

**Syrian girl killed as fire ravages Spring Camp in Jahra area**



**With Ivanka, the duties of first daughter may change**



**Pope Francis, at 80, looks to 'fruitful and joyous' old age**



**Costa shines as Chelsea secure 11th straight win**



## SUICIDE BOMBING TARGETS TURKISH SOLDIERS; 13 DEAD

AMIR SENDS A CABLE OF CONDOLENCE TO TURKEY PRESIDENT



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40 PAGES

### 241,220 WORK PERMITS ISSUED

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Manpower Authority Deputy Director for Recruitment Ahmed Al-Mossa said that the total work permits issued in 2016 were 241,220 compared to 253,829 issued last year. Al-Mossa justified the drop by the organizational decisions issued by Minister Hind Al-Sabeeh concerning the assessment of companies' need for laborers.

Al-Mossa added that according to MSAL's decisions, laborers locally sponsored by small projects would be allowed to transfer their residency visas after working for the same sponsor for a minimum of one year, whereas those brought from outside Kuwait would be allowed to transfer to another small or medium project companies after working for the same sponsor for a minimum of three years. He said that the Authority had no intentions (at the time soon) to open - for transfer of commercial visit visas and domestic helpers' visas to work visas.

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KAYSERI: A public bus is seen burning at the scene of a car bomb attack in central Anatolian city of Kayseri, Turkey yesterday. — AP

ISTANBUL: Thirteen Turkish soldiers were killed and dozens more wounded yesterday in a suicide car bombing targeting off-duty conscripts blamed on Kurdish militants, the latest in a string of attacks to rock Turkey in recent months. The government said all signs so far suggested the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was behind the bombing in the city of Kayseri, a usually calm industrial hub in Anatolia.

Forty-eight soldiers were wounded in the attack which struck when the soldiers were being taken from their barracks by bus on a weekend shopping trip, the army said in a statement. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said a total of 55 people were wounded, six seriously. Television pictures showed the bus reduced to a smoldering wreck by the blast, which comes a week after 44 people were killed in a double bombing in Istanbul after a football match. That attack was claimed by Kurdish militants.

Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak said in televised comments that Kayseri attack was "unfortunately similar" to last weekend's strikes in Istanbul. "All indications at present point to the PKK," Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesman Numan Kurtulmus told NTV television. "We have to take into account all possibilities but the signs at present point to the PKK." Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said that the attack was carried out by a "suicide bomber", without giving further details.

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### BIN LADEN'S SON AND WIFE DENIED ENTRY INTO EGYPT

CAIRO: Osama Bin Laden's son Omar was refused entry to Egypt yesterday, airport sources said, giving no reason why his name was on a list of people banned from the country. Omar, 34, Osama Bin Laden's fourth-eldest son, was travelling with his British wife Zaina Al Sabah from Doha, and they asked to be sent to Turkey, the sources said. The couple, who lived in Egypt for several months in 2007 and 2008 were previously denied entry to the country in 2008. Omar Bin Laden broke with his father in 2001 after living in Afghanistan for much of 1996 to 2001.

In an interview with Reuters in 2010, Omar said he was working with Saudi Arabia and Iran to end his separation from a group of brothers and sisters that dates back to the chaos in Afghanistan following the Al-Qaeda attacks of Sept 11, 2001. Omar said Bin Laden's children were trying to be "good citizens of the world" but suffered from the lack of a father and the stigma of being the Al-Qaeda leader's children.

None were part of Al-Qaeda, he said at the time. "We are working with the Iranian government and the Saudi government at the moment to have my mother's children and grandchildren join us," he said. Osama Bin Laden was killed at his Pakistani hideout by US commandos in 2011 in a major blow to the militant group which carried out the Sept 11 attacks. — Reuters

## NEW DEAL REACHED FOR ALEPPO

ALEPPO: A new deal has been reached to complete the evacuation of rebel-held areas of Syria's east Aleppo which ground to a halt yesterday over demands from pro-government forces that people also be moved out of two villages besieged by rebels. Syrian rebel official Al-Farouk Abu Bakr, speaking from Aleppo to news channel Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath yesterday, said the deal comprised an evacuation from the two Shiite villages besieged by insurgents, the evacuation of wounded people from two towns besieged by pro-government forces near the Lebanese border, and the full evacuation of rebel-held east Aleppo.

A Syrian government official also said the stalled evacuation of Aleppo would resume, alongside some evacuations from the four besieged towns and villages. "It was agreed to resume evacuations from east Aleppo in parallel with the evacuation of (medical) cases from Kefraya and Al-Foua and some cases from Zabadani and Madaya," said the government official, part of the evacuations negotiating team. The Shiite villages of

Al-Foua and Kefraya in Idlib province are besieged by insurgents. The towns of Madaya and Zabadani are blockaded by pro-government forces.

The operation to evacuate fighters and civilians from the last opposition-held area of Aleppo was suspended yesterday, its second day, after pro-government militias demanded that wounded people also be brought out of Al-Foua and Kefraya, and protesters blocked the road out of Aleppo. There were recriminations on all sides and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said "Aleppo is now a synonym for hell". Rebel sources accused pro-government forces they identified as Shiite militias of detaining and opening fire on a convoy carrying evacuees from east Aleppo on Friday.

Abu Bakr told Al-Hadath the previous agreement was breached by pro-government militias who detained "hundreds" of people trying to leave, leading to some deaths. A Syrian military source denied this, but said a convoy trying to leave Aleppo was returned back to the city.

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United Nations staff and other supporters assemble on UN headquarters grounds, around a sculpture entitled 'Non-Violence', to show their solidarity with the people of Aleppo. — AP

## ARTIST BRINGS BEAUTY TO WAR-RAVAGED GAZA

KHAN YUNIS: Dutch artist Marjan Teeuwen walks past a column formed from rubble to show off her latest creation, a barren house in the Gaza Strip where doorless rooms face into bleak, empty space. The 'Shaath House' in Khan Yunis in the south of the Palestinian territory was largely destroyed by an Israeli attack in the 2014 Gaza war but Teeuwen, 52, specializes in turning unwanted places into works of art.

Working with Palestinian engineers and artists and the Palestinian Red Crescent, she is "transforming a demolished house into a beautiful sculpture" which will serve briefly as a museum. There is one major difference however between the Gaza house and her previous works, in the Netherlands, Russia and South Africa.

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GAZA: Palestinian youths from Gaza's Free Parkour team, practice their Parkour skills in Gaza City. — AFP

### CHURCH ATTACK RAISES CALLS TO UPROOT BIGOTRY

CAIRO: Growing up in Egypt, Mina and other Copts remember all too well the anti-Christian slurs they used to hear at school and on the street. Once, while playing football, a Muslim youth snatched Mina's necklace and crucifix and stomped on it. "I won't forget that day," said Mina, now in his 30s. Egypt is now trying to come to terms with the kind of religious bigotry behind a December 11 suicide bombing in a Cairo church that killed 26 people during Sunday mass. "School curricula, some (religious) platforms and the absence of an enlightened current are what have led to this," said Coptic Church spokesman Boulos Halim.

Egyptian authorities have announced the arrest of four jihadist suspects. But the authorities must go much further and address the kind of prejudice running through Egyptian society that for decades has fuelled attacks on Coptic Christians, said Halim. "Police and military power have never been able to erase terrorism. It must be accompanied by the power of thought," he said. The attack claimed by the Islamic State group was the second church bombing in Egypt since 2011 and only the latest sectarian incident in the Muslim-majority country where Christians have long complained of discrimination.

Copts, who make up about 10 percent of Egypt's 90-million population, say they are sidelined both in the education system and state institutions. Halim traces the roots of violence against his community to the 1970s, when then president Anwar Sadat empowered Islamists against his socialist opponents.

Continued on Page 13

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## KUWAIT SCRAMBLES TO RELIEVE SYRIANS

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society's (KRCS) urgent operation in Syria is aimed at securing badly-needed food and clothes to the city residents who are experiencing extremely hard conditions, KRCS Chairman said yesterday.

The KRCS, defying surrounding security hazards, has managed to deliver its first batch of humanitarian aid to those in need in the war-battered Aleppo region, in collaboration with the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS).

Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, the KRCS Chairman, was speaking following speedy dispatch of the first batch of supplies, including food and clothes, to Syrians in Aleppo's western rural regions and Idlib governorate. A team will be dispatched in few days to northern Syria to coordinate with Qatari teams in delivering the relief supplies to the people of Aleppo, those in the city and the ones who have been locally relocated.

Aggravating humanitarian conditions and the heavy losses suffered by the civilians in Aleppo in recent days have prompted the society to act promptly, Dr Sayer said, appealing to good doers in Kuwait to present donations to help the Syrian people. —KUNA

## KRCS CONTINUES TO AID SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

**BEIRUT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) continued yesterday to provide relief aid and assistance to the Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. Head of the KRCS field team Talal Al-Khattaf said that the society provided clothes to Syrian refugee families in Beqaa District, eastern Lebanon.

This campaign is within the KRCS initiative to help Syrian refugees fend off the harsh winter season, said the official. There

are around one million Syrians refugees in Lebanon escaping from the ongoing war in their country raging since 2011.

Recently, the city of Aleppo, besieged by Syrian regime forces and allies, had been subjected to a ruthless onslaught that resulted in the death and injury of many Syrians. The crisis in Aleppo is expected to worsen the humanitarian situation in Syria and nearby countries. —KUNA



## FUND DELEGATION EXAMINES PROJECTS IN TANZANIA

**DODOMA:** A delegation of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) is currently visiting Tanzania examining projects executed with its contributions, including a main road linking the African state with neighboring countries.

The delegation has met with Tanzanian Finance Minister Dr Philip Mpango in Dar es Salaam, the country's capital, for assessing the ventures, namely expansion of a major hospital in the city of Zanzibar and building a highway in the west linking the country with Burundi, Kongo and Rwanda, according to a statement sent to KUNA by the Kuwaiti embassy in Dar Es Salaam yesterday. KFAED contributes to financing

these mega projects.

Mohammad Al-Omairi, the Kuwaiti charge d'affaires, said the minister noted during the meeting KFAED's role in bolstering the solid bilateral ties between Kuwait and Tanzania. He added that the Kuwaiti embassy, since its opening last year, has worked to boost the rapprochement between the two countries.

KFAED's success in funding ventures that cannot be financed by larger funds affirms that the State of Kuwait has rightly earned the UN title, the humanitarian center, Omairi said. The delegation is visiting Tanzania to work out a loan agreement for funding the hospital and road projects. —KUNA



**DODOMA:** Tanzanian Finance Minister Dr Philip Mpango meets with Kuwait fund for Arab Economic Development delegation. —KUNA

## KUWAIT'S HUMANITARIAN ROLE IN LEBANON EXTOLLED



**BEIRUT:** Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Lebanon's Children Cancer Center Nora Jumblatt (second right) meets Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development's delegation. —KUNA

**BEIRUT:** Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Lebanon's Children Cancer Center, Nora Jumblatt extended yesterday thanks and appreciation to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people for their generous humanitarian contributions to various parts of the world.

Regarding the \$1 million donation by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) to help treat Syrian refugee children at the Center, Jumblatt said that Kuwait has always been supportive of Lebanon through its various charitable and humanitarian institutions.

She added that this grant was part of Kuwait's commitment towards the Syrian people as announced during the donors' conferences for Syria. She said that Kuwait has also been supportive of millions of Syrian people who have been forced to flee their country as a result of the ongoing war. She also thanked KFAED for its continuous support of the Syrian refugees.

Meanwhile, Director of the medical center Dr Hassan Al-Sulh praised the generous and humanitarian initiative by KFAED, thanking at the same time His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah as well as the government and people of Kuwait for the humanitarian initiative.

On Friday, KFAED's Director General Abdulwahab Al-Bader said that the grant targets Syrian children, the most vulnerable segment among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Kuwait has been one of the leading countries in providing relief aid to the conflict-affected Syrian people through government and non-government organizations. The Gulf State also hosted three conferences for Syria and also helped to organize one in London.



## FIRM ACTION AGAINST OFFENDERS: MINISTER

**KUWAIT:** The Interior Minister yesterday urged for firm action against law offenses noting the homeland security tops any other consideration. Regional developments warrant vigilance and readiness, particular-

ly in light of "explicit hazards and roving threats," said Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, also the Deputy Prime Minister, in a statement marking the Arab Police Day, which falls today. The policemen are able to confront any "hardships, on national bases for sake of attaining the country's higher interests; which are security, stability and prosperity, as well as facing the rapid security developments locally, regionally and globally," he added.

The Ministry of Interior is updating its networks to live up to such challenges that threaten Kuwait's security and stability, he confirmed, also re-affirming the political leaders' support for the security chiefs. He praised on the occasion the Arab policemen for serving their countries' security and stability. —KUNA



**Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah**

## KFSD OFFICIAL EXPLAINS DANGER OF HEATERS WHILE CAMPING

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Wintertime is the best time for family gatherings and camping. But while enjoying this time, we should be aware of carbon monoxide, the silent killer. Carbon monoxide, or CO, is a colorless, odorless, and toxic gas. Room heaters fueled with gas, oil, and kerosene produce it; CO can accumulate to dangerous levels. Though the briquettes do not produce visible smoke and seems to be smokeless and harmless, it contains poisonous gas within, which works in shadows.

"During winter, we face many cases of death due to fire and suffocation. People use heaters, coals, and briquettes to heat the room and forget to extinguish it," First Lieutenant Ali Qali, public relations and media department of the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) told Kuwait Times. He added that this causes suffocation and may lead to a fire due to lack of ventilation. Another cause of death is Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning which is ignored in some cases.

One of the joys of life for Kuwaitis is that people can spend their time in the desert. But to ensure the safety and security of campers, Qali noted that people should follow fire prevention procedures while camping in order to prevent accidents and ensure safety at camps by put-

ting out the coal before sleeping.

"People must use high quality coal. After the coal turns white, the camper should make sure the tent has proper ventilation to prevent breathing in CO while using the heater," he said. Qali said that the briquettes, coal and gas heaters should be kept outside the room and if possible CO detectors should be used in buildings for better precautions. He pointed out that all kind of heaters are considered safe if people use it in the right way.

With electrical heaters, the most common cause of ignition is short circuit. According to a survey, the cause of ignition during the third quarter of 2016 were 510 short circuit accidents, while 145 were caused by youngsters and children. "Low quality power socket may cause a short circuit, which may lead to fire and death," Qali said. He added that

people should avoid warming up their clothes by putting them on the heater. "The electrical heater has ventilation slots and a fan. When you cover it, it damages the heater." To avoid the risk of suffocation and fire, he advised people to supervise children when the heater is being used, keep flammable things away from the heater, have a qualified professional install the equipment and make sure that all fuel-burning equipment are vented outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.



First Lieutenant Ali Qali

# GIRL KILLED IN JAHRA CAMP FIRE

## TWO WOMEN DEAD IN CRASH

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** A Syrian girl was killed while her mother and brother were injured when a fire broke in a Jahra spring camp yesterday, said security sources. Firemen rushed to the scene shortly after the fire was reported, but the victim had already succumbed to her injuries by the time they arrived, the sources added. Public Relations Director at Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) Khalil Al-Amir extended condolences to the victim's family. He also urged campers to avoid using electric-powered heaters inside or around tents, and switch off power generators before falling asleep.

### Fatal crash

Two Kuwaiti women were killed after losing control over their vehicle, which turned over near King Fahad highway yesterday. Firefighters, paramedics and police arrived to the scene in response to an emergency call, and soon discovered that the victims had died. The bodies were taken to the coroner. Meanwhile, a case was filed to investigate the causes of the accident. Separately, a policeman was killed and his companion was gravely injured after losing control over their vehicle which turned over along the Sixth Ring Road, said security sources.

### Fire drill

A fire drill was recently conducted at the central prison to familiarize both prison guards and inmates with the standard procedures to follow in case of a fire, said security sources



KUWAIT: Detectives examine the scene after the fire was extinguished.

noting that the drill was organized by the civil defense, KFSD and attended by the correctional facilities, forces and doctors.

### Municipality campaign

Ahmadi municipality recently inspected Sabahiya, Mangaf, Abo Hlaifa, Jaber Al-Ali and

Fahaheel industrial areas to stop street vendors and remove violations, said Ahmadi municipality manager Fahad Al-Shetaili noting, that the tour resulted in filing nine citations for bad health condition, hiring labor without health certificates, using expired health licenses and road blockage.

# ILLEGALS PAY DOUBLE FEES AT PUBLIC MEDICAL FACILITIES

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** Illegal residents in Kuwait receive medical treatment as visitors, which means that they have to pay a KD 5 fee for medical examination at public polyclinics, in addition to extra fees for other services such as radiology tests and ward hospitalization. "The ward



Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi

fees gradually increase the longer a patient stays," Minister of Health Dr Jamal Al-Harbi said, adding that the ministry cannot prevent people living illegally in Kuwait from receiving treatment at public hospitals for humanitarian reasons.

In addition, Dr Harbi said that such patients usually have to pay double fees for surgeries, adding that many of them prefer seeking medical services at private hospital to get quicker service, especially since they pay would almost be the same as what they would have to pay in a public hospital.

In other news, Dr Harbi is due to give orders to fill in several vacant posts within the ministry, including his previous post of assistant undersecretary for assisting medical services, and that of the assistant undersecretary for technical affairs. Moreover, Harbi is scheduled to sign a ministerial decree within a few days pertaining forming a special committee to examine the overseas treatment program files.

### Financial committee

The parliament's financial affairs committee is due to discuss a bill today on Kuwait's contribution in the capital of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Headed by chairman MP Khalaf Dumaitheer and with the attendance of Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh, the committee is also due to discuss the State Audit Bureau's report on assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Authority of Industry's operation systems as well as the biannual report about privatization. In other news, MP Saleh Ashour criticized what he described as 'sectarian calls made in speeches outside the Russian embassy' and stressed that those calls are after dividing Kuwait. He also urged the interior ministry to hold those responsible for such calls accountable.

### Decisions examined

Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Faleh Al-Azeb announced forming a special committee to examine the ministerial decisions issued previously in the justice ministry, as well as to examine the work of various committees and cancel any unnecessary ones. Further, Azeb said that he would discuss the decision to refer former Secretary General of the Public Anticorruption Authority Ahmad Al-Rumaihi to retirement with the authority's officials. In addition, Azeb said that he would work on reducing divorce rates through studying the various reasons that lead to divorce, in addition to age categories, and then suggesting proper solution. He also noted that he would develop the judiciary system and support judges' demands. Media wise, Azeb said that the ministry's public relation employees would be subjected to special training courses.

### New directors

A directive was recently issued to assign five Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) managers to assume acting positions in Kuwait Integrated Petrochemical Industries Company until further notice. According to the directive, Tareq Al-Houtti would be appointed as acting legal affairs manager, Mohammed Mansour Al-Ajmi would be appointed as acting maintenance manager at Al-Zour refinery, Ali Mohammed Al-Ajmi would be appointed as acting operations manager at the refinery, Nadia Hajji would be appointed as acting planning manager and Abdurrahman Al-Alyan would be appointed as acting human resources and manpower development manager.



Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah

## JARALLAH STRESSES IRAN'S COMPLIANCE OVER DETAINED KUWAITIS

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah underlined yesterday the Iranian authorities' compliance over the detention of four Kuwaiti citizens in Iran's Ahvaz area. Speaking to Kuwait Radio over the issue, Jarallah hoped that definite outcomes would be reached in the next couple of days, regarding their whereabouts and immediate release.

As soon as it was informed about detention, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs moved immediately and contacted the Kuwaiti embassy in Tehran, which, in turn, communicated with Iranian authorities to reach the whereabouts and fate of the Kuwaiti citizens, he said.

Jarallah quoted the Iranian authorities as having promised to do their utmost to secure their release and safe return. He added that the Iranian ambassador in Kuwait was summoned on Friday for a meeting with the assistant foreign minister for consular affairs over the fate of the four Kuwaiti citizens. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) organized an awareness campaign Friday evening at the Julaia desert camp, in cooperation with EQUATE and the Ministry of Interior. The goal of the campaign is to spread awareness among campers regarding common fire prevention and safety procedures. Meanwhile, fire extinguishers were distributed to campers as well. —By Hanan Al-Saadoun

In Brief

**AMIR OFFERS CONDOLENCE TO BAHRAINI KING HAMAD**

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolence to Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa over the death of Sheikha Lulwa bint Rashed bin Mohammed bin Isa Al-Khalifa. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent the Bahraini King similar condolence cables. — KUNA



**SPEAKER OFFERS CONDOLENCES**

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday sent a cable of condolence to his Turkish counterpart Ismail Kahraman over the victims of a bomb blast that hit central Turkey yesterday and left dozens of people dead or wounded. In the cable, the speaker reiterated full support with the Turkish people in their fight against terrorist acts, saying that Kuwait stands side by side with all measures Turkey is taking in order to maintain its security and stability. — KUNA



**SMES FORUM CONCLUDES**

**RABAT:** Concluding its activities on Friday, the 7th Arab forum on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) recommended boosting investment atmosphere in Arab countries so as to promote SMEs. In a final communique issued at the end of the forum, the conferees called for paying much attention to SMEs in Arab countries to help achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. — KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: Birds are seen at Kuwait Bay. — KUNA

# INITIATIVE TO NAME SHARM AL-SHEIKH SQUARE AFTER AMIR

## 'KUWAIT OF PEACE, EGYPT OF LOVE' FESTIVAL ANNOUNCED

**CAIRO:** A press conference was held in Kuwait recently to announce the 'Kuwait of Peace, Egypt of Love' festival, due to be held at Sharm Al-Sheikh, Egypt, on December 29-30 under auspices of Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail. The festival is first initiative organized by the Kuwaiti Future Group and comes as a manifestation of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's instructions to support Egypt.

Speaking during the press conference held at Kuwait's embassy in Cairo, Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Mohammed Saleh Al-Thuwayyikh expressed by expressing Kuwait's condolences to Egypt for the victims killed in Abbasiya Cathedral

explosion, describing the attack as 'a mean act of terrorism'. He also stressed that Kuwait-Egypt relations were historic and a role model for other Arabs countries.

In addition, Thuwayyikh explained that the festival will be held in collaboration with a number of official and non-official Egyptian and Kuwaiti bodies. He also stressed that choosing Sharm Al-Sheikh as a venue for the festival comes because of its fascinating scenery and nature, in addition to the safety and security it enjoys and offers to visitors.

**Supporting Egypt**

Meanwhile, the head of the Future Group

and head of the festival, Abrar Al-Masoud said that the festival comes in implementation of His Highness the Amir's instructions to support Egypt in various fields, namely the economic and touristic sectors. She started her words by quoting His Highness the Amir's words saying: "Egypt is so dear to us and we will never let it down."

Masoud added that the festival is the first but not only initiative to express such love and joint history and destiny between Kuwait and Egypt. She added that the festival would mark launching several Kuwaiti small projects to help solve the problem of unemployment in Egypt. "The festival will also witness the display of Kuwaiti

and Egyptian traditional artifacts," she added, noting that the festival would be sponsored by Al-Sabah Royalty Company, the Arab Real Estate Investment Company, Kuwait Fund for Arab Development, Al-Kharafi Company, the Kuwaiti-Egyptian real Estate Company, Al-Anbaa, Al-Ahram, Al-Nahar, Rosealously, Egypt 11 news website and the Nile Specialized TV Channels represented by Nile Life.

**Charm and security**

Also speaking on the occasion, South Sinai Governor Major General Khaled Foudah stressed the deep-rooted relations between both countries, and invited the Kuwaiti peo-

ple to attend the festival and visit Sharm Al-Sheikh to enjoy its charm and security.

Foudah announced that two Kuwaiti flights would arrive on December 28, carrying a large number of Kuwaiti tourists. He also hailed the initiative suggested by Masoud to name one of Sharm Al-Sheikh's squares after His Highness the Amir.

Also speaking on the occasion, the Egyptian Minister of Tourism Amr Al-Ezabi stressed that cordial relations between both countries go way back to the 1973 War. He also noted that around 140,000 Kuwaiti tourists had visited Egypt last year, adding that the numbers are still growing.



CAIRO: Officials attend a press conference to announce the 'Kuwait of Peace, Egypt of Love' festival.

## GCC STUDENTS PARTAKE IN ROME YOUTH, CULTURAL GATHERING

**ROME:** A delegation of GCC students took part yesterday in a youth and cultural gathering at the Municipality of Rome as part of the

'Youth Ambassadors of the Gulf' initiative. Organizers from the Rome municipality welcomed the students to the event which aimed at

promoting dialogue and cultural exchange amongst world youth.

Speaking on behalf of the Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi, the officials affirmed that the city was the perfect venue for such a gathering due to Rome's historical and multicultural significance. The city of Rome is very keen on holding this gathering which will hopefully contribute to world peace and understanding amongst youths of the globe, said the officials who lauded the participation of the GCC youth in the event.

The Rome youth and cultural gathering was held via an initiative by Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other GCC Ambassadors. Meanwhile the Mayor of Rome Raggi, held a meeting with Ambassador Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled and other GCC diplomats, discussing issues of mutual interest and ways to bolster relations between the GCC and Italy. — KUNA



**ROME:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other GCC Ambassadors meet with Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi.



**ROME:** A delegation of GCC students pose for a group photo with Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other GCC ambassadors. — KUNA

## UN TEAM LAUDS KUWAITI WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**GENEVA:** A UN team lauded yesterday the accomplishments of the State of Kuwait within the domain of women's rights, saying that the Gulf State had taken strong leaps in empowering women and enabling them to take leading roles in society. The UN team, which concluded a nine-day visit to Kuwait last Thursday, said in a report that Kuwaiti women were 'highly professional,' adding that they have been strongly contributing to the development of their society.

The team, which was headed by Vice President of UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women Kamala Chandrakirana, affirmed that the Kuwaiti constitution secured the rights of women, revealing that for decades, women

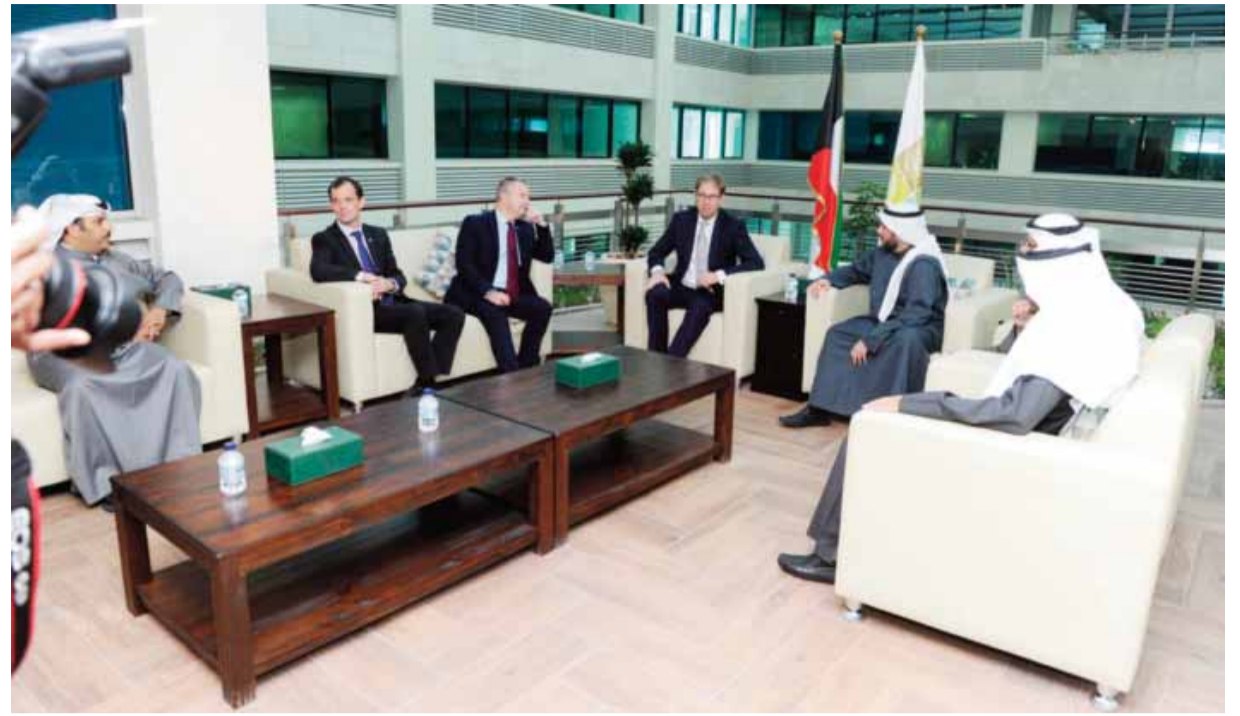
were contributing to social, economic, and cultural progression in the GCC country.

"Kuwaiti women won their parliamentary rights in 2005, which was an important accomplishment that led to several legislative reforms," said the team's report, adding that the approval of the 2015 domestic workers law helped to protect the rights of some 60,000 helpers who are mostly women.

Other reforms within the constitutional level have also helped elevate the status of women in Kuwait in general, said the team, noting that there were some new laws protecting women rights in the country which were highly progressive on a regional level. The team was impressed by the inclusion of

women in the security apparatus of Kuwait, revealing that there around 358 policewomen within the ranks of the Interior Ministry.

The increase of women in the working force, by 56.5 and 51 percent in the public and private sectors respectively, was also an indication that women empowerment in Kuwait was heading in the right direction, said the report which also commended Kuwait's keenness on decreasing illiteracy especially among women. The team concluded their report by wishing Kuwait evermore progress within the fields of women's rights and empowerment, saying that what have been witnessed in Kuwait in these regards, puts the Gulf country on the right track. — KUNA



## CHANGING ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR A NATIONAL DUTY: BRITISH MINISTER

**KUWAIT:** A visiting senior British official said that changing people's behavior toward the environment should become a national duty. In an interview on the sidelines of a visit to the Environment Public Authority (EPA), the British Minister of Middle East and North African Affairs Tobias Ellwood emphasized yesterday the significance of educating people on the environment.

Ellwood called for a collective approach for the protection of the environment, noting that the UK's Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, had started investing its long experience in Kuwait, namely to help build capabilities to understand and monitor the air and the maritime environment in the country. The British minister expressed admiration of Kuwait's leading efforts for the preservation of the environment for the future generations.

Meanwhile, EPA's Director General Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said that Ellwood's visit is part of the efforts to boost ties between the authority and the British Department for Environment, which will be positively reflected on a host of projects. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed stressed EPA's keenness on exchanging



**KUWAIT:** British Minister of Middle East and North African Affairs Tobias Ellwood meets with EPA's Director General Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. —KUNA

expertise for enhancing the quality of work, and promoting the authority's services.

During the official visit, Ellwood, the British ambassador to Kuwait Matthew Lodge and an accompanying delegation met with Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmed and his deputies for technical affairs Mohammad Al-Enzi, and environment monitoring

Mohammad Al-Ahmad. The meeting discussed a host of the existing projects between the EPA and the British Department on the protection of maritime environment. In addition, the British delegation was acquainted with the EPA's Geographical Information System monitoring the pollution rates in Kuwait round the clock. — KUNA



**An Invitation to Tender No (KAC/PP/4 /2016)  
For chartering vehicles (buses) to transport staff from  
KAC accommodation to work site at Kuwait International  
Airport and vice versa.**

Kuwait Airways is pleased to invite all local companies and establishments specialized in this field to participate in the above tender regarding chartering vehicles (buses), along with driver, to transport staff from KAC accommodation to work site and vice versa.

To all interested applicants shall bring a copy of such announcement and check in the office of secretary of Tender Committee, Ground Floor, KAC Head Office, AlDajeej Area, near Kuwait International Airport, during business hours as of the date of this announcement publication. To purchase the tender documents, the interested bidder shall pay an amount of KD 50/- (Kuwaiti Dinar Fifty only), which is non-refundable, to the chief treasurer at KAC location against an official receipt to be furnished along with the offered bid. Furthermore, a copy of this announcement shall be attached therewith, taking note that the Documents submission

Date ( in a sealed and closed envelopes) is 2PM, this day Monday, corresponding to 02/01/2017. All documents shall be submitted to the office of secretary of KAC Tender Committee. Any tenders provided after the aforesaid date shall be disregarded.

A preliminary meeting will be held to answer all inquiries received from the participated entities concerning the tender, at 9 AM in the morning of this day Monday, corresponding to 26/12/2016, at the Meeting Hall of Arrangements and Housing Department located at The Ground Floor, KAC Head Office, AlDajeej Area, near Kuwait International Airport. In the event of the bidder's absence, all discussions, decisions, and recommendations included in meeting minutes shall be binding upon the bidder.

**If you have any further questions, please contact:  
Tel. 24345555 Ext. 2249**



### KUNA PARTAKES IN ARABIC LANGUAGE FAIR

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) took part yesterday in a fair organized by the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs; themed 'pastime in the modern standard Arabic' language. Sheikha Al-Khbaizi, in charge of KUNA's pavilion, told the national news agency that the exhibition was held on the occasion of the World Arabic Language Day (WALD); designed to encourage children to embrace the language. The exhibition, held at Al-Shaheed Park, included a workshop displaying editions of "KUNA Al-Saghir", the children magazine published by the news agency, Kuwait Television and a number of local magazines took part in the activity. —KUNA

### FM CONDEMNS BOMBING

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Ministry yesterday expressed the state's condemnation of the "terrorist" bombing that targeted a bus boarding troops in Kayseri in the Republic of Turkey. A Ministry official source affirmed in a statement the State of Kuwait's siding with Turkey and supporting its measures to safeguard its security and stability. — KUNA

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Al-Anbaa

A STATEMENT

By Saleh Al-Shayegi

Previous ministers who were not reappointed in the new cabinet, those who kept their posts and those appointed for the first time are all keen to serve their country and do their jobs as they accepted to shoulder such huge responsibilities. We can but think positively about public servants and ministers in particular. However, is this how things are evaluated or is this how an observer should judge the previous cabinet or a newly appointed one with agendas yet to be disclosed? Has the previous government filed a 'statement' listing its achievements and failures? Has the government filed a clearly defined program for its achievement or addressed the public before ending its tenure regarding its achievements, and apologized for its mistakes or justified them?

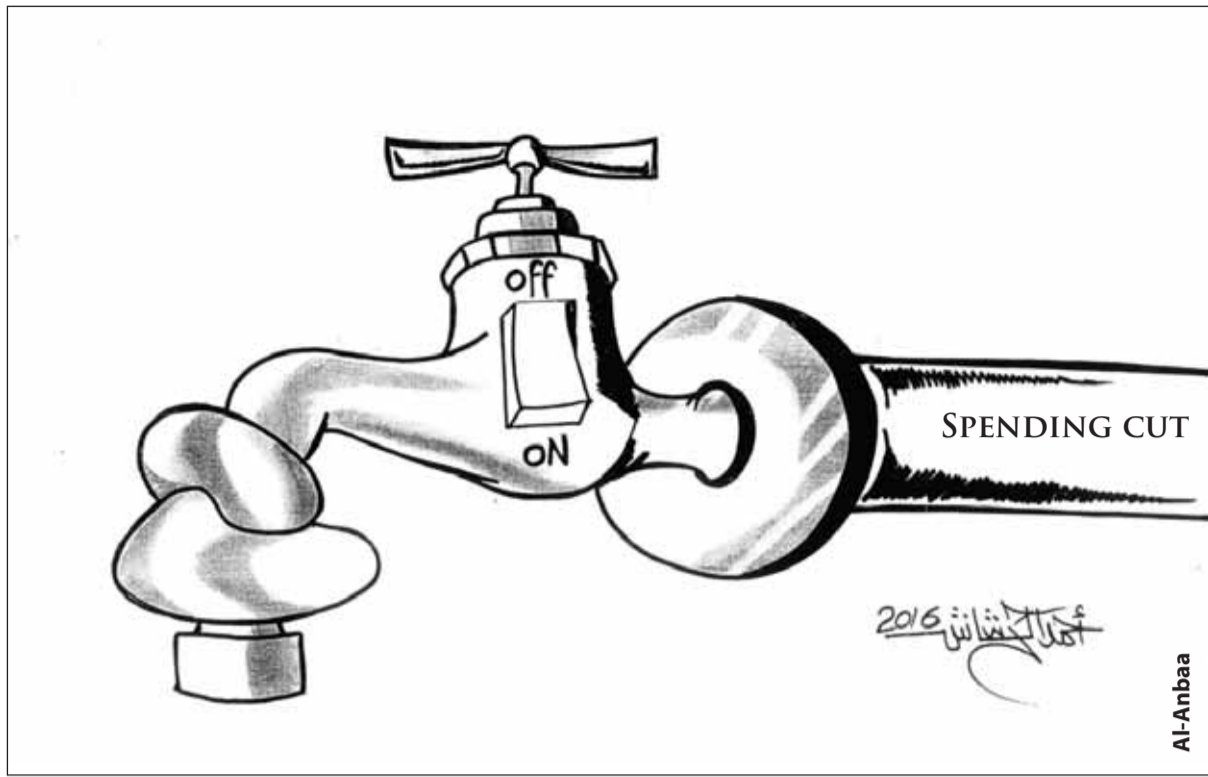
None of the above was ever done by the outgoing cabinet, nor by any of the previous ones. It will not

Has the previous government filed a 'statement' listing its achievements and failures?

be done by the current cabinet or the following ones, either. Such facts make a ministerial position more of an honor through which ministers go unharmed and as sure-footed as peacocks. Unless we have a means of assessing a minister's performance and measure his success or failure, things will remain the same regardless of the formation of the cabinet. The government has become like a train that stops at certain points where some passengers get off to be replaced by others.

The parliament's monitoring of the government's performance has proved to be ineffective so far. It has never fixed any problems. It remains nominal and verbal as long as the government is capable of neutralizing the parliament through some of its members, which results in us remaining the same with an outgoing or incoming cabinet.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



Al-Anbaa

A RICH MAN'S ADVICE

By Saad Al-Mo'tesh

I would like to give an advice to all the businessmen who strive to make financial gains, although I have a feeling that many of them will not listen to it because

I have relatively no experience in business, save for being legally authorized to sign the papers of a commercial establishment. But the main reason I think they would not take my advice is the common saying among merchants, which comes in the form of an advice a merchant son had given to his son that goes like: "My son, do not mingle with or befriend poor people, because if there was any good in them, they would have benefited from themselves in the first place."

No businessman will ever accept my advice even if I am offering it for free. But I will give them my advice, nevertheless. I have noticed that many businessmen put

their commercial ads on YouTube to promote themselves. The annoying part about these ads is that they are usually accompanied with background music, and they usually pop up when someone is listening to verses from the Holy Quran on YouTube, causing an interruption.

Almighty Allah ordered us to listen attentively to the Quran, saying: "So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy" (A'raf 204). Hence, my advice to businessmen who place such ads on YouTube is not to interrupt the Quran in the run of making profits. I have stated my case and know that I am not poor in terms of money, but I am very poor before Almighty Allah, who has bestowed so many blessing upon me, and upon all of us.

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

COUPLE'S VEHICLES SET ABLAZE IN QAIRAWAN

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti citizen working for the Ministry of Electricity and Water reported recently that his and his wife's luxurious vehicles were incinerated while parked outside the family's house in Qairawan. The man told police that his neighbor said that he had seen a golden sports utility vehicle (SUV) near the two vehicles when the fire broke out. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Fugitive arrested

A bedoon (stateless) man was recently arrested in Ferdous when policemen found that he is wanted for attempted murder, damaging personal property and a financial claim, said security sources. The man was apprehended at a checkpoint and taken to the proper authorities to face charges, the sources added.

Brawl after accident

A simple traffic accident was the reason of starting a fight between two female citizens in Salmiya, said security sources, noting that in addition to the accident report, both women filed cases in which they exchanged assault accusations.

Family disputes

A woman threw her husband out of their apartment after he beat her up following a family dispute, taking advantage of the fact that the lease contract is signed with her name only. The man had to spend the following few hours roaming around, before police called and summoned him to the police station where his wife filed an assault report, said security sources. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Smuggling foiled

An Iranian man was recently arrested at Doha port where custom inspectors foiled his attempt to smuggle tons of medicines, herbs and chemical substances used in hair transplant, which he had hidden inside his wooden boat.

Abortion suspect detained

Following the arrest of a doctor for conducting illegal abortions, a Syrian woman who is also wanted to serve an eight-year prison sentence for providing abortion services, was recently arrested while hiding at her brother's house in Salwa. — Al-Rai, Al-Anbaa



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait hosted a team from Prime Bites Nutrition Company, which offered health tips and advices on healthy nutrition habits.

KFH COMMENCES SHARIA AUDIT PROGRAM AT GROUP LEVEL

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has commenced Sharia Audit Program comprising models and practices of various sharia transactions, and thorough illustration on their provisions. The program was held in presence and participation of the staff of Sharia Control Departments at KFH-Group including Turkey, Bahrain, Malaysia and Kuwait. This serves in achieving the goal of exchanging expertise and information on the field of sharia audit at the level of the group. It is worth noting that the program is the first of its kind at the level of the Group.

Shaikh Tareq Mufarreh, Sharia Audit Manager at KFH-Bahrain presented the program that consists of practical and theoretical chapters. The program tackles a number of significant subjects such as the importance of sharia control in the work of Islamic financial institutions, the goals and regulations of sharia audit, mapping out plans and specialized agendas for the sharia audit purposes, in addition to the procedures of implementing the results of sharia audit reports.



The training program took into consideration the different work environments of the group banks and the various markets and customers' requirements, in addition to the various regula-

tions, bearing in mind the strict commitment in complying with the rules and provisions of sharia and the approved criteria from Fatwa and Sharia Supervisory Board at KFH.



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait sponsored a contest organized by the Jahra Governorate recently to select the best diabetes patient in terms of following up with medical instructions.



KUWAIT: The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced hiring 300 Kuwaiti fresh graduates in 2016, further cementing its position as a leading destination for Kuwaiti manpower in the private sector.



**SALE**

The Avenues | Marina Mall



**BOGGI**

M I L A N O



**With Ivanka Trump, the duties of first daughter may change**

CROWDED STARTING LINE FOR FRANCE'S SOCIALIST PRIMARY



ALEPPO: In this image released on Thursday, Dec 15, 2016 by Aleppo 24, shows residents gathered near a green government bus as they hold their belongings for evacuation from eastern Aleppo. —AP

# THOSE FLEEING ALEPPO TELL OF THEIR PAIN

‘THIS REVOLUTION IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST FAILURES IN THE WORLD’

**BEIRUT:** Death in Aleppo was personal for Modar Sheko. He lost his sister to government bombing early in the revolt. His brother was killed last month. And as they looked for a place to bury him, another airstrike killed his father. Still, Shekho held out in the besieged city as long as he could.

When he finally was forced to evacuate Friday, he made a video bidding farewell to the city. “We were asking for our freedom. This is what we get,” he said against a backdrop of bombed-out buildings and thousands of people waiting for buses to take them away from Aleppo. But even in his first hours of exile, the 28-year-old nurse longed to return.

“My soul is torn out more with each step away from Aleppo,” he whispered in an audio message to The Associated Press, not wanting to wake other evacuees in their temporary home in a village west of the ancient city. He and thousands of others held tight to their crumbling enclave despite a grueling four years of war. Bit by bit over three weeks, the government offensive chipped away at their last refuge. Their realm of destroyed buildings and crater-filled roads in eastern Aleppo shrank from 17 square miles to just one over a few weeks as forces loyal to President Bashar Assad swept through, neighborhood by neighborhood.

**‘Deceiving rebels’**

The promise of boarding buses to safety was a relief. But for many like Shekho, losing Aleppo was inconceivable. Of the more than half-dozen residents and activists that AP has maintained regular contact with in recent months, only one said he felt disillusioned with the rebellion. “This revolution is one of the biggest failures in the world,” said 21-year-old Ahmed, who has not left the enclave yet and refused to give his family name out of fear of reprisal. “If God saves me from this, I will go to Turkey and start a new life, away from the criminal regime and the deceiving rebels.”

Most seemed haunted by the city’s struggle, saying they can’t let go of their dream to create a Syria without Assad. They said they will continue their anti-government activities somehow from wherever they end up. One gynecologist who had refused to leave her patients said her husband forced her to flee to a government-controlled area for safety.

The woman, who identified herself only

as Farida to protect her family, earlier had sent her daughter out with thousands of other evacuees. Farida said she could not stand living for even two days in the government-controlled sector and fled to the countryside, where the rebels are in control. “Despite how hard it was under siege and bombardment, I was at peace with myself,” she said. Farida’s husband, also a doctor, followed. But she is still angry at him for forcing her to leave, adding: “I can’t continue my life with him.”

**‘Getting slaughtered’**

“I can’t feel any joy when my colleagues are getting slaughtered,” she said in text

messages. She hopes to be reunited one day with her daughter. Shekho left on the first day of the evacuation, which was monitored by the Red Cross. He and thousands of other holdouts boarded green government buses with portraits of Assad in the windshield and were taken to rebel-controlled areas.

“It is very painful that I separate from my city of 28 years,” Shekho said. “I hope it is quickly liberated so I can return to it.” Besides seeing his city crumble, Shekho watched his family shattered by more than five years of civil war. On the first day of the government’s big ground offensive three weeks ago, Shekho and his family sought a

new home to avoid intense bombing.

Like many others, his family was caught on the road by the bombardment, and his brother was killed on the spot. He and his father had to search for a cemetery because Aleppo was running out of burial space. In the process, his father - a prominent professor of Arabic - also was killed. Four years earlier, an airstrike killed his sister outside the hospital where she worked as a nurse.

After mourning his father and brother, Shekho had told the AP: “We are all on the road to death. May God accept them as martyrs.” Before he boarded the bus, he roamed the few streets of Aleppo still open

to him for one last time - but he couldn’t visit the graves of his relatives because the government had seized the neighborhood where they are buried.

“I hope they forgive us” for losing Aleppo, Shekho said. He said he plans to be reunited with his wife, who left as the fighting intensified, and also wants to see his English teachers again. Most likely, he will settle in a town on the Orontes River in Idlib province where rebels are in control. Many predict that Idlib may be the next front in a government offensive. Asked what he expected in his new life, he said: “It is the unknown future filled with painful memories.” — AP

## CHURCH ATTACK PROMPTS FEARS OF MILITANT ESCALATION

**CAIRO:** When a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Cairo church a week ago, it marked a bloody escalation by Egypt’s jihadi militants, raising fears that an insurgency which for years largely focused on fighting in the Sinai and killing policemen may now turn to unleash attacks on civilians in the country’s capital. A stepped up campaign by militants linked to the Islamic State group would be a heavy blow to a country trying to rebuild a wrecked economy and revive a vital tourism industry. The prospect is already spreading terror among Egypt’s Christians, who could be a main target.

In fact, the militants may use Christians in

an attempt to enflame sectarian divisions in Muslim-majority Egypt, following the strategy of the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq. By targeting the minority community, the group may be betting it can sow chaos and undermine the government of President Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi while avoiding indiscriminate bombings that kill fellow Muslims and bring an even more furious public backlash.

“They are framing justification for sectarian violence in Egypt in the same way they do it in Syria and Iraq,” said Mokhtar Awad, research fellow in the Program on Extremism at George Washington University. A storm of attacks on civilians would be a frightening

change for Egypt. Despite continued political unrest since 2011, Cairo and Egypt’s other cities along the Nile Valley have largely been spared such mass mayhem, even as Iraq, Syria and neighboring Libya have collapsed into chaos.

**Tourism devastated**

Extremists linked to the Islamic State group have been waging an insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula in brutal fighting with soldiers and security forces. In Cairo, they have carried out small-scale attacks on policemen and soldiers, as well as assassinations of officials, but rarely mass bombings. In the past two years, security agencies succeeded in breaking up multiple militant cells outside of Sinai, aiming to keep the insurgency bottled up in the peninsula. Northern Sinai is a hotbed of militancy with plentiful weaponry. Last year, the militants are believed to have smuggled a bomb on to a Russian jet leaving the Sinai resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, downing it in an attack that has devastated tourism there. But weapons and explosives are easily found across Egypt and can be smuggled through the porous western border with Libya, a failed state where militias hold sway, said author and Sinai expert Mohannad Sabry. “It’s a sprawling hub for explosives like TNT, just take a look at all the improvised explosive devices going off in Sinai and that the government claims it has seized - we are talking tons,” he said.

El-Sissi has fashioned himself as the leader of the fight against Islamic militancy in the region, portraying his crackdown on Egypt’s previously ruling Muslim Brotherhood as part

of that wider battle. The new attack could be a move by militants to shake confidence in him at a sensitive time, after introducing painful economic reforms.

Last Sunday’s suicide bomber hit a church linked to the main cathedral of Egypt’s Coptic Christian Church, ripping through a crowd of mainly women worshippers, killing at least 26 and wounding dozens more. It was the deadliest such attack on Christians in years, recalling a 2011 suicide bombing at an Alexandria church that killed more than 20. The government said Sunday’s bomber was a former supporter of the Brotherhood who joined militants. Later, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

Egyptian officials, however, have kept their focus on the Brotherhood, the Islamist political movement whose leader, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted from the presidency by the military in 2013. On Monday, the Interior Ministry said exiled Brotherhood leaders provided “financial and logistical support” for the church bombing.

**Uptick in attacks**

Spokesmen for the Interior Ministry, responsible for police, as well as the Foreign Ministry, did not respond to requests for comment on whether they believed the bombing signaled the start of a wider campaign. But a recent uptick in attacks has shown how violence has evolved the past two years. New groups such as one known as Hasm have emerged, launching high-level assassination attempts and attacks on security forces in mainland Egypt, including one that killed six policemen outside Cairo last week.—AP



CAIRO: A Coptic clergyman examines the damages at the scene inside the St. Mark Cathedral in central Cairo, following a bombing, Sunday, Dec. 11, 2016.—AP



## PROTESTERS RIP GOP FOR TAKING AWAY NEXT GOVERNOR'S POWER

**RALEIGH:** Protesters say the North Carolina legislature's actions limiting the next governor's influence before he even takes office were unconstitutional power grabs by GOP legislators unhappy their candidate didn't win re-election. "We voted for a new governor and they're choosing to come and ... take away the power," said Caren Parker of Carrboro, among the crowd who demonstrated this week against the Republican-controlled General Assembly, leading to more than 50 arrests.

So what's next for Gov-elect Roy Cooper and other fellow Democrats now that a special session is over that passed laws designed to weaken them? Lawsuits and more demonstrations are likely, although it's unclear how effective those will be. "Once more, the courts will have to clean up the mess the legislature made, but it won't stop us from moving North Carolina forward," Cooper said in a statement after the legislature adjourned an extraordinary three-day special session Friday.

McCrory, who lost to Cooper by about 10,000 votes in November, quickly signed into law a bill that merges the State Board of Elections and State Ethics Commission into one board composed equally of Democrats and Republicans. The previous state elections board law would have allowed Cooper to put a majority of Democrats on the panel.

### Partisan again

The law would also make elections for appellate court judgeships officially partisan again, which could favor Republicans. A Democrat's win last month in an officially nonpartisan Supreme Court race will give the party its first majority on the court in almost 20 years. Another bill that received final legislative approval would subject Cooper's Cabinet choices to Senate confirmation and would allow Cooper to designate only up to 425 state employees as his political appointees, compared with a cap of 1,500 for McCrory.

The Cabinet bill apparently remains on McCrory's desk. Emails and a phone call to McCrory's office seeking comment weren't returned. With 30 days to decide whether to sign or veto a bill, McCrory could kick the bill to his successor Cooper, although that's unlikely. Republicans will continue holding veto-proof majorities in 2017.

Republicans call their approval of legislation reasonable actions to rebalance state government before a new administration takes office. The North Carolina

governor's powers have expanded since the state became the last in the country to give the veto to its executive in 1997. "It is proper for the legislative branch to adjust that so that the legislative branch has more checks and balances," House Speaker Tim Moore said Friday. "The more that can be reviewed by the legislative branch, I would submit, the better."

### 'This ain't right'

Several pieces of legislation passed by Republicans since they took control of the General Assembly in 2011 have been struck down by courts. House Democrats are convinced new laws also will be thrown out. They formally protested all three days because they said the method by which Republicans called themselves in - minutes after an earlier special session McCrory announced for disaster relief legislation ended - wasn't initiated properly. The issue involves the collecting the signatures from enough House and Senate members.

"This ain't right; you can't make it right," said House Minority Leader Larry Hall of Durham. "The people of North Carolina aren't being treated right." Bob Orr, a former state Supreme Court justice, doubts the success of a challenge of the constitutionality of holding the extra special session if there are enough signatures. But Orr said the bills passed by the legislature that address the confirmation of Cabinet officials and transferring power from the State Board of Education to the new Republican state school superintendent aren't as cut and dry.

While the state Constitution gives the Senate power for "advice and consent" of the governor's officers, "where that balance of power lines between the legislative branch and the executive is not settled," said Orr, also a previous Republican gubernatorial candidate. Lawmakers' veto-proof majorities since 2013 and the uncompetitive election districts they drew have allowed legislative Republicans to ignore Democratic viewpoints.

Retired school librarian Carolyn White, a longtime demonstrator who was arrested two years ago as part of the "Moral Monday" protests against GOP-led legislative policies. She said that arrest didn't seem to make a difference, but she's still speaking out. "Just like the civil rights movement, it's forward together," White said Friday. "You just have to keep going forward." — AP



WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama speaks during a news conference, Friday, Dec 16, 2016, in the briefing room of the White House. — AP

## OBAMA RAPPING PUTIN, SAYS US COULD STRIKE BACK ON CYBER

'THIS HAPPENED AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT'

**WASHINGTON:** President Barack Obama has put Russia's Vladimir Putin on notice that the US could use offensive cyber muscle to retaliate for interference in the US presidential election, his strongest suggestion to date that Putin had been well aware of campaign email hacking. "Whatever they do to us, we can potentially do to them," Obama declared Friday.

Caught in the middle of a post-election controversy over Russian hacking, Obama strongly defended his administration's response, including his refusal before the voting to ascribe motive to the meddling or to discuss now what effect it might have had. U.S. intelligence assessments say it was aimed at least in part on helping Donald Trump defeat Hillary Clinton, and some Democrats say it may well have tipped the results in his favor.

Though Obama avoided criticizing President-elect Trump by name, he called out Republicans who he said fail even now to acknowledge the seriousness of Russia's involvement in US elections. Obama expressed bewilderment about GOP lawmakers and voters who now say they approve of Putin, and he said unless that changes the US will be vulnerable to foreign influence. "Ronald Reagan would roll over in his grave," Obama said as he closed out the year at a White House news conference. Afterward he left for the family's annual vacation in Hawaii.

### 'Cut it out'

Obama declined to state explicitly that Putin knew about the email hacking that roiled the

presidential race, but he left no doubt who he felt was responsible. He said that "not much happens in Russia without Vladimir Putin" and repeated a US intelligence assessment "that this happened at the highest levels of the Russian government."

Obama said he confronted Putin in September, telling the former KGB chief to "cut it out." That was one month before the US publicly pointed the finger at Russia. Suggesting his directive to Putin had been effective, Obama said the US "did not see further tampering" after that date. The president has promised a "proportional" yet unspecified response to the hacking of the Democratic Party and Clinton's campaign chairman. Emails stolen during the campaign were released in the final weeks by WikiLeaks. On Friday, CIA Director John Brennan said in a message to employees that the FBI agrees with the CIA's conclusion that Russia's goal was to help Trump win.

Trump has dismissed the CIA's assessment and talk about Russian hacking as "ridiculous," while arguing both Democrats and the CIA are trying to undermine the legitimacy of his victory. He made no mention of the hacking - or of Obama - during the latest stop on his "thank you" tour in Orlando, Florida, Friday night. Clinton has even more directly cited Russian interference. She said Thursday night, "Vladimir Putin himself directed the covert cyberattacks against our electoral system, against our democracy, apparently because he has a personal beef against me."

### 'Obsession'

Obama said he'd leave it to political pundits to debate the question of whether the hacking swayed the election outcome. He did, however, chide the media for that he called an "obsession" with the emails that were made public during the election's final stretch. Accusations of Russian election interference have heightened the already tense relationship between Washington and Moscow. Separately, Obama has blamed Russia for standing in the way of international efforts to stop the civil war in Syria, where government forces have beaten back rebels in Aleppo.

Obama said he feels "responsible" for some of the suffering in Syria, but he defended his decision to avoid significant military action there. He said that while military options short of invasion were tempting, it was "impossible to do this on the cheap." Still, he pinned the bulk of the blame on Russia, as well as Iran, for propping up Syrian President Bashar Assad. "This blood and these atrocities are on their hands," he said.

Meanwhile, the president rejected any notion that the dispute over hacking was disrupting efforts to smoothly transfer power to Trump. Despite fiercely criticizing each other during the election, Obama and Trump have spoken multiple times since the campaign ended. "He has listened," Obama said of Trump. "I can't say he will end up implementing. But the conversations themselves have been cordial." — AP



RALEIGH: A protestor shouts as she is arrested outside the House gallery during a special session of the North Carolina General Assembly at the Legislative Building. — AP

## BIG STORM HITS CALIFORNIA

**LOS ANGELES:** A pre-winter storm drenched California with rain and dumped nearly three feet of snow to help bolster the vital Sierra Nevada snowpack but also triggered mud flows, street flooding and the dramatic rescue Friday of two homeless women and 10 dogs from a river island near Los Angeles.

With thousands of acres of wildfire burn scars all over the state, authorities were warily monitoring barren slopes where parched earth soaked with rain can cause life-threatening mudslides. Mud from the San Gabriel

Mountains flowed into the foothill city of Duarte east of Los Angeles before dawn, affecting 18 homes where residents were told to not to leave, KCBS-TV reported. Firefighters rescued two people stuck in cars.

A helicopter was sent Friday morning to a homeless encampment on the small island in the San Gabriel River, where it hovered in rain between power lines as the two women, six puppies and four adult dogs were hoisted to safety. When the Los Angeles County sheriff's air rescue crew arrived,

one of the women was on top of a shelter and the other was standing knee-deep in water, said Deputy Brice Stella, a tactical medic.

Stella hoisted one woman up but the other wanted to stay because she feared her dogs would be left behind. Stella convinced her to go into the helicopter by saying he'd do his best to rescue the dogs. The helicopter crew emptied two large bags normally used to store gear, then lowered Stella down with the bags. "I was able to fit all the dogs," he said. "They actually looked well-cared-for."

### Potential flooding

Earlier, torrential rain fell on the coast between San Francisco and Los Angeles near the landmark Hearst Castle late Thursday and rockslides closed about 36 miles of Highway 1 in the region. Highway crews expected to have the scenic route reopened by mid-afternoon Friday. A weather station in the area recorded more than 5 inches of rain. In the Sierra Nevada, the Tioga Pass entry point to Yosemite National Park received 35 inches of snow in 24 hours, the weather service said. — AP

## CHEMICAL LEAK REPORTED WEEK BEFORE THE PUBLIC WAS WARNED

**DALLAS:** A chemical leak from an asphalt plant that led Corpus Christi officials to warn residents this week not to drink the water was apparently reported a week earlier, according to an email from a state environmental official that was obtained Friday. The internal email sent Wednesday by Susan Clewis, a regional director for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, contained an incident report that described the leak as a "backflow incident from a chemical tank impacting the public water system."

It was reported Dec 7 at a plant run by Ergon Asphalt and Emulsions. The email doesn't say who initially reported the leak on Dec. 7 or to whom. It says the state environmental agency was notified around 3 pm on Wednesday. City officials notified the public that evening.

"Obviously we are concerned about that initial report that this may have been known for seven days and it may have been going on for that long. And why did it take so long for TCEQ to get notified?" asked Luis Moreno, chief of staff for state Sen. Juan Hinojosa, whose district includes Corpus Christi. "Those are all things that I think are starting to be figured out right now."

### Hazardous materials

Dan McQueen, the mayor of the Gulf Coast city of about 300,000 people, has said local officials also only learned of the leak on Wednesday. Neither Clewis nor city officials responded to requests for comment on Friday, when many schools remained closed for a second day. The TCEQ report indicates that a combination of Indulin AA-86 and hydrochloric acid leaked into the water supply.

Indulin is an asphalt emulsifying agent that's corrosive and can burn the eyes, skin and respiratory tract if a person comes into contact with concentrated amounts. The amber liquid is considered a hazardous material by the

Occupational Safety and Health Administration and could cause damage to internal organs. "You don't expect to see it in water," said Terry Clawson, a spokesman with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Up to 24 gallons of it may have seeped into a pipeline carrying water, allowing it to move to other areas of the city, Kim Womack, a spokeswoman for the city, said Thursday. Ergon has said in a statement that it has been in contact with the TCEQ and was "working cooperatively to provide all information to ensure state officials can remedy the situation as quickly as possible." Bill Miller, a company spokesman, declined to explain Friday how a hazardous chemical may have entered the water supply.

State and city officials have referred to a "backflow problem" at the plant, and Womack said inspectors didn't find a device in place that prevents contaminated water from flowing backward into a potable water supply. Ergon, though, has argued that the plant does have a prevention device, Womack said.

Miller said Ergon Inc is leasing the property for manufacturing purposes. The privately held Flowwood, Mississippi-based conglomerate's Corpus Christi subsidiary makes paving and pavement preservation products. The 62-year-old company also has refining, trucking and real estate businesses.


State and federal environmental records list no problems at the plant over the past five years. Nationwide, the Environmental Protection Agency reports no current "significant violations" at Ergon facilities but shows seven receiving fines since 2010, the highest \$17,200 paid by a Vicksburg, Mississippi, refinery. A Texas Commission on Environmental Quality record lists an emergency response at the site on March 24 as having been closed. Clawson, the agency spokesman, said he had no details.

### Avoid bathing

Meanwhile, city officials on Friday continued to ease restrictions on the use of tap water while workers flushed water pipes to make sure any remnants of the chemical are removed. Limited use of water is allowed in some neighborhoods. Water can be used for showering and washing clothes, but not yet for drinking. They warn that young children and those with weakened immune systems should avoid bathing so as not to accidentally swallow the water.


Officials said Thursday that residents in some parts of the city can consume water however they wish, but there were still sections Friday where authorities urged no use at all. In addition to shuttering schools, the leak also continued to disrupt commerce. Officials said plenty of bottled water has been donated to help residents. City officials have said that no one has turned up at area hospitals with symptoms that might indicate they were sickened or burned by the chemical. A city councilman, Michael Hunter, told the Corpus Christi Caller-Times that it was unlikely the leaked chemical was concentrated enough to do harm, but that every precaution must be taken.

The incident is the latest in a string of water scares for Corpus Christi. In May, the city issued its third boil-water advisory in a year as a precaution after nitrogen-rich runoff from rain flowed into the water system, resulting in low chlorine disinfectant levels in the water supply. Boil-water notices were issued last year because of elevated levels of E. coli and another for low chlorine levels, the Caller-Times previously reported. The notices mirrored two others that were issued in 2007. City crews have worked to reconfigure some water mains to ensure that water keeps circulating and to prevent bacteria growth. But an overarching concern is an old water system where more than half of 225 miles of cast-iron pipe needs to be upgraded. Bajak reported from Houston. — AP



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## TRUMP ANGER SMASHES VANITY MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTION RECORD

**NEW YORK:** Vanity Fair has had the last laugh after President-elect Donald Trump blasted the magazine over a snooty review of one of his restaurants: its subscription numbers have broken a company record. "Has anyone looked at the really poor numbers of @VanityFair Magazine?" the incoming Republican commander-in-chief asked his 17.4 million followers on Twitter bright and early Thursday.

"Way down, big trouble, dead! Graydon Carter, no talent, will be out!"

he added for good measure in reference to the magazine's editor, with whom he has a feud dating back decades. Only it seems that offending the 70-year-old billionaire real estate tycoon is good for business—at least in the news industry.

A magazine spokeswoman said Vanity Fair that day collected the highest number of subscriptions sold in a single day for any Conde Nast company publication, clocking up 13,000 new subscriptions in a single 24-hour period. The magazine has added a banner to its

website, calling itself the "magazine Trump doesn't want you to read" and encouraging readers to subscribe.

The offending restaurant review, written by reporter Tina Nguyen, summed up a recent lunch at a bistro in Trump Tower lobby as "rich-man slop" under the headline "Trump Grill Could Be The Worst Restaurant in America." Folio Magazine quoted Conde Nast as saying the article received one million unique views since Trump's tweet, which did not link to the review.

Trump has been at loggerheads with Carter since the 1980s, when the former reality TV star projected himself as the definition of wealth. Carter infuriated the former reality star by calling him a "short-fingered vulgarian." Other print media have similarly seen an uptick in business since the vitriolic US presidential campaign and shock election of Trump, who inflamed the country by insulting myriad population groups.

The New York Times has announced an exceptional surge in digital subscrip-

tions, adding more than 200,000 net subscribers since late September. The newspaper was among several media outlets attacked by Trump during his presidential race. It launched a series of investigations that revealed his reported tax loss of more than \$900 million. Vanity Fair followed up the restaurant review by writing a critical article examining the ambition and missteps of Trump's daughter Ivanka, who is reportedly considering a role in the White House. — AFP

## WITH IVANKA TRUMP, THE DUTIES OF FIRST DAUGHTER MAY CHANGE

AFTER ROLE IN CAMPAIGN, NEXT MOVES CLOSELY WATCHED



**MANCHESTER, New Hampshire:** In this Nov 7, 2016 file photo, Ivanka Trump speaks beside her father, then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, left, and vice presidential nominee, Indiana Gov Mike Pence during a campaign rally.— AP

## TRUMP SALUTES HIS SUPPORTERS IN FLORIDA, NAMES BUDGET DIRECTOR

**ORLANDO:** President-elect Donald Trump, in the latest stop of his victory lap, told a military veteran-laden crowd in Florida that while he would build up the country's armed forces, he would use them sparingly as commander-in-chief. "For too long, we've moving from one reckless intervention to another, to countries you've never heard of before," Trump said at a rally Friday night in Orlando. "It's crazy and it's going to stop."

Trump still vowed to defeat the Islamic State group, offering no details but promising a foreign policy strategy that "means crushing ISIS rapidly." Yesterday, Trump will make the final stop on his "thank you" tour at a football stadium in Mobile, Alabama, revisiting the site of the largest rally of his campaign. Then he will return to Mar-a-Lago, his palatial Palm Beach estate. Aides said the president-elect would likely spend all of Christmas week there, taking meetings and relaxing with his family, and could stay at the coastal resort until New Year's.

Trump on Friday also selected South Carolina Rep. Mick Mulvaney, a budget hawk and conservative Republican, to be his budget director, according to a transition official not authorized to speak publicly about the decision before it was announced.

The stop in Orlando was meant to salute Trump's Election Day victory in a must-win state for his upstart presi-

dential bid. The Republican businessman, who owns multiple properties in Florida, calls it his "second home" and relentlessly campaigned across it, successfully turning out white voters from non-coastal areas to best opponent Hillary Clinton's strength among minority voters in the state's large cities.

He was in vintage campaign form Friday, settling scores, belittling opponents and even conducting a poll from the stage as to whether the crowd liked the phrase "Made in America" or "Made in the USA" better. ("Made in the USA" won convincingly.)

## 'Lock her up'

The raucous crowd - which was double in size of the one in the same venue in late October - also acted as if the campaign was still ongoing, repeatedly chanting "Lock her up" about Trump's former Democratic foe Hillary Clinton. They also turned their scorn on the press pen, chanting "Move them back" when Trump bitterly noted that the reporters at the rally had better seats than most of the attendees.

Trump's pick to head the Office of Management and Budget helped found the House Freedom Caucus, the group of conservative lawmakers who frequently battled former House Speaker John Boehner. An early backer of Trump during the campaign, Mulvaney took a hard line on federal

spending under the Obama administration. A strong proponent of spending cuts, Mulvaney fought against raising the nation's debt limit and frequently expressed a willingness to shut down the federal government instead. Mulvaney, as budget director, would be tasked with steering Trump's promised tax cut and infrastructure investment as well as working to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

Though Trump will now set up camp at Mar-a-Lago, he has conducted most of his Cabinet and White House interviews from his office in Trump Tower high above Manhattan. Those interviews, as well as meetings with his advisers, continued Friday morning and included a sit-down with Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson, the only current member of President Barack Obama's Cabinet to make the trip to the tower.

Also on Friday, Trump's incoming staff - Reince Priebus - had lunch at the White House with President Barack Obama's current chief of staff, Denis McDonough. Other former chiefs of staff were also invited. Meanwhile, three protesters who have sued Trump, claiming they were assaulted last March at one of his campaign rallies, are asking the president-elect to sit for a deposition before he takes office next month. Trump's attorney says he intends to "oppose any efforts" to depose the president-elect. — AP



**ORLANDO:** President-elect Donald Trump takes the stage with Vice President-elect Mike Pence during a rally on Friday night.— AP

**DES MOINES:** With Ivanka Trump, the typically minor role of first daughter could get a major makeover. After she played a key role on the campaign trail, the next moves by President-elect Donald Trump's 35-year-old daughter are being closely watched. She's been attending her father's transition meetings with high-profile figures from the Japanese prime minister to technology leaders and has indicated her interest in working on policy issues like child care.

An executive vice president at the Trump Organization, Ivanka Trump also owns her own company selling clothes and jewelry. While three of the president-elect's adult children are viewed as close advisers, he often highlights Ivanka and has made clear that he'd love to have her with him when he moves into the White House. Whether that would be in a formal or informal position is not clear. But Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway suggested this week that there may be an exception to anti-nepotism laws for Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, who runs a real estate and construction business.

Previous first daughters have played a social role in the White House. For example, during Harry Truman's presidency, when Bess Truman was home in Missouri, her daughter, Margaret, would play hostess. But it would be "unprecedented" for Ivanka Trump to serve as a close adviser, said Katherine Jellison, who chairs the history department at Ohio University. She added: "If there was ever a first daughter who played such a close advisory role to her dad, she really kept it under cover." Here's what we know so far about Ivanka Trump:

## The business

With the Trump family, everything comes back to the vast family business empire. Ivanka, one of Donald Trump's three children with his first wife, Ivana Trump, is an executive vice president of the business along with her two brothers, Donald Jr., 38, and Eric, 32. Just how the president-elect will handle his sprawling business interests remains unclear. Trump has said he will turn management over to his sons and executives.

Of course, Ivanka has her own business to consider as well. She recently drew criticism after her company promoted a \$10,800 bracelet she wore during a "60 Minutes" interview on CBS. The spokeswoman for the company later apologized. Since then, Ivanka has sought to put some distance between herself and her fashion business. A letter posted on her website said that she would separate her social media accounts from her company's. But questions continue to come up. Earlier this month, Eric Trump offered a "Private Coffee with Ivanka Trump in NYC" on a charity fundraising website. But after drawing high bids - and a New York Times story - the auction appeared to have been removed from the website Friday. The Trump organization did not respond to a request for more details.

## The White House

Trump's team says no official decision has been made about Ivanka Trump's role, and she was not made available for an interview for this story.

But the president-elect has made his wishes known. "I think we'll have to see how the laws read. I would love to be able to have them involved," Trump said on Fox News of Ivanka Trump and her husband.

Congress passed an anti-nepotism law in 1967 that prohibits the president from appointing a family member to work in an office or agency the president oversees. But Conway said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" that the law has "an exception if you want to work in the West Wing, because the president is able to appoint his own staff." Still, Richard Painter, chief White House ethics lawyer under President George W. Bush, said: "I don't believe that this statute exempts the White House." He said Conway's interpretation would be reasonable policy because it would bring family members under conflict of interest rules, but added "I'm just not convinced that's what the statute says."

## Policy platform

While much about Ivanka Trump's future role is murky, her policy interests are quite clear. Throughout the campaign she highlighted her interest in issues like child care, pay equity and maternity leave. Her father mentioned those issues rarely. Ivanka Trump met with a group of Republican congresswomen on these issues in September. Since the election, she has been reaching out to members of Congress to continue the conversation, according to Sarah Chamberlain, the president and CEO of Republican Main Street Partnership, who said she has not heard from the future first daughter.

Republican consultant Katie Packer, who opposed Trump, said she was welcoming "the spotlight that Ivanka Trump is going to put on these issues." But Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, executive director MomsRising, an advocacy group for women and families, said she was concerned that the president-elect's conservative Cabinet picks don't share those interests. "Ivanka Trump is right that child care and paid family leave are national emergencies, but she was not elected to be president of the United States of America and her dad, who was, has taken the opposite approach," Rowe-Finkbeiner said.

## White House hostess

Throughout the campaign, Ivanka Trump played a more prominent role than Trump's third wife, Melania, who has focused her attention on 10-year-old son Barron. Donald Trump said last month that Melania and Barron Trump would not move to the White House until the end of the school year. She could still come in for major events, but there is historical precedent for a daughter or sister to step in and shoulder some of the social responsibilities. Since the election, Melania Trump has kept a low profile while Ivanka Trump has been a regular fixture at Trump Tower in New York. This week she appeared in a photo with Kanye West. — AP



**WASHINGTON:** First lady Michelle Obama 'winks' and gestures to guests after speaking following the screening for the movie 'Hidden Figures,' Thursday, Dec 15, 2016, in the South Court Auditorium in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House complex.— AP

## FIRST LADY: WHITE HOUSE NEEDS 'GROWN-UP' IN TIMES OF CRISIS

**WASHINGTON:** Michelle Obama says the White House needs a "grown-up" and the nation will come to appreciate President Barack Obama. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey set to air tomorrow night on CBS, the first lady says the election has reinforced her view that her husband's administration was able to inspire hope "because we feel the difference now."

"Now we're feeling what not having hope feels like," she says. "You know? Hope is necessary. It's a necessary concept. And Barack didn't just talk about hope because he thought it was just a nice slogan to get votes. I mean, he and I and so many believe that if you ... what else do you have if you don't have hope?" "What do you give your kids if you can't give them hope?" she added.

Mrs Obama sat for the interview five weeks after the election of Donald Trump to the White House. The Obamas campaigned aggressively against Trump and argued that the New York businessman is unfit to be president. CBS released an excerpt of the interview on Friday. In it, Mrs Obama does not mention the incoming president by name.

While Obama has refused since the Nov 8 election to repeat his criticisms of Trump, Mrs Obama comes off as less accepting of the outcome. In the interview, which was taped Wednesday in the White House residence, she said the public will eventually appreciate what a reassuring presence her husband was during the past eight years. She compared him to the person who doesn't freak out when a toddler bumps his head, causing the child to start crying.

"I feel that Barack has been that for the nation in ways that people will come to appreciate," she said. "Having a grown-up in the White House who can say to you in times of crisis and turmoil, 'Hey, it's gonna be OK. Let's remember the good things that we've done. Let's look at the future. Let's look at all the things that we're building.'" "All of this is important for our kids to stay focused and to feel like their work isn't in vain. That their lives aren't in vain," Mrs Obama added. "What do we do if we don't have hope, Oprah?" — AP

## AUSTRIA SEARCHES FREIGHT TRAINS FOR ILLEGAL MIGRANTS

**STEINACH AM BRENNER:** Austrian police have started searching freight trains travelling from Italy at night to tackle illegal migration and avert further deaths after two stowaways died earlier this month. A man and a woman from Eritrea who had hidden on a train bringing trucks from Italy were crushed to death in Austria's Tyrol province, likely having lost consciousness due to freezing winter temperatures.

Since early November, police have picked up about 90 African migrants heading for Germany on railways in Tyrol, which are used by most cargo trains going from Italy across the Alps. Austrian police found 71 dead migrants locked into a lorry in August 2015, and many officials fear another disaster. "Illegal migrants always try to scout out new ways to get north. We have reacted to this phenomenon of freight train stowaways and intensified controls," said Manfred Dummer from Tyrol police about the new search regime that started this week.

Police stop and search all goods trains coming from Italy between 2200-0600 local time in the shadows of the ski slopes of the sleepy border town of Steinach, about 80 kilometers closer to Italy than Woerl, where the two migrants died. "Every kilometer that they're not on the train at these temperatures is vital," Dummer said. With temperatures of minus 4 degrees Celsius overnight, about 10 policemen and rail security officers in Steinach train station carefully searched about 10 freight trains, some of which were about 600 meters long.

Austria championed the de facto closing this spring of the Balkan route which hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war, violence and destruction in the Middle East and Afghanistan used to reach western Europe last year. Countries such as Macedonia and Hungary have strongly tightened controls of road traffic and green border regions or have erected fences.

This, and a deal the European Union reached with Turkey to stem the flow, have resulted in more and more people resorting to travelling across the Mediterranean in flimsy boats to reach Italy. Most of them want to go north to Austria, Germany or Scandinavian countries—some as stowaways on freight trains.

Gerald Tatzgern, who heads the anti-human trafficking unit at the Interior Ministry, says police pick up about 100 to 150 illegal immigrants a day in Austria. The majority of those are found on passenger and freight trains. Tatzgern singled out Bulgaria and Serbia as hubs for traffickers smuggling Afghans between cargo on trains, sometimes in groups of up to 30 people in one wagon. — Reuters

## SOCIAL MEDIATION: POLITICIANS AVOID PRESS, CONTROL MESSAGE

**SPRINGFIELD:** To deliver his first extensive remarks on the contentious Dakota Access oil pipeline, all the new North Dakota governor needed was a camera and a Facebook account. The simplicity of the setup spared Republican Gov. Doug Burgum from having to answer questions from reporters on Thursday and allowed him to convey his thoughts unfiltered and unchallenged by the press.

It's a strategy that's been used for a while by governors, state lawmakers and other elected officials in more tech-savvy states and becoming increasingly popular among new-to-politics officeholders, such as Burgum, Illinois Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner and, of course, President-elect Donald Trump, who heavily relies on Twitter to share his thoughts.

By making social media platforms the first stop to announce or react to events in a controlled setting, the politicians are bypassing the press - who would call into question assertions made at news confer-

ences - and taking their message to where their audience is most likely to be engaged. "Politicians are always trying to communicate with potential voters. They want to get a message out and they want to tell the story the way they want to tell it," said Christopher Mooney, director of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois.

This week, Democratic US Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham announced her run for New Mexico governor in a YouTube video. In Utah, Republican Gov. Gary Herbert declared on Twitter he was pulling his support for Trump after a video surfaced in October of the businessman making lewd remarks about women. Some House Republicans in Colorado film a YouTube message every week during the legislative session because "we can't be sure how it will be covered," House GOP spokesman Joel Malecka said.

Rauner, a former venture capitalist

who hadn't served in an elected position before January 2015, usually takes questions from reporters after news conferences. Recently, he began hosting Facebook Live events, typically drawing about 500 viewers who listen to his answers to screened questions about policies he's advocating for during his 18-months-and-running budget struggle with Democrats.

### Weakening traditional media

"As the world continues to engage and connect on social media, it's important to the governor to interact directly with people in Illinois to explain how he is working to create jobs, lower property taxes, improve schools and enact term limits," spokeswoman Catherine Kelly said in a statement. A July report from the Pew Research Center on Journalism and Media found that 44 percent of US adults said social media was the platform that informed them of events in the 2016 pres-

idential election during a week in January. About 29 percent said they relied on a local print newspaper.

"(Social media has) weakened the hand of traditional media in many senses. ... Candidates had to give access, they had to give interviews, they had to be hospitable to reporters," said Tom Hollihan, professor of media and politics at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. "Nowadays," he added, "the Trump campaign has challenged very powerful news organizations, including the Washington Post."

For decades, most presidents-elect have held a news conference within days of the election, which differ from one-on-one interviews, because the president-elect must field questions from a broader range of journalists. Trump has not held a news conference for more than 140 days - the longest stretch by a president-elect in recent memory, according to a running

tally from National Public Radio. During that time, he's sent nearly 1,500 tweets by NPR's count, and carefully grants one-on-one interviews. And it's not unusual for presidents to champion a direct-to-voters approach: President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave intimate radio addresses called "Fireside Chats," and President Barack Obama posts weekly video addresses on the White House website.

Burgum also is new to the political arena, having spent most of his life as a computer software executive turned philanthropist. His "first-day message" Facebook video, which had 13,000 views by Friday afternoon, came hours after he had thrown open his first Cabinet meeting to reporters for 15 minutes - and then ushered them out without taking questions. The "media have been the interpreters" of politicians' stories, Mooney said, but now, "There's no challenge to their story. The story is straight out of their mouths." — AP



**BANJUL:** This filephoto taken on November 29, 2016 shows Gambian President Yahya Jammeh listening to one of his aides in Banjul, during the closing rally of the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC). — AFP

## GAMBIA'S JAMMEH: FROM TV CONCESSION TO DRAMA

**BANJUL:** Longtime Gambian leader Yahya Jammeh, who initially conceded defeat in a December 1 presidential poll, has lodged a Supreme Court case to challenge the result, despite pressure from the international community for him to cede power peacefully. The opposition in the small West African country, however, fears Jammeh will use a judicial system-considered by experts to lack independence-to give legitimacy to his attempt to hang on to power.

### The legal complaint

The ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) filed a complaint with the Supreme Court on December 13 alleging that opposition leader Adama Barrow was "not duly elected or returned as president, and that the said election was void". The court challenge came after Jammeh had surprised observers by conceding defeat after 22 years in power on television, before changing his mind. It said the country's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had violated electoral law, announced a December 5 recount without the consent of the APRC, and that its returning officers intimidated legitimate voters and turned them away on election day.

### The Supreme Court

The Gambia's Supreme Court has lain dormant since May 2015 with Chief Justice Emmanuel Fagbenle, a Nigerian, the only current sitting judge. Judicial independence is "the exception rather than the rule," said Niklas Hultin, an assistant professor at the US's George Mason University and Africa specialist. "Where the Supreme Court and other high-level courts have asserted their independence, there has usually been some kind of retribution on the part of the executive," he added. Jammeh fired several judges last year after they commuted the death sentences of former military officers to life imprisonment.

### Judges needed

Jammeh needs to appoint four more Supreme Court judges for the constitutionally required panel of five to hear the challenge, and six if the decision requires a judicial review. Complicating matters, the target of his complaint, the Independent Electoral Commission, is represented by Jammeh's own Attorney-General. The

Gambia's most influential lawyers' group, the Bar Association, has described any future hearing as therefore "fundamentally tainted". A Bar Association statement said the challenge was "tantamount to one being a judge in his own cause considering that the outgoing president has already pre-empted the outcome of court process by declaring the election result as a nullity".

President-elect Barrow says Jammeh has left cases against the government to stack up by failing to appoint justices. "There are a pile of cases that are waiting... but he doesn't care about it," Barrow told AFP. "And now he has a case, if he appoints judges we will see this is personal interest, and not in the interests of justice."

### Leverage

Senegalese political analyst Babacar Justin Ndiaye believes Jammeh's aim is to obtain better terms for his exit, given the universal condemnation of his volte-face and lack of other options. "It's a strategy of giving him time, making the situation worse, wearing down the international community and finally to look for some sort of compromise, an arrangement," he told AFP. Jammeh has "played his cards well", Ndiaye said, leveraging his continued support from important sections of the military to keep the Gambian population from taking to the streets against him. If Jammeh wins the case at some point in the future, new elections could be called with a President Barrow in State House. That would be a "unprecedented" situation in Africa, according to Ndiaye.

### International reaction

The United States has said it does "not believe (the case) will be heard by a credible court dedicated to ensuring the integrity of The Gambia's democratic process", a reaction that was notably more hardline than the UN and regional bloc ECOWAS. "It is OK for the legal process to be going on," the UN's west Africa envoy Mohamed Ibn Chambas told AFP Wednesday. "That legal process has nothing to do with the term of his mandate," he added. Banjul-based diplomats have emphasized that the most important focus now is the handover of power still expected on January 19, rather than the outcome of the legal case that for now remains looming in the background. — AFP

## A CROWDED STARTING LINE FOR FRANCE'S SOCIALIST PRIMARY

### A LOOK AT THE LEFT-WING, RIVALS AND THE ISSUES

**PARIS:** France's once-powerful left wing is fighting for its political survival as it prepares for a cacophonous primary for the Socialist presidential candidate. Former Prime Minister Manuel Valls leads the pack but is facing tough challengers who say he's betrayed leftist ideals. Here's a look at the left-wing contenders, their rivals, and the issues.

### When do the votes take place?

Nine candidates declared their candidacy by Thursday's deadline to represent the Socialist party and its allies in France's two-round, April-May presidential election. The candidates' list was being finalized Saturday for the left's nationwide primary, which will take place in two rounds on Jan. 22 and 29. All French citizens are allowed to vote if they pay 1 euro (\$1.04) and sign a document saying they share the values of the left. Whoever wins the primary will face strong competition: the anti-immigrant far-right represented by the National Front, the traditional conservatives and other centrist and far-left candidates wooing voters fed up with Socialist President Francois Hollande.

### Why is France's socialist president not running?

Hollande, acknowledging that his personal unpopularity might cost his party the Elysee Palace, decided not to run for re-election - clearing the way for Valls to seek the Socialist nomination instead. Valls, an immigrant from Spain who became French as an adult, is campaigning against populism and wants to be the candidate of "reconciliation." The primary is a "great way to be united again," Valls said in his first campaign speech. Yet divisions within the Socialist party remain deep. The pro-business shift that Hollande and Valls adopted has prompted rebellion among some Socialists who believe they betrayed the leftist values that underpin France's social welfare system and its worker protections.

### What socialist candidates are critical of Valls?

Among Valls' critics is Arnaud Montebourg, who may be his most serious Socialist challenger. Montebourg, France's industry minister and then



**PARIS:** Former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, now candidate for the socialist party primary election, is pictured during the inauguration of his campaign headquarters. — AP

its economy minister from 2012 to 2014, lost his portfolio amid feuding over the country's economic policy. "We have an enormous problem with Valls. His policies have been, if I summarize, pro-free market and authoritarian ... it has dislocated the left," Montebourg told the Le Monde newspaper. Montebourg pledges to boost the economy through protectionist measures and state intervention. Former French Education Minister Benoit Hamon is also running to present a more leftist alternative to Valls' centrist views. A wild card could be Vincent Peillon, another former education minister who presents himself as the candidate of "unity" and has a less divisive reputation than Valls.

### Who are the popular leftist wild cards?

In a sign of the French left's deep malaise, other left-wing candidates have decided to run for president without taking part in the January primary. Polls show far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon and

centrist figure Emmanuel Macron - Valls' former economy minister - currently have more support than the eventual Socialist nominee and will be on the ballot for at least the first presidential round on April 23.

### The right wing and far right

Whoever wins the Socialist primary must also face strong challengers on the right for France's presidential vote on April 23 and - if the Socialists survive the first round - the presidential runoff on May 7. Former Prime Minister Francois Fillon was designated last month as the conservatives' presidential nominee. Another serious presidential contender is far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who wants to restore France's borders and its national currency and has strong anti-Islam, anti-migrant views. Political analysts say Le Pen may reach the second round of the French presidential election by coming among the top two contenders in April. — AP



**BARCELONA:** The president of the Catalonia region's parliament, Carme Forcadell, center left, stands next to pro-independence mayors and other elected officials as she walks towards a court to testify for allowing lawmakers to debate earlier this year on the region's secession from Spain. — AP

## CATALAN LEADER MULLS EARLY VOTE ON BREAK WITH SPAIN

**BARCELONA:** Separatist leaders in Catalonia plan to seek Spanish government support for a referendum on the region's independence, but a lack of consent from Madrid will not stop them from staging the vote, the president of the regional government said Friday. Carles Puigdemont, Catalonia's pro-independence leader, told The Associated Press in an interview that he may seek to push forward his original plan to hold a binding vote in September 2017.

"We would need to have everything ready, but it could be earlier, of course," Puigdemont said, when asked if his government would hasten the timetable to prevent the referendum from becoming mired in legal and political proceedings. "The welfare of Catalonia is only possible outside of Spain." Spain's constitution doesn't

permit a referendum or the secession of a region. Earlier Friday, Catalonia Parliament Speaker Carme Forcadell appeared before a judge to be questioned about allowing the body's lawmakers to debate a secession motion this year.

A thousand Catalan pro-independence supporters, including Puigdemont and hundreds of town mayors, turned out Friday to support Forcadell. Waving pro-independence flags and chanting slogans, the crowd accompanied her from the local parliament to a nearby regional court. Other officials, including a former president of the region, Artur Mas, have also been questioned or are being called to testify for organizing votes in and outside of parliament about Catalonia's future within Spain.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy recent-

ly put his second-in-command of his newly-formed government, Soraya Saez de Santamaria, in charge of thawing relations with the Catalans, but both sides blames each other for the lack of formal negotiations. Friday's display of support for Forcadell was aimed, partially, at putting pressure on Madrid.

A leading figure in the independence movement, Forcadell is accused of disobeying Spain's Constitutional Court by recently allowing the regional Parliament to approve a resolution expressing its intent to press ahead with secession. "I made clear that no court can stop the parliament from debating independence or any other issue that affects the people of this country," she said after answering a judge's questions for half an hour. — AP

## POLISH LAWMAKERS, RESIDENTS PROTEST MEDIA RULES CHANGES

**WARSAW:** Thousands of Warsaw residents joined in a spontaneous protest in front of Poland's parliament against a plan by the conservative ruling party to limit reporters' access to legislators. Mobilized by the civic movement, the Committee for the Defense of Democracy, or KOD, the crowd on Friday waved white-and-red national flags and chanted "Free media!" in cold winter weather.

Radek Sikorski, a former foreign minister, was among the government critics who addressed the protest, harshly denouncing Poland's political direction under Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the powerful chairman of the ruling Law and Justice party that is introducing many sweeping changes.

Earlier Friday, inside the parliament's session hall, a large group of liberal opposition lawmakers protested the new media rules by standing on and around the

speaker's podium for several hours. They blocked a vote on the 2017 state budget. The budget vote was eventually taken by the ruling party's lawmakers in another hall, but the opposition questioned its legality. It was the most serious crisis in Poland's parliament in many years.

"The political crisis has grown more aggravated," Law and Justice lawmaker Tadeusz Cymanski said. The crowd blocked lawmakers' cars, preventing them from leaving the parliament area. After a few hours, police had to make way for them, as the crowd chanted "We will win!" At the heart of the issue was free access to information. In the 27 years of Poland's democracy, journalists have been a constant presence in the parliament's halls. Banned from the main assembly room, they can grab politicians for interviews in the halls. — AP

## MISSING CHINESE ACTIVIST 'GAVE AWAY STATE SECRETS'

**BEIJING:** A prominent Chinese human rights lawyer who had been missing for almost a month was held in police custody and "confessed" to handing over state secrets, official media said. Jiang Tianyong took on numerous high-profile cases, including those of Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetan protesters and victims of the 2008 contaminated milk powder scandal before being disbarred for his activism in 2009, according to campaign group Amnesty International. He disappeared on

November 21 en route to Beijing from Changsha, the capital of the central province of Hunan, where he had gone to inquire about the situation of a detained human rights lawyer.

On Friday a Communist Party newspaper reported that he had been arrested after using another person's documents to board the train and was held in administrative detention for nine days. "Investigations showed... that he was in possession of documents containing state secrets and was in

contact with foreign structures, organizations and persons, and illegally handed over state secrets abroad," the website of Fazi Ribao (Legal Daily) said, citing police sources.

The newspaper reported that since December 1, Jiang had been subject to a "criminal coercive measure"-a vague term which indicates a restriction on freedom of movement. "Jiang Tianyong confessed the relevant crimes," the daily added. Forced confessions are common in China, where courts are over-

seen by the ruling Communist Party.

UN Special Reporter on extreme poverty and human rights Philip Alston met Jiang on a visit to China in August and said last week he feared the disappearance was in part a retaliation against the lawyer's assistance to UN experts.

President Xi Jinping has overseen a tightening of controls on civil society since assuming power in 2012, closing avenues for legal activism that had opened up in recent years.

While the government initially targeted political activists and human rights campaigners, it has increasingly turned its attention to the lawyers who represent them.

In the most striking example, authorities detained more than 200 people last year during the so-called "709 crackdown"-named after the July 9th date of the roundup-including lawyers who took on civil rights cases considered sensitive by the ruling party. — AFP

## DUTERTE TO US OVER AID ISSUE: BYE-BYE AMERICA

DUTERTE UNLEASHES EXPLETIVES-LADEN TIRADE

**MANILA:** President Rodrigo Duterte threatened yesterday to terminate a pact that allows US troops to visit the Philippines, saying "bye-bye America" as he reacted with rage to what he thought was a US decision to scrap a major aid package over human rights concerns. A US government aid agency, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, said earlier in the week that its board deferred a vote on a renewal of the development assistance package for the Philippines "subject to a further review of concerns around rule of law and civil liberties."

The agency has clearly not voted to scrap or approve the aid package, but Duterte unleashed an expletives-laden tirade upon his arrival in his southern hometown of Davao after back-to-back visits to Cambodia and Singapore. "I understand that we have been stricken out of the Millennium Challenge. Well, good, I welcome it," Duterte said with apparent sarcasm.

## Tit for tat

"We can survive without American money," he said. "But you know, America, you might also be put to notice. Prepare to leave the Philippines, prepare for the eventual repeal or the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement," he said, referring to a 1998 accord that governs American forces visiting the Philippines for joint combat exercises. "You know, tit for tat... if you can do this, so (can) we. It ain't a one-way traffic," Duterte said, adding tauntingly, "Bye-bye America."

The 71-year-old Duterte, who describes himself as a left-wing politician, has made similar threats before and after taking office in June, but he and his officials have walked back on many of his public statements, causing confusion. While calling Americans "sons of bitches" and "hyp-



**SINGAPORE:** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte waves to the Filipino community in Singapore as he leaves the stage. — AP

ocrites," Duterte praised China as having "the kindest soul of all" for offering what he said was significant financial assistance. "So, what do I need America for?" he asked.

He also said Russia can be a very important ally. "They do not insult people, they do not interfere," he said. Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. also criticized the US aid decision, saying it happened after Duterte declared he would chart a foreign policy course independent of Washington. The Philippines had been slated for another aid package after its previous five-year, \$434 million poverty reduction program was successfully completed in May under Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino III.

The agency's spokeswoman, Laura

Allen, said Thursday that it would continue to monitor events in the Philippines before the next board review in March 2017. The US decision is among the first signs of how concerns about the rule of law and human rights under Duterte could entail economic costs. The US government, along with European Union and UN officials, has raised concerns about Duterte's crackdown on illegal drugs, which has left more than 2,000 suspected drug users and dealers dead in purported gunbattles with police. More than 3,000 other deaths are being investigated to determine if they were linked to illegal drugs.

## Burumbumbum

In his news conference, Duterte was

pointedly asked how many crime suspects he has killed in the past when he was still a crime-busting city mayor amid his vague and contradicting accounts of his exploits. The former government prosecutor again gave contrasting replies. "Maybe one, two three... I'm saying, maybe my bullets hit them, maybe not, but after the burumbumbum, they're all dead," Duterte said.

Replying to another question, he said that he indeed has killed, but did not provide details and tried to justify his act. "When I tell you now that I killed, do not term them as suspects because all of them died while they were fighting government people." He asked God for forgiveness in advance, saying he may not have time to pray if he's assassinated. "God, forgive me for killing these idiots," Duterte said, then blamed God for the presence of criminals. "You create a human monster so if you are God, why do you have to create these idiots? That's why they die."

Duterte, who has had a difficult relationship with President Barack Obama, said he would change his mindset if President-elect Donald Trump appeals to him. "I have talked to Trump, he was very nice, very courteous," he said. "I could not sense any hostile drift, or even the manner he was saying it, so, in deference, I'll just wait."

"I will let Obama fade away and if he disappears, then I will begin to reassess," Duterte said, adding that he and Trump acknowledged each other's similarly brash manners. "We talk in the same language," Duterte said. He recalled that when he told Trump in a recent phone call that "I like your mouth, it's like mine," he said Trump responded by saying, "Yes, Mr President, we're similar." "And you know, people with the same feather flock together," Duterte said. — AP

## 5 WAYS N KOREA HAS CHANGED IN 5 YEARS UNDER KIM JONG UN

**TOKYO:** It's been five years since North Korean leader Kim Jong Un took power following the death of his father, Kim Jong Il, whose demise was observed at monuments and on city center plazas across the nation Saturday. Here's a look at five ways the country that has now been ruled by three generations of Kim - starting with grandfather Kim Il Sung - has changed since the ascension of its 30-something "respected marshal."

## The man himself

Kim Jong Un is in some ways a lot more like his charismatic and gregarious, albeit brutal and megalomaniacal, grandfather than Kim Jong Il. He has gone out of his way to milk that resemblance, right down to adopting his trademark haircut from a seemingly bygone era. While his father almost never spoke in public, Kim Jong Un has done so on any number of occasions, including a four-hour address at his ruling party's congress in May. On the flip side, one of his most important moves to consolidate power - the execution of his powerful uncle and the purges that ensued - demonstrated both his personal independence and his willingness to employ the same kind of oppressive tools that were the hallmarks of both his father and grandfather. And, despite a short-lived friendship with former NBA bad boy Dennis Rodman, he has yet to travel abroad or meet a foreign head of state.

## Nukes, missiles and rockets

Turning North Korea into a nuclear power wasn't Kim Jong Un's idea - it almost certainly originated with Kim Il Sung himself - but it's defined his first five years. Of the five nuclear tests North Korea has conducted, three have been under his watch and two, including its most powerful to date and its first of what Pyongyang claims was an H-bomb, were this year. Kim Jong Un's North Korea has been sprinting to the finish line of a viable nuclear arsenal and the advanced missile technology needed to attack South Korea, Japan and the 50,000 US troops it hosts, the key US military outpost of Guam and the US mainland itself. At the same time, and some argue for largely the same reasons, the North under Kim has also joined the space race, putting satellites into orbit and aiming to reach the moon within the next decade.

## Shifting priorities

North Korea's main motto under Kim Jong Il was "Military First." Under Kim Jong Un, the focus is now on building

more and better nukes and bolstering the national economy, in large part through developing science and technology. To suit his goals, Kim has shifted more power to the ruling party and to his Cabinet and put the nation on collective overtime with repeated "loyalty campaigns." It remains to be seen how sustainable his two-pronged nukes-and-but policy will be in the face of international sanctions and internal, systemic weaknesses. So far, it has been at least workable. The North is already a de-facto nuclear state and its economy, though fragile and no doubt underperforming, is showing small but persistent growth.

## Fostering markets

Probably more out of pragmatic necessity than anything else, Kim Jong Un has allowed capitalist-style markets and entrepreneurialism to expand, invigorating the domestic economy and creating new revenue streams for the government, which profits by either taking a cut or by directly supporting such enterprises. Changes in farming policy that let individuals personally benefit from bigger harvests have boosted agricultural output. The relatively affluent capital of Pyongyang - home to the North's most fortunate - has seen a significant increase in everything from taxis to coffee shops and streets stalls. But the rise of the "cash masters," an empowered middle class more open to capitalist ideals, or just more determined to acquire material wealth, could prove to be a problem for Kim down the road.

## Keeping the masses entertained

Kim Jong Un has on several occasions vowed to make North Korea a "more civilized" nation. His signature development projects include an equestrian center and sprawling water park in Pyongyang and a luxury ski resort near the port city of Wonsan on the east coast. He has tried to give his regime something of a softer face through the all-female Moranbong Band, which sings its odes to him in a decidedly pop, and vaguely titillating, manner. Kim also generated a major national sensation by ordering a Disney-quality update to the "Boy General" anime series originally commissioned by his father. On another major front, Kim has made a big shift toward sports - vowing North Korea will become a major international sports power - presumably as a means of bolstering health and national pride and providing the masses with a relatively innocuous diversion from their daily lives. — AP



**SEOUL:** Supporters of South Korea's President Park Geun-Hye march toward the presidential house during a rally against the impeachment of the president. — AFP

## S KOREA'S PARK SUPPORTERS CLASH WITH DEMONSTRATORS

**SEOUL:** Supporters of impeached South Korean President Park Geun-hye clashed with anti-Park protesters yesterday, as large crowds of demonstrators again gathered in Seoul to demand the scandal-ridden leader's immediate ouster. The historically large weekend protests over an explosive corruption scandal pushed South Korea's opposition-controlled parliament to vote this month to impeach Park. The impeachment suspended Park's powers until the Constitutional Court decides whether she should permanently step down or be reinstated.

While polls measure Park's popularity in the low single digits, her impeachment has become a rallying point for her conservative supporters, who turned out in the tens of thousands yesterday. They waved the country's national flag and shouted for Park's "illegal" impeachment to be "nullified," and the "rotten" parliament to be dissolved. The tension was tangible as anti-Park protesters, whose numbers were much bigger, gathered on a boulevard across the street from where Park's supporters were rallying. Protest organizers estimated that about 600,000 anti-Park protesters turned out.

## Yelling and shoving

Despite thick lines of police officers separating them, there was some yelling and shoving between the two groups, with one Park supporter hitting an anti-Park protester with the pole of her flag. There were no immediate reports of serious violence or injuries. Huge throngs of anti-Park protesters later walked toward the presidential

offices and residence, known as the Blue House, carrying candles and signs and demanding that Park immediately quit.

Other groups marched toward the office of Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn, who assumed the role as government caretaker after Park was impeached on Dec. 9, and toward the Constitutional Court. "I can't stand Park for even another day. Nobody wants her, but she's stubbornly sticking around, using taxpayer money like it's her money," said Kim Eun-young, who participated in her third weekend protest.

Prosecutors accuse Park of colluding with a longtime confidante to extort money and favors from companies and allowing her to manipulate state affairs. The court has up to six months to decide on Park's case. If she is formally removed from office, the country will hold a presidential election within 60 days. Park has apologized for putting trust into her jailed friend, Choi Soon-sil, whose criminal trial begins on Monday, but has denied any legal wrongdoing.

On Friday, lawmakers attempted to inspect records at the president's office, but were denied entry. The lawmakers had planned to look into allegations that Blue House security officials allowed Choi and her key associates to easily move in and out of the presidential offices and residence. Park's lawyer, Lee Joong-hwan, said the court should restore Park's powers because there is insufficient evidence to justify her unseating.

He and other members of Park's legal team submitted a statement to the court explaining why the case should be decided in the president's favor. — AP

## News

in brief



**KANDAHAR:** An Afghan policeman inspects a damaged vehicle in Kandahar yesterday, in which five female airport workers were killed. — AFP

## Afghan gunmen kill five female airport workers

**KANDAHAR:** Gunmen shot dead five female airport workers and their driver in southern Afghanistan yesterday, underlining the threat to employed women in the country. The women were in a van driving to the airport in the southern Kandahar province when at least three gunmen on motorcycles opened fire at them, provincial spokesman Samim Kheplwak told AFP. "All the women and their driver aboard the van were killed. The attackers fled the area and we have launched an investigation," he said. Kandahar International Airport Director Ahmadullah Faizi said the women were employees of a private company who would provide luggage and body search services for female passengers. He said the women were concerned about their security after receiving death threats from people who disapproved of their career. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but Kandahar females who work outside their homes have long been at high risk of attack from Taliban militants and other insurgent groups. Afghan women have made giant strides since the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001, but they are still absent from public life and continue to suffer high levels of violence, oppression and abuse.

## 3 arrested for lynching couple over 'witchcraft'

**NEW DELHI:** A mob beat to death an elderly couple accused of witchcraft in eastern India, police said yesterday, the second such killing in the region in two weeks. Three people have been arrested over the lynching, police said, adding that the couple, both in their late sixties, had been suspected of using black magic to kill their neighbors in a remote tribal district of Jharkhand state. After rumors spread that the couple had killed four people with witchcraft, the mob set upon them, beating them to death and burning down their house. "The accused said they killed the couple in revenge to the death of their four relatives, who they believe were killed by the couple using witchcraft," local police officer Amit Kumar Singh told AFP. Last week, in another village in the improvised state, a 60-year-old woman was burnt to death by her neighbor on suspicion of having used black magic to kill a newborn baby. Police arrested the neighbor on charges of murder. Experts say belief in witchcraft and the occult remains widespread in many tribal and remote areas of India, where occasional incidents of human sacrifices have also been reported. More than 2,000 people were killed in India on suspicion of witchcraft between 2000 and 2012.

## China protests Dalai Lama meeting with Indian prez

**BEIJING:** China has objected to the Dalai Lama meeting with Indian President Pranab Mukherjee earlier this month, saying the talks had negatively impacted ties between the Asian neighbors. The Tibetan spiritual leader met with Mukherjee at the Indian presidential palace in New Delhi during a child welfare summit attended by Nobel laureates and world leaders on December 10-11. "The Chinese side is firmly opposed to any form of contacts between officials of other countries with him (the Dalai Lama)," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular media briefing Friday. "We urge the Indian side to... fully respect China's core interest and major concerns, (and) take effective means to remove the negative impact caused by the incident, so as to avoid disturbance to the China-India relationship." India's external affairs ministry brushed off Beijing's objections, saying the Dalai Lama and Mukherjee had met at a "non-political" event, local media reported. The Dalai Lama fled to India after a failed uprising in 1959, but is still deeply revered by many Tibetans in China. — Agencies

## Sri Lanka road accident kills 10, more wounded

**COLOMBO:** Ten passengers were killed and another 21 wounded yesterday when a van and a bus collided on a highway in Sri Lanka's former war zone of Jaffna, police said. All those killed in the head-on collision along the A-9 highway were passengers travelling in the smaller vehicle, police said adding that three of the wounded were in critical condition. The crash involved a van heading to Jaffna town and a bigger bus travelling in the opposite direction, police said, adding that an investigation was underway. A police officer told AFP it was the worst crash in the area that he could remember. Last month, the government proposed significantly raising the average traffic fine of 500 rupees to 25,000 rupees (\$166) in a bid to reduce the number of accidents on Sri Lankan roads. About 3,000 people are killed in traffic accidents in the south Asian country annually.

## POPE, AT 80, LOOKS TO 'JOYOUS' OLD AGE

ROME: Pope Francis voiced hope for a "fruitful and joyous" old age at a mass for his 80th birthday yesterday, as he received messages of congratulations from around the world. "Old age sounds ugly, and causes fear. But old age years for wisdom," he told dozens of cardinals at the mass in a papal chapel in Rome. "Old age is quiet and religious, but also fruitful. Pray that mine will be that way, quiet and religious, fruitful and also joyous." The Argentine pope received messages of congratulations from around the world for his 80th birthday, including at email addresses in eight languages specially set up by the Vatican.

"Italy is grateful to you for your constant closeness," said one from Italian President Sergio Mattarella. "The pope's office is covered in drawings by children from the whole world celebrating his birthday," tweeted Antonio Spadaro, a Jesuit theologian close to the pontiff. Spadaro released photographs of drawings showing a smiling pope with the world on his head or surrounded by children and party balloons. But like almost every other day of his papacy, Saturday will be a working day for the holiday-phobic Francis.

Apart from the morning mass with the cardinals, he has meetings with Maltese President Marie-Louise Coleiro, sev-

eral prelates and members of the Nomadelfia, a secular community that tries to live as the early Christians. In recent years, the pope has marked his birthday by distributing hundreds of sleeping bags to homeless people in Rome or by sending food to a migrant shelter. Born into a family of Italian heritage on December 16, 1936, Jorge Bergoglio became the 266th pope when he was elected on March 13, 2013. This will be the fourth birthday the former bishop of Buenos Aires has celebrated in the modest St Martha's boarding house he has made his home inside the Vatican's walls.

He has shown no sign of slowing down in his drive to reshape the Catholic Church to reflect his own vision of compassion and humility. The first pope from the Americas continues to set a relentless pace as he reaches a milestone at which cardinals are ushered into semi-retirement. There are signs of fatigue, natural for a man of his age who lost part of a lung in his youth, and the occasional grimace bears witness to the sciatic pain that is a near constant companion. He has not ruled out following the historic example of his predecessor Benedict XVI, who retired, exhausted, in 2013, although there is no suggestion that could happen soon. — AFP

## ARTIST BRINGS BEAUTY TO WAR-RAVAGED GAZA

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Teeuwen usually works in buildings that are due to be destroyed in a few months, turning them into temporary exhibits in what she describes as juxtaposition of the opposing forces of construction and destruction.

"(But) for the first time I started in a building which was destroyed already, which was destroyed by war," she said. Perhaps Teeuwen's most famous work in the Netherlands saw her transform four empty houses due for demolition into a minimalist space with tilted floors and caved-in walls. But in Gaza, they had to start by rebuilding one of the walls destroyed during the war. The team closed it with rows of bricks and breeze blocks stacked on top of each other but without cement, which is sparse in Gaza, leaving space for light to come through.

Inside the exhibition, which took Teeuwen three months, she has used rubble and chips of tiles from the war to construct a column which snakes upwards to the ceiling. Floors have been twisted upwards or collapsed inwards, while some interior walls were removed completely. Others fall diagonally or are deliberately disjointed to create the feeling that "everything is on edge," a written guide to the work said.

More than 120,000 homes were partially or fully destroyed in the 50-day war in 2014, which led to the deaths of 2,251 Palestinians and 73 Israelis, according to the United Nations agency for Palestinians (UNRWA). 71,000 have been repaired, while 12,000 are in the process, UNRWA spokesman Chris Gunness said. A further 57,000 are yet to be repaired or rebuilt. Dressed in black, Teeuwen talked to her colleagues by a fire to keep warm in the winter air, despite the sun poking through holes in the roof. "My message to the Palestinian people is visit this place and see the beauty," she said. Mohamed Abu Dagga, Teeuwen's assistant, said he hoped the artwork would send a "message" about Gaza.

"Despite the blockade and all the wars the Palestinian people still love art and beauty and life," he said. Gaza has been under an Israeli blockade for a decade, while Egypt has also largely closed its border with the beleaguered Palestinian enclave which is run by Islamists Hamas. Mohammed al-Najjar, 40, from a nearby town, is still waiting for war-damaged his home to be rebuilt. "I hope I find help to build a home like this," he said. After being shown to the public the Saath House building will eventually be demolished, as the owner wants to construct a family home. — AFP

## SUICIDE BOMBING TARGETS TURKISH SOLDIERS...

Continued from Page 1

The army said that the bus-carrying low-ranking privates and non-commissioned officers was attacked after leaving the commando headquarters in the city. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the "acts of terror" in Turkey were "aiming at all 79 million of our citizens together with our soldiers and police." Without referring specifically to the Kayseri attack, he said that Turkey was targeted by all terror groups but especially the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

"We will fight decisively against these terror organizations in the spirit of a national mobilization," he said. Turkey has seen a spate of deadly bombings in a bloody 2016 blamed both on jihadists and Kurdish militants that have left dozens dead and put the country on daily alert. In June, 47 people were killed in a triple suicide bombing and gun attack at Istanbul's Ataturk airport, with authorities blaming the Islamic State group.

Another 57 people including 34 children were killed in August in a suicide attack by an IS-linked bomber at a Kurdish wedding in the southeastern city of Gaziantep. Kurdish militants have twice struck with bombings that killed dozens in Ankara in February and March. The attacks have come with the civil war still raging in neighboring Syria, where Turkey is staging its own incursion to expel jihadists and Kurdish militia from the border area. Turkey is also still reeling from a failed July 15 coup blamed on the US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen that has been followed by a relentless purge of his alleged supporters from all state institutions.

One of the main cities of central Turkey, Kayseri is a key industrial hub with a population of over one million

and usually seen as a peaceful area. The city lies close to the famous landscapes of Cappadocia, a magnet for tourists around the world. It is well west of the south-east of the country that has been hit by months of deadly fighting between the PKK and the security forces. Following the bombing, dozens of protesters stormed the offices of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in Kayseri, draping a Turkish nationalist flag from the top floor, footage posted on social media showed.

The government slapped a temporary broadcast ban on footage of the attack, as is becoming typical in the aftermath of major incidents in the country. The Turkish military has stepped up operations against the PKK after a fragile ceasefire broke down in the summer of 2015. Since then, there has been a dramatic surge in violence that shows no sign of ending. Last week's double bombing in Istanbul, which targeted police after a match of the Besiktas football club, was claimed by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) seen as a radical offshoot of the PKK.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolence to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the victims of the car bombing that hit Turkey's central province of Kayseri earlier yesterday and left dozens of people dead or wounded. In the cable, His Highness the Amir condemned the blast as a terrorist act that targeted innocents and breached all religions and human and ethical values. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent the Turkish president cables of similar sentiments. — Agencies

## CHURCH ATTACK RAISES CALLS TO UPROOT...

Continued from Page 1

Attacks by Muslims on Christians, especially in rural areas, carried on after Sadat himself was assassinated by jihadists in 1981 and succeeded by his vice president, Hosni Mubarak. In more recent times, Copts have also had to contend with Islamist extremists whose propaganda portrays them as outsiders and second-class citizens.

Some say the roots of discrimination can be found in schools. Schools teach compulsory classes in religion, with Christians leaving classrooms during Islamic lessons to attend separate Christian religion tuition. In Arabic classes, Christians memorize Quranic verses—a primary reference for teaching the language—while Muslims are taught about Christianity from an Islamic perspective. "They don't learn anything about my religion," said Peter, a Copt in his 30s. Bigotry was one of the reasons that Peter, who asked not to be fully identified, left Egypt, saying it made him feel "like I'm not from this country".

Halim said confronting discrimination should involve government ministries as well as institutions from both sides of the religious divide. They should "create a national project to start a current of enlightenment among Egyptians", Halim said. After Mubarak's overthrow in a 2011 uprising, Copts came under attack again, with dozens killed in sectarian clashes and in a confrontation with the military in October that year. Under Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, fundamentalists regularly incited violence against Christians. Following his overthrow by the military in 2013, Muslim mobs attacked dozens of churches and Christian properties

accusing the Copts of having sided with the army. With former military chief Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's election a year later, Copts hoped they had found an ally who understood the dangers of Islamist extremism. Sisi, who oversaw a bloody crackdown on Morsi's supporters and pledged to wipe out a jihadist insurgency, became Egypt's first president to attend a Christmas mass. His administration also finally regulated church construction under a law supported by the Coptic Church, though opposed by critics for retaining obstacles.

"What happened is not enough to change ideologies," said Halim. There has been an uptick of sectarian incidents in 2016. In May, Muslim villagers set ablaze Christian homes and paraded an elderly Coptic woman naked over rumors that her son was in a relationship with a Muslim woman. In February, authorities halted the hiring of a Christian woman as a school principal after student protests in Minya province, south of the capital.

Violent attacks have increased, with clashes often ignited by rumors that Christians were building a church. Activists say extremist Salafi preachers are spreading hatred in non-mainstream religious services, some of them available online. "It is very clear that hatred is present in speeches. I don't know what they (the authorities) are waiting for," Halim said. This year, four Coptic teenagers were convicted of insulting Islam after they recorded a video mocking the Islamic State group. The government prefers to defuse communal tensions or clashes between Muslims and Copts by holding "conciliation meetings" rather than applying the law, critics say. — AFP

## 241,220 WORK PERMITS ISSUED

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the Acting Manpower Authority Director Abdullah Al-Motoutah said that the Authority is coordinating with the Manpower and government restructuring program to inspect workers at the private sector - and taking legal actions against those involved in fake

employment only to get the national labor support allowances. An inspection committee including elements from the Manpower Authority, Kuwait Municipality, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Interior Ministry had discovered 2,036 fake companies since the beginning of the year and that those companies had been sponsoring 1,128 illegal laborers and beggars.

## NEW DEAL REACHED FOR ALEPPO

Continued from Page 1

"Now we are working on international guarantees to guarantee the safety of those who leave Aleppo so that such violations are not repeated," Abu Bakr said.

The chaos surrounding the Aleppo evacuation reflects the complexity of Syria's civil war, with an array of groups and foreign interests involved on each side. Aleppo had been divided between government and rebel areas in the nearly six-year war, but a lightning advance by the Syrian army and its allies that began in mid-November deprived the insurgents of most of their territory in a matter of weeks.

### Iranian demands

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war, said no buses or ambulances had yet entered Al-Foua or Kefraya, but the operation was expected to begin soon. It said in the villages there are about 20,000 people, of whom roughly 4,500 are pro-government fighters. Iran, one of Syria's main allies, had demanded that the villages be included in any ceasefire deal, rebel and United Nations officials have said.

Though both Russia and Iran back Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, rebels have blamed Tehran and the Shiite groups it backs in Syria for obstructing Moscow's efforts to broker the evacuation of east Aleppo. Earlier this week, the government side demanded the evacuation of wounded people from al-Foua and Kefraya for the Aleppo deal to proceed. Rebels initially accepted the demand, but on Friday it emerged that one group, formerly known as the Nusra Front, had not agreed to it.

The Syrian Observatory said 8,000 people, including some 3,000 fighters and more than 300 wounded, had left the city in convoys of buses and ambulances in the evacuations that began on Thursday morning. Rebel officials say the numbers evacuated are much lower, with no fighters having left. The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria said no one knows how many people are left in rebel-held Aleppo, and the evacuation could take days.

The UN says around 30,000 people remain in the crowded enclave of rebel-held Aleppo, of whom a number would be taken to Idlib province, which is mostly

controlled by hardline Islamist groups, and the rest would go to government-held city districts. Idlib is already a target for Syrian and Russian air strikes but it is unclear whether the government will push for a ground assault or simply seek to contain rebels there for now. Turkey has said Aleppo evacuees could also be housed in a camp to be constructed near the Turkish border to the north.

### Putin seeks ceasefire

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Syria's most powerful ally, said on Friday he was working with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to try to start a new round of Syrian peace talks aimed at securing a nationwide ceasefire. A senior Syrian opposition leader, Riyad Hijab, said he was willing to attend the talks if the aim was to set up a transition government. Assad has ruled out stepping down as part of a political solution to the war. Aleppo, a once-flourishing economic centre with renowned ancient sites, has been pulverized during the war that has killed more than 300,000 people, created the world's worst refugee crisis and allowed for the rise of Islamic State.

The United States has watched from the sidelines as the Syrian government and its allies, including Russia, pinned down the rebels in an ever-diminishing pocket of territory, culminating in a ceasefire this week. US President-elect Donald Trump said on Friday his administration would build "safe zones" to try to help civilians trapped in Syria's bloody conflict, an idea that President Barack Obama said would be too hard to enforce. "Responsibility for this brutality lies in one place alone: with the Assad regime and its allies Russia and Iran. And this blood and these atrocities are on their hands," Obama said on Friday.

The Syrian White Helmets civil defense group and other rights organizations accused Russia of committing or being complicit in war crimes in Syria, saying Russian air strikes in the Aleppo region had killed 1,207 civilians, including 380 children. Even with victory for Assad in Aleppo, the war will be far from over. Insurgents retain their rural stronghold of Idlib province, and the jihadist Islamic State group holds swathes of the east and recaptured the ancient city of Palmyra this week. — Reuters

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## Focus

MIDEAST PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE ROLES PLAYED  
BY REGIONAL POWERS

Dr James J Zogby

The tumult that has rocked the Arab World, has contributed to dramatic changes in the Arab public's attitudes toward important global and regional powers. This is one of the findings of a recent Zogby Research Services (ZRS) poll of over 7,000 adults in six Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iraq), Turkey, and Iran.

The wide-ranging study, prepared for the annual Sir Bani Yas Forum, covered a number of topics asking respondents to identify: obstacles to stability and sources of the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Libya; the causes of extremism; and how best to deal with the threat of extremism. While all warrant examination, the shake up in the region's positive and negative perceptions of the roles played by global and local powers is both fascinating and consequential.

In face to face interviews, conducted in late September-early October, ZRS found that Saudi Arabia is in an exceptionally strong position in the Arab World, while favorable attitudes toward Iran and Turkey continue to decline. These ratings and the mixed reviews given to the US and Russia define the turn-about that has occurred in recent years. In 2006, just one decade ago, the attention of most Arabs was focused on the continuing US war in Iraq and the US support for Israel's destructive assault on Lebanon and its occupation policies in the West Bank and Gaza. In that context, not surprisingly, attitudes toward the US were at their lowest point.

With then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad leading a war of words not only against the US and Israel, but also the weak Arab response to both, favorable attitudes toward Iran were on the rise region-wide reaching over 70% in most Arab countries-including over 85% in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In 2009, Turkey's then Prime Minister Erdogan created a sensation with his televised public rebuke of Israeli President Shimon Peres. This behavior brought about a spike in the Arab World's favorable assessment of Erdogan and Turkey.

After the Turks broke relations with Israel and continued to publicly challenge its policies, their favorable ratings rose even higher. Contributing to the Arab World's positive assessment of Turkey were that country's economic progress and what appeared to be its successful democratic experience. Much has changed in the past decade. Iran's meddlesome regional role has angered many Arabs causing a steep and steady decline in its ratings. The "nail in the coffin" of Iran's regional standing has been its support for the Syrian regime of Bashar Al Assad.

Just how precipitous this decline has been can be seen by looking at the changes that have occurred in Egypt and Saudi Arabia dropping from almost nine in ten who had a favorable rating of Iran in 2006 to less than one in ten in 2016. Even Lebanon, which continued to rate Iran favorably throughout the last decade, has now joined the rest of the Arab World in giving that country a net negative rating. It is also worth noting that in no Arab country does a majority see Iran as playing a positive role in the region or view it as important to have good relations with the government in Tehran.

The Arabs' assessment of Turkey has also taken a hit largely owing to that country's bungling efforts to claim a regional leadership role and its troubling drift toward authoritarianism. Once held in high esteem in every Arab country, now only Jordan and Lebanon give Turkey a net favorable rating and only Jordan and Saudi Arabia see Turkey playing a constructive regional role.

While attitudes toward Turkey and Iran are in decline across the region, Saudi Arabia continues to receive the highest favorable ratings in all Arab countries and Turkey. Majorities in all the Arab countries also see the Kingdom contributing to peace and stability and view having good relations with Saudi Arabia as important-with a majority of Iranians also favoring good relations with the Kingdom.

Both of the major global powers covered in this survey, the United States and Russia, fare quite poorly. They each receive a net positive rating in only one country-the US in Lebanon and Russia in Iran. Neither the US or Russia are seen as promoting peace and stability, and both receive mixed reviews in response to the question about the importance of having good relations with them-the US scores high in just Lebanon, Jordan, and the UAE, while only Egypt, Lebanon, and Iran want good ties with Russia.

Iraq is the one country where the US scores lowest in all areas. Only 6% of Iraqis view the US favorably and see it contributing to peace and stability in the Middle East, and only 16% of Iraqis say that it is important for their country to even have good relations with the US. It is interesting to note the countries where attitudes toward the US actually improved (Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan). The cause of both appears to be the Administration's lighter regional footprint.

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## ON FRONTLINE OF NIGERIA'S JIHADIST WAR, NIGHTLIFE FIGHTS THE BLUES

By Celia Lebur

At Hot Bites, the party is in full swing and there is beer, dancing and boy-meets-girl until curfew time hits Maiduguri, the cradle of the Boko Haram jihadist movement. "We need to move on," said 18-year-old Fatima, her almond-shaped eyes rimmed with eyeliner, teetering on high heels with a dress sporting a plunging neckline. "Maybe I can find my future husband here," she said with a laugh. Nightlife is slowly returning to the northern city, where the Boko Haram insurgency erupted in 2009 and has since spread havoc and destruction across Nigeria and its adjoining countries.

At Hot Bites, the trendiest nightclub in the capital of Borno State, northern Nigeria's many cultures cavort, with dancers in veils next to writhing women in sexy glittering dresses. Beer flows as indulgent soldiers watch on, taking a welcome break from the rigours of the frontline. After years of being under siege, Maiduguri is attempting to return to normal. The ceasefire has been pushed back four hours to 10 pm, and there are fewer policemen and soldiers on the streets. Boko Haram's violent campaign for a hardline Islamic north has claimed more than 20,000 lives in Nigeria alone and led to more than 2.6 million people to flee their homes. Teens like Fatima have spent half their lives living in fear: fear of being abducted, raped or killed, or having someone in the family murdered.

## 'I just drink beer'

But tonight, Fatima is out to snare a man, and has dropped her hijab toward that end. "I live with my grandma, so I can't dress like that, she doesn't even know I came here," she said, adding: "I changed my clothes on the way." Although Borno is conservative-Sharia was decreed in the state in 2001 well before the Boko Haram insurgency broke out-Maiduguri has always been more relaxed, attracting youths from across the north seeking more freedom and fun.

Christians and Muslims party together at Hot Bites, grooving to hits from Afropop stars such as Wizkid or Mr Balogun, born more than 1,000 kilometers down south in

Lagos, Nigeria's teeming seaside economic capital. Muna, her hair tucked under a black turban and a cigarette in hand, downs a third beer perched on a bar stool. "I just drink beer, I don't take anything else," she said, adding that many of her peers did drugs. Tramadol-a powerful pain killer which is used by Boko Haram fighters and can lead to addiction-is sold round the corner. Heroin and cocaine are also easily available in Maiduguri, humanitarian workers say.

## 'Can't live without music!'

But revelers at Hot Bites know that the conflict is not over, that Islamist fighters are hiding out at the nearby Sambisa forest and that they have to scrupulously respect the curfew. Some hardened veterans lock themselves in

and party all night long over weekends. "We are free to do what we want" in the pulsating nightclub, said a 32-year-old official named Sunday. "Everybody is welcomed, except for Boko Haram."

Hot Bites' owner Ayo Deji organizes poolside parties with local artists on Sunday afternoons. "We suffered too much. Young people just want to relax and forget the troubles," Deji said, adding that Boko Haram members or their cohorts would spy on the young to see if they were adhering to traditional Islamic mores. "When Boko Haram was there, they forbid us to listen music. Even on the phone you couldn't listen to music or they shoot you," he said. But that left him undeterred. "They can launch bombing attacks, I've never stopped listening to music. We, the Nigerians, cannot live without music!" he said. — AFP



A picture taken in Bama, northeast Nigeria shows a fuel station destroyed by Boko Haram. The conflict with Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria has displaced more than 2.6 million people. — AFP

## MAIDUGURI OVERWHELMED BY VICTIMS OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

By Celia Lebur

Ali Bukar didn't know anyone when he arrived in Maiduguri with 43 people in tow and not a coin in his pocket. Bukar was fleeing the brutal killings of civilians by the Boko Haram Islamists in northeast Nigeria-along with his wives, his sons, their wives and grandchildren. They slept in a parking lot "until a man took pity on us," he said. Around one million people have flooded the capital of Borno state seeking to escape the insurgency that Boko Haram has waged since 2009.

The camps set up for displaced people are not sufficient, so many residents of Maiduguri have opened their doors to these victims of conflict. But now years later the refugees still cannot return to their home villages, and struggling city residents are starting to blame the influx for problems in the community. Between 70 to 90 percent of the displaced in Maiduguri have relied on the compassion of the local people to survive. Bukar and his family have never stayed at a camp. A local merchant had welcomed them to his home and fed them for a year, the scar-faced old man said.

But then they had to leave because the financial burden came too much, Bukar said. Today the family is living in a so-called "hosting community", one of hundreds of such private places where refugees are sheltered around the city. "I couldn't just sit there and watch people die of hunger, I had to help them," said Baba Kura Al-Kahi, the boss of these hosting communities, a local businessman who made his fortune in real estate and in 2013 turned over some land he owned to the displaced.

## Boko Haram epicenter

Today many refugees are squatters on construction sites, in schools, in public housing, while thousands of others are taken in by relatives or members of their ethnic group, often Kanuri or Hausa. Neighbors have organized aid, growing food for the most needy, bringing them clothes and sheets and cooking utensils. But "resources are overstretched, especially with regards to water and sanitation, with regards to hospital facilities, with regards to even food security issues," the Borno state governor, Kashim Shettima said.

Still Maiduguri, after years of being under siege, has a semblance of normal life compared with the devastated hinterland. The city's ceasefire has been pushed back four hours to 10:00 pm. Soldiers and checkpoints are less noticeable and merchants and passers-by have returned to the centre city's sidewalks. The schools, which were closed for two years, reopened last month.

Over the past year, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's government has made repeated announcements that Boko Haram is close to being defeated, and Shettima considers the battle "over" and predicts that hundreds of thousands of displaced people will have returned to their homes by May. But this is the cradle of Boko Haram Islamists and they have not disappeared. Just last weekend, a new suicide bombing hit Maiduguri's busy market, killing one person and injuring 18 others. The two bombers were girls thought to be only seven or eight years old, a hallmark of the jihadist group which often uses women or girls in such operations-especially in Borno state-the epicentre of their insurgency.

## Begging and prostitution

And the economy of the region has been ravaged by war. Unemployment is sky high at around 35 percent or more, according to the Borno governor. In the streets of Maiduguri the number of beggars in rags who bang on the windshields of the cars stopped at red lights has mushroomed. The city's ills are now being blamed on the refugees, these waves of people who have flooded Maiduguri and doubled its population since the Boko Haram revolt began. The insurgency has left more than 20,000 people dead and 2.6 million displaced in northern Nigeria. The governor says the displaced camps "are the source of many problems", including networks for prostitution and drug trafficking.

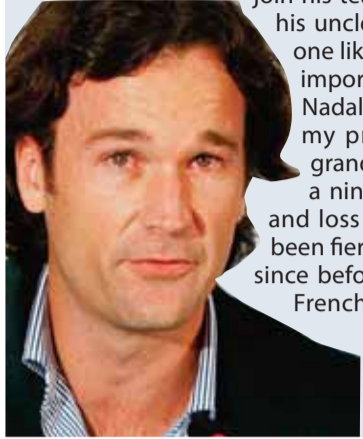
"The residents helped as much as they could but now they are more and more critical," a journalist in Maiduguri who requested anonymity said. "The people are afraid of the crime and epidemics that can arise," Yannick Pouchalan, director of Action against Hunger in Nigeria, says "it is clear that Maiduguri cannot offer a decent life to all these people." Yet compared to the villages, the refugees, especially the youth, find the city has more to offer. "If you are 15, and you can take advantage of the security, the services of a big city and have access to the internet... you're surely not going to go back home to your village," Pouchalan says. — AFP



Photo shows a general view of the abandoned streets in Bama in northeast Nigeria. —AFP

## CARLOS MOYA JOINS RAFA NADAL'S COACHING TEAM

**MADRID:** Fourteen-times grand slam champion Rafa Nadal has turned to fellow Mallorcan Carlos Moya in an attempt to revitalise his career, the 30-year-old Spaniard said yesterday. Moya, like Nadal a former world number one, will join his team for the coming season and work alongside his uncle Toni Nadal and Francis Roig. "To have someone like Carlos who is not only a friend but also a very important person in my career is something special," Nadal said in a statement. "He will be next to me on my practice and competition." Nadal, without a grand slam title since winning the French Open for a ninth time in 2014, has been plagued by injuries and loss of form in the past two years. He has always been fiercely loyal to uncle Toni who has been his coach since before he burst into the limelight by winning the French Open as a teenager in 2005. However, with his powers apparently on the wane Nadal has moved to shake up his entourage, turning to close friend Moya. — Reuters



## ILKA STUHEC CONTINUES GREAT FORM WITH WCUP DOWNHILL WIN

**VAL D'ISERE:** Ilka Stuhec continued her outstanding form by winning a World Cup downhill race yesterday for her fourth victory so far in a remarkable season.

The 26-year-old Slovenian finished .28 seconds ahead of Austrian Cornelia Huetter and .32 clear of Italian Sofia Goggia - who is also enjoying a breakthrough season.

Stuhec had never finished higher than fourth in a race prior to this year, but this was her third success in downhill and her second straight win after clinching Friday's Alpine combined.

"It was really bumpy. I told myself, 'just push, push, push,'" Stuhec said. "I tried to keep the (racing) line but I was really tired. I did enough."

Goggia also had a career best of fourth before this season began, and now has six podiums in eight races during this campaign. She was also third in Friday's race and strengthened her grip on second in the overall standings behind American slalom specialist Mikaela Shiffrin.

"Everyone asks me about the overall, but actually it's not my goal," the 24-year-old Goggia said. "Maybe when I was a child and I was dreaming about having this crystal globe in my hands."

Still, Goggia is confident that she can turn her podium finishes into wins.

"I still haven't found my limit yet on the downhill, I think I have something more to give," she said. "I'm happy with the final result but not so satisfied with my skiing. I was pretty slow on the upper part."

Three Italians, including two sisters, completed the top six: Nadia Fanchini was fourth ahead of Johanna Schnarf and Elena Fanchini. But the day belonged to Stuhec. She was ahead of Huetter on all the time splits as she powered down the Oreiller-Killy course in bright morning sun-

shine. Only .07 ahead on the fourth split, Stuhec then accelerated away on the bottom section to beat Huetter, who now has 10 career podiums.

Stuhec knew she was quick, but even the result surprised her as she put her hands over her face, then sank onto her back, shaking her head in disbelief.

"It was a surprise for me. Coming down and seeing the No. 1 (on the screen) I just didn't get it at first," Stuhec said. "I thought I'd made too many mistakes."

Her two other wins in downhill were both in Lake Louise earlier this month. It has been a remarkable turnaround. Prior to this year, Stuhec had finished only twice in the top five, with fourth in super-G three years ago.

Meanwhile, defending World Cup overall champion Lara Gut of Switzerland failed to finish for the second straight race, skiing off course after losing balance on the top section. She was .03 seconds faster than Huetter at the first split but then lost time to drift .35 behind on the next.

Then, just like during the slalom run in Friday's Alpine combined race, Gut went out. "There are days when you feel well and you ski well, and there are some when you just cannot bring it all together," said Gut, who explained that a bump on the course led to her mishap. "That's how it goes." Gut came here with a great chance of overtaking Shiffrin. But she remains 105 points behind and needs to pick up some points in Sunday's super-G. "I shouldn't start to have doubts," said Gut, who was won a giant slalom and a super-G race this season. "Tomorrow is another day and I'm going to go for it."

But she faces a strong challenge. When Gut won the super-G in Lake Louise earlier this month, Goggia was third and Stuhec was fifth. — AP



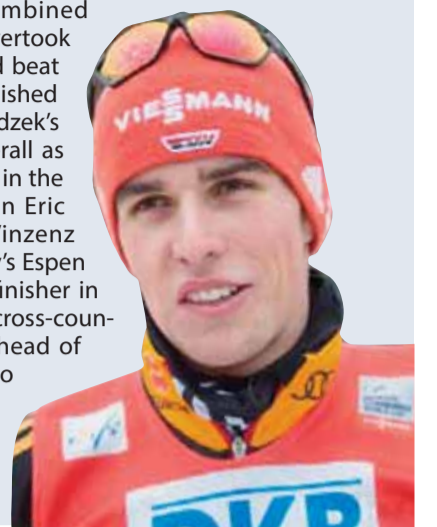
**VAL D'ISERE:** First placed Slovenia's Ilka Stuhec celebrates at the end of an alpine ski, women's World Cup downhill, in Val D'Isere, France, yesterday. — AP

## DORTMUND BOSS SLAMS REF AFTER DRAW AT HOFFENHEIM

**BERLIN:** Borussia Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke has slammed the referee who sent off their Germany international winger Marco Reus in the 2-2 draw at Hoffenheim. Hoffenheim remain the only unbeaten team in Germany's top flight this season after Friday night's stalemate. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang earned a point for the visitors just after the break with his 16th league goal of the season. But Dortmund played the entire second half with 10 men after Reus's dismissal and Watzke was furious with the performance of referee Benjamin Brand. The official missed Sandro Wagner's push on Sven Bender to make it 2-1 to the hosts on 20 minutes at a sold-out Rhein Neckar Arena, before Aubameyang struck the leveller. And Brand missed a pull by Nadiem Amiri on Reus, who then earned a second yellow-and subsequent red-on 41 minutes having already been booked early on. "I'm happy (with the result), but still annoyed by these unbelievable incorrect decisions in the first half, that is clear," Watzke told Sky. "Everyone saw the push (from Wagner) and the referee was five metres away. — AFP

## RYDZEK LEADS GERMAN SWEEP IN NORDIC WCUP

**RAMSAU:** Johannes Rydzek led a German sweep of the top four spots in a Nordic combined World Cup event yesterday. Rydzek overtook Fabian Riessle on the finish stretch and beat his teammate by 1.5 seconds as he finished in 22 minutes, 23.6 seconds. It was Rydzek's third win of the season and ninth overall as the world champion extended his lead in the season standings. Olympic champion Eric Frenzel trailed by 8.7 in third, and Vinzenz Geiger was 15.0 back in fourth. Norway's Espen Andersen was the best non-German finisher in fifth. Frenzel opened the 10-kilometer cross-country race after winning the jumping ahead of Mario Seidl of Austria. Seidl dropped to seventh after posting the 37th time in the cross-country portion. Another Nordic combined event is scheduled for today. — AP



**VAL GARDENA:** From left, second placed Aksel Lund Svindal, of Norway, first placed Max Franz of Austria and third placed Steven Nyman of the United States celebrate on the podium of an alpine ski, men's World Cup downhill, in Val Gardena, Italy, yesterday. — AP

# FRANZ BEATS SVINDAL TO MAIDEN WORLD CUP WIN

**VAL GARDENA:** Max Franz stunned the field to win a World Cup downhill yesterday, ending Austria's 13-race drought in skiing's signature event with his first career victory.

Starting with the No. 26 bib after all of the favorites had already come down the Saslong course, Franz finished a slim 0.04 seconds ahead of Norwegian standout Aksel Lund Svindal and 0.41 in front of Val Gardena specialist Steven Nyman. The previous Austrian man to win a downhill was Hannes Reichelt in Kvitfjell, Norway, in March last year. Austria, once known as the sport's "Wunderteam" for producing downhillers like Franz Klammer, Stephan Eberharter, Hermann Maier and Michael Walchhofer, didn't win a single downhill all of last season.

"It's a big relief," Franz said. "We knew that all we needed was a little something and then the pressure would let up and now we can all ski without this external pressure." Matthias Mayer of Austria won the downhill at the 2014 Sochi Olympics but he had his season cut short last year with a horrific crash in Val Gardena, breaking two vertebrae. Having returned to action earlier this season, Mayer finished 17th yesterday. Franz also had injury problems last season, missing several races due to knee and ankle

problems. "Of course it's an individual sport but this is going to help the entire team," Franz said in German through a translator.

The 27-year-old Franz's previous best results were two runner-ups and one third-place. Svindal was already being interviewed as the presumed winner when Franz came down and made up a deficit in the final interval.

Upon seeing his result, Franz whipped his poles around wildly while Svindal took his hat off and Nyman applauded.

Svindal swept both the super-G and downhill in Val Gardena last season and was looking for his first victory since missing much of last season following a crash and knee injury in Kitzbuehel. Nyman, meanwhile, needed one more win to match Klammer and Italian stand-out Kristian Ghedina for a record fourth downhill win in Val Gardena.

The highlights of the Saslong are the camel bumps, which launch skiers into the air for nearly 80 meters (90 yards), and the twisty and technical "clacslat" section - two areas that come right after another midway down. There are also numerous little bumps and jumps, providing constant air time.

Svindal made a major error midway through his run, landing a jump far outside the race line,

prompting him to brake to clear the next gate. "You don't win races with mistakes," Svindal said. "The other guys are too fast. ... I knew it wasn't really perfect."

Nyman also struggled, sitting down on his skis while landing the bigger camel jump. Still, the American was able to regain his speed. "I was just telling myself, 'You got to keep pushing. The first thing in my mind was that the knees didn't pop so things are OK. Let's keep going, keep charging. Let's go, let's go, let's go,'" Nyman said.

All three of Nyman's wins have come in Val Gardena.

"I can't not be happy about a podium," Nyman said. "I'm really happy to perform the way I did with a mistake." Adrien Theaux of France finished fourth and 2013 winner Erik Guay of Canada was fifth.

In a strong day for the US Ski Team, Travis Ganong came seventh and Bryce Bennett was eighth. Kjetil Jansrud, the Norwegian who had won the opening three speed races of the season - including Friday's super-G on the Saslong, was only 12th.

The men travel over the Gardena pass into Alta Badia for a giant slalom and a parallel slalom today and tomorrow, respectively. — AP

# KOSTNER WORKING WITH MISHIN TO REGAIN HER OLYMPIC FORM

**EGNA:** Carolina Kostner is coming full circle. The Italian has returned to her native Alto Adige region to climb back to the elite level of international figure skating after a nearly three-year absence due to a suspension for helping her then-boyfriend evade doping controls.

While the hometown fans gave her a heroine's welcome during the Italian championships this week, Kostner was nowhere near her top form of 2014, when she won the bronze medal at the Sochi Winter Olympics with a near flawless free skate.

But if anyone can raise her back to Olympic levels, it is Alexei Mishin, the Russian coach who trained Alexei Urmanov, Alexei Yagudin, and Yevgeny Plushenko to greatness.

Kostner has been training with Mishin full-time in St. Petersburg since Sept. 1. "When she came to me, she was destroyed," Mishin said after Kostner claimed her eighth Italian title on Thursday. He said his first mission, after her long absence from competition, was to give her confidence "that she is able to complete. And step by step, I think we did." His second task has been to radically shake up her approach to the elements. Mishin's skaters don't learn by repetition, a common approach to vanquish errors and create muscle memory. Instead, Mishin assigns them a set of exercises for each jump to create the proper technique.

### LEARNING ALL OVER AGAIN

The program, call it creative destruction, is nothing less than grueling, Kostner acknowl-

edged. "He has revealed an interesting but not so simple method that has provoked many moments of frustration, some cursing, many falls, and many moments of uncertainty," Kostner said. She said she felt like she has been learning all over again.

"In some ways, I feel like a 14-year-old who is learning, almost from zero. It is not from zero, it is only a change in perception, which often in life isn't bad." Kostner's last competitive season in 2014 was by far her finest. She won the Olympic bronze with a career-best 142.61 points in the free skate after landing eight triples, three in combination, to a fluidly choreographed "Bolero." She followed that with a best-ever short program at the world championships in Saitama, Japan, where she finished third.

She always planned to take off at least part of the 2015 season to rest, but the suspension turned that into two full years. She called it "a period of maturation" when addressing reporters after reaching a deal last year to return to competition. She exuded a newfound tranquility, along with a determination to get back into competition, sights set on the 2018 Winter Games.

During the break, Kostner kept up exhibition skating, and she started training with a dance company in Rome to enhance her expression. But she was missing critical ice hours working on top-level elements.

Fast forward 2 1/2 seasons, and her level of difficulty has clearly diminished.

In her final free program before an adoring

hometown crowd, the former world champion skipped a simple triple toe loop jump in combination. As she came off the ice, Mishin gave her a quizzical look and pointed to his head, as if to say, "What happened?" The error was surprising, but Mishin played it down. "We did not plan to be perfect right now," he said.

He huddled backstage after the nationals with Lori Nichols, Kostner's longtime choreographer, telling her that they needed to add more difficulty to the program to be competitive. Kostner's next challenge will be the Europeans in Ostrava, Czech Republic, at the end of January. Depending on the outcome, the Italian federation will make a final decision on whether Kostner will get Italy's single world's berth, which last year went to Roberta Rodeghiero, who finished 16th. Kostner is spending two weeks at home in Alto Adige with her family, at least part of that time she will be working huddled with Nichol to add difficulty to the program according to Mishin's prescription.

Mishin is confident in Kostner's ability, saying "Carolina is one of the most precise and serious pupils which I ever had."

The multilingual Kostner likened Mishin's technique to learning to converse in a new language. The experience has been nothing if not humbling. "Slowly, slowly, I am managing to put into practice what he is teaching me. I still have a lot to learn, and that is wonderful because two years ago, I thought I had learned everything in my sport. Instead, every day I am aware there is a whole new world." — AP



**EGNA ORA:** In this photo taken on Thursday, Dec 15, 2016 Carolina Kostner performs during the Italian figure skating championships in Egna Ora, Italy. The Italian has returned to her native Alto Adige region to climb back to the elite level of international figure skating after a nearly three-year absence due to a suspension for helping her then-boyfriend evade doping controls. — AP

## AUSTRALIA BOARD UNDER FIRE OVER PREGNANCY CLAUSE

**MELBOURNE:** Australia's Fair Work Ombudsman is investigating the national cricket board's controversial pregnancy clause in contracts offered to elite women players.

Cricket Australia has been under fire over the clause which required women to declare whether they were pregnant before signing contracts.

The clause said: "The Player warrants that, to the best of her knowledge, she is not pregnant as at the date of signing this Contract and undertakes that upon

becoming aware that she is pregnant, she will notify the details of the pregnancy (in writing, where practicable) to the CA medical officer (or such other appropriate representative of CA or other person designated by CA) as soon as reasonably practicable."

The clause has been slammed by women's groups as discriminatory after being brought to light during pay negotiations between the board and the players' association.

CA initially defended the clause as

being out of concern for women's health and safety.

"Our only interest in whether one of our women players is pregnant is to ensure the health of her and her baby, and we have strict rules around medical confidentiality," CA high performance chief Pat Howard said in a statement this week. "We are very mindful that cricket involves physical risk, and we need to ensure that our medical staff and players are aware of every aspect that can affect a player's health."

But CA changed its position on Saturday, announcing it would review its policies and contracts that applied to "pregnancy, maternity leave and carer support" after it was contacted by the labour watchdog on Friday.

"We will co-operate fully with the Ombudsman, and welcome their inquiries because it is always our intention to provide the best support for all our players," CA chief executive James Sutherland said in a statement.

Despite the probe, Sutherland

blamed the players' association for raising the issue.

"We are extremely disappointed that this issue has been raised by the ACA (Australian Cricketers Association)," he said. "Their senior executives were fully involved in negotiating, amending and then agreeing the contract for women players in the first half of 2015."

"As the ACA has shown no objection to this contract, they should take responsibility for their role in developing the current policy." — Reuters

## DAWSON, RASHID PROPEL ENGLAND IN FIFTH TEST

**CHENNAI:** Debutant Liam Dawson yesterday said it could be "hard work" for England bowlers on flat deck after his gritty half-century helped the visitors post a formidable 477 on day two of the fifth Test against India in Chennai.

Dawson scored an unbeaten 66 and shared a 108-run stand with Adil Rashid (60), England's best for the eighth wicket, to lift their first innings total after the Indian bowlers hurt the visitors with early strikes. England, who resumed the day on 284-4, slipped to 321-7 after overnight centurion Moeen Ali departed for 146, but Dawson and Rashid made sure the tourists keep going. England's innings ended 45 minutes into the evening session as India were firm in their reply with 60 for no loss at stumps. Lokesh Rahul (30) and Parthiv Patel (28) were at the crease as the hosts trail by 417 runs. "There isn't huge amount of spin, hasn't been much pace in it for the seamers, so tomorrow is going to be hard work for us," Dawson, who bowls left-arm spin, said.

"But if we keep going all day and keep trying to take wickets then we can take wickets," the 26-year-old allrounder told reporters at Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium. Allrounder Dawson, who was a late inclusion in the England squad before the fourth Test in place of Zafar Ansari, showed his batting prowess during his 148-ball stay, hitting 5 fours and a six.

His effort was the highest by an England No. 8 on debut in Tests, surpassing the late David Bairstow's 59 against India in 1979. "It is obviously nice to do well on debut. It was interesting first few balls in Test cricket for me but I was pleased to get through

them," said Dawson on getting a bouncer from Ishant Sharma that saw him lose his balance after being hit on the helmet.

Dawson has represented England in a one-day international and Twenty20 earlier this year, but the Hampshire allrounder was thrilled to play a part in the team's Test performance.

"I was extremely excited and from a team point of view as well, we want to finish on a high. We are in a fairly good position," said Dawson. Rashid, who recorded his second Test fifty in his 10th game, also looked solid during his gutsy effort as he fell one short of his Test best of 61.

### ALI BOUNCED OUT

Earlier Ali seemed relentless in his drive to consolidate England's position after adding 26 runs to his overnight score but his efforts were cut short just after the first drinks interval of the day. Indian skipper Virat Kohli's ploy of getting his pacemen to bowl short at Ali paid off as the left-hander mistimed a pull on one of Umesh Yadav's rising deliveries.

Yadav and Sharma took two wickets each while Ravindra Jadeja, with three wickets on the opening day, stood out on the bowling list for India. "They (England) got some quick runs, but I think the ball is not turning that much. That is the problem, we can't get wickets and that momentum," said Yadav, who bowled at a lively pace.

"Let's see how the wicket behaves, if it turns after the third day (or not). I think there is still some interest left in the game," said Yadav. The hosts have already pocketed the series 3-0. — AFP



**BRISBANE:** Pakistan's spin bowler Yasir Shah (R) dives to field a ball played by Australia's batsman Steven Smith (C) during the third day-night cricket Test match between Australia and Pakistan in Brisbane yesterday. — AFP

## PAKISTAN KNUCKLE DOWN IN FIGHT TO SAVE PINK-BALL TEST

**BRISBANE:** Pakistan were in a backs-to-the-wall struggle to save the day-night first Test as Australia took a strangle-hold on the third day at the Gabba yesterday. At the close, the tourists were hanging in at 70 for two with Azhar Ali not out 41 and 112-Test veteran Younis Khan not off the mark after facing 19 balls. Pakistan trailed by 419 runs.

Pakistan made a much better fist of playing in the tricky twilight session with the pink ball losing just two wickets after their catastrophic evening. The openers lasted into the 12th over before Starc got Sami Aslam to edge to Matt Renshaw at first slip for 15. Babar Azam fell to spinner Nathan Lyon in the final half-hour when he edged to Steve Smith at slip for 14.

It was slow going but at least the tourists were not shedding wickets in clumps to keep the Australians at bay and still with two long days to play. "We have had some very good partnerships and we are hopeful of getting some more partnerships," Pakistan batsman Asad Shafiq said. "We are taking this game step by step, hour by hour, and we are looking for the good batting opportunities here."

Australia will be pressing hard on Sunday's fourth day to win the series opener where they have yet to lose at the Gabba in 27 Tests stretching back to 1988.

"We wanted to have a crack at them at night time," senior batsman Usman Khawaja said, explaining Australia's decision not to enforce the follow-on. "We wanted to try and get a big lead, give our bowlers another little rest, it's tough for the bowlers to back up in the hot humid conditions. "We've got two days and they need to chase 400-odd, you always want to be in this position, but we've got to do a lot of hard work early tomorrow."

### THWARTED BY TECHNOLOGY

The highest winning run chase in the fourth innings at the Gabba stands at 236 for seven by Australia against the West Indies in 1951. But Pakistan will have to go well beyond the record highest-ever Test run chase of 418 for seven set by the West Indies against Australia in Antigua in 2003. Skipper Smith chose not to enforce the follow-on after Pakistan were dismissed for 142 in the first session, even though they were 287 runs in

## SCOREBOARD

**BRISBANE, Australia:** Scoreboard at stumps yesterday after the third day of the first cricket test between Australia and Pakistan, a day-night match at the Gabba.

Australia, 1st Innings: 429		Pakistan, 1st Innings	
<b>(Overnight 97-8)</b>			
Sami Aslam c Wade b Bird	22	Peter Handscomb not out	35
Azhar Ali c Khawaja b Starc	5	Nic Maddinson c Azam b Wahab	4
Babar Azam c Smith b Hazlewood	19	Matthew Wade not out	1
Younis Khan c Wade b Hazlewood	0	Extras: (2b,4lb,1nb)	7
Misbah-ul-Haq c Renshaw b Bird	4	TOTAL: (for five wickets, dec.)	202.
Asad Shafiq c Khawaja b Starc	2	Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-24, 3-135, 4-188, 5-199.	
Sarfraz Ahmed not out	59	Overs: 39. Batting time: 177 minutes.	
Wahab Riaz c and b Hazlewood	1	Did not bat: Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon, Jackson Bird.	
Yasir Shah c Khawaja b Starc	1	Bowling: Mohammad Amir 8-0-37-1, Rahat Ali 10-1-40-	
Mohammad Amir c Wade b Bird	21	2, Yasir Shah 10-1-45-1, Wahab Riaz 7-1-47-1 (1nb),	
Rahat Ali run out (Warner)	4	Azhar Ali 4-0-27-0.	
Extras: (3lb, 1w)	4		
TOTAL (all out)	142.	<b>Pakistan, 2nd Innings</b>	
Overs: 55. Batting time: 250 minutes.		Sami Aslam c Renshaw b Starc 15	
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-43, 3-43, 4-48, 5-54, 6-56, 7-66, 8-67, 9-121, 10-142.		Azhar Ali not out 41	
Bowling: Mitchell Starc 18-2-63-3 (1w), Josh Hazlewood 14-1-22-3, Jackson Bird 12-6-23-3, Nathan Lyon 11-2-31-0.		Babar Azam c Smith by Lyon 14	
		Younis Khan not out 0	
		TOTAL: (for two wickets) 70.	
		Fall of wickets: 1-31, 2-54.	
		Overs: 33. Batting time: 147 minutes.	
		Still to bat: Misbah-ul-Haq, Asad Shafiq, Sarfraz Ahmed, Wahab Riaz, Mohammad Amir, Yasir Shah, Rahat Ali.	
		Bowling: Mitchell Starc 8-3-28-1, Josh Hazlewood 11-8-5-0, Jackson Bird 8-3-24-0, Nathan Lyon 6-2-13-1.	

front on the first innings. Instead Australia amassed a formidable lead over the beleaguered tourists to set up a declaration during the dinner break to capitalise on bowling in the final twilight session. Smith went after the runs and brought up his 19th Test half-century off 59 balls with his eye on a declaration.

But he was caught at long-on by Rahat Ali going for a heave off leg-spinner Yasir Shah for 63 off 70 balls with 11 fours. Khawaja, out cheaply for four in the first innings, cracked 74 off 109 balls before he was splendidly caught by Misbah-ul-Haq off Rahat nearing the dinner break. Nic Maddinson once again failed and was out for four off just three balls before he was caught off Wahab Riaz.

Both the Australian openers were out before tea. David Warner fell for 12 when he went to hit Mohammad Amir through mid-

wicket only to miscue his pull shot to Wahab Riaz at mid-on, while Matthew Renshaw was caught at second slip off Rahat Ali for six.

Earlier Pakistan's last two partnerships battled for almost an hour before they were all out for 142. Wicketkeeper Sarfraz Ahmed top scored with a fighting unbeaten 59 off 64 balls as the tourists added 45 runs to their overnight total 97 for eight. Sarfraz and Mohammad Amir put on a stubborn 54 runs for the ninth wicket before Amir was adjudged caught behind off a faint edge, detected by Hot Spot.

Technology again thwarted Pakistan when after repeated replays Rahat Ali was given run out by Warner for four. Replays showed that Rahat's bat was millimetres off the ground when the balls were dislodged by Warner's throw from mid-off. — AFP



**CHENNAI:** India's Parthiv Patel runs between the wickets during their second day of the fifth cricket Test match against England in Chennai, India, yesterday. — AP

## GRANITE-TOUGH SRI LANKA BRACED FOR SOUTH AFRICA

**JOHANNESBURG:** Buoyed by victories in their most recent five Test matches, Sri Lanka embark on a two-month tour of South Africa with a three-day match against a youthful South African Invitation XI, starting in Potchefstroom today.

It is likely to be a relatively gentle introduction to a tough challenge in a country where Sri Lanka have struggled on four previous tours. In anticipation of having to deal with South Africa's strong fast bowling attack on pitches with pace and bounce, the Sri Lankan batsmen practiced on granite surfaces before leaving for the tour.

Sri Lanka have been beaten in eight of the ten Test matches they have played in South Africa, with just one win and one draw. But they have done better in one-day internation-

als. Although South Africa have won 15 times on home soil, Sri Lanka have had seven wins and a tie in 2003 which ended South Africa's hopes of progressing in a World Cup they hosted. The current tour includes three Test matches, five one-day internationals and three Twenty20 internationals.

It is Sri Lanka's first tour of South Africa in five years and there are only five survivors from the 2011/12 tour-captain Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Rangana Herath, Dimuth Karunaratne and Kaushal Silva.

Chandimal made his debut and hit two half-centuries in Sri Lanka's only Test win in South Africa, in the second Test in Durban, while Herath took nine wickets and was man of the match. Mathews and Chandimal helped Sri Lanka in a 3-0 home Test series win against

Australia but missed a recent 2-0 victory in Zimbabwe because of injuries.

Both are likely to be key players if Sri Lanka are to challenge a South African Test team which is coming off a third successive away series win in Australia. After a succession of leg injuries, Mathews is confident that he will be able to play a full all-rounder's role in a country where his seam bowling is likely to be needed more than in his home country.

The first Test, though, is in Port Elizabeth, which usually provides the slowest and lowest of South Africa's Test pitches.

The Sri Lankans arrived in South Africa last Sunday and have had a full week of preparation in Potchefstroom, a university town an hour's drive from Johannesburg which is a favoured training venue for a variety of inter-

national sporting teams and individuals.

The Invitation XI consists mainly of some of South Africa's most promising young players, led by experienced Cape Cobras and South Africa A batsman Omphile Ramela. Off-spinner Dane Piedt is the only Test player in the side. Sri Lanka Test squad: Angelo Mathews (captain), Dinesh Chandimal, Kusal Mendis, Kusal Perera, Dimuth Karunaratne, Kaushal Silva, Dhananjaya de Silva, Upul Tharanga, Lahiru Kumara, Vikum Sanjaya, Nuwan Pradeep, Dushmantha Chameera, Suranga Lakmal, Dilruwan Perera, Rangana Herath.

**Fixtures:**  
December 18-20, South African Invitation XI, Potchefstroom  
December 26-30, First Test, Port Elizabeth

January 2-6, Second Test, Cape Town  
January 12-16, Third Test, Johannesburg  
January 20, First Twenty20 international, Centurion  
January 22, Second Twenty20 international, Johannesburg  
January 25, Third Twenty20 international, Cape Town  
January 28, First one-day international, Port Elizabeth  
February 1, Second one-day international, Durban  
February 4, Third one-day international, Johannesburg  
February 7, Fourth one-day international, Cape Town  
February 10, Fifth one-day international, Centurion. — AFP







NIGUEZ STUNNER HANDS ATLETICO MUCH-NEEDED WIN

MADRID: A stunning 25-yard strike from Saul Niguez snapped Atletico Madrid's three-game winless streak with a nervy 1-0 win over Las Palmas yesterday to move up to fifth in La Liga.

volleyed off the inside of the post on 15 minutes. Atletico's struggles have coincided with Antoine Griezmann's loss of form as the Frenchman, who finished third in the running for the Ballon d'Or this week, was held scoreless for a ninth consecutive league game.

the closest they came to breaking the deadlock before half-time was an outrageous hit from fully 40 yards by centre-back Mauricio Lemos that came back off the crossbar.

season. Moya was called into action again three minutes from time to parry Marko Livaja, but Atletico held out for a crucial three points.

and La Liga goal of the season 16 minutes from time before Carlos Carmona registered a late consolation for Sporting. Defeat for Sporting also ensures that Valencia will end the year outside the relegation zone on goal difference.

LEIPZIG DOWN HERTHA TO KNOCK BAYERN FROM TOP

LEIPZIG: RB Leipzig knocked Bayern Munich, who they meet in five days' time, off the top of the Bundesliga yesterday with a 2-0 win at home to Hertha Berlin.

booed by Ingolstadt fans every time he got the ball. That had been the 20-year-old's first appearance since winning a penalty in the 2-1 win over Schalke a fortnight ago with what the club later admitted was a dive.

However, Carlo Ancelotti's Munich can regain top spot due to their superior goal difference by beating Darmstadt, ahead of Wednesday's mouth-watering clash against Leipzig at the Allianz Arena.

Leipzig used their 64 percent possession to create 16 shots to Hertha's three and made nearly twice as many passes.

Orban looked to have claimed his second on 78 minutes, but the linesman flagged with three Leipzig players offside.

PATRICK AANHOLT LIFTS SUNDERLAND OFF BOTTOM

Table with 2 columns: Team, Score. Sunderland 1, Watford 0.

SUNDERLAND: Patrick van Aanholt's goal earned Sunderland a potentially priceless 1-0 win over Watford yesterday as they climbed off the foot of the Premier League table.

The Dutch left-back struck for the third time this season in the 49th minute at the Stadium of Light as David Moyes's men returned to winning ways after back-to-back losses to Swansea City and Chelsea.

Matches on TV (Local Timings) table with columns: League, Match, Time.



STOKE: Leicester City's Riyad Mahrez, right, makes an attempt on goal past Stoke City's Erik Pieters during their English Premier League soccer match at the Bet365 Stadium, Stoke, England, yesterday. — AP

VARDY OFF BUT LEICESTER RALLY TO HOLD STOKE

Scoreboard showing Leicester 2, Stoke 2.

STOKE-ON-TRENT: Claudio Ranieri lost Jamie Vardy and his own composure, but saw 10-man Leicester City display the spirit of champions in a 2-2 draw at Stoke City yesterday.

shot. King's cross was then met by Robert Huth, whose powerful header was tipped over the crossbar by Grant.

beyond their reach just before the hour when Diouf's deep cross found Walters, whose goal-bound header was well saved by Schmeichel.

NEGREDO LIFTS GOAL-SHY MIDDLESBROUGH PAST SWANS

Scoreboard showing Middlesbrough 3, Swansea 0.

MIDDLESBROUGH: Alvaro Negredo scored a brace as goal-shy Middlesbrough got back to winning ways before Christmas with a 3-0 success which sent Swansea deeper into the relegation zone yesterday.

second-bottom. The defeat piles more pressure on the Welsh outfit who headed north without Federico Fernandez and Ki Sung-yeung, who were both recovering from toe injuries.



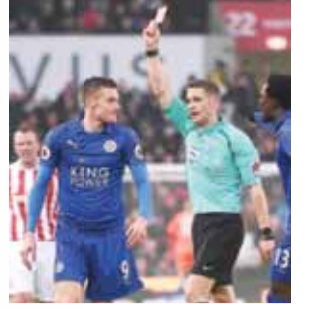
MIDDLESBROUGH: Swansea City's Angel Rangel, right, and Middlesbrough's Viktor Fischer battle for the ball during their English Premier League soccer match at the Riverside Stadium, Middlesbrough, England, yesterday. — AP

# Sports

**Kostner working with Mishin to regain her Olympic form**



**Vardy off but Leicester rally to hold Stoke**



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LONDON: Chelsea's Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois (C) jumps to save a shot by Crystal Palace's Zaire-born Belgian striker Christian Benteke during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Chelsea at Selhurst Park in south London yesterday. — AFP

## COSTA EARNS CHELSEA 11TH STRAIGHT WIN

Crystal Palace 0

Chelsea 1

LONDON: Diego Costa struck as Chelsea won 1-0 at Crystal Palace yesterday, a club record-equalling 11th straight victory that sent them nine points clear at the Premier League summit.

Costa's 43rd-minute header was the striker's sixth goal in his last eight games, his 50th Chelsea goal in total and gave Antonio Conte's side a third successive 1-0 win.

Chelsea once again delivered a controlled, effective performance, giving struggling Palace little chance of getting back into the game once they fell behind. Chelsea matched their record of 11 consecutive wins from April to September 2009, achieving the feat within

the same season for the first time, and remain on course to break Arsenal's all-time record of 14.

The only blemishes were yellow cards for Costa and N'Golo Kante that mean both players will be suspended for next weekend's home game against Bournemouth.

The match marked the first anniversary of Jose Mourinho's dismissal as Chelsea manager and the contrast in fortunes between the two clubs over the subsequent 12 months has been striking.

This time last year, Palace were in sixth position—they entered 2016 in fifth — 11 points ahead of Chelsea, who were in danger of getting drawn into a relegation battle. With Guus Hiddink taking temporary charge, Chelsea steadied the ship before this season's resurgence under Conte, while for Palace, 2016 started badly and got worse.

Their dismal run over the calendar year would have seen them relegated if replicated over a whole season. Yet while they came into the game still smarting from the late 2-1 defeat by Manchester United in mid-week, there have been promising signs during a

recent spell of improved form. Conte opted to restore Nemanja Matic in place of Cesc Fabregas, despite the Spain midfielder scoring the match-winner at Sunderland in mid-week.

### PUNCHEON FLUFFS LINES

Eden Hazard, meanwhile, returned after missing the Sunderland clash through injury, with Pedro Rodriguez making way, while Willian retained his place. Palace enjoyed long periods of possession in the first half, but Costa's side held them comfortably at arm's length before Costa struck.

Before then, Palace had the better chances, with Jason Puncheon in particular guilty of missing a clear opportunity when he screwed a first-time shot wide from Martin Kelly's right-wing cross.

While Alan Pardew's side continued to press, with James McArthur heading wide from another Kelly cross, it was clear that Puncheon's miss could prove costly.

Chelsea had looked comfortably in possession without truly stretching Palace and goalkeeper Wayne

Hennessey had barely been troubled.

But when the home side lost concentration two minutes before half-time, Costa was on hand to cap a routine move and put the visitors ahead.

Hazard moved the ball from left to right to Cesar Azpilicueta, who floated a deep cross towards the far post that should have been dealt with comfortably by the Palace defence. Instead, it caused confusion, with Hennessey starting to come for the ball before stopping and Scott Dann failing to monitor Costa's run, enabling the striker to climb above him and head past Hennessey.

The hard work of the previous 43 minutes had been undone and instead of holding on, Palace were forced to chase the game after the break.

For 15 minutes after the restart, Pardew's side pressed, but Chelsea held on comfortably before taking control as they attempted to kill off the game.

Fabregas drew a smart save from Hennessey, low to his right, and Marcos Alonso struck the bar from a free-kick. — AFP



WEST BROMWICH: Manchester United's Zlatan Ibrahimovic, left, fouls West Bromwich Albion's Craig Dawson as they battle for the ball, during the English Premier League soccer match between West Bromwich Albion and Manchester United, at The Hawthorns, in West Bromwich, England, yesterday. — AP

## IN-FORM IBRAHIMOVIC AT THE DOUBLE AS UNITED SOAR

West Bromwich 0

Man United 2

WEST BROMWICH: Zlatan Ibrahimovic was again at his irrepresible best with another double earning Jose Mourinho's increasingly

confident Manchester United a 2-0 win at West Bromwich Albion in the Premier League yesterday.

The 35-year-old Swede told the TV cameras beforehand that he felt as sprightly as a 20-year-old kid before going out and silencing the Hawthorns within five minutes when nodding home Jesse Lingard's superb half-volleyed cross.

Wayne Rooney was denied the chance to equal Bobby Charlton's all-time United record of 249 goals when his 23rd-minute shot was

tipped brilliantly on to the bar by Ben Foster.

After Lingard volleyed another chance high and wide just before half-time, Ibrahimovic sealed the win in the 56th minute, skipping between two defenders before firing a deflected shot into the corner for his 16th goal of the season in all competitions.

It was the first time since the start of the season that sixth-placed United had strung together four wins in a row and it thrust them on to the same points total as Tottenham Hotspur who are fifth. — Reuters

## NOBLE SPOT ON TO BOOST WEST HAM'S SURVIVAL BID

West Ham 1

Hull 0

LONDON: Mark Noble boosted West Ham's bid for Premier League survival as the midfielder's late penalty sealed a 1-0 win over fellow strugglers Hull yesterday.

Noble struck from the spot with 14 minutes left to give Slaven Bilic's side successive victories at the London Stadium for the first time since moving into their new home in the close-season.

Although they were out-played by lowly Hull for long periods, West Ham have pulled five points clear of the relegation zone with a solid run of one defeat in their last five league matches.

Hull slumped to the bottom of the table after setting a club record with seven consecutive away defeats in the top-flight. The Tigers have gone six league games without a win and head into the busy Christmas period facing a tough fight to avoid relegation.

Dieumerci Mbokani was back in Hull's attack after returning from suspension and the Congolese forward had the visitors' first chance when a nimble step-over opened space for a shot that flashed just wide. Mbokani went even closer moments later, pouncing on Aaron Cresswell's under-hit back pass to Hammers goalkeeper Darren Randolph before smashing his strike against a post.

Hull had failed to score in any of their past four away matches, but Mike Phelan's team were well on top and when Randolph made a fine save to keep out Harry Maguire's header from a Robert Snodgrass corner, rumbles of discontent could be heard all around the London Stadium.

It was no surprise the natives were restless given West Ham's miserable start to life in their new home this season and their complaints grew more vocal after Maguire brought Randolph into action again just before the interval. Bilic sent on Andre Ayew and Edimilson Fernandes for Manuel Lanzini and Pedro Obiang at half-time, but West Ham almost shot themselves in the foot when Noble headed against his own post in a panicked attempt to clear.

Remarkably, Hull struck the woodwork yet again, this time through Andrew Robertson, who lashed a superb effort beyond Randolph only to see it rebound back off a post. West Ham mounted a rare incisive attack of their own as Ayew's header was cleared off the line by Andrew Dawson, but Hull were immediately back on the attack and Maguire saw his header scrambled off the line by Fernandes.

Hull's profligacy finally came back to haunt them in the 76th minute when Tom Huddlestone conceded a penalty with the slightest contact on Michail Antonio. Noble had seen his spot-kick saved before he converted the rebound in midweek, but this time he netted at the first attempt, sending his penalty racing past Marshall. — AFP

# Kuwait Times 55th Anniversary BUSINESS

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Mutawa Alkazi launches its festival of gifts: Buy a G55

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## HOW TO FIND MORE JOBS IN 2017

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LONDON: Two shoppers stop to take a selfie in front of Selfridges window display on Oxford Street, one of the main shopping streets in central London yesterday. Confounding economists, Britain's economy has grown solidly since the June referendum, household spending has grown faster than expected, while the housing market has remained resilient and unemployment has dropped to its lowest level since 2005. — AFP

## US HOUSING STARTS TUMBLE FROM 9-YEAR HIGH

### BUILDING PERMITS DECLINE 4.7%; SINGLE-FAMILY RISE

WASHINGTON: US homebuilding fell more than expected in November, tumbling from a nine-year high as construction activity declined broadly, the latest sign of slower economic growth in the fourth quarter. But the housing market remains on solid ground, with Friday's report from the Commerce Department showing permits for the future construction of single-family homes, the biggest segment of the market, rising to a nine-year high in November.

"The economy won't be flying as high without new construction that leads to additional consumer purchases of furniture and appliances and cars. The economy has some risks to the downside," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFG Union Bank in New York.

Groundbreaking on new housing projects dropped 18.7 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.09 million units, the Commerce Department said. Last month's percentage decline was the largest in nearly two years, and unwound the bulk of October's 27.3 percent surge.

Housing starts data are choppy month-to-month, with much of the volatility coming from the multi-family segment of the market. October's starts were revised up to a 1.34 million-unit rate, the highest since July 2007, from the previously reported 1.32 million rate. Economists had forecast housing starts slipping to a 1.23 million-unit rate last month.

The report came on the heels of data this month showing a widening in the trade deficit in October and weak retail sales and industrial production in November. The Atlanta Federal Reserve is forecasting GDP rising at a 2.4 percent annualized rate in the fourth quarter after increasing at a brisk 3.2 percent rate in the third quarter. Residential construction has been a drag on economic growth since the second quarter, but economists expect it will contribute to GDP this quarter.

Despite the weak report, the PHLX housing index rose 0.4 percent, tracking a broadly firmer US stock market. Shares in the nation's largest homebuilder, D.R. Horton, gained 0.6 percent and Lennar Corp advanced 0.3 percent.

US Treasury debt prices rose marginally, while the dollar was little changed against a basket of currencies after scaling a 14-year high.

#### Permits data upbeat

Starts fell in all four regions last month. October's surge in home building had widened the gap between permits and starts. With last month's drop in groundbreaking activity, building permits are now leading starts, which augurs well for the housing market.

Permits fell 4.7 percent in November to a 1.20 million-unit rate. They have remained above the 1.20 million-unit level for three straight months, the longest stretch since 2007. Single-family permits rose 0.5 percent last month to their highest level since November 2007. Building permits for multi-family units, however, dropped 13.0 percent. "The trends in the single-family data still appear to be moving higher over time, which is a favorable signal regarding upcoming single-family construction activity," said Daniel Silver, an economist at JPMorgan in New York.

Economists expect housing to continue growing even with mortgage rates having jumped to their highest in more than two years following the election of Donald Trump as the next president. Trump has advocated for an expansionary fiscal policy, which could fan inflation pressures. A survey on Thursday showed homebuilders' confidence in December hitting its highest level since July 2005, with builders anticipating strong sales. Since the Nov. 8 presidential election, the fixed 30-year mortgage rate has increased about 60 basis points to average 4.16 percent in the week ending Dec. 15, the highest since October 2014, according to data from mortgage finance firm Freddie Mac.

Mortgage rates could rise further after the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark overnight interest rate on Wednesday by 25 basis points to a range of 0.50 percent to 0.75 percent. The US central bank forecast three rate hikes in 2017. Last month, single-family home building fell 4.1 percent to an 828,000-unit pace after hitting a nine-year high in October. Housing starts for the volatile multi-family segment tumbled 45.1 percent to a 262,000-unit pace. — Reuters

## VENEZUELA CASH CRISIS SPARKS LOOTING, PROTESTS

CARACAS: Desperate Venezuelans looted delivery trucks and clashed with police as a botched plan to introduce new banknotes left people without cash—the latest shortage in a spiraling economic crisis.

Late Friday President Nicolas Maduro blamed opposition politicians for the unrest, claiming that there were pictures and videos of some opposition members of the National Assembly

involved in "attempts of vandalism and some acts of violence." He warned that "parliamentary immunity does not reach that far," but did not give any names.

Maduro mentioned that rioters had torched two state banks in the town of Guasdalito, near the border with Colombia. He blamed unnamed opposition leaders who were also part of a "contraband mafia" for the incident, and warned that

they "will be captured and put behind bars in the next hours."

Faced with world-high inflation that has made its money increasingly worthless, the government is trying to introduce new bills in denominations up to 200 times higher than the old ones. But the plan went off the rails when Maduro ordered the 100-bolivar note removed from circulation before the new bills arrived.

Formerly the highest denomination bill, the 100-bolivar note was worth about three US cents, and accounted for 77 percent of the cash in circulation in Venezuela.

Angry protests erupted around the country as the chaotic reform left people without money to buy food or Christmas presents. In the second city of Maracaibo in the west, groups of protesters hurled stones at police, reports said. In the eastern city of Maturin, dozens of people blocked off a major avenue and looting broke out. "I went by the market and it was being guarded by the military. A chicken truck was looted," Juan Carlos Leal, a farmer in Maturin, told AFP.

In the eastern city of Puerto la Cruz, "people rioted because they wanted to take out money and they weren't allowed to," said Genesis, a local baker.

"The police fired in the air to calm the riot. Everyone dispersed and the police ordered all shops to be closed," said Genesis, who asked not to be identified by her surname for fear of reprisals. — AFP



SAN CRISTOBAL: People protest on the "Troncal 5" road over the lack of cash as the new bank notes have not appeared, in San Cristobal, in Venezuela's Tachira state yesterday. — AFP

## STRONGER YEAR-END GERMAN ECONOMY WILL PUSH INTO 2017

BERLIN: The German economy will rebound more strongly than previously expected in the fourth quarter and this growth momentum will carry through into 2017, one of Germany's leading forecasting groups said. The projection, by the Ifo Institute, comes after the quarterly growth rate halved to 0.2 percent in the third quarter because exports to major trading partners weakened.

A recent jump in industrial orders and upbeat sentiment surveys have, however, indicated a rebound in the last three months of the year. "All signs point to a fourth quarter that is stronger than had been expected until now," Ifo President Clemens Fuest said in a statement. "We'll take this impetus into the new year." The Ifo institute slightly raised its growth forecasts for the German economy to 1.5 percent in 2017 and 1.7 percent in 2018. That was an extra 0.1 percentage points for each year.

This is slightly higher than the predictions of analysts polled by Reuters. For this year, Ifo confirmed its growth prediction of 1.9 percent, which would be the strongest in five years, propelled by soaring private consumption and higher

state spending. "The change of growth pace from 2016 to 2017 is only due to a lower number of workdays," Fuest said. Germany's strong domestic demand is helped by record-high employment, rising real wages and low borrowing costs.

Ifo expects the German labour market to expand further, with employment levels reaching new record highs at 43.8 million in 2017 and 44.2 million in 2018 after 43.5 million this year. The institute predicts unemployment to remain stable at 2.7 million despite the influx of more than one million migrants since the beginning of 2015, meaning the social costs for the state could turn out to be lower than originally feared. Ifo said inflation would bounce back in Germany as past oil price drops are being knocked out of the base figures. It expects the national inflation rate to climb to 1.5 percent in 2017 and 1.7 percent in 2018 after 0.5 percent this year.

Fuest said the German inflation rate was close to the European Central Bank's policy target of almost 2 percent. "Since a similar development is also expected for the euro zone, the ECB should speed up the exit from the bond-buying program," Fuest said. — Reuters

OUTPUT DEAL IMPLEMENTATION IS KEY TO NEAR-TERM OIL PRICE TREND

KUWAIT: Oil prices surged to a 17-month high level after the successful outcome of the much-awaited meeting between OPEC members during the last week of November-16 followed by the December-16 agreement with non-OPEC producers.

According to the two output cut agreements within the OPEC and with non-OPEC members, a total of 1.8 mb/d of crude oil has been decided to be curtailed starting next month by global oil producers.

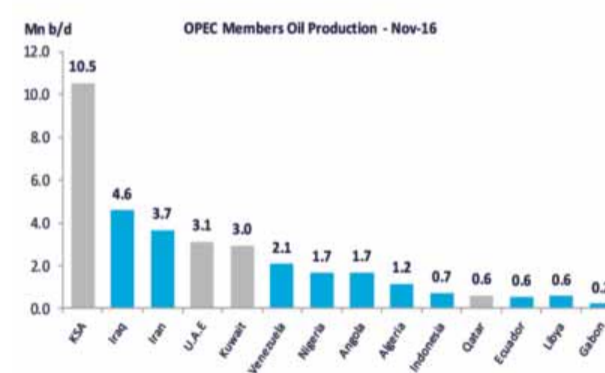
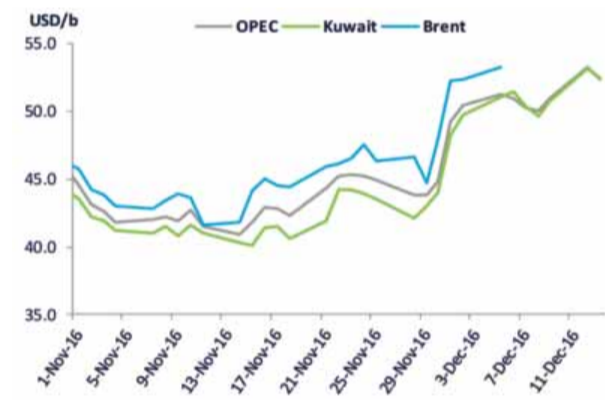
In terms of the timeframe, OPEC said that the oil market would not rebalance until the 2H-17 as a result of a decline in oil inventories after the production agreement.

Crude oil price surged more than 17 percent since the end of November-16 and with the optimism related to lower production, some oil watchers are speculating an oil price of \$60/b in 2017 followed by \$70/b in the following year.

KAMCO Research believes that an oil price of over \$50/b would trigger additional output from US shale producers as seen in the past few weeks and would partly offset the expected impact of the OPEC agreement.

Oil Prices

Oil prices reached a 17-month high level of \$53.24/b of OPEC crude after two consecutive successful meetings held for curbing oil output.



Source for the above charts : OPEC and Bloomberg

KAMCO OIL MARKET MONTHLY REPORT



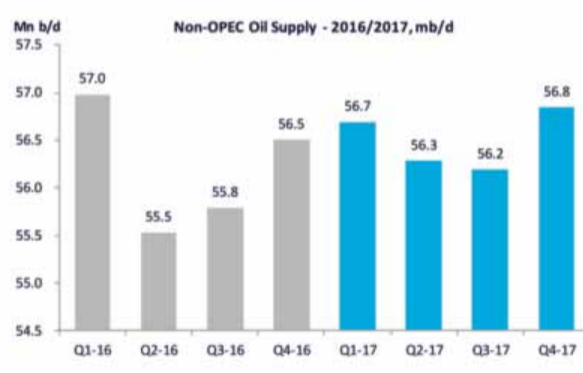
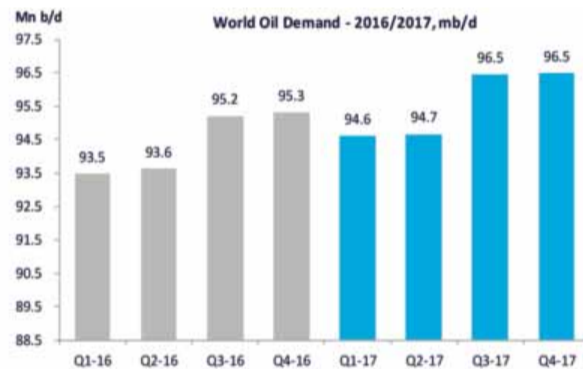
the first deal in over 15 years, to slash non-OPEC output by 0.56 mb/d spread across 11 non-OPEC producers.

Meanwhile, a strengthening \$ had a negative impact on oil prices over the past few months partly offsetting the optimism related to the expected reduction in output.

On the consumption front, IEA raised its oil demand forecast for the current year and for 2017. The agency expects oil demand growth of 1.4 mb/d for 2016, an increase of 120 tb/d as compared to its previous forecast.

World Oil Demand

OPEC raised its world oil demand growth expectations for 2016 slightly by 11 tb/d in its latest monthly report to 1.24 mb/d to reflect better-than-expected oil consumption in OECD Europe and Asia Pacific.



Source for the above charts : OPEC and Bloomberg

October and November-16, US oil demand is estimated to have increased by 0.31 mb/d. Oil demand also increased in OECD Europe on the back of economic growth and the low oil price environment that supported oil consumption in the road transportation sector.

In the other Asia region, India continued to record strong oil demand in October-16 at around 6.5 percent y-o-y. The solid economic growth in India has pushed oil demand for YTD-16 at above the 5-year average level.

For 2017, oil demand is expected to grow at a slightly lower pace of 1.15 mb/d, in line with OPEC's previous month's expectations, and average at 95.56 mb/d.

World Oil Supply

Non-OPEC supply expectations for 2016 was kept unchanged by the OPEC and is expected to contract by 0.78 mb/d to reach year-end supply expectation of 56.2 mb/d.

On the other hand, supply growth expectations for 2017 were raised by 70 tb/d and is now expected to grow by 0.3 mb/d to average at 56.5 mb/d. Again in 2017 forecasts, the change was only related to supply from Russia.

OPEC Oil Production & Spare Capacity

OPEC production reached another high in November-16 recorded at 34.16 mb/d, according to Bloomberg, on the back of higher production in Angola, Libya and Nigeria with the three OPEC members adding 310 tb/d during the month.

Countries that are exempt from the agreement include Nigeria, Libya due to the production disruption in these countries and Indonesia. Nigeria is yet to reach its production capacity of 2.2 mb/d although the country has recovered some of its lost capacity over the past few months to reach a production level of 1.68 mb/d.

The six-month agreement is seen as a major boost to the world oil market, however, the temporary lid on the oil taps would be closely watched as OPEC producers continue to add new oil rigs by announcing new contracts.

News

in brief

BP to take 10% stake in ADCO oil concession

DUBAI: BP will take a 10 percent stake in Abu Dhabi's ADCO onshore oil concession for 40 years under a deal signed yesterday with Abu Dhabi's Supreme Petroleum Council and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), the latter said.

Kuwait oil price down 81 cents to \$49.61 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 81 cents to \$49.61 per barrel Thursday as oppose to \$50.42 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Friday.

Sri Lanka secures \$1.34bn WB loan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has secured \$1.34 billion in loans from the World Bank to boost the cash-strapped island's economy over the next three years, the finance ministry said yesterday.

Morocco Jan-Nov trade deficit rises 18%

RABAT: Morocco's trade deficit rose 18 percent to 166.03 billion dirhams (\$16.43 billion) in the first 11 months of 2016 compared with the same period a year ago, the foreign exchange regulator said on Friday citing increased imports.

Ecuador finance minister quitting on health grounds

QUITO: Ecuador's Finance Minister Fausto Herrera is stepping down for health reasons after three years in the cabinet, President Rafael Correa said.

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

Table listing exchange rates for various currencies including Asian, GCC, Arab, and European & American countries.

Table showing Gold prices and Dollar exchange rates for various currencies.

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Table listing Dollar exchange rates and selling rates for various currencies.

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

Table listing exchange rates for various currencies under the heading 'CURRENCY'.

Table listing exchange rates for various currencies including Japanese Yen, Kenyan Shilling, etc.

## HOW TO FIND MORE JOBS IN 2017

### BAYT.COM WEEKLY REPORT

**F**inding a job is a full-time job; it's a competitive process that requires research, hard work, and commitment. Finding a job right after graduation and with zero effort on the job seeker's behalf is very rare. Many job applicants are not fully aware of the challenges prior to delving into the search process. No matter where you're applying, it is important that you are familiar with the challenges and how to overcome them as there are many available tools to help you out.

Much like many activities that moved from being a desktop experience to a smartphone one, as seen in Bayt.com's poll, Job Search Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa, November 2016, the far majority (85.1 percent) of job seekers now search for jobs on their mobiles using tools like the Bayt.com job seeker application. Here are more research findings to help you find better career opportunities in 2017:

#### 1. Job websites take the lead

Where do most people look for jobs nowadays? Online job sites like Bayt.com. Almost a third of job seekers find their career opportunities using online job sites. While many complement that method with company social media pages, company websites, networking, newspaper and magazines, the number of professionals who resort to online job sites is an indicator of their ease of use and higher success rates.

#### 2. Job search everywhere

It's not news that smartphones have bloomed during the past decade, so it comes as no surprise that it is a very popular method for finding jobs. The flexibility of having your phone everywhere allows you to browse for jobs at any given point, fill out job applications, network, as well as create CVs and cover letters. For instance, the Bayt.com app allows you to apply directly anywhere you are, and receive insights on who has viewed your CV as well as updates on your application status.

#### 3. Go the extra mile

The process of finding a job requires hard work and dedication and will continue to be demanding in the years to come as competition grows. Half of surveyed job seekers in the Middle East spend between one and four hours a day searching for jobs, while almost a third of job seekers pass the four-hour mark between searching, filling out applications, writing emails, networking, and following up. So next time you look for a job, give it the time and energy it deserves.

#### 4. Network and connect

The vast majority of MENA professionals will tell you that the secret to landing a job is networking. If you can directly speak to a person related to the desired job position, don't hesitate. Your persistence and confidence in doing so only provides positive indications of you as an applicant. The Bayt.com Specialties mobile application allows you to do that exactly; form meaningful professional connections through insightful discussions that have the potential to unfold new career opportunities.

#### 5. Acknowledge obstacles and adapt

Job search challenges are affected by different factors. Geographical location can influence employment opportunities. A shortage of jobs in the market can also be a big barrier against landing a job. Another important factor is lacking the necessary skills that employers look for. So in order to make the search less challenging, locate and apply for job opportunities with a high relevancy to your qualifications, which is automatically calculated for your CV on Bayt.com. You are also encouraged to seek personalized support in creating a CV and a Cover letter that truly stands out from the applicant pool.

# START-UP WAVE CHALLENGES JAPAN'S AVERSION TO RISK

## RISK-AVERSE JAPAN FIRMS, INVESTORS SLOWLY WARM TO START-UPS

**TOKYO:** A wave of start-ups is emerging in famously risk-averse Japan as cash-rich corporations increasingly delegate the task of keeping pace with technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics to smaller, nimbler businesses. Japan has been dry ground for start-ups, given the shame that entrepreneurs and investors associate with failure, but it is on track for a record funding year for unlisted start-ups, exceeding the dot-com bubble of 2000, according to a private research firm.

"The fundraising environment has improved a lot compared with a few years ago," said Ken Tamagawa, 40-year-old CEO of Soracom Inc, which helps companies set up platforms allowing devices to communicate with each other via the "Internet of Things".

It raised 3 billion yen (\$25.6 million) from Mitsui & Co and an investment fund in which Toyota Motor Corp has a stake. Dozens of companies, including electronics maker Omron Corp and real estate developer Mitsui Fudosan Co, have set up venture capital funds to seek returns or team up with smaller companies. "It's becoming harder to change with the times," says Kei Saika, investment director at Omron's investment arm, which was set up two years ago. "It's more efficient if the venture firms have the technologies that we don't."

The trend comes with the support of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who sees start-ups as a way to breathe new life into Japan's long-stagnant economy, and has spoken of Japan learning the lessons of California's Silicon Valley.

"The tide is changing, although the share of people willing to take the risk of launching a business is still relatively small," said Yasuhiko Yurimoto, President & CEO of Global Brain Corp, a venture capital firm that invests in financial technology, or "fintech", artificial intelligence and robotics start-ups.

"More success stories are needed to create a virtuous cycle of growth." Start-ups raised 92.8 billion yen in the first half of the year, according to data from think-tank Japan Venture Research. At that pace, the amount will exceed last year's 165.8 billion yen and the previous high of about 170 billion yen set in 2000. The funding is mostly homegrown; foreign investors made up just 10 percent. Corporations and their affiliated venture capital firms accounted for more than a third of investment, while independent venture capital firms made up 19 percent.

#### Way to go

Life Robotics CEO Yoon Woo-Keun managed to raise 1.5 billion yen this year for his company, Life Robotics, which developed a robotic arm called "ORO" designed for use at cosmetics companies, car factories and logistic warehouses. CORO is now being used at Toyota, Omron and the Yoshinoya restaurant chain, but for years he got the cold shoulder from investors in Japan and had considered decamping to

the United States. Yoon still thinks Japan has a long way to go. "People talk about a robot boom and start-up boom in Japan, but personally I don't feel we have reached such a stage at all in terms of money," he said. Indeed fundraising in Japan remains a fraction of levels in the United States, where start-ups raised roughly \$60 billion last year, and even China, where they garnered about \$20 billion, according to the Venture Enterprise Center.

Few innovators have made it big in Japan, and most of them got started soon after World War Two, when Soichiro Honda began making motorcycles and Akio Morita launched what became Sony Corp. Softbank's Masayoshi Son is a more recent example.

But new names could soon be emerging among the younger generation. Classes on entrepreneurship at top universities are packed, as many students turn their back on both the seniority-based lifetime

employment model that served their parents, and the cheap, insecure contract work that is slowly replacing it. Yousuke Okada, 28, is typical of this new breed.

He started ABEJA, which uses "deep learning", a form of artificial intelligence that processes vast amounts of data, to analyse shoppers' behaviour. "It tends to be time-consuming if you try to start something new like 'deep learning' at a big company, so I decided to do it by myself," said Okada. Half of the 20 employees at AstroScale Japan Inc, which develops technologies to solve space debris problems, are in their 20s, says company president Miki Ito.

The rest are in their 60s, retirees from jobs at big firms, as it is hard to find mid-career experienced workers willing to jump ship. Success stories from Japan's last start-up boomlet include networking app company Line Corp, and Mixi Inc, a social network operator. — Reuters

## DISCOUNT SUPERMARKET LIDL TO CREATE 5,000 JOBS IN LONDON

**LONDON:** German discount supermarket group Lidl announced plans Friday to create 5,000 new jobs in London as part of a major investment program in Britain, where it is enjoying rapid growth.

The food retailer said it will open 250 shops in the capital after unveiling a three-year, £1.5 billion (\$1.9 billion, 1.8 billion-euro) investment plan last year that will more than double the number of stores in Britain to 1,500. The group also received permission from local authorities Thursday to build a £70 million new headquarters in the Kingston area of southwest London, subject to approval from the mayor.

Lidl, which currently employs 19,000 people in Britain, has also announced plans to open three new depots in northern, central and south west

England, creating an additional 1,500 jobs. In recent years, Lidl and its German rival Aldi have boomed in Britain, wooing bargain-seekers away from traditional supermarkets Asda, Morrison, Sainsbury's and Tesco. Between mid-September and early December, Lidl increased its market share in Britain to 4.6 percent, while Aldi took 6.2 percent, with both appearing to be weathering the uncertainty surrounding Brexit.

Aldi has also stepped up plans for expansion, announcing a £300 million investment in September to revamp its stores over the next three years. Lidl's expansion is positive news for London amid concerns about inward investment following the June referendum vote to leave the European Union. — Reuters



## Panasonic President Strengthens 60 Years Old Partnership with Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. in Kuwait

Panasonic President says Kuwait remains high growth market for the Japanese manufacturer globally

Panasonic Corporation President Mr. Kazuhiro Tsuga visited Kuwait to celebrate the company's 60-year long history with Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co., who has been instrumental in establishing Panasonic as a household brand in Kuwait. In his first visit to Kuwait, Mr. Tsuga met with the owners and management of Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. and visited the Best Al-Yousifi Showroom in Hawally.

Established as a small shop in 1952, Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. is one of Kuwait's leading consumer goods providers, and has over 13 electronics showrooms across Kuwait. Their association with Panasonic began in 1955, and over the past 60 years, this family-run business has played a significant role in establishing the Panasonic brand in Kuwait. Identifying Kuwait's consumer electronics market as one of the most lucrative in the region, Panasonic opened its first Shop-in-Shop in Kuwait in 2015 at Al Yousifi BEST Store in Al Rai.

Highlighting their successful collaboration of over six decades, Mr. Tsuga underlined Kuwait's importance for Panasonic here in the region. He said, "I am pleased to celebrate our 60-year partnership with Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co., which is anchored on the common business philosophy of 'improving the quality of life' for our customers. Kuwait is a key market for us, with a tech-savvy local consumer base. I would like to thank Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. for their valuable support, and remain confident that this partnership will continue to grow from strength to strength."

Mr. Aref Al-Yousifi, CEO and Vice Chairman of Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co., added, "Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. is a market leader in Kuwait, and for the past 60 years we have made Panasonic products widely available in the country. We are extremely proud of the history between the two companies. Kuwait is a very important market here in the region, and we will continue to serve our customers, while securing our successful partnership with a global brand like Panasonic."

Mr. Daizo Ito - Regional Head Panasonic ISAMEA & Executive Officer Panasonic Corporation, Mr. Shinichi Wakita - Managing Director, Panasonic Marketing Middle East and Africa (PMMAF), and other senior members accompanied Mr. Tsuga to the dinner with two generations of Al-Yousifi family and senior management to celebrate their longstanding association. They also interacted with management at an informal Diwaniya gathering.

Mr. Shinichi Wakita, said, "Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co., just like Panasonic, has always kept 'people' central to all its activities and has contributed profoundly to our regional growth. We aim to leverage the strengths of our business partners, and support them with industry leading products and solutions that will help both parties business success."

Mr. Kazuhiro Tsuga has been the President of Panasonic Corporation since June 2012. He served as the President of AVC Networks Company since January 1, 2012 and as Senior Managing Director of Panasonic Corporation since June 2011. He joined Panasonic as a college recruit and has been with the brand for the last 37-years.



Group photo of Senior Members from Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co. and Panasonic



Group photo at Diwan Al-Yousifi



Dr. Abdullah Al-Yousifi & Mr. Kazuhiro Tsuga



Dr. Adel Al-Yousifi & Mr. Kazuhiro Tsuga



Mr. Aref Al-Yousifi & Mr. Kazuhiro Tsuga









## MUTAWA ALKAZI LAUNCHES ITS FESTIVAL OF GIFTS: BUY A GS5

'PRICE IS A SURPRISE!' OFFER ON GS5 AND GA6 CARS IN MARINA MALL



**KUWAIT:** Mutawa Alkazi, the exclusive agent of (GAC Motor) launched their "Festival of Gifts" at the Marina Mall. The offer gives the first 50 customers who buy one of GS5 or GA6 cars the opportunity to win an iPhone 7, comprehensive insurance, and 1000 liters of petrol as a gift from the company to the buyers. Their offer gained large acceptance and interest among visitors of the mall.

Mutawa Alkazi also provides its potential customers with an opportunity to test drive any of the GAC cars in their showrooms located in Al-Tilal Complex, and offering them the chance of winning an iPhone 7. The GS5 stands out with its distinctive price, car specifications and offer. In addition to an 11 year warranty, traffic registration, 3 year insurance, and 3 year maintenance or 30,000 km (whichever comes first) as well as providing a higher valuation of customers previous car.

The GS5 car is characterized by its motor with four-cylinder, 2.0 liter, 2000-CC and double valve with variable electronic timing, with its picturesque lines, and frontal grill giving it a strong and smooth appearance, in addition to the basic safety factors to feel confident and secure when driving.

The GA6 is characterized by beautiful design, strength and control suitable for all needs and requirements. GA6 cars represent the specifications of European performance of high strength with a coordinated sportive car which ensures an enjoyable drive for the driver.

What distinguishes Mutawa Alkazi, is the quality of services provided to its customers. The company strives to offer the best to its customers to ensure a strong relationship with them and maintain reciprocated trust.

MAC offers the best service at all times and ensures that all of their customer's needs are met in their dealings with the company. The company owns a number of service centers that welcome GAC car owners 12 hours a day for the completion of maintenance and repair

of the largest number of cars in the shortest time period possible as they take in a vast number of cars monthly without any prior arrangements or appointments.

"Mutawa Alkazi" is proud of its fast maintenance and repair work carried out by a specialized technical team and the coach of engineers and technicians with high efficiency and large capacity to detect any malfunction and work to repair with the possibility of providing an integrated report on the state of the car and repair systems.

The company is keen on pleasing its customers through its focus on providing after-sales services by offering original spare parts at the best prices parts with the quality and originality of the parent company guarantee, as well as the constant warning of fake spare

parts and the many risks, which have become a threat to the lives of the people on the road as a result of such defects and damages. (GAC) mentions such in their Marketing introduction as they are keen on always providing the best quality parts, and efficient repair by the hands of skilled technicians and engineers.

The company is keen to secure the original spare parts for different types and models of cars, either through multi-service centers or through requesting certain pieces from abroad. Therefore, through MAC's serious commitment towards all its clients in Kuwait from citizens to expatriates, its goal is to always provide better service while maintaining a hardworking, integrated, dedicated, and highly qualified team in terms of experience, training courses and intense programs.



## JOY ALUKKAS RECOGNIZED AS 'BUSINESS INNOVATOR' AT NDTV GULF INDIAN EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2016

**DUBAI:** Joyalukkas Group Chairman & MD Joy Alukkas was recognized as "Business Innovator" at the NDTV Gulf Indian Excellence Awards 2016, held on the 11th of December, at the Hyatt Regency Dubai Creek Heights. The star-studded event was India news broadcasting pioneer NDTV's first major event in the UAE and will simultaneously be broadcasted over NDTV 24x7 and NDTV Profit. The NDTV Gulf Indian Excellence Awards honours outstanding Indian leaders in the Gulf for their contributions across various areas of excellence. This prestigious honour was received by John Paul Alukkas, Executive Director, Joyalukkas Group.

"It is very heartwarming to receive recognition for doing something that I love," said Joy Alukkas, Chairman & MD, Joyalukkas Group. "I began my journey 29 years ago with the simple aim of offering the best and giving my best in service to customers. The response to all my ventures has been overwhelming, and I cannot be more grateful for the people around me who continue to offer me their support, and the loyal customers who have put their trust in Joyalukkas in the 11 countries we have a presence in. I thank NDTV from the bottom of my heart for this honour, which I share with the over 8,000 employees of the Joyalukkas Group who inspire me to lead them with conviction and determination day after day."

Joy Alukkas's vision and foresight has kept Joyalukkas Group on the growth path year after year and 2016 has been a year of achievements and milestones, starting with a 7th consecutive Superbrand status recognition, as well as a Dubai Service Excellence Scheme (DSES) Award win for outstanding customer service from the Dubai Department of Economic Development. The founder and the Group, however, is far from resting on the laurels, the Group has recently ven-



tured into USA by two Joyalukkas jewellery showrooms within the last two months.

Joy Alukkas's leadership has seen the Group grow from a single jewellery showroom in Abu Dhabi into a multi-billion conglomerate spanning the jewellery retail, fashion, money exchange, realty and aviation industries in 11 countries. In such a brief span of time, the Joyalukkas brand has been dubbed become a household name enjoying the loyal patronage of over 10 million customers in the UAE, India, UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain,

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the USA. Joyalukkas Group is a multi-billion dollar global conglomerate with varied business interests. The group operates its various business operations across India, London, USA, Singapore, Malaysia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar. The group businesses include jewellery, fashion & textiles, money exchange, luxury air charter, Malls & Realty. Joyalukkas employees a staff of over 8,000 professionals across the world and is one of the most awarded and recognized jewellery retail chains in the world.

## INVESTOR OPTIMISM, GLOBAL REALITY MAY CLASH IN 2017

### GLOBAL ECONOMY YEARAHEAD

**LONDON:** Investors sound optimistic about a breakout for the world economy next year, but for all the talk of huge tax cuts from the incoming US presidency of Donald Trump, the economic outlook looks similar to 2016: uneven and unspectacular. Accelerating inflation and a soaring US dollar as the Federal Reserve raises interest rates are also risks to the economic balance, magnified by that pending stimulus.

Much may hinge on financial markets, which for a brief period around the start of this year looked like their fretting over China might throw the global economy off track. There is plenty more uncertainty about trade with China now than then. So, many of the several hundred professionals polled by Reuters worldwide say the global trade slowdown during the world economy's lukewarm recovery from financial crisis that started nearly a decade ago could worsen.

Emerging economies will remain vulnerable. Brazil's persistent, crippling recession is way out of line with its soaring stock market, and much of Asia will grow below potential, putting the latest global growth forecast for the year ahead at 3.2 percent, less optimistic than it was this time last year.

For the developed world, meanwhile, it has been productivity gains that have been lacking for so long and policymakers remain at a loss on the reasons why, and how to remedy the problem.

The US jobless rate is already down to 4.6 percent and hiring slowing, so economists say improving growth in output per worker will be crucial for prosperity. "Mr Trump and his team have promised growth of 3.5 to 4 percent or more, which we see as 'magical thinking' unless accompanied by accelerated productivity growth," noted Michael Carey, U.S. economist at CA-CIB in New York.

### Markets out of step

The most optimistic US growth forecast for any point in 2017 in a Reuters poll taken a month after Trump's shock election victory was 3.8 percent, well short of the peak rate in a business cycle that is already mature by past standards. The consensus, in line with the Fed's view, is a little above 2 percent. That is similar to a Reuters poll outlook for 2016 in a series of forecasts made a year ago on growth, rates, inflation and foreign exchange that were broadly accurate.

Such lukewarm growth does not compute with another set of wildly bullish stock market views, although it is

clear many strategists who initially said Trump would be a threat to markets have abruptly changed their minds since the election.

Strategists foresee a rising US dollar, already at a 14-year high, and US Treasury yields edging up as the Fed follows through with more rate hikes next year. But Wall Street isn't convinced yet there will be three more.

A rising dollar may blunt future performance of US companies, many dependent on international business for revenue. Many of their share prices trade near record highs, but propped up by buyback schemes and stimulus, not business investment. Dollar strength, weakening other currencies, will also influence how emerging markets manage relatively higher inflation, as well as wilting business confidence.

But for all the talk of trade barriers, oil prices rising on supply cuts, and planned US tax cuts and infrastructure spending, the global inflation outlook hasn't changed much, even if the Fed is sounding more worried about it. The Fed's preferred inflation gauge is forecast to average 1.8 percent next year, in line with its own view.

### Political risk rising

The world's second largest economy, China, has turned up slightly this year, but built on a government borrowing binge and a partly-managed weaker currency. Growth is forecast to slow, and tensions between Beijing and the incoming Trump administration are already flaring.

Even India's economy - the fastest-growing in the world this year - is bracing for a growth hit from a radical government move to replace huge swathes of its currency in circulation. One bright spot is the recent acceleration in eurozone growth as the European Central Bank continues buying tens of billions of euros worth of bonds each month, keeping the euro under pressure and making exports relatively cheaper.

But elections in Germany, France and the Netherlands threaten to further challenge the status quo just as economic effects from expected formal divorce proceedings start to appear after Britain's shock vote in June to leave the European Union. The potency of global monetary policy is fading too, and further out of synch with the Fed's tightening campaign. The ECB and other major central banks like the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of Brazil, are expected to ease more. — Reuters

## GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 11 December 2016 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 4 December - 7 December 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 4/12): Sultan Abdullah Sultan Al-Malki, Abdullah Abdulateef Ali Hamad  
(Monday 5/12): Mohammed Ahmed Hussain Al-Kandari, Falah Muhsen Rakan Ghareeb  
(Tuesday 6/12): Dehayana Nashmi Hasan Al-Ajmi, Dana Mahdi Abdullatif Jawhar Hayat  
(Wednesday 7/12): Sameerah Zuhdi Abou Jayab, Haitham Abduredha Abdullah Kakooli  
Gulf Bank's Al Danah 2016 draw lineup includes daily draws (two 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. Customers can also log on to www.gulfbank.com/aldanahwinners, to find out more about Al-Danah and its winners.

# ANOTHER YAHOO BREACH RATTLES INVESTORS

**NEW YORK:** Yahoo shares slid yesterday on worries that Verizon will walk away or slash its \$4.8 billion offer for the company's digital operations after another massive data breach. Yahoo revealed on Wednesday that information was stolen from more than 1 billion user accounts in 2013 after disclosing a separate hack in 2014 of some 500 million accounts in September. Verizon had said it would reevaluate the Yahoo deal after the first hack, and said the same Wednesday after the latest revelation. Verizon spokesman Bob Varettoni on Thursday declined to comment beyond the company's Wednesday-night statement. Yahoo said in a statement it was confident in its value and continuing to work on its integration with Verizon.

The deal was expected to close by March 2017. If the hacks drive Yahoo's users away, the company wouldn't be as valuable to the telecom giant in its quest to build a digital-ad business that could rival industry giants Google and Facebook. Yahoo has said that the September announcement of the 2014 hack didn't hurt traffic to its services. The second hack "clearly ups the ante" that Verizon may try to abandon the Yahoo purchase or lower its price, said CFRA Research analyst Scott Kessler.

But if Yahoo doesn't agree, Verizon might not have the legal grounds to do so under the terms of its deal, he said. There would have to be significant damage to the value of Yahoo's business, like if it caused many users to deactivate their accounts, and that's not yet clear, he said. "If you're looking to buy a house and enter into a



**CALIFORNIA:** A cyclist rides past a Yahoo sign at the company's headquarters in Sunnyvale, Calif. — AP

contract, and then you find something out that makes you want to reduce your offer, that's not necessarily as easy to do as it is to say," he said. "Everyone wants a better deal. Whether or not it's legally supported or possible I think is still unclear."

If Yahoo and Verizon can't agree on whether to end the deal or lower its price, there would be a court battle, said Craig Newman, a lawyer with Patterson Belknap who specializes in cybersecurity. That has risks for both sides. A case like Verizon's historically has been difficult to win, he said, but a trial could also mean a lot of pointed, embarrassing questions for Yahoo about "who was watching the store" on data security. Yahoo shares fell \$2.23, or 5.5 percent, to \$38.68 in afternoon trading. Verizon shares rose 21 cents to \$51.84. — AP



**SAN FRANCISCO:** An Uber driverless car waits in traffic during a test drive in San Francisco. The ride-hailing company is refusing to obey demands by the state's Department of Motor Vehicles that it stop picking up San Francisco passengers in specially equipped Volvo SUVs. — AP



**SAN FRANCISCO:** An Uber driverless car heads out for a test drive in San Francisco. — AP

## TOYOTA UNLOCKS ITS ENGINE TECHNOLOGY

**TOKYO:** Long guarded about what was beneath the hood of its pioneering Prius cars, Toyota Motor Corp plans to open up its powertrain technology to rivals, hoping this will boost sales and speed up the industry's shift to lower-emission vehicles. Announcing last week it would expand its gasoline hybrid technology development, the world's largest automaker said it would consider selling complete powertrain modules - engines, transmissions and other drive components - to its competitors.

The prospect of giving rivals access to "one-size-fits-all" powertrains comes as cars are increasingly dependent on computerized components, making it easier to design similar parts across model ranges. The industry has moved on from competing largely on mechanical engineering. That trend will likely accelerate as automakers face pressure from regulators to further cut car emissions and develop more long-range electric vehicles. As cars become more like glorified computers, automakers are standardising many mechanical parts and competing more on style and packaging - giving drivers a bigger range of features from automated parking to cockpit concierges.

For Toyota, this is a big departure from having a tightly-knit network of suppliers keeping much of their jointly developed technology exclusive so as to have an engineering competitive edge on rivals.

"Toyota suppliers produce a lot of technology which can only be used by Toyota," Toshiyuki Mizushima, president of Toyota's powertrain company, told reporters. "We want to change that to a system where we develop technology with our suppliers at an earlier stage ... so they can make that technology available to non-Toyota customers."

Mizushima, who joined Toyota a year ago from group company Aisin Seiki Co, noted, for example, that past versions of Toyota's hybrid system didn't fit other automakers' cars, limiting suppliers' options to sell to non-Toyota customers.

Powertrains combine parts often made separately by several independent parts makers, but Toyota's are unique in that they are made by its group suppliers, allowing engineers at the automaker and its suppliers to collaborate in development.

"Until now, we couldn't sell the same inverter used in Toyota's previous hybrid system to other customers because it wouldn't fit the motor, or the voltage was different," said Yoshifumi

Kato, executive director of engineering R&D at Denso Corp, Toyota's biggest supplier. "We can avoid this issue if suppliers can sell the entire system." The move should help auto parts companies such as Denso and Aisin spread their customer base and compete better against global rivals including Robert Bosch and Continental. Currently, Toyota accounts for around half the annual sales at Denso and Aisin.

### Spreading the R&D burden

Mizushima said he would like to see Toyota offer its powertrain modules to all its rivals, in an industry where more automakers are setting up exclusive tie-ups on parts. Nissan Motor Co this year launched the Infiniti QX30 luxury compact crossover using engines and other parts developed and made by Daimler AG's Mercedes and its suppliers. Toyota already shares components for Fuji Heavy Industries Ltd's Subaru BRZ sports car under a joint development agreement. In opening up its proprietary technology, Toyota is acknowledging the escalating costs of R&D, as global automakers vie to develop hybrid and all-electric cars, self-driving cars and cars connected to mobile technology.

Toyota's R&D spend last year was 73 percent more than in 2010 at around \$9 billion, while spending at Volkswagen, its biggest competitor, more than doubled over the same period. As automakers are having to invest more, they are cramming as much technology as possible into each vehicle, while limiting price increases. Toyota and its suppliers expect their newer production platform will mean making a lot more of fewer common parts across its models, and selling them to other automakers to earn back more of the money spent on R&D.

"If we take a component developed with Toyota and sell a million to Toyota and another million to other customers, it would double our return on our development costs," said Denso's Kato. Toyota's rivals, too, should be able to keep their own development and procurement costs down if they can source off-the-shelf from Toyota, say industry consultants.

"It could be a win-win for Toyota and its rivals because Toyota could develop another sales line, while customers could gain access to components which may be cheaper and of higher quality than the same parts developed in-house," said Takeshi Miyao, Asia managing director at Carnorama. — Reuters

## TWITTER ADDS 'ABILITY TO BROADCAST LIVE VIDEOS'

**NEW YORK:** Twitter is adding the ability for users to broadcast live video directly from its app as it seeks to distinguish itself among social media rivals as the place for real-time connections and discussions. The move follows Facebook, which launched live broadcasts for public figures in 2015 and everyone else this April, along with a bevy of smaller competitors that include Twitter's own Periscope app.

Twitter says it is not shutting Periscope down. Rather, the company hopes that the new Twitter feature will broaden its appeal. Live video - by regular people as well as curated creations from celebrities - is growing. Twitter touts itself as the place to see what's happening now, and has had several livestreaming deals, including with the NFL and CBS News for the presidential debates. — AP

# UBER DEFIES CALIFORNIA RIDESHARING GIANT KEEPS THE SELF-DRIVING CARS ROLLING

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Uber said yesterday it planned to keep its self-driving cars on the streets of San Francisco, defying a state order to halt the test program. The ridesharing giant said it disputed the interpretation by the California Department of Motor Vehicles that the cars require a special permit, saying they had the same autonomy capabilities as Tesla cars which have an optional "autopilot" feature.

Anthony Levandowski, Uber's vice president for advanced technologies, said that as with the Teslas, the cars driven by Uber still have a driver capable of assuming control at any time. "We respectfully disagree with the California DMV's interpretation of autonomous regulations, in particular that Uber needs a permit to operate in San Francisco," Levandowski told a conference call with journalists. "While these are considered state of the art today, they still require monitoring by a vehicle operator at all times." Levandowski said Uber did not plan on

seeking a state permit and for now planned to continue picking up passengers in San Francisco despite the threat of legal action.

He called it "an important issue of principle" about "uneven application of statewide rules." "We cannot in good conscience sign up for regulation of something we are not doing," he said. Levandowski said Uber was having "frank conversations" with regulators and hoped to convince them that its autonomous cars were no different from Tesla's, which allow a driver to turn over many operations to an onboard computer but still need a human behind the wheel.

"We have a person sitting in the driver's seat, and there's also a person next to them looking at the system and trying to confirm that everything is going well," he said. "They are able to override and take control of the vehicle at any time." The announcement by the global ridesharing colossus came two days after state

regulations said the testing program was not authorized. In a letter to Uber, DMV counsel Brian Soublet said the permit is required to protect public safety.

"It is illegal for the company to operate its self-driving vehicles on public roads until it receives an autonomous vehicle testing permit," he wrote. "It is essential that Uber takes appropriate measure to ensure safety of the public. If Uber does not confirm immediately that it will stop its launch and seek a testing permit, DMV will initiate legal action." Backers of autonomous vehicles say the technology can reduce more than 90 percent of accidents, which mostly are due to human error. Since its debut in 2010, Uber has grown into a worldwide phenomenon despite regulatory hurdles and resistance from traditional taxi operators. In its latest funding round, Uber was valued at more than \$60 billion, but has racked up losses at it expands and takes on competitors such as Lyft. — AFP

# GERMANY THREATENS TO FINE FACEBOOK OVER HATE SPEECH

**BERLIN:** German officials are stepping up their criticism of Facebook, saying the social network is doing too little to stop hate speech and could face stiff fines unless it deletes illegal content faster. In an interview published Friday, Justice Minister Heiko Maas said his ministry was checking whether it would be possible to make social networking sites legally liable for illegal posts. "Of course in the end, we also have to think about fines, if other measures fail to work," Maas told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper. "That would be a strong incentive to act quickly." Germany has seen a sharp increase in vitriolic posts on social media in recent years amid a heated public debate over the influx of more

than a million migrants since the start of 2015. The country has laws against speech deemed to be racist, defamatory or inciting violence - a response to Germany's Nazi legacy. But authorities have struggled with the deluge of often anonymous postings on foreign-owned websites. Facebook, based in California, says it takes the issue seriously and has hundreds of contractors reviewing posts at a Berlin office. But Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported Friday that staff members there complain of inconsistent rules and overwork. Thomas Oppermann, a senior lawmaker in Maas' Social Democratic Party, told German weekly Der Spiegel that dominant social media sites like Facebook could be

required to delete illegal posts within 24 hours or face fines up to 500,000 euros (\$522,000).

Facebook also could be compelled to distribute corrections that reach the same number of people as the original post, Oppermann suggested, something traditional media companies in Germany are already required to do. The proposals come as German officials warn that the country's upcoming general election is likely to be heavily affected by hate speech and fake news spread on social media. The nationalist Alternative for Germany party, which has a strong presence on Facebook, criticized the government's proposals as an attempt to limit free speech. — AP



**LONDON:** Photo shows Facebook logos pictured on the screens of a smartphone and a laptop computer, in central London. Facebook said it was offering a tool allowing users to report fake news, a move aimed at stemming a wave of misinformation which some claim influenced the 2016 US election. — AFP

CLIMATE SCIENTISTS ADJUST AS TRUMP BUILDS TEAM

WORRIES OVER BUDGET CUTS OVERSHADOW RESEARCHES

SAN FRANCISCO: Climate scientists worried that President-elect Donald Trump will slash their budgets and sideline their research are entering survival mode, trimming the words 'climate change' from study proposals...

majority of scientists believe is driving sea level rise, droughts and more frequent violent storms. Trump is also preparing to nominate cabinet members with close oil industry ties, including Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson as secretary of state...

Research said he had replaced the politically charged term 'climate change' with 'global change' in a project he submitted for the oil industry. He said that regardless of how it is labeled, interest in climate research would likely endure given the importance of extreme weather forecasting to a broad array of industries...



This file illustration photo taken on November 04, 2015 shows a small globe above the flames of a gas ring to illustrate global warming. When the world triumphantly celebrated the signing of the landmark Paris climate pact last December, it was hard to imagine that only a year later it might face an existential threat. —AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: Kurt Wechsler holds an image of the earth during a rally by scientists in conjunction with the American Geophysical Union's fall meeting in San Francisco. The rally was to call attention to what scientists believe is unwarranted attacks by the incoming Trump administration against scientists advocating for the issue of climate change and its impact. —AP

what you are doing and how you are labeling it" said Andreas Prein, a scientist at the federally funded National Center for Atmospheric Research, who previously had changed the term 'climate change' in a project for the oil industry...

according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. While Trump has not explicitly said he would cut such funding, one of his advisers told The Guardian newspaper last month that climate research at NASA would be eliminated.

'DATAREFUGE' Prein at National Center for Atmospheric

Tracye Holloway, an air quality scientist at the University of Wisconsin, said she believed simple word changes sometimes could help scientists avoid trouble. Using the term 'weather' instead of 'climate change' for example, could work for studies that deal with a short-term time scale, she said.

But Eric Holthaus, a meteorologist who writes for online magazine Slate, has taken efforts to protect scientists and their work a step further. He spearheaded an effort, with the support of the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Toronto, to let scientists move their data onto publicly available non-government servers.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest later said in a press briefing he believed the concerns of the scientific community about Trump were 'legitimate.' 'If the incoming administration determines that they want to base their policy on something other than science, it looks like they're going to get at least four years to try that out and we'll have an opportunity to see how it works,' he said.

Other scientists were dealing with the stress of a new administration using humor. University of South Florida glaciologist Jason Gullely said his team had a list of joke projects for science under Trump. 'How could we weaponize glaciers?' he asked, and what is the best real estate currently hidden under Greenland ice sheets. — Reuters

MOSUL BATTLE LEAVING LEGACY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

QAYYARAH, Iraq: The battle to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group is leaving a legacy of environmental damage and health risks that will pose dangers to people for years to come.

Iraqis have already paid the initial price for burning oil wells and a sulphur factory that IS set alight south of Mosul, Iraq's last jihadist-held city which is the target of a major military operation launched two months ago.

'We are concerned about how the pollution will affect the health of local populations and negatively impact their capacity to rebuild quality, sustainable livelihoods within those affected areas,' said Jenny Sparks of the International Organization for Migration.

A United Nations report on environmental and health risks in the Mosul area said that 'hundreds of people were treated for exposure to chemicals, and millions are exposed to soot and gases from the burning oil wells'.

'We can't sell our sheep any more. We have had some sheep die, other times people won't buy them because they look black,' said Jaber, a 16-year-old shepherd.

Iraqi civil defense forces have been battling the Qayyarah fires, and while they

have extinguished some, others are still burning.

Destroyed buildings, polluted water IS also set fire to the Mishraq sulphur plant south of Mosul, and while the blaze was eventually put out, it had already blanketed nearby areas with a haze of smoke that caused respiratory problems for those who inhaled it.

'Crushed building materials contain harmful substances, pulverised cement, household wastes and chemicals which can cause exposure hazards to civilians and people dealing with the rubble,' the UN report said.

'Collapse of environmental governance can further lead to accumulation of solid household, medical and industrial waste, and if not dealt with properly, can result in increased burning of solid waste and resulting environmental health risks, or the outbreak of communicable diseases,' it said. — AFP



AL-QAYYARAH, Iraq: This file photo taken on November 25, 2016 shows smoke billowing from a burning oil well, set ablaze by retreating Islamic State (IS) group's jihadists, in Qayyarah, some 60 kilometres (35 miles) south of Mosul. The battle to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group is leaving a legacy of environmental damage and health risks that will pose dangers to people for years to come. — AFP

SCHUMACHER'S HEALTH TO REMAIN PRIVATE MATTER

BERLIN: The condition of Michael Schumacher's health will remain closely guarded among family and close associates, the former Formula One champion's manager said yesterday. 'Michael's health is not a public issue, and so we will continue to make no comment in that regard,' Sabine Kehm said in a statement.

Schumacher sustained severe head injuries in a skiing accident in France on Dec. 29, 2013 and has been cared for at his home in Switzerland since September 2014.

Kehm announced that the family was launching a 'Keep Fighting Initiative' as a sign of gratitude to fans and to encourage people inspired by Schumacher's career 'to keep fighting and never give up.'

Schumacher's accident happened on a family vacation as he was skiing with his son at the Meribel ski resort in the French Alps.

Schumacher's condition stabilized after he was placed in a drug-induced coma, from which he later emerged. 'Michael has always been very protective of his privacy, even during the most successful times of his career. He has always made sure there is a clear and distinct line between his public persona and his private one,' Kehm said.

Schumacher, who made his name with Benetton before joining Ferrari in 1996, won a record seven F1 titles and 91 races. — AP



TAEZ, Yemen: A malnourished Yemeni child is attended to at a therapeutic feeding centre in the country's third-largest city of Ta'izz yesterday. The UN children's agency UNICEF says nearly three million people in Yemen need immediate food supplies, while 1.5 million children are suffering from malnutrition, including 370,000 with severe malnutrition that weakens their immune system. —AFP



PARIS: A picture taken on December 15, 2016 shows a warning placard reading 'A deratisation operation is taking place in the garden. To increase the efficiency, the square will remain stay close until the end of the interventions' at the square of the Saint Jacques tower close to the rue de Rivoli, in Paris. — AFP

PARIS SEEKS HIGH GROUND IN FIGHT TO KEEP RATS UNDERGROUND

PARIS: Gazing upward to take in the majesty of the Eiffel Tower, visitors to Paris may be astonished to learn that a vicious war, pitting Man against Rat, is unfolding at their feet.

The Champ de Mars park around the famous monument is a battleground in a city-wide anti-rodent campaign that has drawn both cheers and jeers. Several of the French capital's green spaces are off-limits for two weeks as rat catchers go about a grim task, baiting traps with powerful poison.

'It's about time,' one Paris native said. 'In all my 40 years I've never seen rats in the daytime,' said the dancer, giving her stage name Fabiola H.

'They used to hide, but now we see them in broad daylight... obviously well fed.' Safely out of sight, they were blissfully out of mind, except in the imaginations that created the hit 2007 cartoon 'Ratatouille', which depicted a Parisian rat cooking in a famous restaurant.

The campaign is seen by some critics as rodent mass murder-an online petition entitled 'Stop the rat genocide' has gathered 19,000 signatures-and others fault the city for failing to keep the streets clean.

Georges Salines, head of Paris's environmental health services, is at the centre of the storm. 'When it's an emergency... we have to carry out operations to destroy the rats, which satisfies no-one,' Salines told AFP in his office adorned with pictures of flora and fauna.

because I love animals too,' he said. 'Rats multiply very, very fast,' the public health doctor said. 'As long as they have food, water and places to burrow, they'll multiply.' Biologists say a female rat will normally have three litters totalling around 20 offspring in her one-year lifespan.

'Killer in chief'

Salines hit back at the animal rights activist behind the petition, Josette Benchetrit, who labelled him the 'killer in chief'. 'I'm well aware of the issue of animals' suffering and respect for animals,' Salines said, calling Benchetrit's attack 'totally unacceptable'.

On another front, Socialist Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo came under fire in a scathing commentary in the conservative daily Le Figaro. 'New in the Parisian cityscape: filthy streets because of the total and persistent disarray in the cleaning services,' wrote author and politician Serge Federbusch.

Describing the situation as 'Hidalchaos', he accused the eco-friendly Hidalgo of dragging her feet before 'closing several green spaces long enough to kill the beasts!' Federbusch, who heads a small libertarian party, then said sarcastically: 'Great ecological record.'

Geppy Vitale, a 55-year-old Swiss tourist, agreed. 'Where there are rats, there's rubbish, and therefore sloppy standards. Big cities like Paris should not have too many rats, they are supposed to have the means' to prevent such a thing.

Salines said the problem was the sheer abundance of tasty morsels in Paris. 'Rats have to be hungry' to go in the traps, he said. That is why parks are being closed for the extermination effort. 'If we leave them open there are too many people who bring in food,' Salines said. — AFP

COMPANIES NEED TO DISCLOSE MORE ON CLIMATE RISKS: PANEL

LONDON: Investors need more information about the risks companies face from global warming so they can fund development of the new technologies that are needed to control climate change and mitigate its effects, a task force said.

An international panel, chaired by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, developed recommendations over the last year based on the idea that markets need more and better data to respond to the challenge of climate change.

The recommendations come a year after 195 countries agreed to work together to limit the rise in average global temperatures to less than 2 degrees Celsius. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who has called global warming a 'hoax,' has said he plans to abandon the U.S. commitment to reduce carbon emissions as part of that agreement.

The task force is composed of executives from major companies, banks and insurance companies, including J.P. Morgan Chase, BHP Billiton and Swiss Re. The companies represented have a combined market value of \$1.5 trillion, while the financial institutions oversee \$20 trillion in assets.

The panel developed its recommendations after the G-20 asked it to examine the financial stability risks posed by climate change. The advice focuses on 'practical, material disclosures' that can be used by all financial institutions and companies that raise money from investors, Carney and Bloomberg said.



**GRENOBLE: (FILES)** This file photo taken on December 13, 2016 shows a "CRIT'air" eco-vignette on a car window in Grenoble, eastern France. The French government wants to extend the use of the coloured "air quality certificate" vignettes, to better target and fight air pollution. —AFP

## Q&A: US SECRETARY OF STATE PICK COULD AFFECT CLIMATE POLICY

**PORTLAND, Maine:** President-elect Donald Trump this week tapped Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson to serve as his secretary of state. If confirmed by the Senate, where opposition is emerging, the move could have broad consequences for US environmental policy and affect the role the US plays in multinational discussions about climate change. Here are some questions and answers about the selection of Tillerson.

**Q. What's his background?**

**A.** Tillerson, 64, is a Texas native and has spent his entire career at Exxon after graduating from the University of Texas with a civil engineering degree. He started as a production engineer and rose to become general manager of the company's oil production division in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Kansas in 1989. He was named president of Exxon Yemen in 1995 and was later put in charge of Exxon's operations in Russia and the Caspian Sea. After being named president of the corporation in 2004, Tillerson became chairman and CEO in 2006. He was expected to retire next year in line with the company's mandatory retirement age of 65.

**Q. What's his relationship to Trump, and who was in the running for the post?**

**A.** Trump has said he believes Tillerson's role as an international businessman for Exxon makes him uniquely qualified for the cabinet position. He has cited Tillerson's experience in "global enterprise" as evidence that Tillerson can represent US interests around the world. The two share an established network of contacts in international government and business, while both lack public policy experience. Tillerson's selection for the nation's top diplomatic job came after former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney emerged as early favorites. John Bolton, a member of President George W. Bush's cabinet, was also mentioned.

**Q. What is Exxon's environmental record?**

**A.** Eleven million gallons of oil spilled when the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska's Prince William Sound in 1989. The accident fouled birds and marine life and left a lasting stain on Exxon's reputation. Tillerson last year described it as a turning point that ushered in a new "culture of safety." Nevertheless, accidents and violations of pollution regulations have continued. Since 2006, Exxon's pipelines have spilled roughly 350,000 gallons of oil, costing \$158 million in property damage and repairs, including major spills in Montana's Yellowstone River and in Mayflower, Arkansas. The Environmental Protection Agency lodged at least 73 enforcement cases against Exxon and related companies in the same period, resulting in \$11.3 million in assessed penalties and \$436 million in compliance costs, according to an Associated Press analysis.

**Q. What is the status of the federal lawsuit involving accusations that Exxon hid climate change research?**

**A.** Officials in Massachusetts and New York have said Exxon understood a connection between burning fossil fuels and global warming as far back as the 1970s. They contend the company deliberately misled the public about the issue. Exxon has denied the accusations, and pushed back. Exxon went to court in Dallas in June to throw out the Massachusetts request and later added a New York subpoena. Lawyers for the company have said in their lawsuit that the state investigations were politically motivated. Federal Judge Ed Kinkeade in Texas has the case.

**Q. How has Exxon's position on climate change morphed?**

**A.** Exxon was long considered a leading opponent of efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels that scientists say is responsible for climate change. That changed over the past decade, coinciding with Tillerson's leadership and shifting energy markets, said David Levy, a management professor at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. The company now supports imposition of a "carbon tax" that would put a price on each ton of carbon emitted. Criticism lingers. "While the world needs to go one direction, he's been hell-bent as CEO trying to go the other direction," said U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat.

**Q. What has Exxon's position been on President Barack Obama's efforts to protect the environment?**

**A.** Exxon has been critical of some of Obama's efforts to safeguard natural resources. The company, under Tillerson's leadership, has questioned the wisdom of limiting offshore oil drilling off the Atlantic coast and Alaska. Tillerson told The Associated Press last year that drilling off Alaska is important despite disapproval from environmentalists because "eventually we are going to need it" to meet energy needs. US policy about domestic drilling would fall under the Interior Department more than under Tillerson.

**Q. How would Tillerson interact with other countries on climate change?**

**A.** Tillerson would be responsible for representing US interests in international meetings on climate policy and in dealings with world powers about issues that overlap with climate, such as energy, security and environmental protection. John Kerry has put a focus on climate change as secretary of state, in keeping with the agenda of Obama. The selection of Tillerson signals to other countries that the Trump administration is changing diplomatic priorities, said Varun Sivaram, director of the Program on Energy Security and Climate Change at the Council on Foreign Relations. But he added it's important to note Tillerson has acknowledged that the world is warming. "There certainly is symbolism to nominating the CEO of the biggest oil company in the world as secretary of state," Sivaram said. "I think it's important to separate the man from the symbolism." —AP

# NINE DEAD OF FENTANYL OPIOID ABUSE IN ONE DAY IN VANCOUVER

## CANADA BATTLING TO CONTAIN OVERDOSE CRISIS

**OTTAWA:** Nine people died from fentanyl opioid overdoses in the Canadian city of Vancouver in just the past 24 hours, Mayor Gregor Robertson said Friday. The spike in deaths comes as Canada-like its neighbor the United States has been struggling to contain an overdose crisis that claimed 2,000 lives last year, with even more expected in 2016.

Flanked by the city's police chief and other emergency officials, Robertson lauded existing harm reduction services such as drug consumption rooms in the city, but said more treatment options are urgently needed. "It's desperate times in Vancouver and it's hard to see any silver lining right now when we haven't hit rock bottom," he said, warning of more overdoses to come. "Can you imagine nine people dying from another cause in one day in our city?" Police Chief Adam Palmer said, calling for more help for addicts. The government has poured tens of millions of dollars into bolstering public health emergency responses, with little effect. Across the border, the United States has also seen a sudden spike in fentanyl-related deaths, including the apparent overdose of the pop star Prince in April.

Vancouver has seen an average of 15 overdoses a month and police are currently investigating 160 fatalities, Palmer said. The city's coroner said morgues have reached capacity.

Most of the deaths occurred in the gritty Downtown Eastside neighborhood, where an open drug market and extreme poverty persist despite decades of interventions. As the crisis snowballed, the city council approved a 0.5 percent property tax hike this week to help stem the number of overdoses.

The funds are to go to support frontline emergency workers, shelters and outreach centers. Meanwhile, the federal government this week removed hurdles to opening new drug consumption rooms-as demand skyrocketed-and expanded its fight against narcotics trafficking at the border. Its revamp of drug laws is expected to pave the way for at least nine new drug consumption sites-known in Canada as "supervised injection sites"-across the nation, and more customs searches for fentanyl. The first North American consumption rooms

were established at a clinic in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 2003 under a special exemption from federal drug possession and trafficking laws.

It remains the only facility on the continent where addicts can receive medical supervision as they inject heroine illegally bought on the street. Ottawa also recently restricted six chemicals used to make fentanyl and partnered with

China to stem its flow into the country from abroad.

Highly potent and addictive, the analgesic fentanyl is estimated to be up to 100 times stronger than morphine. The related drug carfentanyl is 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. Two milligrams of pure fentanyl-the size of about four grains of salt-is enough to kill an average-size adult. —AFP



**NEW YORK: (FILES)** This file photo taken on September 22, 2016 shows bags of heroin, some laced with fentanyl, displayed before a press conference at the office of the New York Attorney General, in New York. Nine people died of fentanyl opioid abuse in the Canadian city of Vancouver in just the past 24 hours, Mayor Gregor Robertson said. —AFP

# STUDY: REPEALING OBAMA HEALTH LAW CUTS TAXES FOR WEALTHY

**WASHINGTON:** Republicans may be handing wealthy Americans a big tax cut by repealing President Barack Obama's health care law, according to a study released Thursday that spells out potential economic pitfalls behind the election-year slogans. The richest households - those with incomes above \$3.7 million - would get an average tax cut of about \$197,000, said the analysis from the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, a joint venture of the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution think tanks.

The windfall would come mainly from the repeal of taxes that the Affordable Care Act aimed at upper-income earners, including an investment tax and a Medicare levy.

The study comes as Republican lawmakers and aides start grappling with the complexity of unraveling the 2010 law, which touches most major players in the \$3 trillion health care industry.

While Republicans plan to take just a few months next year to pass legislation dismantling the law, that "repeal" may not actually take complete effect for up to four years, top House GOP aides told reporters Thursday. Congress would need the time to pass replacement legislation and work out a

smooth transition. The Tax Policy Center study did not consider the impact of replacement legislation, so its look at potential winners and losers is preliminary. President-elect Donald Trump and GOP congressional leaders have promised to replace "Obamacare" with a conservative-tinged version that provides access to affordable coverage for all Americans. Details of that plan are unavailable, but it's bound to affect the final bottom line.

The "repeal" part of the GOP promise would definitely have one-sided consequences, said Gordon Mermin, an Urban Institute researcher who conducted the study. "This is a change that helps high-income folks more than everyone else," said Mermin.

"People who currently get these premium tax credits are going to lose a lot."

The impact is more complicated for middle- and low-income households. The vast majority would see little or no change in taxes. Repeal of various taxes on the health care industry would get passed through as modest benefits for most. But more than 8 million consumers receiving tax credits through the law to help pay for health insurance could take a significant hit. They would lose financial assistance

worth several thousand dollars. How big a loss depends on individualized factors such as household size and family income. The study did not look at the impact on insurance coverage. Obama's law has helped drive the nation's uninsured rate to a historic low of about 9 percent. A separate Urban Institute study earlier projected that nearly 30 million people could lose coverage if Obama's law is repealed without a replacement.

GOP aides who briefed reporters Thursday on Capitol Hill said a stable and orderly transition is one the party's top goals. The aides spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the broad outlines of a private dialogue among Republican decision-makers.

The long transition period under consideration - two to four years - reflects a desire to avoid disrupting existing coverage for consumers and to give lawmakers time to create a new health care program. It's an exercise fraught with policy and political complications. Four years would put Republicans on the threshold of the next presidential election.

During that period, Republicans hope to write replacement legislation, perhaps with several bills whose provisions would kick in stage by stage. —AP

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## LULU HYPERMARKET REWARDS WINNERS OF 'LIVE FOR FREE' PROMOTION

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading hypermarket in the region, distributed prizes to 20 winners of its 'Live for Free' promotion, during a ceremony held at its Al Rai outlet on Thursday, 15 December. LuLu Hypermarket management along with an enthusiastic crowd of shoppers were present to felicitate the winners. The winners expressed excitement at their very generous prizes, with the first prize being a gift voucher worth KD 600, while 19 second place winners were given KD 200 worth of gift vouchers each.

The 'Live for Free' promotion, which ran from 23 November to 3 December, provided LuLu shoppers with raffle coupons for every purchase worth KD 5. An official draw ceremony was held at the Al Rai outlet on 6 December and the names of the lucky winners announced. The 'Live for Free' promotion is part of LuLu Hypermarket's commitment to consistently providing the best shopping experience and rewarding loyal customers through a variety of exciting campaigns throughout the year.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## AAW LAUNCHES THE NORTH FACE, EASTPAK AND VANS AT BOULEVARD

Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW) yesterday celebrated the inauguration of three of its new stores, The North Face, Eastpak, and Vans at Boulevard, Salmiya. The ribbon cutting ceremony was attended by AAW Chairman Faisal Al Mutawa, AAW General Manager Ali Faisal Al Mutawa, and Regional Sales Manager of Eastpak Michele Messori.

AAW has brought together world's prime brands catering to families practicing seasonal outdoor activities, individuals that have a passion for action sports and also provides a choice for the contemporary lifestyle consumer. The North Face delivers

an extensive line of performance apparels, equipment, and footwear with an innovative collection designed to provide rock climbers, backpackers, hikers, trail runners, and outdoor enthusiasts with the ultimate fit and function. Eastpak offers street-smart backpacks to convenient shoulder bags and ingenious luggage and travel items. While Vans offer fully comprehensive range of footwear, apparel, and accessories for men, women and kids.

Opening the ceremony with a speech AAW Chairman and CEO Faisal Al Mutawa expressed AAW's commitment to providing customers with top-of-the-line outdoor

products and adding more stores to serve them better. The event concluded with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by media and mall visitors who indulged in canapés and refreshments and enjoyed exclusive store opening benefits in all three stores.

AAW General Manager, Ali Faisal Al Mutawa said: "We at AAW aspire to provide Kuwait's market with the highest quality products and offer our customers a wholesome shopping experience. By opening three of our brands under one roof at Boulevard, we are meeting our customers' growing demand for new and practical products and promise them more expansions in

order to provide them with the best brands, customer satisfaction, and service we can."

Boulevard is one of the newest and largest touristic hubs in the country occupying more than 353 thousand square meters and includes a heritage village, botanical garden, multiple sporting areas, a health club, and more. Eastpak's first exclusive store occupies 127 square meters and offers bags of various size, type, and style as well as travel gear and accessories specializing in design, development, and manufacturing able to withstand and resist strong conditions of use and a guarantee up to 30 years. The North Face flagship store occupies 242 square meters

and delivers an extensive line of performance apparel, equipment, and footwear designed to provide outdoor enthusiasts with the ultimate fit and function.

The Vans store occupies 127 square meters and provides a fully comprehensive range of footwear, apparel, and accessories made to be a dominant force in the action sports and the brand of choice for the contemporary lifestyle consumer. In addition to Eastpak, The North Face, and Vans, AAW provides top-of-the-line products for outdoor and action sport enthusiasts from worldwide brands such as Arc'teryx, Patagonia, Houdini and more.

## MMF KUWAIT HOLDS FAREWELL PARTY TO HONOR SRIVASTAVA

Malayali Media Forum (MMF), Kuwait hosted a farewell reception in honor of A K Srivastava, Second Secretary (Information and Cultural Affairs), Indian Embassy Kuwait, who is leaving Kuwait next week after completing his tenure in the country. At a small function held at the FOKE auditorium, Abbassia, MMF members wished Srivastava all success in his future endeavor and recalled how he strengthened the interaction between media persons and the Indian embassy in disseminating information and news during

the last three years.

In his reply speech, Srivastava said he has striven hard to help make the embassy services more accessible to people. As the cultural secretary, he had the opportunity to interact with several members of the Indian community and experience the problems being faced by them during many of the cultural meetings he attended as the representative of the embassy. Srivastava, who has served in Indian embassies in Pakistan and Nepal prior to his appointment in Kuwait, will be posted in Delhi.

MMF General Convener Sam Painummodu presided over the meeting. Sajeev K Peter, Anil K Nambiar, Anil P Alex, Hikmath, Azeez Thikkodi, Sathar Kunnil, Abdul Fathah Thayyil, Sunoj Nambiar, Anwar Sadath Thalassery, Jalin Triprayar, Girish Ottapalam, Reji Bhaskar, Muneer Ahmad and Mustafa delivered felicitation speeches. Salim Kottayil welcomed the gathering while Mohamed Riyaz proposed vote of thanks. MMF members presented a memento to Srivastava on the occasion.





—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## HOLIDAY DOWNTOWN HOTEL CELEBRATES GRAND RE-OPENING



The Holiday Downtown Hotel in Sharq has celebrated the grand reopening on 13th December 2016, witnessed by top media personals and dignitaries from various social institutes. "We are proud to reopen our doors to guests who will enjoy our newly renovated European contemporary style rooms and elegant fabric spaces resulting in the creation of truly 4 star experience in the heart of Kuwait Downtown" says the newly appointed General Manager Mohamed Wahib Mohamed Labib.

The Hotel will extend its known service standards as before and will acquire back being one of the best in the market. The pride of the hotel was excellent convention and events facilities, with the renovation carried out, it is going to be better. As part of the reopening, exceptional offers are provided for outside catering and weddings. As well, for corporate guest's meeting requirements, a superior arrangement is awaiting in 2017 with free 24 hours valet parking services. Amenities includes first class offering of full service experience to guest with 169

rooms, cutting edge top qualifying food served at the restaurants, the hotel houses a modern fitness centre with personal trainers along with indoor pool.

A total of 210 guest was entertained by a musical group, followed by a gala dinner, which made the evening elegant and special. Holiday Downtown Hotel has forever changed hotels catering for business and leisure clientele. "It is all about the comfort of our guests and exceeding their needs, and Holiday Downtown exemplify this, both physically and in terms of the staff attitude

and culture". Mr Wahib continued to explain that his ambition is to be No 1 in the market by simply creating "A right way, the Holiday Downtown Way" for his guest, an art of hospitality & Arabic generosity in welcoming our valued guest. A sense that anything is possible which he and his team will ensure will happen to each of his guest.

It does not stop here, the hotel will soon expand facilities for long stays and more F&B options such as Fallah Restaurant opening by 1st quarter of 2017 specialist in authentic traditional and contemporary Kuwaiti cuisines.



## MILLENNIUM HOTEL HOLD GCC & MIDDLE EAST ROADSHOW EVENT

Millennium Hotel & Convention Center hosted a 'Millennium & Copthorne Hotels-GCC & Middle East Roadshow Event' in Kuwait last Monday, December 5th, 2016 wherein 23 senior representatives of these hotels participated, each one highlighting the properties to promote its extraordinary and enticing services that will evoke new potential clients.

Speaking on this occasion, Dani Saleh, Area General

Manager of Millennium & Copthorne Hotels Kuwait, said: "This event represents and ignites Millennium Hotel Kuwait's commitment to build and impasses business relationship with the region's premium property entrepreneurs. Competency builds a strong team. No doubt, the event is a golden opportunity to deliberately discuss and share mutual businesses and interests". We are taking the modern strategical approach in providing brand awareness to locals, frequent business travelers, travel

agencies and new entrepreneurs. It is better to target a group of clients and new business partners by honing them and standing out where you can in a niche segment of the industry."

"Although the world is filled with professional competitors, we are still positive making our way towards developing the brand "Millennium & Copthorne Hotels" well known worldwide. That's why our main target is to have a much more tougher and profound sales initiative; aiming to commercialize and intro-

duce the brand awareness overall Millennium & Copthorne regional hotel's excellent services and introducing our international benefits by spreading the message to a wider range. This is to drive the business effectively and be the key decision makers and rampantly promoting tourism inside and outside of Kuwait." "Taken together as one team, these measures are powerful drivers for higher levels of performance, profitability and productivity for organizations." Saleh concluded.







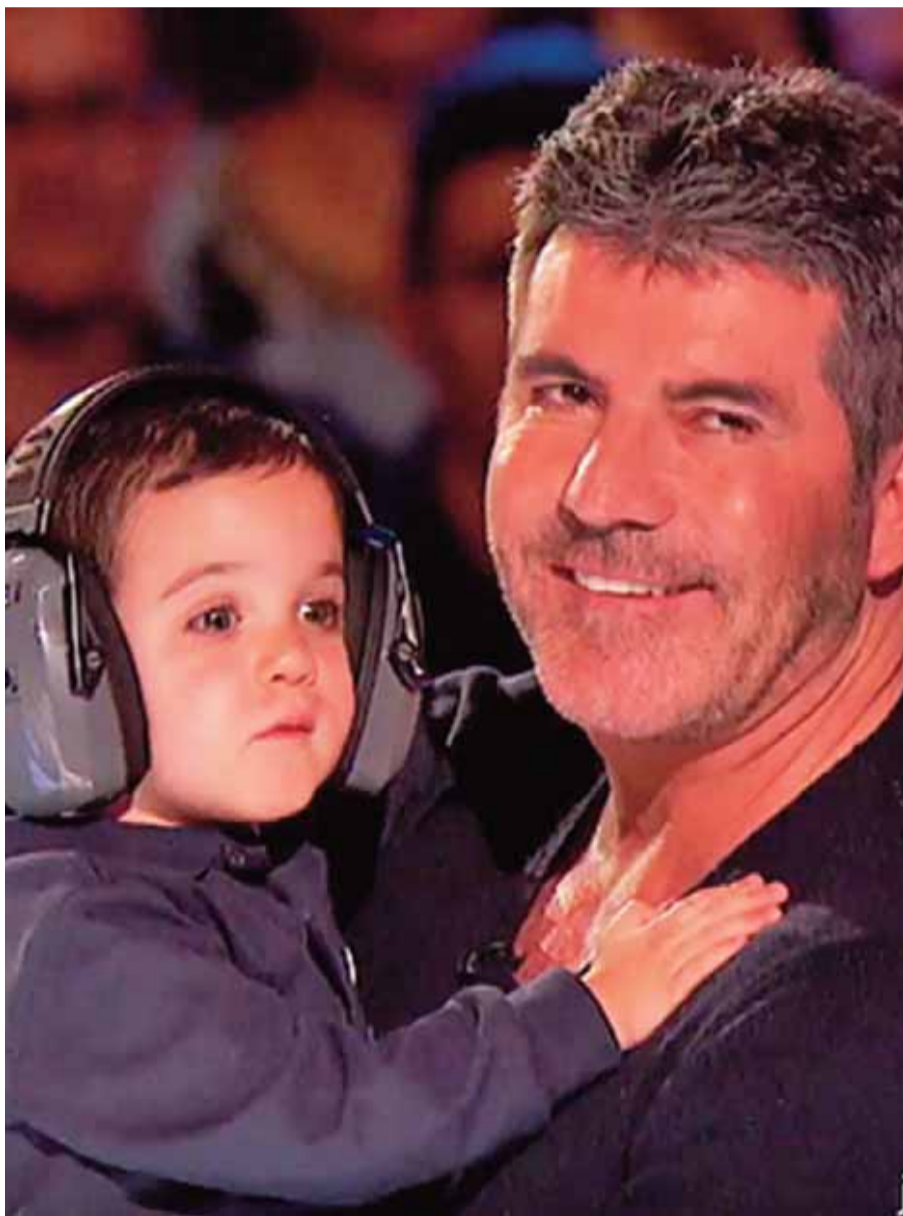




## Anna Faris fined after her dog was found homeless

The 39-year-old actress was hit with the penalty after her Chihuahua named Pete - that she adopted from Kinder4Rescue four years ago - was found emaciated and wandering the streets in North Hollywood, California last month. Now, TMZ reports, Anna has paid the fine, after she was publicly shamed by the animal shelter. Writing on the Kinder4Rescue official Facebook page, Laurel Kinder - who runs the rescue centre - wrote in a since-deleted post: "Calling Anna Faris house bunny The puppy you adopted from us years ago was found starving on the street. Someone brought it into a vet, scanned the microchip, we've been calling you for days no return call did you read your contract about giving our dogs away and the \$5,000 fine. If you were panicking looking for your lost dog you certainly would've contacted us or the microchip company. I'm not sure what you're guilty of this dog ended up in this condition, you signed a four

page contract how does this dog end up on the street Anna, being a celebrity does not excuse you from following the rules or respecting the rescue you adopted the dog from, or abiding the contract. This is why people are not allowed to give Kinder4Rescue dogs away they have adopted from us because they become disposable get passed around and end up on the street like this (sic)." Anna's representative previously said: "Anna is thrilled that the dog has been found, and is ensuring all necessary arrangements are made to bring the dog home." Pete is still at the shelter, waiting for a new home.



## Simon Cowell thinks his son will marry his ex-girlfriend's daughter

The music mogul has stayed close friends with Terri Seymour since they ended their six-year relationship in 2008, and his two-year-old son Eric is "madly in love" with the 'Extra' presenter's little girl Coco, 21 months, who she has with boyfriend Clark Mallon. Terri said: "Eric and Coco are madly in love with each other and Simon is convinced they're going to get married." Eric calls Coco his girlfriend but they're having a long-distance relationship. And it seems Eric - whose mother is Simon's girlfriend Lauren Silverman - already has competition for Coco's affections. Terri added: "It's funny as they're apart so often as Terri spends so much time in the UK, but he's also very loyal. "Coco on the other hand isn't so loyal and has another little boyfriend called Henry, so Eric had better get back in the picture as Henry is

moving in there." Despite her history with Simon, Terri gets along very well with his girlfriend. She said: "Lauren is a really good friend and we've become very close. She's one of my best friends and we speak all the time." And the 42-year-old beauty wouldn't be surprised if the couple have more children. She told Closer magazine: "Having Eric has completely changed Simon. "He's an amazing dad, very hands on and completely adores Eric. "I wouldn't be surprised if he has another one soon. "I think it would be good for him to have a little girl and for Eric to have a playmate. He has Coco but it isn't the same as having a sibling. I'd say watch this space."

## LEAH SAYS TOM CRUISE THINKS SHE IS THE DEVIL

The 46-year-old actress abandoned the Church of Scientology in 2013 after 30 years and has been working on a new A&E docuseries 'Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath' in order to expose it and says Tom and other members of the church see her as the enemy. In an interview for 'Larry King Now', she said: "He thinks I'm the devil. Tom and most Scientologists, all Scientologists, are taught to believe that people like me are literally the devil, that we mean them harm. "Tom is a dedicated and loyal Scientologist. Tom is very well-aware of what is Scientology, truthfully. He is very well-aware that it's an organisation that is defrauding people out of their lives. But in his heart, I believe he believes it." When asked if she thinks Tom is "delusional", Leah said: "I could say that about myself at the time. "I didn't want to look. I didn't want to believe that what I've been involved in my whole life was a lie, that it was damaging and hurting people. Yeah, you can say I was delusional." Speaking previously about her reason for making the documentary, Leah said: "For too long, this multi-billion-dollar organisation bullied victims and journalists to prevent the truth being told. It is my hope that we shed light on information that makes the world aware of what is really going on and encourages others to speak up. "Even though I had been a member of the church for a long time, I was stunned by some of the things I learned. There is a lot more to this story than anyone knows. And this series is breaking ground in bringing that information to light."



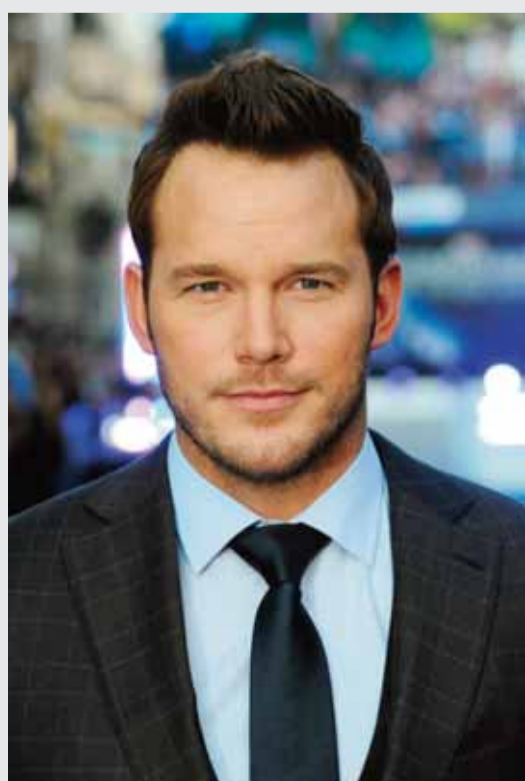
## Kim Kardashian West and Kanye West's marriage was strained

The 39-year-old was rushed to hospital in Los Angeles with suspected "temporary psychosis", brought on by exhaustion, in November but insiders claim they were having marriage problems ever before then. A source told PEOPLE: "The divorce claims come from before he had the breakdown. She didn't know what was up with him and they weren't spending time together. She didn't know it was a mental breakdown. And an insider recently revealed that Kanye didn't handle the "pressure" of fame very well and things had started going downhill for the rapper in late October. A source said: "The pressure had gotten to him and he didn't handle it well. He made himself exhausted. But [the exhaustion] was a symptom of the problem, not the problem itself ... He wasn't making a lot of sense when he talked, and he was texting a lot of strange stuff to people. Not dangerous, but he just didn't make a lot of sense. "Part of loving Kanye is that he sometimes is talking on a different level from you, and you just listen. But this was a lot more alarming. When Kanye gets like this, he doesn't sleep. So, you'd wake up to like 20 texts. The more tired he got from not sleeping, the less sense he was making. He wasn't in a good head space." However, despite reports of trouble in their marriage, Kim, 36, and Kanye - who have children North, three and 12-month-old Saint together, have no plans to split up. An insider said: "Truly no truth behind divorce reports. It's not something she would divorce him over."



## Daniel Radcliffe likes to shock people by asking them for cigarette lighters

The 27-year-old actor - who shot to fame as Harry Potter, the saviour of the wizarding world, in the 'Harry Potter' franchise - admitted he "gets a kick out of" surprising strangers by smoking. He said: "I do smoke and I like roll-ups. I get a kick out of asking people for a light - I'm always losing lighters. "They fumble in their pockets, look up and realise they've committed the crime of giving Harry Potter cancer." Daniel is currently dating New York based actress Erin Darke, 30, and says the pair have a romantic trans-Atlantic love. He explained: "I live in both London and New York. My girlfriend and I hop back and forth, so we're constantly saying goodbye but looking forward to seeing each other. It's quite a romantic state to be in." And although Daniel loved working on the 'Harry Potter' movies, he is happy to have moved on from the role of the young wizard. He said: "I'm not Harry Potter any more, but I don't regret a day of it. I had the time of my life. "People look at me with pity sometimes. I know it's because they think I didn't have a childhood, that I was like a slave to the Potter set. "But it was fun hanging out with Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, and the most fascinating grown-ups like Alan Rickman, Julie Walters and Maggie Smith. "You don't meet those characters every day and they were like family to me."



## Chris Pratt bought his first gun when he was just 12

The 'Guardians of the Galaxy' actor had his father and mother's permission to buy a firearm with his own money, even though his age meant his cousin had to acquire the weapon for him. He said: "My cousin bought it for me, with my parents' permission [and it was] one I paid for with money I earned." And the first toy Chris ever bought himself - after doing odd jobs around his local neighbourhood - was an air rifle. He said: "I loved that BB gun. I must have shot it 10,000 times. It was my main toy. It was mine. I bought it - you know what I mean?" The 37-year-old actor - who has four-year-old son Jack with wife Anna Faris - became a stripper when he was just 14 years old and charged \$40 for his services. He said: "I put the word out there that I was going to start stripping. I marketed myself." Chris was first hired for a teenage girl's birthday party, but things didn't go according to plan. Though he was initially "totally

pulling it off", the girl's parents unexpectedly returned home, so he jumped out of the balcony, put his clothes back on, said hello to the couple who were then leaving again, and returned inside to finish his routine. He said: "It was like something out of a John Hughes movie." The former 'Parks and Recreation' star then landed gigs at a 40th birthday party and a grandmother's birthday - which he described as "more funny than weird" but he quit stripping when he began to consider it as a full time career option and went for an audition at a local club, only to find one of the strippers sleeping outside. He told GQ magazine: "It just felt seedy and that I was moving into less innocent territory."

MUSIC



Gayla Peevey, singer of that enduring Christmas classic, 'I Want a Hippopotamus For Christmas,' stands next to an image she drew of a hippopotamus in her home in La Mesa, California. — AP Photos

## Want a hippo for Christmas? The story of a girl who got one

All a cute, curly haired 10-year-old girl named Gayla Peevey wanted for Christmas in 1953 was a hippopotamus. And amazingly enough, after "I Want a Hippopotamus For Christmas" became the biggest hit song of that holiday season, she actually got one, a 700-pound baby named Matilda. She promptly donated it to the Oklahoma City Zoo, where it lived to be nearly 50, a ripe old age for hippos. As for Peevey's song, it may never die. "That one just really took off, and it's still going strong, stronger than ever. Sixty-three years later! Hard to believe," Peevey, an ebullient woman of 73, says during a recent phone interview from her San Diego-area home.

So much so that it's used as a cell phone ringtone these days, included on holiday ornaments and Christmas cards, available for download on iTunes. It's even featured in a US Postal Service commercial in which the post office boasts it ships more online gifts, hippopotamuses included, than anybody. Some people will tell you it's an annoying ear worm, a tune with such silly lyrics and a melody so maddeningly memorable that it will play endlessly in your head every holiday

season until New Year's Day. But that's part of its charm, says Tim Moore, iHeart Radio's New Hampshire programming director who over the decades has played it plenty of times.

"It's got the sound of an old-time recording," Moore says. "It sounds dated. It sounds a little corny. But that's the thing about it. Also, not to be discounted is its effect on children." Yes, definitely don't discount that. For years, Peevey has been hearing from schoolteachers around the world who tell her their students perform the song and can't get enough of it. "Over 15 years now we've done it, and I don't think we're stopping," laughs Dana Caro, who directs the second-grade Christmas music program at a suburban Southern California school. Other songs come and go, says Caro, but "Hippo" stays in the mix every year at Arcadia's Longley Way Elementary School.

**A hit but not a big hit**

"Even in class today, we weren't in rehearsal yet when one kid started singing it, and then they were all singing it," added the teacher, who says it has a bounce and a cheeriness that

kids love. And who knows, singing it may actually get a kid a hippo. Unlikely, perhaps, but it did get one for Peevey. Her hometown zoo, hippoless at the time, teamed with the local newspaper to encourage people to send in enough money to buy her one after she debuted the song on television's "The Ed Sullivan Show." Three thousand dollars later, Matilda arrived on Christmas Eve, a fitting gift for someone who would so enthusiastically declare, "No crocodiles, no rhinoceroses. I only like hippopotamuses. And hippopotamuses like me too."

Soon after, however, Peevey left her hippopotamus behind, moving to California. She had been singing professionally for two years before recording "Hippo," moving up from local watermelon festivals to radio shows and then a spot on television's "Saturday Night Revue" hosted by Hoagy Carmichael. But her hippo fame caught her off guard, and for months afterward she couldn't move around Oklahoma City without being mobbed by fans. Her parents figured she'd blend in as just another "normal kid" in California while recording a few more songs. None would have the impact of that first one, written by John Rox and personally selected for

Peevey by Columbia Records' legendary producer and A&R man Mitch Miller, who backed her with his orchestra.

She did resurface briefly in 1959 with "My Little Marine," an aching teen ballad she'd written about her first crush. She recorded it under the name Jamie Horton, her manager not wanting people to dismiss it as another hippo song. It peaked at Number 84 on Billboard's Hot 100. "A hit but not a big hit," she says now. "Certainly not a hit as big as the hippopotamus song." Soon after, she was off to college, then marriage and motherhood. Eventually she founded her own advertising agency, keeping her hand in music writing commercial jingles. Retired and married for 53 years now, she still sings regularly in church. "But not the hippo song," Peevey says, laughing. "It's not really a church song." — AP



## SAMBA GETS NEW RHYTHMS 100 YEARS AFTER FIRST RECORDING

Monday nights feel like Saturdays in Rio's Little Africa neighborhood when the sun sets and the samba starts to play. Surrounded by a mostly young crowd, seven musicians sit around a table with the small four-string guitar called a cavaquinho, the cuica drum and a tambourine. The instruments and the relaxed format, known as a "roda de samba," has changed little since its infancy in the late 19th century, when Afro-Brazilians first developed the style in this same neighborhood, officially known as Saude.

"It's our samba, folks, it's your samba!" called out percussionist Walmir Pimentel, 34, to applause from the crowd that fought off the evening heat with cold beer and caipirina cocktails. Pimentel's group has been playing Monday night "rodas" here at Pedra do Sal square since 2006, performing right at the steps where slaves once unloaded sacks of salt. The lively performances have helped resurrect the long depressed center of Rio de Janeiro. But exactly 100 years from the first ever recording of samba—a song called "Pelo telefone" ("On the telephone") — the likes of Pimentel are also helping to rejuvenate the venerable art form.

The group Moca Prosa has been breaking new ground at the same symbolic space in the Little Africa neighborhood since 2012. As the only all-female band in a musical genre which, like much of Brazilian society, suffers from deep sexism, they let the music do their talking. "At first, there were men in the audience who were shocked, saying, 'Wow, these girls play samba?' They looked at us with mistrust, but when the roda started, they saw we played the same," said singer Fabiola Machado, 35.

Since that recording of "Pelo Telefone," samba has picked up layers from the Argentinian tango, the jazz-influenced Bossa Nova, samba-funk and today everything from samba-rock to samba-rap.

One of the biggest sources of regeneration for samba can be traced to another Rio neighborhood, Lapa, which was also long run-down but re-emerged in the late 1990s as a nightlife hub. Clubs like Carioca da Gema and Rio Scenarium were catalysts for a more professional and adventurous set of samba musicians like Moyses Marques, Teresa Cristina, Mariene de Castro, Julio Estrela, Nilze Carvalho and second generation stars, like the children of well-known sambista Serginho Procopio. "Our generation has this idea that everything is samba. So we have no qualms about adding a guitar or a piano," said Marques, 37. "We're seeking more harmony."

**From 'telephone' to WhatsApp**

The lyrics are also adapting to the new sounds and new times. If the historic first recording sang about the then new-fangled telephone, current star Arlindo Cruz peppers his lyrics with talk of social networks and messaging service WhatsApp. "Samba is alive, strong and creative," said historian Andre Diniz, although he added that the music was not "for the masses. Its fans have an intellectual, middle class aspect."

At its best, samba continues to bring together old and new, just as the Rio musicians modernized what had originally been a slave tradition in the faraway north-east. At a recent concert, the daughter of famed composer Paulinho da Viola, Beatriz Rabello, joined him on stage to present her own first album. In the audience were some of samba's living legends, like Monarco, the 84-year-old composer from the Portela samba school, and Nelson Sargento, 92, from the rival Mangueira school. — AFP

**Evolution**

Samba has its roots among the slaves of Brazil's northeast Bahia before arriving in Rio, then the country's capital, where it took form and became the soul of the Brazilian carnival. Today, samba rhythms and songs are omnipresent, from the February carnivals to dance clubs, and are one of the most internationally recognizable symbols of Brazil. But the music rooted in African traditions has not stood still.

## Nine Inch Nails return with 'impenetrable' music

Industrial rockers Nine Inch Nails on Friday announced their first release in three years—an EP that frontman Trent Reznor described as "impenetrable." Reznor, who last year promised new Nine Inch Nails music within 2016, made good on his word with days to go and said that the five-song EP, "Not the Actual Events," would come out December 23. "It's an unfriendly, fairly impenetrable record that we needed to make," Reznor said in a statement. "It's an EP because that ended up being the proper length to tell that story." Reznor did not further characterize the sound but said that it marked a departure from his recent material.

Since the last Nine Inch Nails album, 2013's "Hesitation Marks," Reznor has pursued various side projects with a more ambient sound. His recent music has included work on soundtracks including to the new film "Before the Flood," a documentary on climate change led by Leonardo DiCaprio. Reznor created Nine Inch Nails in the late 1980s as he was working as a janitor at a Cleveland recording studio and quickly won both an underground and mainstream audience. With albums such as 1994's "The Downward Spiral," Nine Inch Nails pioneered a brand of industrial rock rooted in post-punk but guided by electronic elements and Reznor's searing voice of despair.

Reznor said that the new EP would mark the arrival of British sound engineer Atticus Ross as a full-fledged member of Nine Inch Nails. Ross has



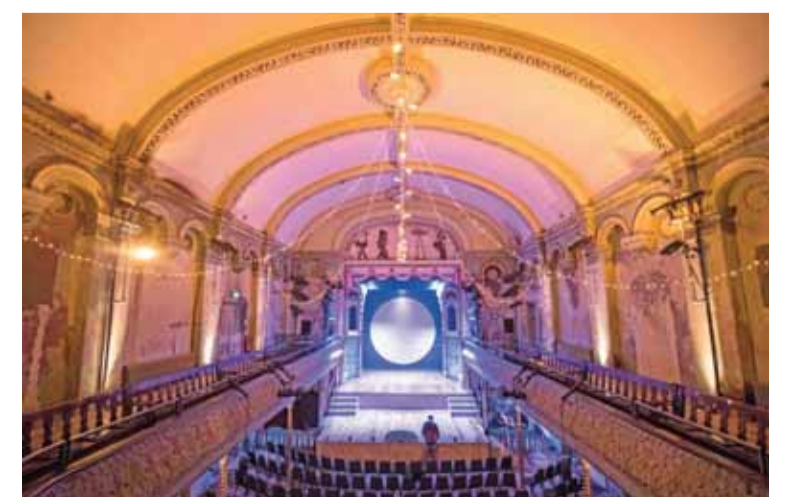
been a longtime collaborator of Reznor, working with him on the Oscar-winning score to the 2010 Facebook drama "The Social Network" and the Grammy-winning music to dark thriller "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo." Nine Inch Nails also announced that the band was re-mastering all of its major albums for vinyl editions to be released starting in 2017. Reznor said the effort required "an insane attention to detail that you probably won't notice," but that he hoped to create definitive versions of the albums. — AFP



Writer, comedian and actor Roy Hudd, who plays the character "Mother Goose," is pictured in the midst of a costume change during a performance of the pantomime 'Mother Goose' at Wilton's Music Hall in London.



Actress Maria Askew, who plays the character "Priscilla The Goose" gets into costume in a dressing room before a performance of the pantomime "Mother Goose" at Wilton's Music Hall in London.



Wilton's Music Hall is pictured before a performance of the pantomime "Mother Goose" in London. — AP Photos





Members of the public watch a performer in the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market in the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds, northern England.



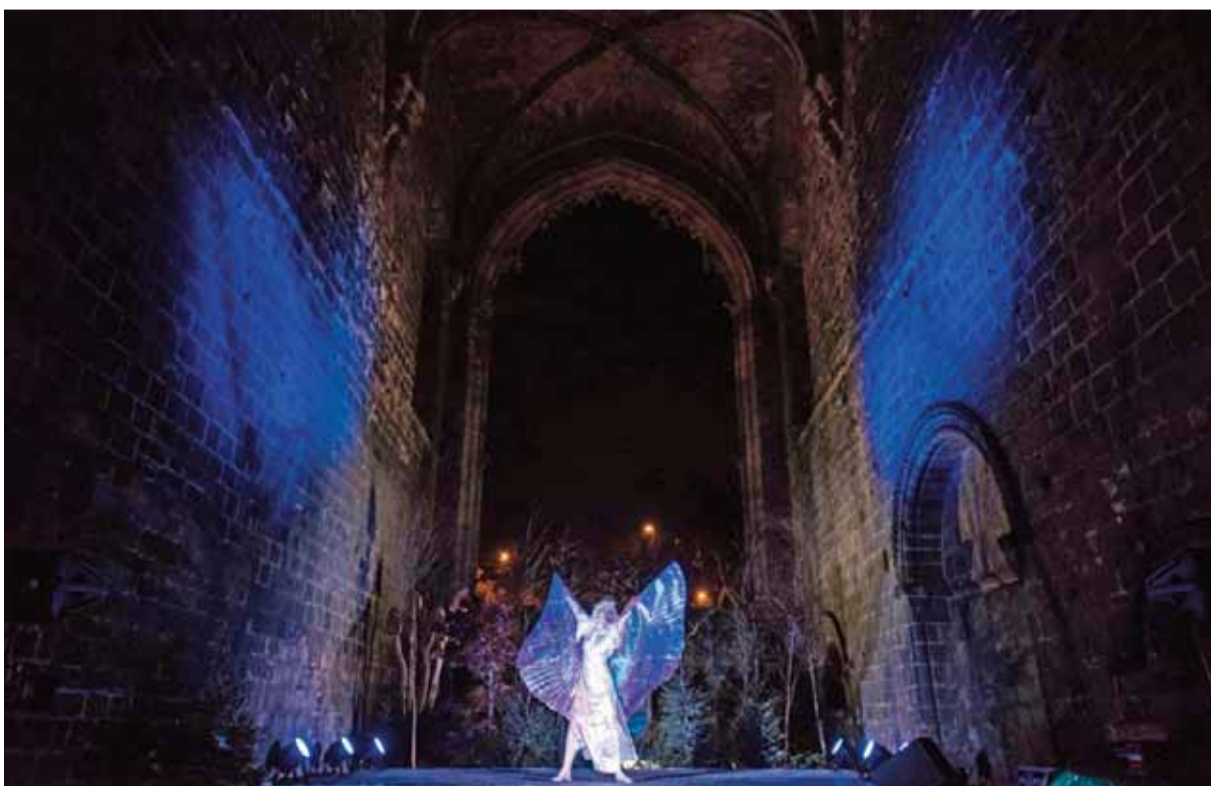
Sausages are barbecued on a food stall at the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market in the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds, northern England. —AP photos



Christmas gifts are displayed for sale at the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market.



Members of the public queue to experience the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market.



Performers entertain the crowds from the main stage of the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market.



Members of the public experience the Leeds Hidden Christmas Market.

# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

Samba gets new rhythms 100 years after first recording

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Sparrows fly along the edge of the forest as they feed in a field on the outskirts of Minsk, Belarus. — AP

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY, ARTIST PRESERVE 'SUBWAY THERAPY' NOTES

The subway sticky notes that New Yorkers used to express their thoughts about the future of the nation after last month's election will be preserved in a museum, officials announced Friday. The installation called "Subway Therapy" will be housed at The New-York Historical Society on Manhattan's upper west side, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced. Thousands of people have left messages in subway stations and tunnels since artist Matthew Levee Chavez created the project after the Nov 8 election. Chavez said he felt New Yorkers needed a place to vent their emotions after the election of Republican Donald Trump, whom few city residents supported.

The project quickly became a forum for New Yorkers and visitors to express their thoughts and feelings. One note read: "You will not divide us. Love is everything." Another said, "It doesn't end today." The museum will preserve a selection of

notes as part of its History Responds program. Beginning Tuesday through Inauguration Day on January 20, 2017, members of the public can continue to participate in the project by placing sticky notes on the glass wall inside the museum's front entrance.

Chavez said he is "thrilled that we have found a way to work together to move the project and preserve it for others to experience in the future." "I started the project so people could have a channel to express their thoughts, feel less alone, and also become exposed to opinions different than their own," Chavez said. New-York Historical Society president Louise Mirror said museum officials are happy to preserve the sticky notes for future generations. She said that ephemeral items "can become vivid historical documents." — AP



In this file photo, sticky notes are seen on the Subway Therapy wall in New York.



In this file photo, a commuter places a sticky note on the Subway Therapy wall, in New York.



Matthew Chavez, who goes by the artist name Levee, talks to commuters about the messages posted on the Subway Therapy wall, in New York. — AP Photos