

Government pleased with steps to lift sports ban



Trump's pick for ambassador to Israel has all sides on edge



Behind Tata, Mistry clash, distinct set of governance rules



Chelsea make it 12; Giroud saves Arsenal; Ibra powers Man U



MP PROPOSES REDRAWING OF ELECTORAL CONSTITUENCIES

COURT ORDERS OPENING MORE BALLOT BOXES FOR RECOUNT



Min 12°
Max 23°
High Tide 11:53 & 22:23
Low Tide 05:29 & 16:42



150 FILS
NO: 17093
40 PAGES

By B Izzak



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (second right), HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (second left), National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem (right) and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (left) attend a luncheon banquet hosted by HH the Amir yesterday. — Amiri Diwan (See Page 2)

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmaker Ali Al-Deqbasi yesterday submitted a draft law calling for a fundamental change to the existing electoral constituencies, which would have an important impact on the results of elections if accepted. Deqbasi proposed that electoral districts be based on the six existing governorates in the country, with four of the governorates electing 10 MPs each and the remaining two electing just five lawmakers each to make up the 50 members of the National Assembly.

According to the bill, residential areas in the Capital governorate will make up the first constituency, which will elect 10 MPs. Each eligible voter will be allowed to select a maximum of four candidates. Hawally, Farwaniya and Ahmadi governorates will make the second, third and fourth constituencies respectively, and each of them will elect 10 lawmakers. Also, each voter in these districts can select a maximum of four candidates. The last two districts will be that of Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Jahra governorates, with each electing five MPs and every voter allowed to select up to two candidates.

Changing electoral constituencies or the voting system can be done through a law, but the number of MPs in the Assembly can only be altered only through an amendment of the constitution, which is a very complicated process. The Kuwaiti constitution has never been amended since it was issued in 1962.

Changing the electoral law, particularly the voting system, was one of the top priority issues during the election campaign last month, especially by opposition candidates. Most opposition groups had boycotted the Dec 2012 and July 2013 parliamentary elections to protest the government's unilateral change of the voting system.

Continued on Page 13



PARIS: This file photo taken on Sept 9, 2012 shows British singer George Michael performing onstage during a charity gala for the benefit of Sidaction at the Opera Garnier. — AFP

'LAST CHRISTMAS': TRIBUTES FLOW FOR GEORGE MICHAEL

LONDON: Tributes came from around the music world and tearful fans yesterday after British pop superstar George Michael, who rose to fame with a string of smash hits including "Last Christmas", died aged 53. Michael died of apparent heart failure on Christmas Day at his home in Goring, a village on the River Thames in Oxfordshire, west of London, after an award-winning career spanning more than three decades.

Big names in entertainment like Elton John and Madonna hailed Michael's tal-

ent and human qualities, while former Wham! bandmate Andrew Ridgeley said he was "heartbroken at the loss of my beloved friend". Michael was best known for 1980s and 1990s hits like "Freedom", "Careless Whisper", "Faith", "I Want Your Sex" and "Wake Me Up Before You Go Go". He won a string of awards including two Grammys and three Brits, but runs-in with the law over drugs and a series of bizarre incidents and health scares in his final years often overshadowed his music. — (See Pages 38 & 39)

FILIPINA JAILED FOR JOINING IS

OVER 2,000 SAUDIS FIGHTING ABROAD

News

in brief

CSC sets Jan 1 as New Year holiday

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced yesterday that Sunday, Jan 1 will be a public holiday to mark the start of the new year, citing a Cabinet decree. Normal operations for all state bodies and agencies will resume the following day (Monday, Jan 2), it said in a press statement.

Jail, fine for parking in spaces for disabled

KUWAIT: The traffic department will start implementation of article 63 of law 8/2010 related to the rights of the disabled, which says "any person who uses parking spaces designated for the disabled will be jailed for a maximum of one month and fined KD 100 or either of the two penalties, and in case of repeated offences, the court can order suspension of the driving license for a month." A statement by the interior ministry's security information department said enforcement of the law will start on Jan 1, 2017. The statement said violators must appear at the investigations department, which will send them to the concerned court to receive the suitable punishment.

KUWAIT/RIYADH: A Kuwaiti court yesterday sentenced a Filipino woman to 10 years in jail after convicting her of joining the Islamic State militant group and plotting attacks. The ruling, which is not final, also calls for deporting the 32-year old after serving her term. The woman was arrested in August, two months after arriving in the state to work as a domestic helper. At the time, the interior ministry said she had confessed to being a member of the Islamic State group and was plotting terrorist attacks in the state.

The woman told interrogators that her husband was an active fighter with IS in Libya and he had asked her to come to Kuwait from the Philippines as a domestic helper, according to the ministry. An IS-affiliated group in the Philippines has conducted a string of bombings as well as kidnappings for ransom of foreign tourists and Christian missionaries in the country.

Kuwaiti courts have sentenced to various jail terms a number of members, sympathizers and financiers of the IS group. In October, Kuwait police arrested an Egyptian driver suspected of being a member of the IS, after he rammed a garbage truck into a pick-up carrying five



Americans. Authorities in July said they had dismantled three IS cells plotting attacks, including a suicide bombing against a Shiite mosque and against an interior ministry target. An IS-linked suicide bomber killed 26 worshippers in June last year when he blew himself up in a Shiite mosque, in the worst such attack in the state's history.

Separately, more than 2,000 Saudis are fighting abroad with jihadist groups, with over 70 percent of them in Syria, the kingdom's interior ministry was reported as saying yesterday.

Continued on Page 13



AL-SUWAYQ, Oman : An Omani woman casts her ballot for the municipal elections at a polling station in northeastern Oman on Sunday. — AFP

WOMEN WIN OMAN MUNICIPALITY SEATS

MUSCAT: Seven women were elected to Oman municipal councils, according to vote results released yesterday by the interior ministry, a day after the Gulf sultanate held its second ever local election. Voters across the country went to the polls on Sunday to choose 202 councilors from among 731 candidates for 11 municipalities, including the capital Muscat. There were 23 women candidates, and seven won seats on local councils - three more than in the previous election.

In 1994, Oman became the first Gulf monarchy to give the vote to women and in 2011, Sultan Qaboos decreed that elections be held for municipal councils. Oman has made tentative steps in recent years towards reform, although political parties remain banned. Councilors, who serve for four years, have limited powers as authorities designate the chairmen and deputy chairmen for the municipalities, and not from those elected.

The interior ministry said that 39.85 percent of the 623,224 registered voters cast their ballots in the election. Oman has a population of 4.5 million, 46 percent of whom are foreigners. At the national level, Oman has a consultative council with limited powers, the 85-member Majlis Al-Shura. In 2011, Sultan Qaboos slightly expanded the powers of the Majlis Al-Shura after unprecedented social unrest when the normally quiet nation became caught up in protests which swept across the Arab world. — AFP



BREST, France: French skipper Thomas Coville holds a burning flare onboard his "Sodebo Ultim" trimaran as he arrives in this port in western France yesterday after beating the record in solo non-stop round-the-world sailing. — AFP

HERO'S WELCOME FOR FRENCH SAILOR

BREST, France: Frenchman Thomas Coville was given a hero's welcome on his return to the French port of Brest yesterday after slashing the record for a solo non-stop circumnavigation of the world. Coville broke the record on Sunday, completing his journey in 49 days, three hours, seven minutes and 38 seconds on his trimaran Sodebo Ultim. "I am very happy to have achieved this dream," said a tearful Coville, who had tried and failed on four previous occasions to beat the round-the-world record.

The 48-year-old Breton sailor reached the finish line off France's Atlantic coast at 1557 GMT on Christmas Day and spent a final night on his giant trimaran "unwinding". "The biggest dreams don't come true at the first time of asking," he added as he was greeted by thousands of fans on a sunny day in the Brittany city. Coville, whose wife and children joined him on board for the triumphant return to land yesterday morning, shaved an incredible eight days off the previous record set by Francis Joyon, of 57 days and 13 hours.

"Physically, I couldn't go any further. Several times I was within a whisker of not doing it. What I'll take from this isn't the 49 days, it's the journey I've travelled to achieve it, to have tried, to have dared and not to have given up.

Continued on Page 13



KUWAIT: MP Saadoun Al-Otaibi greets His Highness the Amir.



MP Jamaan Al-Harbash greets His Highness the Amir. — Amiri Diwan photos



MP Khaled Al-Shatti greets His Highness the Crown Prince.

AMIR HOLDS BANQUET FOR TOP OFFICIALS, MPs



(From left) MP Mohammad Al-Hadiya, MP Adel Al-Dhamkhi, MP Saleh Ashour, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and MP Safaa Al-Hashem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, held yesterday a

luncheon banquet in honor of National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and MPs. — KUNA



MP Nasser Al-Dossari greets His Highness the Prime Minister.



MP Riyadh Al-Adasani greets His Highness the Amir.



MP Abdulkareem Al-Kandari greets His Highness the Amir.



MP Talal Al-Sahli greets His Highness the Amir.

AMIR RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF NEWLY-APPOINTED ENVOYS



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the new ambassador of Brazil.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the new ambassador of Morocco.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the new ambassador of Bhutan. — Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday credentials of newly-appointed ambassadors of Brazil, Morocco and Bhutan.

The ceremony was attended by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Adviser Lieutenant General Khaled Abdullah Bodai, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan Ibrahim Mohammad AlShatti, Director of His Highness the Amir's Office Ahmad Fahad AlFahad, Amiri Diwan Adviser Mohammad Abulhassan, Chief of Amiri Protocol Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran and Chief of the Amiri Guards, Staff Brigadier Fahad Al-Zaid. — KUNA



CROWN PRINCE MEETS OFFICIALS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Minister of State for Housing Affairs and State Minister for Services Affairs Yasser Hasan Abul. His Highness also received Head of the National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA



MUNICIPAL COUNCIL HOLDS EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

By Meshal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Chairman of the structural planning committee at the Municipal Council Ali Al-Mousa said the council will hold an extraordinary meeting tomorrow. Mousa explained that the meeting will be about article 15 of municipality law number 33/2016 which states: "The minister, municipal council chairman or at least five of its



Ali Al-Mousa

members may call for holding an extraordinary session provided they determine the topic to be discussed." Mousa also explained that the session is about the transactions the council is currently reviewing. He added that the agenda of the meeting will also include the recommendations made by Hawally and Capital committees. The Municipal Council has not been able to meet recently due to lack of quorum.

MP criticizes MoE

MP Thamer Al-Suwait criticized what he described as the Ministry of Education's (MoE) years-long blundering and lack of a clear vision. "MoE has been coming up with new policies every now and then, and when it fails in one, it moves on to another," he said, reminding how the ministry stored school curriculums on flash memory sticks, then moved on to using smart boards, and finally tablets, before it recently again changed its mind. "Our children have become guinea pigs of the MoE and the World Bank since 2003 without any tangible results," Suwait said, noting that in collaboration with the World Bank, the ministry used an educational quality improvement program that ended in 2004, then another that started in 2015 and is expected to end in 2019 without any positive results so far despite the millions spent. Suwait stressed that the best investment is in human resources, and unless MoE sets proper educational policies, Kuwait will never have real education or human development.

Court orders

The criminal court yesterday annulled an earlier verdict sentencing a suspect in absentia to lifetime imprisonment and acquitted him of charges of kidnapping. Meanwhile, the administrative court yesterday cancelled the Interior Ministry's investigations director's decision to reject appointing a citizen as an investigator. The court ordered to appoint the applicant effective since Feb 2016, when 128 people were appointed and he was excluded despite holding a degree with high scores and after undergoing oral and written tests and an interview.

19,772 KUWAITIS ON JOB WAITING LIST BY YEAR'S END

EXPATS' APARTMENT OWNERSHIP WON'T INCLUDE OTHER PRIVILEGES

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission (CSC) announced that the total number of citizens waiting for a job at the public sector will reach 19,772 by the end of 2016, including 15,327 females and 4,445 males. CSC added that 10,225 of these applicants hold intermediate school certificates, 5,275 hold school leaving certificates and 4,272 hold university degrees.

Property ownership

When the Real Estate Owners Union suggested that the prime minister allows expats to own apartments in Kuwait, union sources assured that such ownership will not entitle owners to demand citizenship or any other privileges enjoyed by citizens. The source added that the system already exists in some neighboring GCC states. The sources stressed that the decision will have a positive impact on various sectors, create more job opportunities for Kuwaiti youth and add value to Kuwait's economy. The target of the suggestion was to sell 1,000 apartments to expats annually at a total value of KD 100 million, and that legislators could set proper conditions for such ownerships.

Four classes

Kuwait University is currently considering

having teaching staff teach four instead of three classes over the increasing number of students due to a lack of budget needed to hire more professors. KU also intends granting more domestic scholarships to students from each section annually.

Farwaniya Hospital

The Supreme Council for Planning and Development's planning and follow up team visited the new Farwaniya Hospital project, led by assistant secretary general for planning and follow up, Bader Al-Refae. During the visit, Refae said that 17 percent of the project has been completed and that it is expected to be concluded by the end of 2019. Refae added that the project's total cost is KD 265 million and that once concluded, the new hospital will help develop healthcare services and provide hundreds of job opportunities.

900 violations

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Essa Al-Kandari said the State Audit Bureau reported that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) had committed over 900 violations and that such violations were intolerable from a body that is supposed to be keen on discipline and order, as it ought to administratively guide other state bodies.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the cabinet's weekly meeting yesterday. — KUNA

GOVT PLEASSED WITH STEPS TO LIFT SPORTS BAN

CABINET TOUTS UNSC RESOLUTION AGAINST ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday lauded recent measures that had been taken at the national level to lift the ban on the sports sector enforced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). During its weekly meeting, the Cabinet praised these measures that had been taken in coordination with the National Assembly, on the basis of national and constitutional responsibilities, hoping that these efforts would result in restoring the national activities in full and ending the compulsory suspension.

The Cabinet was examining the steps taken by the Public Authority for Sport (PAS) regarding the Parliament recommendation for lifting the suspension, in light of a presentation during the meeting by the Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Salman, also the Minister of Information, briefed the ministers about PAS' bill to overhaul the sports sector. The proposed law, to be examined by the parliament before endorsement, urges for temporary lift of the suspension. It is compatible with latest sports legislations, the Olympic Charter and does not contradict with the Constitution or the State.

PAS had also called on FIFA and the IOC to dispatch a delegation to Kuwait to discuss the sports issue with the government and the parliament, as a prelude to working out "a consensus formula acceptable by all the parties," said Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, reading the cabinet statement after the meeting, held at Bayan Palace and chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The sports authority had addressed the Asian Football Confederation, the IOC and FIFA regarding these measures. Moreover, the authority talked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on steps that could be taken by the Kuwaiti embassies, as well as the Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs on the new sports bill to set up a public authority to combat doping.

New Year

At the start of the session, the ministers addressed congratulations to His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince as well as the Kuwaiti people on the New Year. They also extended good wishes to the Arab and Muslim nations. They examined a joint message addressed from the presidents of Mauritius and the United Mexican States, in their capacity as chairmen of the UN team charged with water affairs, to His Highness the Amir, alluding to the task plan endorsed last September, urging for a new full-scale approach to address global water issues, in the hope of attaining the sixth goal of the 2030 sustainable development plan.

The Syrian crisis

The ministers were briefed by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on the extraordinary ministerial Arab session, held last Monday, addressing the Syrian issue, in addition to the fourth Arab-Euro Ministerial Meeting, the special session of the executive commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, recently hosted by Jeddah, also to discuss Syria namely the tragic situation in Aleppo.

Sheikh Sabah Khaled urged the Syrian regime to stop military operations against the unarmed Syrians, calling on the UN to activate relevant resolutions. Moreover, the foreign minister restated that the Syrian crisis could only be resolved through negotiations, according to relevant Geneva resolutions and the Security Council resolution 2254, vowing to spare no effort in backing the Syrian people.

The minister informed his colleagues about measures that had preceded release of the two Kuwaitis who were detained in Iran, praising role of the Kuwaiti embassy in the Islamic Republic and cooperation of the Iranian authorities that led to the speedy release of the two citizens.

They also looked into a recommendation by the utility commission regarding preservation

and prices of fresh food and materials. The cabinet mourned demise of Mohammad Al-Mousherji, the former minister of awqaf and Islamic affairs, expressed condolences to Ouaihan and Gu'ood families following the yacht accident on Saturday that resulted in death of a number of members from the two families.

Israeli settlements

Meanwhile, the Cabinet commended a recent resolution by the UN Security Council (UNSC) condemning Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories. The cabinet said in a statement issued following the meeting that Resolution 2334 came in harmony with the UNSC's historical responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and embodied the international community's stand based on the illegitimacy of Israeli settlements in Palestine.

It hoped that the fresh move would contribute to resuming the Middle East peace process and providing a congenial atmosphere for establishing a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital in line with relevant international legitimacy resolutions and Arab Peace Initiative. The cabinet further reiterated Kuwait's support to all efforts aiming to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue and putting an end to the sufferings of the Palestinian people.

Terrorist attacks

In the meantime, the ministers deplored the recent terrorist attacks in Berlin and Zurich as well as the burning of two Turkish soldiers alive. In this context, it vehemently denounced these heinous terrorist crimes and all forms and manifestations of violence and terrorism, which target innocents and violate divine religions, ethical and human principles, and values as well as diplomatic norms. It also reaffirmed Kuwait's call for the international community to step up efforts to wipe out international terrorism. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Suleiman Al-Fahad meets with Yemeni Ambassador Extraordinary in Kuwait Ali Mansour bin Safaa. — Interior Ministry photo

KUWAIT UNDERLINES DEEP RELATIONS WITH YEMEN

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior Major General Suleiman Al-Fahad said yesterday that Kuwait and Yemen have firm distinguished relations. Stressing bilateral security cooperation, the Kuwaiti official discussed with Yemeni Ambassador Extraordinary in Kuwait Ali Mansour bin Safaa a number of security issues and subjects that are meant to expand bilateral cooperation, the ministry's security infor-

mation said in a press release.

The Yemeni diplomat underscored his government's keenness on promoting and bolstering distinguished relations with Kuwait and lauded its role in reinforcing and boosting development projects in Yemen. He also appreciated that the Yemeni community in Kuwait enjoys much care and attention of the Kuwaiti government. — KUNA

FORTY KUWAITI OFFICERS GRADUATED FROM SUDAN'S COMMAND STAFF COLLEGE

KHARTOUM: The College of Command and Staff of the Ministry of Defense celebrated yesterday the graduation of 40 Kuwaiti officers within the framework of the 43rd batch of command and joint staff. The ceremony was attended by Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir and President of Mubarak Al-Abdullah College for Command and Staff Major General Abdullah Dashti, in addition to a number of senior officials.

Dashti said that the officers were considered among the finest Kuwaiti army officers who have spent their careers at the Faculty of the Sudanese command and staff college for about a year, expressing his best wishes to the officers who will take the responsibility to safeguard Kuwait. He added that President Al-Bashir hailed the deep-rooted ties between his country and Kuwait, expressing hope for further development. — KUNA

IMPORTED FOODSTUFFS SUBJECTED TO STRICT MEASURES: MUNICIPALITY



Pictures from a raid carried out by a municipality team at a food warehouse, which was eventually closed down.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and agencies

KUWAIT: Director of imported food management at Kuwait Municipality Al-Humaidi Al-Mutairi asserted yesterday that his department carries out strict inspection campaigns of all sorts of foodstuffs since entering the country to ensure they meet all health requirements.

That food shipments will not be released

without full inspection and that they meet the set requirements in this regard, Mutairi said in a statement issued by the public relations department at Kuwait Municipality. He pointed out that his department has sent some 17,426 samples of foodstuffs to the laboratory of the Ministry of Health to assure they meet all requirements.

Meanwhile, the Capital emergency team at the municipality raided a food warehouse and confis-

cated nine tons of spoiled foodstuff. The warehouse was closed down. Director of Capital Municipality Ammar Al-Ammar said supervisory departments are carrying out surprise campaigns in various areas at the instructions of the Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi to intensify campaigns at cooperatives, restaurants, meat markets and roaming vendors to make sure about the validity of food.

In Brief

KUWAIT'S AMBASSADOR SUBMITS CREDENTIALS

CAIRO: Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Saleh Al-Thuwaikh yesterday submitted his credentials to President Abdulfattah Al-Sisi as Kuwait's new ambassador. Thuwaikh said that he conveyed the best greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to President Sisi wishing him all the best and more prosperity and development for Egypt. — KUNA



UAB FIGHTS LAUNDERING

CAIRO: Chairman of the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) Sheikh Mohammad Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah said yesterday that UAB is firm on dealing with issues gripping the world, most notably, money laundering and terror financing, and is working with the international community on that regard and to cut off all funding sources for the Islamic State (IS). Sheikh Mohammad Al-Jarrah, who is also Chairman of Kuwait International Bank (KIB), made these remarks in a statement to the press after meeting with the Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmad Abul-Gheit. — KUNA



KUWAIT HOSTS TOURNAMENT

ABU DHABI: Secretary General of the GCC organizing committee for the wheelchair basketball Jassem Hassan Mubarak announced yesterday that Kuwait would host the 9th edition in 2018. Kuwait's Wheelchair team was honored on Sunday as champion of the 8th GCC Wheelchair Basketball Championship that was hosted at New York University in Abu Dhabi after defeating Saudi Arabia 62-56. — KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A car phone, once a very commonly used item in Kuwait, now rests at a museum for antiquities in Kuwait City. — KUNA photo



OOREDOO PARTICIPATES IN HEALTH MINISTRY MARATHON

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF MORE THAN 1,500 STUDENTS

KUWAIT: Ooredoo, the fastest network in Kuwait in 2016, participated in the Open Health Day organized by the Ministry of Health's Public Relations Department last week. The marathon, which took place along the Arabian Gulf Road, witnessed the attendance of more than 1500 students from different schools from across Kuwait, in coordination with the Ministry of

Education and other government entities.

Ooredoo Kuwait stated that participating in such an event is in tandem with the company's deep-rooted belief and commitment to its core values of caring, connecting and challenging. The company also lauded the joint efforts and cooperation between entities from both public and private sector to make this event a success. Supporting this

initiative is also reflective of Ooredoo's commitment to the UN Global Goals endorsed by Ooredoo, which include good health and well-being.

Ooredoo furthermore continues to exert efforts to support government entities in raising awareness about a variety of health issues and ways to adopt a healthier lifestyle. This comes in alignment with

Ooredoo's commitment to the Global Goals project of the United Nations, which was adopted by Ooredoo in 2015, and focuses on health and well-being as one of its main points.

Aside from the marathon, the event included a number of competitions and games for participants of all ages, in addition to health exhibits held and organized

by different private clinics and pharmaceutical companies. Medical staff were available to conduct tests for all attendees to measure their blood sugar, pressure, cholesterol, body mass index, and to provide various medical consultations. Ooredoo Kuwait is committed to supporting different segments of society through its sponsorships around the year.



KUWAIT PLANS LABOR TOWNS, PUBLIC RENOVATION: MINISTER

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality plans to examine, in line with His Highness the Amir's aspiration to transform the country into a regional financial hub, a number of mega projects such as construction of labor towns and renovating the shores adjacent to Al-Jahra district, the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs said.

The municipality, in the foreseeable future, will devote attention to proposed projects such as building the labor towns, a service and entertainment center in Al-Ugailah district, renovating Al-Jahra Governorate's beachfront and Al-Mubarkiah commercial area and setting up a safe system for managing hard, liquid and hazardous waste, Mohammad Al-Jabri, also the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, was quoted as saying in a statement released by the Municipality's Public Relations Department yesterday.

"This future visionary approach will

be enlisted in the Government manifesto for the 15th legislative term that would be submitted to the National Assembly," said Jabri, noting that it is based on His Highness the Amir's outlook of transforming Kuwait into a lucrative financial-commercial center in the Gulf region.

The municipality will examine other venture such as privatizing and specifying usage of land plots for housing and industrial or commercial purposes. As to the State Fourth Structural Plan, Jabri indicated that it aims at distributing the land plots fairly; according to forecast population growth, economic policies and State's needs.

Urban development constitutes a factor of the Municipality's future vision, incorporating the government platform, he said, noting necessity of building the infrastructure for expanding urban development. —KUNA



Minister Mohammad Al-Jabri



KUWAIT: A group photo of participants in 6th annual forum of scholarships, and the 10th annual of the practical training and development-oriented program.— KUNA

KISR KEEN ON PROMOTING NATIONAL MANPOWER'S PERFORMANCE: OFFICIAL

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) has reaffirmed eagerness to promote the capabilities and skills of the national cadres at the institution through training programs and courses. Acting Director of KISR's Manpower Development Department and head of the mission and special programs Mona Al-Failakawi made the stress during the 6th annual forum of scholarships, and the 10th annual of

the practical training and development-oriented program. She added that the gathering is part of KISR's goals for promoting scientific research to serve development in Kuwait.

These efforts include the scholarships and study missions program KISR launched in the mid-1970s, she said, noting that as 2016 is coming to an end, beneficiaries have hit 509. She stressed KISR's keenness on acquiring staff with

the necessary scientific expertise and developing their abilities in line with the institute's strategic plan and researches.

Failakawi's statement was followed by a session in which eight researches shed light on their experience while studying in foreign universities. KISR's Director General Dr Samira Ahmad Al-Sayed Omar and senior officials were attending the ceremony. — KUNA

FORUM ON CHARITABLE ACTS CALLS FOR E-PLATFORM FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

RELIEF TEAMS ON THE FIELD TO SEE SYRIAN REFUGEES

KILIS/BEIRUT: The first forum on coordinating humanitarian and relief efforts called for setting up an e-platform to gather national and humanitarian organizations to organize hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey. This came on Sunday during a meeting organized by Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization (ARCO), in the presence of Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) and Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) in Gaziantep city, southeast of Turkey. The conferees stressed the importance of this e-platform as a small operations room to achieve the clear goals, and field integration and coordination as well as make quick responses, share information and meet urgent requirements of the refugees. The podium will be linked to endeavors made by other international organizations so as to unify the current efforts in the field.

The TRC said in a speech that it would take charge of activating the platform's activities that will gather executive and donor bodies of relief organizations on the ground. TRC added that its recent participation in alleviating suffering of people in the Syrian city of Aleppo helped it to put a concept for coordinating relief aid for helping needy people and refugees. Secretary General of ARCO Dr Saleh Al-Sohaibani expressed his appreciation to all bodies and societies working on aiding Syrian refugees, mainly in Turkey. He affirmed that the accelerated tragedy in Syria prompted bodies in

humanitarian field to react quickly, indicating that the matter requires further coordination to meet all needs of refugees amid difficult conditions, especially in winter. He referred to humanitarian efforts by TRC, KRCS and QRCS aimed to meet needs of the refugees and needy people in line with a certain mechanism.

Addressing relief organizations and societies, he said: "We support you and put our hands into your hands to work together on setting priorities to ensure the delivery of aid completely to the refugees and coordinate with organizations working in this field for providing relief and humanitarian aid for them." He expressed his hope for achieving fruitful coordination with KRCS, emphasizing that responding to attend this meeting is a successful step in achieving the message, and saving much efforts and money.

Earlier on Sunday, a team dispatched by Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) to the Syrian-Turkish border regions has met a number of Syrians who fled war-torn Syria, examining their living conditions away from home and pressing needs. Musaad Al-Enezi, the head of the KRCS mission in Turkey, told KUNA on Sunday that the society's field team met earlier today with a number of Syrian refugees, who spoke about their requirements for housing, medicines and heating. The KRCS has dispatched the team to the frontier areas to examine conditions of Syrians settling in several

camps straddling the border line. The society is coordinating with Turkish and Qatari philanthropic societies to facilitate delivery of the humanitarian aid to the Syrians, namely those who fled Aleppo.

Meanwhile, KRCS has distributed 5,000 liters of diesel to 250 Syrian families settling in the northern mountainous region of Akkar. The help came at high time, with temperature in the Lebanese mountain ebbing to zero, Fahad Al-

Yagout, the head of a KRCS field team said in a statement yesterday. He lauded the Lebanese Red Cross for coordinating with the society to deliver relief supplies to the Syrian refugees in remote areas, braving heard weather conditions and heavy snow blocking many main routes. Many of the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in squalid conditions and poorly-built shanty towns in the country.



BEIRUT: Refugees collect diesel fuel to be distributed by KRCS to Syrians in Lebanon.



KILIS: An official speaks during a forum held on coordinating humanitarian and relief efforts for Syrian refugees.— KUNA

MINERVA LIMITED JOINS HORECA 2017

KUWAIT: Minerva Limited Company for General Trading announced its intention to join over 70 other participants who are taking part in the 2017 Horeca Kuwait exhibition, which is due to be held on January 19-18, 2017 at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref.



Abdullah Al-Harz

Abdullah Abdul Redha Al-Harz, Minerva's Deputy Board Chairman And Managing Director, said that Horeca plays a major role in helping regional companies communicate directly with customers, adding that it opens new channels for the hospitality and food industries' businesses. "Taking part in such exhibitions help explore customers' tastes and demands," he

explained. "It also opens the door for holding bilateral deals with other companies, and to discuss new trends

in the business." Further, Harz added that Minerva invites major distributors to explore Japanese and Asian fresh and frozen food products, in addition to a large variety of high quality food products imported from the United States and Europe. Harz also noted that Minerva plans to display a number of exclusive products at the exhibition, including Barakat Fresh Juices, live cooking of Italian Pizza by T G Professional's top chefs, a live show by the American GFC for Japanese cuisine, in addition to a live show for Korean cuisine by CG Company.

The 2017 Horeca Kuwait exhibition takes place under auspices of the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, and is organized by Leaders Group in collaboration with the Hospitality Services Company.

28 RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS PENDING

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) said yesterday that it is currently working on residential projects at a total cost of more than KD 645 million. PAHW has undertaken projects dealing with residential compounds in Jaber Al-Ahmad city, Deputy Secretary General of PAHW's Implementation Department Ali Al-Habail said in a statement to the press. Moreover, he noted that the projects comprise residential compounds, housing units and infrastructure development.

On the housing units, the PAHW official said that work has begun on a total of 7,798 projects in the areas of Abdullah Al-Mubarak, Wafra and Abu Halifa, in addition to 369 units in Sulabikhat and 319 residential compounds in Sabah Al-Ahmad. He also noted that 237 lots have been designated for new apartments in the areas of Sabah Al-Ahmad and Wafra.— KUNA



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Crime

Report

ROYAL, HUSBAND INVOLVED IN DISPUTE

KUWAIT: Three citizens insulted a ruling family member and her Saudi husband and damaged her car following a dispute over a parking spot in front of a restaurant in Funaitees. A complaint was lodged at Adan police station. The three citizens who escaped were later arrested and are being interrogated.

Ingrate son

A citizen in Qasr told police that her son beat her, and lodged a complaint. Police attempted to call the suspect several times but he did not respond. The case was sent to detectives to search for the suspect and arrest him for questioning.

Man abducts children

A Jordanian man abducted his children from his ex-wife, so she called Nugra police to make him return the children. The woman told police the father took the children during a visitation and did not return them. When she called him, he hung up on her. The woman has custody of the children. Detectives arrested the man after he attempted to escape.

KD 600 stolen

A 27-year-old citizen told police that KD 600 was stolen from her bank account. She said she received a call from a local number, and the man on the phone told her she had won KD 20,000 and asked for her account number and PIN code. The victim obliged, only to receive a message that KD 600 was withdrawn from her account.

Search for maid

Waha police placed the name of an Asian maid on the wanted list after her sponsor accused her of stealing items worth KD 8,000. Forensics experts went to the house to collect evidence. Investigations are ongoing.



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) sponsored the third ideal family protection festival and second exhibition for people with special needs, which was organized by Jahra Governorate recently.



النباء

Al-Anbaa

SYRIA AND MISCALCULATIONS

By Salah Al-Sayer

An old saying goes like "He who gets bitten by a snake, is terrified by a rope on the floor". This well-known saying perfectly applies to the development in some Arab countries including Syria, whose revolution was initially backed and supported by everyone. They all prayed and called for support, which is normal and logical, as people tend to help the weak and helpless in distress. However, such compassion and support existed before things were cleared up and ambiguity about the Arab Spring subsided, revealing its shameful and evil side in more than one Arab country, where people realized that somebody had been stealing their revolutions and that they had miscalculated things. They then became very skeptical and minds are in a conflict with feelings.

There have been domestic conflicts in many countries that witnessed the Arab Spring. There were conflicts amongst families and divisions, who then started exchanging rockets instead of points of view for very well-known reasons. The jihadist groups, which represent the military wing of political Islam, gasp about achieving their dream at the expense of the entire society, which pays the price of their

disappointment. This is happening in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, and this is why everyone (locally, regionally and internationally) fears that this might happen in Syria as well. We have to reject the saying 'IS is here to stay and expand' and knock down a statelet to build a state.

Like everyone else, I feel terribly sorry for the situation in Syria, particularly in Aleppo and the disasters befallen on its people. I also call for helping the wounded and presenting humanitarian aid to them. The killers should be indicted. Yet, I would also like to bring to your attention the Syrian rope that looks like a snake to beholders, which reminds me of a tweet I recently read: "If you want to know the truth about what happened in Aleppo, check who organized the demonstration."

The blogger here refers to the demonstration organized in Kuwait outside the Russian Embassy, where the majority protesting there were fanatics and fundamentalists, which reminds me of a poet who wrote that if you want to know someone better, check whom he mingles with. May the Almighty help and protect the Syrian people.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

الجريدة

Al-Jarida

CONSTRUCTIVE CHAOS THROUGH PROXY WARS

By Hassan Al-Essa

In his book 'Shadow Wars, The Secret Struggle for The Middle East', Christopher Davidson quoted a militant speaking in an interview with The Guardian, saying that Bashar Al-Assad wanted the opposition to be radical, and if peaceful street demonstrations had continued, his regime would have toppled within a few months. The militant added that Assad released Mohammed Al-Joulani of Al-Qaeda, the real backbone of jihadists. He also released Awwad Makhlof, who later became an IS representative. Similarly, Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh released Al-Qaeda members to describe his opposition as terrorists.

Assad did not stop at creating a monster. GCC states and charity groups in these states used millions of dollars to fight the sectarian Alawite regime in Syria, as Gulf militants support the revolution and are against the Alawite minority that has been ruling Syria. Thus, our conservative countries showed keenness and support to the Syrian revolution, as if these states spearheaded the political change starting with the Arab Spring. They never supported counter revolutions and helped kill the Spring on inception to avoid setting examples for further regime changes.

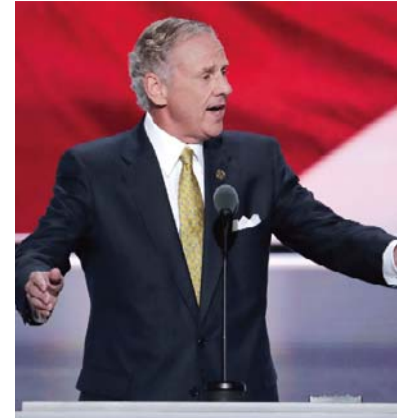
Billions poured in with the excuse of supporting moderate rebels in Syria such as the Free Syrian Army, while this army shrunk and its troops merged with militants, especially after corruption prevailed in the areas it ran, with the eventual result that Nusra Front and other jihadist groups took over. Yes, we feel sorry for the death and destruction in Aleppo and other Syrian cities. We are angry with Iran, Russia and Hezbollah's interference in Syria as if they are nothing but humanitarians supporting 'moderate' rebels in that war-stricken country.

It is as if we are not responsible for shedding the blood of civilians including women and children when our charity groups supported religious powers that used civilians as human shields and took them as hostages to be used in their war against the regime. We do shed tears for the people of Aleppo today, as it became easy to blame others like the Syrian regime for everything and kept silent while terrorist groups beheaded people, blew up churches and stole historic documents.

Does anyone remember the Palestinian cause? Have we forgotten the dream of establishing a Palestinian state? So, greetings to this constructive chaos unfolding in the form of sectarian proxy wars. —Translated by Kuwait Times



KUWAIT: A team from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) recently visited the Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, which is affiliated to the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The team consisted of 75 students from 11 Arab countries.



Trump supporter succeeds Haley

DR CONGO CHRISTMAS SLAUGHTER LEAVES 35 DEAD

Page 10

Page 9



SOCHI: People lay flowers along the pier in this Black Sea city yesterday, a day after a Russian military plane crashed on its way to Syria. — AFP

PARTS OF CRASHED RUSSIAN PLANE FOUND

PILOT ERROR, TECHNICAL FAULT MAIN THEORIES • NO EVIDENCE OF FOUL PLAY FOUND

SOCHI: Russian rescuers found yesterday the first parts of the Syria-bound military plane that plunged into the Black Sea, as officials dismissed terrorism as a possible cause of the crash that killed all 92 people on board. The Tu-154 jet, whose passengers included more than 60 members of the internationally-renowned Red Army Choir, was heading to Russia's military base in Syria when it went down off the coast of the resort city of Sochi shortly after take-off on Sunday.

Investigators have yet to confirm the cause of the crash, but officials said that an act of terror was not being considered as a possible explanation, despite the plane and its black boxes still being underwater. A spokeswoman for the Sochi-based search and rescue branch of the emergency ministry confirmed that parts of the plane had been found underwater. "The debris is at the depth of 27 metres one mile from shore," spokeswoman Rimma Chernova told AFP. The Russian military added that divers had retrieved "two elements of the plane's control mechanism."

Authorities have said that the search operation would continue overnight. Russia's federal security service said it is looking into four suspected causes of the crash, which do not include terrorism. "No signs or facts pointing to a possible act of terror have been received at this time," Russia's Federal Security Service said in a statement carried by national news agencies. The probe is focusing on a pilot error, a technical fault, bad fuel and a foreign object in the engine as the four main scenarios, it added.

Thousands searching
 The military has cordoned off part of the Sochi shore, with sol-

diers standing in a chain and motorboats participating in the search regularly unloading at the pier, an AFP photographer reported. More than three thousand people are racing to find the remaining bodies and debris in a massive operation that includes 45 vessels, planes, helicopters and drones, along with divers and remotely-operated deep-water machines. Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said some of the bodies could have already been carried off by the "strong current" to Abkhazia, the separatist region of Georgia, and some of its own rescue workers have joined the search operation.

Along with the first 10 bodies, 86 body fragments were brought to the Russian capital for DNA analysis, defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said. He said searchers have finished looking over the on-land territory around the crash site while divers are working over an area with a radius of 500 m.

Choir 'orphaned'

The Tu-154 jet went down on Sunday morning minutes after taking off at 5:25 am (0225 GMT) from Sochi's airport, where it had stopped to refuel after flying out from the Chkalovsky military aerodrome in the Moscow region. Onboard were 64 members of the Alexandrov Ensemble - the army's official musical group, also known as the Red Army Choir - and their conductor Valery Khalilov. "The ensemble has been orphaned by a third," said state channel Rossiya.

The choir was set to perform for Russian troops at the Hmeimim airbase in Syria, which has been used to launch air strikes in support of Moscow's ally President Bashar Al-Assad. "These people were flying to

Syria to support and wish happy holidays to those who are serving their military duty there," Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said after opening a government meeting, which held a moment of silence.

Other passengers included military officers, journalists and popular charity worker Yelizaveta Glinka, also known as Doctor Liza, who had been flying with a cargo of medical supplies for a hospital in the coastal city of Latakia. Another passenger was the head of the defense ministry's culture department Anton Gubankov, who worked to popularise the armed forces, including by authoring the song "Polite People" which honored special forces officers who oversaw the annexation of Crimea.

President Vladimir Putin ordered a national day of mourning yesterday, with state television flashing black and white pictures of the victims across the screen while entertainment programs were cancelled. People brought flowers to improvised memorials at the port in central Sochi and the city's airport, as well as to the Moscow headquarters of the Red Army Choir and the office of Fair Aid, the NGO that Glinka headed, which primarily worked with Moscow's homeless.

"I know all of them. I cannot believe it, can't collect myself," said Vladimir Kuznetsov, a former member of the Alexandrov Ensemble who came to pay his respects. "They knew us all over the world, we went everywhere," he said of the troupe, holding a candle in a plastic cup. Tu-154 aircraft have been involved in a number of accidents in the past, including the April 2010 crash killing then-Polish president Lech Kaczynski and his delegation. They are no longer used by commercial airlines in Russia. — AFP

OMAN APPEALS COURT REVOKES BAN ON AZAMN DAILY: LAWYER

MUSCAT: An appeals court yesterday lifted a ban on Azamn newspaper which was forced to close in August after it published an article alleging government corruption, the paper's lawyer said. The court also reduced prison sentences handed down by a lower court to editor-in-chief Ibrahim Al-Maamari and his deputy Yousef Al-Haj. They were arrested on July 28, two days after the paper published an article accusing public officials of corruption and interfering in judicial decisions.

The authorities shut down the paper indefinitely in a decision later confirmed by judicial authorities, and the journalists were tried and sentenced to three years in prison each. They were accused of "undermining the prestige of the state and misusing the Internet", according to the charge sheet.

But yesterday, the appeals court lifted the ban on Azamn and reduced the sentences to six months in jail for Maamari and one year for Haj, lawyer Yacoub Al-Harithi said. Maamari and Haj, who were released on bail in October, will appeal the latest sentencing, sources close to the pair said.

Ten international rights groups had urged Sultan Qaboos to revoke the closure order and end a crackdown by the authorities on journalists and activists. A joint statement by the 10, including Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists, said "the harsh sentences are a clear attempt to hinder the work of journalists and to curtail the rights of freedom of expression in Oman". — AFP

The biggest family entertainment event is now open

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16 KILLED IN MEXICO DURING CELEBRATIONS

SOME BEHEADED, OTHERS TORTURED

ACAPULCO, Mexico: Sixteen people were killed during Christmas holiday celebrations in Mexico's main drug-trafficking states and six human heads were found in one location, officials said. A gang slaughtered seven people - including three police officers - at a family celebration in the violent southern state of Guerrero, police told AFP. The massacre occurred early Christmas Day outside a house in the village of Puente del Rey, where the gunmen shot dead the six men and one woman, aged 24 to 54.

Those killed were three brothers, their father, their uncle, and a man and a woman who had been invited to the home. Three of the victims were police officers, a regional security ministry official said.

In Chihuahua - which borders the United States and has, like Guerrero, endured brutal drug-related violence - nine people were killed during Christmas celebrations, authorities said. Five of them died in Ciudad Juarez, including three women who were first tortured and a man whose dismembered

remains were found in an abandoned trunk. In the western state of Michoacan six human heads were found, according to the local prosecutor's office. Authorities have not identified the remains, which have been transferred to a forensic office for analysis. The heads were found near the border with Jalisco, where the powerful Jalisco Nueva Generacion cartel operates. That gang is known for clashing with rival criminals in neighboring Michoacan state, where the Knights Templar drug cartel once held sway. Cartels have been burying their victims in hidden graves across the country for years, and authorities regularly find human remains.

Guerrero recently earned international infamy as a region where 43 students in 2014 went missing, and were presumably murdered, at the hands of corrupt police working for criminals. The government says that since 2006 more than 170,000 people have been killed and more than 28,000 have been reported missing. The data does not indicate which cases are related to organized crime. —AFP



MANDAN, North Dakota: Mandan firefighters Shane Weltkol (left) and Chad Nicklos clear accumulating snow from outside the firehouse in downtown Mandan as the Christmas Day blizzard intensifies on Sunday. —AP

BLIZZARDS, ICE STORMS WREAK HAVOC ACROSS NORTH PLAINS

CHICAGO: Travel conditions remained hazardous as a winter storm swept across much of the northern Great Plains Monday, with blowing and drifting snow creating near-zero visibility on some roads. The combination of freezing rain, snow and high winds that forced the shutdown Sunday of vast stretches of highways in the Dakotas continued into Monday morning, and authorities issued no-travel warnings for much of North Dakota.

The storm also has caused widespread power outages in the Dakotas, Nebraska and western Iowa. As of 1 am yesterday, the South Dakota Rural Electric Association was reporting 10,231 "member-consumer-owners" were without power. In Nebraska, high winds were cited for hundreds of power outages in central and eastern portions of the state. "Between the ice and

snow, and winds howling like crazy, there will be nothing moving" until late afternoon Monday, said National Weather Service meteorologist Greg Gust in Grand Forks, North Dakota. "Then it's dig-out time." Gust's advice to travelers: "Stay put."

The weather service office in Bismarck, North Dakota, predicted snow accumulations of 8 to 15 inches in western parts of the state and thunderstorms in the central region. The North Dakota Transportation Department closed most of a 240-mile stretch of Interstate 94 Sunday night, from the Montana border to Jamestown. That stretch remained closed yesterday morning. Portions of US Highways 2, 52 and 281 were also closed because of snow, ice and "near zero visibility." Motorists who

drive past the roadblocks can be fined up to \$250.

No-travel advisories were issued for much of North Dakota, including the Williston, Dickinson, Minot, Bismarck, Jamestown, Valley City and Grand Forks areas. Authorities in South Dakota shut down Interstate 90 from the Wyoming border to Chamberlain - a distance of about 260 miles. Icy conditions in Aberdeen, South Dakota, prompted the Brown County Sheriff's Office to issue a no travel advisory. Aberdeen was also under a weather service flash flood warning after rain and snowmelt flooded major intersections in the city. The weather service warned anyone who "must travel" on icy roads in central Minnesota to have an extra flashlight, food and water. —AP

BRAZIL SAYS 19 FEARED DROWNED OFF BAHAMAS

BRASILIA: At least 19 Brazilian migrants who went missing last month are feared drowned off the Bahamas as they tried to cross illegally to the United States, officials in Brasilia said yesterday. "The fear is that the boat the Brazilians were traveling in went down in the Caribbean as it left the Bahamas," according to Brazilian authorities on the official government information website, Portal Brasil. The migrants' families have not heard from them since November 6, the Brazilian foreign ministry said. Brazilian media reports said there

were also dozens of other migrants aboard the boat, which officials suspect went down while attempting the roughly 80-km crossing between the Bahamas and the Florida coast. "The Brazilian embassy in Nassau, Bahamas and the Brazilian consulate in Miami, Florida are in contact with family members and Caribbean and US authorities to try to locate the missing persons," said Portal Brasil. The Brazilian foreign ministry said it was not ruling out the possibility that the migrants could be in prison or missing for other reasons. —AFP

TRUMP SUPPORTER SUCCEEDS HALEY

COLUMBIA: If South Carolina Gov Nikki Haley is confirmed as President-elect Donald Trump's pick for United Nations ambassador, her successor will be an entrenched veteran of the state's GOP who as attorney general decided not to prosecute then-Gov Mark Sanford for his spending after his disappearance to rendezvous with his mistress.

Lt Gov Henry McMaster, a 69-year-old known for his ability to disagree affably, would get the job he's long wanted in the governorship. His leadership offers a sharp contrast in style if not in substance from Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants and the nation's youngest governor at 44, who hasn't hesitated to publicly bash legislators who differed with her.

McMaster also was the nation's first statewide officeholder to back Trump for president, in an endorsement before the state's first-in-the-South presidential primary. The move stunned political observers, but McMaster's support never wavered, despite Democrats' calls to withdraw it. He told AP last month he never regretted the endorsement. "No ma'am, the more it went on, the more confident I was he was the man for the job," he said in his characteristic, genteel drawl. He's revealed little about what he would do as governor, and his office said he wasn't available for an interview.

But as a savvy political insider, McMaster has forged strong relationships statewide. He's "a commonsense conservative - very reasonable, never abrasive," said House Judiciary Chairman Greg Delleney. "He's a realist, and he's a gentleman, and I think he's going to work with the General Assembly to get things done." Legislators hope McMaster's entry could finally lead to passage of a comprehensive road-funding bill. Haley's threats to veto anything with a gas tax increase stymied efforts for years.

'Good Ol' Boy'

Questioned by reporters after a meeting earlier this month, McMaster said, "We will make progress, great progress," but gave no specifics. In the 2010 GOP primary, Haley trounced McMaster and two other better-known men partly by running against the "good ol' boy" network. Yet days after taking a 32-percentage-point beating, McMaster endorsed Haley with an exuberant "I'm all in!" and has been a close ally since. Beyond campaigning with her statewide, he arranged a series of private meetings between Haley and skeptical business leaders a week after she publicly chided the state Chamber of Commerce as a fan of bailouts and corporate welfare. Bakari Sellers, a Democrat who lost to McMaster in the 2014 lieutenant governor's race, contends McMaster "exemplifies the good ol' boy network in South Carolina." "Henry's been around a very long time. He's the status quo," said Sellers, a former state House member. "Courageous and visionary are not adjectives you use to describe Henry McMaster."

Other longtime political adversaries applaud McMaster's impending move. "Henry is somebody who wants to do the right thing and move the state forward," said former state Democratic Party Chairman Dick Harpootlian, who's not one to pull punches. "If a good ol' boy means somebody who remembers his friends and has a genial approach to governing, then I would take that as a compliment. He's not going to rant and rave and pick fights. He's not going to denigrate people publicly."

McMaster began his political career in 1973 as an aide to then-US Sen Strom Thurmond. He led the state Republican Party for 10 years, while the GOP took control of the Legislature. He frequently boasts of being President Ronald Reagan's first appointment for US attorney in 1981 and launched "Operation Jackpot", an investigation into international drug smuggling that resulted in more than 100 convictions. As state attorney general, he created a task force of officers posing as children to catch online sex predators and built an attorney network to prosecute criminal domestic violence. In 2010, he helped lead a multi-state challenge of President Barack Obama's health care overhaul that allowed states to opt out of its intended Medicaid expansion - as South Carolina has steadfastly done. In 2009, McMaster asked the state Ethics Commission to investigate Sanford after his disappearance to rendezvous with his mistress in Argentina brought scrutiny to his travels.

After Sanford paid \$74,000 to resolve 37 civil charges, McMaster opted not to pursue criminal charges, saying Sanford's use of first-class tickets, travel on state aircraft and questionable campaign reimbursements didn't rise to a criminal level - and it was time for the state to move on. A month after that announcement, McMaster lost to Haley. Legislators say his decades-long relationship with many of them is an asset. GOP Senate Education Chairman John Courson, who met McMaster while at the University of South Carolina in the 1960s, said it helps that McMaster "understands the personalities in the Senate." —AP



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A LOOK AT RUSSIAN ENSEMBLE WIPED OUT BY CRASH

MOSCOW: The Russian military choir that lost most of its singers in a plane crash Sunday is often described as the Kremlin's "singing weapon." The Alexandrov Ensemble, sometimes referred to as the Red Army choir, was founded in the 1920s. It won global fame with its patriotic repertoire during Soviet times, but in recent years has sought to cater to modern audiences. Many of its performances have gone viral, including a rousing rendition of Daft Punk's "Get Lucky" by singers in full military dress at the opening of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Sixty-four members of the ensemble, including director Valery Khalilov, were heading from Sochi to Russia's air base in Syria to perform a New Year's concert for troops when their plane crashed into the Black Sea on Sunday. All 92 people on board are presumed dead.

"It's difficult to grasp the scale of that tragedy," Moscow city's culture department head Alexander Kibovsky said in televised remarks. "They were raising pride for our culture, our country, across the entire world." As word of the crash spread Sunday, people placed bouquets of flowers outside the ensemble's Moscow headquarters.

"We all loved this ensemble," said Moscow resident Mark Novikov. "We valued it. They are our brothers, our friends, our colleagues." The 186-member ensemble includes a band and a dancing troupe along with the choir that had about 70 singers. Viktor Yeliseyev, head of the rival choir of the Russian National Guard, said most of the Alexandrov Ensemble's singers were on the plane. Among the few who stayed back was soloist Vadim Ananyev, whose wife just delivered a baby and pleaded with him

to remain at home to help. The couple has three small children. "I feel as if I were hit over the head," he said. "I still can't believe it. They are telling me now I was born with a silver spoon." The Interfax news agency said another member of the choir was denied access to board at the last minute because his foreign passport has expired.

The choir was founded in 1928 by composer and conductor Alexander Alexandrov, and after his death in 1946 was led by his son, Boris Alexandrov. Alexandrov, who headed the choir for more than 40 years, made it famous worldwide. Pavel Kogan, the director of Moscow State Academic Symphonic Orchestra, described the choir as "a symbol of the country." "It was impossible to imagine what happened, even in a nightmare," he said, according to Snob online publication. — AP



MOSCOW: A woman places a photo of a victim as flowers are laid in tribute in front of the home stage building of the Alexandrov Ensemble (The Red Army Choir), in Moscow yesterday.—AFP



This file photo taken on July 16, 2016 shows a general view of the village of Buleusa. A militia from DR Congo's Nande ethnic group has killed 13 civilians including a child from the Hutu community in the restive North Kivu province, an official told AFP yesterday.—AFP

CHRISTMAS MASSACRES IN DR CONGO LEAVE 35 DEAD

TROOPS KILL 10 SOLDIERS FROM BURUNDI

GOMA, DR Congo: Attacks in villages and fighting between militias killed at least 35 people over the Christmas weekend in North Kivu, a majority Christian area in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The bloodshed began in Eringeti—a town 55 kilometres (35 miles) north of the regional hub Beni, which for two years has been hit by massacres killing hundreds, many of whom were hacked to death.

Rebels from The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) — dominated by puritanical Ugandan Muslims—killed 22 people after storming Eringeti on Saturday, regional official Amisi Kalonda told AFP. The toll climbed to 35 yesterday with the announcement that at least 13 Hutu civilians, mostly women and an eight-year-old girl, were killed on Sunday by a militia from the Nande ethnic group.

"The victims were all Hutu. There was an eight-year-old girl, a father and the rest were women," said local official Alphonse Mahano. They were killed around the village of Nyanzale, a Hutu majority community. The Nande and some other ethnic groups regard the Hutus as

outsiders because of their attachment to the majority ethnic group in neighboring Rwanda.

A string of attacks in the past year by both Hutu and Nande militia forces has deepened hatred between the communities. Hutu farmers have also been forced to abandon land further south because of high property costs and under pressure from major landowners.

Relentless bloodshed

Although Congolese officials have blamed the attacks on the ADF, several expert reports have suggested that other groups, including elements within the Congolese army, took part in some killings. When the Beni massacres began in October 2014, the ADF was quickly branded the culprit by both DR Congo authorities and MONUSCO, the UN mission in DR Congo.

More than two years on, Congolese authorities and the UN have been unable to protect civilians and the ADF remains the only official explanation—with the government insisting on a jihadist link to the killings. It comes as relations with the international community have

soured over President Joseph Kabila's refusal to step down despite his term ending on December 20.

Separately, the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) announced yesterday that its troops had killed 10 soldiers from neighboring Burundi after they crossed the border last week in pursuit of rebels.

"There were 10 deaths," Major Dieudonne Kajibwami, told AFP, following a previous statement that five bodies had been taken to Uvira, a lakeside town in the eastern South Kivu province.

Kivu is rich in natural, mainly mineral resources, such as gold, coltan and cassiterite, coveted by the telecommunications industry. Both south and north Kivu have rich agricultural and forestry resources.

North Kivu is one of the DRC's most densely populated areas. Tiny compared to the vast size of the country, the two provinces suffer not only because of fighting over their mineral resources but because of their proximity to an unstable border with Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, along with Tanzania. — AFP



PARIS: French President Francois Hollande (second left) listens to Vincent Bronze (left), the Director General of French elevators company ETNA France, next to French Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri (fourth left) and mayor of Taverny Florence Portelli (center) during his visit of the company yesterday in Taverny, near Paris.—AFP

FRAGILE UKRAINE TRUCE HOLDS FOR THIRD DAY

KIEV: A new indefinite truce in Ukraine held by a thread for a third day yesterday as both pro-Russian insurgents and Kiev reported clashes near a prized railroad hub but no deaths.

Ukraine and Russia-two ex-Soviet neighbours that are now sworn foes—agreed to the armistice Wednesday with the help of mediation from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The rebels signed on to the ceasefire Friday after some deliberation. Yet mortar and artillery fire has continued unabated without claiming any lives.

"Our positions came under attack 33 times since early Sunday," the Ukrainian military said in a statement. The insurgents' website said their side had come under fire from Ukrainian grenade launchers 62 times in the past day. Such weapons have been banned by a February 2015 peace agreement that both sides have long ignored. Kiev and its Western allies view the eastern separatists as Russian proxies who have been fighting for 31 months to destabilise the Ukrainian government and keep it dependent on the Kremlin's whims.

Moscow denies interfering in the conflict but international monitors have seen tanks and other heavy military equipment enter the Ukrainian war zone from Russia throughout the war.

March 2014 saw Russia annex Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in apparent retaliation for Kiev's ouster of the Moscow-backed president the preceding month. The latest truce came shortly after a week-long battle for control of positions near Debaltsevo—a railway hub that links the pro-Russian regions of Lugansk and Donetsk. Details are disputed but Kiev appears to have won back control of most regions around the town after an initial rebel assault. — AFP

SCHOLARS FRET ABOUT FATE OF 'HOLY GRAIL' GERMAN ABBEY BOOKS

ALTMUENSTER, Germany: It was filthy, cramped and in major disarray, but when art historian Eva Lindqvist Sandgren entered the library in Altmuenster Abbey, off-limits to all but the German monastery's nuns for more than five centuries, she immediately knew she was looking at a major treasure.

The dusty shelves held at least 500 books, by her estimate, including precious illuminated manuscripts from the 16th century, chants used by the uniquely women-led Bridgettine Order and processions bursting with colorful religious and ornamental decoration in their margins.

Unlike most Bridgettine libraries, the tomes had survived the Protestant Reformation, the 30 Years War and Germany's "secularization," when the state took most church property. It represents the most complete collection of the order known today. "I had entered a time capsule," said Lindqvist Sandgren, a senior lecturer at Sweden's Uppsala University.

Surprised by the spontaneous decision by Altmuenster's last remaining nun, Sister Apollonia Buchinger, to open the library, 20 scholars including Sandgren made plans to return and meticulously catalog the remarkable collection. But before they could, the Vatican ordered the abbey in the Bavarian town of 7,500 closed and locked up the library, which also contains some 2,300 statues, paintings and other works of art.

If plans go ahead to close it down, all of the abbey's property — the books, the artworks, the city block-sized abbey and the acres of forests and fields that make up the monastery grounds — would be turned over to the dioceses of Munich and Freising. Altmuenster is the end of a subway line from Munich, one of Germany's most expensive cities, and its land alone is thought to be worth tens of millions of euros (dollars) — assets that Sister Apollonia thinks the dioceses are eager to get their hands on.

Since 1496, the former Benedictine abbey in Altmuenster has housed a female religious order founded by Saint Bridget in Sweden in the 14th century. It is one of three monasteries of the original branch of the scholarly, monastic order operating today. But with its numbers in decline, Sister Apollonia now lives there alone. The Vatican requires at least three nuns to train novices to become nuns, prompting the decision to shut the abbey down.

The Franciscan nun the Vatican put in charge of the abbey's closure, Sister Gabriele Konrad, says the library's collection is just being kept safe but she's refused to grant the scholars or anyone else access to the books. "The value of the library is the ensemble, because it's never been taken

apart," said Corine Schlieff, an art historian at Arizona State University who visited the library with Sandgren. "If this should be taken apart and divided up between books that collectors would give tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars for and those only of interest to scholars, it would lose a lot of its value."

Schlieff, Sandgren and other academics have written an open letter to the Vatican, Sister Gabriele and the Munich dioceses urging that the library be kept together and made available to the public and offering to catalog it.

Sister Gabriele and the Munich dioceses insist there is no plan to sell the books, and that their experts are perfectly qualified to handle them. Munich-Freising Vicar General Msgr. Peter Beer dismissed speculation of any land-and-treasures grab by the dioceses. "There's a false impression that we're taking in riches and gems and gold and everything imaginable — that's nonsense," he told the AP at his office in Munich. "We are taking on costs more than anything."

Historical significance

His office also downplayed the library's potential value or historical significance, telling the AP it includes "a large number of antiphonaries from the 18th century, most in very used and some in damaged condition," and that six antiphonaries — books containing religious chants — from the Middle Ages have "already been studied by scholars."

That's made the group of scholars who wrote the open letter and others even more suspicious. From the hundreds of photographs they took, they know there's much more — including an illuminated manuscript from the 1500s in Belgium, which might be expected to fetch 100,000 euros (\$105,000) or more if sold to a private collector, said Schier. Volker Schier, another expert from Arizona State University, noted that even financially insignificant books are historically important. Ledgers, cookbooks and even antiphonaries help tell how the nuns lived over the centuries.

"Altmuenster is the holy grail," he said. Beer bristled at the offer of help from the group of scholars. "You can be assured that we do not need any help from the US to understand how to treat cultural assets of significance for Europe. We have a slightly longer history and slightly longer experience," Beer said. The dioceses plan to digitize all books dating from before 1803 and make them available online for researchers — but Schlieff says that's not enough. "Digitization is laudable, but it never replaces the books themselves, which now need to be carefully studied and catalogued," she said. — AP



The undated reproduction shows a religious book which was found in library of the abbey in Altmuenster, southern Germany.—AP

BALKAN STATES ILLEGALLY PUSH BACK MIGRANTS: UNHCR

BELGRADE: Illegal deportations of migrants seeking to reach western Europe along the so-called Balkans route have been on the rise, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) warned yesterday.

Some 1,000 people from the Middle East, Asia and Africa "were expelled in November alone along the Balkans route... more than before", the UNHCR spokeswoman in Serbia, Mirjana Milenkovska, told AFP. Hundreds of thousands of migrants took the Balkans route through Macedonia and Serbia, Croatia and Hungary as they tried to reach western Europe from Greece before it was largely shut down in March.

Non-governmental human rights organisations and activists also warned that an increasing number of legally-regis-

tered migrants were being "illegally deported" from Serbia to Bulgaria and Macedonia.

On December 17 "a seven-member Syrian family, including a two-year old child, 16-year old girl and two women almost froze after being left in a forest in -11 Celsius degrees (12.2 Fahrenheit) to walk towards Bulgaria some one kilometre (half a mile) away," an activist said.

"The family was registered in Belgrade and on its way to a refugee centre, when they were taken off the bus by a police or army unit that tore their documents," said Gordan Paunovic of the Info Park group that provides help to refugees. They were eventually rescued by a regular police officer from a nearby town who was alerted by activists, Paunovic said. — AFP

INDONESIA MARKS TSUNAMI 12 YEARS AGO WITH PRAYERS



A woman wipes her tears as she offers prayers to loved ones at a mass grave in Aceh yesterday to mark the tsunami which devastated Aceh province 12 years ago in one of the worst natural disasters in human history. — AFP

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia: Thousands of Indonesians prayed for their loved ones at mass graves and mosques yesterday to mark a tsunami which devastated Aceh province 12 years ago today, one of the worst natural disasters in human history.

Some 170,000 lives were lost in the country when a 9.1-magnitude "megathrust" quake struck Aceh, a predominantly Muslim province in the northern tip of Sumatra island, bringing about massive waves that also hit coastal areas as far away as Somalia. "I came here every year to pray for my children, daughter-in-law, and their three children," Maryam, who goes by one name, told AFP, at the Ulee Lheue mass grave, where 14,800 people were buried.

The bodies of her family were never found but 65-year-old Maryam, who survived by holding on to a tree trunk, was certain her family were buried in the mass grave as they lived in the vicinity at the time of the tsunami. Graves across the province, including in Siron in Aceh Besar district where more than 46,000 were buried, were crowded with people

who scattered flowers on the earth where they believe the remains of their loved ones lie to rest.

Survivors then gathered at a mass prayer in Ulee Lheue mosque, one of the few sea-front mosques still standing in the region after the tsunami.

"The main reason to commemorate the earthquake and tsunami disaster was not to open old wounds," acting Aceh governor Soedarmo told the mosque attendance. Indonesia sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," where the meeting of continental plates causes strong seismic activity, and is frequently hit by earthquakes. The tsunami commemoration comes just weeks after a strong 6.5-magnitude shallow quake struck inland in Pidie Jaya, a district in Aceh, killing more than 100 people, levelling hundreds of buildings and displacing nearly 84,000 people.

400 bodies unidentified

At least 400 victims of Asia's 2004 tsunami that killed 226,000 people remain unidentified in Thailand 12 years on, police said yesterday. The 9.15 mag-

nitude Dec. 26 earthquake triggered a tsunami across the Indian Ocean in one of the biggest natural disasters in history.

Thailand, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka were among the worst hit countries. Some 5,395 people were killed in Thailand, among them about 2,000 foreign tourists.

"Since the 2004 tsunami, authorities have contacted between 4,000 to 5,000 relatives to come and receive bodies. There are about 400 bodies that we cannot identify," Anand Boonkerkaew, deputy superintendent of Takua Pa district police in Phang Nga province, told Reuters.

Thailand's tourist high season is in full swing and in much of the area affected by the tsunami, it is business as usual. New hotels have replaced those flattened by the wall of water. Thailand expects a record 32.4 million foreign tourists this year. Critics have said Thailand's tsunami warning system remains inadequate, partly because it isn't maintained properly. The government has said it is in good order. — Reuters

THAI POLICE CHARGE MAN IN HACKING ATTACKS ON GOVT SITES

BANGKOK: Police in Thailand yesterday charged a suspect with participating in recent hacking attacks on government computers that were billed as a protest against a restrictive law governing internet use.

Natdanai Kongdee, 19, was one of nine people arrested in connection with the attacks that blocked access to some websites and accessed non-public files, Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said.

Police said he was a low-level hacker rather than a leader and had confessed to participating in the attacks. They said he belonged to several online groups specializing in hacking activities.

Natdanai was present at yesterday's news conference but did not speak. He was charged with gaining unauthorized access to police data, along with illegal possession of firearms and marijuana, allegedly found when police searched his house.

The legal status of the other people arrested was not explained. Groups promoting the attacks say they are in protest of passage of revisions to Thailand's Computer Crime Act, which would restrict freedom of speech and facilitate targeting political dissidents. The new law would allow Thai authorities to intercept private communication and to censor websites without a court order.

In addition to the leaking of documents, government sites have been subject to distributed denial of service, or DDoS, attacks, where access is denied by overloading the online server with requests. A Facebook group encouraged a simple version of such attacks by suggesting people repeatedly reload them by pressing the F5 key.

"He (Natdanai) was naive to believe the (Facebook) group and hack into the system," Siripong Timula of the police's technology department said. The Facebook group, with the name Citizens Against Single Gateway, earlier this month called for a "cyberwar."

Its name reflects activists' concerns about plans for a single gateway through which all international internet traffic would pass. The government claims such a system is necessary for national security, but opposition from many sectors has made the government evasive about whether it plans to implement a single gateway. The group on Dec. 19 claimed responsibility for temporarily bringing down the Thai defense ministry's website.

Since then, it has claimed to have brought down websites for Thailand's military, customs department, police, foreign affairs ministry and additional government websites. Other hackers, operating as part of the informal activist network Anonymous, have been posting data they say is from government computers. Police said yesterday that their systems are still "well protected" and that the attacks constitute minor hacks. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said, "If we do not have any laws or write it down to make it clearer and if they continue to do this, what can we do?" Should hackers simply be allowed to poke into personal data, he asked reporters rhetorically.

"We've talked about it many times. Everything is passed. Talk about something else," said Prayuth, who is noted for his brusque manner of speaking. — AP



SEOUL: The empty seat (center) of Choi Soon-Sil, a long-time friend of South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, is seen during a parliamentary probe into a scandal as lawmakers set up a special hearing to question Choi at the detention centre where Choi is being held in Uiwang, south of Seoul yesterday. — AFP

LAWMAKERS QUESTION SOUTH KOREA'S ELUSIVE 'RASPUTIN'

PARK SNUBS TELEVISED HEARING

SEOUL: A handful of South Korean lawmakers yesterday finally got to question the woman at the heart of the impeachment crisis surrounding President Park Geun-Hye, after she snubbed a televised hearing at her detention centre. Choi Soon-Sil, a long-time friend of the president, has repeatedly ignored several summons to appear before a parliamentary committee probing a corruption scandal that triggered Park's impeachment earlier this month.

So the lawmakers came to her, with the committee organising a special hearing yesterday morning with TV cameras inside the detention facility where Choi is awaiting trial on charges of extortion and abuse of power. Choi initially refused to leave her cell, but eventually agreed to meet eight selected members of the committee behind closed doors.

Citing the lawmakers, Yonhap news agency reported that Choi denied all her charges,

including allegations that she colluded with the president and set up two dubious foundations that were later used for her personal gain. Choi, however, said she was prepared to serve a life sentence and apologised to the public for "causing confusion", according to Yonhap.

She said she was feeling "dizzy" both physically and mentally and refused to answer most of the lawmakers' questions during the meeting that lasted nearly three hours, Yonhap said. Two former top presidential aides being held in a separate facility also refused to appear for questioning.

There are no legal grounds for forcing witnesses to attend a parliamentary hearing, although they can be held in contempt and face a maximum five-year prison term for not doing so. The National Assembly voted to impeach Park earlier this month, stripping away her substantial executive powers. She remains presi-

dent in name, pending a decision by the Constitutional Court on whether to ratify parliament's impeachment motion.

Earlier Monday, prosecutors seized documents during an early-morning raid on the central Seoul residence of Kim Ki-Choon, who served as Park's chief of staff between 2013-15.

Kim has a long association with Park's family, having also served her father-the late military strongman Park Chung-Hee who led the country for 18 years after seizing power in a 1961 military coup. Those close ties have led to allegations that he must have been aware of the inappropriate influence that Choi-dubbed a "female Rasputin" by the local media-wielded over the president.

Park allegedly leaked confidential documents to her friend, and allowed her to meddle in state affairs-including the appointments of senior officials. — AFP



BANGKOK: Natdanai Kongdee (third from right) is interviewed at the police headquarters in Bangkok yesterday. Police in Thailand have charged 19-year-old Kongdee in connection with a series of recent hacking attacks on government computers that were billed as a protest against a restrictive law governing internet use. — AP

TRAFFICKERS GET LIFE TERM IN INDIA FOR CHOPPING OFF LABOURERS' HANDS

BHUBANESWAR: Eight human traffickers found guilty of torturing and chopping off the hands of two labourers have received life prison sentences and hefty fines, a prosecutor said on Sunday, hoping the severity of the punishment would deter others.

Prosecutor Dharendra Nath Patra said the court in Bhubaneswar heard how the traffickers chopped off the hands of Nilambar Dhangdamajhi and Dayalu Nial in Odisha state on Dec. 15, 2013.

The two men were among of a group of 12 labourers who had taken money from labour agent Parvesh Duni in exchange for working for him but quickly realised he had trapped them. When the men found out they were being taken to Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India instead of Chhattisgarh state in central India as expected they tried to escape but were caught and locked up for hours before their hands were chopped off. News of the torture and confinement triggered widespread outrage and made national headlines in India which is estimated to have the highest number of modern day slaves of any country.

Dhangdamajhi died on Sept. 21 this year after years of illness. "Under the sentence Parvesh Duni and other traffickers will serve a life term in prison. They will also have to pay fines," the prosecutor told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "This is a lesson for all."

Amidst the publicity, in 2014 the Supreme Court intervened and asked the Odisha government to fast track charges against the traffickers and provide rehabilitation for the two men whose stories are typical of many trapped in debt bondage in India. Modern slavery has become a catch-all term to describe human trafficking, debt bondage, forced marriage and other slave-like exploitation with an estimated 46 million people in slavery around the world. — Reuters



LAHORE: Released Indian fishermen wait to go to their home country in Lahore yesterday. Pakistani officials said 220 Indian fishermen have been released from a jail in Karachi and will be handed over to Indian authorities at the Wagha border yesterday. — AP

INDIA POLICE ARREST 4 OVER US WOMAN'S GANG-RAPE

NEW DELHI: Indian police yesterday arrested four men accused of drugging and raping an American tourist at a five-star hotel in New Delhi earlier this year, an officer said. The woman told police that she was part of a tour group visiting India in April when her local guide gave her a spiked bottle of water and raped her with four acquaintances inside her hotel room.

"We arrested four of them a few hours ago. And they, as in the tour guide, driver, cleaner and another hotel employee, have been charged with rape," Delhi police spokesman, Dependra Pathak, told AFP.

He said the victim, who returned to New Delhi last week, had already recorded her testimony in court and would be able to fly back home in a few days after identifying the suspects. Police launched a formal investigation earlier this month after the woman filed a complaint through an American charity. She has told local media in the past week that she had no memory

of the assault for nearly three months. "The first two nights I was drugged, physically assaulted and sexually assaulted," she told NDTV news network, covering her face with a scarf to hide her identity. "I had no memory of what happened to me while I was in India. I regained my memory three months later around the end of July and that's when I took action."

The assault in April was one of the latest in a series of sex attacks on foreigners in India, reigniting concerns about women's safety in the country. A 35-year-old Japanese tourist was raped in southern India last month. In June, five men were jailed for life for gang-raping a 52-year-old Danish tourist in New Delhi in 2014.

India introduced tough laws against sex offenders in the wake of the fatal gang-rape of a student in the capital in December 2012 that sparked mass street protests. But high levels of sexual violence against women continue. — AFP

INDONESIAN MILITANTS PLANNED NEW YEAR'S ASSAULT: POLICE

JAKARTA: Indonesian militants supporting Islamic State planned to attack a police post on New Year's eve with machetes and knives, a police spokesman said yesterday.

The plot was broken up after police arrested two of the would-be attackers who led them to their hideout, where police shot dead their two co-conspirators on Sunday after police said they tried to attack officers with machetes. "The four of them were planning to attack a police post in Purwakarta. They planned to attack on New Year's Eve,"

Rikwanto, a national police spokesman, told reporters, referring to a district about 100 km (60 miles) east of the capital, Jakarta.

Sunday's raid was the latest in a series over recent weeks that police say have disrupted attacks, raising concern that homegrown militants in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation are getting bolder. Police said last week that at least 14 people were being interrogated over 14 suicide bomb plots targeting the presidential palace in Jakarta and an another undisclosed location. — Reuters

JAPAN'S ABE DEPARTS FOR VISIT TO PEARL HARBOUR



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (center) speaks to reporters before departure for Hawaii at Tokyo's Haneda airport yesterday. Abe departed yesterday for Hawaii where he will visit Pearl Harbor with US President Barack Obama as the two countries highlight decades of post-World War II reconciliation. —AFP

TOKYO: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe departed yesterday for Hawaii where he will visit Pearl Harbor with US President Barack Obama as the two countries highlight decades of post-World War II reconciliation. Abe's visit to the site, which was bombed by Japan in a surprise attack in December 1941 that drew the United States into World War II, was announced earlier this month.

It follows a journey Obama made with him in May to the city of Hiroshima where a US plane dropped the world's first atom bomb as the war drew to a close in 1945.

"I am visiting Pearl Harbor in Hawaii to commemorate victims as the prime minister of Japan, as the representative of the Japanese people," Abe told reporters at Tokyo's Haneda airport. "We must not repeat the horror of war

ever again. Together with President Obama, I would like to express to the world this pledge for the future and the value of reconciliation."

The two leaders hope that their joint visits will underscore the alliance between their two nations forged in the years following the war. They will meet Tuesday in Honolulu for a summit before venturing together to Pearl Harbor to visit the wreck of the USS Arizona, where 1,177 sailors and Marines died. The ship's rusting remains are now a memorial.

The two-hour attack killed 2,403 Americans in all, injured more than 1,100 others and sank or heavily damaged eight US battleships. Officials have said that the purpose of Abe's visit is not to apologize but rather to pay homage to the victims and encourage historical reflection,

as Obama did in Hiroshima. It also comes at a delicate time with Obama due to hand over power to US President-elect Donald Trump next month.

The New York real-estate magnate sent shockwaves through Japan during the campaign when he appeared to question the US-Japan security alliance. He said that Japan should pay more to support US troops stationed in the country and could even consider developing its own nuclear weapons.

Though he later walked back on the comments, they jolted public opinion in the world's only country to ever be attacked with atomic bombs.

Abe became the first world leader to meet Trump after the election, rushing to New York to confirm the importance of the relationship. —AFP

CHRISTMAS TYPHOON LEAVES FOUR DEAD IN PHILIPPINES

8 FERRY CREWMEN STILL MISSING AS STORM LEAVES ARCHIPELAGO

LIGAO, Philippines: A powerful typhoon left at least four people dead and eight missing as it crossed the Philippine archipelago yesterday, spoiling the Christmas holidays with strong winds, heavy rains and destructive flooding. Nock-Ten made landfall on the eastern island province of Catanduanes with gusts of 235 kilometres (146 miles) an hour

Quezon province, electrocuting them, a police report said.

An anchored ferry went down off the coastal province of Batangas yesterday with eight crewmen still missing, said coast-guard officer Joy Villegas. Two people also died after suffering heart attacks during the storm but it was unclear if those deaths were direct-

The unusually late storm cut off electricity to millions and forced government agencies to order evacuations of whole communities in Bicol, marring the traditional Christmas celebrations in this largely Christian nation.

Wet Christmas

In the Bicol town of Ligao, many streets and surrounding farms were

though her own family was luckier.

"The floods (last night) only reached to our knees. Thank goodness the current wasn't that strong," she told AFP. "This was supposed to be a celebration but we cannot celebrate. This is a sad Christmas for us. No one (in the family) died but a lot of our neighbours' homes were washed away."

The disaster monitoring council said more than 12,000 people spent Christmas stuck at ports after authorities barred ferries from sailing due to the storm.

The council's spokeswoman Mina Marasigan also said hundreds of people in Bicol celebrated Christmas in evacuation centres where many had to make do with emergency food packs.

Some local officials had offered roast pigs—the traditional Filipino holiday fare—to entice people to go to the shelters, Marasigan said.

Manila spared

By late yesterday afternoon the typhoon had weakened, with wind gusts of 180 kilometres per hour, and was in the South China Sea heading west away from the country, government weather forecaster Genet Quitlong said. Nock-Ten had been expected to bring heavy rains and winds to Manila, but the city of 13 million residents was spared after the typhoon lost force as it crossed the eastern islands.

"It was like a blessing in disguise. Every time it hit land, its diameter lessened. It also lost moisture so it became weaker," Quitlong told AFP. Some 20 typhoons and storms strike the Philippines each year, routinely killing hundreds of people. Huge tsunami-like waves devastated the city of Tacloban and nearby areas when super typhoon Haiyan struck the central Philippines in November 2013, leaving 7,350 people dead or missing. —AFP



MANILA: Vehicles navigate a flood-prone area caused by rains from Typhoon Nock-Ten in Quezon city, north of Manila yesterday. —AP

on Christmas Day, ravaging the Bicol region and surrounding areas before moving west across the country. A couple perished in a flood while an elderly man was crushed to death by a falling wall, the governor of Albay province, Al Bichara, told local media. Another person was killed and two more were injured when the storm toppled a power line in

ly related to the typhoon, local government reports said.

More than 383,000 people were forced to flee their homes while over 80 domestic and international flights were cancelled due to the storm, the civil defence office said. The coast-guard on Sunday ordered beaches south of Manila to be cleared of holidaymakers by yesterday.

covered by ankle-deep water while some homes remained caked in mud left by flooding. Masseurse Erna Angela Pintor, 20, said she and her family spent a sleepless Christmas in fear as the strong winds ripped off part of their roof.

Neighbours living near a river sought refuge in their home as the waters rose to their chests, she said,

CHINA RESUMES TIES WITH SAO TOME IN TRIUMPH OVER TAIWAN

BEIJING: China and Sao Tome and Principe officially resumed diplomatic relations yesterday, in a triumph for Beijing over rival Taiwan after the African island nation abruptly broke away from the self-ruled island last week. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his counterpart from Sao Tome, Urbino Botelho, signed books at a ceremony in front of their flags at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. Wang said the re-establishment of relations would bring benefits to both countries and that they would hold exchanges in tourism, the media and other areas.

The move is a victory for Beijing, which considers the self-governing island of Taiwan a part of China's territory and has been outraged by suggestions by President-elect Donald Trump that he could rethink US policy that accepts this. Beijing and Taipei have competed for allies for much of the nearly seven decades since the end of China's civil war in 1949, when the defeated Nationalist government fled across the Taiwan Strait. Most of the world does not formally recognize Taiwan as a condition of maintaining relations with China. Sao Tome and Taiwan broke ties last week, leaving 21 countries and governments, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean, that have official ties with Taiwan. Taiwanese Foreign Minister David Lee last week accused Sao Tome of demanding "an astronomical amount of financial help," though he did not say how much.

Sao Tome and Principe is an island nation off the coast of central Africa with a population of almost 200,000. The impoverished former Portuguese colony relies heavily on foreign aid. Beijing suspended its relationship with Sao Tome in 1997 after the island nation established diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

In re-establishing relations with Beijing, Botelho said yesterday, "We want to redeem our mistakes in the past." He said he hoped that more Chinese businesses would invest in his

country and more Chinese tourists would visit. As its economic, military and political clout has grown, China has become more successful in pulling away governments in a bid to diplomatically isolate Taiwan, though some countries, including the United States, maintain strong unofficial ties with Taipei.

Relations have worsened between Beijing and Taipei since independence-leaning Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen was elected in January. In March, China established formal diplomatic ties with the small African nation of Gambia, which had severed relations with Taiwan in 2013. That was seen as a move toward abandoning the unspoken diplomatic truce between the sides that lasted eight years under Tsai's China-friendly predecessor.

Beijing suspended contact with the main Taiwan liaison body in June, blaming Tsai's refusal to endorse the concept of a single Chinese nation. While just a few countries and governments still have official ties with Taiwan, Beijing is eager to play up its latest addition after Trump suggested he might not adhere to the policy that recognizes only one China unless the US gains trade or other benefits, analysts say.

Wang Dong, a professor of international relations at Peking University, said Monday's re-establishment of diplomatic ties was a warning to Taiwan that Beijing has "a lot of countermeasures" up its sleeve should they pursue independence, as well as a warning to the United States. —AP



BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) shakes hands with his Sao Tome counterpart Urbino Botelho after signing an agreement in Beijing yesterday. —AFP



BEIJING: Figurines sit in front of a check-in desk for the ninth Chinese Catholic representative conference in Beijing yesterday. China said yesterday it will restart a conference of local Catholics, ending a years-long hiatus, as it expressed goodwill towards the Vatican after six decades of estrangement. —AFP

CHINA TO HOLD CATHOLIC CONFERENCE AFTER 6-YEAR HIATUS

BEIJING: China said yesterday it will restart a conference of local Catholics, ending a years-long hiatus, as it expressed goodwill towards the Vatican after six decades of estrangement. The country's roughly 12 million Catholics are divided between a government-run association, whose clergy are chosen by the Communist Party, and an unofficial church which swears allegiance to the Vatican.

Although Beijing and the Vatican have improved relations in recent years as China's Catholic population has grown, they remain at odds over which side has the authority to ordain bishops. The ninth Chinese Catholic representative conference will begin Tuesday and run through Thursday in Beijing after a six-year hiatus, the foreign ministry said during a press briefing.

The Vatican had condemned previous conferences because members of the unofficial church loyal to Rome had reportedly been forced to participate. But this time the

Holy See has given tacit approval for members of the so-called "underground" church, including bishops, to attend the conclave, according to Catholic web sites familiar with religious affairs in China.

"We believe this conference can push the integration of Catholic activities into Chinese society and culture a step forward," spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters, adding that the country had "goodwill" towards the Vatican. "We want to move forward down the same road with the Vatican and promote bilateral, constructive dialogue and relations," she said.

China and the Vatican severed diplomatic relations in 1951. Since becoming head of the Holy See in 2013 Pope Francis has tried to improve relations with Beijing in the hope of reconnecting with Catholics in China. Chinese and Vatican officials have met at least four times since January to try and resolve the delicate issue of the appointment of bishops—the heart of the dispute. —AFP

CHINESE AIRCRAFT CARRIER ENTERS SOUTH CHINA SEA

TAIPEI: A group of Chinese warships led by the country's sole aircraft carrier entered the top half of the South China Sea yesterday after passing south of Taiwan, the self-ruled island's Defence Ministry said of what China has termed a routine exercise.

The move comes amid renewed tension over Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own, ineligible for state-to-state relations, following US President-elect Donald Trump's telephone call with the island's president that upset Beijing. The Soviet-built Liaoning aircraft carrier has taken part in previous exercises, including some in the South China Sea, but China is years away from perfecting carrier operations similar to those the United States has practised for decades.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said the carrier, accompanied by five vessels, passed southeast of the Pratas Islands, which are controlled by Taiwan, heading southwest.

The carrier group earlier passed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan's southernmost point via the Bashi Channel, between Taiwan and the Philippines. "Staying vigilant and flexible has always been the normal method of maintaining airspace security," said ministry spokesman Chen Chung-chi, declining to say whether Taiwan fighter jets were scrambled or if submarines had been deployed.

Chen said the ministry was continuing to "monitor and grasp the situation".

Senior Taiwan opposition Nationalist lawmaker Johnny Chiang said the Liaoning exercise was China's signal to the United States that it has broken through the "first island chain", an area that includes Japan's Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan. In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said people should not read too much into what the carrier was up to, as its movements were within the law.

"Our Liaoning should enjoy in accordance with the law freedom of navigation and overflight as set by international law, and we hope all sides can respect this right of China's," she told a daily news briefing. Influential state-run Chinese tabloid the Global Times said the exercise showed how the carrier was improving its combat capabilities and that it should now sail even further afield.

"The Chinese fleet will cruise to the Eastern Pacific sooner or later. When China's aircraft carrier fleet appears in offshore areas of the US one day, it will trigger intense thinking about maritime rules," the newspaper said in an editorial. China has been angered recently by US naval patrols near islands that China claims in the South China Sea. This month, a Chinese navy ship seized a US underwater drone in the South China Sea. China later returned it. Japan said late on Sunday it had spotted six Chinese naval vessels including the Liaoning travelling through the passage between Miyako and Okinawa and into the Pacific.

Japan's top government spokesman said yesterday the voyage showed China's expanding military capability and Japan was closely monitoring it. China's air force conducted long-range drills this month above the East and South China Seas that rattled Japan and Taiwan. China said those exercises were also routine. Last December, the defence ministry confirmed China was building a second aircraft carrier but its launch date is unclear. The aircraft carrier program is a state secret.

Beijing could build multiple aircraft carriers over the next 15 years, the Pentagon said in a report last year. China claims most of the South China Sea through which about \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes every year. Neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims. —Reuters



In this Dec 19, 2016 photo, an Iranian shepherd brings back his herd from grasslands in the Talesh mountain area, close to the Caspian Sea, some 430 km northeast of Tehran. Villagers leave their wooden cottages in cold seasons due to heavy snowfall, returning in late spring to host tourists.— AP

US LED UN 'GANG-UP' ON ISRAEL VOTE: AMBASSADOR

WASHINGTON: The White House orchestrated a "gang-up" against Israel on last week's UN settlement vote, its ambassador to Washington said yesterday, in the latest sign of anger between the longtime allies. Israel's ambassador Ron Dermer said in an interview with CNN that his government plans to show evidence of the alleged US maneuvering in due time. "What is outrageous is that the United States was actually behind that gang-up. I think it was a very sad day, really a shameful chapter," the Israeli diplomat told CNN.



Ron Dermer

"We have clear evidence of it. We will present that evidence to the new administration through the appropriate channels. And if they want to share it with the US people they're welcome to do it," Dermer said, adding that the Israeli government is "deeply disappointed" with Washington over the UN vote. On Friday, the UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding that "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem."

The United States - which has a veto - refrained from casting its vote, enabling the adoption of the measure, the first resolution since 1979 to condemn Israel over its settlement policy. Dermer accused the Obama administration of helping Palestinians "wage a diplomatic and legal war against Israel". They do not want to negotiate peace with us, which is why they've avoided negotiations for eight years," he said. "What do the Palestinians want? What they want is to blame Israel for the lack of peace and to internationalize the conflict," Dermer continued. "What this resolution just did is it gave the Palestinians ammunition in their diplomatic and legal war against Israel. And the US not only didn't stop it, they were behind it."

Obama's soon-to-be successor, president-elect Donald Trump, who has campaigned on a promise to recognize

Jerusalem as Israel's capital, slammed the position taken by the White House. Trump, who last week said Washington should have used its veto to block the resolution, has chosen as ambassador to Israel the hardliner David Friedman, who has said Washington will not pressure Israel to curtail settlement building in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summoned US Ambassador Daniel Shapiro Sunday to express his displeasure. An official Israeli source confirmed only that Netanyahu and Shapiro had met, without elaborating on the content or outcome of their discussions. The text was passed with support from all remaining members of the 15-member council, with applause breaking out in the chamber.

The Haaretz daily's website said that for Israel to summon an American ambassador was "considered a most unusual step". "Even more unusual is the fact that unlike the other envoys who were summoned on Sunday to the foreign ministry, Netanyahu will conduct the conversation himself at his office," it said ahead of the meeting. - AFP

MP PROPOSES REDRAWING OF ELECTORAL...

Continued from Page 1

Some opposition groups still boycotted last month's polls for the same reason, but a majority of the opposition groups returned to the fray and won nearly half of the 50 seats. The opposition says that the change in the electoral law in 2012 divided the country on tribal, sectarian and family lines, and is preparing proposals to amend it.

Meanwhile, the constitutional court yesterday ordered the opening of a number of ballot boxes of last month's polls from the fourth constituency to examine petitions against the results. The court on Sunday ordered the opening of several boxes from the second

and third constituencies. The court will sit again today and in late January to issue its rulings on this issue.

The rapporteur of the Assembly's public funds protection committee MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain said the panel has set its priority list, and it will start discussing alleged wrongdoing in distribution of state farms, state funds invested in Kuwait and Gulf Link Co (KGL) and the issue of Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA). Other issues to be discussed include the Shell contract and the proposed sale of 50 percent of government-owned companies. Babtain said the committee will also discuss the Jaber Stadium, Jaber Causeway, the Kuwaiti loan to Russia and other issues.

HERO'S WELCOME FOR FRENCH SAILOR

Continued from Page 1

And today, it's paid off. "He's a hero," said Denis Gourlan, 64, among the crowd quayside to welcome Coville. "It's really extraordinary what he's done," he added. Joyon had initially set the record for the single-handed

round the world effort in 2004 before Britain's Ellen MacArthur beat his mark the following year. Joyon then reclaimed the mark in 2008. Coville's record will stand at least until next year when his compatriot, Francois Gabart, the winner of the 2012/2013 Vendee globe, will set out to lower his impressive record. — AFP

FILIPINA JAILED FOR JOINING IS

Continued from Page 1

"The number of Saudis proven to be in conflict areas is 2,093," interior ministry spokesman General Mansour Al-Turki told daily newspaper Al-Hayat. He said that 1,540 of them were in Syria, where militants have flocked since the Islamic State group seized control of vast areas in mid-2014.

Another 147 were in Yemen, which is the base of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, considered by Washington as the most dangerous affiliate of the global terror network. Another 31 were believed to be in Afghanistan or Pakistan, Turki said. Only five were believed to be in neighboring Iraq, where IS also seized significant territory in 2014. Turki said 73 Saudis had also been detained abroad "on charges related to acts of terrorism".— Agencies



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FOCUS

HUNGARIAN PRIEST
BRINGS MIGRANTS
IN FROM THE COLD

Save us before we die from the cold, read the email in Father Zoltan Nemeth's inbox. It was an appeal that this Hungarian priest could not ignore. The SOS was sent by an asylum-seeker, one of 14 relocated from a refugee camp earmarked for closure near Budapest to what they say are freezing military tents in Kormend close to the Austrian border. Nemeth, the Catholic parish priest in Kormend, a town of around 12,000 souls some 230 km west of Budapest, quickly offered them shelter in the parish community hall.

"I'm not a hero, it was simply my duty as a committed Christian to help," the bespectacled and portly 61-year-old told AFP in the parish house next door where he lives. But Nemeth calls his stance a "lonely" one in a country led by the fiercely anti-migrant Prime Minister Viktor Orban. In 2015 Orban built fences on Hungary's borders to keep out migrants, and changed laws enabling the expulsion and jailing of "illegal border crossers". Refugee camps are being closed while a government referendum in October urged Hungarians to vote "No" to the EU's plan to relocate migrants around the bloc. The ballot however was declared invalid because of low voter turnout. "Hungary doesn't need a single migrant," Orban has said, warning that the "poison" of mass migration will destroy Europe's Christian identity.

'I follow Jesus' (PBUH)

According to Nemeth however Orban's referendum campaign, with nationwide billboard posters that linked migrants to terrorism and crime, had an "anti-Gospel message". "I follow Jesus, not the state's leaders," he told AFP, citing a passage from the Bible: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... I was a stranger and you invited me in." The priest says his inspiration is Pope Francis who has regularly defended migrants and called on Europe to keep its doors open to those in need. Upstairs in the parish hall, priest vestments hang on racks at one end, while mattresses and rucksacks line the walls. Greeted with bear hugs when he goes upstairs to chat to the asylum-seekers, Nemeth says a three-year period in South America as a missionary taught him to "disregard religion, race, or class, and only see the person". The group of young men, all awaiting decisions on appeals of rejected asylum claims, is comprised of Iraqi Kurds, Afghans, Cameroonians, Nigerians, Cubans and a Congolese. They include both Christians and Muslims.

'Non-Christian'

But Hungarian Catholic Church leaders have remained silent so far about his gesture, with only two priests nationwide backing him, neither publically, says Nemeth. During the peak of the migrant crisis last September when thousands were entering through the country each day, Hungarian Cardinal Peter Erdo even said hosting migrants could legally amount to "human-trafficking". In Kormend some parishioners have accused Nemeth of being "non-Christian" or "anti-Hungarian". "One even stopped me on the street to warn that the migrants will kill me as a jihadist did Pere Hamel in France," the 85-year-old priest murdered in July, Nemeth told AFP. In his office though, amid Christmas food packages for delivery to the parish's sick and poor, he points to many messages of support on his computer that he has received from people around the country, churchgoers and atheists alike.

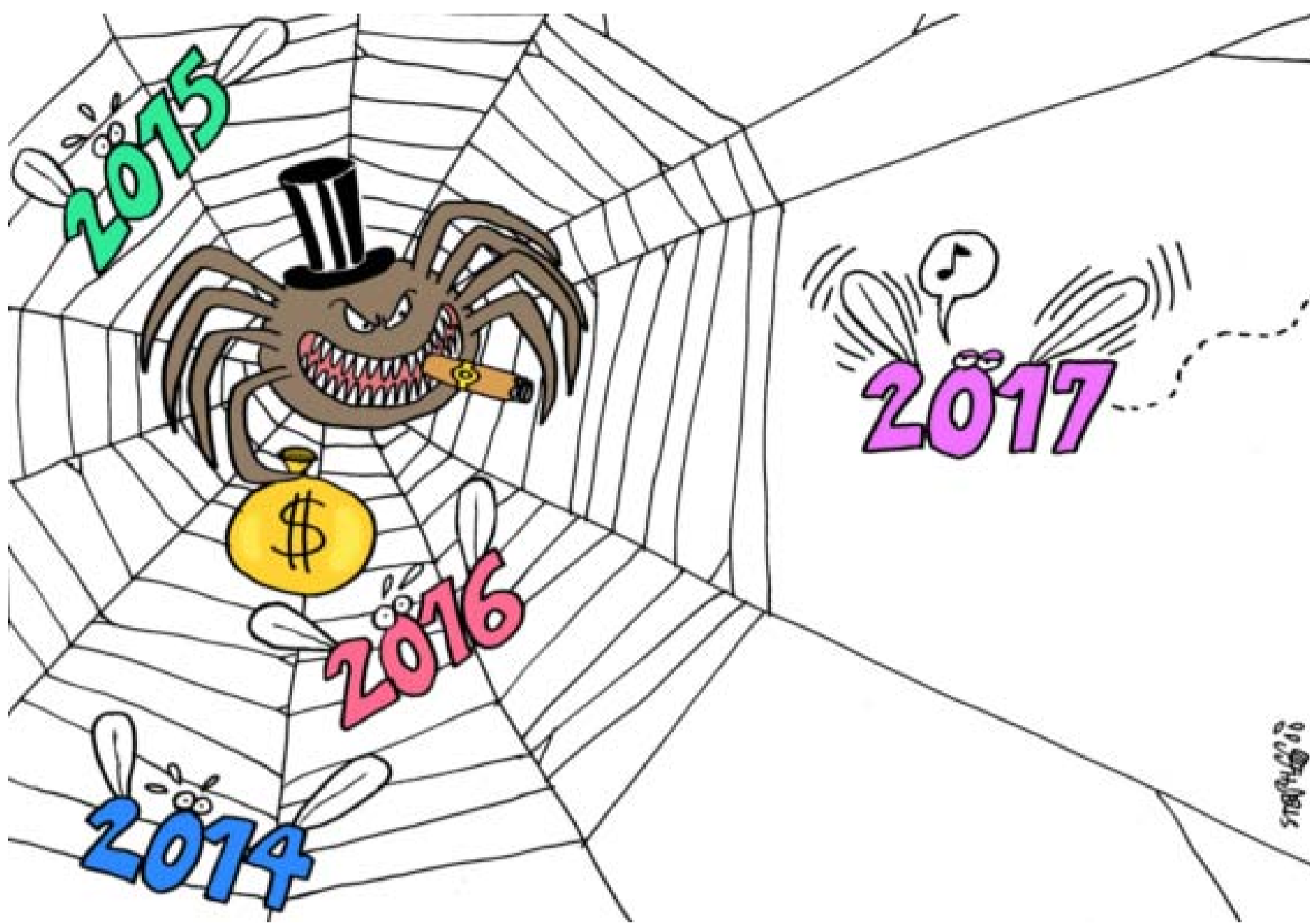
'With humanity or not'

Media have not been allowed into the nearby complex of military tents but several of the migrants showed AFP photographs they took of conditions inside. The only heating is a wood-fired stove, they say. "One of us had to stay awake all night to keep feeding it with wood to keep warm," said the Cameroonian who wrote the email to the priest, but asked not to be named. Hungary's Immigration Office told AFP in an email that the conditions in Kormend comply with all EU and international regulations.

A local refugee rights group meanwhile has slammed the tent camp as "inadequate and inhuman". "The unwelcoming message is clear, it gives asylum-seekers no choice but to leave the country," Aniko Bakonyi of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee told AFP. According to the official data, almost 30,000 migrants sought asylum in Hungary this year, but less than 400 have received some form of protected status.

Nemeth says attitudes in Austria, just a dozen kilometres down the road, have hardened too, especially after attacks like in Paris or Berlin. "But at least the camp conditions there are dignified. This migration crisis is not over, the question is how we receive people who come, with humanity or not." — AFP

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CHINA CANCER PATIENTS GAMBLE ON GREY MARKET

When her father's lung cancer worsened, Yin Min, a 51-year-old financial broker from Shanghai, faced a choice: pay nearly \$3,000 a month for an approved drug or pay a fraction of the price for a generic drug not approved for use in China. Yin, like many families in China, turned to the increasingly popular, unregulated market of online pharmacies, agents and peer groups for drugs. She bought a generic version of Iressa, not approved for use in China, directly from a manufacturer in India. "With this sort of misfortune, it's hard to put into words the financial pressure you feel," Yin told Reuters.

Of 30 cancer patients interviewed by Reuters over the past year, two thirds took routes similar to Yin's, pushed by China's high drug prices and a lack of access to newer drugs. The patients were aged between 32 and 81, had varying income levels and suffered from a variety of cancers. There is no official data on how many cancer patients in China turn to unregulated channels, but research indicates an increase globally in the use of grey and counterfeit markets.

Liu Xuemei, a 61-year-old carcinoma patient from Beijing, said she went through a pharmacy agent to get a cheaper alternative to the approved Zadoxin, while Zhao Xiaohua, who has lung cancer, said he found a cheaper treatment through a patients group recommended by his doctor. Patients Reuters spoke to said doctors often turn a blind eye to them accessing drugs through the grey market, and some actively help them do this. Medicines bought through unofficial channels are not necessarily harmful, and some of the Indian generics available online are approved for use in other markets.

But they can include drugs that are ineffective or fake. The reason patients in China turn to these unregulated channels are largely financial. Low average salaries, a chasm between urban and rural wealth, and creaking state reimbursement schemes mean serious disease is among

the leading causes of poverty, creating a major social burden and rising debt.

In Yin's case, the generic drug she bought was 13 times less expensive than the China-approved branded Tarceva. But Chinese also turn to unofficial channels because of bottlenecks in China's drug approvals, which pharmaceutical executives say can mean drugs lag markets like the United States by 5-10 years. China requires all new drugs to be tested and approved in the country, but has a shortage of specialists for this work.

The national drug reimbursement list, the main catalog of medicines covered by state health insurance, is being updated for the first time since 2009. That means even if a drug has been approved, patients can often only access it if they pay for it themselves.

China's health ministry did not respond to Reuters' questions about patients turning to unregulated channels to buy medicines, or the lack of access to new drugs. The high cost of drugs is not confined to China, and there has been a jump globally in so-called 'buyers clubs' - informal patient groups sourcing drugs via the grey market to help those with HIV and hepatitis access drugs at more affordable prices.

Limited Options

China last year had four million new cancer cases, according to official data, and the nation's personal health-care bill is set to soar almost fourfold to 12.7 trillion yuan (\$1.84 trillion) by 2025, according to Boston Consulting Group. For many Chinese, being left outside the health system at a time of need is in sharp contrast to the 'iron rice bowl' concept of state benefits and guarantees for life. "If we can't buy the drug in China or we can't afford to buy it, then what other options do we have?" asked Duan Guangping, a banker in Chongqing, whose mother got lung cancer in 2011. He bought a drug for her from

Bangladesh. China has sought to increase insurance coverage for serious diseases, and encourage drug makers to lower their prices to gain better market access. It has also tried to speed up the regulatory approval process by thinning out the waiting list, forcing manufacturers to withdraw new drugs where trial data isn't strong enough.

But change has been slow. "A lot of new oncology drugs were approved in the US and UK, but in China there's a 5-7 year delay," said Li Tiantian, a former doctor and founder of medical platform DXY.com. "A lot of patients with cancer cannot wait." The overall 5-year survival rate for cancer in China is just over 30 percent, less than half the level in the United States, according to Deutsche Bank.

Legal Risk

Turning to unofficial channels can also carry a legal risk. Leukemia patient Lu Yong, a prominent member of a local 'buyers club', was arrested last year and charged with selling unapproved drugs and credit card fraud. He was later released after a public outcry. In 2004, after buying a generic version of Iressa from India, Lu helped set up an online group for leukemia patients, who wanted the same drugs he was getting at a fraction of the price of the approved drug in China.

The generic started at around 3,000 yuan (\$435) and the price slowly dropped over the years, Lu said - to a long way below the price of the approved drug from AstraZeneca.

"There was no other option, so we took this path even though what we were doing was against the law," Lu told Reuters before his arrest. Lu declined to comment to Reuters after his release, but in his earlier interview he said he never profited from the transactions and only helped other patients to make the complicated overseas payments. "It's because of problems with China's public health insurance system that so many seriously ill patients aren't able to survive," he said then. — Reuters

ELITE INDONESIA POLICE TURN TIDE ON MILITANTS

As the world battles a spike in assaults and plots by militants, Indonesia's anti-terrorism unit is drawing praise for stemming a wave of bloody attacks in the sprawling Muslim-majority nation. Indonesia has foiled at least 15 attacks this year alone and made more than 150 arrests, disrupting plots ranging from suicide attacks in Jakarta to a rocket attack from Indonesia's Batam island targeting Singapore.

Going back to 2010, a Reuters analysis of data shows the elite unit, Special Detachment 88 (Densus 88), has prevented at least 54 plots or attacks in the nation of 250 million people, the world's fourth largest. "Densus 88 has become better than pretty well any other counter-terrorism group in the world," said Greg Barton, a terrorism expert and research professor in Global Islamic Politics at Alfred Deakin Institute in Melbourne. "They have had an incredible workload and they have become remarkably good at what they do."

In the last six years, there has been only one major attack in Indonesia that caused civilian deaths, when assailants hit a Jakarta mall and police post with gunfire and bombs, resulting in the deaths of three Indonesians and a dual Algerian-Canadian national. All four attackers were also killed in the January 2016 attack. Between 2002 to 2009, there were nine major attacks by militants, leaving 295 dead and hundreds of others wounded. Since its formation in 2002, the unit has put a premium on clandestine intelligence gathering. Now much of that intelligence work is done online, by infiltrating and monitoring chat rooms, social media and messaging apps popular with militants.

Self-Sufficient

Few details about Densus 88 are publicly available. "We built our organization to learn from the enemy," said a senior counter-terrorism officer who provided some insight into the working of the unit but spoke on condition of anonymity. Created in the aftermath of the deadly 2002 Bali bombings that killed more than 200 people, Densus 88 has about 400 to 500 members, state-of-the-art weaponry and training, said another official. It has received more than \$200 million of funding from Western allies such as Australia and the United States. The unit is headed by a task force, a core of 30 or so senior members, said the Indonesian law enforcement source. "Many of them possess doctorates and have specialties like psychology and social behavior," the source added. "They are not like regular police." The black clad, heavily armed members of Densus 88 sometimes seen during raids on suspected militant hideouts make up a small proportion of the unit, officials say.

Far more personnel are dedicated to gathering intelligence in the field and monitoring communications and online activity. There is also a large team of investigators analyzing that intelligence and forensically examining explosives and other evi-

dence. Sidney Jones, the director of Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), said the key to Densus 88's success lies in its intelligence gathering. "They know the radical networks and have a good set of informers," she said. "It is unparalleled in terms of its ability to understand the sources of possible threats."

Strategic Interrogation

Densus 88 has long been accused by human rights groups of abuses, including beatings of alleged separatists and Islamist suspects. Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission has identified 121 terrorism suspects who have died in custody since 2007 but the police routinely deny using torture or inappropriate force in interrogation. Amnesty International said earlier this year there was an "endemic culture of impunity" in Indonesia's police service and a need for an investigation into the "torture" of suspects by Densus 88.

However, Barton said the unit has adopted a unique, "strategic" approach to interrogations that aids intelligence gathering. Suspects were kept at police stations rather than in jails and allowed to meet their families. "They sit down and listen to their story," Barton said.

"They get them talking and that's an effective way of getting intelligence." Despite Densus 88's recent successes, the worry is that the militant threat to Indonesia is mounting as Islamic State fighters return battle-hardened from Syria and Iraq. The ultra-radical group also commands support from some Indonesians who have stayed at home. About 800 Indonesians have travelled to Syria to join Islamic State and 169 have been stopped en route and deported, according to Indonesia's national counter-terrorism agency.

In the past two months alone, there have been 40 arrests, and at least six attacks foiled, according to the Reuters study, which collated data with the assistance of IPAC staff. At least two of the attacks were planned for New Year's Eve, police said. Many of these plots have been linked to Islamic State, with police alleging they were inspired, if not directed, by Bahrudin Naim, an Indonesian militant who fled to Syria about two years ago. "These new homegrown terrorists and the local jihadists have never gone abroad. But with the advent of the internet age and technologies like social media, it's easier to make bombs and explosives to do operations," said the law enforcement source. — Reuters



Officers of the Indonesian national police elite unit "Mobile Brigade" take their positions during a drill ahead of Christmas celebration in Medan, North Sumatra on Dec 21, 2016. — AP

LEICESTER MAKE MASKED PROTEST OVER VARDY BAN

LEICESTER: Leicester City's owners distributed around 30,000 Jamie Vardy masks ahead of their game against Everton yesterday in protest at the England striker's three-game suspension. Vardy was banned by the Football Association after being sent off for a two-footed challenge on Mame Biram Diouf during champions Leicester's recent 2-2 draw at Stoke City. Leicester had an appeal against the punishment rejected, which Thai chairman Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha described as "unfair". Prior to the game, pictures circulated on social media showing rows of Vardy masks placed on the blue seats at Leicester's King Power Stadium ahead of their home game with Everton. Television footage showed Vardy jokingly putting a mask over his face after taking his seat in the directors' box. He then gestured to suspended team-mates Robert Huth and Christian Fuchs, sitting alongside him, both of whom laughed. FA chairman Greg Clarke was also due to attend the match. Leicester go into the game 15th in the Premier League table, three points above the relegation zone. — AFP



ACCIONA RETURNS TO DAKAR RALLY WITH ELECTRIC CAR

MADRID: Spanish energy firm Acciona said yesterday it will compete in the Dakar Rally next month in Latin America for the third straight year with the only electric vehicle of the gruelling off-road race. "Next January in Asuncion (Paraguay) we will once again cross the starting line of the Dakar, and we will again be the only zero emissions vehicle," the company said in a statement. "We compete in Dakar 2017 with an electric vehicle because we believe 100% in the potential of renewable energy," it added on the Facebook page of its Dakar Rally team. Some 316 vehicles, including 83 cars and 146 motorbikes, are registered for the 39th Dakar Rally, which will be staged over nearly 9,000 kilometres (5,600 miles) from January 2-14 in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. The race will set off from the Paraguayan capital of Asuncion, with race sporting director Marc Coma promising "the toughest edition in the history of South American rally-raiding". Acciona entered its car in the 2015 Dakar Rally, making it the first zero-emissions vehicle to compete in the event, but it pulled out after just three days due to a navigation system malfunction. — AFP

FIRMINO CHARGED WITH DRINK DRIVING

LONDON: Liverpool star Roberto Firmino has been charged with drink driving after being arrested in the early hours of Christmas Eve. Firmino was stopped by police while driving in Liverpool city centre on December 24 and was later charged with the offence. "Merseyside Police has charged a 25-year-old man with drink driving after his car was stopped in Liverpool city centre in the early hours of Saturday, December 24 2016," a Merseyside Police spokesperson told the Guardian yesterday. "Roberto Firmino, from Liverpool, will appear at Liverpool City Magistrates Court on January 31." Brazil forward Firmino, 25, is currently preparing for Liverpool's Premier League clash against Stoke at Anfield on Tuesday. His court date could prove a problem however as it is scheduled for the same day that Liverpool play title rivals Chelsea at Anfield. Firmino is a key member of Jurgen Klopp's side and has scored 17 goals, including six this season, in 67 appearances since joining Liverpool from Hoffenheim in July 2015. — AFP



A group photo

VIVA CONCLUDES REAL MADRID & MAN UTD SOCCER SCHOOLS CEREMONY

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, organized a closing ceremony for VIVA Real Madrid and VIVA United Soccer Schools 2016. Ceremony included an exciting friendly match between both academies at Corner field near Kuwait Towers. Players' parents, relatives and friends were present amid large audience.

Field's exciting atmosphere was similar to the Old Trafford stadium and the Santiago Bernabeu stadium, and players showed individual high skills, and VIVA Real Madrid's team won 2-0.

Commenting on this occasion,

Abdulrazzaq Al-Essa, Corporate Communications Director at VIVA said: "We are honored at VIVA to have been able to support these young athletes in bringing them closer to their dream of becoming professional football players. And this ceremony was organized in recognition of their commitment and passion."

Real Madrid Soccer School players (16) participated in training camp in September 2016, at Real Madrid Academy's ground in Valdebebas sport city. Manchester United Soccer School players (16) participated in training camp at Manchester United's Cliff Training ground, in July 2016. The training

program included several workshops and activities educating the players on the best maneuvers, attacks, different scenarios and conditioned games. The program also focused on different technical areas, such as dribbling, short passing, turning and finishing. At the end, Al-Essa recognized all players, coaches and referees.

VIVA announced its sponsorship for Manchester United in 2011 for five years, and for Real Madrid in 2014 for five years as well, to offer the opportunity to the fans of both teams to be closer to the most famous soccer teams in the world through exclusive offers and promotions.



Al-Essa honoring Al-Falah, Al-Yasin and Al-Shimmiri.

SUPERMAXIS EYE RACE RECORD AS SYDNEY TO HOBART SPEEDS OFF

SYDNEY: The favourite supermaxi led the fleet out of Sydney Harbour heading for Hobart yesterday as a fine weather forecast brought a new record back into sight at the start of one of the toughest yacht races in the world.

Under a blazing azure sky, hundreds of leisure boats lined the course to the Heads watched by masses of spectators on the shoreline as a fresh north-easterly sped the fastest yachts—all 100-footers—ahead of the 80-odd smaller vessels entered for Australia's bluewater classic. Skipper Anthony Bell's Perpetual LOYAL was the first into open ocean followed by Hong Kong-owned Scallywag, and local race favourite Wild Oats XI trailed by the

untested CQS of Finn Ludde Ingvall, who took line honours in 2000 and 2004.

As they flew south down the coast under spinnaker touching 26 knots in freshening northerly winds Wild Oats edged into an early lead, heading into a weak southerly change due to move through late on Boxing Day.

The Bureau of Meteorology said the southerly will be lighter than previously forecast at around 10 to 15 knots and on Tuesday winds will back around to the north again, far earlier than expected.

In the race for line honours, conditions favour the slim Wild Oats, which set the record of 1 day 18hrs 23mins 12secs for the gruelling

628-nautical-mile (1,163 kilometre) event in 2012. Skipper Mark Richards said he's not thinking about records, but rival David Witt, at the helm of Hong Kong businessman Seng Huang Lee's entrant, Scallywag, certainly is.

"If I had to write a forecast for us, it would be this one," he said. "Light air just forward of the beam really suits us." Witt said Scallywag could break Wild Oats' race record. "Our routing puts us at the Iron Pot (mouth of Tasmania's Derwent River) in 1 day 11 hours. That gives us 7 hours to do 14 miles and beat the record."

Rival Bell on Perpetual LOYAL, the leading challenger to Wild Oats, was less pleased with Monday's forecast noting that his heavier and powerful super maxi needs as much time to windward as it can get rather than the light southerly now predicted.

"We'll have to be a lot more tactical and bear more risk to use the better points of our boat. We'll have to sail away from the fleet to find more power reaching that will give us better boat speed," Bell said.

'STILL EARLY STAGES'

In a bid to be more competitive, Perpetual has brought in half the world-class crew of last year's winner, the US super boat Comanche, which is not entered for 2016.

Aboard the hi-tech CQS, which slipped back to eighth, Ingvall reported: "We are somewhat underpowered at the moment, all the others have spinnakers and we do not, but it is still early stages." Organisers at the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia said the hardest part of this year's race would likely be the Tasmanian Coast and the fickle Derwent River leading to Hobart's Constitution Dock where windless holes can halt a boat for hours, while others sail through on a breeze. Line honours for the fastest vessel and the overall handicap winner could both be decided on a becalmed Derwent. Last year's overall handicap winner, Australia's 52-footer Balance, is hoping for a second successive crown for the TP52. The forecast stood in stark contrast to 2015 when savage southerlies forced dozens of boats to pull, including Wild Oats. Storms are a regular hazard, with six men dying, five boats sinking and 55 sailors rescued on a fatal night in 1998 when a deep depression exploded over the Tasman Sea.

Within the first hours, the organisers reported that two vessels had been forced to retire with Freyja, a 71-year-old timber cruiser blowing out her headsail just beyond the Heads and Dare Devil breaking a rudder leaving 86 yachts at sea. — AFP



SYDNEY: Hong Kong supermaxi yacht Scallywag sails through Sydney Harbour at the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race yesterday. — AFP



SYDNEY: Australian supermaxi yacht Perpetual Loyal sails through Sydney Harbour at the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

AUB ORGANISE ALI MANSOUR AL SARRAF FOOTBALL TOURNEY

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced yesterday that it has organized the "Ali Mansour Al Sarraf" football tournament amongst its employees from various departments and branches. The competition, which runs from the 18th-22nd December, is taking place at the football pitch located at the Kuwaiti Lawyers Association. The tournament reflects the Bank's overall commitment to a diversified range of sports activities, catering for its employees, developing their health as well as nurturing a healthy competitive environment.

The tournament has been hold for 4 hours daily throughout the duration of the competition from 6:00 pm - 10:00 pm, where a number of the Bank's employees from Head Office and branches will compete to win the tournament's cup. Teams have been formed of 6 players including a goalkeeper.

Naqeeb Amin AUB's General manager of Human Resources said, "The competition comes as part of our core belief that our employees' own health and safety is of paramount importance to the Bank, and are at the same time our most important asset that we continue to invest in. To that

extent, we have launched this initiative which is in line with the Bank's overall social responsibility drive, and its approach towards sponsoring a diversified range of sports activities, internally and externally. Furthermore, it serves to nurture a healthy competitive environment amongst working teams."

Amin added, "The competition aim at communicating a clear message about the importance of practicing different sports, while also encouraging employees to manage their own health to benefit their personal as well as professional lives, and the wider society. The competition has been named "Ali Mansour Al Sarraf" after a member of staff in commemoration to his long service at the Bank, which has amounted to 63 years. The Bank embarked on this initiative to encourage employees from various departments come together. The activity also provides the chance for female employees to compete in the tournament.

AUB has been a leader and strong advocate of sports activities, while supporting Kuwaiti athletes in international arenas. The Bank recently supported special needs athletes in the latest Paralympics which took place in Brazil.



KUWAIT: Ali Mansour Al Sarraf, Amer Najem the head of branches at AUB and Mrs Mariam Al-Mudhaf the head of employees relations celebrate with winner team .

UNCAPPED BRUCE NAMED IN NEW ZEALAND T20 SQUAD

CHRISTCHURCH: Uncapped batsman Tom Bruce has been called into New Zealand's Twenty20 squad for their three-match series against Bangladesh next month, while left arm pace bowler Ben Wheeler has been recalled to the national side.

The right-handed Bruce would provide a powerful hitting lineup for New Zealand with the aggressive Martin

Guptill, Colin Munro and Colin de Grandhomme and Corey Anderson, who has been selected solely as a batsman. "Tom is one of the cleanest strikers of the cricket ball in the country," selector Gavin Larsen said in a statement yesterday. "He has averaged 76 at a strike-rate of 174 this season, so has proven himself to be a very dangerous player. "Power is a critical element to Twenty20 cricket, so to have

him alongside the likes of Martin, Corey and the two Colins is an exciting prospect." Wheeler played six one day internationals last year but not been picked for New Zealand since. He has been brought into the side with Tim Southee being rested for the entire series, while Trent Boult will miss the first game in Napier on Jan. 3.

"It's been great to see Ben back play-

ing cricket and getting near his best," Larsen added. "He has put in a lot of hard work to get to this point again, so were looking forward to having him back in the mix."

"Ben's ability to swing the ball at a decent clip can trouble any batsmen, as he has shown in domestic cricket this season." Top-order batsman Ross Taylor was not included as he continues to recover from

eye surgery last month. Larsen said he was expected to be back for the test series that begins on Jan. 12 in Wellington. New Zealand Twenty20 squad: Kane Williamson (captain), Corey Anderson, Trent Boult, Tom Bruce, Colin de Grandhomme, Martin Guptill, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Colin Munro, Jimmy Neesham, Luke Ronchi, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Ben Wheeler. — Reuters

BIRD PUTS AUSTRALIA ON TOP AGAINST PAKISTAN

MELBOURNE: Australian seamer Jackson Bird claimed two crucial wickets just before rain stopped play on the opening day of the second Test against Pakistan at the MCG yesterday.

When tea was called early due to rain, the visitors were 142 for four with opener Azhar Ali on 66 and first Test centurion Asad Shafiq on four, and that proved to be the stumps score as well.

The rain continued after tea and play was abandoned without any more action. After winning the toss and choosing to bat the visitors made a cautious start but only Ali was able to build an innings of substance. Bird (2-53) struck twice in quick succession just before the rain set in to give the home team the ascendancy, removing experienced duo Younis Khan (21) and Misbah-ul-Haq (11).

Khan, who had been given out lbw on three but successfully appealed, looked to be finding his touch when Bird sneaked a ball between his bat and pad to bowl him.

Misbah got an inside edge onto his pad and short leg Nic Maddinson dived forward to take a fine catch which was confirmed by the third umpire.

However, Pakistan coach Mickey Arthur was comfortable with the decision to bat first, saying the pitch would remain difficult to bat on.

"I think the wicket was tough," Arthur said. "It was really tough to bat on for a period, if you got the ball in the right area there was just enough there for the bowlers. "We're comfortable that will con-

tinue, and when you win the toss and bat you always rationalise that decision against what could happen in the fourth innings.

"We think that in the fourth innings that it will be tough to score, history says it is... we've still got a hell of a lot of work to do in getting some runs and then bowling very well when we get first crack with the ball."

Pakistan's openers Sami Aslam and Ali played and missed on occasion but were able to negotiate the seamers, and it was not until the introduction of off-spinner Nathan Lyon that the home side tasted success. Aslam had batted with great caution for nine from 41 balls but was surprised by some extra bounce off the third ball from Lyon. It caught the glove and Australian captain Steven Smith took the catch at first slip. Ali survived a confident lbw appeal from the bowling of Josh Hazlewood when he was on six and was comprehensively beaten by the next ball, but steadied to anchor the innings.

But Hazlewood (1-15) struck with the last ball of the morning session, with Babar Azam (23) edging to Smith in the slips.

Smith, who made some rare catching errors in the first Test, went low to his right and just managed to cling onto the sharp chance to reward some excellent bowling from Hazlewood.

Australia kept the same side which won the first Test of the three-match series in Brisbane by 39 runs, keeping faith in struggling rookie batsman Maddinson. Pakistan made one change, replacing seamer Rahat Ali with Sohail Khan. — AFP



CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand's Mitchell Santner attempts to catch Bangladesh's Imrul Kayes during the one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at Hagley Park in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

LATHAM'S TON LEADS NZ TO COMPREHENSIVE WIN

CHRISTCHURCH: Opener Tom Latham's career best 137 set New Zealand up for a crushing 77-run victory over Bangladesh in their opening one-day international at Hagley Oval yesterday.

With Latham in commanding form and Colin Munro chiming in with a rollicking 87, New Zealand posted 341-7 and the Bangladesh innings closed at 264-9 with Mushfiqur Rahim retired hurt.

It was New Zealand's highest score in 26 matches against Bangladesh and Latham's 158-run stand with Munro was a New Zealand record for the fifth wicket against the tourists. For New Zealand, it was the commanding performance they were looking for after their recent 3-0 hiding by Australia. But for Bangladesh there were few highlights to launch their New Zealand tour. Their talisman Shakib Al Hasan topped their bowling (3-69) and batting (59) performances, and Mosaddek Hossain was not out 50 at the end, his maiden ODI half century.

Mushfiqur reached 42 before a hamstring strain ended his innings, but by then Bangladesh were 219-6 and the required run rate had ballooned out to 10.69. But it was always going to be a big ask for Bangladesh after Latham's 137 off 121 deliveries.

The left-hander had a nerve-racking moment on seven when a Mashrafe Mortaza delivery sailed just over the off stumps but otherwise he remained unflustered despite the inability of the top order to stay with him.

Martin Guptill (15), Kane Williamson (31), Neil Broom (22) and Jimmy Neesham (12) all failed to push on. New Zealand were 158-4 when Munro joined Latham and proceeded to smack 87, his

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play in the first One Day International between New Zealand and Bangladesh on yesterday in Christchurch, New Zealand.

New Zealand Innings		Bangladesh Innings	
M. Guptill c Sarkar b M. Rahman	15	T. Latham c Santner b Neesham	38
T. Latham c Rahim b M. Rahman	137	I. Kayes c Ronchi b Southee	16
K. Williamson c Rahim b Ahmed	31	S. Sarkar c Williamson b Neesham	1
N. Broom lbw b Al Hasan	22	Mahmudullah c Ronchi b Neesham	0
J. Neesham lbw b Al Hasan	12	S. Al Hasan c Southee b Ferguson	59
C. Munro c Ahmed b Al Hasan	87	M. Rahim retired hurt	42
L. Ronchi b Ahmed	5	Sa. Rahman c Boult b Ferguson	16
M. Santner not out	8	Mosa. Hossain not out	50
T. Southee not out	7	M. Mortaza c Broom b Santner	14
Extras (b-6 lb-8 w-3)	17	T. Ahmed c Ronchi b Ferguson	2
Total (for 7 wickets, 50 overs)	341	M. Rahman b Southee	0
Fall of wickets: 1-31 M. Guptill, 2-79 K. Williamson, 3-134 N. Broom, 4-158 J. Neesham, 5-316 C. Munro, 6-323 T. Latham, 7-327 L. Ronchi.		Extras (b-1 lb-6 nb-1 w-18)	26
Did not bat: L. Ferguson, T. Boult		Total (for 9 wickets, 44.5 overs)	264
Bowling: M. Mortaza 10-0-61-0; M. Rahman 10-0-62-2(w-2); T. Ahmed 9-0-70-2; S. Al Hasan 10-0-69-3(w-1); S. Sarkar 4-0-25-0; Mosa. Hossain 7-0-40-0.		Fall of wickets: 1-34 I. Kayes, 2-48 S. Sarkar, 3-48 Mahmudullah, 4-81 T. Iqbal, 5-144 S. Al Hasan, 6-167 Sa. Rahman, 7-242 M. Mortaza, 8-252 T. Ahmed, 9-264 M. Rahman	
		Bowling: T. Boult 9-0-43-0(w-3); T. Southee 9.5-2-63-2(w-3); L. Ferguson 9-0-54-3(w-5); J. Neesham 7-1-36-3(nb-1 w-3); M. Santner 10-0-61-1(w-3).	
		Result: New Zealand won by 77 runs	



MELBOURNE: Pakistan's Younis Khan, right, watches as compatriot Azhar Ali ducks a bouncer from Australia's Mitchell Starc, left, on the first day of their second cricket Test in Melbourne, yesterday. — AP

SCOREBOARD

PORT ELIZABETH, South Africa: Scores at close on the first day of the first Test between South Africa and Sri Lanka at St George's Park yesterday.

South Africa, first innings	
S. Cook c Chandimal b Lakmal	59
D. Elgar c Chandimal b Lakmal	45
H. Amla c Chandimal b Lakmal	20
J. Duminy lbw b Herath	63
F. du Plessis c Karunaratne b Lakmal	37
T. Bavuma lbw b Herath	3
Q. de Kock not out	25
V. Philander not out	6
Extras (lb3, nb5, w1)	9
Total (6 wks, 90 overs)	267
Fall of wickets: 1-104 (Cook), 2-105 (Elgar), 3-178 (Amla), 4-213 (Duminy), 5-225 (Bavuma), 6-253 (Du Plessis).	
Bowling: Lakmal 23-6-62-4, Pradeep 17-4-48-0 (2nb), Mathews 13-5-26-0 (1w), Chameera 14-1-68-0 (3nb), Herath 20-4-48-2, De Silva 3-0-12-0.	
To bat: K. Maharaj, K. Abbott, K. Rabada	
Sri Lanka: A. Mathews, K. Silva, D. Karunaratne, K. Mendis, D. Chandimal, D. de Silva, K. Perera, R. Herath, S. Lakmal, N. Pradeep, D. Chameera.	

SRI LANKA FIGHTS BACK, SA 267-6 IN FIRST TEST

PORT ELIZABETH: Sri Lanka had all its success in the afternoon to pull South Africa back from 104-0 to 267-6 at stumps on the first day of the opening Test yesterday. Seamer Suranga Lakmal led Sri Lanka's revival at St. George's Park with four wickets and spinner Rangana Herath took two to undo the South Africans' work in the first half of the day.

A watchful half-century from Stephen Cook (59) in a century opening stand with Dean Elgar (45) and an attacking 63 from JP Duminy gave South Africa early impetus in the series-opener after winning the toss. Sri Lanka persevered after struggling in the morning session. Lakmal removed both openers in the space of four overs soon after lunch before Herath stopped the free-hitting Duminy in his tracks, trapping him leg before wicket. Lakmal also dismissed captain Faf du Plessis for 37 with the new ball six overs before stumps, suggesting that Sri Lanka's bowlers had taken a little time but had finally found their range on a pitch that had a good covering of green grass but didn't appear to clearly favor either batsman or bowler.

Lakmal's 4-62 was a career-best performance for him in tests. "The first two hours didn't go our way but we came back strongly," Sri Lanka's Kaushal Silva said.

The Sri Lankans are on a five-test winning streak but will especially value a strong start in South Africa, having never won a series in the country.

As well as getting rid of the openers, Lakmal also dismissed Hashim Amla for a scrappy 20, continuing the South African No. 3's dip in form and giving the quick bowler all of the first three wickets - and all caught behind by wicketkeeper Dinesh Chandimal. Herath had Duminy and Temba Bavuma (3) out lbw and when Du Plessis, South Africa's new permanent skipper, nicked Lakmal to Dinesh Karunaratne at first slip at the end of the day, the Sri Lankans strode off to their dressing room in the ascendancy.

They had trudged off at lunch with nothing to show for their efforts from the first session of the three-test series. Openers Cook and Elgar began with a record, with their partnership of 104 the first century opening stand for South Africa in Port Elizabeth in nearly 50 years. The last time two openers put on 100 for South Africa was in 1970 and the country's last test before a 22-year absence from international cricket because of apartheid.

Lakmal produced edges by Cook and Elgar in the space of four overs straight after lunch, though, and continued Amla's lean run. The year started with Amla stepping down as captain, and making 201 in a test against England, but he hasn't made a 50 in his last seven test innings and has gone 10 knocks without a hundred. Herath, Sri Lanka's 38-year-old spinner, had arguably the day's most important breakthrough when he tempted Duminy into a

sweep and trapped him in front. Duminy failed with a DRS review.

Duminy had started in a whirlwind of attacking shots, eventually hitting 10 fours, most of them blistering cover drives. He tried to take the attack to Herath,

though, and he came unstuck. "You can get ahead of yourself," Duminy said. "The way that Dean (Elgar) and Stephen (Cook) started was exceptional. We got quite a few starts but unfortunately we didn't capitalize on it." — AP



PORT ELIZABETH: South African batsman JP Duminy plays a shot during the first day of the first cricket Test match between South Africa and Sri Lanka yesterday at the Port Elizabeth stadium, South Africa. — AFP

Sports

Irving's jumper
lifts Cavs
over Warriors



Latham's ton
leads NZ to
comprehensive win



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2016

IBRAHIMOVIC KEEPS MAN UNITED MOTORING

Page 19



LONDON: Chelsea's Spanish midfielder Pedro (CR) slides into Bournemouth's Polish goalkeeper Artur Boruc (L) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. — AFP

PEDRO DOUBLE FIRES RECORD-BREAKING CHELSEA

Chelsea 3

Bournemouth 0

LONDON: Pedro struck twice as Premier League leaders Chelsea registered a club record 12th successive league win by beating Bournemouth 3-0 at Stamford Bridge yesterday. Antonio Conte's side can edge ever closer to Arsenal's Premier League record of 14 consecutive wins when they face Stoke at the Bridge on Saturday. Victory then would set up the possibility of matching the record, set across the 2001-02 and 2002-03 seasons, when they travel to face London rivals Tottenham on January 4.

On this form, few would bet against the Blues extending their current run after they moved nine points clear of second-placed Liverpool, who host Stoke today. In control long before Pedro put them ahead with a superb individual strike in the 24th minute, they

effectively killed off Bournemouth's hopes with Eden Hazard's 49th-minute penalty before Pedro's deflected second wrapped up the win.

Diego Costa's one-match ban meant Conte was forced to reshuffle his forward line for the first time since his team embarked on their winning run, with Michy Batshuayi hoping to make his first league start since his arrival from Marseille.

Conte, though, had made it clear in the build-up to the game that the 23-year-old still has work to do as he attempts to acclimatise to life in the Premier League.

And Batshuayi once again found himself on the bench as the Chelsea boss opted to stick with his established senior players, moving Hazard into the middle with Willian and Pedro operating either side of the Belgium international.

Conte also made an enforced change in midfield with Cesc Fabregas slotting in alongside Nemanja Matic in place of the suspended N'Golo Kante.

Chelsea's form has been such, however, that the changes had little effect on Conte's side, who once again demonstrated the confidence that comes with winning matches.

Last December, Bournemouth's win at Stamford Bridge helped hasten the departure of former Blues manager Jose Mourinho.

This time around there seemed little chance of a repeat upset with Eddie Howe's side having won just one of eight away games.

And an early move when Fabregas almost played in Pedro behind the visitors' defence suggested this would be a testing afternoon for the Cherries.

OUTSTANDING

Chelsea defender Cesar Azpilicueta was forced to react quickly to prevent Adam Smith's low cross reaching Josh King who was positioned in space in front of the home goal.

But that was a fleeting moment of concern for Conte's side before Pedro produced a moment of outstanding individual skill to put the leaders on course for victory with the 24th-minute opening goal.

Hazard started the move, running incisively towards the heart of the Bournemouth defence before playing the ball into the feet of Fabregas, who found his Spanish international team-mate Pedro with a short pass.

The former Barcelona player did well to create space on the edge of the box before chipping the ball over keeper Artur Boruc and into the top corner of the Bournemouth goal.

Howe's side responded positively, and in particular Jack Wilshere who produced a weaving run into the home box before testing keeper Thibaut Courtois with a low shot. Then moments later the on-loan Arsenal midfielder latched onto a poor clearing header only to see his volley deflected wide.

That opportunity provoked an angry reaction from Conte who was frustrated at his side's failure to organise themselves at the preceding free-kick.

Hazard had been a constant threat and the forward's powerful running again unsettled the visiting defence, drawing the foul from skipper Simon Francis that ensured the game was effectively over just four minutes after the restart.

Francis' mistimed challenge sent Hazard sprawling inside the penalty area and the Belgian recovered to convert the resulting penalty. Pedro's second goal arrived deep in stoppage time to seal another emphatic victory. — AFP

GIROUD LATE GOAL LIFTS ARSENAL

Arsenal 1

West Brom 0

LONDON: A late goal by Olivier Giroud on his first Premier League start of the season gave Arsenal a hard-fought 1-0 win over West Bromwich Albion yesterday. Arsene Wenger's side seemed certain to slip further off the pace at the top of the league against an ultra-defensive Albion team as the game moved into its final stages at the Emirates Stadium. But Giroud's header in the 86th minute provided a welcome return to winning ways for Arsenal after painful defeats on the road at Everton and Manchester City.

Gunners boss Wenger had defended Mesut Ozil, a scapegoat in some quarters for failing to pull his defensive weight in those pre-Christmas setbacks. And he was rewarded for his faith as Ozil provided the cross for Giroud's winner to keep Arsenal nine points behind leaders Chelsea.

It was clear from early on that Albion's priority was keeping a tight rein on Arsenal's attack and most of the first half followed a repeated pattern—the hosts moving the ball forward and attempting to find gaps without much success.

Ozil had a shot blocked, Giroud sent a curling effort high and wide, and then failed to react quickly enough to provide a target when Hector

Bellerin beat the offside trap and volleyed the ball across the penalty area.

When Arsenal attempted to pass their way through, any inaccuracy or failure of control was punished as defenders surrounded and outnumbered attackers. Claudio Yacob intercepted as Alex Iwobi and Giroud attempted an intricate one-two. Iwobi then decided to go it alone, but his shot drifted just over the bar after he had dribbled in from the left. In the opening five minutes of the second half Arsenal raised the pace and urgency of their game and might have scored twice.

ATTACKING INTENT

First Iwobi's low volley forced a save from Albion goalkeeper Ben Foster and as Alexis Sanchez rushed in to attempt to stab home the loose ball, Foster knocked it away for a corner.

From the resulting set piece, the ball reached Sanchez inside the six-yard box but with his back to goal. The Chilean dribbled away from goal to his left and shot on the turn but the ball rebounded off the near post. Sanchez, full of attacking intent, then ran in from the left and shot fiercely for the top corner, his drive finger-tipped away by Foster.

Perhaps that inspired Giroud to run past two defenders and hit a low, left-foot shot that Foster had to keep out with his leg.

Albion had little to offer until Salomon Rondon charged down the left, but Gabriel was able to outpace him as he bore down on goal.

A second run by Rondon, however, forced the first of a series of corners that ended with Yacob blasting over the crossbar after Petr Cech had



LONDON: West Bromwich Albion's English defender Craig Dawson (L) vies with Arsenal's Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and West Bromwich Albion at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. — AFP

failed to make a clean catch.

At the other end Giroud's outstretched foot was inches away from reaching a low cross from Lucas Perez, and when Bellerin worked his way clear of defenders to meet a cross from the right, he could only head the ball over the bar.

It seemed Albion had done enough to earn a point until Ozil crossed from the right and Giroud, bumping and barging defender Gareth McAuley, sent a header looping over Foster and in. Late substitute Aaron Ramsey almost made it 2-0 when he ran onto Sanchez's header only to hit his shot against Foster's legs. — AFP

MAN CITY WEARS DOWN HULL TO WIN 3-0 IN EPL

Hull 0

Man City 3

HULL: Manchester City wore down last-placed Hull to win 3-0 in the English Premier League, thanks to late goals by Yaya Toure and substitute Kelechi Iheanacho as well as an own-goal yesterday.

Toure converted a penalty kick in the 72nd minute after Raheem Sterling was tripped by Andrew Robertson as the England winger drove into the area. Up until that point, City lacked inspiration going forward as Hull defended valiantly and in numbers, but more spaces opened up to allow the visitors a second goal.

Kevin De Bruyne laid in David Silva, whose pinpoint cross was tapped home by Iheanacho at the far post in the 78th. In the fourth minute of stoppage time, Sterling weaved his way into the area and sent in a cross that was deflected

into his own net by Curtis Davies.

A third straight win continued City's recovery after a sticky period of results for coach Pep Guardiola, lifting the team into second place ahead of Liverpool. Liverpool plays its game in hand against Stoke today.

City is seven points behind Chelsea after 18 rounds of the 38-game season. Toure has scored all 10 of his penalties for City and has three goals since returning to the team after being ostracized by Guardiola early in the season.

The former Ivory Coast midfielder could have a key part to play in City's title challenge this season now that fellow midfielder Ilkay Gundogan has been ruled out for the rest of the campaign with damaged knee ligaments.

Hull will rue Robertson's moment of madness in bringing down Sterling as the bottom side was looking compact in defense and giving up few chances. Only De Bruyne, with a low shot against the post, had come close to breaking the deadlock before Toure's penalty. — AP

KFH LAUNCHES 'INVESTMENT PLANS MARKETING' CAMPAIGN

Page 22

Commercial sector boosts Kuwait real estate sales

Noor Capital Markets holds seminar on financial markets

Page 23



Markaz successfully closes a 5-year KD 25m bond issue

Page 26

Page 25



LONDON: Customers queue to enter the Selfridges department store in central London yesterday to shop during the post-Christmas, Boxing Day sales. —AFP

TATA'S MARKET VALUE TOOK A HIT AFTER MISTRY CLASH

A DISTINCT SET OF GOVERNANCE RULES LED TO SPAT IN INDIA'S LARGEST CONGLOMERATE

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI: When Ratan Tata retired as chairman of Tata Sons Ltd in 2012, he proposed a change in the laws governing the relationship between India's largest conglomerate and its key shareholder, according to sources familiar with the situation.

Until then, the Tata Trusts - public charities owning two-thirds of the company - had easily protected its investment. A Tata family member had for decades held the chairmanship at both the Trusts and the company, whose businesses include cars, software and steel. But an outsider, Cyrus Mistry, had just taken the top job at Tata Sons. Tata wanted to make sure the Trusts, that rely on Tata Sons for dividends to fund their charitable work, could keep having a major say in company decisions, the sources said.

Mistry agreed, and in doing so sowed the seeds of his ouster from the company last October, according to interviews with more than half-a-dozen current and former Tata executives and advisors, and a review of meeting minutes, emails and a court petition that Mistry has filed against Tata Sons.

Mistry's departure - and the reinstatement of the 78-year-old Tata as interim chairman - has triggered a bitter, public spat that has contributed to nearly a \$10 billion decline in the market value of Tata's many listed companies. Even if the conflict is resolved, the company could face future governance issues as the structure remains unchanged, which means it could weigh on any new chairman. "It is going to be very difficult for an external person to take the role," said Shriram Subramanian, founder of proxy advisory firm InGovern Research.

Mistry wrote in a letter to the Tata Sons board on Oct. 26 that Tata improperly used the change in bylaws to interfere in the affairs of the company and created an alternate power center at the group, which made it hard for him to do his job.

Tata Sons spokesman Debasis Ray said Tata asked Mistry to do only what was in the bylaws and got involved in the company's affairs when he was asked. Tata Sons has cited Mistry's performance as the main reason for firing him, holding him responsible for rising expenses and impairment provisions.

Still, interviews with sources on both sides and the review of documents show that the changes in bylaws helped create the conditions that caused friction between Mistry and Tata and increasingly hindered smooth functioning of the group. Over the past 30 months, Mistry met Tata



MUMBAI: Crisis erupted in Indian conglomerate Tatas after Cyrus Mistry (left) was ousted as Tata Sons chairman on 24 October, 2016.

- often along with fellow trustee Noshir Soonawala - more than two dozen times to update them on deals and other strategic decisions at group companies. In several cases, the meetings and explanations led to disagreements, the sources said.

Changes to bylaws

The changes in bylaws, which were finalized in 2014 after more than a year of discussions, substantially increased the accountability of the chairman of Tata Sons to the directors nominated by the Trusts. The Trusts can nominate one-third of Tata Sons' directors. The new bylaws require major decisions, such as deals and changes to the company's capital structure, be approved by a majority of the Trusts' nominees. The chairman was also now required to present five-year and annual business plans to the board and have them approved by a majority of the nominees, the bylaws show.

The chairman, though, was not directly accountable to any of the trustees, including Tata. The Trusts' nominees were expected to represent their interests on the Tata Sons board, sources familiar with the rules on both sides of the conflict said.

Mistry said in his letter that the family's patriarch nevertheless continued to directly interfere in the conglomerate's affairs and called the nominees "postmen" who did Tata's bidding.

Mistry also wrote that Tata's interference "severely constrained" his ability to make the necessary changes to turn around many of the conglomerate's loss-making businesses.

Of the three nominees of the Trusts on the nine-member Tata Sons board at the time of Mistry's ouster, one declined to comment and two others could not be reached. Tata Sons' Ray denied that Tata interfered with operational matters after stepping down. Tata never attended the group's board meetings and any interaction between Tata and Mistry was at Mistry's behest, Ray said.

The dispute is now being litigated. Mistry filed a petition on Dec. 20 at the National Company Law Tribunal, a quasi-judicial body that deals with corporate grievances in India.

In his petition, Mistry has asked the court to stop Tata and the trustees from interfering in the affairs of the company, replace the entire Tata Sons board and

order an investigation into the role of the trustees. Tata Sons has called his accusations baseless and malicious and said it believes that Mistry's petition is not maintainable in law.

Many meetings

While the extent of Tata's influence remains in dispute, sources on both sides acknowledged that Tata and Mistry often met to talk about the affairs of the company, and sometimes disagreed on the best course of action.

For example, when Tata Power decided to buy \$1.4 billion worth of renewable energy assets from rival Welspun Energy this summer, Tata and Soonawala - who is also a former Tata group finance chief and close confidante of the family's patriarch - got involved. Emails from early July between Mistry and Soonawala show that Soonawala had ideas about how the deal should be structured that were different from the proposals made by bankers who were advising the group.

Soonawala also told Mistry to get Tata's sign off before finalizing the deal, two sources close to Mistry said, adding that the involvement of the two men led to the deal being delayed by several weeks.

Ray said Soonawala, 81, got involved because he was asked by Mistry to do so. Another Tata Sons spokesman said "there were no delays because of consultation with the trustees". Sources close to Mistry deny he asked for Soonawala's advice. Reuters could not independently confirm whether such a request was ever made.

In another instance, just weeks before an Indian telecom airwaves auction in the autumn, Mistry met Tata and Soonawala on three separate occasions to discuss Tata Teleservices' bidding strategy, two sources close to Mistry said. They said the meetings lasted for hours, as the two sides disagreed on how much extra spectrum Tata Teleservices should buy.

Reuters could not independently determine who asked for the meetings. Tata and Soonawala wanted the purchase to be kept at a minimum because the company was already bleeding, but Mistry and Tata Teleservices executives wanted to buy more, arguing it could help increase value and draw interest from suitors, the sources said. Tata Teleservices ended up paying 46.2 billion rupees (\$681 million) for some of the spectrum being sold, government data showed. What is not clear is who prevailed in the internal argument over the bidding. — Reuters

SAUDI POST-BUDGET RALLY STALLS, UAE BOURSES FIRM

MIDEAST STOCK MARKETS

DUBAI: The Saudi Arabian stock market's post-budget rally ran out of steam yesterday as the index neared technical resistance, while United Arab Emirates bourses outperformed the region.

The Saudi index added 1.5 percent on Sunday in reaction to Riyadh's modestly expansionary state budget for 2017. But it closed 0.3 percent lower at 7,166 points yesterday in lower trading volume. Technical resistance lies at this year's peak of 7,235 points, hit earlier this month.

Utility Saudi Electricity, which jumped 8.7 percent on Sunday after the government said in the budget that it would raise domestic fuel and electricity prices by unspecified margins later this year, fell back 2.6 percent.

The petrochemical sector, which had outperformed after the budget plan pledged not to raise gas feedstock prices before 2019, slipped 0.4 percent.

But Zain Saudi, which rose 1.9 percent on Sunday after saying it was in talks to sell its mobile transmitter towers to a consortium of TASC SAL and ACWA Holding, climbed a further 3.0 percent yesterday. In Dubai, the index rose 0.8 percent as trading volume expanded. Amusement park operator DXB Entertainment gained 3.9 percent.

Shuaa Capital initially rose as much as 2.6 percent after it bought 14 percent of Bahrain's Khaleeji Commercial Bank, a subsidiary of GFH Financial Group, on Sunday for 9.6 million dinars (\$25 million). But Shuaa closed down 1.3 percent. Retail and hospitality firm Marka, which surged last week after news that its chief executive Nick Peel had resigned, continued pulling back, losing 2.6 percent.

Abu Dhabi rose 0.4 percent on the back of strength in blue-chip banks such as Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, up 1.6 percent. In Egypt, the index dropped 0.6 percent amid profit-taking in blue chips such as Global Telecom, down 4.0 percent. But Arabia Cotton Ginning, which climbed 5.9 percent on Sunday after its board approved splitting the company into two separate entities, rose by the same margin again yesterday.

HIGHLIGHTS

- SAUDI ARABIA**
* The index dropped 0.3 percent to 7,166 points.
- DUBAI**
* The index rose 0.8 percent to 3,552 points.
- ABU DHABI**
* The index gained 0.4 percent to 4,456 points.
- QATAR**
* The index fell 0.5 percent to 10,344 points.
- EGYPT**
* The index dropped 0.6 percent to 12,182 points.
- KUWAIT**
* The index rose 0.3 percent to 5,714 points.
- OMAN**
* The index edged down 0.1 percent to 5,727 points.
- BAHRAIN**
* The index fell 0.3 percent to 1,208 points. — Reuters

UK BOXING DAY ONLINE SALES JUMP 11.5%

LONDON: The number of Britons who hit the shops on Boxing Day morning, a traditional shopping day, fell 6 percent versus the same period last year, while online transactions rose 11.5 percent year-on-year, retail data company Springboard said. British retail sales grew at the fastest rate in more than a year in late November and early December, which may have taken some of the buzz out of the period around the Christmas holiday.

Boxing Day sales have traditionally been an indicator of the strength of the Christmas shopping period. But as online transactions grow in importance, discounting periods are being spread more evenly over the year and fewer people are visiting shops to make purchases.

In further evidence of changing shopping habits, Springboard said the number of people in shopping centres on Boxing Day morning fell 16.6 percent versus the same period last year.

Britain's The Telegraph newspaper said huge volumes of returns from Black Friday in November meant that many items would not make it back into shops in time for Boxing Day, hampering shops' sales further, citing data from Clear Returns which tracks online shopping returns. A record 1 billion pounds worth of items are expected to be returned after this year's Black Friday as online customers adopted a "buy now and decide later" stance, The Telegraph said.

Clear Returns was not immediately available to comment. — Reuters



NOOR CAPITAL MARKETS HOLDS SEMINAR ON FINANCIAL MARKETS

PROFESSIONAL ANALYSIS TO THE MARKETS' MOVEMENT

KUWAIT: As a part of Noor Capital Markets (NCM) mission to raise the awareness about the global markets and its sophisticated mediums, an educational seminar was conducted about the international economics, markets activities and related topics that concern the investors. The seminar was presented by Dr Yousef Al-Hadhoud along with Noor CM team and lasted for two days at Radisson Blue Hotel.

"We endeavor to collaborate our efforts in supporting our customers through our customer service and sales teams. We keep an open channel for direct communications to understand clients concerns, therefore we observed that many do lack the basic information about trading terminology, tools and strategies, thus we provide the knowledge to them to increase awareness," Nada Sulaiman, Assistant manager-Business development stated.

"Investors need to know the basics of online trading before they start trading portfolio, thus we present in our gatherings the trading principles, and such a collaboration with one of the prime names in trading industry" Noor Capital Markets' is a privilege," The markets expert Dr Yousef Al Hadhoud commented.

"We touched a momentous interaction amongst the attendees who were interested in all topics discussed such as An Introduction to Financial Markets, Trading Platform and Capital Management and we are going to keep cus-



tomizing our discussions to our customers' demands accordingly," Ms Sulaiman concluded. NoorCM-Kuwait is a service provider of Amwal International Investment Company KSCC, one of the most prestigious Investment and financial companies in the region. Amwal specializes in

private equity, financial services, and development projects in the Middle East and North Africa region, headquartered in Kuwait City. Amwal is a public regulated company on the Kuwait Stock Exchange and is licensed by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Capital Markets Authority Kuwait.



LONDON: Customers look at handbags at Selfridges department store in central London yesterday during the post-Christmas, Boxing Day sales. — AFP

ARGENTINE FIN MINISTER SACKED AMID RECESSION

BUENOS AIRES: Argentine President Mauricio Macri sacked his finance minister Alfonso Prat-Gay yesterday, shaking up his economic team amid a stubborn recession that has made his center-right reforms deeply unpopular.

"The president asked him to resign," chief of staff Marcos Pena told a press conference. "It's a matter of policy differences." Prat-Gay's ministry will be split in two, Pena said.

Nicolas Dujovne, a respected economist, will take over as finance minister. Luis Caputo, who previously served Prat-Gay as budget secretary, will take over the newly created budget ministry.

Caputo was the government's envoy for negotiations that ended Argentina's decade-old legal battle with US hedge funds demanding full repayment on defaulted Argentine bonds. It is Macri's first cabinet reshuffle since he swept to

power just over a year ago, putting an emphatic end to 12 years of left-wing rule.

Prat-Gay had been instrumental in a flurry of market-oriented reforms, including the end of foreign exchange controls which triggered a sharp devaluation of the peso and sent annual inflation soaring above 40 percent. Other reforms under his watch included the removal of subsidies for public transportation, electricity and gas, which triggered angry protests.

Macri says his reforms are necessary to revive Latin America's third-largest economy. But as he starts his second year in office, the promised growth has yet to arrive.

The Argentine economy is forecast to shrink by two percent this year. Macri's government is banking on growth of 3.5 percent in 2017, with inflation falling to 17 percent. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: This file photo taken on April 19, 2016 shows Finance Minister Alfonso Prat-Gay after giving a press conference at Casa Rosada Government Palace in Buenos Aires. — AFP

CUBA'S RAUL CASTRO FACES DEEP ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN 2017

HAVANA: Alex Romero was delighted when President Barack Obama came to Havana in March bearing the promise of a bright new future. Like so many other Cubans, the 42-year-old state photography shop employee thrilled at the president's vision of restored ties between the US and Cuba. Families would reunite. A flood of American business would lift the stagnant centrally planned economy, fueling its slow path toward reform. Even as Obama spoke, an 80 percent surge in US visitors was drenching state-run and private businesses with hundreds of millions of desperately needed dollars.

Nine months later, the world seen from Havana looks very different. President Raul Castro faces what could be his toughest year since he took power in 2006. 2017 brings a possible economic recession and a US president-elect who has promised to undo Obama's normalization unless the Cuban government makes new concessions on civil rights. Resistance to pressure from Washington is a founding principle for the Cuban communist system, making domestic concessions in exchange for continued detente a virtual impossibility.

"People expected that after Obama came there would be changes in the relationship between the US and Cuba but that we could keep the best of what we have, the benefits for the people," Romero said. "Trump's not going to be able to get what he wants, another type of Cuba. If the world's number one power takes us on, 2017 is going to be really bad for us."

Twin challenges
Castro must manage these twin economic and diplomatic chal-



HAVANA: In this March 20, 2016 file photo, tourists ride in a classic American car past a balcony decorated with Cuban and US flags in Havana. Slow growth during a surge of interest in foreign investment and the greatest tourism boom in decades attests to both long-term systemic mismanagement and the depth of the crisis in other sectors, particularly aid from Venezuelan in the form of deeply subsidized oil. — AP

lenges during a year of transition. The 85-year-old general has promised to hand over the office in early 2018 to a successor, widely expected to be Miguel Diaz-Canel, a 56-year-old official with neither the Castro name nor revolutionary credentials. The change will occur without Castro's older brother Fidel, the revolutionary leader whose largely unseen presence endowed the system he created with historical weight and credibility in the eyes of many Cubans before he died last month at 90.

"Even if those two events hadn't taken place - Trump's victory and Fidel's death - 2017 was going to be a very difficult year for Cuba," said Cuban economist Omar Everleny Perez, a visiting professor at Keio

University in Tokyo. Cuba publishes few credible economic statistics, but experts expect the country to end this year with gross domestic product growth of 1 percent or less. It maintained a rate close to 3 percent from 2011-2015.

One bright spot is tourism, booming since Obama and Castro's Dec. 17, 2014, detente announcement set off a surge in overall visitor numbers, up more than 15 percent in 2015 and again this year.

"I've never seen as many tourists as I have this year," said Magaly Pupo, a street-corner pastry vendor in Old Havana. "They're everywhere and they're the income that we need in this country."

The slowness of macroeconomic growth despite a surge of interest

in foreign investment and the greatest tourism boom in decades attests to both long-term mismanagement of the Cuban economy and the depth of the crisis in other sectors, particularly aid from Venezuelan in the form of deeply subsidized oil.

Analysts believe that as Venezuela's Cuba-inspired socialist economy has disintegrated, exports to Cuba has dropped from 115,000 barrels daily in 2008 to 90,000 in recent years to 40,000 a day over the last few months. Venezuela was the prime destination alongside Brazil for Cuban doctors and other professionals whose salaries go directly to the Cuban government, providing another vital source of hard currency believed to be slackening in recent years. Nickel, another of Cuba's main exports, has seen a sharp price drop this year.

The revenue drop may be creating a vicious cycle for Cuba's state-run industries. Experts say cutbacks in imported industrial inputs this year will lead to lower productivity in Cuba's few domestic industries in 2017 and make zero growth or recession highly likely.

"Raul Castro's government has a year left and it should be planning what needs to be done," said Pavel Vidal, a Cuban economist at the Universidad Javeriana in Cali, Colombia. "Above all, it will be managing a crisis." The government cut back summer working hours and gas rations for state-owned vehicles and has so far avoided any sustained power outages. But a crackdown on black-market gasoline sales to taxi drivers led them to increase prices, causing drivers to raise their prices, squeezing many Cubans already struggling to get by on state salaries of about \$30 a month. — AP

US PIPELINE UNCERTAINTY ILLUSTRATES BROADER CONCERNS FOR TRIBES

NEW YORK: For hundreds of protesters, it was cause to cheer when the Obama administration this month declined to issue an easement for the Dakota Access pipeline's final segment. But that elation was dampened by the uncertainty of what comes next: a Donald Trump-led White House that might be far less attuned to issues affecting Native Americans.

"With Trump coming into office, you just can't celebrate," said Laundi Germaine Keepseagle, who is 28 and from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, where the demonstrators have been camped out near the North Dakota-South Dakota border. Anxiety over the 1,200-mile pipeline illustrates a broader uncertainty over how tribes will fare under Trump following what many in Indian Country consider a landmark eight years.

President Barack Obama has won accolades among Native Americans for breaking through a gridlock of inaction on tribal issues and for putting a spotlight on their concerns with year-

ly meetings with tribal leaders. Under his administration, lawmakers cemented a tribal health care law that includes more preventive care and mental health resources and addresses recruiting and retaining physicians throughout Indian Country. The Interior Department restored tribal homelands by placing more than 500,000 acres under tribes' control - more than any other recent administration - while the Justice Department charted a process approved by Congress for tribes to prosecute and sentence more cases involving non-Native Americans who assault Native American women. Before Obama, a gap in the laws allowed for such crimes to go unpunished.

In addition, the federal government settled decades-old lawsuits involving Native Americans, including class-action cases over the government's mismanagement of royalties for oil, gas, timber and grazing leases and its discrimination against tribal members seeking farm loans. "In my opinion, President Obama

has been the greatest president in dealing with Native Americans," said Brian Cladoosby, chairman of the Swinomish Tribe north of Seattle and president of the nonpartisan National Congress of American Indians, based in Washington, D.C. "The last eight years give us hope going forward with the relationships we have on both sides of the aisle."

Trump, meanwhile, rarely acknowledged Native Americans during his campaign and hasn't publicly outlined how he would improve or manage the United States' longstanding relationships with tribes.

His Interior secretary pick, Republican Rep. Ryan Zinke of Montana, sponsored legislation that he says would have given tribes more control over coal and other fossil fuel development on their lands. But some of Trump's biggest campaign pledges - including repealing health care legislation and building a wall along the US-Mexico border - would collide with tribal interests. — AP

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MARKAZ SUCCESSFULLY CLOSES A 5-YEAR KD 25M BOND ISSUE

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" and Gulf Bank announced in a joint statement the successful completion of "Markaz" 5 years bond issue with a nominal value of KD25 million, which was oversubscribed. This extensive demand reflects the investors' trust in "Markaz", the quality of the issue, and the high creditworthiness of "Markaz", in addition to the effectiveness of the joint distribution efforts with Gulf Bank. "Markaz", the Issue Manager, has appointed Gulf Bank as the Financial Advisor and Sales Agent.

The bonds are issued in two tranches, one with a fixed interest rate of 5% annually payable quarterly, while the other tranche offers a floating interest rate of 2.25 percent

above the Central Bank of Kuwait discount rate, annually and payable quarterly.

It is worth noting that these bonds, due in 2021, are issued in Kuwaiti dinar and enjoy a credit rating of (BBB) from Capital Intelligence. The credit rating reflects the diversity of "Markaz's" investment assets and the good level of liquidity, in addition to the decrease of the leverage level, and the good flow of revenues from commissions, administrative fees, direct and indirect investments.

Manaf Alhajeri, "Markaz" CEO, said: "We are pleased to issue the new bonds, which represent the third issue of 'Markaz', reflecting the trust of the capital markets in the quality of Markaz's issues. The extensive participation of

corporate investors in this new issue confirms this trust again in 'Markaz', and reflects the suitable pricing. We hope in light of these positive signs that corporate efforts in both the public sector and private sector will continue to create a strong and deeply established bonds market."

Alhajeri added: "We cherish our strong relationship with Gulf Bank as financial adviser and selling agent, and we seek to maintain and reinforce this relationship through the continuous cooperation between us. We entrusted Gulf Bank with this role in this issue, and also the one preceding it, in view of the strong market position it enjoys as well as our confidence in the potentials of its distribution

network. Gulf Bank is a leading financial institution with a strong network of branches. We are confident that our agreement with the bank is essential to reach a wider base of investors."

Meanwhile, Antoine Daher, CEO of Gulf Bank said: "We are pleased to have played an active role in successfully closing the Markaz bond issuance. The issue was well received by the investors and was oversubscribed due to the excellent reputation of 'Markaz', the distinctive conditions of the bonds, as well as the outstanding distribution capabilities of Gulf Bank. We have offered both our institutional and private banking clients the opportunity to subscribe in these bonds. Finally, we believe

that we achieved a significant milestone for Gulf Bank by adding this issue to the extensive set of diversified investment products offered to our clients."

The international credit rating company "Capital Intelligence" affirms the credit rating of "Markaz" bonds at the (BBB) investment grade with a stable outlook. It stated in its report that the transformation in the assets diversity away from the most fluctuating financial markets towards the relatively stable real estate sector is a factor for supporting the stabilizing of the rating. Furthermore, the rating reflects the strength of the brand, the conservative business model and good reputation of the company.



BANGKOK: Workers clean the window of an office building in downtown Bangkok yesterday. Thailand, a country beset by more than a decade of political instability, has one of the region's weakest economies, forecast to grow by around 3.2 percent for this year. — AFP

ABU DHABI BOURSE TO LAUNCH SHORT-SELLING

DUBAI: Abu Dhabi's stock market plans to introduce covered short-selling in the first quarter of 2017, its chief executive said yesterday, as it seeks to boost liquidity and attract more foreign investors.

In covered short-selling, investors borrow shares and sell them in the expectation of repurchasing them later at a lower price. Regulators in the Gulf have until now shied away from allowing the practice because of concern that it could destabilise markets, though some countries including Saudi Arabia and Qatar have said they plan to introduce it.

The Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) said yesterday it had held meetings with brokerages in Abu Dhabi and Dubai ahead of the launch of a short-selling service. ADX chief executive Abdullah Al-Blooshi told Reuters the exchange was acting after the United Arab Emirates market regulator, the Securities and Commodities Authority, approved rules on short-selling.

Dubai Financial Market, the UAE's other big exchange, did not respond to an emailed request to comment on whether it too might eventually launch short-selling. Blooshi said the ADX aimed to diversify investment instruments in order to increase the level of liquidity to match global markets. This will enable us to attract foreign investors accustomed to these instruments.

ADX's short-selling service will be open to investors with margin trading accounts, investment funds, institutional investors, custodian clients and market makers, said Blooshi, noting that the 'door will be open' to other investors if they obtain approval from the exchange. In a statement, the ADX described several rules to reduce risks surrounding short-selling. For example, the price of a stock sold short must be higher than the last deal price involving the stock, while brokers' clients will have to provide guarantees when selling short. — Reuters

CHINA'S OUTWARD INVESTMENT TOPS \$161BN IN 2016

FDI INTO CHINA FOR 2016
SEEN AS FLAT IN YUAN TERMS

BEIJING: China's non-financial outbound direct investment (ODI) is likely to hit 1.12 trillion yuan (\$161.19 billion) in 2016 and foreign direct investment into China will total 785 billion yuan, Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng said yesterday. The government will "promote the healthy and orderly development of outbound investment and cooperation" in 2017, Gao said in remarks at a conference that were published on the ministry's website.

China's ODI in November jumped 76.5 percent from a year earlier and it rose 55.3 percent in the first 11 months of 2016, the ministry's data showed, as local firms continued to invest abroad amid a slowing economy and weakening yuan.

Separately, the ministry said on its microblog that China will sharply reduce restrictions on foreign investment access in 2017, opening up sectors where foreign companies have strong investment interest and risks are under control.

No details were given on what restrictions will be changed. Earlier this month, China published draft foreign investment

guidelines which it said would "increase openness to the outside world".

Based on Gao's forecasts, non-financial ODI is set to surpass foreign direct investment into China by an unprecedented 335 billion yuan this year, amid worries about capital outflows. For all of 2015, the ministry reported non-financial ODI of 735.1 billion yuan, and FDI of 781.4 billion yuan.

Gao said that in 2017, difficulties faced in maintaining a stable flow of foreign investment into China will increase, while sources of volatility for China's outbound investment will rise along with risks, according to an interview with state media published Monday.

Beijing has announced a string of measures recently to tighten controls on money moving out of the country, including closer scrutiny of outbound investments, as the yuan skids and the country's foreign exchange reserves fall to the lowest levels in nearly six years. China will further enhance the competitiveness of its foreign trade and consolidate recent good momentum, Gao added. — Reuters

BLINDSIDED BY SUV BOOM, HYUNDAI TRIMS COSTS, PERKS

SALES HURT BY LACK OF SUV MODELS, LACKLUSTER SEDAN DESIGN

SEOUL: Headed for a fourth straight annual profit decline, Hyundai Motor is trimming its cost fat; scaling back on business class flights and annual family home trips for overseas employees, executives told Reuters. The South Korean automaker has been hit by its exposure to weak emerging markets, and a product lineup that features more sedans than sport utility vehicles, just as SUVs have become more popular across many global markets.

The belt-tightening - which also includes cutting back on printing and fluorescent light bulbs - aims to buy Hyundai time to prepare new models and a design revamp. "We're trying to address a mismatch between the market trend and our product line-up," said one Hyundai insider, referring to a need for more SUV models. "That's a longer term plan. For now we're trying to save every penny," he said, declining to be identified because the plans are not public.

Since October, Hyundai Motor Group executives have taken a 10 percent pay cut, the first such move in seven years. The number of executives at Hyundai Motor alone has risen by 44 percent in five years, to 293 last year. The group has also downgraded hotel rooms for executive travel, and is encouraging video conferencing as a cheaper alternative to travel, insiders said.

"We're in emergency management mode," said another insider, who didn't want to be named as he is not authorized to speak to the media. In a response to Reuters for this article, Hyundai Motor said it is "making various cost-saving efforts", with shrinking global demand and growing business uncertainty, but did not elaborate.

Other costs, such as low-margin supplier parts and labor at the heavily-unionized automaker, are tougher to pare back, said Ko Tae-bong, analyst at HI Investment & Securities, noting Hyundai needs also to spend more on research and development in self-driving and other new technologies. While Hyundai remains cash-rich, its costs as a proportion of revenue have risen for five straight years, to 81 percent so far this year, regulatory filings show. "Cutting expenses are stopgap measures, and won't do much to improve its bottom line," Ko said, calling them more "symbolic".

Sales decline

Hyundai grew quickly after the global financial crisis, with brisk sales of its Sonata and Elantra sedans. It was the only major automaker to increase sales in the United States in 2009. But it has struggled to maintain that momentum as rivals' sales of SUVs have boomed and emerging market economies have weakened. Hyundai



Motor shares have fallen 40 percent in the past three years, the worst performer among global automakers. The automaker's top US executive has resigned, and the South Korea sales chief and China head have been replaced. Sales of Hyundai cars, and those of its affiliate Kia Motors, could drop to 8 million this year, a first decline since Hyundai bought its smaller domestic rival in 1998, said Ko, the analyst.

For next year, Hyundai-Kia Executive Vice President and research head Park Hong-jae, expects sales to pick up again. "It was a difficult year this year. Things will get better," he told reporters on Thursday, citing recovery in markets such as Brazil and Russia. Another Hyundai source said the group has trimmed its preliminary 2017 sales target to 8.2 million vehicles, from 8.35 million forecast in mid-year.

More SUVs

While it looks to manage its staff budget, Hyundai is beefing up its SUV offerings, freshening up its Sonata sedan, and redirecting exports from slow-demand markets such as the Middle East to the United States. In the United States, SUVs accounted for 28 percent of Hyundai's sales in January-November, up from 23 percent a year earlier, according to Autodata Corp, but less than half the industry average.

At its plant in Montgomery, Alabama, Hyundai has replaced some Sonata production with its popular Santa Fe SUV. Next year,

Hyundai will look to plug a gap in its SUV offerings for developed markets by making a sub-compact model - under the project name "OS" - in South Korea for sale at home, in the United States and Europe, people inside the company said. Hyundai makes sub-compact SUVs locally in China, India and Russia.

"We need that small SUV in the US, much sooner than later," Scott Fink, one of Hyundai's biggest US dealers, told Reuters. In sedans, Hyundai is pushing sales of bigger, higher-margin models like the Azera, or Grandeur, and its Genesis luxury line. Its smaller sedans, including the Elantra and Sonata, have lost ground to rivals like Honda Motor's Civic, which one Hyundai executive said has "wowing design".

Hyundai is working on a next generation of cars with "a different flair" to hit the market from 2019, Luc Donckerwolke, senior vice president for design, told Reuters on the sidelines of a recent event.

The biggest holder of Hyundai Motor preferred shares, the Norway-based Skagen Kon-Tiki fund, expects the automaker to get back on track over the next couple of years, with new SUVs, recovering emerging market currencies and better plant utilization. Knut Harald Nilsson, the fund's lead portfolio manager, reckons Hyundai's margins should recover to above 7 percent over that period, from 6 percent earlier this year, but are unlikely to return to the 10 percent levels of a few years ago "anytime soon". — Reuters

INDIA CRACKDOWN ON 'NAMELESS' PROPERTIES COULD PURGE SECTOR

EXPERTS SEE IMPLEMENTATION HURDLES

MUMBAI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vow to take on benami, or nameless properties, can bring greater transparency to a notoriously opaque sector and help check prices if a new law is implemented properly, experts said yesterday.

The practice of buying a property in the name of someone other than the buyer has been widely misused to buy real estate with undeclared income and with fake names and identities to avoid paying tax. It is estimated benami properties worth billions of dollars are held under fictitious names across India, bypassing laws to check ownership and depriving states of valuable revenue that could be spent on development and welfare schemes. A 1988 law on such properties was amended this year to ban illegal benami transactions with stricter punishments including imprisonment and a fine of up to a fourth of the property's fair market value. These properties can

also be confiscated. "We are going to take action against the properties which are purchased in the name of others. It is the property of the country," Modi said in his monthly radio address on Sunday. "This law will be put to use in the coming days to fight corruption," he said. Property as defined under the 1988 law includes not only land and homes, but also assets such as gold, stocks and bank deposits. "If the new law is implemented properly, there will be greater transparency in the real estate sector, there will be less corruption, and we may see a correction in prices," said Vinod Sampat, a property lawyer in Mumbai.

"But these transactions are hard to track, and the government has a poor record of implementation. While the intention is good, it remains to be seen if the law can be implemented properly," he said. A series of slum evictions in cities including Delhi has put the spotlight on an acute hous-

ing shortage in urban India. About a third of the country's 1.25 billion population lives in cities, with numbers rising as tens of thousands of people leave villages to seek better prospects.

A government plan to provide housing for all by 2022 is meant to create 20 million new urban housing units and 30 million rural homes. But the government has been criticized for the slow pace of implementation. Going after benami properties can help accelerate the pace of implementing the government's plan, said Anuj Puri, chairman of real estate firm Jones Lang LaSalle India. "When titles are clear and transactions transparent, the confidence of lenders increases, so we will see a pickup in lending to buyers," he said. "This will increase the supply of residential real estate." The focus on benami properties comes on the heels of a crackdown on undeclared "black money" by withdrawing high-value rupee bills from circulation. — Reuters

ALARGAN CEO TALKS ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

KUWAIT: Speaking at the second Dal Talks held at Al-Shaheed Park on Saturday, ALARGAN International Real Estate Company CEO and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors, Khaled Al-Meshaan, emphasized on the notion of sustainability in career, entrepreneurship and business to drive long-term growth. He further highlighted the importance of quality, building on strengths and evolving over time to remain competitive.

Sharing a panel with speakers comprising Global Investment House Vice Chairman and Group Chief Executive Officer, Maha Al-Ghunaim, Al-Meshaan shared his story of the evolution of ALARGAN, a story interlaced with his personal growth in the professional world.

Al-Meshaan said: "It all starts with a single idea; what market need does it target and what challenges does it attract. We all start small somewhere and grow bigger by focusing on our strengths, which can be revealed with time. Therefore, it is important to focus on what we are doing and do it better, as well as evaluate the idea over time."

ALARGAN International Real Estate Company was established as a contracting company and has evolved to become a leading developer with fully-owned subsidiaries in the region, executing developments that are sustainable and add value to their communities.

Al-Meshaan said: "Our primary focus at ALARGAN is to add value for the benefit of our society as we follow our motto 'Life...as you love it' through which we develop real estate solutions to enhance



our customers' enjoyment of life. Yields will subsequently follow."

Al-Meshaan also affirmed that the success of the company was mainly led by its ability to adapt to changes and to lead innovation. "We study future changes in needs and habits, and challenges coming our way. From there we innovate and evolve." ALARGAN is today the only company in Kuwait to obtain the Platinum ranking for the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program, which is awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). ALARGAN focuses on the development of affordable and middle income housing in the GCC to serve the growing population and changing income scales.

In addition to its future-looking strategy,

ALARGAN invests in talents by providing them profit sharing schemes and benefits, a collaborative work environment and sense of belonging. This goes hand-in-hand with the company's heavy investment in corporate social responsibility, a key investment that it recognizes as a pillar to long-term sustainability.

Al-Meshaan concluded his talk with an advice to the younger audience: "Always look ahead and do not get distracted. Think long-term, think sustainable and value. These values make for great entrepreneurship."

Dal Talks is a moderated conference organized by the Kuwait International Law Society at the School of Law at Kuwait University, and is aimed at motivating and inspiring, as well as changing



the views of its audience. Dal Talks previously hosted Dr Saad Al-Barrak, former CEO of Zain; Ghanim Al-Muftah, the Qatari child wonder diagnosed with Caudal Regression Syndrome at birth; and Faisal Al-Nashmi, Kuwaiti Chef and founder of Al-Makan.

ALARGAN International Real Estate Company is a leading real estate company based in Kuwait and focused on the development of affordable and middle income housing in the GCC. The company strives to integrate its motto, 'Life... As You Love It', across its projects by creating 'live, work, play and savor' environments that present a unique lifestyle experience. The company also endeavors to pass on its sustainability values to the community by including green and ener-

gy efficient initiatives in its projects. ALARGAN is the only company in Kuwait to obtain the Platinum ranking for the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program, which is awarded by the US Green Building Council (USGBC). ALARGAN follows a balanced investment strategy, and tries to seize opportunities with stable and superior returns based on the market's investment cycle. Its projects are diverse and located across the Gulf region, including the State of Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman, delivering popular hotels resorts, widely visited shopping and food destinations, large development communities, and middle income level residential housing.

DAMAC PROPERTIES GUARANTEES A BMW WITH PURCHASE OF AN APARTMENT THIS DSF

DUBAI: This Dubai Shopping Festival (Dec 26, 2016 to Jan 28, 2017), DAMAC Properties is offering a brand new BMW or another luxury car - guaranteed with the purchase of a luxury apartment starting from AED 599,000.

Niall McLoughlin, Senior Vice President, DAMAC Properties said: "We're pleased to offer investors a unique opportunity to experience the pleasure of luxury with DAMAC and drive away in a BMW or another luxury car, when they invest in a property across select luxury developments in Dubai. From luxury apartments overlooking Dubai Canal to branded residences in Dubai Marina, this offer allows property buyers not only to live the luxury, but to drive it too."

Known for its big deals for discerning customers, DAMAC has been at the forefront of luxury real estate development in Dubai. In addition to its promotions, the company stresses high appreciation potential and returns in the Dubai property market. "With the city's development still on the rise, there's no better time than now to invest in property that will show high appreciation in the years to come. With Dubai's real estate returns averaging at 7-9 percent, easily 2-3 percent higher than its matured international counterparts like London, New York or Paris, the city becomes a more attractive investment destination. In prime areas, even a 10-12 percent return isn't uncommon," added McLoughlin.

According to recent reports, the UAE's real GDP is expected to grow 4 to 5 percent between 2017 and 2020. Country-wide contracts worth around \$22.6 billion were awarded during the first half of 2016, mainly driven by real estate, power and transport projects in Dubai. The exponential rates of development coupled with a maturing property market that offers

strong returns makes Dubai a global hotspot for real estate investments today.

"The market value of Dubai's real estate sector also receives a push from socio-economic factors such as continuous population growth, expanding job markets, rapid infrastructural development, increasing tourism and retail growth - leading to a boost in the desirability and profitability of real estate," McLoughlin concluded.

As of 30th September 2016, DAMAC Properties has delivered approximately 16,800 homes. The company has a development portfolio of over 44,000 units at various stages of progress and planning, comprising more than 13,000 hotel rooms, serviced apartments and hotel villas, which will be managed by its hospitality arm, DAMAC Hotels & Resorts. With vision and momentum, DAMAC Properties is building the next generation of Middle East luxury living.

DAMAC Properties has been at the forefront of the Middle East's luxury real estate market since 2002 - bringing luxury living experiences to residents from all over the world. Making its mark at the highest end of stylish living, DAMAC Properties has cemented its place as the leading luxury developer in the region, offering iconic design and the upmost quality. The company's footprint now extends across the Middle East with projects in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon and the United Kingdom.

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KFH LAUNCHES 'INVESTMENT PLANS MARKETING' CAMPAIGN

SOLUTIONS FOR EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, PROJECTS AND RETIREMENT

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has launched a new marketing campaign dedicated for the long term saving and investment plans as part of the bank's continuing effort to cater for customers' banking needs and future aspirations, yet to educate them on the benefits of those plans that encompass 'Jameati' for education, 'Rafaa' for marriage, 'Enjaz' for youths' projects, and 'Themar' for retirement. The investment plans are flexible with high investment returns, not to mention are characterized by having Takaful insurance coverage during the investment period.

The campaign that has been launched on eve of the New Year affirms KFH's keenness to address customers' banking and investment needs, while reflects its endeavors to cope with their future aspirations by offering them products and services in line with international standards of quality. It is worth noting that the client targets a sum of money that he wishes to collect in the future, and through an organized plan, this sum of money is saved during a specific timeframe over monthly installments. Accumulative sums of money are invested, and clients receive annual investment profits. "Jameati" Higher Education Investment

Plan is designed for university education purposes. The saving period ranges between 4 to 18 years, and the targeted saving amount ranges between KD 4,000 to KD 120,000. "Rafaa" Marriage Investment Plan is designed for children to help them cover the expenses of their marriage. The target saving amount ranges between KD 5,000 to KD 120,000. The saving period ranges between 4 years to 25 years.

"Injaz" Flexible Investment Plan is designed for customers to achieve their personal plans and dreams. The targeted saving amount ranges between KD 4,000 to KD 150,000. The saving period ranges between 2 to 15 years.

"Thimar" Retirement Investment Plan is designed for customers to help them enjoy a comfortable retirement period worthy of their life achievements. The targeted saving amount ranges between KD 5,000 to KD 120,000.

The Saving period ranges between 5 years to 39 years. Upon completion of the saving period, the targeted saving amount and the accumulated profits during the investment period will be available to customers in the four investment plans. KFH was established in Kuwait in 1977 and is enlisted in the

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

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

KFH's mission is to achieve highest levels of excellence and innovation in the field of client service, while developing common interest for all those concerned with the financial institution. KFH's vision is to spearhead the global development in Islamic financial services, and to upgrade the bank into the level of becoming the most sustainable profitable Islamic bank in the world. KFH's values include cementing leadership through all its businesses, including leadership in the Islamic banking services worldwide, through innovation and in client service and the development of its employees. In addition, KFH is committed to all its procedures, and to setting up long-life partnerships with the concerned authorities.



BURGAN BANK ANNOUNCES WINNER OF KD 125,000 CASH PRIZE IN YAWMI DRAW

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced Ahmad Khalifah Rashed Al-Shahoumi as the new KD 125,000 cash prize winner in the Yawmi quarterly draw. The winner expressed his excitement for being the winner of the rewarding cash prize with Yawmi Account from Burgan Bank.

The Yawmi Account offers customers more chances to win higher rewards, entitling one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 cash prize every three months. To enter Burgan Bank's Yawmi quarterly draws, customers should maintain a minimum amount of KD500 in their account for tow months prior to draw date. Additionally, every KD10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. For more information about the Yawmi quarterly draw, customers are advised to visit their nearest Burgan Bank branch, or call the bank's Call Center at 1804080 where customer service representatives will be delighted to assist with any questions on the Yawmi account or any of the bank's products and services. Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks.



The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the

MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

CANON MIDDLE EAST PARTNERS WITH IN5 TO ORGANIZE 'THE DUBAI DECODE HACKATHON'

Canon Middle East (CME), the leader in imaging products and solutions, partnered with in5to organize 'The Dubai Hackathon'. The event was held at the In5 Innovation Center, and brought together technology developers and designers from several countries to present ground-breaking ideas to promote the ICT sector. Decode Dubai Hackathon offers the ideal platform for technopreneurs to compete, build and develop exciting mobile applications and win exciting prizes. The event comes under the purpose of finding disruptive solutions in the Printing industry with the main objective of finding a solution to offer convenience and efficiency for all printing requirements.

Canon Middle East has invested in supporting the startup ecosystem and this project is first of the many initiatives to originate. The intense competition helped get talent under one platform at the In5 Innovation Center. A total of 21 teams consisting of 68 individuals took part in the competition. Mentors from Canon, as well from in5 briefed the contestants on the theme. The expected outcome from the contestants was to create a new innovative idea for a solution or application which will help support the printing industry. Rohit

Jayakaran and Ahmad Shabbir from 'On the Go Team' delivered a promising idea which won them the first prize.

The second prize was won by Prince Virgil Gesty Coching and Mehrad Yaghmai from 'Open Print Team' who presented their innovative idea of focusing on print services and how they can replace printers. Anurag Agrawal, Managing Director, Canon Middle East, said: "We are inspired by the impressive work of the contestants at the event and congratulate the winners and all the participants for their path-breaking ideas. We are very proud of this new collaboration with in5, which has allowed contestants to come up with new ideas. Today, hackathons build vital bridges between large organizations and innovative tech businesses that benefit the market."

"Our participation in the event also complements our guiding corporate philosophy - Kyosei, which means living and working together for the common good, and which we abide by for all our plans and activities in the region," he added. The contestants were asked to present their innovative ideas for developing them into applications that can be delivered in the market and potentially contribute to a positive impact in the world.



MILWAUKEE: In this file photo, workers begin a statewide presidential election recount in Milwaukee. —AP Photos



MICHIGAN: In this file photo, a challenge is reviewed on a ballot during a statewide presidential election recount in Waterford Township, Michigan.

RECOUNTS OR NO, US ELECTIONS ARE VULNERABLE TO HACKING

'A SMALL NUDGE MIGHT BE DECISIVE'

ALLENTOWN, Pennsylvania: Jill Stein's bid to recount votes in Pennsylvania was in trouble even before a federal judge shot it down Dec 12. That's because the Green Party candidate's effort stood little chance of detecting potential fraud or error in the vote - there was basically nothing to recount. Pennsylvania is one of 11 states where the majority of voters use antiquated machines that store votes electronically, without printed ballots or other paper-based backups that could be used to double-check the balloting. There's almost no way to know if they've accurately recorded individual votes - or if anyone tampered with the count.

More than 80 percent of Pennsylvanians who voted Nov 8 cast their ballots on such machines, according to VotePA, a nonprofit seeking their replacement. VotePA's Marybeth Kuznik described the proposed recount this way: "You go to the computer and you say, 'OK, computer, you counted this a week-and-a-half ago. Were you right the first time?'" These paperless digital voting machines, used by roughly 1 in 5 US voters last month, present one of the most glaring dangers to the security of the rickety, underfunded US election system. Like many electronic voting machines, they are vulnerable to hacking. But other machines typically leave a paper trail that could be manually checked.

The paperless digital machines open the door to potential election rigging that might not ever be detected. Their prevalence also magnifies other risks in the election system, simply because error or fraud is harder to catch when vote counts can't be verified. And like other voting machines adopted since the 2000 election, the paperless systems are nearing the end of their useful life - yet there is no comprehensive plan to replace them. "If I were going to hack this election, I would go for the paperless machines because they are so hard to check," said Barbara Simons, the co-author of "Broken Ballots," a study

of flawed US voting technology. Stein described her recount effort as a way to ensure that the 2016 election wasn't tainted by hacking or fraud. There's no evidence of either so far - a fact federal judge Paul Diamond cited prominently in his decision halting the Pennsylvania recount. Stein pursued similar recounts in Wisconsin and Michigan, to little avail. Those states use more reliable paper-based voting technologies. (The Electoral College certified Donald Trump's presidential victory last week). But a cadre of computer scientists from major universities backed Stein's recounts to underscore the vulnerability of US elections.

Paper can't be hacked

These researchers have successfully hacked e-voting machines for more than a decade in tests commissioned by New York, California, Ohio and other states. Stein and her witnesses said worries about fraud were justified given US charges that Russia meddled in the 2016 presidential campaign. Emails of top Democrats were hacked and leaked. Over the summer, hackers also tried to breach the voter registration databases of Arizona and Illinois using Russia-based servers, US officials said. Election networks in at least 20 states were probed for vulnerabilities. "It's a target-rich environment," said Rice University computer scientist Dan Wallace.

Researchers would like to see the US move entirely to computer-scannable paper ballots, because paper can't be hacked. The US voting system - a loosely regulated, locally managed patchwork of more than 3,000 jurisdictions overseen by the states - employs more than two dozen types of machinery from 15 manufacturers. Elections officials across the nation say they take great care to secure their machines from tampering. They are locked away when not in use and sealed to prevent tampering. All of that makes national elections

very difficult to steal without getting caught. But difficult is not impossible.

Wallace and his colleagues believe a crafty team of pros could strike surgically, focusing on select counties in a few battleground states where "a small nudge might be decisive," he said. Most voting machines in the US are at or near the end of their expected life spans. Forty-three states use machines more than a decade old. Most run on vintage operating systems such as Windows 2000 that pre-date the iPhone and are no longer updated with security patches. On Nov 8, election officials across the US handled numerous complaints of aging touchscreens losing calibration and casting votes for the wrong candidate. But while many experts agree the US voting system needs an upgrade, no one wants to pay to fix it.

Money flowed after the 2000 Florida recount debacle, when punch-card technology was discredited by hanging chads. Congress appropriated \$4 billion for election upgrades; states raced to replace punch cards and lever machines with digital technology. But when that money ran out, so did the ability of many states to address security concerns overlooked in their initial rush. Four in 5 US election officials polled by New York University's Brennan Center last year said they are desperate to replace equipment but lack the cash.

Voters in poorer areas suffer disproportionately, the center found. Data collected in Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota and Colorado suggests the poor are more apt to encounter failing machines. In Virginia, wealthier counties near Washington have upgraded technology while lower-income counties in the state's southwest have not been able to afford it, said Edgardo Cortes, the state elections commissioner. Bajak reported from Houston. Associated Press writers Tami Abdollah in Washington and Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee, contributed to this report. —AP



MIDDLETOWN SPRINGS: In this photo, Rhonda "Honey" Phillips poses next to a Tesla Powerwall battery and inverter connected to a solar panel array in her yard in Middletown Springs, Vermont. —AP

IN VERMONT, SOLAR, BATTERIES KEY ENERGY REVOLUTION

MIDDLETOWN SPRINGS: Rhonda "Honey" Phillips keeps her own cows and garden at her small, hillside homestead, and now is pushing self-sufficiency in a more high-tech direction. This year, she installed new solar panels just downhill from her modest house and hung a Tesla Powerwall backup battery on her basement wall, to charge up when it's sunny and draw down when it isn't. "My grandfather used to say, 'Whatever you can see is what you should be taking care of,'" said Phillips, 57, whose family has been in Vermont since the 1700s. With shorter winters and hotter temperatures in the summer, Phillips is convinced she's seeing climate change.

In her renewable energy project, Phillips got help from the Vermont solar company SunCommon and Vermont's major electric company, Green Mountain Power. GMP has been pushing to be a leader in the search for the Holy Grail of renewable energy - economical batteries to store energy from wind farms and solar panels for those times when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. In an interview last year, the company's CEO, Mary Powell, told The Associated Press that batteries would be a linchpin in a newly envisioned future for electrical energy. They would store solar energy and provide backup power during outages and put electricity on the grid at times of peak demand.

Evolution of energy

All signs are that it's happening. Phillips is one of 20 GMP customers to have installed Tesla Powerwalls - 70 more are in the queue. GMP charges \$37 a month over the life of the battery, or allows customers to buy them up-front for about \$7,000 installed. Email and phone messages left for a Tesla spokeswoman drew no immedi-

ate response. On a larger scale, GMP in the summer of 2015 put into service a solar and battery storage project on the former Stafford Hill landfill in Rutland. The system has multiple purposes. During long-duration power outages, it can be used for electricity to serve the emergency shelter that would be set up at the neighboring high school, said Dan Mackey, whose job title at GMP is "innovation champion."

But on an August afternoon, when air conditioners were cranking and the six-state New England region was hitting its annual peak demand, the Stafford Hill project was used to load the batteries' 2.2 megawatts of power onto the grid. GMP was able to avoid its spot power purchases during a time of peak prices. The total savings: \$200,000, the company said. "Through careful planning, we anticipated when the New England peak load would occur, and worked tirelessly to ensure that control technology would enable us to draw down the power from Stafford Hill providing significant benefit to customers," Powell said.

Last week, the company took what it called "the next step in the evolution of energy." It became the first utility to announce a package of products and services designed to enable a customer to go off the grid. It used to be anathema for utilities to encourage customers to disconnect from the power grid. But spokeswoman Kristin Carlson said if the company can reduce the miles of line it has to run to homes and businesses in remote places, it could be a cost savings to everyone. "This off-grid suite of products illustrates very well where energy is going and for us at GMP. We are leading the revolution toward clean, affordable, local and highly reliable power," Powell said. —AP



5 WAYS MUSEUMS ARE USING TECHNOLOGY FOR NEW EXPERIENCES

NEW YORK: Museums are always looking for ways to make their exhibitions more exciting. Now, new technologies are making that easier. From 3-D scanning and 3-D printing, to virtual reality and special apps, these technologies are being applied in a multitude of ways. Still other technologies are being tested and developed as museums seek to ever broaden public access.

"Where we used to have one way of visiting and experiencing a museum, people now expect a variety of ways," said Catherine Devine, chief digital officer at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. "It's about exploring technologies." A look at some of the ways museums are integrating and developing technologies to engage their audiences:

Navigating a big collection

You can get lost in the giant American Museum of Natural History. Explorer, a new app, uses

hundreds of Bluetooth hotspots to navigate visitors around its halls to artifacts that may interest them the most. "Instead of saying 'turn at West 14th Street,' it says 'turn left at the huge mosquito, go through the green sign,'" said Devine. "From the app's point of view, you don't have to say where you are. Whenever you raise your phone, the thing you're immediately in front of is at the top of the app." Devine said the app can also customize visitors' tours. If a person selects "Really Big," for example, the app might take them to the museum's mammoth blue whale. Once there, layers of information are added, including animation, videos and fun facts like comparing the whale's weight to 1.6 million slices of pizza.

3d printing and scanning

Museums are still exploring the many and varied applications of 3-D printing and 3-D scanning for their programming, research and gallery

experience. Some are already using the latest 3-D printing technology to make replicas of historical artifacts to give visitors a new way to interact with the object without damaging the original. 3-D scanning tools also allow for detailed analysis of fragile specimens.

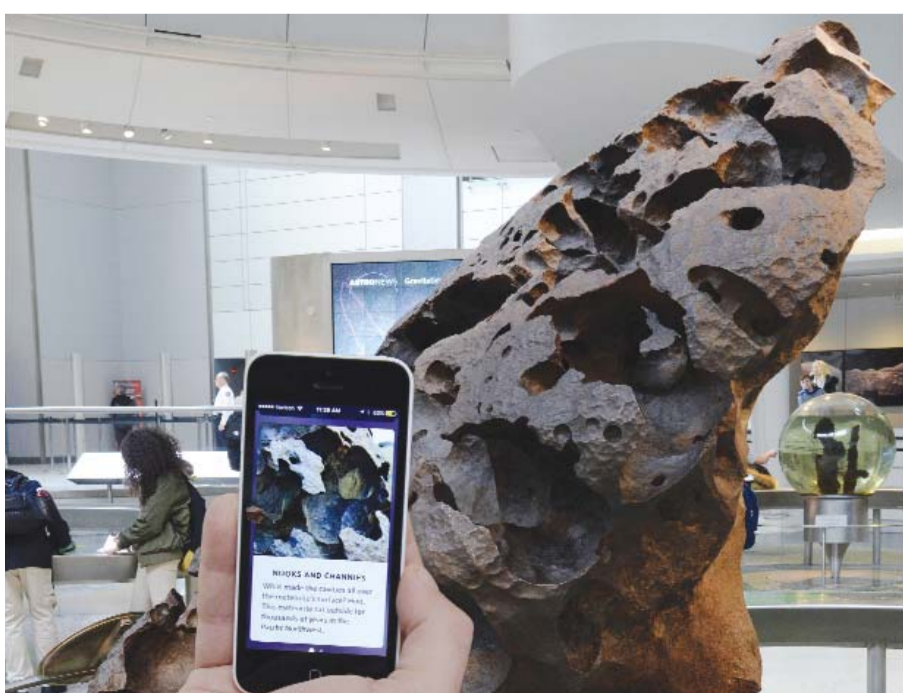
An example of that is an exhibition traveling around the country called "Mummies: New Secrets from the Tombs" organized by Chicago's Field Museum. It used a medical CT scanner to "unwrap" the mummies. Museum-goers can peek under the wrappings by manipulating large table-top computer scans placed alongside the delicate specimens to see their clothes, hairstyles and the jewelry they took to their graves.

"The real power of 3-D scanning is that you have so many different potential outcomes," said Adam Metallo, who, with Vincent Rossi, leads the 3D digitization team at the Smithsonian's 19 museums and nine research centers. You can make

an exact replica of something for display or create a digital model for a touchscreen interactive that people can view outside the museum. "We're interested in leveraging the technology to kind of take down the walls and provide unprecedented access," said Rossi.

Virtual reality

Virtual reality, which utilizes special head gear to create the effects, can transport visitors to places they could never reach, like inside the human body or the bottom of the sea. At the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, visitors can explore a space shuttle and walk through the nuclear disaster site in Chernobyl with a virtual reality headset. At a recent special event at the American Museum of Natural History, young visitors tested out virtual reality goggles that "shrank" them to the size of a beetle for a close-up view of the weevil's anatomy. —AP



NEW YORK: In this photo provided by the American Museum of Natural History, a visitor uses the museum's flagship app Explorer which acts like a virtual curator, teaching visitors about the surprising facts and stories, near the Willamette Meteorite at the museum in New York. —AP

MINNESOTA BEATS REST OF US IN BANNING GERM-KILLER

MINNEAPOLIS: Minnesota's first-in-the-nation ban on soaps containing the once ubiquitous germ-killer triclosan takes effect Jan 1, but the people who spearheaded the law say it's already having its desired effect on a national level. The federal government caught up to Minnesota's 2014 decision with its own ban that takes effect in September 2017. Major manufacturers have largely phased out the chemical already, with some products being marketed as triclosan-free. And it's an example of how changes can start at a local level. "I wanted it to change the national situation with triclosan and it certainly has contributed to that," said state Sen. John Marty, an author of Minnesota's ban.

Triclosan once was widely used in anti-bacterial soaps, deodorants and even toothpaste. But studies began to show it could disrupt sex and thyroid hormones and other bodily functions, and scientists were concerned routine use could contribute to the development of resistant bacteria. And University of Minnesota research found that triclosan

can break down into potentially harmful dioxins in lakes and rivers. The group Friends of the Mississippi River and its allies in the Legislature, including Marty, got Gov. Mark Dayton to sign a ban in 2014 that gave the industry until Jan 1, 2017, to comply.

In September, the FDA banned triclosan along with 18 other anti-bacterial chemicals from soaps nationwide, saying manufacturers had failed to show they were safe or more effective at killing germs than plain soap and water. However, the FDA allowed the use of some triclosan products such as Colgate Total toothpaste, saying it's effective at preventing gingivitis. Marty and Trevor Russell, the water program director for Friends of the Mississippi River, acknowledged they can't take direct credit for the FDA's action because that rulemaking process began in 1978, though it didn't finalize the rule until after a legal battle with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

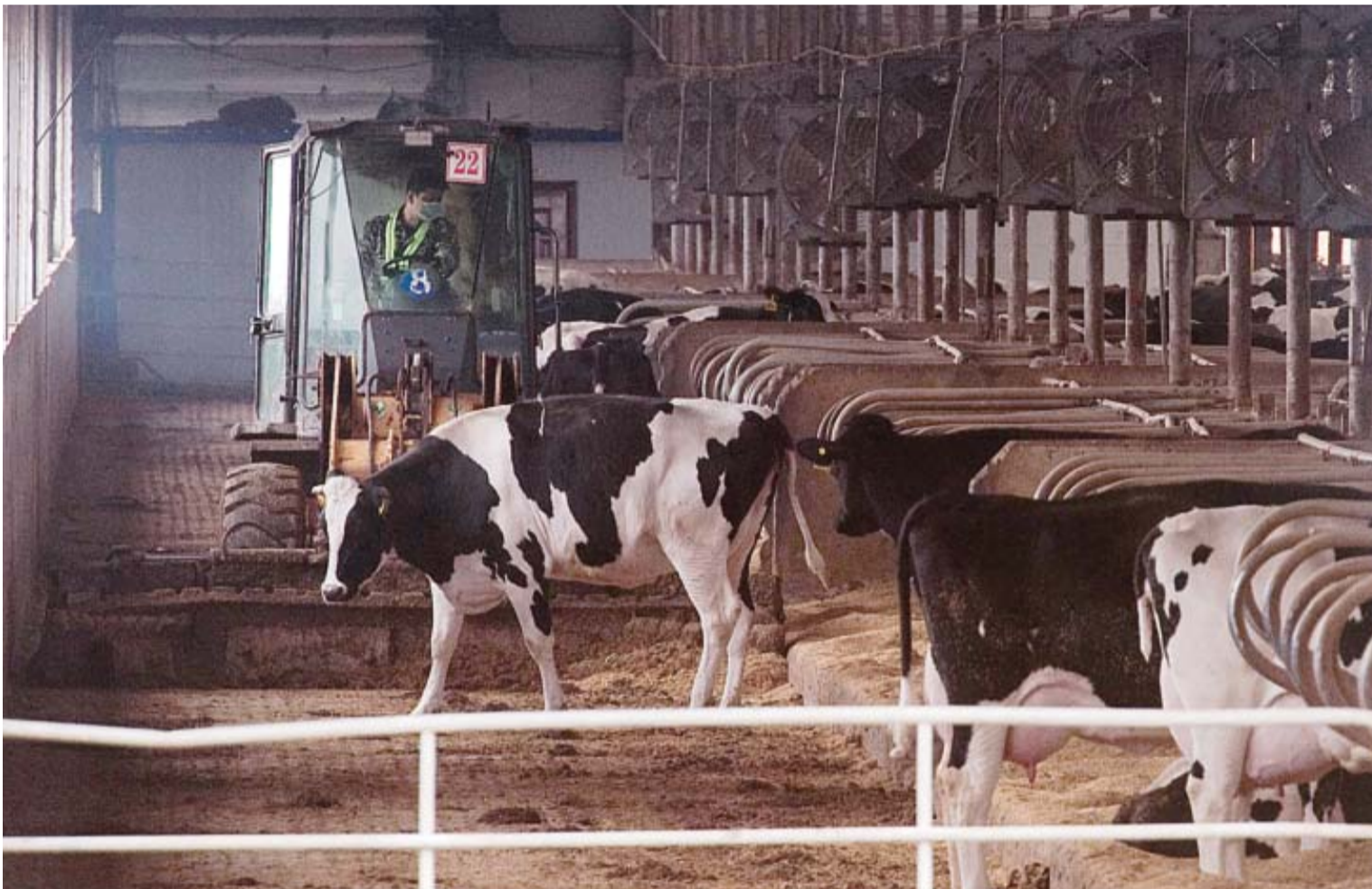
However, the Minnesota men hope their efforts helped turn opinions against

the chemical and are confident the state's ban helped prod manufacturers to accelerate a phase-out that some companies such as Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson had already begun. Most major brands are now reformulated, said Brian Sansoni, spokesman for the American Cleaning Institute, a lobbying group. Soaps containing triclosan on store shelves are likely stocks that retailers are just using up, he said. Russell noted he recently found Dial liquid anti-bacterial hand soap at two local Wal-Marts, two supermarkets and a Walgreens.

The industry is now submitting data to the FDA on the safety and effectiveness of the three main replacements, benzalkonium chloride, benzethonium chloride and chloroxylenol. "Consumers can continue to use these products with confidence, like they always have," Sansoni said. By going first, Russell said, Minnesota can identify any issues with implementing the ban and share it with the rest of the country. The Minnesota Department of Health will remind consumers and businesses of the ban's start.—AP



CHICAGO: This file photo shows the label of a bottle of antibacterial soap in a kitchen in Chicago. —AP



CHINA: This picture shows a worker driving a tractor amongst cows inside a dairy farm near Gannan county, Heilongjiang province. —AFP Photos

CHINA'S GIANT COW FARMS LEAVE NEIGHBORS UP MILK CREEK

GANNAN, China: Giant piles of black manure towering over cornfields, while rancid-smelling effluent from thousands of cows spills onto the land—this is the price of a glass of milk in China yesterday. Large-scale dairy farms have boomed in the Asian giant, as its near 1.4 billion consumers overcame centuries of cultural reluctance to embrace the white fluid. An economic boom and government backing transformed dairy into a \$40-billion-a-year industry, shifting production away from small-scale producers towards massive mega farms with up to 10,000 cattle—and a lot more waste.

"The smell of the manure... in the summer it's very intense," said Ren Xiangjun, a farmer in Gannan county. Pointing at a stream of green water escaping from under a grey brick wall at the giant farm owned by agro-conglomerate Feihe International, he added: "You can see how it flows right out of the farm. Dodging packets of animal medicine and syringes

littered nearby, he explained: "The rubbish left after injections is just thrown here. My land is directly affected." When the Feihe farm opened in 2012 in the grassy hills of the northern province of Heilongjiang it said it had 10,000 cows.

In Daxing village next door, a woman also surnamed Ren said: "You can see the manure piled up like a mountain. There are no advantages for us. There is just pollution and noise." The dairy industry in China has posted average yearly growth rates over 12 percent since 2000, due to rising wealth and desire for the health benefits of calcium. The ruling Communist party fanned the expansion, with former Premier Wen Jiabao in 2006 expressing a "dream" that Chinese children should enjoy a daily 0.5 kilograms of dairy products.

But a 2008 scandal over baby formula tainted with the industrial chemical melamine saw six children killed and more than 300,000 others affected, shaking

confidence in the industry. The crisis was blamed on small-scale farmers using chemicals to inflate the protein content of their milk as they scrambled to meet demand. The Chinese government responded by demanding the creation of large-scale milk production units. "They thought if we have scale farms they are easier to regulate and inspect," said David Mahon, founder of a Beijing-based investment firm specializing in dairy.

Unbearable

There are large scale farms in other countries, such as New Zealand, but rarely with more than 3,000 cows at a single facility. By 2014 China boasted 56 farms with 10,000 cows or more, according to state media — 80 percent of the global total—creating a string of pollution problems in several provinces. Estimates say that just 3,500 cows can produce 100,000 tons of fluid waste and effluent a year. Chinese farms are required to process it into fer-

tilizer, but regulations are often flouted. "There are some areas of China that it's better to visit in winter, because of the small hills of effluent. Once it thaws it's unbearable," said Mahon.

"China is learning about dairy farming and the lack of experience has resulted in such things." In Gannan residents alleged that local officials profited from the farm and took no action against polluters. AFP was not able to verify the claims and local food officials could not be reached for comment. But attitudes may be starting to shift. The vice-head of China's state-backed Dairy Association, Yang Ligu was cited in 2014 as saying "The bigger the scale, the bigger the environmental, pollution and bio security problems." Mahon said there had been a "genuine rethink" in Beijing and the Chinese government was "looking more and more to 350 head farms".

Like a mountain

Packing more animals together increases the risk of illnesses such as brucellosis, which can spread to humans and cause arthritis. Feihe employee Wang Dali, who once mucked out cowsheds at the farm in Gannan, contracted brucellosis in 2012, leaving him unable to work, and now suffers near-constant pain in his joints. He blames his infection on poor sanitation. "The cows were packed very close together," he said, estimating each had about 12 square meters. "There was no way to treat the manure. We dug a big hole close to the facility... now it has piled up like a mountain."

Feihe denied the residents' allegations, with a woman who answered the phone at the Gannan office saying: "These things are impossible." Dismounting from a tractor a stone's throw from the manure piles in Daxing, one farmer said: "The pollution hasn't been cleaned up well. Of course it has an impact." Pointing to corn stalks growing beside syringes, he added: "We don't eat these ourselves. We sell them to the market."—AFP



CHINA: This picture shows an area strewn with rubbish and cow manure in front of a dairy farm (in background) in Gannan county, Heilongjiang province.

NO TAX ON CO2 EMISSIONS IN CHINA'S ENVIRONMENT LAW

BEIJING: China has passed a law that levies taxes on pollution, but ignores carbon dioxide, one of the major contributors to global warming, according to the web site of the country's highest legislative body. The National People's Congress (NPC) standing committee passed the law, the first to tax polluters, on Sunday, less than a fortnight after a red alert for smog left more than 20 cities in the country's northeast choking under a heavy haze.

Polluters will be charged for contributing to air, water and noise pollution, according to a copy of the legislation on the NPC's official web site. But CO2 did not make the list, which includes air and water pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and sulfite, taxed at rates beginning at 1.2 Yuan (\$0.17) and 1.4 Yuan (\$0.20) per unit

respectively. It also stipulates a monthly tax ranging from 350 to 11,200 Yuan (\$50 to \$1612) for noise pollution. The Environment Tax Law will come into effect on January 1, 2018.

China is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, due to its heavy reliance on coal to provide electricity to its population of 1.37 billion. The fuel has also contributed to the country's severe smog problem. Last week, cities across China's northeast went on "red alert" for air pollution, triggering an emergency response that included taking large numbers of cars off the road and closing some factories. The crisis also spurred a call by Chinese President Xi Jinping for the country to develop clean energy sources in order to reduce smog.—AFP

MONGOLIANS PROTEST WORSENING SMOG, DESPITE FRIGID WEATHER

ULAANBAATAR, Mongolia: Hundreds of Mongolians braved frigid weather yesterday to stage a protest in the country's capital demanding that the government do more to address worsening air pollution that they fear is sickening their children and shortening their lives.

The demonstrators gathered in a public square in front of government offices, holding banners with slogans such as "Let's give fresh air to our future children," "Smog is silent killer" and "We can't breathe."

"We are desperate and we are organizing this demonstration to make authorities feel our frustration and anger," said Purevkhoo Tserendorj, one of the protest's organizers and a mother of two. The air temperature hovered around minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 Fahrenheit). According to UNICEF, the United Nations' children's agency, air pollution is linked to the three diseases that have resulted in the most "lost life-years" in Mongolia.

The agency said in February that pneumonia and other respiratory infections were among the leading causes of death among Mongolian children under the age of 5. It said that the lungs of children living in highly polluted districts of Ulaanbaatar, the capital, do not function

as well as those living in rural areas, with real risks of them suffering chronic respiratory diseases when they're older.

The protesters demanded that the government increase the number of beds in hospitals that have been overcrowded with sick children and develop a plan to reduce air pollution by 80 percent by 2018. They also urged the government to install air filters in kindergartens in the capital's sun areas, which are worst-hit by the pollution. Ulaanbaatar is one of the world's coldest capitals, with temperatures sometimes falling to -40 C (-40 F) in January, the coldest month of the year.

More than half of the city's 1.3 million residents have to rely on burning raw coal, plastic, rubber tires and other materials to stay warm and cook meals in their homes. Such areas, where residents live in traditional round tents that do not have centralized heating, have been shrouded in choking smog in recent days. Responding to the protesters' calls, Mongolian Minister of Environment and Tourism Oyunkhorol Dulamsuren said that between 2011 and 2015, the government spent more than \$37 million while international donors spent \$47 million on measures aimed at curbing air pollution.—AFP

IRAN CULLS BIRDS AFTER AVIAN FLU OUTBREAK

TEHRAN: Iran has killed hundreds of thousands of birds in recent weeks as avian flu spreads across seven provinces of the country, officials have reported. More than 1,000 wild birds, mostly geese, have been found dead in the Mighan wetland in central Iran, the environmental protection organization told state news agency IRNA yesterday. IRNA said 63,000 chickens, along with 800,000 fertilized eggs and day-old chicks, were culled at a farm in Qazvin province in recent days after an outbreak of the deadly H1N8 and H1N5 strains of the disease.

That adds to the 725,000 birds destroyed since mid-November across the country following nine flu outbreaks, according to a report from the World Organization for Animal Health released last week. Licenses for bird shooting have been suspended due to fear of infection by migratory birds, and people have been advised not to buy game birds at local markets. Despite a small number of human deaths in different countries over the years, the disease is mostly a risk to other birds, spreading rapidly and killing large numbers. However, scientists have raised concerns that bird flu strains could mutate to be transmitted between humans.—AFP

ACCIONA RETURNS TO DAKAR RALLY WITH ELECTRIC CAR

MADRID: Spanish energy firm Acciona said yesterday it will compete in the Dakar Rally next month in Latin America for the third straight year with the only electric vehicle of the grueling off-road race. "Next January in Asuncion (Paraguay) we will once again cross the starting line of the Dakar, and we will again be the only zero emissions vehicle," the company said in a statement. "We compete in Dakar 2017 with an electric vehicle because we believe 100% in the potential of renewable energy," it added on the Facebook page of its Dakar Rally team.

Some 316 vehicles, including 83 cars and 146 motorbikes, are registered for the 39th Dakar Rally, which will be staged over nearly 9,000 kilometers (5,600 miles) from January 2-14 in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. The race will set off from the Paraguayan capital of

Asuncion, with race sporting director Marc Coma promising "the toughest edition in the history of South American rally-raiding". Acciona entered its car in the 2015 Dakar Rally, making it the first zero-emissions vehicle to compete in the event, but it pulled out after just three days due to a navigation system malfunction.

The Team Acciona car, which features a lithium battery pack that is supplemented by solar panels, was disqualified from the 2016 Dakar Rally after it failed to make it to the start line for the 11th stage on time. Founded in 1997, Madrid-based Acciona focuses on the development and management of renewable energy projects and infrastructure around the world. It posted a net profit of 348 million Euros (\$364 million) during the first nine months of the year, more than double the 166 million euros it made during the same period last year.—AFP

POLLUTION FROM IVY LEAGUE LAB'S OLD DUMP WORRIES NEIGHBORS

HANOVER, New Hampshire: Neighbors of Dartmouth College property where for years the Ivy League school disposed of mice and other small animals used in science experiments say they fear pollution from the site has contaminated their groundwater and they worry the school hasn't been completely up front with them. The site has contaminated the well water of at least one family, that of Richard and Debbie Higgins, who blame a variety of health problems on it, including rashes, hair and skin loss and dizziness. Even their dogs were not spared, they say, with one urinating blood and another vomiting.

"We have been drinking the water for years and we had no idea, absolutely no idea," Debbie Higgins said. Few nearby residents even knew the half-acre plot on the college's Rennie Farm was used from the 1960s until 1978 to dump carcasses from "tracer experiments," in which scientists used radioactive compounds to see how things moved through life systems. A nearby site also contained remains of human cadavers and stillborn fetuses used in medical classes. The obscurity of the fenced site changed in 2011, when Dartmouth chose to clean it up, removing 40 tons of carcasses and soil from scores of unlined pits that were legal at the time they were dug.

That led to the discovery of hazardous waste and low-level radioactive materials on the site and eventually evidence that at least one chemical used in the animal experiments, the suspected carcinogen 1,4-dioxane, had leaked into the groundwater. It was initially found at 50 times the state standard of 3 parts per billion on the site and more recently as high as 600 parts per billion in the ground. The chemical has been linked to eye, nose and throat irritation and, in long-term exposure, to liver and kidney damage, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The 1,4-dioxane was eventually found to have migrated off the site and contaminated the Higginses' well across the street, about 800 feet from the site - at twice the state standard.

Aggressive monitoring

They learned in September 2015 that their well was polluted, and now depend on bottled water supplied by Dartmouth for cooking and drinking. The news has rattled the semi-rural neighborhood, sparking anger and fear among dozens of homeowners who worry the plume will reach

their own wells and damage their property values. Many contend Dartmouth was too slow to respond once it found the contamination and has been reluctant to provide full details of what was on the site - something the college denies. "Right now, everyone is very confused and concerned," said Ellen Waitzkin, a radiologist who lives across from the site. "They are trying to determine on what basis they should feel threatened or not."

The Higginses and other residents argue an alert about the spreading contamination should have gone out earlier. New Hampshire environmental and Dartmouth officials said initial test showed the levels of 1,4-dioxane were declining on the site and were projected to remain on the farm site - though state officials now concede there could have been more aggressive monitoring. Now, Dartmouth is working to regain the trust of Higgins and the other residents. It apologized in September for its handling of the case, established a neighborhood advisory panel and sampled 110 drinking wells in the neighborhood; no others have tested positive.

It also offered 20 households bottled water. It is also finishing construction on a system at the dump site to capture and clean the contaminated water. When it begins operating in January, wells will pull contaminated groundwater into the system and filter it. The treated water will then be returned to the ground, a process that could take several years. "We are committed to protecting the health of our neighbors, addressing their concerns, and communicating regularly and openly with them about the project," college spokeswoman Diana Lawrence said of the cleanup, which so far has cost \$8.4 million.

But for the Higginses and their neighbors, the college hasn't gone far enough. Some want more soil removed, while others want Dartmouth to offer compensation for their deteriorating property values - demands the college says it is considering. The Higginses say their health problems have mostly disappeared since they switched to bottled water. But they call that a short-term fix and want the college to move them to a new home a safe distance from the site of the contamination. "We want to become whole if there is such a thing," Richard Higgins said. "We want to get on with our lives. Right now, our life is in limbo." —AP



COLOMBIA: A healer prepares a mixture of the Ayahuasca hallucinogenic liana and a psychoactive bush during a traditional indigenous ritual in Colombia. —AFP

HALLUCINOGENIC PLANT GAINS FOOTHOLD IN US

'THEY CONSIDER IT ANTI-PARASITIC IN THE JUNGLE'

LOS ANGELES: Dominique was hooked on cocaine and smoked two packs of cigarettes a day until she stumbled onto ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic concoction that she says has changed her life. The French-American woman, who lives in Los Angeles and did not want her real name used, is among thousands of people across the United States who are increasingly turning to the powerful psychedelic brew from the Amazon to overcome addiction, depression or psychological trauma. The potion, prepared and consumed as part of a shamanic ritual, is especially gaining a following in Hollywood and Silicon Valley.

Thousands are flocking to sample the elixir and swear by its therapeutic properties, despite warnings from scientists and users that ayahuasca can be dangerous and even prove fatal, especially when mixed with other drugs. Ayahuasca's proponents, who include celebrities such as Sting, Paul Simon, Tori Amos and Lindsey Lohan, say the plant offers a spiritual experience like no other. Many also say it has allowed them to overcome traumas that no other conventional therapy can tackle.

"There's been this misconception that it's the hippies that come with feathers in their hair, but it's pretty much the opposite," says Jeff, who organizes ayahuasca ceremonies in the Los Angeles area and who did not want his real name used. "In a time defined by consumerism and entertainment, people want to have strong experiences, one might consider spiritual experiences, something sacred." According to Dennis McKenna, assistant professor at the University of Minnesota's Center for

Spirituality and Healing, some 100 clandestine ayahuasca ceremonies are held nightly in New York and other cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco.

McKenna said it is difficult to get a firm count on the number of ceremonies held across the country as ayahuasca contains the hallucinogenic drug dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which is illegal in the United States and is in the same category as Ecstasy and heroin. Two Brazilian churches in the western United States that use ayahuasca as a sacrament are exempt from the ban. Firm believers in ayahuasca say they drink the foul-tasting tea only at intervals of several months and must observe a strict diet before sampling the brew.

'Pink swallows'

The ceremonies are often held outdoors and are usually accompanied by meditation and spiritual songs called icaros. Users of ayahuasca describe a sort of out-of-body experience that allows them to confront some of their worst fears. "I saw pink and violet swallows, and green geometric shapes," recalled Leonard. Such visions, however, are often accompanied by darker ones that are described as terrifying. Users also experience lots of vomiting, described as purging. "The purging aspect is very cathartic," says Jeff. "They consider it anti-parasitic in the jungle."

Some say they come out of the experience with no distinct revelation while others describe a radical transformation. "I stopped smoking, started meditating and reconnecting with nature," says Leonard. "And I made peace with my parents." The

effects of the brew have prompted growing interest among scientists and researchers like Jessica Nielson, a University of California, San Francisco, neuroscientist who is studying ayahuasca. Nielson said she became interested in the potion after trying it herself while on a trip to Peru. "Two people I was with in Peru who had severe PTSD seemed totally healed just after," she said.

Charles Grob, a psychiatrist at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center who studied ayahuasca's use in a Brazilian church, said he is seeing a shift in attitude toward the brew and growing acceptance that it may be worth studying. "Western medicine and psychiatry often struggle in treating substance abusers and alcohol abusers," Grob said. "So it's certainly worth looking at it." While scientists in the United States confront legal obstacles in studying the brew, much research is being conducted in other countries, notably Spain and Brazil, where ayahuasca is legal. Grob cited a pilot study in Brazil involving people suffering from chronic depression and who didn't respond well to anti-depressants.

"The preliminary results are positive," he said. Still, scientists caution that the brew can be dangerous, especially if mixed with other drugs and should be avoided by those who have asthma, suffer from epilepsy and are bipolar or schizophrenic, as the concoction can trigger psychotic episodes. "You have to screen people to make sure everybody is mentally up for the experience," said Jeff. "The worst I've had is somebody who was screaming for a couple hours," he added. "But he was fine the next day and came back." —AFP



HANOVER, New Hampshire: In this photo, Debbie and Richard Higgins, whose well water has been contaminated by a suspected carcinogen from a Dartmouth dump site, look at a map on their kitchen table in Hanover, N.H., which shows where the contamination has spread. —AP

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Kuwait Times
248 33 199





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OVER 650 PLAYERS PARTICIPATE IN WINTER FOOTBALL FESTIVAL

Premier Sport Academy Winter Festival of Football and Carnival at Bayan Park, Kuwait. The Premier Sport Academy in association with Everton FC, under the sponsorship of Porsche Centre Kuwait, Behbehani Motors Company, held their 2016 Winter Festival of Football and Carnival event at Bayan Park on Saturday 10th December. In total, over 650 players aged 3 to 16 participated in the Porsche Centre Kuwait sponsored event,

including teams from the PSA/Everton Coaching Courses and Everton Centre of Excellence, as well as numerous private schools and academies from across Kuwait. A huge turnout of enthusiastic parents and spectators cheered on and encouraged the players, who were superbly organized and guided by their coaches throughout a series of exciting matches. The players demonstrated great skills, sportsmanship and an abundance of effort and commitment. There were also lots of attractions enjoyed by all, including the Porsche Kids Driving School, where the children took time out from the football to drive the Porsche pedal cars around the specially designed road circuit to promote road and traffic safety. Move One provided the inflatables and Fantasy World the games to ensure everyone was kept busy and having fun in between the football games. Colonel

Finlay McLean, the Defense Attache of the British Embassy, attended as Guest of Honor, along with several other VIP guests. Medals were presented to all participants, as well as certificates of appreciation to event sponsors and supporters. Colonel McLean expressed his appreciation and recognition for the collective effort behind such an important community event, and congratulated all the players and coaches who took part.

Presentations were made to the event sponsors Porsche Centre Kuwait, Behbehani Motors Company and Sports Direct. The PSA Winter Holiday Camp will commence 18th December 2016 at Bayan and everyone is welcome to participate in this program, available for children aged 3 to 16 years. For details of all Premier Sport Academy events and activities, check out the website, www.PSA-kuwait.com



KKMA ELECTS NEW OFFICE BEARERS FOR FARWANIYA AREA COMMITTEES

Kuwait Kerala Muslim Association (KKMA) Farwaniya conducted Darul Quran, Arbeed and Ghazali Area general Body meetings. Darulquran Meeting was inaugurated by KKMA Advisory Board Member Sageer Thrikarippur, Arbeed meeting was inaugurated by KKMA Secretary K

Basheer and Ghazali and by KKMA Vice President Hamza Payyannur. KKMA Central Committee and Branch committee leaders offered felicitation speeches. Area General Body Meetings unanimously elected the following office bearers for the year 2017-2018.

Darul Quran Area
Ishaq Kunhimangalam (President), Sajbeer Ali (Gen. Secretary), C. Hameed (Treasurer), Aboobacker V, Naser N.P (Vice President), T.P Shafeeq, Jaleel Mattoo (Secretary)

Arbeed Area
Muhammed Ujooob (President), Majeed Neckli (Gen.

Secretary), Anwar K.PB (Treasurer), Fathah C.V (Vice President), Mansoor Palakkad (Secretary)

Ghazali Area
Navas Kunnumkai (President), Muhammed Ali VPP (Gen. Secretary), Navas Ismayil (Treasurer), Ibrahim Haji (Vice President), Saifudheen, Rafeeq K.V (Secretary)



MULLA GROUP HONORS STAFF FOR 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

On behalf of the Management of Al Mulla Group; Anwar Al Mulla, Deputy Chairman and CEO, along with Abdulla Najeeb Almulla, Chief Administrative Officer, felicitated few employees for successfully completing 40-year service with the Group and gave away certificates of appreciation, commemorative shields and cash awards as a gesture of gratuity for achieving such a mile-

stone in the annals of the Company at a simple ceremony recently held at their Head Office at KFTZ. Anwar Al Mulla extended his personal warmth and great commendation to Abraham Itty Kadavil, Abdul Jalil Inayatullah Kazi, Ghazanfer Ali Abdul Ghafoor, Nawaz Ahmed Uppal and Gulam Mujtaba Ilam Din for the continuous engagement with the Group demonstrating loyalty and dedication.

Further he was sincerely thankful for honoring them for their genuine contribution and devotions executed towards accomplishing their duties and responsibilities which had positively contributed in enriching the performance of their related divisions and departments. It has been the long standing policy of the group and a management initiative to express and communicate to employees

how much they are appreciated for their long term pursuit in the company to entrench the principle of trustworthiness and faithfulness of employee- employer relationship. The event was intended to express the management's efforts to provide touching and moral support for its earnest staffs who has earnestly contributed for the growth of the Group.



MILLENNIUM HOTEL KUWAIT CELEBRATES NEW YEAR WITH EXCITING OFFERS

Millennium Hotel & Convention Centre Kuwait, one of the finest 5-star hotels in the country, extends its warmest season's greetings and holiday wishes on the occasion of the New Year and for a definitive celebration Millennium Hotel will

be introducing exciting offers to its guests during their stay. In a word from Millennium & Copthorne Kuwait's Area General Manager - Dani Saleh - said: "We would like to extend our holiday greetings to all our visitors, hoping that the coming year will be a year of

peace and serenity for all, and to celebrate 2017, we would like to present our exclusive deals and offers for a perfect family stay at our hotel's relaxed ambience and excellent quality services, along with our experienced staff members who will make sure that all our guests are well served and satisfied".

On the occasion of the New Year, Millennium Hotel & Convention Centre Kuwait will offer special room rates including complimentary breakfast at Lamar International Restaurant, with free WiFi, and a free meal for kids 5 years and below. Other exclusive benefits which guests can enjoy comprise free valet parking, airport transportation, access to health club and swimming pool, early check-in, and late check-out. And for an unforgettable New Year's Eve dinner; Lamar International Restaurant invites guests to enjoy a special delightful buffet with a wide variety of international and oriental dishes, and the choice of an all-day delicious à la carte menu.

The "Library café" however - with its ambient design striking a chord of contemporary chic - offers an eclectic mix of salads and sandwiches of all types, in addition to substantial main dishes, and a mouth-watering array of fruit and sweets. With a unique energy pulsating through it, the endless beverage

menu entails an assortment of fresh juices, mocktails, smoothies and a variety of coffees flavored teas. Millennium Hotel & Convention Centre is one of the premium emerging 5-star quality business hotels in the country that is strategically located on

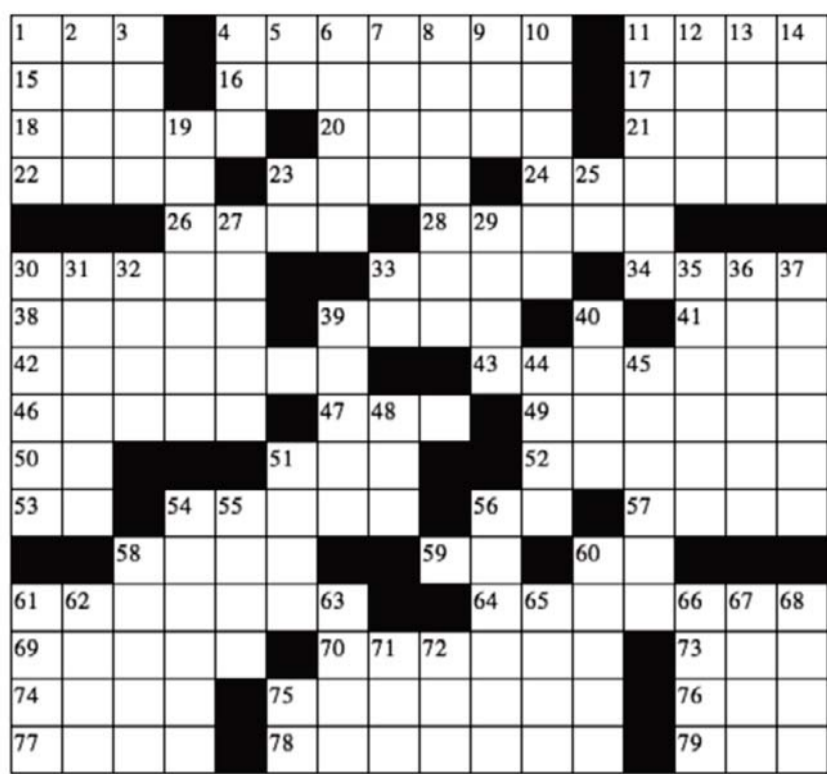
the 4th ring road in the heart of Al-Salmiya area, close to the main shopping malls, dining and entertainment spots around the block. It is also home to business conferences and trade exhibitions with varying capacities.



RAWD AL-SALEHEEN BILINGUAL SCHOOL ORGANIZES FAMILY MARATHON

Under auspices of the health minister and upon coordination with the head of MOH's media office, Dr. Ghalia Al-Mutairi, Rawd Al-Saleheen Bilingual School recently organized its first family marathon with participation of 1500 students. The event was also attended by school director, Abdul Rahman Al-Alyan his deputy Hamad Al-Alyan, teaching staff and parents. On concluding the marathon, the winners were honored by sponsors.

CROSSWORD 1473



- ACROSS**
1. A newt in its terrestrial stage of development.
 4. Island country in the Atlantic east of Florida and Cuba.
 11. South African term for 'boss'.
 15. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
 16. Either of two flat triangular bones one on each side of the shoulder in human beings.
 17. An inflammatory disease involving the sebaceous glands of the skin.
 18. A painful emotion resulting from an awareness of inadequacy or guilt.
 20. Relating to or caused by a virus.
 21. A strategically located monarchy on the southern and eastern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula.
 22. Tropical starchy tuberous root.
 24. The superior of a group of nuns.
 26. An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
 28. Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
 30. Having the leading position or higher score in a contest.
 34. Divulge information or secrets.
 38. A form of Japanese poetry.
 41. A unit of surface area equal to 100 square meters.
 42. A white powder used as a pigment for its high covering power and durability.
 43. Someone employed to collect and dispose of refuse.
 46. Any property detected by the olfactory system.
 47. (informal) Roused to anger.
 49. (usually followed by 'to') Full of eagerness.
 50. That is to say.
 52. A former British gold coin worth 21 shillings.
 53. A yellow trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
 57. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
 59. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
 61. Of or relating to or characteristic of Greece or the Greeks.
 64. A wheeled vehicle adapted to the rails of railroad.
 69. Containing or involving or occurring in the form of ions.
 70. A fleshy wrinkled and often brightly colored fold of skin hanging from the neck or throat of certain birds (chickens and turkeys) or lizards.
 73. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 74. Type genus of the Rutaceae.
 76. A spacecraft that carries astronauts from the command module to the surface of the moon and back.
 77. Made of fir or pine.
 78. A festival featuring African-American culture.
 79. A federal agency established to regulate the release of new foods and health-related products.
- DOWN**
1. Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.
 2. King of Saudi Arabia since 1982 (born in 1922).
 3. (British) Traditional jazz as revived in the 1950s.
 4. A fatal disease of cattle that affects the central nervous system.
 5. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
 6. Czech dramatist and statesman whose plays opposed totalitarianism and who served as president of Czechoslovakia from 1989 to 1992 and president of the Czech Republic since 1993 (born in 1936).
 7. The capital of Western Samoa.
 8. United States publisher (born in Australia in 1931).
 9. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
 10. A deep bow.
 11. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
 12. The highest level or degree attainable.
 13. Type genus of the Anatidae.
 14. A strong-smelling plant from whose dried leaves a number of euphoriant and hallucinogenic drugs are prepared.
 19. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
 23. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
 25. A radioactive transuranic element.
 27. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
 29. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
 31. (often used in combination) Having hair as specified.
 32. (prefix) Within.
 33. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
 35. A thin plate or layer (especially of bone or mineral).
 36. A genus of orb-weaving spiders including common garden spiders and barn spiders.
 37. A region whose eastern part is Bangladesh and western part is included in India.
 39. Arboreal snake of central and southern Africa whose bite is often fatal.
 40. (Old Testament) The eldest son of Isaac who would have inherited the Covenant that God made with Abraham and that Abraham passed on to Isaac.
 44. The capital and largest city of Mongolia.
 45. Relating to or characteristic of a tribe.
 48. (informal) Of the highest quality.
 51. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
 54. Of or belonging to an aecium.
 55. Concerning those not members of the clergy.
 56. A parenteral cephalosporin (trade names Fortaz and Tazicef) used to treat moderate infections.
 58. A woman gossip.
 60. A representation of the Virgin Mary mourning over the dead body of Jesus.
 62. A dissolute man in fashionable society.
 63. The compass point that is one point west of northwest.
 65. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
 66. Young of domestic cattle.
 67. In bed.
 68. Avatar of Vishnu.
 71. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
 72. Being one more than nine.
 75. A state in northwestern North America.

STAR TRACK

- Aries (March 21-April 19)**
Others will find you most persuasive and almost charismatic in speech and communication. Things are very natural for self-expression and work particularly well with new ideas and thoughts. If you have been trying to convince higher-ups of better business techniques, now is the time. Positive energy is in the air and you should feel a super sense of support and harmony. Someone younger than you may look up to you for some answers or ideas. You will delight in helping others. Understanding and being sensitive in this situation is a wonderful prerequisite to having a special time with someone you love. Expect a good conversation with those that you love and care for the most. Smile, it is an infectious act. Enjoy the evening!
- Taurus (April 20-May 20)**
This time favors practical endeavors, as well as expanding or creating a business. Your goals are especially clear and your planning ability is sharp. There is a final need to push for some impressive results with regard to work. Success at this time depends on how well you know your own motivations. You should be experiencing financial gain now, perhaps a bonus. Spend some time alone in thought. You will work very hard on your own personal projects at this time. Your inner confidence shines. You are particularly sensitive to beauty and this time favors buying art objects or other things of beauty. Purchases today are likely to be a good investment over the long run. You plan to spend this evening in the company of loved ones.
- Gemini (May 21-June 20)**
Relationships with other people are the main keys to your satisfaction this day. You may be working with a relative or spouse and find that it is important you have some new ideas or input that would demonstrate unexpected thinking. Suggest a field trip to a museum or art show. It will give employees a chance to take pleasure in each other's company and perhaps enjoy a new opportunity to expand their thinking. Perhaps a tour would be stimulating. You will not be stealing ideas but you will be opening up to creative thinking. You are respected for your ability to think outside the box, so to speak. This is a very nice day, one with a great many possibilities. Taking in a movie or reading a good book this evening may be a fun escape.
- Cancer (June 21-July 22)**
Though your nature may seem a bit on the quiet or reserved side, it should serve you well most days. This is still a great time of the year to cook on the grill and as the good cook you may decide to bring samples to share with everybody. Perhaps a time could be set aside occasionally, to trade recipes in the hopes of making a meal more interesting or easy, etc. You may find yourself put to task by your friends and this may be in the workplace as well as outside of work. This evening, you find you have lots of energy for making improvements to your surroundings or life conditions. The motivation to improve is available. Your emotions should be well under your control and it would be easy to communicate your desires as well as to please another.
- Leo (July 23-August 22)**
Career decisions that show you the possibility of some real success may just not fit in with your schedule today but can be included in the changes you want to make for next year. You probably are not going to be able to appreciate a job where you would be held back from expressing yourself. You are the only one that can lay the concrete for your path to success-you may be asking yourself if it is time for the road to turn. You are interested in broadening your options and becoming the best you can possibly be. There are many aspects to consider-let your conscience be your guide-it will not deceive you! You may need to help some young people solve problems this evening. You turn into a cook tonight and decide to do some grilling.
- Virgo (August 23-September 22)**
Your creative and intuitive talents are what guide you today. Some may see you as a bit eccentric because of your rather unique and unusual approach to things. All in all, you should benefit well from your actions. In fact, someone that you would not have thought to be so supportive will be on your side in your endeavors at this time. This afternoon proves to be an excellent time to work together or just socialize. You will definitely want to get with the program, as your managerial and directional abilities will be guiding you in a progressive direction. At home this evening, you may become responsible for the care of young children. This is a benefit since you enjoy their company; later you will enjoy someone near your age.

- Libra (September 23-October 22)**
This will be the kind of day that we all long for, easygoing and calm, with everything running in a smooth manner. It is easy for you to understand the feelings of others and you can usually create a desire in the onlookers to purchase whatever it is that you are selling. As a result, you are probably a very good salesperson. Although there are a few problems this day, everyone is patient. A proposition may come to your attention, but you would be wise to set it aside for further consideration sometime in the future. Your more reserved qualities are apparent and should be valuable. You may want to run in a new year's charity run; if this is so, you will probably want to purchase some warm underclothes as it might be very cold at that time.
- Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**
You may find some new answers to old questions or have breakthroughs with regard to your professional state of affairs. Others appreciate and admire your independence. You could find yourself with the offer of manager or coordinator. It is a good thing that you have prepared and stored all sorts of finger food for impromptu parties because, as you clear away your e-mail that has accumulated over the past few days, you will find lots of invitations and your finger food would make a good contribution to those you want to see. You enjoy entertaining and are a very good cook! You could find many opportunities to entertain people in your home soon. Cousins are in town, old friends as well, and you are looking forward to all the reunions.
- Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**
You have a great respect for law and order and an appreciation for responsibilities and duty. This is an excellent time for getting work accomplished that must be done. In fact, your personal power enables you to accomplish things that would otherwise be difficult. This is a very good day for all types of mental work and communications. Your mind is sharp and you are able to state your case clearly and forcefully. You probably will not find a better day to work out any kind of business negotiations, begin a course of study or do some organizing. This is also a good day to get rid of any backlog of paperwork, or to make those phone calls that you have been putting aside. Rest as much as you can this afternoon-tonight is for a neighborhood meeting!
- Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**
You are quite charming as usual today. If your work is not the type of business that allows the worker to take off for a personal birthday, someone may get a group together for a big birthday lunch or a cake sometime during this day. Your personality is catching and your positive outlook on life creates some type of magnetic attraction that just automatically calls people to you. You could be looking at better transportation soon; you bring the company a lot of money from your travels and your interaction with customers-so talk to your boss and see about a raise. Your timing will be good. The luck of the Irish and their gift of gab are part of your charm, particularly today. Young people in your life have good news to share this evening.
- Aquarius (January 20-February 18)**
You may be working especially hard to get things and people organized. You always have a sense of ambition and can hold up your end of almost any responsible task. Do not take it upon yourself to do someone else's work today. You will be pushing yourself enough with the plans you have for tonight. You are an admirable person and you nurture your health. You enjoy helping others and may find that you and a friend do your best health program when you join together in an exercise program. Be careful not to overextend yourself; pace yourself. A silent auction or a charity drive today will be worth attending. This is a successful drive to help the city increase funds for a shelter and for aid to the needy through the winter.
- Pisces (February 19-March 20)**
There are opportunities to work on group-planning committees today. There could be a little bit of frustration associated with trying to get things accomplished quickly. If you move too rapidly in making decisions, you could make mistakes that you regret, so just take one step at a time. A friend of yours tends to see the lighter side of things in general and when the day becomes a bit crowded it might be good to just take a break and call that friend for a little chat. You will also be helping them more than you realize. You are thankful that you choose your friends so well. Everything conspires to reveal you at your most elegant in social encounters this evening-if that is what you desire. If you desire to be at home, family members are appreciative.

WORD SEARCH

Beatles Songs 1

Find and circle all of the songs by The Beatles that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional Beatles song.

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

ANOTHER GIRL FLYING IN MY LIFE SOMETHING
 ASK ME WHY GET BACK JULIA SUN KING
 BIRTHDAY GETTING BETTER LADY MADONNA TAXMAN
 BLACKBIRD HELLO GOODBYE LOVELY RITA TELL ME WHY
 CRY BABY CRY HEY BULLDOG MICHELLE THE END
 DAY TRIPPER HEY JUDE NO REPLY TICKET TO RIDE
 DEAR PRUDENCE HONEY PIE OH DARLING TWO OF US
 DIG A PONY I M MINE PLEASE PLEASE ME WAIT
 ELEANOR RIGBY I WILL POLYTHENE PAM YER BLUES
 FIXING A HOLE IF I FELL SEXY SADIE YESTERDAY

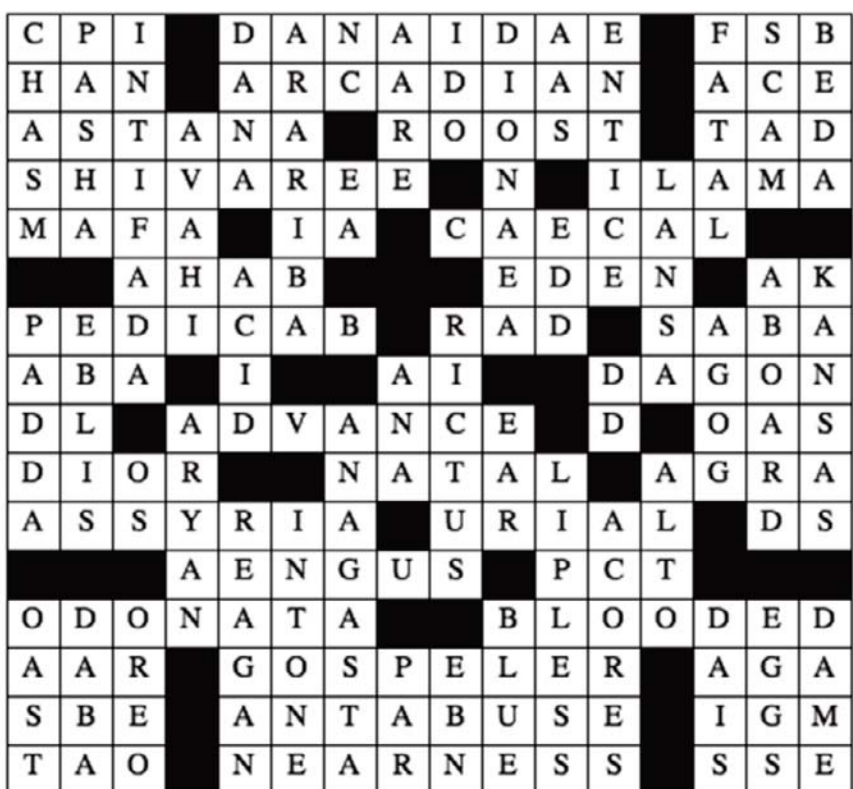
Yesterday Solution

Basketball

Grid with hidden words: ASSIST, BACKBOARD, BALL, BASKET, BENCH, BLOCK, CENTER, CLOCK, COACH, COURT, DRIBBLING, FOUL, FREE THROW, GAME, HALF-TIME, HOOP, JERSEY, LAY-UP, NET, OUT OF BOUNDS, OVERTIME, PASSING, PLAYER, POINT GUARD, POWER FORWARD, QUARTER, REBOUND, REFEREE, RIM, SCOREBOARD, SHOOTING GUARD, SHOT, SLAM DUNK, SMALL FORWARD, SNEAKERS, SUBSTITUTIONS, TEAM, THREE POINTER, TIME-OUT, TRAVELING.

The hidden message is: THE INVENTOR OF BASKETBALL WAS JAMES NAISMITH

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku

9x9 grid for Sudoku with numbers and empty cells.

Yesterday's Solution

9x9 grid for Sudoku with numbers and empty cells.

GOSSIP



Bella Hadid feels 'so damn lucky' to be a model

The 20-year-old catwalk icon has admitted she feels "so grateful" to have had such a successful year and is "privileged" to have worked with "inspiring, talented people" this year, and the star has vowed to work equally as hard next year. The brunette beauty - who made her debut appearance in this year's annual Victoria's Secret Fashion Show last month - shared a video of her walking in a variety of catwalk shows throughout this year in a montage on social media. She captioned the Instagram post: "I feel so grateful..thank you to every single person I have had the privilege of working with this year and everyone that believed in me and supported me along the way. I feel so damn lucky to call this my job and to work with such inspiring, talented people everyday..i will keep working hard I love you so so so much! (sic)." And the fashion muse - who has also graced the runway for Moschino, Versace and Chanel - has been voted the Model of the Year by the Industry, and Bella has admitted it is a "huge honour" for her to receive the accolade, although her older sister Gigi, 21, was crowned International Model of the Year at The British Fashion Awards earlier this month. Alongside a picture of an article with her new title, which she shared on the photo-sharing site, she wrote: "What a crazy way to end the year This is such a huge honor !!! Industry's vote!!! Thank you SO much to everyone in the industry that voted, everyone I've worked with and @modelsdot for all of the love and support ... this really means so much to me And congrats Kenny I love you (sic)."

Snoop Dogg gifted with King Kong statue

Snoop Dogg has been gifted with a King Kong statue worth \$200,000. The 45-year-old rapper was due to perform a DJ set at Ora - a nightclub in Miami Beach, Florida - when French artist Richard Orlinski arrived with the six-foot statue, according to the New York Post newspaper. A witness told the publication: "Three security guards had to drag it into Snoop's green room." The same insider also confirmed the hefty price tag to the publication. It's unknown whether or not the statue made it to the home of the 'Drop It Like It's Hot' rapper finished his set and left the nightclub. The show at the Ora nightclub comes after the 'Young, Wild & Free' hitmaker wrapped his 'Puff Puff Pass Tour part 2' earlier this month, which resurrected the special run of gigs he played in 15 years ago 2001. Snoop enlisted the help of several associates to help him along the way, including Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Tha Dogg Pound, DJ Quik, the Pomona City Movement and the LBC Movement. The star announced the 'Puff Puff Pass Tour Part 2' on his Instagram account in October by sharing an image of the schedule and adding the caption: "The Puff Puff Pass Tour Part 2 with Snoop Dogg, Bone Thugs, Warren G, DJ Quik & The Dogg Pound!! Featuring Pomona City Movement & LBC Movement! ON SALE NOW!!! (sic)" The tour featured 10 dates in North America throughout this month, and wrapped on December 15 with a show in Billings, Montana. It comes after the star admitted last month he wants to do a "joint tour" with the likes of Dr. Dre, Kendrick Lamar and Eminem. He said: "I think [a joint tour] makes sense more than anything. A Snoop-Dre album would be amazing, but a tour even more, because we have legendary music the world has yet to see us perform globally. I'm pretty sure he wants to do it. He just wants the team in place. Kendrick Lamar, Eminem, Snoop Dogg and Dr Dre - that's the dream team for him."

Pixie Lott is too busy to have children at the moment

The 25-year-old pop star got engaged to fashion model Oliver Cheshire in November, but has insisted she does not envision them having children anytime soon because she has so many other ambitions to pursue in 2017. The blonde beauty shared: "I'd like kids at some point, but not anytime soon. There's too much to be done! And I'm not sure where I'll be next year because it's going to be a busy time with my new music coming out." In the more immediate future, Pixie has her eyes firmly focused on her wedding to Oliver, admitting she is relishing the prospect of planning her big day. She told Star magazine: "I'm going to start planning early next year and I can't wait. We haven't had time to do anything yet and planning is the most exciting bit! "We don't have a date yet, so we need to figure out what's best. It will be hard to squeeze a wedding in next year because we're both so busy, but if it can't be done in 2017, it will definitely be done the year after." Pixie also explained that her wedding will see her move from the flat she's lived in since she was 18 into a larger house with Oliver. The 'All About Tonight' hitmaker said: "I've started to look for a place near my sister's home in Chelmsford, Essex, because I need to get a house with more space. "I'm in a really small flat that I've had since I was 18. I think it's time to move out, but there's no rush right now."



Paris Hilton launches Lidl haircare line

Paris Hilton has teamed up with budget superstore Lidl for a new hair collection. The 35-year-old Hilton Hotels heiress has announced the line, consisting of items priced from just £1.99 to £16.99, of haircare beauty products to her 6.3 million Twitter followers. Taking to the micro-blogging site, she wrote: "I'm excited to share my new collection from @lidl with you! Be the first to get it: @lidl with you! Be the first to get: @lidl #HereComesParis #Hair #BTS #Blonde #Beauty (sic)" The highest priced item is a pair of Wave Curlers and Rotating Hot Air Stylers and those with not much in their budget can pick up a hairbrush for £1.99. The 'Simple Life' star is not the first millionaire to team up with a budget store, as earlier this year Victoria Beckham unveiled her limited edition collection with Target, which is expected to drop next year. The 42-year-old fashion designer revealed she is working on her VB x Target fashion range, which is inspired by her Victoria, Victoria Beckham capsule. Victoria confirmed that the range will be available in all American retail giants, online and in-store, as well as Target.com in April 2017, and is the brunette beauty's first foray into children's wear. She previously said: "The timing just felt right. "I've made no secret of the fact that I wanted to put a collection out there for people who either can't afford designer prices or don't want to pay designer prices. "It was really about looking at the business, discussing it with my partners and my CEO, and just figuring out when that time was going to be. And when I had the time to be as involved as I like to be with every single project I take on."

Aled Jones never watches 'The Snowman' over Christmas



The 45-year-old singer is most famous for singing 'Walking In The Air' when he was just 12 for the 1982 animated festive film, based on Raymond Briggs' children's picture book. The Channel 4 TV movie has become an annual watch for many families but Aled and his wife Claire and their children, Emilia, 14, and Lucas, 11, don't settle down to watch the magical tale about a young boy and his snowman because his kids aren't interested in his work. When asked if the short fantasy film is part of his annual festivities, he said: "We don't! It isn't part of our Christmas routine. If it's on the kids might watch it but I haven't ever made it a family ritual! If I did that the kids would be like, 'I don't get it dad'. My kids literally don't care what I do. "My kids don't care what I do as long as I've got enough money to buy Lucas Lego he's happy." And the former 'Daybreak' presenter has revealed he couldn't watch 'The Snowman' himself as a kid, despite providing the music, because it didn't air in his native Wales. Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, he said: "I didn't see the cartoon for ages because I was from Wales they didn't play it on Channel 4 Wales." Aled - who has a new album, 'One Voice at Christmas', out now - is looking forward to a traditional Christmas and plans to watch lots of television and feast on seasonal food. Discussing his festive plans, he shared: "I've got two weeks off which will probably be the only two weeks off I'll have all year so I'm going to really enjoy them and put on about two stone! I do what everybody else does. I eat too much, I drink too much, tell rubbish jokes from crackers and watch loads of telly, that's about it. For me it's always been a very family orientated time and a time to close the door and be together. I'm not a big one for Christmas parties or things like that."



Donatella Versace remembers her dangerous party days in the 90s

Donatella Versace says she and her friends Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss were "dangerous" party girls in the 90s. The 61-year-old designer is great pals with the two supermodels and she admits they lived life to the full when they were all starting out in the fashion business. Donatella admits those times were "a lot of fun" but she eventually made the decision to leave the late nights behind her to live a quieter life. Whilst being interviewed on stage at the Teatro Piccolo Studio in Milan, Italy, last week to promote new book 'Donatella Versace' published by Rizzoli, Donatella was asked: "You, Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss were known as the 'dangerous trio'. Tell us about them..." To which the blonde star replied: "We were really dangerous. During that time, in the 1990s, you were allowed to do everything, there were no limits. Or at least we used to think so. We did everything you could imagine. Parties, events, it was a lot of fun at that time, but then at a certain point I started thinking about my life. I wondered, 'What am I doing? What's my future?' " Quizzed on what made her stop partying so much, Donatella - who has daughter Allegra, 30, and son Daniel, 26, with ex-husband, model Paul Beck, whom she divorced in 2000 - said: "Around 2005, 2006. I did it for my children. They didn't tell me anything, but I looked them in the face and I told myself, 'I have to change for them.'" During the talk, Donatella - who was wed to Manuel Dallori from 2004 to 2005 - also opened up on the support her friend Madonna gave her in the wake of the shooting of her brother Gianni Versace on 15 July 1997 at the hands of Andrew Cunanan. The Vice President of the Versace Group

admits she will never forget that Madonna was there waiting for her at her brother's house after she landed in the American city from Milan the day after his tragic death. She shared: "I entered the house and there was Madonna waiting for me. I'll never forget what she did; she was there because she wanted to support me. She hugged me, she stayed with me for many, many hours. I never thought to find her there waiting for me. I'll be always grateful for that."



Chris Martin plays impromptu concert at homeless shelter

Chris Martin played an impromptu gig at a homeless shelter in New York City. The Coldplay frontman surprised homeless people at The Bowery Mission in Manhattan by jamming with them on Wednesday before announcing he was to star at a concert fundraiser at the Mercury Lounge in aid of people sleeping rough in New York. James Macklin, the mission's director of outreach, said Chris' appearance, which included performances of songs such as The Beatles' 'Yesterday' and hymn 'Amazing Grace', had helped to lift the spirits of the homeless men and women at the shelter. He explained: "Chris Martin proved once again the power of one person to make a difference through The Bowery Mission. "As the temperatures drop and we serve thousands of lonely people during the holidays, Chris has lifted our spirits today." Chris played solo for part of the show, but was later joined by two singers, both of whom had previously turned to the mission as they sought to fight their way out of homelessness. Meanwhile, it was recently reported that Chris and his wife Gwyneth Paltrow are planning to move back to London. The couple split over two years ago, but have made a mutual decision to return to the UK in 2017 for the sake of their kids Apple, 12, and Moses, 10. A source previously said: "They're horrified by Donald Trump's election and feel it's a damning indictment of the current state of America. "Their children's education is extremely important to them and they're in agreement that the English school system is better." The duo are also said to miss their



friends and family back home. The insider explained: "On top of that, Gwyneth misses her friends in London and Chris is keen for the kids to be closer to his parents in Devon."

GOSSIP



Lottie Moss 'never really wanted' to be a model

The 18-year-old star - who is the sister of supermodel Kate Moss - has confessed she didn't see herself following in her older sibling's footsteps until she was scouted at Kate's wedding to Jamie Hince back in 2011. She said: "It's quite funny actually. I never really wanted to be a model when I was younger. It was something I didn't think I could do - until I was scouted at my sister's wedding. I remember thinking, 'Yeah, that actually sounds fun!' "I was still at school when the agency saw me, and I mostly just did test shoots for a while. When I turned 16 they smoothed me into it and signed me up properly, and the work increased gradually from there. We were careful not to let it interfere with school, but I could do schoolwork while I was away." And Lottie - who is the daughter of Linda Shepherd and Peter Edward Moss - insists her parents were never strict when she was growing up. She added to The Telegraph newspaper: "My parents weren't strict at all. Mum's method has always been, 'Do what you

want, but don't come crying to me when it goes wrong.' "So if I wanted a piercing or whatever, she told me she'd not be there when I was crying about it, and that worked." Meanwhile, the blonde model previously admitted she finds it "weird" getting her hair and make up done all at once. She said: "It's really nice to be pampered but it's quite weird when everything - hair, make-up, manicure and pedicure - is being done at once. It's your 10 minutes to relax before the madness begins. Being on the red carpet is such an unusual and surreal experience. I try to stay as calm as I can, but I do get awkward. I don't know how some celebrities stay so composed."

Payne donates Christmas presents to children's hospital

Liam Payne has donated hundreds of Christmas presents to a children's hospital. The former One Direction star - who is thought to be expecting his first child with Cheryl Fernandez-Versini - made many children's Christmas by sending presents and handwritten cards to the patients at New Cross Hospital in his hometown of Wolverhampton, England. Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust's charity coordinator, Leanne Bood said: "I got a call from someone who works with Liam asking if it was okay for the gifts to be delivered. Of course I was delighted to and we set about arranging it. We just want to say a huge thank you to Liam for this wonderful gesture and also to everyone who has helped the Charity this past year." And the trust are hoping Liam, 23, will visit in the New Year so the children and the team can thank him personally for the gifts. A spokesperson for the trust added: "He has not visited himself but I know the invitation for him is going out in the new year. The nurses on the ward estimate there are a few hundred presents. "They don't know what they are yet because they're all wrapped and they're keeping them for Christmas Day, all they know is they are a range of gifts for boys and girls aged 0 to 18." Meanwhile, Liam recently revealed he is the "happiest" he has ever been. When one fan asked in a Twitter Q & A if he was content, he replied: "@xPositive_Girlx the happiest I could be (sic)" And the 'Live While We're Young' hitmaker is said to be working on his debut solo album and he recently thrilled fans when a screenshot did the rounds on Twitter, revealing he has registered a new song called 'Myself'.



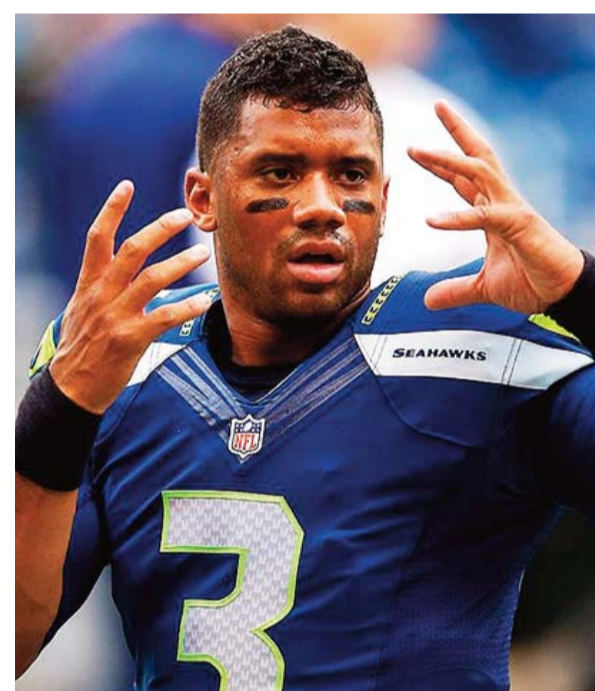
Drew Barrymore's Christmas plans

Drew Barrymore has bought her children a Christmas tree each. The 41-year-old actress - who has Olive, four, and Frankie, two, with her ex-husband Will Kopelman - has revealed she purchased the festive decorations for her kids so they could "express themselves" through it. Asked about her Christmas plans by Women's Wear Daily, she said: "A lot of plans. A massive Christmas, I've already gotten the girls two trees - I said, 'Let's do two short trees, instead of one tall tree,' and then they can each decorate their own tree, and express themselves. "There's the Olive tree and the Frankie tree. That's what I did this Christmas for my little girls - and they're little trees, but I think it will be fun." The 'Miss You Already' star has had a tough year after her divorce from Will and she admits she has "cried a lot" in the last 12 months. Reflecting on her "unique" year on Instagram, she wrote: "#peopleilove #sweatybetties ok this is my last post for this series. Every Monday I work out with my girlfriends and, as female writer Isaac Dennison said, 'There is nothing you can't cure with saltwater. Sweat, tears and the ocean.'" May I say 2016 has been a most unique year. I have cried a lot this year. I have run to oceans. I have tried to pull it all back together by moving my body until the egg cracks, and the sweat pours out and releases something. I have always been a person who is flawed. I forgive. I fight. But I do not fight with others. "I will spend my life trying to give love. And I am always aware and appreciative when I receive it. My heart is very open right now. Let us all be as good to each other as we have ever been. 2017, here we come. And yes! I will be arm and arm, with all the #peopleilove (sic)"

Dion reflects on roller coaster year in a retrospective video

Celine Dion has reflected on her rollercoaster year in a retrospective video. The 'My Heart Will Go On' hitmaker - who tragically lost her husband René Angélil in January after a battle with throat cancer - posted a four minute video documenting her year, which has seen her achieve a number of career highlights including winning the Billboard Icon Award and celebrating her 1000th Las Vegas show. In a message to fans at the end of the video, she said: "My voice does not resonate without you. You have made my childhood dream come true. I hope I have inspired you to reach out for yours." The 48-year-old singer - who has René-Charles, 15, and six-year-old twins Nelson and Eddy, with her late husband - will spend this Christmas skiing as it was a family tradition to head to the slopes of Montana every holiday. She shared: "He put some something magic into that snow, into those mountains, and every time we go down, I go down with him. My children go down

thinking about him. Every time I take the lift to go up, I feel closer to him. "For me the trip is not to party. It's to try and mediate, find balance and be at peace with myself and my children and to eat, to play games, whether it's Monopoly or the telephone game." And Celine wishes time could slow down as she is "not ready" for the anniversary of René's passing. She explained: "I can't believe it's going to be a year that my husband passed. I don't know when Santa Claus is coming, but if I had a wish to make this year, can you just tell him to take his time? I'm not ready!" "It's kind of a bittersweet moment and at the same time we need to really make the holidays really happy. I feel thankful that he doesn't suffer and he doesn't have to worry because we got him. He got us and the spirit of the holidays will get us together again ... We're going to ski again all together and he will be there with us."

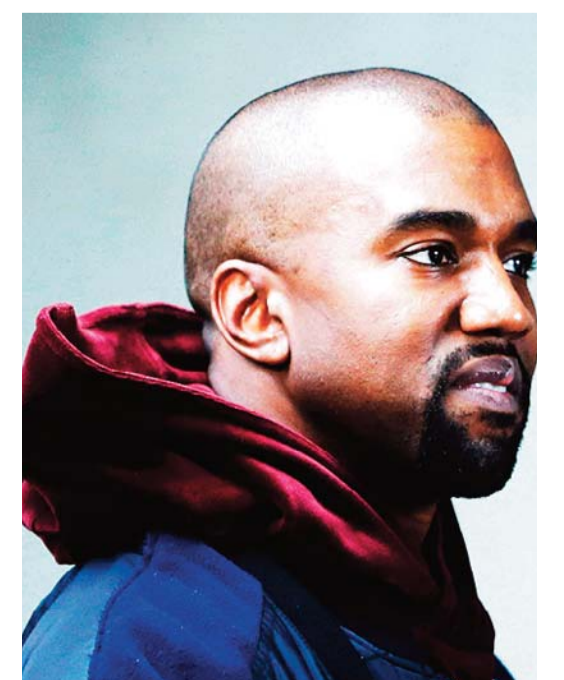


RUSSELL WILSON BUYS GIFTS FOR SEAHAWKS TEAMS

Russell Wilson splashed out on lavish gifts for his American football team. The 28-year-old sportsman - who is quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks - followed tradition by purchasing two first-class tickets to anywhere in the world for his teammates as well as curved-screen 4K Samsung TVs for his linemen. A source told the New York Post's Page Six column: "Every player, all the coaches, trainers, strength coach, equipment staff ... Everyone in the Seahawks organisation. He has a lot to be grateful for. He really is one of the most generous and thoughtful guys on the planet. He even picks up doughnuts for the team at 5 a.m. on the way to practice." Russell showed off the gifts on his Snapchat account as he clutched a handful of Alaska Airlines tickets. Meanwhile, Russell has had a great 2016. He tied the knot with 'Dance Like We're Making Love' hitmaker Ciara and the couple are also expecting their first child together. Ciara - who already has two-year-old Future Zahir Wilburn with her ex-partner Future - and Russell have already settled on a name for their little bundle of joy. She shared recently: "I do know [if it's a boy or a girl]. I'm not telling, not yet, but I'm very excited. We've already done that [chosen a name] actually." And Ciara has revealed Future "can't wait" to be a big brother. She added: "He rubs my belly and he says, 'Hi baby. I love you, baby,' ... and then he puts my shirt down and says, 'Bye, bye baby.' So, that's his own thing. "He sees a baby walking, smaller than him and walking-it doesn't matter, it's a baby. So, he goes, 'baby' and he looks at me and he goes, 'Mama, baby' - and he tries to pull my sweat-shirt up."

Kanye West won't return to stage until full recovery

Kanye West won't move ahead with his European tour dates because of his ongoing health concerns. The chart-topping rapper received treatment for exhaustion and sleep deprivation in November and although he has since been released, Kanye is not considered to be ready to return to the stage for the scheduled appearances on his Saint Pablo Tour. A source shared: "Fitness - physical and mental - are essential to him being able to be restored fully and cleared to work. He has health issues that need to be resolved prior to returning to work." There are fears that Kanye's cancellation of his European tour could put a serious strain on his finances, but a source close to the 39-year-old star has insisted he will be fine, despite the lost income. The source explained to PEOPLE: "He reinvests a lot of his earnings into his companies. A lot of what he does he finances himself. "Money that comes in from touring, he uses to finance his fashion stuff. When he talked about being \$50 million in debt, that was prior to the massive Adidas deal that he did and this wildly successful tour, and all the merch he was selling night after night. He's had an incredible, massive year, financially." The insider explained, too, that Kanye's wife Kim Kardashian West has also helped the rap star with his financial dealings. The 36-year-old reality TV beauty - who has a three-year-old daughter called North and a 12-month-old son called Saint with Kanye - advises her husband on how he should invest his money. The insider said: "Kim's always advised him on his businesses. He's always talked about her business acumen - how she's a great businesswoman and he's learned so much from her." - Bang Showbiz



Bella Thorne wants a partner who 'understands' social media

The 'Shake It Up' star - who has been romantically linked to singer Charlie Puth following her split from 'Teen Wolf' star Tyler Posey - wants to find a person who doesn't mind being in the spotlight. She told the new issue of Paper magazine: "They don't realize that social media is such a big thing in my life. So when you're in a relationship with someone who doesn't understand social media, it's a really big challenge ... If you're not willing to be down with that, I can't change that about me. "You think I want paparazzi following my every move? You think I want people trashing me on the Internet all the time, talking s**t about me? No! But that is my life, and if you're dating me, you need to know that you have to take that on in a sense, too." It comes after Bella took to social media recently to insist she has been "single for two weeks" amid claims she cheated on Tyler with Charlie. She wrote: "Ty and I have been broken up for like over two weeks and Charlie and I AREN'T DATING we are friends. (sic)" Her denial comes after Charlie took to his own Twitter account to say he thought she was single when their rumored romance reportedly took place. He wrote: "I can't believe what I'm reading. No one should have their heart messed with like this, and I'm not going to be in the middle of it. I don't know Tyler personally, but I know he shouldn't be treated this way. She told me she was not with him anymore. This is all news to me. I want nothing but peace for all, I'm just removing myself from this. (sic)"



FEATURE

The truth about social media

By Yalda Golsharifi

For the past few years, social media has been a huge part of my life. It has brought my family and I so many amazing opportunities and allowed me to meet so many amazing people. It is truly been a great experience, however, there is another side to it that not everybody sees.

Social media users, like myself, tend to present the best possible image of themselves. We share the fun, exciting, and positive things going on and share our most flattering photos, basically creating the impression that life is perfect, sharing one good time after another. However, this is not always the case. I love showing the positive side of life and promoting positivity on my social media accounts but this doesn't mean that my life is positive all the time, which is what some people assume. Everyone faces ups and downs,

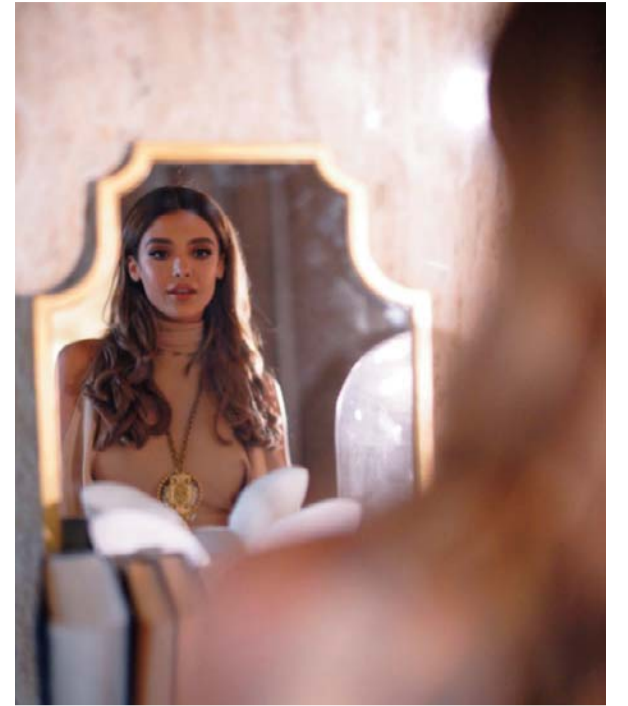
which is totally normal. This is one thing that bothers me about social media that people don't usually get to see.

Another issue related to this topic is a lot of people think that since our jobs are based on social media and we don't work a 9-5, that we have it so easy and there's no work or effort involved in anything we do, however this is totally wrong. There is SO much time and effort involved in the work I do and sometimes it gets too much to handle. It can be frustrating when you get comments saying things like "you don't do any work" or "everything comes easy to you" or you have an easy life" because that really isn't true. If people could see what goes on behind the scenes I think they'd appreciate the work we do a little more.

Having no privacy is another challenging aspect of sharing your life on social media. Don't get me wrong, I love sharing my life and my family with my followers and supporters, however these aren't the only people watching.

There are a lot of people watching just to criticize you and invade your privacy, which is hard to deal with sometimes. I try to find a balance with sharing my life and my family, but also keeping some things private which I think is very important. Living in the moment is something I really treasure so when making memories with my family and going through certain experiences, there needs to be a time when the phones and cameras shut off and we can enjoy these experiences privately as a family. Those are some of the moments I treasure the most.

With social media and the Internet in general, always remember, what you see isn't always what you get. There's a lot more that goes on that isn't exposed and I think it's important for people to understand that before judging and jumping to conclusions.



A group photo shows Sophie Parou (second left), CEO of FAME.

A WORD WITH SOPHIE PAROU, ABOUT THE ART OF PASTRY AND CHOCOLATE MAKING

By Faten Omar

After an amazing live demonstration of the art of pastry and chocolate making "Pastry Live & Beyond Chapter IV" by France and Middle East Co (FAME) last month, Sophie Parou, CEO of FAME, shared with Kuwait Times some secrets of FAME and its journey in Kuwait over the years.



Photo shows Sophie Parou, CEO of FAME during an interview with Kuwait Times. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

Kuwait Times: Tell us more about FAME.

Parou: FAME Co's motto is 'quality, tradition and richness.' Its mission is to bring the best possible quality of chocolate, baked products, pastry, raw material and equipment from Europe and offer them to Kuwait and the GCC. Its objective is to promote maximum creativity and innovation in the field of pastry, chocolate and baking.

KT: Can you evaluate the success of Fame's latest event?

Parou: Pastry Live and beyond Chapter IV was a complete success and on a scale from 0 to 10, I would say we achieved a good 9.

KT: As the CEO of FAME, what value did you add to the company's achievement over the last five years?

Parou: A good management, with good team spirit and performance towards clients. However, a manager also keeps in touch with market changes in terms of taste and demands. Accordingly, I believe my good understanding of the market as well as my sourcing skills have definitely led FAME to being one of the most dynamic food company in the market today.

KT: Tell us about the originality and speciality of your products compared to what the competitors offer?

Parou: Our products make a statement in themselves - they are creative unlike the other items that are already in the market.

KT: Do you think the Kuwaiti community appreciates your industry?

Parou: I believe a good company is not one that is followed by consumers, but rather the one that follows the consumer's needs and demands, and allows itself to maneuver changes accordingly.

KT: What will your future projects be about?

Parou: FAME is preparing for Pastry Live & Beyond Chapter V next year, but my current wish is to introduce Kuwait to the famous worldwide pastry/chocolate competition held in France. I do believe that Kuwait is ready for such a challenge.

KT: Will the next event have new and creative ideas?

Parou: Chapter V will be bigger with even more spectacle than the previous chapters. However, we will only see this in 2018.

Love of sewing patterns leads to world-class collection

If a costume designer wanted to recreate a World War I era wrap-around dress, a 1940s zoot suit or even a bodice from 1875, the sewing patterns are in Rhode Island. The University of Rhode Island has the largest known collection of sewing patterns in the world, according to the collection's curator, Joy Spanabel Emery, and the United States Institute for Theatre Technology. About 50,000 are on paper and 62,000 are in an electronic database. They're at the university because of Emery's love of patterns. Emery donated her personal collection of patterns and periodicals to the university years ago and has painstakingly sorted through the donations sent there as word spread about the growing repository. Three more boxes full just arrived to be added to the overflowing filing cabinets.

"This is much more than a hobby. It really is a passion," said Emery, a professor emerita of theater at URI. "I'm learning things every day about pattern companies and the different styles and I enjoy creating something that's a legacy." As a costume designer, Emery began saving paper patterns in the 1980s because everyday clothes often aren't preserved over time. Notable pieces like military uniforms and wedding dresses tend to be saved. And, she worried electronic versions of the patterns could be lost as technology changed. The association for performing arts and entertainment professionals, USITT, honored Emery this year for documenting the clothing of American history. The 80-year-old Emery received a distinguished achievement award in costume design and technology, the only one given this year in that category.

Costume designers can replicate period clothing and the public can understand how middle-class Americans dressed over time because of Emery, said executive director David Grindle. "The archive is unique to her," he said. "No one else has done this kind of work." Emery finds the patterns from the 1930s the most interesting because they're elegant and inventive despite the fact they were designed during the Depression. She's also intrigued by the WWI dress, the "Hoover apron." Women wore it when Herbert Hoover promoted food conservation by encouraging Americans to grow vegetable gardens. The oldest patterns in the collection are from 1847, including a peignoir and a baby cap. The database can be used to trace the evolution of clothing and

recurrence of trends.

Emery was inspired to collect patterns by her friend, Betty Williams, a theatrical costume maker in New York and pioneer in dressmaker pattern research. When Williams died 20 years ago, her 12,000 patterns, periodicals and research papers were donated to URI. The Butterick pattern company's archives are also at the university. Rhode Island has a strong history with the textile industry, fashion and theater. Emery wrote a history of the paper pattern industry that was published in 2014. She gets inquiries from all over the world from people doing clothing research. "It's very rewarding," she said. "I just love to see the collection growing to a point where we have enough for it to really be worthwhile for significant research." — AP

In this photo, Joy Spanabel Emery, professor emerita and curator of the University of Rhode Island's commercial pattern archive, displays a donated sewing pattern in her office on campus in South Kingstown, RI. — AP



Succulents lend rustic, elegant chic to modern weddings

Succulents are showing up everywhere in the world of weddings, from bouquets and boutonnières to centerpieces and even take-home favors. They're dainty yet hardy, and come in a surprising array of colors and textures. Best of all, they're eco-friendly and can be replanted at home after your nuptials as a reminder of the special day. "Succulents add a modern look," says Viva Max Kaley, a New York-based wedding planner. "Instead of pretty petals, it's a cool geometric use of lines. My clients tend to gravitate toward that aesthetic, so it's been a really popular choice."

Robbin Watson, a 27-year-old living in Boston who is getting married in Connecticut next July, is using succulents to add a pop of dusty blue and mint green to her cream-colored bridal and bridesmaid bouquets. But while she loves their aesthetic, succulents are more of a sentimental choice for her. "I lived on the West Coast for a few years with my fiancé, where succulents are very prevalent. Not so much in the New England region, where I live now," Watson says. "To bring a little West Coast into my wedding ceremony, I thought succulents would be a great way to incorporate my memories of living in San Diego."

Bridal bouquets

Bouquets like Watson's are the most obvious and popular way to use succulents in weddings. Debra Prinzing, Seattle-based author and founder of the eco-conscious floral directory site SlowFlowers.com, says the trend has been popu-



lar among California brides for years but has really taken off thanks to social media sites like Pinterest and Instagram. Demand for drought-hardy succulents in the gardening world has also made these once hard-to-find plants readily available year-round across the US, and at a cheaper price than more traditional wedding flowers like roses and peonies.

Taylor Cassard, a 27-year-old nursing student in Montana, used a variety of light green rosette-shaped succulents from the Echeveria family in her bouquet for a rustic yet modern look when

she got married at a guest ranch in Big Sky this summer. "They were absolutely gorgeous and mixed so nicely with the other flowers to create a soft natural look," says Cassard, who planted some of the succulents post-ceremony in metal buckets used by her flower children.

Many wedding florists recommend sprinkling succulents among traditional flowers rather than creating an all-succulent bouquet, which can get heavy and bulky-looking. The plants' vibrant green and sometimes purple colors pair especially well with jewel tones, burgundy and apricot

shades. According to Prinzing, succulents are a particularly nice complement to dahlias, hydrangeas, lilies, orchids, roses and spring bulb flowers.

Boutonnieres and centerpieces

Succulents can feel like a more "masculine" floral accent and have become a popular choice for boutonnières as a result, says Anastasia Stevenson, a wedding planner and founder of the website How to DIY Wedding. They're sturdy and can stand up to the rigors of being pinned to

a jacket that's tossed about all day. Succulents make good corsages for the same reason. Cassard used a mix of small, rosette-shaped succulents and wild grasses for rustic-yet-elegant boutonnières, sprinkling the plants throughout her reception area that night as table centerpieces and cake accents. Rosette-shaped Echeverias like those Cassard used work well as centerpieces because they can grow up to a foot in diameter, according to Prinzing.

Other uses

How about succulents as jewelry? Wiring and flower glue are keys to this recent bridal trend, which includes everything from rings and necklaces to bracelets and headpieces, says Prinzing. Other couples have said their vows before a wall of succulents or used them as eco-friendly wedding favors - a parting gift that's "unlikely to be tossed in the trash when the guests arrive home," says New York-based wedding-trends expert and editor Anne Chertoff. And succulents aren't just for people.

"I know of one creative designer who offers floral dog collars for her wedding parties," Prinzing says. "Succulents are ideal for this situation because they withstand canine activities that are probably more lively than a groom or bride's movements during a ceremony." — AP

OBITUARY

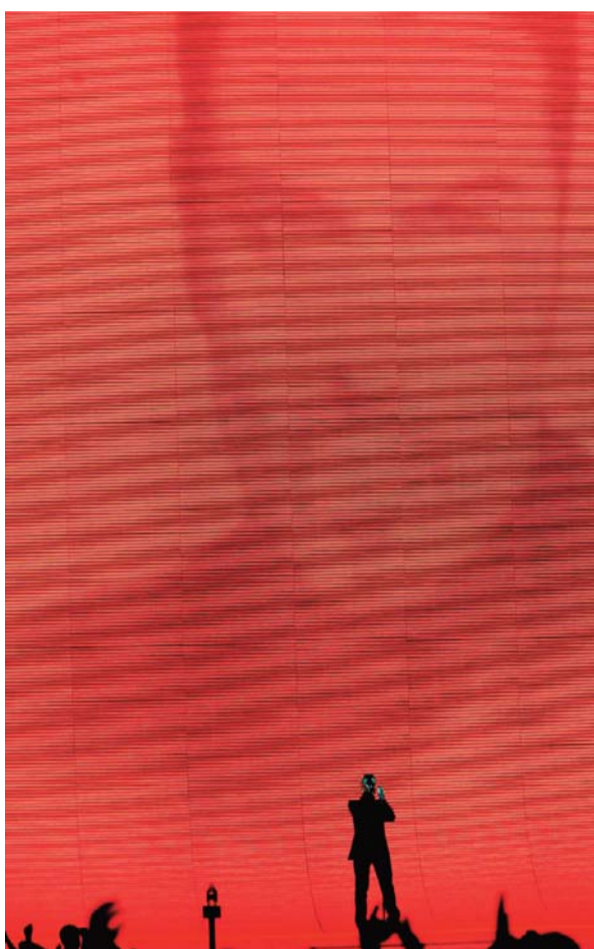


In this Sept 9, 2012 file photo, British singer George Michael performs at a concert to raise money for the AIDS charity Sidaction, during the Symphonica tour at Palais Garnier Opera house in Paris, France. — AP/AFP photos



In this Saturday, July 2, 2005 file photo, British singer George Michael accompanied by other musicians and children from Africa wave to the crowds goodbye at the finale the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, London.

British pop star **George Michael** dies aged 53



In this July 21, 2008, file photo, musician George Michael performs in concert at Madison Square Garden in New York.

British pop star George Michael, who rose to fame with the band Wham! and sold more than 100 million albums in his career, has died aged 53, his publicist said on Sunday. "It is with great sadness that we can confirm our beloved son, brother and friend George passed away peacefully at home over the Christmas period," the publicist said in a statement. Thames Valley Police said the ambulance service had attended a property in Goring in Oxfordshire, where the singer lived, at 1342 GMT on Sunday and a 53-year-old man was confirmed dead at the scene.

"At this stage the death is being treated as unexplained but not suspicious. A post-mortem will be undertaken in due course," the police said. Singer Elton John published a picture of himself with Michael on his Instagram account. "I am in deep shock. I have lost a beloved friend - the kindest, most generous soul and a brilliant artist," the British star wrote. Madonna posted a video of herself presenting Michael with an award and wrote: "Farewell my Friend! Another Great Artist leaves us." Michael was due to release a documentary in 2017 after a period of living as a virtual recluse in which he hit the headlines for a series of bizarre incidents linked to drugs.

Earlier this month it was also announced that producer and songwriter Naughty Boy, whose real name is Shahid Khan, was working with Michael on a new album for next year. Michael was best known for his 1980s hits "Last Christmas", "Freedom", "Careless Whisper" and "Wake Me Up Before You Go Go" but his career spanned more than three decades. He won a string of awards including two Grammys and three Brits. His last album "Symphonica" (2014) rose to number one in the charts.

'Talented soul'

Many tributes to Michael referred to other music world deaths in 2016, starting with David Bowie in January and including Status Quo guitarist Rick Parfitt who died on Saturday. "2016 - loss of another talented soul. All our love and sympathy to George Michael's family," the band Duran Duran, which were 1980s contemporaries of Wham!, said on their official Twitter account. Referring to him by his nickname "Yog" (Yours Only George), Wham! co-star Andrew Ridgeley said he was "heartbroken" by Michael's death. Canadian musician Bryan Adams tweeted: "I can't believe it. Such an incredible singer and a lovely human being, far too young to leave us."

Tributes poured in from outside the music world too. Football presenter and former England captain Gary Lineker tweeted: "No, not George Michael as well. Another musical great leaves us this year. 2016 can just sod off." "Star Trek" actor George Takei referred to some of Michael's greatest hits in a tweet, writing: "Rest with the glittering stars, George Michael. You've found your Freedom, your Faith. It was your Last Christmas, and we shall miss you."

Drug charges, health scares

Michael was born Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou to a Greek Cypriot father and English mother in north London in 1963. He met Ridgeley at high school and the pair went on to form Wham! in 1981. With their good looks, permans, highlighted hair and hedonistic image, the duo captured the go-getting spirit of the age and fast became one of Britain's biggest pop acts. In 1985, Wham! became the first Western pop band to perform in China as the country was slowly beginning to open up to the outside world under reformist leader Deng Xiaoping.

Following years of speculation over his sexuality, Michael came out as gay in 1998 after being arrested for committing a lewd act in the public toilet of a Los Angeles park. It was the first of several incidents that were to overshadow his musical career in his later years.



In this July 13, 1985, file photo, from left, George Michael of Wham!, concert promoter Harvey Goldsmith, Bono of U2, Paul McCartney, concert organizer Bob Geldof and Freddie Mercury of Queen join in the finale of the Live Aid famine relief concert, at Wembley Stadium, London.

He notched up police cautions for cannabis and crack cocaine possession and in 2010 was sentenced to eight weeks in jail after crashing his car into a London shop while under the influence of cannabis and prescription medication. In 2011, he spent several weeks in hospital in Vienna after contracting pneumonia, later saying that he had been close to death. There were fresh concerns in 2013 when he had to be airlifted to hospital after falling out of his chauffeur-driven Range Rover as it travelled at high speed on a motorway. — AFP



In this Monday, Dec 1, 2008 file photo, George Michael performs at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on the last stop of his 25 Live tour.



In this Monday, Jan 31, 1989 file photo, George Michael accepts one of his three American Music Awards during ceremonies in Los Angeles.



In this April 10, 1997, file photo, George Michael, left, and Stevie Wonder perform 'Living for the City' at the 4th annual VH1 Honors in Universal City, Calif.



In this Monday, Oct 18, 1993, file photo, pop star George Michael, 30, outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London at the start of his court action against Sony Music Entertainment (UK) Ltd.



In this April 7, 1985 file photo, George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley of the British group WHAM! perform during a concert in Peking, China.

WHAM!'S INFLUENCE FELT IN CHINA AFTER LANDMARK 1985 CONCERT

George Michael's death brought back memories in China of the heady 1980s when Wham! was the first major Western band to play after the death of Mao Zedong. Chinese who had never even heard of the band lined up for hours to buy \$1.75 tickets to the 1985 concert in Beijing. Inside the 12,000-strong stadium seated spectators watched in bewilderment as Michael and Andrew Ridgeley danced in big-shouldered jackets with bleached and feathered hair.

The backing dancers' strapless costumes and polka-dot miniskirts also stunned the audience in China at a time when people still dressed in similar shades of green and gray. The Wham! concert influenced Chinese musicians, who had never seen electric guitars played on stage and began to get interested in rock 'n' roll. — AP

OBITUARY



In this July 2, 2005, file photo, George Michael, left, and Paul McCartney, right, perform during the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, London.



This file photo taken on May 11, 2011 shows British singer George Michael attending a press conference at the Royal Opera House, central London.



In this Wednesday, May, 11, 2011 file photo, George Michael poses for the cameras at an event to announce his European Orchestral tour in London.

GEORGE MICHAEL: FROM CLOSETED LIFE TO GAY RIGHTS ADVOCATE

Pop superstar George Michael concealed his homosexuality, as well as the trauma of his boyfriend's death, for years but later became a gay rights advocate and a major supporter of HIV campaigns. Michael, who died Sunday at 53, only came out as a gay man in 1998 — nearly two decades into his career — after being caught in a police sting involving a "lewd act" in a public bathroom in a park in Beverly Hills, California. His sexuality was by then an open secret in show business but Michael said he did not go public so as not to worry his mother because of fears about the AIDS virus in the gay community at the time.

"Understand how much I love my family and that AIDS was a predominant feature of being gay in the 1980s and early 1990s as far as any parent was concerned," he told BBC Radio in an interview in 2007. "My mother was still alive and every single day would have been a nightmare for her thinking what I might have been subjected to," explained Michael. Initially confused about his sexuality, Michael said he realised he was gay by the end of the 1980s.

His 1987 hit "I Want Your Sex" was banned from many radio stations for its sexually charged video and lyrics, which appeared to hint at homosexuality. "There's things that you guess/ And things that you know/ There's boys that you can trust/ And girls that you don't," Michael sings. "There's little things you hide."

'Couldn't tell'

At a concert in Rio de Janeiro in 1991, he met Anselmo Feleppa, a Brazilian dress designer who became his first love. "It's very hard to be proud of your sexuality when it hasn't given you any joy, but once you have found somebody you really love it's not so tough," Michael told the Huffington Post in an interview. Six months into the relationship, they discovered Feleppa was HIV-positive a devastating blow for Michael. "I couldn't go through it with my family because I didn't know how to share it with them — they didn't even know I was gay. I couldn't tell my closest friends because Anselmo didn't

want me to," he said. Feleppa died of an AIDS-related brain haemorrhage in 1993. Whenever performing the single "Jesus To A Child" from the album "Older" (1996), Michael dedicated it to Feleppa and the singer later said the entire album was a tribute to his late partner. "Heaven sent/ And Heaven stole/ You smiled at me/ Like Jesus to a child," Michael sings. He said of the album: "To many fans and the people that were really listening, I felt like I was trying to come out with them."

'Abuse, homophobic language'
Michael later told the BBC his arrest in 1998 may have been "a subconsciously deliberate act" to out himself and said he wished he had gone public sooner. "I don't think I would have had the same career — my ego might not have been satisfied in some areas — but I think I would have been a happier man," he said.

Following a series of run-ins with the law, Michael told one interviewer in 2011 that he blamed himself for "letting young gay kids down" with his antics. "My behavior meant these kids suffered abuse and the homophobic language that is legal in this country," he said. The same year that he came out as gay, Michael began his public activism by helping with a documentary about six young people affected by the HIV virus to coincide with World Aids Day. As part of his philanthropy — much of it under the radar — he was also a major supporter of the Terrence Higgins Trust, a British HIV charity.

"His donations contributed to a vision of a world where people living with HIV live healthy lives free from prejudice and discrimination," the charity said in a Facebook post yesterday. The gay rights group Stonewall said on Twitter: "You inspired many and your music will live on in the hearts of the community. You will be sorely missed!" — AFP



This file photo taken on August 24, 2010 shows British singer George Michael (center), leaving after appearing at Highbury Corner Magistrates Court in London.



This file photo taken on August 12, 2012 shows British singer George Michael performing during the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games at the Olympic stadium in London.



This file photo taken on September 6, 1997 shows pop stars George Michael (left) and Elton John (right) leaving Westminster Abbey following the funeral service of Diana, Princess of Wales.



This file photo taken on December 23, 2011 shows British singer George Michael talking about his recent illness outside his home in Hampstead in London.



In this July 13, 1985, Britain's Princess Diana meets singers Elton John, center, and George Michael, right, on her arrival at Wembley Stadium in London for the Live Aid famine relief concert for Africa.



In this Friday, Dec 23, 2011 file photo, British singer George Michael leaves his house in north London, after recovering from a life-threatening bout with pneumonia that kept him in a Vienna hospital for a month.



People arrive with bunches of flowers to lay in tribute outside the north London home of British singer George Michael after news of the singer's death broke.

Madonna, Elton John lead tributes for George Michael

Madonna and Elton John led tributes from around the world for British pop star George Michael, who died at his home near London on Sunday aged 53. "Farewell my Friend! Another Great Artist leaves us. Can 2016 F***k Off NOW?" Madonna wrote in a post on Instagram accompanied by a video of her presenting Michael with an award. Elton John also published a picture of himself with Michael, saying: "I am in deep shock. I have lost a beloved friend — the kindest, most generous soul and a brilliant artist".

Michael shot to fame with the 1980s band Wham! and sold over 100 million albums in his career, winning two Grammys and three Brit awards. Referring to him by his nickname "Yog" (Yours Only George), Wham! co-star Andrew Ridgeley said he was "heartbroken" by Michael's death. Many reactions referred to the spate of music world deaths in 2016, starting with David Bowie in January. Singers Prince and Leonard Cohen also died this year and Status Quo guitarist Rick Parfitt passed away on Saturday in a Spanish hospital.

"2016 — loss of another talented soul. All our love and sympathy to George Michael's family," the band Duran Duran, who were 1980s contemporaries of Wham!, said on their official Twitter account. Spandau Ballet, a British band which formed in the late 1970s, wrote: "We are incredibly sad at the passing of our dear friend George Michael. A brilliant artist & great songwriter." Newer pop stars also paid tribute to the influential London-born artist, who was planning to release a new album and a documentary next year.

"Oh God no... I love you George... Rest in peace," wrote pop star Robbie Williams, while fellow singer Pixie Lott paid tribute on Twitter to the "beautiful and talented" Michael. In the United States, Recording Academy president Neil Portnow said he was "deeply saddened"

by the loss. "During an influential career that spanned nearly four decades, George became one of the most beloved pop craftsmen and respected entertainers," said Portnow, whose organization awards the Grammys. "From the enormous success he achieved with pop duo Wham! to his influential solo career, his extraordinary talent had a profound impact on countless entertainers worldwide, and his creative contributions will live on forever," he said.

Canadian musician Bryan Adams tweeted: "I can't believe it. Such an incredible singer and a lovely human being, far too young to leave us." US singer La Toya Jackson wrote: "You have given the world an amazing gift! What a talent! What a loss!"

'Your music will live on'

Tributes came in from outside the music world too. Football presenter and former England captain Gary Lineker tweeted: "No, not George Michael as well. Another musical great leaves us this year. 2016 can just sod off." "Star Trek" actor George Takei referred to some of Michael's greatest hits in a tweet, writing: "Rest with the glittering stars, George Michael. You've found your Freedom, your Faith. It was your Last Christmas, and we shall miss you." London Mayor Sadiq Khan said Michael "brought joy to millions of us" and British opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn hailed Michael as a "strong supporter" of gay and workers' rights.

Following years of speculation about his sexuality, Michael came out as gay in 1998 after being arrested for committing a lewd act in the public toilet of a Los Angeles park. The gay rights charity Stonewall said: "You inspired many and your music will live on in the hearts of the community. You will be sorely missed!" — AFP



Messages and candles are seen among floral tributes outside the north London home of British singer George Michael yesterday, after news of the singer's death broke.

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2016

British pop star George Michael dies aged 53

38



Farewell George Michael

This file photo taken on June 09, 2007 shows British pop singer George Michael performing during his 25 Live concert at the Wembley Stadium in London. George Michael died aged 53, according to his publicist on December 25, 2016. — AFP



Participants pose for a photo at the mass wedding of 236 fatherless girls organized by the PP Savani Group in Surat, on Sunday. — AFP photos



A Christian bride to be, Daxa, is helped by her friend at a mass wedding of 236 fatherless girls organized by the PP Savani Group.



Hundreds of brides in colorful ethnic attire and ornate jewelry performed their wedding rituals in front of thousands of guests in the city of Surat.

HUBLOT DAZZLES WITH ITS SECOND MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA CAMPAIGN FEATURING FRIEND OF THE BRAND RAGHEB ALAMA

Luxury Swiss watch brand Hublot has undertaken yet another great project, its second Middle East and Africa advertising campaign, featuring friend of the brand Ragheb Alama. Following its usual "first, different and unique" motto, Hublot connected East to West by shooting in Budapest-Hungary, the campaign which was fully conceptualized and developed by a Middle East team.

Arab superstar and singing-sensation Ragheb Alama took the spotlight in the new campaign, embodying the elegant and refined Hublot man with a young spirit. In an elaborate production embodying the brand's Art of Fusion concept, the campaign brings past to future with the world acclaimed artist who has been in the Arabic pop music scene for more than 3 decades, always connecting generations through his style, music and vibrant personality. Ragheb personifies the Hublot man who travels the world enjoying a particular lifestyle, but who also shines in everyday situations be it a casual walk out by the water or a busy day at work.

"Working with Ragheb Alama was a great experience as he has high standards and is a professional at everything he does. Having shot many video clips, he brought along an artistic sense and creative insights to the shoot," asserts Marco Tedeschi, Hublot Regional Director Middle East & Africa. Well before his collaboration with Hublot, Ragheb was a big fan of the watchmaker and owned several Hublot watches. To him, this association is built on a family bond as well as mutual love and respect.

A well-seasoned musician having been in various clips, Friend of the Brand Ragheb Alama admits: "Every photo shoot involves fatigue, focus and skill; but when backed by a passion for success, coupled with conveying the right image to the audience, no task is too daunting."

The campaign boasts two looks based on

different facets of a man's life, and was shot in different ambiances and distinctive lighting, creating a special mood for each look. Casually admiring a breathtaking twilight sinking behind a warmly-lit bridge by a vast lake; and elegantly descending the majestic steps of a lavish opera house. "The shot by the bridge at sundown was quite amazing because natural light was exceptional that day and allowed an emotional feel to radiate through all the elements in the image," says Marco Tedeschi.

With a big smile, Ragheb Alama confirms: "The looks fit my own style perfectly, as I feel at ease both in a tuxedo and in a casual chic outfit." Adding: "We should cherish every moment in life and live it with love, dedication, hard work, peace and happiness." There is nothing the Hublot man cannot do on time with total style and elegance. For that is what the Art of Fusion is all about.



Indian tycoon throws mass wedding for fatherless brides

An Indian diamond trader has thrown a mass wedding for more than 200 fatherless brides and given each of them gifts worth thousands of dollars, to help poor women start a new life. Mahesh Savani performed the Hindu wedding ritual of 'Kanyadaan'-the practice of giving away one's daughter in marriage-for 236 fatherless brides from poor families at a mega-wedding event in the western state of Gujarat at Christmas. Savani, who believes that giving away brides is a blessing from God, has been organizing similar mass weddings every year since 2012. "With

Sunday's mass wedding, I have become (a) proud father to have performed 'kanyadaan' of over 700 girls," he told AFP.

Hundreds of brides in colorful ethnic attire and ornate jewelry performed their wedding rituals in front of thousands of guests in the city of Surat, a hub for the diamond polishing industry. The tycoon also gave gifts of gold and household items, including sofas and beds, worth 500,000 rupees (\$7,400) to each of the brides to help them start married life. Two of the grooms at the mass wedding were his own sons. "This year my two sons also got mar-

ried during the mass wedding event. So, in all there were 238 marriages," said Savani.

Savani said he began his charitable campaign in 2008 when one of his own employees died just days before his daughter's wedding. It is not known how much the giant ceremony cost. Indian weddings are famous for their lavish scale with multi-course feasts, decorated horses, brass bands and huge tents to entertain hundreds or even thousands of guests. — AFP

