road is to consistently get enough sleep, said Dr. Flaura Koplin Winston, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who wasn't involved in the study. "Drowsy driving is perhaps the most under-recognized cause of serious crashes and sadly, the evidence is not there on how to counter it," Winston said by email.

More research is needed on the potential of bright light therapy to make exhausted drivers safer, said Dr. Donald Redelmeier, a researcher at the University of Toronto who wasn't involved in the study.

But there are still things drivers can do now to stay safer on the road. "Safety strategies while driving can include minimizing distractions, stopping at stop signs, respecting speed limits, yielding right-of-way, buckling a seatbelt, signaling all turns and not driving after drinking alcohol," Redelmeier said. —Reuters



BRITISH COLUMBIA, Canada: A citizen driving at nighttime, while street lights and car lights take affect. —AFP

FDA LETS LILLY CITE JARDIANCE HEART DATA, SHARES JUMP

WASHINGTON: US regulators said on Friday they would allow Eli Lilly and Co to state that its diabetes drug Jardiance reduces risk of death from heart problems, lifting company shares almost 3 percent and potentially giving a strong boost to the drug's future sales.

Jardiance, a once-daily pill also known as empagliflozin, was approved by the FDA in 2014 to help lower blood sugar in patients with type 2 diabetes. It generated global sales of \$48 million in the third quarter.

Lilly sells the drug in partnership with privately held German drugmaker Boehringer Ingelheim. At the time of

approval the FDA asked that a separate trial be conducted to show the drug did not increase the risk of cardiovascular problems.

The study instead unexpectedly showed Jardiance slashed deaths by 32 percent in patients with type 2 diabetes at risk of heart attack and stroke, when added to standard diabetes medications. It was the first time any diabetes drug was shown to reduce risk of cardiovascular death. Moreover, patients taking Jardiance had a 35 percent lower rate of hospitalization for heart failure. That information can now be included on the drug's label. —Reuters

NEW DATA ON RISK VS BENEFIT FOR POTENT CAR-T CANCER DRUGS

NEW YORK: A promising but risky new group of customized cancer drugs will be in focus this weekend at the annual meeting of the American Society of Hematology (ASH), where clinical trial results will help clarify their potential for doctors and investors.

Experimental chimeric antigen receptor T-cells, or CAR-Ts, are made by genetically altering a patient's own T-cells in the lab to help the immune system find and kill cancer cells. The altered cells are then infused back into the patient.

Early excitement over the drugs has propelled investor interest in biotech Kite Pharma Inc, whose shares have tripled since a 2014 initial public offering, as well as rival Juno Therapeutics Inc, whose therapy JCAR015 has generated concerns after five leukemia patients died due to severe brain swelling. Juno shares now trade about 14 percent below their IPO price.

"Juno has dug themselves into such a deep hole," said Brad Loncar, manager of the Loncar Cancer Immunotherapy ETF. "My guess is that they may drop the JCAR015 program." He will be watching closely to see whether data at ASH on another Juno candidate, JCAR017, shows similar issues.

Data to be presented

Data on CAR-T drugs from Kite and Novartis AG will also be presented at the meeting. In early trials, CAR-Ts eliminated all trace of leukemia

and lymphoma in 40 percent to 90 percent of patients who had run out of other options. But it is not yet clear how long those remissions will last. Also, the drugs can overestimate the immune system, which can cause dangerous side effects.

If they work safely, Wall Street expects annual sales for CAR-T therapies in the billions of dollars. Shares of Bluebird Bio Inc closed 14 percent higher on Thursday after a small study showed that its CAR-T, bb2121, induced remission in several patients with advanced multiple myeloma with no worrisome side effects. The Bluebird drug is being developed in partnership with Celgene Inc.

"The data look good, but these are very small trials," said Les Funtleyder, healthcare portfolio manager at E Squared Asset Management in New York, which does not currently hold positions in CAR-T companies. "We would definitely like to see larger sample sizes and longer duration." He is also looking for clarity on pricing. Estimates have run into hundreds of thousands of dollars per treatment. It is not yet clear if patients will need more than one treatment or whether that can even be done safely.

The CAR-T technique is being tried initially against blood cancers, which contain specific proteins that can be differentiated from normal tissue, limiting a possible immune system attack on healthy organs. Drugs like Juno's JCAR015

target a protein called CD19, which is found on the surface of a type of white blood cell.

Juno is slated to present early-stage data at the ASH meeting in San Diego on JCAR017, which also targets CD19. Juno Chief Executive Hans Bishop said JCAR017, and the similar JCAR014, are safer than JCAR015 because of a manufacturing process that allows for active control of the composition of the T-cells that make up the final product, said "We think when you get to the extremes ... that is likely a source of variability," he said.

Novartis plans to file next year for US Food and Drug Administration approval for its drug, CTL019, in children with acute lymphoblastic leukemia who have exhausted other options, based on Phase 2 trial results to be released at ASH on Saturday.

The study results show "what it looks like when you roll this out to a bunch of different centers across the world," said Dr Stephan Grupp, research director at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's childhood cancer center and the study's lead investigator.

He said most patients in the Novartis trial experienced a serious side effect known as cytokine release syndrome, or CRS, as well as neurological toxicity, including confusion and seizures, but all responded to treatment for those side effects and none had severe brain swelling. —Reuters

DESIGNED TO INSPIRE TOMORROW'S RACING DRIVERS, ENGINEERS AND DESIGNERS - FORD'S LE MANS VICTORIES IN LEGO BRICKS

It's a gift 50 years in the making that could set your child on the path to becoming a racing legend. The iconic Ford GT40 and new Ford GT that won Le Mans 24 Hours in 1966 and 2016 are being brought to life in LEGO bricks.

The new LEGO Speed Champions set will include both cars as well as racing driver minifigures, a chequered flag and even a trophy to make it easy to recreate those history-making victories.

"Many people in my team grew up with the legend of Ford's history-making 1966 victory - and experienced the excitement of building and design for the first time through LEGO bricks," said Dave Pericak, global director, Ford Performance. "This kit is a powerful way to tell our Le Mans story, and will hopefully inspire the race drivers, engineers, and designers of the future."

Ford won at Le Mans earlier this year after returning to the scene of what was a historic 1-2-3 clean sweep 50 years previously. The LEGO Group worked closely with Ford's design and licensing teams on every detail of the 1966 win-

ning car, and the new Ford GT race car.

"This was a dream project - with a lot of pressure. The Ford GT40 is one of the most iconic race cars of all time, and the new Ford GT is just incredible," said Craig Callum, head of design, LEGO Speed Champions. "Designed for children, but with grown-ups fans in mind too, we know these models will be closely scrutinized for authenticity."

Callum, who in his spare time races a Ford Model A hot-rod, and started out as a designer of full-sized cars, helped develop ten prototypes before the final versions of each model were selected, all created from existing LEGO bricks.

You can watch Callum assemble the new kit in record time here. <https://youtu.be/lauf-ijm1zM>

The new 2016 Ford GT and 1966 Ford GT40 set will be available to order at LEGO.com/shop from March 1, 2017, with a recommended retail price of euro 34.99 (£29.99). A Ford Mustang set is on sale now, alongside a Ford F 150 Raptor with trailer and Ford Model A hot rod.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PASTAMANIA SINGAPORE VISITS KUWAIT

Pastamania is a casual dining restaurant concept specializing in Pasta and Pizza and all things Italian. Making humble beginnings in 2002; today we are across 10 locations in Kuwait and steadily extending the reach across the region.

The menu features mouthwatering appetizers, traditional Italian pastas & pizzas, delectable salads and authentic Italian desserts, in addition to a whole range of beverages to choose from. Having started in 1998 from a mall in Singapore, Pastamania is one of the most preferred destinations in Singapore. Today Pastamania is available in Singapore, Malaysia, China, UAE, Kuwait, Egypt & Brunei with over 52 locations.

All Pastamania outlets will now be designed in accordance to the Italian piazza concept, which means 'City Square' where the bustling of public life takes place. Customers can find Italian newsstand (Edicola), the neighborhood pasta shop (Negozio Della Pasta) and grocery store (Alimentari) settings in the restaurant.

Speaking on the occasion- Mr. Wilson Lim- Executive Director International

Business- Commonwealth Capital Pte Ltd, the franchisor for the concept says that "We believe the evolution and fresh ambience of the Pastamania Piazza concept will bring joy and satisfaction to the discerning customers in Kuwait and provide an enhanced dining experience."

Mr. Ahmed Al Ghannam- the chairman of KAPI-O group added "We want to bring a piece of Italy to our customers so that they can enjoy the simple pleasures of living like the Italians do." "Customers will be transported out of their daily grind to an intimate Italian escapade at Pastamania" stated Mr. Pradeep Handa the CEO and Vice Chairman of KAPICO Group.

Under the guidance of the Dy CEO- Mr. Vipin Handa, PastaMania Kuwait aims to rapidly expand its footprints in the country. In the pipeline, there are another incremental 15 to 20 retail points and delivery hubs being charted in Kuwait.

Immediately, in quarter 4 of FY 2016, PastaMania Kuwait will be launching its first stand-alone dine-in focused restaurant at 'The Lake'- Abu Hasaniya, Kuwait.



VANITHAVEDI KUWAIT HOLDS 'NOOPURAM-2016'

The cultural festival 'Noopuram-2016' organized by Vanithavedi-Kuwait at Indian Community School (Senior) auditorium concluded with a colorful dance display. Well-known classical dancers Srikanth accompanied by Aswathy Srikanth narrated the powerful forces of nature and their impact upon human emotions, through their dance bonanza "Atmata", entralling the audience.

The program started with a colorful cultural procession portraying several traditional art forms accompanied by chendamelam by Vanithavedi team. Indian Embassy Second Secretary AK Srivastava formally inaugurated Noopuram followed by principal's address from Aswathy Srikanth. She observed that a perfect artist should be a virtuous person and only with balanced mind, an artist can perform with excellence. Anjana Saji presented "Kerala Formation day" message. By receiving the first copy from Nasser Al-Hameed Mohammad Kamal, Director, Kuwait TV, John Mathew released the Noopuram 2016 souvenir, edit-



ed by Bindul Sajeev. Naganadhan, President, KALA Kuwait, Sam Panummoodu, Advisor Vanithavedi and Devi Nadini - Balavedi delivered felicitation speeches. Santha R Nair, President Vanithavedi Kuwait presided over the function while Tolly Prakash, General Secretary

welcomed the audience. Program Convener Shyamala Narayanan rendered a vote of thanks. NAFO team received first prize in Thiruvathira competitions conducted as the part of Noopuram 2016 with Samanvayam team while Mangaf stood second and Palpak

team in third position. They received cash prizes" and Vanithavedi trophies. Bindu Dileep and Rema Ajith administered Thiruvathira competitions. Display of several art forms, skits and dance forms kept the day-long program buoyant.



The chairman of Pakistani progressive forum Javid Ahmad signing the condolence book about the late leader Fidel Castro at the Cuban embassy.



KUWAIT NATIONAL ENGLISH SCHOOL STUDENTS VISITED THE STOCK EXCHANGE OF KUWAIT

As always, students of business studies and economics take learning outside the school premises. Combining classroom learning with practical understanding is of prime importance and we at Kuwait National English School offers our students the perfect opportunities to explore and learn in a more practical manner. Our students continuously improve their knowledge of the Economic environment through a series of field trips, job shadowing and work experience sessions.

One such visit was to the Kuwait Stock Exchange now known as Boursa Kuwait. The objective of this visit was to learn how the exchange Centre works and how Public companies are listed on the Stock Exchange. It was a valuable experience and students got to see the trading area as well as traders engaging in the stock market. Our students were given a warm reception by Priya Cardoza and Jafar Al Wael. They briefed the students on the general functioning and a brief history of the Boursa. This was followed by a presentation by Dalal Al Barrak on the strategic transformation undertaken by the Boursa. Mr. Saud Al Dhayyan then explained the trading process and the daily activities at the Boursa.

Students were keen to ask questions and they were impressed by the history of the Boursa. Our students greatly benefit from such trips as it helps them substantiate their theoretical learning with practical understanding. It will go a long way in achieving the school's objectives of taking education beyond classrooms.



Greetings



Happy Birthday dear Merin Mol and Andrew Mon. May God Almighty shower his choicest blessings upon you both. With prayers and loving wishes from Pappa, Mamma, Appacha, Ammachi, Gigi and all loved and dear ones.



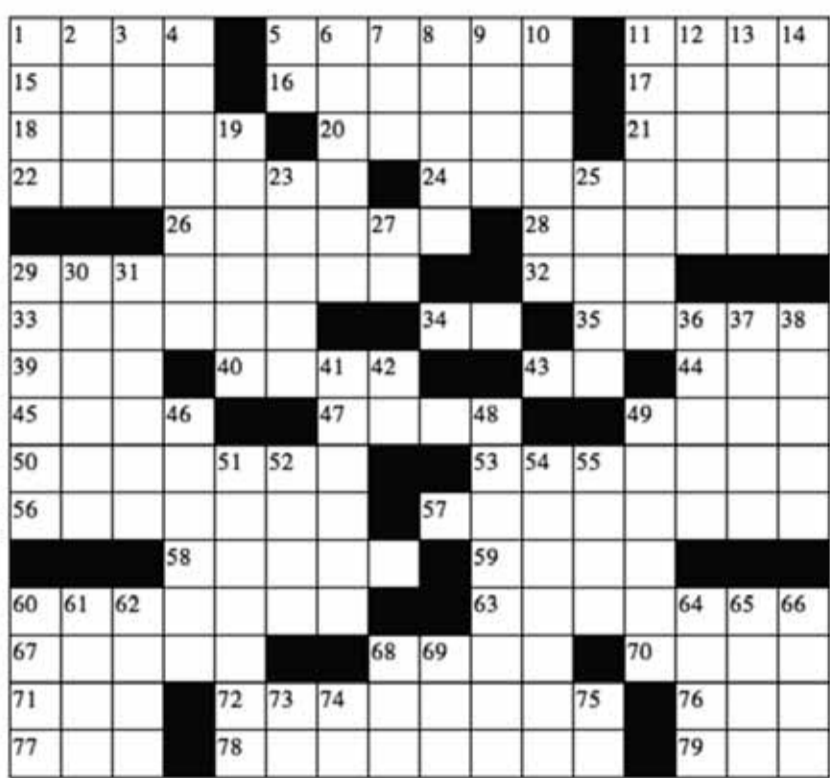
Many many happy returns of the day, and many more to come stay blessed, your beloved Noor Hafeez.

WHAT'S ON - SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All photos submitted for What's On should be minimum 200dpi. Articles must be in plain text and should include name and phone numbers. Articles and photos that fail to meet these requirements will not be published.

Please send them to news@kuwaittimes.net

CROSSWORD 1450



ACROSS

- 1. (computer science) The rate at which data is transferred (as by a modem).
4. Serving an esthetic rather than a useful purpose.
12. Type genus of the Muridae.
15. The upper side of the thighs of a seated person.
16. Not giving or reciprocating affection.
17. Antibacterial drug (trade name Nydradid) used to treat tuberculosis.
18. (botany) Relating to a plant of the family Araceae.
20. The choicest or most essential or most vital part of some idea or experience.
22. Capital city of the Apulia region on the Adriatic coast.
23. English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907).
25. The general activity of selling.
26. One celestial body obscures another v 1.
29. An indication of approved or superior status.
31. National capital of Kiribati.
33. A hidden drawback.
35. Harsh or corrosive in tone.
36. An associate degree in applied science.
39. Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
43. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
44. Of a pale purple color.
47. Avatar of Vishnu.
48. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
50. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
52. Any triangular fore-and-aft sail (set forward of the foremast) v 1.
53. A support consisting of an arrangement of straps for holding something to the body (especially one supporting a person suspended from a parachute).
59. A Hebrew prophet in the Old Testament who opposed the worship of idols.
62. Of or relating to or derived from or containing boron.
64. A technician who is highly proficient and enthusiastic about some technical field (especially computing).
68. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
70. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
71. Having an oblique or slanted direction.
72. Monoamine oxidase inhibitor (trade name Nardil) used to treat clinical depression.
76. A graphical recording of the cardiac cycle produced by an electrocardiograph.
78. Coming next after the ninth and just before the eleventh in position.
79. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
80. Golden Italian liqueur flavored with herbs.
83. Free from liquid or moisture.
84. Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.
85. Small genus of sometimes spiny shrubs or small trees.
86. A colloid that has a continuous liquid phase in which a solid is suspended in a liquid.

DOWN

- 1. Divulge information or secrets.
2. (obstetrics) The number of live-born children a woman has delivered.
3. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
4. An actor's line that immediately precedes and serves as a reminder for some action or speech.
5. United States musician (born in Japan) who married John Lennon and collaborated with him on recordings (born in 1933).
6. A noticeable decline in performance.
7. (Old Testament) The Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites from Egypt across the Red sea on a journey known as the Exodus.
8. A unit of energy equal to the work done by an electron accelerated through a potential difference of 1 volt.
9. Bound or secured closely.
10. Small air-breathing arthropod.
11. System of measurement based on centimeters and grams and seconds.
12. Tropical Asian starlings.
13. The brother of your father or mother.
14. Any broad thin expanse or surface.
19. Stout-bodied insect with large membranous wings.
21. A dry scab formed on the skin following a burn or cauterization of the skin.
24. A former agency (from 1946 to 1974) that was responsible for research into atomic energy and its peacetime uses in the United States.
27. A radioactive transuranic element synthesized from californium.
28. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
30. (informal) Of the highest quality.
32. Any organic compound formed by adding alcohol molecules to aldehyde molecules.
34. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
37. By bad luck.
38. Be seated.
40. A Hindu prince or king in India.
41. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
42. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
45. A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
46. A stiff chitinous seta or bristle especially of an annelid worm.
49. A law passed by US Congress to prevent employees from being injured or contracting diseases in the course of their employment.
51. A fibrous amphibole.
54. Support resembling the rib of an animal.
55. Chief of the Vanir.
56. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
57. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures).
58. An interval during which a recurring sequence of events occurs.
60. In a nice way.
61. Any of various spiny trees or shrubs of the genus Acacia.
63. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
65. (with 'in') Guardianship over.
66. Formally making a person known to another or to the public.
67. The univalent hydrocarbon radical C2H5 derived from ethane by the removal of one hydrogen atom.
69. A small cake leavened with yeast.
73. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
74. One of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
75. Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
77. United States liquid unit equal to 4 quarts or 3.785 liters.
81. Being five more than fifty.
82. A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Romance is high on the list of favored activities today. It is not only fun but very gratifying to be included in entertainment. This could mean showing an animal in some sort of competition or performing in some group or get-together. Whatever the case, plenty of pictures will show your efforts. You may just want to get out and walk or exercise this afternoon. Your ability to take care of things on the behalf of others will be appreciated or valued. This is a time when you look forward to having new people in your life. You should be feeling a sense of rapport-the lines of communication are wide open. All of the support that you need should be available for you now. This evening you return to the subject of romance. Love is in the air!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may have a feeling that your life situation is much better than in the past. Old friends are in touch this morning and if you are not making plans to see them, you are at least visiting on the phone. There is seriousness to your inclination to get with the program of taking better care of yourself at this time. Diet, exercise and work all somehow mean more to you now; you just want to feel good about yourself and the way that you do things. Getting things organized may be the number one secret to success at this time. Finding a place for everything and then keeping everything in place is very helpful. You are determined to establish a good nutritional program so a shopping trip to the market is in order. A new recipe of yours becomes quite popular.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Family members want to prepare the house for winter. This may mean decorate or it could mean they want to make some adjustments that will help keep them warmer. Focusing on what others want endears you to the group. Get a shoebox and have each person submit ideas. You can read them and everyone can decide on how to bring in the funds to support the needs or ideas. You are keen to help achieve as much as possible and instead of spending a great deal of money, you may find that when all have a hand in the planning it makes for pleasant endings. The requests that need funds may include a party or perhaps, a new bookshelf. Voting on some request is a good way to involve everyone. Enjoy the feedback.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Some very personal or sensitive issues regarding your life circumstances could find you at odds with those around you. Remember, suffering has nothing to do with the events but with one's reaction to the events. You may uncover some blocks, difficulties or hot spots that require you to use caution. Frustrations may turn around into blessings today, both at home and at work. You could be helping someone move later this afternoon. You might decide to use paper towels instead of newspaper as you wrap breakables. These towels cushion the ride and can be used to clean with after the move is completed. The rest of your evening is full of good food, spices, good smells and beautiful music. Someone could be waiting on your needs this evening.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a time when you are definitely feeling secure and brave with your knowledge and your abilities. You seek to make a positive difference as you embark on a very new field of interest. This may include some competition, but the competition may be the stimulating part of the new interest. Physical activity of any kind is both stimulating and good for your health. A little fast-paced walking will get rid of stress and help to circulate the blood. Relations with a spouse are on a solid ground. You have support for your endeavors. Expressing affections should come easily at this time and can do much good for your disposition. Good food, good exercise and a winning attitude create for you one of your best days to remember thus far, this year.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Putting the past behind you or getting in touch with the mystical and the spiritual are the things that give you a feeling of satisfaction and wholeness. Compassion and comprehension are emotional qualities that mean more at this time. That which you thought was real, you now see as an illusion. In a similar vein, illusions may now seem all too real. You realize that it is wisdom and not knowledge that counts the most. Some nice compliments come your way today and it may involve the little personal touches you give to your customers or to your surroundings. It should be easy for you to enjoy your own life circumstances today. This should also be an excellent time to prepare for winter and the events of the holidays!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You are likely to be wearing rose-colored glasses today, as everything takes on a wonderful hue. You appreciate all things beautiful and natural. Your surroundings may even remind you of a remembered garden place. Perhaps you have wind chimes, a fish tank, a waterfall lamp, hanging baskets of ivy or orchids, etc., etc. You have a most relaxing home and many times, you carry your surroundings with you as you have an almost old-spirit type of demeanor. The things you hear are usually things like Mozart, etc. You are relaxed in most circumstances with just enough energy to be curious about anything that moves. This could all lead to a discovery of insights into day-to-day problems that will be of benefit throughout your life. Hold fast, steady as she goes!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Someone that you are close to could be having some problems concerning very personal or emotional issues. This would be a good time to invite this person to talk with you-you are a good listener. Your understanding of a problem will lead you to a quick resolution of what would otherwise be a potentially volatile situation. You have the ability to cut through the red tape and get at what is behind a problem. It may be a little bit difficult to keep the cobwebs cleared out of your head this afternoon. Thoughts and ideas that come to you now may be important to some particular future event-take notes and then practice letting go. This may be all about traveling. There are a lot of good energies present now for whatever you want to accomplish.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You may seek more education and decide to check out one of the internet sites that might be helpful toward you achieving a degree. If you build upon your knowledge and understanding, you will come closer to those long-term goals of yours. Your communication skills have increased and you effectively communicate with a loved one or close family member-bringing a new understanding. Long distance communication is also possible this whole weekend. Communicating with people that you have not seen in a while helps to bring back good memories. You might find yourself working on a scrapbook or a photo album this afternoon. This new birth year will be full of love and good friendship! Happy birthday!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The situation in which you currently find yourself may need some revision. Perhaps it is time you speak up and say what it is you would like to do this weekend. If you are in a large family, you might include everyone for a vote. Whatever the case, this is a beautiful time of year for whatever you want to do, enjoy or accomplish. You may find yourself in an art show. Exchanging ideas with others is one of your focal points. Learning, knowing a little about many things, staying in touch with the latest developments are what satisfies you now. Later today, you will have a little time to stop by the hobby store and shop or just stand around and check out the latest displays. Tonight you and your loved one enjoy some quiet time together.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Mentally, you will be wearing your thinking cap and could be caught up in some very deep thoughts. Analytically speaking you are at a high. Financial expertise and businesslike skills are qualities that take on a greater meaning in your life just now. You may decide that now is the time to overhaul your resume and bring it up-to-date. Shopping later this afternoon you may be able to lend a helping hand to someone looking for a first set of furniture. Those around you are very impressed with your ability to make wise purchases. You just naturally know what others need. You have already done the work to compare prices and quality on a vehicle and later today may be the time you bring home a new vehicle.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The power of persuasion will be working in your favor. You are quite articulate in speech and communication. The circumstances are a natural for self-expression. An enjoyable conversation with someone you love is possible. You may feel something pulling you toward the social life today and you may want to be out shopping in the malls and neighborhood stores. You should find this a very successful shopping day. You carry around with you the aura of personal confidence and heads turn as you walk down the aisle of a store. Volunteering your services to a friend can be most rewarding this evening. Remember that friends are very important and this would be a good time to build on those relationships.

WORD SEARCH

Family Ties

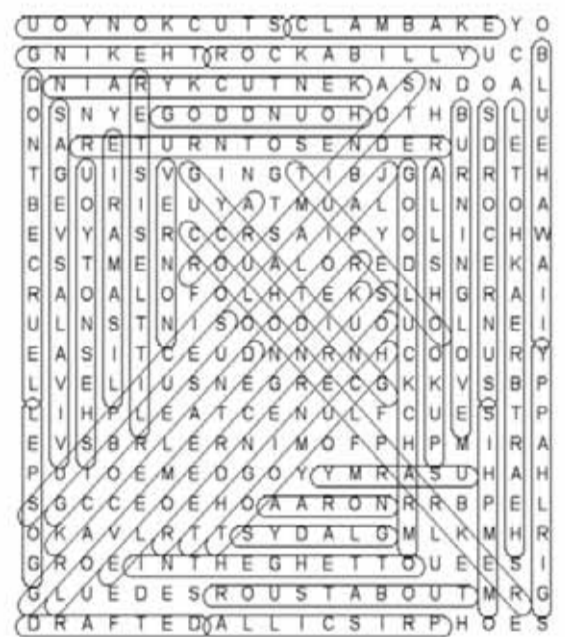
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a special occasion for families.



- ANCESTOR, AUNT, BOND, BROTHERS, CHILDREN, CLAN, COUSINS, DAD, DAUGHTER, DESCENDANTS, FATHER, FOLKS, GENEALOGY, GRANDPARENT, HALF BROTHER, HALF SISTER, HUSBAND, KIN, MARRIAGE, MOM, MOTHER, NEICE, NEPHEW, NEWLYWED, OFFSPRING, PARENTS, PROGENY, RELATIONS, RELATIVES, SIBLING, SISTERS, SON, SPOUSE, STEPPARENT, TRIPLETS, TWINS, UNCLE, WIFE.

Yesterday Solution

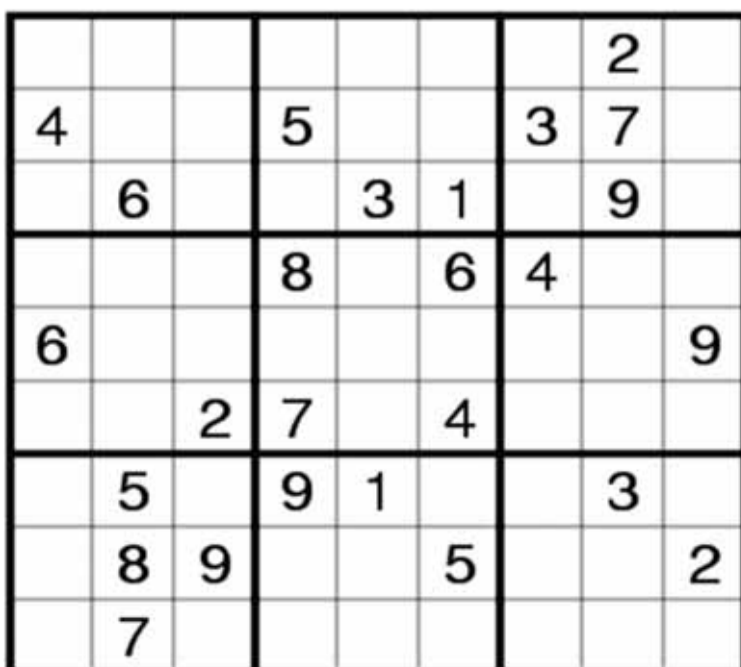
Elvis



- AARON, ALL SHOOK UP, BLUE HAWAII, BURNING LOVE, CLAMBAKE, COLONEL PARKER, DRAFTED, G.I. BLUES, GIRL, HAPPY, GLADYS, GOOD LUCK CHARM, GOSPEL, GRACELAND, GYRATING, HEARTBREAK HOTEL, HOUID DOG, IN THE GHETTO, JAILHOUSE ROCK, KENTUCKY RAIN, KING CREOLE, LISA MARIE, LITTLE SISTER, LOVE ME TENDER, MEMPHIS, ONE NIGHT, PRISCILLA, RCA, RETURN TO SENDER, ROCKABILLY, ROUSTABOUT, SHE'S NOT YOU, STUCK ON YOU, SUN RECORDS, SURRENDER, SUSPICIOUS MINDS, THE KING, TOO MUCH, TUPELO, U.S. ARMY, VERNON, VIVA LAS VEGAS.

The hidden sentence is: YOU CAN DO ANYTHING BUT LAY OFF OF MY BLUE SUEDE SHOES

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





Bella Thorne, Tyler Posey rekindle their romance

The 19-year-old actress and her 25-year-old actor beau briefly ended their relationship in November after just a few months of dating but have now decided to give the romance another shot. A source told HollywoodLife.com: "They really like each other and when they started their relationship it was the honeymoon phase in overdrive. It got to a point where they were both obsessed with each other. They fell for each other hard. "They still have those feelings and are trying to make it work out with things being so intense. They kind of scared each other on how much they liked each other and how things were working. So, they are now attempting to slow down all the lovey-dovey over-

board stuff around each other and move forward having a healthy relationship." In August, Bella split from Gregg Sulkin after just over one year of dating, because of their busy schedules. They said in a joint statement: "After much thought and soul-searching, we have made the difficult decision to end our relationship. We will always love each other and have a deep respect for one another, as we have each grown to be better people because of our time together. Our schedules made seeing each other difficult, and we decided that for now this would be best."

Irina Shayk 'so excited', expects her first child

The 30-year-old star is reportedly "so excited" to be expecting her first child with boyfriend Bradley Cooper, who she started dating in May 2015, and her fellow models were reportedly shocked when her pregnancy was revealed after the show last week. A source told PEOPLE: "Looking back, some of her outfits were less revealing in the stomach and seeing the news after the show, it made sense. No one suspected backstage, that's for sure! She looked as beautiful as ever." The report comes after Irina - who has yet to confirm her pregnancy - recently revealed she wants children sooner rather than later. She said: "I think family is the reason why we are here. I love my job and it's very important to me. I really enjoy what I'm doing but it's not the most important thing in my life - family is, friends, people who I love. "My father was married to my mother for more than 20 years and, yes, definitely one day I want to have a family because that is the most important thing on this earth. I don't think there is a perfect time. I think it's more important to have the right person by your side. "My sister had her baby when she was 22, and for her that was the perfect time. I will be 31 in January, so maybe soon it will be my perfect time. I don't know - time will tell!"

Jennifer Lawrence gives Darren Aronofsky keys to her home

The 'Hunger Games' actress is smitten with the 47-year-old director and has reportedly invited him to live with her in Los Angeles whenever he is in town as though it is still early days for their romance, she already thinks it is much more serious than her brief 2015 fling with Chris Martin. A source said: "Although she was initially reluctant to date Darren, he won her over and she's really starting to think he could be the man she's been waiting for. "It's turning into something serious and she's told friends she could actually see herself settling down with him. "She says he's different to everyone else she's dated, especially Chris. He was such a commitment-phobe during their time together and their whole relationship felt like one big runaround. "Unlike him, Darren is mature and grounded." However, some friends are said to be concerned about the speed the relationship is moving and also the reputation the filmmaker - who has son Henry, 10, with ex-fiancee Rachel Weisz and was previously engaged to producer Brandi-Ann Milbradt - has for being difficult and "nasty". The source told Grazia magazine: "Darren has a reputation as Hollywood's Mr Nasty within the industry and friends are worried that he could be equally cut-throat in his personal life."



Jamie Oliver refuses to have vasectomy over selfie fears

The 41-year-old chef has five kids - Poppy, 14, Daisy, 13, Petal, seven, Buddy, six, River, three months - with wife Jools and while he is keen to put a stop to extending his brood any further, he is too "shy" to have the procedure done. He said: "I'd go and get it done tomorrow in secret if I wasn't petrified of having a brigade of trainee doctors all taking selfies around my vasectomy. "I'm just a bit shy, to be honest. I'm old fashioned - I don't like getting my gems out in front of the public." While Jamie is frightened about baring his bits to people, he managed to scare his family last Christmas when he

dressed up in a "slightly see-through" Santa suit. He added: "I think they thought I was some kind of dodgy geezer. "Instead of spending up on a quality velvet outfit, I invested in something that was highly inflammable and slightly see-through. "I looked like a dirty Santa. I jumped out and said, 'Hi!' and the two little kids just screamed and started to cry. I won't do that again." Jamie doesn't dress his tree with his family until a week before Christmas Day, but admits his house is always carnage on the decorating day.



JENNIFER ANISTON WANTS TO BE AT HOME WITH HUSBAND

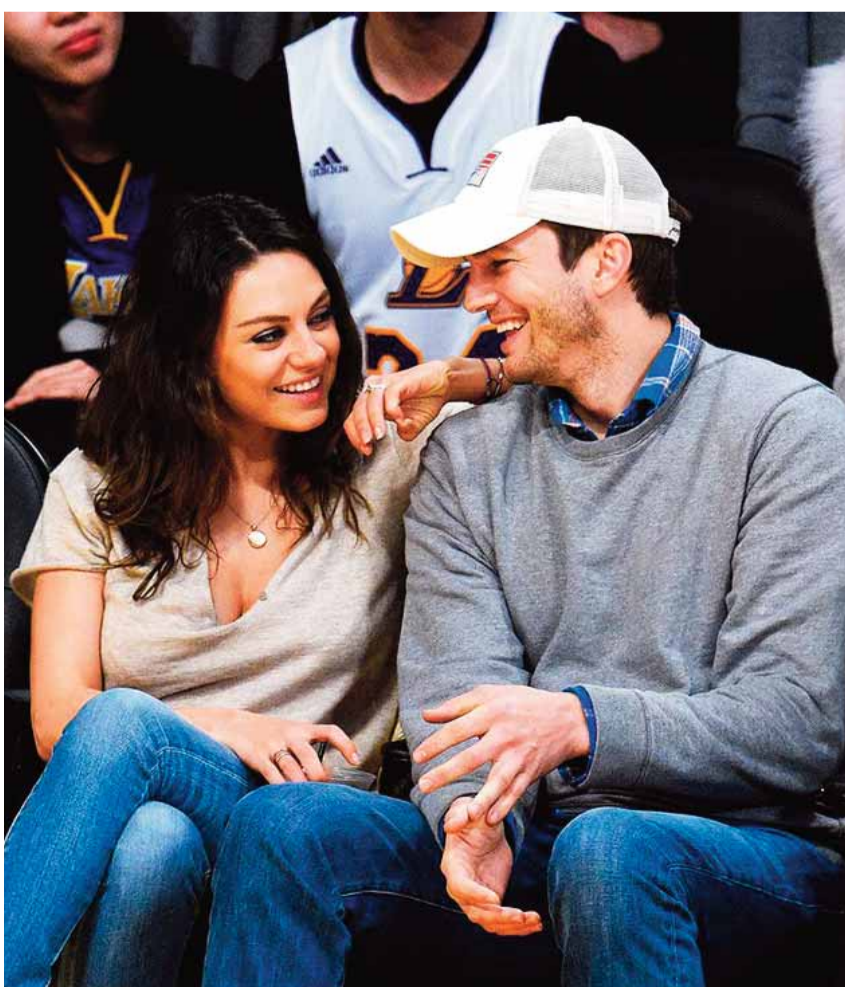
The 'Horrible Bosses' star loves receiving handmade gifts from her family and friends but admits what she wants most this festive season is to be with Justin Theroux. She said: "Let's go and have a beautiful shared experience together and let that be our gift." And the 47-year-old actress also recalled her past Christmas experiences, revealing she had to travel around a lot to visit all her family members. She told Parade magazine: "My mom and I would go to Tavern on the Green [in New York City]. We'd treat ourselves to a Christmas Eve dinner there. I'd wake up, spend Christmas with my mom and then I'd go with my dad to my stepmom's in

Jersey. "Then I'd go to my grandmother's in Pennsylvania and see all the Greeks. I travelled a lot of ground. And I looked forward to it. Especially when you got to the Greeks, because they're so much fun. And I did get a nice little stash of goodies." Meanwhile, the 'Leftovers' star previously admitted he doesn't mind being called "Mr Jennifer Aniston" because his wife is a "proper badass". He shared: "It doesn't really get under my skin. It's just one of those things that's a shorthand for describing who I am. [Jennifer] is a proper badass. She has lived through a lot of bulls**t."



Ashton Kutcher, Kunis named their child Dimitri Portwood

The 'What Happens in Vegas' star and the 'Bad Moms' actress have revealed the moniker they have chosen for their newborn son, who was born at 1.21 in the morning on November 30 and weighed 8 pounds and 15 ounces. The couple - who also have Wyatt Isabelle, two, together - are keen to keep their children out of the spotlight until they can decide for themselves if they want to be in the public eye. Speaking to A Plus, Ashton said: "We'd like to allow our kids to make their own choices on whether to have a life in the public eye or not. We don't want to make the choice for them." The news comes after Ashton previously revealed he would love to call his son Hawkeye. He shared: "There was a rallying cry from a collective that believed in the name Hawkeye. A kid named Hawkeye, it could be 'M*A*S*H'-y, like he could be a doctor. Hawkeye Kutcher, it didn't fly, it didn't cross the Mila threshold, it came to the threshold but it got knocked out. You don't want everyone else's opinion on the name. When we get in the naming process she hates every name I come up with." Meanwhile, Ashton previously admitted he was hoping to have a little girl so he could try and have more children.



GOSSIP

Scott Disick 'proved' himself to Kourtney

The 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' star and the 33-year-old model - who have Mason, six, Penelope, four and Reign, 23 months, together - are reportedly back together after Scott showed her he was a changed man. A source said: "Their love for each other never went away. He's been trying to win Kourtney over for a while now, but his constant partying was a huge issue. He's been spending a lot more time with Kourtney and the kids and proving himself to show that his family is the priority." And the 37-year-old television personality was the one who inspired Scott to make the change. The insider told E!

News: "He's doing his best to keep himself in check. Kourtney is definitely the reason for that. He still has his own place, but he loves her. He's always loved her and wanted his family back together. They're best friends - that's never changed, even when things were rough between them ... "Scott has just been over the partying. He got sick of it and decided to clean up his act. He was having people over at his house to party until 6 a.m. all the time, and he hasn't been doing that either."



50 Cent claims saw Kanye West's problem coming

The 'In Da Club' hitmaker says he wasn't surprised when he heard the 39-year-old rapper had been admitted to hospital with sleep deprivation and exhaustion and believes Kim Kardashian West's terrifying ordeal of being robbed at gunpoint in October contributed to Kanye's state. Speaking on Watch What Happens Live, he said: "That was interesting because I kind of felt like you could see that coming. It was like little outbursts. I think [Kim's robbery] was a part of Kanye's breakdown." Kanye has now returned home to rest and be with Kim, 36, and their two children - Saint, 11 months, and North, three - but he is desperate to start working again. A source shared: "People in Kanye's inner circle are hoping the hospital stay has made him realize that he needs to take a step back from work and focus on his personal health and mindset. Kanye loves working, but he loves Kim and his family more. He had way too much on his plate and it came to a point where he couldn't handle it all, so he just broke. He needs to find a good balance with the two in his life and he'll work hard at finding that." Even when he was in the hospital, Kanye was keen to make music.



Kanye West and Kim Kardashian living apart

The 'Only One' hitmaker left hospital earlier this week but rather than head home to his wife and their two kids - North, three, and Saint, 11 months - he is reportedly receiving outpatient care elsewhere. A source told People magazine: "He is receiving outpatient care else with a medical team. Kim still seems concerned but is supportive. "They don't know for how long Kanye will need outpatient care ... There are frustrations and problems, like any relationship, but they love each other deeply." Meanwhile, it was previously claimed that Kanye is desperate to get back to work but has been ordered to rest up. A source shared: "People in Kanye's inner circle are hoping the hospital stay has made him realize that he needs to take a step

back from work and focus on his personal health and mindset. "Kanye loves working, but he loves Kim and his family more. He had way too much on his plate and it came to a point where he couldn't handle it all, so he just broke. He needs to find a good balance with the two in his life and he'll work hard at finding that." Whilst another insider added: "Kanye keeps wanting to work. At the hospital, he requested that recording equipment be brought to the hospital so he can record in his bed. And he has kept asking to see sketches of his fashion lines. He continues to want to work and Kim has to keep telling him to rest."



MARIAH CAREY IS STAYING POSITIVE

The 'Without You' hitmaker will continue to film scenes for her documentary 'Mariah's World' despite the fact it was supposed to partly focus on her wedding plans as she prepared to tie the knot with the Australian billionaire. She said: "Oh, I can't give somebody that much power. Are you kidding me? ... You gotta keep on pushing." Asked if the rumors she is dating her backup dancer, Bryan Tanaka, are true, she added: "I refuse to answer under the grounds that it may incriminate me." Since her split from Nick Cannon, the 46-year-old singer has remained close to her ex for the sake of their five-year-old twins Moroccan and Monroe. She shared: "It's important for the kids. He's part of their lives forever." Mariah's kids make a number of appearances in her documen-

tary but she insists she never forced them to star in the show and always ensured they were "comfortable". She told The Today Show: "I wanted to make sure that [the kids] were comfortable at all times. I never want to be like a stage mom. That's not me." Meanwhile, a source previously claimed that Mariah is "ready to move on" from James. They said: "She's ready to move on. She feels like she dodged a bullet ... The negotiations aren't going well. At the best, she'll keep the ring." Time has been the best healer for Mariah as she was "devastated" by the split soon after it happened.



Lady Gaga doesn't think fame makes you happy

The 'Bad Romance' hitmaker says celebrities have been "put on a pedestal" and feels kindness is far more important than celebrity and fame. Speaking at a concert at Westfield shopping centre in West London, she said: "Money has been put on a pedestal, beauty has been put on a pedestal, celebrity has been put on a pedestal. I have travelled the world and seen the happiest people in the poorest parts of the world. "Their values are intact. In the richest homes I meet the saddest and most depressed people. With this album I wanted to remind the whole world and my fans that the most important things are love and kindness.

Kindness is what will create harmony, not celebrity and not fame." Meanwhile, the 30-year-old singer previously admitted she doesn't feel "free" now she is famous. She explained: "I'm very acutely aware that once I cross that property line I'm not free anymore. As soon as I go out into the world, I belong, in a way, to everyone else. "It's legal to follow me. It's legal to stalk me at the beach. And I can't call the police or ask them to leave. And I took a long hard look at that property line and I said, 'Well, if I can't be free out there, I can be free in [my heart]."

Chelsea Handler has a bar in her closet

The 41-year-old television personality has a refrigerator and ice drawer amongst her clothes, perfect for a quick drink when she is getting ready to go out. In a video for People magazine where she takes them on a tour around her wardrobe, she said: "The favorite part of my closet is my refrigerator and ice drawer. "If you have a bar in your bedroom, it feels like things are going your way. And I'm proud of myself. Way to go, girl!" Meanwhile, the 'Chelsea Does..' host previously revealed she grew up dreaming about hosting "beautiful parties" and having staff to look after her home. She shared: "I grew up with my two inadequate parents constantly dodging phone calls from debt collectors. I didn't want, as an adult, to ever have my telephone shut off. "I wanted the nice life. Materialistic as it may sound, I wanted a house where I could have beautiful parties and beautiful catering and cleaning ladies and a driver. And I wanted to make my mark." And Chelsea feels she is single because she is a "difficult person to please" but isn't too worried as she doesn't want to have any children.



FEATURES

'Belzebuth, Body Electric, Len and Chakay top Ventana Sur

Mexico's "Belzebuth," Brazil's "Body Electric," Colombia's "Len and the Whales' Song" and Ecuador's "Chakay, the Master of the Two Worlds" won top or multiple industry awards at Ventana Sur on Friday night. Not only the prize winners had something to celebrate. The awards, mostly in industry services, went to three Ventana Sur sections, two of which - the genre-focused Blood Window and Animation! - are growth industries in Latin America passionately favored by many young talents in the region's newest generation of filmmakers.

Also, Animation!, an inaugural development and pitching training forum, looks to have been a roaring success. Part of this must be put down to the quality of top animation coming out of Latin America: It is no coincidence that a Chilean work, "Bear Story," won the Oscar for animated short this year. Animation! was launched in collaboration with France's Annecy Festival, with winners given flight to and accommodation at

Annecy, or at least accreditation for special mentions, which in the world's toon industry is the equivalent of winning passage to Lourdes.

As the Animation prizes were announced in an Annecy-style good humor and ebullience, the only thing lacking at Ventana Sur to simulate the prestigious French fest were paper darts launched towards the stage, in hallowed Annecy tradition. Animation!'s kudos highlight potential standout movies and TV series coming out of the region. Top trophies went to, as best TV series, "Chakay, the Master of the Two Worlds," from Ecuador's Alicia Studio, directed by Daniel Esteban Jacome.

Turning on a geek 12-year-old whose routine life changes when his cell-phone receives an Incan life-force allowing him to travel through alternative dimensions, the toon series was praised by the Animation! jury for "its original concept, strong lead character and the capacity of the team to improve their

pitching." "For its capacity to emotionally move the jury, its promise of an epic and special journey, and the theme which is both traditional and cultural but also leaps to the universal," Joan Manuel Millan and Manuel Victoria's 2D "Len and the Whales' Song" won best feature. It turns, as around half the projects at Animation, on an indigenous protagonist in tune with nature battling invasion of her ancestral lands.

Curated by San Sebastian Fest director Jose Luis Rebordinos, Blood Window Work In Progress winners played broadly according to form, three titles taking the major awards: Emilio Portes' demonic shock fest "Belzebuth, shot in the U.S. and Mexico and English and Spanish; "Clementine," from Argentine producer-turned-director Jimena Monteoliva, which casts a story of domestic abuse as a horror narrative; and "Black Circle," the first Swedish-language movie of Adrian Garcia Bogliano, a founding father of modern Latin American genre. Nicolas Puenzo's "The Unseen" and Natalia Beristain's

"The Goodbyes" provoked much of the buzz in the build-up to Primer Corte. Both took a couple of prizes on Friday night. It was, however, a Brazilian movie, "Body Electric" from Marcelo Caetano, which stopped most plaudits, three in total.

Move is a story of obsession, turning on Elias, a designer running a Sao Paulo fashion factory who falls in love with Filipe, an African immigrant working on the production line. Caetano is hardly off the radar. His half-hour "Verona" played te Rotterdam Fest in 2014; he has attended the Berlinale Talent Campus. That said, "Body Electric's" Primer Corte wins exemplify Brazil's capacity to generate relatively-unknown talent for the rest of the world which goes on to festival or market glory, making movies which explore social issues at the forefront of public debate in the country. — Reuters



Director Kim Jee-woon — AFP photos



Saida Jawad



Laetitia Blegier



Rachid M'Barki and his wife Marianne Soubret



Leila Hadioui attends the opening ceremony of the 16th Marrakech International Film Festival in Marrakech yesterday.

Marrakech Film Festival kicks off on a more serene note

Following last year's emotionally-charged edition which took place shortly after the Paris attacks, Marrakech Film Festival opened on a more serene note on Friday, with an introduction by Hungarian Master Bela Tarr who serves as the 16th edition jury president. Tarr, a radical filmmaker best known for "The Man From London" and "The Turin Horse," made a heart-warming, politics-free speech celebrating the humanistic virtues of cinema.

"We all are here because we all believe of the power of the motion picture, we all believe in human beings, in human dignity and dignity of all kinds of life and I hope we'll see beautiful movies. Cross your fingers for the future," said Tarr, stirring strong applause. The ceremony was followed by the Moroccan premiere of Kim Jee-woon's "The Age Of Shadows" and a lavish party hosted by the Prince Moulay Rachid.

Tarr is presiding over a multinational jury composed Italian actress Jasmine Trinca, Moroccan actress Fatima Harandi, Indian-French actress Kalki Koelchin, French director Bruno Dumont, Canadian actress Suzanne Clement, American actor Jason Clarke, Swedish director Billie August and Argentine director Lisandro Alonso. Hailed as one of Arab

world's most significant cultural event, Marrakech gathered several stars, including Japanese director Tsukamoto Shinya, French actress Elsa Zilberstein, Egyptian star Youssa, Jee-Woon, Moroccan TV host and actress Leila Hadioui, Omar Loth.

Marrakech is also expected to welcome "Elle" director Paul Verhoeven, French star Isabelle Adjani, Japanese director Shinya Tsukamoto and Moroccan actor Abderrahim Tounsi, who will receive career tributes. Other guests of honor set to attend are American helmer Paul Haggis and Russian director Pavel Lounguine who will give masterclasses, along with Verhoeven. Lounguine is among the many Russian filmmakers and industry figures who will be feted at Marrakech as part of this year's focus on Russian cinema.

Iranian master Abbas Kiarostami, who passed this year, will also be remembered at the festival. Although this is year's fest is low on Hollywood star presence, the festival managed to draw a US delegation of industry players, including Gary French, senior VP of production at Touchstone Television Productions, and Gary Goodman, executive VP of productions at Lionsgate. The presence of US execs at the festival is part of the Moroccan government's

push to continue attracting foreign productions in Morocco in spite of the geo-political context.

Last year's festival, which took place less than a months after the attacks, welcomed Francis Ford Coppola and Bill Murray, along with a flurry of high-profile film figures. In recent years, the fest drew Martin Scorsese, James Gray, Mads Mikkelsen, Sharon Stone and Marion Cotillard, among others. Chaired by Morocco's King Mohamed VI and the Prince Moulay Rachid the festival will present two Moroccan films: "Majid" and "My Uncle," both of which are directed by up-and-coming director Nassim Abassi. Five feature debuts will play in competition: "The Donor," "The Fits," "Knife in the Clear Water," "Heartstone" and "Parting," which will represent Afghanistan in the foreign-language Oscar race.— Reuters

Jury members (from left) Kalki Koelchin, Suzanne Clement, jury president Bela Tarr, Fatima Harandi 'Raouia' attend the 16th Marrakech International Film Festival Opening Ceremony in Marrakech. The festival runs from Dec. 2-10.



'Siren'

Film Review

Easily the best segment in the 2012 franchise-starting, found-footage omnibus "V/H/S" was its first, "Amateur Night," in which a trio of frat-type dudes out to shoot some consensual-or-not porn with unwitting "real" girls find that one bar pickup isn't a girl-or even human-at all. It was short, sweet, and shocking. None of those qualities quite carry over to "Siren," a belated feature expansion of the earlier film, with Hannah Fierman the only major returning talent, as the titular creature.

Encompassing more conventional genre material than its predecessor (and jettisoning the found-footage angle, perhaps thankfully), this is nonetheless an energetic and entertaining exercise that could spawn its own spin-offs. Chiller Films opened "Siren" on a handful of US screens Dec 2, with DVD and streaming release following four days later. After a prelude, in which a sheriff and the cowboy-hatted Mr. Nyx (Justin Welborn) discover the bloody aftermath of an apparent occult ritual, we enter standard horror terrain with the introduction of young protagonists whose numbers will surely dwindle in short order.

It's the bachelor party for generic nice guy Jonah (Chase Williamson), who's about to marry Eva (Lindsey Garrett). He assures her he won't be getting up to much trouble; neither he nor best men Elliott (Randy McDowell) and Rand (Hayes Mercure) are much inclined toward hedonistic excess. Unfortunately, they're at the mercy of Jonah's brother Mac (Michael Aaron Milligan), who promptly ditches their cell-phones (so no girlfriends or spouses can be contacted mid-revel), breaks out the drugs, and hustles the otherwise reluctant group to the nearest strip club. Truly wild nightlife proves hard to find, however, at least until an insinuating stranger claims he can lead them to the "real underground" local party scene. This involves a disquietingly long drive to the middle of nowhere. But at road's end, the stag quartet find themselves faced with an incongruous mansion-full of upscale club/bordello kinkiness under the proprietorship of the aforementioned Mr. Nyx. Suspicious exotic libations are drunk, smirking staffers (looking like a cross between Burning Man attendees and Russian mafia) are goaded, and, as a special treat, Jonah is hustled off to a side chamber for a promised "experience" that will be memorable, but not-in deference to Eva-involve actual physical contact.

The experience turns out to be sexual, however, despite Jonah and the mysterious Lily (Fierman) being different rooms, with a window in-between. All it takes for the imminent newlywed to experience an earth-shaking orgasm is for her to press up to the glass. Upon leaving, he takes note of her locked cell and assumes she is being held against her will. He's right about that, but very wrong in freeing her, which has immediate unfortunate consequences for everyone-not least for Jonah, to whom this shape-shifting "Lilith" now has an emotional attachment, and woe betide anyone who gets in her way.

The bachelor party members flee, pursued not only by that amorous, now-not-so-pretty critter but also by her enraged keeper Nyx and his goons. Director Gregg Bishop, who made two prior indie genre features before contributing to 2014 franchise entry "V/H/S Viral," replaces original segment helmer/co-writer David Bruckner ("Southbound"). Here, Bishop, along with scenarists Luke Piotrowski and Ben Collins, hits some pretty familiar notes. The yuppie-terrorizing badass villains and their only-in-the-movies decadent pleasure-palace are redolent of "Hostel," "From Dusk Till Dawn" and so forth.

The semi-tongue-in-cheek tone makes for a flying-stalker-creature movie that's less scary than "Jeepers Creepers" and "Lily's" backgrounding mythology is not very fully explained. (Her "siren song" could be a lot more distinctive, too.) Still, "Siren" is lively if occasionally rough around the edges, packing a satisfying amount of action and a couple of amusingly nasty surprises into its short running time. Performers are game, and digital FX are wisely kept rationed until the last reel. While the concept's potential isn't fully tapped, there's enough fun to be had here that one hopes any future installments will sustain and increase the air of macabre unpredictability rather than succumbing to the succubus-slasher model of the "Species" films, which have a somewhat similar gist. — Reuters

'Scribe'

Turin Film Review

The political thriller genre gets a very timely infusion of life with Thomas Kruithof's debut "Scribe," a lean, edgy drama about an outwardly bland middle-aged factotum hired to transcribe taped conversations that may or may not have been recorded by the French secret service. Set during an election clearly intended to elicit parallels with current right-wing campaigns from Marine Le Pen to Donald Trump, the film, at one time given the unwieldy English title "The Eavesdropper," boasts an ace cast and the kind of skillfully crafted script that keeps audiences tensely guessing the outcome until the delicious "did that just happen?" denouement.

The movie is likely to do strong home business on its January opening, and should be enjoyed by Francophile art houses worldwide. When we first meet bookkeeper Duval (Francois Cluzet), he's on the verge of a nervous breakdown, precipitated by a nasty boss and a weakness for alcohol. Two years later he's a teetotaling AA member, unemployed and needing a job, not just for the money but to give his life a sense of structure.

After a few unsuccessful interviews, he gets a call from Mr. Clement (Denis Podalydes), proposing they meet the next day; in a spare office, Duval is offered a job transcribing phone-tapped conversations which, according to the coldly intimidating Clement, are vital to the nation's interests. The whole set-up is peculiar: an empty apartment has been rented, where Duval is to go every workday strictly between 9 and 6. Each morning numbered tapes will be waiting for him, which he's to transcribe on a typewriter, not a computer, so there's no risk of hacking.

Duval protests he's not the right person for the job, but Clement counters he's ideal, and so he seems: older, not especially adapted to computer systems, apolitical, lives alone, and has no friends outside of AA. Besides, he needs the work, so he allows himself to think that perhaps Clement is part of French national security. Duval develops a routine mindlessly typing out the phone conversations until he hears what seems to be the murder of a Libyan businessman acting as go-between with the government to release some French hostages.

Shaken, he wants to throw in the towel, but suddenly Clement's lackey Gerfaut (Simon Abkarian) shows up, recklessly running his mouth and literally strong-arming Duval into breaking into the offices of the Libyan's lawyers to steal note-

books meant to contain important information. The operation is a failure, Gerfaut kills the janitor, and the next day the traumatized Duval is interrogated by Major Labarthe (Sami Bouajila) from the Secret Service. In the manner of the best political thrillers, Duval is sucked into a nightmare of uncertain loyalties, forced to play sides against each other in a game he doesn't understand.

The mild-mannered bookkeeper with a fragile core must develop a steely quick-wittedness, especially after his AA buddy Sara (Alba Rohrwacher) is threatened. As a character, Sara is almost superfluous, patently designed to provide Duval with a slightly more developed emotional trajectory, and Rohrwacher, giving life to the weakest plot point, has little to do of any consequence. Otherwise, the cat-and-mouse game becomes increasingly gripping as viewers put the pieces of the puzzle together one step ahead of Duval himself until the corks of an ending. In the backdrop - but not so far back - is an election campaign in which conservative candidate Philippe Chalamont touts his slogan "France is back."

Surely it's no coincidence that the phrase has a similar ring to "Make America Great Again" (though such nativist mantras are the stock-in-trade of all right-wingers). Nor is it likely to be mere chance that the hostage situation referred to, on the eve of an election, recalls the 1979 hostage crisis when Ronald Reagan was campaigning against Jimmy Carter. One of the strengths of "Scribe" is how it plays on the notion that conspiracy theories don't always have to be far-fetched, bringing a frightening plausibility to the film's deadly game of manipulation.

Duval's age is a nice detail, making the chain of events far more believable than if he were some young office worker with a drinking problem: Cluzet's lived-in mien allows the character credibility as well as depth, wordlessly adding layers not spelled out in the tight screenplay, co-written by the director and Yann Gozlan (who delivered another enjoyable thriller last year, with "A Perfect Man"). In his first feature, Kruithof boldly exhibits a fine sense of control and a mature understanding of how to build scenes. Visuals are uniformly crisp, suitably cold when required, and matched by ace editing. — Reuters

Paris Impressionist Museum - still a hit

It is one of the greatest and most visited art museums in the world, and the only one in an old railway station. Thirty years after the Musée d'Orsay opened its doors for the first time, it has become as much a Paris landmark as its big sister the Louvre just across the River Seine. But the very success of the museum best known for its unrivalled collection of Impressionist paintings is now causing it problems. An average of 3.5 million visitors a year pour through its spectacular vaulted nave, making it the "most dense museum in the world", according to its director of collections Xavier Rey.

There is simply not enough space, he said. Although the Musée d'Orsay is one of the top 10 most visited galleries in the world, it is several times smaller than its rivals. "It will probably be difficult to welcome any more visitors," said Guy Cogeval, who heads the museum and its smaller offshoot the Orangerie, which houses Claude Monet's water lily murals. Cogeval, who is stepping down in March, said the "one of the greatest challenges my successor faces is how to deal with this". That lack of space will be severely tested this weekend when it opens its doors for free to celebrate its 30th birthday.

Massive donation

But the real problem isn't so much the public as finding a place to show its staggering collection of late 19th-century and early-20th century masterpieces which runs from Courbet's notorious "The Origin of the World" to Manet's reclining nude "Olympia" and Van Gogh's searing self-portraits. While the museum is packed with some of Degas, Cezanne, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec's best work, only around 4,400 pieces can be shown at any one time. That leaves some 164,000 paintings and sculptures in its stores, which is set to grow even further with the massive donation by a Texan couple of their 350-million euro (\$372-million) art collection to the French capital.

Businessman Spencer Hays and his wife Marlene last month signed off on the first instalment of 187 works for the Musée d'Orsay including pieces by Degas and Modigliani worth around 173 million euros. Their gift, the biggest from a foreign benefactor

to France since World War II, also includes important work by Bonnard, Vuillard and Redon. Some 140 works by Bonnard and Vuillard were also given to the museum in January by the French collector Jean-Pierre Marcié-Rivière. Faced with such pressure, the museum has bought a neighboring 18th-century mansion on the banks of the Seine to house its library and research centre on the post-Impressionists.

Architectural gem

The idea of a fine art museum in a railway station was revolutionary when the museum opened in December 1986. Not that the Art Deco terminus was your average transport hub. Built like the Eiffel Tower and the Grand Palais for the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900, it had the same architectural exuberance. Having survived demolition plans in the 1970s, it was converted into a museum for mostly French art dating from the revolutions of 1848 to the outbreak of World War I as one of the late French president Francois Mitterrand's "grands projets" to renew the French capital.

A runaway success from the start, with its architectural elegance and head-turning collection equally praised, Rey said that "one can no longer imagine the museum anywhere but in this station". With another show featuring Van Gogh to open in March, it's biggest hit remains the exhibition questioning if the Dutch artist was really mad—"Van Gogh-Artaud, the Suicide of Society"—which brought in more than 654,000 people in 2014.

Some of its biggest successes have even surprised its curators, with almost half a million people flocking to see an exhibition this year on Rousseau, who was derided as a "Sunday painter" by his contemporaries. A 2013 show on the male nude in art, "Masculin, Masculin", which Cogeval curated, was "to my great surprise a very big popular success with 430,000 visitors," he said. The surprises don't end there. The so-called academic painters from the mid-19th century, who had long fallen out of fashion like William Bouguereau and Charles Gleyre, are now having an unexpected resurgence in popularity, said Rey.— AFP



PARIS: Photo shows the Orsay museum and the Eiffel tower in Paris. One of the most densely populated museums in the world, located in an old station and dedicated to a short and turbulent artistic period: Orsay celebrates its 30th anniversary this weekend. — AFP

Barefoot and brave: Castro's ranch life

Nobody in Fidel Castro's village expected the boy who liked to walk barefoot and jump in the river to leave the comforts of his family's ranch to launch a revolution. The late Cuban leader and his brother, President Raul Castro, were born in Biran, a town nestled amid rolling hills and sugarcane plantations on the eastern end of the Caribbean island. His 77-year-old half-brother, Martin Castro Batista, who still lives in the village, remembers how Fidel kept quiet at home about his ambitious plans. "He spoke little out of fear that the old man would find out," Castro Batista said as he sat on a rocking chair in his home. Martin and Fidel are the sons of Spanish immigrant and wealthy landowner Angel Castro, but they have different mothers. Fidel's mother, Lina Ruz, was a Cuban peasant who had seven children.

A rural road with a simple sign reading "historic site" leads to the family's property, which is now a museum. Fidel Castro was born there on August 13, 1926. "We have more than 100 tourists per day at the moment, when normally we have 15 to 20, sometimes 50," said Antonio Lopez Herrera, 65, the site's official guide. "It has surged since Fidel's death" on Friday at age 90, Lopez said. Fidel Castro visibly had a privileged childhood. Angel Castro, who was a soldier when he arrived in Cuba, built a house with a red roof and yellow walls on a vast green space dotted with palm trees. Around the property, he built a school, a cinema, a grocery store, a bar and a post office. There's even a dentist's office and a

cockfighting arena. "We never needed to leave," Lopez recalled.

Lopez gets emotional as he shows Fidel's small bed, where he slept for the first three months of his epic life. "He took time to fall asleep" and needed to be rocked, the guide said. "He was a very happy, very rebellious child," Lopez said. "He liked to be anywhere but home." Castro would jump in the river, ride horses and climb mountains. "He was an audacious, brave child," Lopez said. Castro walked around barefoot, hanging out with the ranch's 80 Haitian workers until his mother had to fetch him. He left Biran at age six to attend school in the seaside southeastern city of Santiago de Cuba, where his ashes will be laid to rest on Sunday after they are taken on a four-day ceremonial journey across the island.

Napoleon the hunting dog

But Castro always returned home for vacation. "He would hunt small birds with his dog, Napoleon," Lopez said, showing a photo of a teenage Fidel Castro posing with his rifle and pet. His half-brother, Martin, remembers that Castro "always walked around with weapons. He liked to hunt and he would fire in the air." Paco Rodriguez, 91, knew the Castro brothers when he was a child. The siblings affectionately called him Paquito. "We played together. We went to school together. We trained to box. We played ball," Rodriguez said with a nostalgic gaze. While dissidents in Cuba called Castro a dictator who jailed opponents, finding a critical voice in

Biran about the "maximum leader" is impossible. "He was this place's prodigal son," Lopez said. "Here, even the rocks love Fidel." When Castro nationalized properties after the 1959 revolution, he immediately applied the law on the family ranch, building housing for locals on the land. While his parents built a comfortable house for him next to theirs, Castro never wanted to live there.

'A rich man'

Castro said he was affected by the poverty around his village. "All the friends with whom I played in Biran, with whom I went up and down, everywhere, are the poorest people," Castro once told Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet. "What probably most influenced me was that, where I was born, I lived with the most humble people," Castro said. Lopez said Castro "could have lived here peacefully" but instead he abandoned everything for the Sierra Maestra, the mountains in which Castro's guerrillas hid while fighting the army of US-backed dictator Batista. "He had everything. He was a rich man," Paco Rodriguez said. But his contacts with the Haitian workers made him "see that there are injustices," so Castro packed up "and went for it." — AFP



John Legend

On new album, John Legend considers love and darkness

John Legend has become known as a modern master of the ballad, probing the emotional depths behind love and discovering the darkness that lurks nearby. Releasing his fifth studio album on Friday, Legend stretches into new musical territory as he subtly broadens his conception of ballads, injecting elements of funk and rap. The new album is entitled "Darkness and Light" but instead of representing some sort of tug-of-war between the two forces, Legend sees them as intertwined no love song is spared from a touch of melancholy.

The first single off the album, "Love Me Now," is among the most rocking on the album, with a beat bringing uplift-in contrast to Legend's biggest hit, 2013's heartrending "All of Me." Yet "Love Me Now" also has an undercurrent of loss, even as Legend implores the listener to celebrate the joys of the moment. "I don't know who's gonna kiss you when I'm gone / So I'm gonna love you now like it's all I have," Legend sings.

The album comes at a new stage of life for the 37-year-old Legend. A musical prodigy whose talents brought him an Ivy League education and a steady ascent through the music business, Legend recently became a father with his wife, the model Chrissy Teigen. Legend dedicates "Right By You," a piano number with a smoky jazz backdrop, to his daughter Luna as he promises to care for her but wonders about her future and that of the world. "You see, love contains a meaning of despair," Legend warns his daughter, his mellifluous voice backed by strings. "Will we do right by you? Will you have what you require to make your days on this Earth be not so dire?"

Subtle politics

The reflective tone of "Darkness and Light" may come as a surprise to those who know Legend more for his politics. Long active on global anti-poverty efforts, Legend in the past two years has emerged as one of the most prominent artist advocates of the Black Lives Matter movement and has been a vociferous critic of President-elect Donald Trump. Legend shared an Oscar last year with rapper Common for co-writing the song "Glory," the theme to the civil rights movement drama "Selma."

Legend's latest album is political only on a close reading. Legend-raised in humble surroundings in working-class Springfield, Ohio—portrays a struggling city that finally makes the television news on "Penthouse Floor." "Once you're above the city lights / Won't want to spend another night down there on your own," Legend sings, casting escapism as the American dream. "Penthouse Floor" brings in an all-star cast including a lengthy passage by Chance the Rapper. Legend co-wrote the song with Greg Kurstin, the producer best known for Adele's blockbuster single "Hello."

Also credited on "Penthouse Floor" are Sia and Beck, the alternative rock icon who can be felt on the song's funky bass line and guitar licks. Other collaborators on "Darkness and Light" include Alabama Shakes frontwoman Brittany Howard, who refines her famously forceful voice to complement Legend's falsetto on the title track. Legend is at his most introspective at the very start of the album on "I Know Better." To the sound of church organs, he vows never to forget his roots. "Legend is just a name," sings the man born as John Stephens. "I know better than to be so proud." — AFP

Swahili Fashion Week

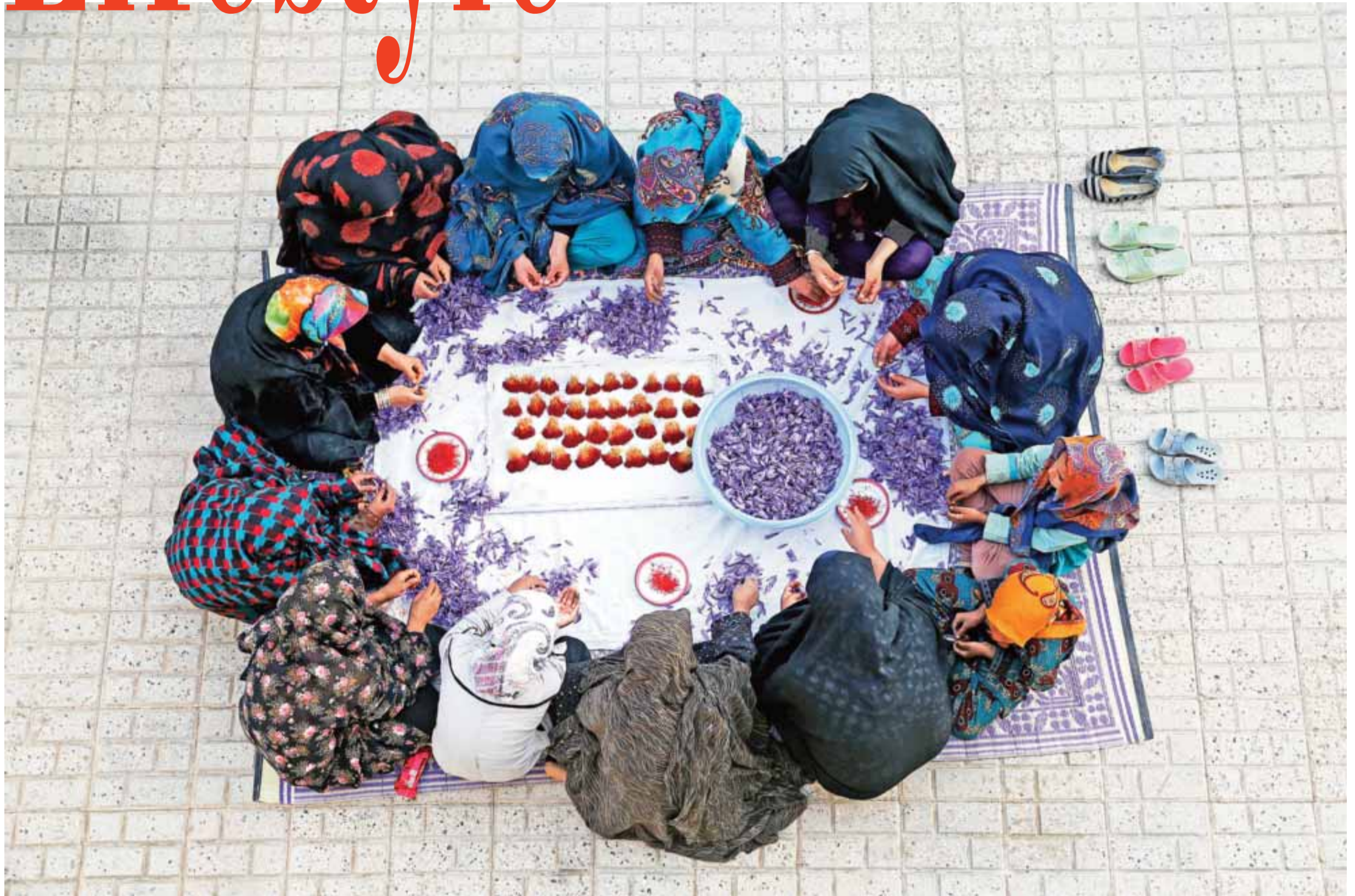


Model Winfrida Metili (left) waits backstage along with other models, prior to the opening night of the Swahili Fashion Week in Dar es Salaam.



Models pose for a photograph backstage during the opening night of the Swahili Fashion Week held at the National Museum in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania yesterday. — AFP





Iranian farm workers separate the crimson stigmas from the purple blossoms in the courtyard of a house just outside the city of Torbat Heydariyeh, southeastern Iran. — AP photos

From a delicate flower comes a very pricy spice



Potential customers inspect saffron flowers in the saffron flowers market in the city of Torbat Heydariyeh.

It's a brilliant patchwork of color. The women open the purple petals of thousands of crocus flowers and, from each one, separate out three deep crimson threads that are tiny, delicate, and extremely valuable. This is harvest season in Iran in the production of saffron, lauded as the world's most expensive spice. It gives a bright golden hue to rice and infuses a complex flavor into paellas, bouillabaisse or Persian dishes. Luckily only a tiny pinch is needed because on store shelves around the world, a small packet of a few grams can easily run for the equivalent of \$5,000 a kilogram.

Iran produces more than 90 percent of the world's saffron supply, more than 300 tons the past year, and it's been expanding every year. What it is hoping to do now is increase its exports - and crack open new American and European markets - after international sanctions were lifted under the

nuclear deal reached with the West last year. That has been slow to happen, however. The harvest is laborious and time consuming. All must be done by hand. Men, women and even children and the elderly join the harvest in places like Torbat Heydariyeh in northwestern Iran.

Saffron is the dried stigma of the crocus flower - the three threads inside the petals. The flowers are picked, and workers sit around tables or on blankets with piles of flowers to gently pluck out the stigmas. The workers are paid around the equivalent of \$10 a day. The strands are then dried in the sun. Thousands of flowers are needed for a single gram, or 1/30th of an ounce. A hectare of flowers, about the size of two football fields, yields about 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of saffron. The farmers can then sell it off to Iranian dealers at about \$1,500 a kilogram.

Iranians, who use it to flavor everything from stews and rice to cookies and sweets, consume about 80 tons a year, the head of the office for expanding saffron exports, Ali Shariati-Moghadam, told the Iranian state news agency IRNA. Now after the nuclear deal, the country is hoping to boost exports, which have languished under sanctions, amounting last year to \$165 million dollars, down from a year earlier. So far the first seven months of this year have seen an improvement, with \$93 million in sales, up from the same period the previous year, according to IRNA. Here is a gallery of images by AP photographer Ebrahim Noroozi of the saffron harvest in Torbat Heydariyeh. — AP



Iranian villagers separate the crimson stigmas from the purple blossoms on the roof of a house just outside the city of Torbat Heydariyeh.



Iranian farm workers harvest saffron flowers.



Iranian farm workers harvest saffron flowers just outside the city of Torbat Heydariyeh, northeastern Iran.