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Kuwait Times



THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016

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150 Fils

UAE TO DEPLOY COMMANDOS TO BOOST ANTI-IS CAMPAIGN

PENTAGON CHIEF CARTER MEETS TOP UAE OFFICIALS



Min 07°

Max 22°



AL-AIN, United Arab Emirates: Jockeys compete in a camel race during the Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan heritage festival, held at the Shweihan racecourse in Al-Ain, on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi yesterday. The festival includes a camel beauty contest, a traditional souq, a camel auction, and competitions for traditional handicrafts. —AFP

NEW APP HELPS IRANIANS AVOID 'MORALITY POLICE'

DUBAI: A new smartphone application that helps Iranians dodge the Islamic Republic's "morality police" is proving popular with the young, tech-savvy population but has quickly fallen foul of the authorities. The Gershad app allows users who spot checkpoints set up by the morality police, who enforce Islamic dress and behaviour codes, to tag their location on a Google map with an icon of a bearded man, enabling others to steer clear of them.

The app was blocked by the authorities soon after it was released for Android devices on Monday but many Iranians bypass Internet restrictions by using a Virtual Private Network. It is already trending on social media and has received almost 800 reviews on the Google Play app store, nearly all of them positive, although Google Play does not show how many times Gershad had been downloaded. Gershad is seen by some as setting a precedent for "digital protest" in Iran as elections loom and the country emerges from years of isolation following the lifting of international sanctions imposed over its nuclear program.

"Technology has created an amazing opportunity to forge a cooperative solution to common social problems," Gershad's secretive creators said in an email exchange with Reuters. Gershad is a contraction of the full title of the Gashte Ershad (guidance patrol), which is part of efforts to purge Western culture from the country following the Islamic revolution which overthrew a Western-backed king in 1979. "For years the morality police have been causing disturbances for Iranian women," the Gershad team said. "Avoiding them in the streets, metro stations and in shopping malls is challenging and tiresome."

Iranian officials have not commented on Gershad but state broadcaster IRIB said the app had been written about on social media and "networks opposed to the (Islamic) revolution". "This is an innovative idea and I believe it will lead to many other creative apps which will address the gap between society and government in Iran," said Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the International Campaign for Human

Rights in Iran. Ghaemi said the app's developers were based outside Iran but had grown up in the country and experienced the problem first hand. "It's really an indigenous product... these are the kind of people who have been stopped at checkpoints," he said.

Gershad is an example of how young Iranians are turning to technology to circumvent checks on their everyday lives. "It's showing a trend in digital protest... I see it as a precedent for future apps of its kind," said Amir-Esmaeil Bozorgzadeh, a Dubai-based consultant for app makers in the Iranian market.

Gershad does not describe itself as a form of protest, but its website describes it as a "social movement" and asks: "Why should we give up the most basic right of choosing what clothes to wear?" An online video advert shows patrol members, rendered as dopey-looking cartoon figures, fidgeting impatiently at a checkpoint as the app diverts the flow of pedestrians away from them. "Wander freely!" says the tagline. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: The United Arab Emirates wants to deploy commandos to help train forces fighting Islamic State jihadists and will resume its contribution to the US-led air campaign, Pentagon chief Ashton Carter said yesterday. Carter met top UAE officials in Brussels following a landmark summit of anti-IS coalition members to discuss ways to step up the 18-month fight against IS in Iraq and Syria.

"They indicated to me their willingness to do more, which is important, specifically to re-start their participation in the air campaign, secondly to work with us on the ground," Carter said. UAE special operations forces would help train and advise-as well as arm anti-IS forces in Syria and local partners in Iraq, including Sunni groups and the Kurdish Peshmerga. Carter did not say how big the force would be. "What is needed in the Sunni parts of Iraq is capacity among moderate Sunnis to re-occupy and govern that territory and keep a multi-sectarian Iraq together," Carter said.

"The Emiratis can be an important part of that." Saudi Arabia too has promised to step up its anti-IS efforts. Like the UAE, it took part in early strikes after the campaign began in mid-2014, but stopped as it turned its attention to the conflict in Yemen. The anti-IS campaign has seen coalition planes and drones conduct more than 10,000 air strikes and dealt the jihadists some significant blows, including the recapture of the Iraqi city of Ramadi. But the extremists retain control of large parts of Iraq and Syria and have expanded their presence in Libya.

The United States, which has ruled out large-scale troop deployments on the ground, has stressed the importance of special operations commandos to work with sympathetic local forces and to help advise and equip them to fight IS. The continued fight against the IS group comes as world powers met in Munich yesterday and agreed an ambitious plan to cease hostilities in war-racked Syria. But the Munich accord will not apply to IS and Al-Qaeda's local branch. "There is no ceasefire in the war against ISIL," Carter said, using an alternative acronym for the IS group. "Be clear about that." — AFP

INTERNET INTERRUPTED

KUWAIT: Internet services in Kuwait were interrupted yesterday due to defect in the main marine GCC cable, the Ministry of Communication said. Buthaina Al-Sbaiee, the Assistant Undersecretary for Administrative and Legal Affairs said in a statement that the electronic services in the other GCC countries were also affected. The Ministry has immediately contacted relevant regional and international authorities to secure alternative means for securing regular online services, she said, adding that it has succeeded in shifting to substitute lines to restore the regular services. The Ministry has coordinated with the company tasked with repairing the cable, Al-Sbaiee said, adding that the work would last for 7 to 10 days. The official affirmed that the Ministry would do its best to ensure regular e-services. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Premier, Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is pictured with the Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim and other MPs, ministers, municipal council members, senior officials and editors-in-chief during a luncheon held at the ministry's camp. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MPS LAUD INTERIOR MINISTRY

AL-GHANIM PRAISES ARMY, NATIONAL GUARD, INTERIOR

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Coinciding with Kuwait's celebration of the 55th National Day and 25th Liberation Day, Deputy Premier, Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held a luncheon at the Interior Ministry's camp in Salmy on Thursday. The event was attended by the Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim, his deputy Mubarak Al-Khurainej, MPs, ministers, municipal council members, senior officials and editors-in-chief.

National Assembly Speaker lauded the vital role performed by the personnel of the army, National Guard, and interior ministry in preserving security of the country and safety of the people, calling them a source of pride and safety for all Kuwaitis. Al-Ghanim made his remarks in his speech at a luncheon which coincided with the country's ongoing national celebrations of the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah's assumption of power, the 25th anniversary of Liberation Day, and the 55th anniversary of National Day.

"We were all honored today by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's invitation, whether myself, MPs, Municipality Council, or the prominent figures and people in Kuwait," the top lawmaker said, expressing his appreciation and pride in the efforts exerted by the interior ministry and all its affiliated bodies. He also expressed his gratitude to the Interior Minister's "generous" invitation of the Kuwaiti people to attend the luncheon, held at the ministry's camp, calling it a gesture that embodies the spirit of the one family and the genuine roots of the Kuwaiti people.

For his part, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled lauded the citizens' role in supporting security personnel, which proves that the security system cannot be fully completed without the people's cooperation with the interior ministry's personnel. Several MPs lauded the role of the Interior Ministry in maintaining the country's, citizens and expats security. They said policemen have a special status, and their work is appreciated by them.

Meanwhile, Deputy Premier, Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah thanked those present - which reflects the spirit of the one family. He lauded the role of citizen in supporting policemen, as they represent the support of the Interior Ministry, and their presence of the interior ministry men is proof that security system will only be complete with cooperation of Kuwait people with policemen.



DIPLOMAT DISCUSSES TIES WITH IRAQ OFFICIALS

BASRA: Kuwait's Consul-General to Basra Yousef Ashour Al-Sabbagh has held talks with senior officials of Maysan Governorate, southeastern Iraq, discussing bilateral relations between Kuwait and Iraq and ways to bolster the two countries cooperation in various fields, particularly economic. The Kuwaiti-Iraqi talks are part of joint efforts to open new prospects of fruitful cooperation between Kuwait and Iraq's southern governorates in various fields, including economic, social, and cultural, Al-Sabbagh said in a joint press conference after the meeting Thursday.

He lauded the level of development in the Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations, noting that he has discussed with Iraqi officials a number of issues of mutual interest, particularly the investment filed and facilitating the entry of Kuwaiti companies to investment market in Iraq. The Kuwaiti diplomat also expressed hope that the Consulate-General's efforts contribute to boosting bilateral cooperation in investments and development projects, in which Kuwait can assist to support the development march in the south Iraq province.

For his part, Chairman of Maysan

Provincial Council Munther Al-Shawy stressed the importance of opening the Kuwaiti Consulate-General in Basra, calling it an important and historic step in the relations march between the two countries after 25 years of estrangement due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Al-Shawy also confirmed his government's keenness in improving ties with Kuwait in various fields and providing Kuwaiti investors commercial and investment opportunities that repeat the successes they achieved in East Asian and African markets. — KUNA



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EXHIBITION SHOWCASES CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION DURING GULF WAR

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis and expats alike have until Sunday (Feb 14) to visit and get to know Canada's contribution during the 1990-1991 war. The exhibition 'The Gulf War of 1990-1991, Contribution to Kuwait's Liberation and Recovery' was opened to public on Wednesday evening as Canada display the timeline of photographs and paintings during Gulf war. The expo is being held under the patronage of National Council for Culture Arts and Letters and was graced by Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah.

Speaking at the opening of the expo, Canada's Ambassador to Kuwait Martine Moreau said the artwork on display portrays Canada's contribution to the global community response to Kuwait's plight - having been invaded by the forces of Saddam Hussein, as well as the aftermath of their withdrawal. "Around this room you will see a number of paintings from Canadian artist Zuber, which were graciously loaned by Canada War Museum in Ottawa, along with various photographs depicting the efforts of both Canadian Armed Forces and civilians in supporting Kuwait's liberation and recovery 25 years

ago," she said. She said, Canadian vividly recalls watching the horror scenes of the invasion. "Within days of invasion, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced Canada's commitment to participate in the United States and Saudi Arabia-led military coalition of 35 nations, in support of United Nations Security Council resolutions authorizing coalition partners to take all appropriate actions to expel Saddam forces out of Kuwait," she mentioned.

She was proud of Canada's military assets in the Gulf at that time which reached 4,500 with two destroyer ships, naval task group, 24 CF 18 fighter attack aircraft, along with CC-137 air-to-air refueller and transport aircraft. Canada was also in the mission to conduct naval interceptions in support of the embargo, escort of the coalition logistics fleet responsible for fuel, ammunition and food, combat air patrols over coalition vessels, bombing missions in Iraq and field hospital operations.

Canadian was present at the aftermath of war in peacekeeping duties, mine clearing operations - working tirelessly to extinguish the oil fire in Kuwait, cleaning oil released into the Sea. Canada also invited some Gulf War veterans to pay respect and



present matters about Gulf War, like Rear Admiral (retired) Ken Summers, Doctor Richard Gimblett, and Al-Hussein Al-Taque.

"They are here today to provide their personal accounts and unique perspective of these world's events," she said.



News

in Brief

**Mubarak Hospital's ER
received 510,145 patients**

KUWAIT: Some 510,145 patients received treatment at the emergency room of Mubarak Hospital in 2015, said its Director Dr Ahmad Al-Hussaini yesterday. Speaking to KUNA, Dr Al-Hussaini said that the hospital was studying these statistics to determine the best way to address challenges facing the hospital. He added that the numbers would also help in setting Mubarak Hospital's plans in motion for the upcoming years. March, April, May, October, November and December were the busiest months for Mubarak Hospital as opposed to the months of July and August, said the Director. Meanwhile, the number of people treated at outpatient wards in 2015 was 321,522, said Dr Al-Hussaini, adding that the number of patients treated at internal medicine wards was 161,629 in the same year. He pointed out that some 113,181 people were treated at the specialized medicine wards in 2015. The staff and administration of Mubarak Hospital are keen on providing the best medical care for patients in accordance with the Health Ministry's plans for developing healthcare in Kuwait, said the Director.

**MoE 'carried out'
CSRSIR's request**

KUWAIT: Education Ministry has carried out the request of Central System for the Remedy of Situations of Illegal Residents (CSRSIR) to terminate the contracts of 23 bedoon teachers because of security restrictions. Education Ministry Undersecretary Haitham Al-Athary said the decision is based on a letter from CSRSIR - asking for the termination, adding that the Education Ministry is committed to implementing the law along with other government bodies.

Field campaign in Fahaheel

By Hanan Al-Saadoun, agencies

Ahmadi Municipality Cleanliness Department has carried out a field campaign in Fahaheel area. 15 abandoned vehicles were removed and 35 warning stickers were placed on other abandoned cars.

Fire lectures

The Kuwait Fire Service Directorate gave a lecture to employees and teachers of Global Academy in Mahboula, on how to act during the fire incidents. Lt Ahmad Al-Enezi and Mushari Al-Naqa gave the lectures - the first hour was in English and the second in Arabic.



KUWAIT, ITALY TO SEAL EUROFIGHTER JET DEAL

KUWAIT: Kuwait and Italy will finalize a multibillion-euro deal next week for the Gulf state to purchase Eurofighter jets, Kuwait's defense minister has said. Sheikh Khaled Jarrah Al-Sabah did not specify the number of planes involved in the deal but the Eurofighter consortium said in September that Kuwait had agreed to buy 28 fighter jets. 'Italian Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti will visit Kuwait next week to sign the Eurofighter warplanes deal,' Al-Sabah was quoted as saying Thursday evening by the official KUNA news agency. Media reports said the value of the deal was between 7-8

billion euros (\$8-9 billion).

The minister said he met with his Italian counterpart earlier Thursday on the sidelines of an anti-Islamic State group coalition meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels. The Kuwait deal follows Oman's order of 12 Eurofighter Typhoons in December 2012. Saudi Arabia already uses the fighter jets in its air force. Kuwait is looking to upgrade its firepower against the backdrop of increased security concerns in the region linked to the rise of IS. Its parliament last month unanimously approved a request by the government for \$10 billion in additional funds for military

spending over the next 10 years.

The emirate is a member of the US-led coalition that has been bombing IS targets in Syria and Iraq since last year and is also taking part in a Saudi-led coalition striking Iran-backed rebels in Yemen. In November, Kuwait signed 2.5 billion euros worth of fixed and provisional military deals led by the purchase of 24 Airbus-built Caracal helicopters. Paris said Kuwait would purchase the helicopters for one billion euros, with an option for a further six. Further deals included the purchase of French light armoured vehicles and patrol boat maintenance. — AFP



Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Subaih meet with a number of undersecretaries. — KUNA

'ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT NEEDS CONCERTED EFFORTS'

KUWAIT: Achieving development in Kuwait is a joint responsibility and needs concerted efforts from all bodies, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabah stressed yesterday. Al-Sabah said some bodies delayed reply to letters sent by the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) on some recommendations and inquiries, the council said in a press statement on Friday, citing the minister.

This runs counter to the government's policy aiming to push ahead the wheel of production and carry out development projects, she said during a meeting with a number of undersecretaries.

Al-Sabah, also Minister of State for Development and Planning, urged all executive bodies to pay much attention to these recommendations and inquiries. She reviewed some letters sent by the council's committees to the government departments for inquiries, saying some ministries don't interact quickly with these letters.

Meanwhile, SCPD Secretary General Dr Khaled Mahdi said the Secretariat will follow up on letters between the council's committees and government bodies to make sure

interaction of these bodies to secure responses. This move will be carried out through the Internet to facilitate the follow-up process, he added. — KUNA

KUWAITI TEAMS DELIVER AID TO SYRIAN REFUGEES

BEIRUT: Kuwaiti relief teams handed over necessities to 400 Syrian families in Lebanon's northernmost region Akkar, said Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday. Nabil Bouftain, head of the KRCS' field team, told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that food rations and detergents were given to the refugees in Al-Abde town, located in Akkar, northeast of the port city Tripoli. Kuwaitis, wholeheartedly, are aiding the Syrian brothers in hope of soothing their suffering, Bouftain has re-affirmed.

KRCS' teams have been delivering relief

supplies to the Syrians in Lebanon, almost on daily basis, undeterred by hard winter weather conditions.

They have reached the refugees in remote regions of the country. The Kuwaiti aid is being delivered as part of the "winter warm campaign 2016," securing basic needs for thousands of the refugees, whose number in Lebanon is estimated at more than one million. The continuous Kuwait humanitarian assistance includes distribution of bread and medical support and treatment. — KUNA

GULF BANK SUPPORTS 'BENCHMARK FORUM'

BRINGING TOGETHER CREATIVE MINDS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced that it is supporting the Benchmark Forum 2016, the 3rd Annual Design Entrepreneurship Forum organized by yourAOK. The Benchmark Forum is set to take place at Al Shaheed Park on 12 - 13 February 2016, with an agenda full of activities that will both inform and inspire entrepreneurs and designers alike. Benchmark Forum brings together innovative business minds and creative designers to share their experience and inspire young entrepreneurs and to provide them with

the mentorship that may guide them down the road of development and success. The event is free of charge.

Benchmark is a non-profit event that aims to educate designers and creative professionals by providing them with a merging skill-set between design and business. The agenda will include lectures by professionals in the industry, mentorships programs for designers wanting to open their own design businesses, an online marketplace will be displayed and sold on behalf of the design-

(youraok.net). YourAOK is a networking platform bringing together creative professionals, design firms and product suppliers together. It offers them a multimedia platform with digital portfolios allowing clients to easily browse through profiles and visual works to hire artists, photographers or designers. YourAOK aims to provide Kuwaiti youth with the skill-set required to create their own, feasible business. For more details and to register for the event, kindly visit <https://youraok.net/benchmark16> or

email us at info@youraok.net with your name, contact info, and the title of "MENTORSHIP" and/or "LECTURES". Gulf Bank is strongly committed to supporting youth initiatives, and doing its part to help empower the next generation. To find out more about Gulf Bank, please see the bank's bilingual website at www.e-gulfbank.com, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches in Kuwait, or see its social media channel on Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.



78 TEAMS QUALIFY TO NEXT ROUND OF THE MIT ENTERPRISE FORUM ARAB STARTUP COMPETITION

KUWAIT: The MIT Enterprise Forum (MITEF) of the Pan Arab region, in partnership with Community Jameel, the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of Abdul Latif Jameel and Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator across the Middle East and Africa, announced that a total of 78 teams from 15 countries have qualified for the next round of the prestigious MITEF Arab Startup Competition, with the final winners' ceremony now confirmed to be held at King Abdullah Economic City, in Saudi Arabia on 14 April, 2016.

The ninth edition of the MITEF Arab Startup competition received a record 5,967 individual and team applications (comprising over 16,500 entrepreneurs) from 21 countries across the Arab world. The three tracks that entrants applied for are: Ideas, Startups, and Social Entrepreneurship with total prize money on offer in excess of \$150,000. Each of the three tracks will award the first three ranked winners with cash prizes in addition to many other benefits including: top tier training, mentorship, coaching, media exposure, and great networking opportunities.

The selected 78 teams will start receiving entrepreneurship-focused training during pre-boot camps scheduled to be conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE later this month and in early March, and will start working to achieve specific deliverables in their specif-

ic tracks. The national origins of the groups and the corresponding number of semi-finalists who made it to the second round include: Egypt (19), Jordan (10), Lebanon (7), Tunisia (7), Saudi Arabia (6), United Arab Emirates (6), Palestine (6), Morocco (4), Kuwait (3), Bahrain (2), Qatar (2), Sudan (2), Syria (2), Algeria (1), Yemen (1).

Hala Fadel, Chair of the Board of MITEF Pan Arab commented, "The record number of applications submitted from across the Arab region this year clearly indicates a steady increase in the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship of the region's youth. Particularly noteworthy is the significant increase in applications received from Saudi Arabia, from five percent last year to nearly twenty percent this year, which promises a great event at King Abdullah Economic City in Saudi Arabia this April. We look forward to meeting and supporting some of the Middle East's most promising youth as they start and continue their entrepreneurial journeys."

Fady Jameel, President of Community Jameel International commented, "The launch of the MITEF Saudi Chapter last year provided an extra opportunity for the Saudi-based entrepreneurs to apply for the competition. The applications submitted for the MITEF Saudi Startup Competition demonstrated great promise, showcasing quality entrepreneurial ideas and startups. Therefore, it was difficult to choose from such a wealth of talent the six winners who

will go on to be part of the MITEF Pan Arab Competition. With such impressive talent coming forward in the competitions, it is with great pleasure that Community Jameel pledges its continuous support to the entrepreneurs of the MENA region."

Zain Group CEO, Scott Gegenheimer said, "We at Zain are proud to foster the growth of this competition as we recognize that much of the region's future development will be driven by young people in technology, whose ideas and the ability to turn them into something constructive and sustainable have been and will continue to be the success story of modern society. Congratulations to the 78 semi-finalists and we are looking forward to interacting with this year's aspiring entrepreneurs and shall take the opportunity to capitalize on the most promising innovative ideas in the regional digital space supporting our evolution to becoming a digital lifestyle provider."

On 13 April, during a four-day final event in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 10 finalists will be announced from each track. These short-listed teams will pitch their ideas to a panel of investors and successful entrepreneurs on 14 April, and the final three ranked winners of the Ideas, Startups, and Social Entrepreneurship tracks will be announced and awarded cash prizes during a gala dinner that same evening. Also during the day, a MIT Technology Review Pan Arab conference will be held.

GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF ITS 'SPEND MORE, WIN MORE' GULF REWARDS CAMPAIGN

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank yesterday announced the first draw winners of its "Spend More, Win More" with Gulf Rewards promotional campaign for its credit card holders. The campaign runs until 29 February 2016. All Gulf Bank credit cards holders are automatically enrolled in this campaign.

The daily winners were: (01-02-2016) Maher Waheed Nashed Fahmi (100,000 Gulf Points);

(02-02-2016) Abdulmuhsen Medej Mohammed Al-Medej (100,000 Gulf Points); (03-02-2016) Adel Ayyad Sanad Hanna (100,000 Gulf Points); (04-02-2016) Fadeelah Yousef Hamed Buteeban (100,000 Gulf Points); (05-02-2016) Zainab Fawzi Fayeze Jarrad (100,000 Gulf Points); (06-02-2016) Pervaiz Ahmad Shabbir Ahmad (100,000 Gulf Points).

This new campaign is part of Gulf Rewards, the fastest and most rewarding points program in Kuwait. Gulf Rewards includes Gulf Points for free flights and hotels redemptions, as well as Gulf Bank "Entertainer," Kuwait's first geo-locator mobile application offering exclusive deals in Kuwait, UAE, and London. There will be 30 lucky winners, 29 daily winners each receiving 100,000 Gulf Points, and one grand prize winner of 1,000,000 Gulf Points. For each 10 KD spent locally, one chance will be earned, and for each 10 KD spent internationally, three chances will be earned.

100,000 Gulf Points can be redeemed in a multitude of ways. For example, they can be redeemed for 5 roundtrip tickets to Dubai, or 3 roundtrip tickets to Beirut, or 2 roundtrip tickets to Europe, or even 1 roundtrip ticket to the USA, depending on how you choose to use them. Or you can use your Gulf Points for free hotel stays in one of 300,000 hotels worldwide. With all these ways to use your points, imagine what you could do with 1 Million Gulf Points. To ensure the redemption procedure is as straight forward as possible, Gulf Bank has created a dedicated webpage on its website at www.e-gulfbank.com/gulfpoin-en where customers can view their points, check their balance, redeem points instantly online for flights and hotel stays, or benefit from frequently advertised special offers.

Customers can earn additional chances to win the Gulf Points draw by using the Gulf Bank "Entertainer" app. This exclusive app offer instant deals on your mobile phone which can be used at restaurants, hotels, spas, as well as on children's activities and interests at participating merchants in Kuwait, UAE, and London. If you use your Gulf Bank credit card to pay for any Entertainer, 'Buy One, Get One Free' offer, you will earn Gulf Points on each of those transactions and have more chances to win in the "Spend More, Win More" campaign. The Gulf Bank 'Entertainer' app is available free for existing Gulf Bank credit card holders to download from App Store for iOS/iPhone and the Google Play Store for Android. You can also visit www.e-gulfbank.com/entertainer-en to receive an activation code. To find out more about the Bank's latest Gulf Rewards campaign, customers can visit the bank's bilingual website at www.e-gulfbank.com, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches in Kuwait.



International

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Bahrain at impasse five years after uprising bid

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EU is poised to restrict passport-free travel

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Relatives sob as 49 dead in Mexico prison battle

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DAMASCUS: Syrian civil defence members evacuate a family following reported air strikes by regime forces on the Kafr Batna town in the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area, on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, Yesterday.—AFP

‘CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES’ IN SYRIA SOON

RUSSIAN WARPLANES LAUNCH AIR STRIKES AMID TRUCE TALKS

MUNICH: Major powers agreed yesterday to a “cessation of hostilities” in Syria to begin in a week, doing nothing in the meantime to halt Russian bombing poised to give government forces their biggest victory of the five-year-old war. If implemented, the deal would allow humanitarian aid to reach besieged towns. It has the potential to be the first diplomatic breakthrough in a conflict that has fractured the Middle East, killed at least 250,000 people, made 11 million homeless and sent hundreds of thousands fleeing into Europe. But by allowing fighting to rage on for at least another week, it gives the Damascus government and its Russian allies time to press on with an offensive that has transformed the conflict since the start of this month.

Russian warplanes were bombing northern Syria on Friday, showing no sign of slowing the pace of attacks despite the agreement hammered out overnight. Syrian government forces, with Lebanese and Iranian allies and vigorous Russian air support, are now poised to recapture

the northern city of Aleppo, Syria’s biggest city before the war, and seal off the border with Turkey. Those two victories would reverse years of insurgent gains and effectively end rebel hopes of dislodging President Bashar al-Assad through force, the cause they have fought for since 2011 with the encouragement of Arab states, Turkey and the West.

The “cessation of hostilities” agreement reached by the world powers falls short of a formal ceasefire, since it was not signed by the main warring parties - the opposition and government forces.

It was announced after marathon talks in Munich aimed at resurrecting Geneva peace talks that collapsed last week. Implementation will now be the key, said US Secretary of State John Kerry: “What we need to see in the next few days are actions on the ground, in the field.”

Russia made clear from the outset that the “cessation” would not apply to its air strikes, which have decisively shifted the balance of

power towards its ally President Bashar al-Assad since Moscow joined the conflict four months ago. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told the news conference that Moscow would not stop bombing, as the deal did not apply to Islamic State and to a rebel group called the Nusra Front, which is affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

“Our airspace forces will continue working against these organisations,” he said.

Moscow has always said that those two jihadist groups are the only targets of its air campaign. Western countries say Russia has in fact been mostly targeting other insurgent groups, including some that they support. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Moscow must halt strikes on insurgents other than Islamic State for any peace deal to work.

“Russia has mainly targeted opposition groups and not ISIL (Islamic State). Air strikes of Russian planes against different opposition groups in Syria have actually undermined the efforts to reach a negotiated, peaceful solution,”

he said. The United States has been leading a separate air campaign against Islamic State fighters since 2014, when that group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, swept through much of eastern Syria and northern Iraq, declaring a caliphate.

Washington has largely steered clear of intervening in the main battlefields of Syria’s civil war in the west of the country, leaving the field to Russia which began its air campaign on Sept. 30 last year. Kerry had entered the Munich talks pushing for a rapid halt in the conflict, with Western officials saying Moscow was holding out for a delay. The tactic of agreeing to a future break in hostilities, while continuing to fight for gains on the ground, is one Moscow’s allies used in eastern Ukraine only a year ago.

A truce there eventually took hold, but only after Russian-backed separatist fighters had achieved a major victory, overrunning a besieged town in a final offensive after the deal was reached.— Reuters

SAUDI WARNS UN, AID WORKERS TO LEAVE REBEL-HELD AREAS IN YEMEN

UNITED NATIONS: Saudi Arabia, which is leading air strikes against rebels in neighboring Yemen, has warned the United Nations and international aid groups to protect staff by removing them from areas held by Yemen's Houthi rebels, according to a letter that was seen by Reuters on Thursday.

The short note sent by the Saudi Embassy in London yesterday said the intention was to "protect the international organizations and their employees," presumably from coalition air strikes.

The Saudi ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Abdallah Al-Mouallimi, told Reuters that Riyadh sent the letter because, "We're just concerned for

the safety of the U.N. staff and their humanitarian agencies. "We want them to go away from areas that are obvious targets," he said.

Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of nine Arab countries that began a military campaign in March to prevent Iran-allied Houthi rebels from taking complete control of Yemen.

UN aid chief Stephen O'Brien acknowledged receipt of the note in a Sunday letter seen by Reuters and said the humanitarian community would continue to deliver aid across Yemen impartially on the basis of need.

He reminded Saudi Arabia of obligations under international humanitarian law

to facilitate access for aid. The Saudi mission to the United Nations responded on Monday that Riyadh would "do its utmost to continue to facilitate and support" humanitarian aid work in Yemen, while also repeating its request for UN and international aid workers to leave areas close to Houthi bases for military operations. "The coalition's request is consistent with its obligations under international humanitarian law and, in no way, can be misinterpreted to indicate any hindrance to humanitarian access and the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Yemen," it said.

The UN Security Council is due to discuss the humanitarian situation in Yemen on Tuesday at the request of Russia, diplo-

mats said. The Houthis and their allies, forces loyal to former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh, accuse the coalition of launching a war of aggression.

Nearly 6,000 people have been killed since the coalition entered the conflict last March, almost half of them civilians.

UN sanctions monitors said in a report last month that the Saudi-led coalition has targeted civilians with air strikes and some of the attacks could be a crimes against humanity. The panel of experts documented 119 coalition sorties "relating to violations of international humanitarian law" and said that "many attacks involved multiple air strikes on multiple civilian objects." — Reuters



MANAMA: Tourists visit the old market in the Bahrain capital Manama. — AFP

BAHRAIN AT IMPASSE FIVE YEARS AFTER UPRISING BID

ECONOMIC CRISIS EXACERBATES CRISIS

DUBAI: Five years after Bahrain crushed a popular uprising, the kingdom is locked in a political impasse exacerbated by an economic crisis, analysts say.

They see an urgent need for a compromise between the rulers and the opposition, after the Arab Spring touched the small Gulf state on February 14, 2011.

"Hopes for progress on human rights and accountability for past and present abuses have faded," Amnesty International said ahead of Sunday's anniversary. Echoing protests against longstanding rulers elsewhere in the region, Bahrain's Shiites demanded a more representative government and a constitutional monarchy in the archipelago kingdom ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa dynasty.

Demonstrators camped at the symbolic Pearl Square roundabout until security forces dispersed them a month after the uprising began. Troops from Saudi Arabia, the region's dominant Sunni power, moved in from across the causeway to support their ally.

Dozens of dissidents are in jail or have been stripped of their citizenship. Sheikh Ali Salman, leader of the main Shiite opposition bloc Al-Wefaq, received a four-year sentence

last June for inciting disobedience. Scores have died in periodic unrest which has flared despite the suppression of the original uprising in Bahrain, home to the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Police warned this week that any calls to protest on Sunday, the uprising's anniversary, will be considered "a criminal infraction punished under the law." The government denies any discrimination against Shiites and regularly accuses Iran-located 200 kilometres (124 miles) away across the Gulf-of meddling in Bahrain's internal affairs. Manama also frequently announces the dismantling of "terrorist" cells that it says are linked to Iran, which the Shiite power denies.

"Today in Bahrain, anyone who dares to criticise the authorities... risks punishment," said Amnesty's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, James Lynch.

For Emirati analyst Mohammed Baharoun, "the events of February 14, 2011 shook the trust in the political class". Baharoun, deputy director of the Dubai-based B'huth research centre, said the political situation "remains tense, but the current economic crisis offers an opportunity to consider a common platform to address this challenge that affects the lives of all citizens."

An 'unmanageable' crisis

Traditionally a centre of pearl diving, oil has dominated the kingdom's economy in more recent decades. Bahrain now produces around 190,000 barrels per day of crude, most of which come from an offshore oilfield shared with Saudi Arabia. But after oil prices collapsed from above \$100 a barrel in early 2014 to around \$30 now, Bahrain has been forced to cut costs, as have its larger Gulf neighbours.

According to economist Jaafar Al-Sayegh, Bahrain derives 86 to 88 percent of its revenue from oil.

The kingdom's growth is projected to slow this year to 2.25 percent, compared with 3.2 percent last year and 4.5 percent in 2014, the International Monetary Fund said. "Hope to exit the crisis needs not only a rebound in crude prices... but also political agreements," said Sayegh, head of the Bahraini Economists Association.

In a bid to reduce its budget deficit Bahrain has cut subsidies on fuel and meat, with electricity and water to follow. However, such austerity measures "will not solve the economic problem," said analyst and former government minister Ali Fakhro. — AFP

JORDAN JOURNALIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO IN UAE: RIGHTS GROUP

AMMAN: A Jordanian journalist has been detained for nearly two months in the United Arab Emirates without access to his family or a lawyer, Human Rights Watch said yesterday.

The watchdog said Tayseer Al-Najjar, 42, was arrested late last year in Abu Dhabi while attempting to board a flight home, and has not been heard from since he appeared in court on December 13.

"Najjar's case bears all the marks of the UAE's shameful practice of forced disappearances and incommunicado detentions," said HRW's deputy Middle East director Joe Stork. "We don't know why Najjar is missing but we know that he was last seen in police headquarters of a country with zero tolerance for free speech."

The New York-based rights group said Najjar's case was one of nine enforced disappearances in the energy-flush Gulf state in recent years, calling on the UAE to clarify where the journalist is being held and to provide access to a lawyer. "UAE authorities have curtailed the access of international rights groups, journalists, and academics to the country, deported bloggers and proponents of media freedom, and imprisoned people who have provided information to non-governmental organisations," HRW said.

It has in the past called for an investigation into allegations of torture of prisoners held in the UAE. Najjar's wife said he had been a journalist for 15 years and recently took the position of culture reporter for a new UAE-based weekly newspaper, Al-Dar. Jordanian media have reported that Najjar is in detention but has not been harmed. HRW nevertheless declared itself "extremely concerned about his physical and mental wellbeing". — AFP

ITALY URGED EGYPT FOR HELP HOURS AFTER STUDENT DISAPPEARED

CAIRO: Italian officials contacted Egyptian authorities hours after a student later found tortured to death disappeared in central Cairo last month, according to an official summary of early Italian efforts to locate him. The summary, obtained by The Associated Press on Thursday, says Ambassador Maurizio Massari contacted Italian intelligence, who reached out to their Egyptian counterparts shortly after Giulio Regeni disappeared on Jan. 25.

Egyptian security forces had been extremely active on that day and the weeks before, raiding apartments, checking IDs, and searching baggage in order to prevent protests or violence on the fifth anniversary of a popular uprising that ousted longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Regeni's body, stabbed repeatedly and exhibiting burns and other signs of torture, turned up dumped by a roadside in a Cairo suburb on Feb. 3. On Jan. 26, Massari sent a diplomatic note to his Egyptian counterpart, and a day later asked to meet the interior minister but the request was denied, the summary said.

An Egyptian Foreign Ministry official said the request was relayed to relevant security agencies "the minute" it was received and they started their search. "We kept following the matter with them and informed the Italian side of any developments and/or information we received," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters. The Interior Ministry could be immediately reached for comment. Italy waited almost a week before going public with the case, prompting accusations that it prioritized business interests with Egypt - and hopes for a trade delegation headed to Cairo after Regeni disappeared - over the search for the student. — AP

PRETORIA BACK IN COURT OVER BASHIR IMMUNITY ROW

BLOEMFONTEIN: The South African government argued in court yesterday that it was not obliged to arrest Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir during his visit to the country last June because he had immunity. Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged war crimes related to the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, and South Africa is a member of the Hague-based institution. The government is seeking leave to appeal against an earlier court judgment that it was legally bound to arrest Bashir, who was in the country for a summit of

the African Union (AU). Lawyer Jeremy Gauntlett, appearing for the government in the Supreme Court of Appeal, argued that local legislation provides immunity to visiting heads of state.

The immunity applies "for anything from genocide to parking offences, for anything from fraud to anything else, to a serving head of state," he said. Lawyer Wim Trengove, appearing for the rights group the Southern Africa Litigation Centre, said the ICC arrest order overrode the local legislation. "The ICC act... is clear and unambiguous. It says that the fact that the per-

son to be surrendered is... a sitting head of state does not constitute a ground to refuse an order." Judgment was reserved and will be handed down at a later date. South Africa's failure to prevent Bashir's departure, despite a court order, sparked international condemnation.

Earlier this month, however, African leaders meeting in Addis Ababa backed a Kenyan proposal pushing for a pullout from the ICC on the grounds that it unfairly targets the continent. Chadian President Idriss Deby, elected African Union chairman at the two-day

summit, criticized the court for focusing its efforts on African leaders. "Elsewhere in the world, many things happen—many flagrant violations of human rights—but nobody cares," Deby said. No legally-binding determination was made, and the decision to leave the ICC's founding Rome Statute is up to individual nations. Bashir has evaded justice since his indictment in 2009 for alleged crimes in the conflict in the western Sudanese region of Darfur in which 300,000 people were killed and two million forced to flee their homes. — AFP

HOPES FOR PEACE AS SOUTH SUDAN PRESIDENT NAMES RIVAL AS DEPUTY

MULTIPLE MILITIA FORCES DRIVEN BY LOCAL AGENDAS, REVENGE

JUBA: South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has named his arch-rival Riek Machar as vice-president, raising hopes for the implementation of a repeatedly broken peace deal to end more than two years of civil war. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and over two million forced from their homes since war between the rivals broke out in December 2013, pushing the world's youngest nation to the brink of famine. "I, Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, do hereby issue this Republican Decree for the appointment of Dr Riek Machar Teny as the first vice President of the Republic of South Sudan," said the decree issued late on Thursday. While the appointment was agreed as part of an August 2015 peace deal, its announcement now adds pressure on Machar to return to South Sudan from exile.

But fighting continues, and the conflict now involves multiple militia forces driven by local agendas or revenge, who pay little heed to paper peace deals. Machar, who was vice-president from 2005 until he was sacked in 2013, and who has yet to return to Juba since fleeing when war broke out, welcomed the decree. "It is welcome news because it is a step forward in the implementation of the peace agreement," Machar told AFP from Ethiopia. "It means we are implementing the peace agreement as stipulated."

40,000 starving to death

Some 2.8 million people—or a quarter of the country—needs aid, while in war-torn northern areas 40,000 are being starved to death, with violence blocking desperately needed aid. It was not immediately clear when Machar would travel to Juba to take up his post, and what it would take for him to feel secure enough to return. "If I get the support needed for the implementation of security arrangements, I think within a few weeks I will be able to take up my position," Machar said. Analysts warned that while Kiir's decree may help end the war between the two, levels of intense violence and conflict will likely continue at a local level.

'Multi-polar war'

Casie Copeland, from the International Crisis Group (ICG) pointed out the increasingly "fractious" nature of



JUBA: File photo shows South Sudan President, Salva Kiir Mayardit (right) and Vice-President Riek Machar standing together in Juba during a burial ceremony for South Sudan's late Defense minister Dominic Diem Deng and his wife Josephine Aken. After more than two years locked in combat, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has appointed his arch-rival Riek Machar as vice-president, the post he held from 2005-2013 before being sacked. — AFP

rebel and opposition forces, repeating previous warnings that violence is shifting into "a multi-polar war with localised conflicts." The peace agreement is increasingly fragile, with Kiir undermining a fundamental pillar of its power-sharing clauses by nearly tripling the number of regional states. Kiir also signed into law on Thursday a controversial Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) bill, restricting numbers of foreign aid workers, which has both raised fears it will hinder efforts to help millions in need, and goes against the peace agreement. Civil war erupted when Kiir accused his former deputy Machar of planning a coup, setting off a cycle of retaliatory killings that have split the poverty-stricken, landlocked country along ethnic lines. The two leaders come from the south's two main ethnic groups, Kiir from the Dinka people and Machar from the Nuer, tribes that are themselves split into multiple and sometimes rival clans.

Kiir and Machar are former rebel leaders who rose to power during Sudan's 1983-2005 civil war between north and south, after which South Sudan seceded in 2011 to form the world's youngest

country. Current vice-president James Wani Igga will remain in his post, but now rank below Machar. Both the government and rebel sides have been accused of perpetrating ethnic massacres, recruiting and killing children and carrying out widespread rape, torture and forced displacement of populations to "cleanse" areas of their opponents.

Residents in Juba welcomed the appointment - but said they would wait to see the agreement fully implemented before celebrating. "It gives hope to the people," said bar owner Michael Duku. "If this decree is implemented and Riek returns to Juba and takes office, I think this is the beginning of the peace process." Akeen Santo, an unemployed young man, said it was "a first step...but more needs to be done." Last month, a UN panel of experts recommended sanctions on both Kiir and Machar for their role in the brutal war. But Machar said the most important thing was trying to create peace. "Do you want war to continue, or do you want to bring peace? If you want peace, then you have to follow the political will to implement the peace agreement," Machar said. — AFP

IRAQI REFUGEES LEAVE FINLAND VOLUNTARILY

RETURNEES FIND FINNISH LIFE HARD

HELSINKI: Thousands of Iraqi refugees who arrived in Finland last year have decided to cancel their asylum applications and to return home voluntarily, citing family issues and disappointment with life in the frosty Nordic country. Europe is in the grip of its worst migrant crisis since World War Two, with more than a million people arriving last year, fleeing wars and poverty in the Middle East and beyond.

Germany and Finland's neighbor Sweden have taken in many of the migrants but Finland too saw the number of asylum seekers increase nearly tenfold in 2015 to 32,500 from 3,600 in 2014. Almost two thirds of the asylum seekers last year were young Iraqi men, but some are now having second thoughts, so Finland will begin chartering flights to Baghdad from next week to take them home. Officials said about 4,100 asylum seekers had so far cancelled their applications and that number was likely to reach 5,000 in the coming months. "My baby boy is sick, I need to get back home," said Alsaedi Hussein, buying a flight back to Baghdad at a small travel agency in Helsinki.

Somalia-born Muhiadin Hassan who runs the travel agency said he was now selling 15 to 20 flights to Baghdad every day. "It's been busy here for the past few months," he said. A majority of the home-bound migrants have told immigration services they want to return to their families, but some expressed disappointment with life in Finland. "Some say the conditions in Finland and the lengthy asylum process did not meet their expectations, or what they had been told by the people they paid for their travel," said Tobias van Treeck, program officer at the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Too cold

Echoing that comment, travel agent Hassan said: "Some say they don't like the food here, it's too cold or they don't feel welcome in Finland. There are many reasons." Nearly 80 percent of the migrants returning home are Iraqis. Just 22 of the 877 Syrians - whose country is racked by civil war - and 35 of the 5,214 Afghans who sought asylum in Finland last year have asked to return to their home country. Along with other Nordic states, Finland has recently tightened its immigration policies, for example requiring working-age asylum seekers to do some unpaid work. Hostility to migrants has also increased in Finland, a country with little experience of mass immigration and which now has economic problems. Germany too, which took in 1.1 million people in 2015, has seen small numbers of Iraqi refugees choosing to go home.

Finland had been preparing to reject up to 20,000 asylum seekers from 2015, but the number of voluntary returnees could significantly reduce that figure. "The number of returnees is increasing steadily ... All asylum seekers are informed about the options for voluntary return and about the available financial assistance," said Paivi Nerg, a senior official in the Finnish interior ministry. However, most Iraqi returnees pay for their own flight home or seek help from Iraq's embassy in Helsinki, she added. Last year the Finnish government and the IOM provided financial help to 631 returnees and a similar number is expected this year. The charter flights will carry up to 100 passengers back to Baghdad from Helsinki every week for as long as demand lasts, officials said. — Reuters

RWANDA TO RELOCATE BURUNDI REFUGEES TO OTHER COUNTRIES

KIGALI: Rwanda is to relocate refugees from Burundi to other countries, the government said yesterday, amid accusations Kigali was meddling in the affairs of its troubled neighbor.

"The government of Rwanda... will immediately begin working with partners in the international community to plan the orderly and safe relocation of Burundian refugees to third countries," the statement read, which took the UN refugee agency by surprise.

Last week, UN experts told the Security Council that Rwanda has recruited and trained refugees from Burundi, among them children, who wanted to remove Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza from power. Burundi has repeatedly accused Rwanda of backing rebels intent on overthrowing the government in Bujumbura. Kigali has fiercely denied the accusations.

"Rwanda readily shoulders its obligations to protect and care for refugees," the government statement said. "However, experience in the Great Lakes is that the long-term presence of refugees so close to their country of origin carries considerable risks for all involved." Burundi has been in turmoil since Nkurunziza announced plans in April to run for a third term, which he went on to win. Hundreds of people have been killed and at least 230,000 have fled the country.

Some 75,000 Burundian refugees are in Rwanda, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, which said yesterday it had not been informed in advance of the decision. "Our representative in Rwanda has immediately sought a meeting with the government," UNHCR spokeswoman Melissa Fleming told reporters in Geneva.

'Risks to national security'

"The callous indifference to the well-known root causes of instability in Burundi, and the refugee exodus is troubling," Rwandan Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said.

"It also exposes refugees to increased threats from forces at home and compromises lasting political solutions. For Rwanda, the growing risks to our national security from the Burundian impasse and misunderstandings in our foreign relations are unacceptable."

Neighbouring nations already host thousands of Burundian refugees in overstretched camps, with Tanzania hosting some 130,000 and Democratic Republic of Congo has over 18,000. Uganda, which borders Rwanda to the north, has 21,000. It was not clear where Rwanda plans to send the refugees to. "In recent months, Rwanda has made requests to international partners and organizations to host Burundians living in camps and in towns in Rwanda," Kigali's statement added. "No party has come forward yet, even as the political situation in the refugees' country of origin shows no improvement."—AFP

CAMEROON SOLDIERS KILL 27 BOKO HARAM FIGHTERS

YAOUNDE, Cameroon: Cameroon soldiers killed at least 27 Boko Haram fighters after launching a cross-border operation in the Nigerian locality of Goshi that also resulted in the death of one soldier, a senior military official said. At least seven other soldiers were injured in the operation early Thursday, said Gen. Jacob Kodji. The Nigerian Islamic extremist group launched a series of attacks in Cameroon earlier this week, said Kodji. Ashigashiya straddles the border of northern Cameroon and Nigeria.

"At least 27 Boko Haram fighters were killed in Thursday morning's operation," said Kodji, commander of Cameroon troops in the area. The soldiers remain on the battle front there, he said.

Regional forces from Cameroon and Nigeria have since December 2015 been launching raids on Boko Haram strongholds along their borders, especially around Ashigashiya. The Islamic militants began attacks across borders in 2014 and stepped them up early last year on neighboring Cameroon and other countries that have supported the Nigerian military's effort to crush Boko Haram.

In northern Cameroon, officials said two suicide bombers believed to have come from Nigeria on Wednesday killed 10 people and injured 40 attending a wake in a border village. Attacks in

Chad and Niger also are blamed on Boko Haram. Boko Haram's 6-year-old Islamic insurgency has killed 20,000 people, and displaced 2.5 million people, according to Amnesty International and the United Nations. —AP



Refugees arrive by train at the transit center for refugees near northern Macedonian village of Tabanovce, continuing their journey to Serbia, yesterday. —AP

EU IS POISED TO RESTRICT PASSPORT-FREE TRAVEL

'DEPORTATION' ONLY SOLUTION TO MIGRANT CRISIS: CZECH LEADER

BRUSSELS: Documents seen by The Associated Press show that European Union countries are poised to restrict passport-free travel by invoking an emergency rule for two years due to the migration crisis. Each of the 26 countries in the open-travel Schengen Area is allowed to unilaterally put up border controls for a maximum of six months. That limit can be extended for up to two years if a member nation is found to be failing to protect its borders.

The documents show that EU policymakers are poised to declare that Greece is failing to sufficiently protect its border. Some 2,000 people are still arriving daily on Greek islands in smugglers' boats from Turkey. A European official showed the documents to the AP on condition of anonymity because the documents are confidential.

Deportation

Czech President Milos Zeman, known for his anti-migrant rhetoric, yesterday called for the "deportation" of economic migrants and suspected terrorists amid what he called the EU's "complete failure" to tackle the migrant crisis.

The 71-year-old leftist has repeatedly spoken out against the surge of migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe and even attended a rally against migrants and Islam organised by the xenophobic Bloc Against Islam movement last year. "The European Union has completely failed to solve the migration crisis," Zeman told a meeting of social democrats in the Slovak capital Bratislava.

"The only solution to the migrant crisis

is the deportation of economic migrants and those advocating religious violence, religious hatred, in short, plotting terrorism." Zeman added that his country would welcome all migrants willing to integrate but said that "Islamic migrants are impossible to integrate and assimilate into European culture," repeating a controversial opinion he first aired last month. "Political correctness is a synonym for a lie." Late last year, Zeman called the surge in refugee numbers "an organised invasion" of Europe and urged young men from Iraq and Syria to "take up arms" against the Islamic State (IS) group instead of running away. Surveys show that most Czechs believe their EU and NATO state of

10.5 million people should not accept refugees from war-torn countries.

But few asylum seekers have chosen to stay in the Czech Republic and EU neighbours Poland and Slovakia, while Hungary last year built a fence to deflect a migrant wave heading from the Balkans westwards to wealthier EU members such as Germany. A million migrants arrived in Europe last year—most from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria—in the continent's worst refugee crisis since World War II, while another 70,000 have arrived this year.

The influx has caused tensions between EU members and has given a boost to far-right, anti-immigration groups across the continent. —Agencies

CRIMEAN TATARS OUTRAGED AS RUSSIA CHARGES FOUR WITH 'TERRORISM'

SIMFEROPOL: Crimean Tatars, a minority Muslim group opposed to Russian annexation, yesterday condemned a new wave of repressions after Russian security forces raided homes and charged four with terrorist offences. "A new wave of repressions has started in Crimea against Crimean Tatars," the community's governing body, the Mejlis, said in a statement.

Crimean prosecutors said the Russian FSB security service had detained four on suspicion of organizing and taking part in the radical Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir party. The lawyer representing the detained men, Emil Kurtbedinov, told AFP yesterday that all four men had

already been charged with organising or joining a terrorist group, for which they could face up to 20 years in jail. Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) seeks to re-establish a Caliphate—a pan-Islamic state based on Islamic rule harking to the medieval era—and has been banned in Russia since 2003.

Since annexing Crimea in March 2014, Russia has cracked down on the Tatars, an indigenous ethnic group that makes up about 13 percent of its population, many of whom oppose Moscow's rule of the peninsula. The FSB raided 12 homes, confiscating computers and other electronic devices, a Tatar community leader, Zair Smedlya, told AFP.—AFP

INDIA'S TOP COURT SAYS GANDHIS NEED TO FACE TRIAL IN GRAFT CASE

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court said yesterday that opposition leaders Sonia Gandhi and her son, Rahul, will have to face trial in a case involving the alleged misuse of party funds, but exempted them from appearing in court. The two members of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty had approached the top court to throw out the case which their Congress party says is a vendetta carried out by a member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling group.

But the court said it saw no justification for interfering in the trial conducted by the lower court. However it granted them leave from attending regular hearings. The Gandhis deny any wrongdoing. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party are bitterly opposed to the Congress party, leading to a gridlock in parliament where key legislation such as simplifying state taxes is stuck. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty ruled India for most of its post-independence era after 1947 and

helped shape the country's institutions. Detractors accuse the family of holding back economic development with socialist policies.

The legal case, brought by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy against the Gandhis, has further poisoned ties and there are no signs of compromise, political analysts say. "The main prayer for which they (Gandhis) came has been defeated," Swamy told reporters after the Supreme Court decision.

Congress leader Kapil Sibal said the party welcomed the court's decision to exempt the Gandhis from appearing in court and would continue to fight Swamy's "false allegations". Swamy has accused the Gandhis of cheating and criminal breach of trust by setting up a shell company to illegally gain control of properties worth \$300 million that belonged to a company that published a newspaper founded by Rahul's great grandfather.—Reuters

NEPALESE PM TO VISIT INDIA ON MISSION TO REPAIR TIES

KATHMANDU: Nepal's prime minister will travel to India next week on a visit aimed at repairing fractured relations between the neighbors after the end of a crippling months-long border blockade, Kathmandu said yesterday. Demonstrators in Nepal had obstructed a major trade route since September in protest at a new constitution, sparking debilitating shortages of fuel and other vital supplies across the landlocked Himalayan nation.

But slow movement of cargo across other checkpoints where no protests were taking place prompted Kathmandu to accuse New Delhi, which has criticized the constitution, of imposing an "unofficial blockade", a charge India denied. The strained ties meant that KP Sharma Oli, who became premier in October, put off visiting India—a traditional first stop for Nepali prime ministers heading overseas—until the blockade ended last week.

"Prime Minister Oli is now in a position to improve the souring relationship with India after the promulgation of the new constitution in Nepal," said the prime minister's foreign affairs adviser Gopal Khanal. "He hopes to end any confusion in bilateral ties that has emerged in recent times," he said. More than 50 people have died in clashes between police and protesters from southern Nepal's Madhesi ethnic minority and share close cultural, linguistic and family links with Indians living across the border. The unrest has triggered concern in India, with New Delhi urging Kathmandu to hold talks with the Madhesi, who say the charter, adopted in September, leaves them politically marginalized.

India's foreign ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup told reporters the visit was "expected to lead to a further strengthening of our age old, close and friendly relations with Nepal". Slated for discussion were developmental assistance, energy and connectivity, he said, as well as the resumption of commerce across the formerly blocked checkpoint. Lok Raj Baral, a former Nepali ambassador to India said that establishing a good rapport with Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be vital for Nepal's new prime minister on the visit, slated for February 19-24.

The small country is heavily dependent on India for fuel and other supplies. "Nepal has serious limitations because of its geography so our leaders need to be realistic instead of chanting nationalistic slogans," Baral said. "Meanwhile India needs to realise that it cannot dictate terms to a sovereign country and micromanage its political affairs," he said. The constitution, the first drawn up by elected representatives, was meant to cement peace and bolster Nepal's transformation to a democratic republic after decades of political instability and a 10-year Maoist insurgency. But ongoing discussions between the government and protesting parties over the charter have failed to yield an agreement.—AFP



HYDERABAD: Pakistani policemen stand guard outside the Central Jail, where Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh is currently on death row for the murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl, in Hyderabad. Pakistan's military yesterday said it had foiled a prison break bid aimed at freeing British-born militant Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh. — AFP

PAKISTAN ARRESTS 97 AL-QAEDA MILITANTS; FOILS JAILBREAK PLAN

3 COMMANDERS AMONG THOSE ARRESTED IN KARACHI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has arrested 97 Al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi militants, including three commanders, in the southern city of Karachi and foiled a planned attack to break US journalist Daniel Pearl's killer out of jail, the army said yesterday. The men are accused of involvement in major attacks on two Pakistani air bases, the Karachi airport, several regional intelligence headquarters and on police installations between 2009 and 2015, the military said.

The LeJ's Naeem Bokhari and Sabir Khan, as well as Farooq Bhatti, deputy chief of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), were captured by Pakistani forces in recent raids, military spokesman Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa said. "Our conclusion is that all of the terrorist groups are trying to cooperate with each other in order to carry out terrorist attacks," he told a news conference. The LeJ and AQIS had been working "in collusion" with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, Bajwa added.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is an Islamist group whose sectarian ideology is closely aligned with Islamic State, as it wants to kill or expel Pakistan's minority Shiites and establish a Sunni theocracy. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent was formed by global Al-Qaeda chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri in September 2014, and is one of dozens of Islamist militant groups, some aligned against Pakistan and others against its neighbors, that operate in the country. Pakistan has been under domestic and international pressure to crack down on all such groups, and launched a renewed operation against some of them in June 2014.

Bajwa declined to give details of the raids, including their timing. Several of those arrested, including Bokhari, were in the advanced stages of planning a jailbreak attempt on the Hyderabad Central Jail, Bajwa said. Khalid Omar Sheikh, who kidnapped and killed the Wall Street Journal's Daniel Pearl in 2002, is being held at that jail and was to be released during the raid, he said. Six

suicide bombers had been enlisted in the attack plan, in addition to 19 involved in facilitating it, Bajwa said. More than 350 kg (772 lb) of explosives had been recovered from a building believed to be a hideout, he said.

The attackers planned to raid the prison compound with two vans filled with explosives, and had a list of about 35 prisoners they planned to kill, Bajwa said, displaying pencil sketches of the prison allegedly made by the militants. They had a separate list of about 100 prisoners, including Sheikh, whom they were supposed to release, he added. Video images of the militants' hideout showed blue plastic barrels filled with explosives, washing machines that had been used to transport arms and ammunition, long lengths of detonating cord and dozens of ball bearings. The footage also showed several rifles that Bajwa said had been stolen from police in earlier targeted attacks. "This plan was 90 percent ready for execution," he added.—Reuters

HONG KONG BOOKSELLER 'INVOLUNTARILY REMOVED' TO CHINA

HONG KONG: Britain said yesterday a Hong Kong bookseller believed detained by China was "involuntarily removed to the mainland", in its strongest comments yet on a case that has rocked the city amid fears its promised freedoms are being eroded. The disappearance of Lee Bo, who holds a British passport and published books critical of Chinese politics, was a "serious breach" of an agreement signed with Beijing before the city was handed back to China in 1997, said foreign secretary Philip Hammond in a new report.

Four other booksellers from the Mighty Current publishing house also disappeared in October and the Chinese authorities have confirmed they are now under criminal investigation. There are still question marks over what has happened to Lee, 65, the only publisher to have disappeared from Hong Kong. Letters purportedly written by Lee and sent to his wife confirmed he was now on the mainland and said he had gone to China of his own volition to help with unspecified investigations.

Lawmakers and activists have accused

Chinese authorities of snatching Lee from Hong Kong, contravening the semi-autonomous city's laws which do not allow Chinese police to operate within the territory. "The full facts of the case remain unclear, but our current information indicates that Mr Lee was involuntarily removed to the mainland without any due process under Hong Kong SAR law," said Hammond in a regular six-month report on Hong Kong to the UK parliament.

"This constitutes a serious breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong and undermines the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems' which assures Hong Kong residents of the protection of the Hong Kong legal system," said Hammond. The foreign secretary said Britain had called for Lee's immediate return to Hong Kong and had been in communication with the Chinese government "at the highest level". He urged the authorities in China and Hong Kong to reassure residents that law enforcement "is exclusively the responsibility of the Hong Kong SAR authorities, and that the

fundamental rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents will continue to be fully protected". Hong Kong's security bureau said it had no immediate comment.

'Reasonable conclusion'

Booksellers Lui Por, Cheung Chi-ping and Lam Wing-kee disappeared in southern mainland China in October. A fourth missing member of the company, Gui Minhai, a Swedish national, was paraded weeping on Chinese state television in January, where he said he had turned himself in for a fatal driving accident 11 years ago. Gui had failed to return to Hong Kong from a holiday in Thailand in October. Lawmaker Albert Ho, a prominent pro-democracy politician who has accused the mainland authorities of kidnapping Lee from Hong Kong, said Britain's comments would up the pressure on authorities in the city and Beijing. "There could be no other conclusion for any reasonable person to draw," said Ho, adding he believed it would be echoed by other nations in the international community.

Britain had previously expressed concern over the case. Earlier this month Washington also called on Beijing to explain the disappearances, with a State Department spokesman saying the incidents "raise serious questions about China's commitment to Hong Kong's autonomy".

Hong Kong enjoys freedoms unseen on the mainland, protected for 50 years under the joint agreement. But there are growing fears those freedoms are being eroded, with attacks on journalists and interference in the city's education institutions exacerbating concern.

Running battles between young Hong Kongers and police Monday and Tuesday which left more than 100 injured were a violent reminder of the simmering tensions in the city.

Those clashes were sparked by government officials inspecting illegal street hawkers, with protesters gathering to protect the stalls. They were the worst clashes since pro-democracy rallies brought parts of the city to a standstill in 2014. — AFP

CHINA URGES UN ACTION TO MAKE N KOREA 'PAY PRICE'

MUNICH, Germany: China will back a UN Security Council resolution to make North Korea "pay the necessary price" for recent rocket launches, its foreign minister told Reuters on Friday, adding the goal was to get Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. Wang Yi also said he was concerned by a possible US deployment of its sophisticated THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system to South Korea, saying it could also be used to target China.

North Korea has been under UN sanctions since its first nuclear test in 2006. It has conducted three more atomic tests since then, including last month's, and numerous ballistic missile launches. Washington and Beijing have appeared divided over how to respond to North Korea, with Washington urging tougher sanctions and Beijing stressing the need for dialogue. However, Wang told Reuters at an interview in Munich that it was time for a "strong" resolution covering a wide range of areas. "(We) support the United Nations Security Council to take further steps and in adopting a new resolution so that North Korea will pay the necessary price and show there are consequences for its behavior," the minister said, speaking through an interpreter.

China has insisted it is already making great efforts to achieve denuclearisation on the "Korean peninsula" and has previously rejected what it calls "groundless speculation" on its North Korea stance, following remarks from US officials that China could do more. The UN Security Council is discussing a new resolution. Diplomats say the Americans have been pushing for tough measures that go beyond targeting North Korea's atomic weapons and missile programs, while China wanted any future steps to focus on the question of nonproliferation. When asked whether Beijing was ready to support stronger economic sanctions, Wang said the resolution would be wide-ranging, but its objective should be to curb Pyongyang's efforts to develop nuclear and missile technologies. "Sanctions are not the end, the purpose should be to make sure that the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula should be brought back to the channel of a negotiation-based resolution," he said. After Wang met US Secretary of State John Kerry in Munich, Kerry urged China to use its influence in Pyongyang to help the international community increase pressure on it, State Department spokesman John Kirby said.

US hidden agenda?

Tensions have been mounting in the region and on Thursday North Korea said it was evicting all South Koreans from the jointly run Kaesong industrial zone, calling the South's move to suspend operations, in retaliation for Sunday's rocket launch by the North, a "declaration of war". In response to the launch Seoul is set to begin talks with Washington as early as next week on deploying an advanced US missile defence system. The discussions would focus on placing one Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) unit with the US military in South Korea after the North's launch last weekend, a South Korean defense official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. —Reuters

NO PEACE FOR NEPAL'S EX-CHILD SOLDIERS, 20 YEARS AFTER WAR

KATHMANDU: Wincing with pain every time he walks, Bijay Rai is constantly reminded of his decision to join the Maoist army aged 14, as one of Nepal's thousands of child soldiers. Rai voluntarily took part in the Maoist's decade-long insurgency, launching attacks on government and army posts, because he believed they were fighting for Nepal's millions of poor and oppressed. But 20 years since the war began, and almost 10 years after it ended, Rai, unable to hold a job because of the bullet shards embedded in his arms and legs, said he feels betrayed and abandoned by the Maoist leadership.

"They used us when they needed us, but when the war ended they did not look after us," the 27-year-old told AFP, ahead of Saturday's anniversary of the start of the war. Maoist guerrillas first attacked a police post in western Nepal's Rolpa district on 13 February, 1996, launching a conflict that eventually claimed some 16,000 lives and left hundreds more missing. Nearly 4,000 children fought alongside the rebels. Many were conscripted by force, while others willingly took up arms, stirred by the idea of a "people's war" that could bring change to the deeply feudal country.

The Maoists laid down their weapons in 2006 after signing a peace agreement, with the UN Mission in Nepal tasked with overseeing their reintegration back into society. Out of 19,000 Maoists identified, 6,500 were offered a chance to join Nepal's regular army while others could take vocational training or a retirement payment of up to 800,000 rupees (\$7,400). But child combatants, including Rai, received little in the way of compensation or job opportunities, after UN officials discovered they were underage and disqualified them from the process. Instead they were discharged with 10,000 rupees (\$90) and offered therapeutic courses such as cooking and photography that were of little use in a country wracked by poverty.

Seduced by slogans

Khadka Bahadur Ramtel, son of a Dalit or "untouchable" bonded laborer in northwest Nepal, was 11 when he was forced to deliver messages for the rebels. Despite being conscripted, he was soon seduced by their slogans promising equality and progress. But today Ramtel is among those who feel



KATHMANDU: This picture shows Nepalese former Maoist child soldier Khadka Bahadur Ramtel and his wife Manisha Khadka (left) sit for an interview with AFP in Kathmandu. — AFP

betrayed by the leaders they fought to protect. Bonded labor, in which landless farmworkers are passed on from one generation of landlords to the next, remains rife in Nepal, including in Ramtel's village, despite Maoist pledges to wipe it out. "The Maoists preached a strong ideology that would end the tradition of bonded labor and untouchability, that's why I liked them," the 24-year-old told AFP. After the Maoists swapped guns for politics, they swept constituent assembly elections held in 2008, campaigning on a platform of social change and lasting peace.

But their success story took a swift wrong turn, with the former rebels coming under fire for abandoning revolutionary ideals and developing a liking for luxury. Strongest criticism was reserved for Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known by his nom-de-guerre Prachanda, whose taste for imported whisky and foreign brands prompted scathing articles in the media. "They adopted the habits of other political parties very quickly," said Aditya Adhikari, author of "The Bullet and the Ballot Box", a history of the country's Maoist struggle.

"They became enamored of power and started disregarding their social base," Adhikari told AFP. When successive govern-

ments, largely Maoist-led, failed to write a long-delayed new constitution aimed at unifying the fractured country, prompting a second round of elections in 2013, the former guerrillas crashed in the polls, finishing in third place. But former Maoist premier Baburam Bhattarai defended the rebels, despite quitting their political party in September in anger over details of the constitution that was finally adopted the same month.

Bhattarai said the rebels deserved credit for engineering a political transformation in the country that eventually ended a 240-year-old Hindu monarchy. The Himalayan nation's new constitution established Nepal as a secular republic, reflecting Maoist ideology, he said. "We brought about democratic change, gave democratic rights to the dalits, women and others, so that part of our promise was fulfilled," Bhattarai told AFP. But for former child soldiers like Rai, who returned empty-handed to his village after the conflict ended, the promises were mere rhetoric. "The Maoists fought for the poor, they fought for people like us who were oppressed, that is why I joined them," he said. "They said they would liberate us from poverty... but they destroyed our future." — AFP

SANDERS ONLINE FUNDRAISING GIVES CLINTON A RUN FOR HER MONEY

'MAKE THE BIGGEST POSSIBLE BUCKETS TO CATCH THAT RAIN'

WASHINGTON: Bernie Sanders is giving Hillary Clinton a run for her money, \$27 million at a time. The insurgent Democratic presidential candidate's success with low-dollar online fundraising perfectly complements his denouncement of big money in politics. He's making big money, all right, but in little increments from average people. When Sanders asks his supporters to chip in a few bucks, they respond with enthusiasm. As a result, his campaign is setting ever-higher benchmarks for online fundraising: \$6 million in the 24 hours after his New Hampshire victory, \$3 million after his narrow loss in Iowa, \$2 million on Sept. 30, the final day of the fall fundraising quarter.

That online cash pile-up helped Sanders outpace Clinton in January and set him up to do so again this month. His fattening campaign bank account ensures he has the ability to wage a long primary battle. "We're in uncharted territory here," said Tad Devine, a senior adviser to Sanders. "No one has ever done what we're doing, raising almost every dollar from small-dollar contributions. So we're hopeful and we're optimistic that we'll have a lot of resources, but we have the resources in now to compete nationally" through next month.

Many factors go into making a candidate an online fundraising rock star. The person and the message are two pieces. A savvy online team is another. For the Sanders campaign, it's all clicking, starting with the candidate himself - a 74-year-old Vermont senator who has always chafed at traditional fundraising. When he asks his audiences if they know his average contribution, they

shout back in unison: \$27million That's one-hundredth the legal maximum of \$2,700, the more typical size of checks to presidential candidates, including Clinton.

Fundraising processor

"I'm going to hold a fundraiser right here, right now, across America," Sanders said in his victory speech Tuesday in New Hampshire, which was carried live on many cable news networks. He urged those listening to go to his website and donate for his campaign's coming battles in Nevada, South Carolina and beyond. "So, there it is, that's our fundraiser," Sanders said. "Pretty quick." The resulting flood of donations slowed his campaign website to a crawl and made up a surge greater than anything ActBlue, his online fundraising processor, had ever experienced. At one point, ActBlue was handling 2,689 contributions per minute, blowing away the 12-year-old nonprofit organization's previous record of 781.

"So it was, in a word, unprecedented," ActBlue employees wrote in a blog post, recapping the Tuesday flood. The group assists all Democratic candidates, Clinton among them. If it is the candidate's duty to "make it rain," it is the digital shop's job to "make the biggest possible buckets to catch that rain," said Ari Rabin-Havt, a liberal talk show host on Sirius XM who knows many of the top Democratic online strategists, including those working for Sanders. Chief of the bucket brigade is a 24-year-old Eagle Scout from California, Kenneth Pennington, Sanders' digital strategist.

In his even younger years, Pennington was



MILWAUKEE: Democratic presidential candidates, Sen Bernie Sanders, I-Vt, and Hillary Clinton shake hands after a Democratic presidential primary debate at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.—AP

an Internet geek who wrote a blog about mobile phones and built a website to help his dad, a middle-school teacher, sell a book. Pennington began as a press aide to the senator, where he grew accustomed to typing out the Facebook posts that his boss would think of in the shower and dictate once he arrived in the office. When Sanders announced his presidential run in May, the campaign brought aboard Revolution Messaging, a Washington-based firm with a name that conveniently echoes Sanders' assertion that his bid is a "political revolution."

Revolution employees Tim Tagaris, Michael Whitney and Robin Curran are working within the campaign. Tagaris, Sanders' digital fundraising director, also helped with Chris Dodd's short-lived Democratic presidential run in 2008. Whitney was part of a group that Democratic strategist Joe Trippi calls "the Wright Brothers" of online fundraising - the digital team for 2004 presidential candidate Howard Dean. Trippi was Dean's campaign manager. Trippi concluded that there's one element above all else that makes a candidate a great online fundraiser: being an underdog.—AP

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AT LEAST 49 DEAD IN MEXICO PRISON BATTLE

'THEY USED SHARP WEAPONS, BATS, STICKS'

MONTERREY, Mexico: Inmates armed with bats and blades brawled and ignited a fire in a packed prison in northern Mexico on Thursday, leaving 49 dead in the bloodiest jail-house riot in years. Twelve others were injured during the "pitched battle" that lasted 30 to 40 minutes at the Topo Chico prison in the industrial city of Monterrey, said Nuevo Leon state Governor Jaime Rodriguez. The fight erupted following a dispute over control of the prison between two rival members of the Zetas drug cartel, Rodriguez said.

"They used sharp weapons, bats, sticks," the governor told radio Imagen, adding that the 60-year-old penitentiary houses 3,800 inmates, overseen by 100 guards. The National Human Rights Commission says the prison has room for 3,635 convicts. One of the inmates was shot dead by a prison guard who was protecting a group of women, Rodriguez said. During the brawl, inmates set a fire in a supply room and TV images showed flames coming out of the prison in the middle of the night. Milenio TV showed video made by people living near Topo Chico of one inmate falling to the ground as others beat him with sticks in a prison yard brawl that highlighted the woes of the country's troubled penitentiary system.

The riot erupted on the eve of Pope Francis' five-day trip to Mexico, during which he is due to visit another notorious prison in the northern border city of Ciudad Juarez. Hundreds of relatives flocked to the prison's gates to demand information. Some bawled and fainted after officials placed a list of victims on a wall outside. "All this for a robbery, my son was innocent," a woman cried after seeing her son's name on the list. Rodriguez said the clash erupted late Wednesday and that authorities brought it under control at 1:30 am Thursday.

"We are experiencing a tragedy stemming from the difficult situation that they are living through at penitentiary facilities," Rodriguez said. Five of the injured inmates were in serious condition. Troops and federal police were deployed to the prison. Rodriguez said no inmates escaped.

Desperate relatives

Nuevo Leon has been the scene of violent turf wars between the Zetas and Gulf cartels for years. The Zetas were behind another Nuevo Leon prison massacre that left 44 Gulf members dead while 30 inmates escaped in 2012. But Rodriguez said this latest prison battle was triggered by a dispute between rival Zetas members—Jorge Ivan Hernandez Cantu, alias "El Credo," and Juan Pedro Zaldivar Farias, alias "El Z-27." Zaldivar, who was transferred to Topo Chico two months ago, apparently wanted to take control of the facility from Hernandez, the governor said.

Ambulances were sent to the prison while relatives crowded at the entrance, throwing rocks and briefly pulling the gate open as riot police blocked their way with a parked vehicle. Other relatives shouted through a fence, hoping to get information from the inmates. Authorities allowed family members to go into the prison later in the day to see survivors for a few minutes. "The main yard is completely burned. The bakery is all black," said Martha, a 22-year-old mother of two who saw her husband. "There are shovels and objects thrown around, yellow tape placed by investigators." Another woman who declined to be identified said the prisoners were handcuffed and looked like they had been beaten.

Notorious prisons

Around 40 prisoners were moved out of the Topo Chico prison following the tragedy, Rodriguez said. "It's one of the most complicated (prisons) and it is in a very complicated area, too. Obviously, we have to look at the future of this prison," he said. Mexican penitentiaries are notoriously overcrowded and massive prison breaks have taken place in recent years. "The power that inmates have in the prisons has reached such a level that they create a sort of self-government," said Raul Benitez Manaut, a security expert at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Even at the country's top maximum-security prison, the Altiplano near Mexico City, weaknesses were exposed when drug kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman escaped through a tunnel in July. He was recaptured in January. The governmental National Human Rights Commission said last year that there was a serious crisis at the country's prisons, with 254,700 inmates packed in prisons with room for 203,000. President Enrique Pena Nieto's administration vowed to reform the penitentiary system following Guzman's escape last year. Pena Nieto expressed his condolences to the families of the victims of the latest prison massacre.—AFP



MONTERREY, NUEVO LEON, Mexico : A woman faints among relatives of inmates as they gather outside the Topo Chico prison where a riot took place- in Monterrey.—AFP

US AIRSTRIKES TARGET ISLAMIC STATE IN AFGHANISTAN

WASHINGTON: The United States has expanded its fight against the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, launching 20 airstrikes in the eastern part of the country in the last three weeks, US officials said Thursday. The strikes come in the wake of a decision by the Obama administration to give the Pentagon the authority to conduct airstrikes against IS in Afghanistan, as the militant group's numbers there continue to grow. Army Brig Gen Wilson A Shoffner told reporters that 1,000 to 3,000 Islamic State fighters in eastern Afghanistan are trying to establish a base of operations in the rugged mountains of Nangahar Province.

He declined to say how many airstrikes the US has conducted in the east, but other US officials said it was around 20. The officials weren't authorized to discuss the numbers publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity. In a teleconference from Afghanistan, Shoffner said that the Islamic State militants have been launching attacks in the east but don't have the ability to conduct operations at more than one location at a time. He said that IS leaders in Iraq and Syria haven't yet been able to orchestrate any of the Afghanistan attacks.

Most of the Islamic State fighters are from other groups that are simply rebranding themselves as Islamic State, and Shoffner said many are former members of the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e Taliban. While the Islamic State group has been a problem in eastern Afghanistan, US and coalition efforts are more focused on the volatile south, where the Taliban have been launching persistent attacks since October in an effort to regain their heartland and protect smuggling routes for drugs and arms.

According to the US officials, the number of American troops in Helmand Province is increasing from about 350 to 500. The officials said the US is sending a few dozen more advisers to the region, but the bulk of the increase will be for forces to provide security for those trainers. The overall troop level for Afghanistan, which has been around 9,800, won't change. Shoffner said the additional advisers will help rebuild the Afghan's 215th Corps and special operations forces, which launched a counteroffensive against the Taliban in November.

Reset and retrain

He said the Afghans have increased the number of special operations forces in Helmand in an effort to take some of the pressure off the 215th Corps, which needs time to reset and retrain. The US has outlined four areas that the Afghans need to work on in the coming months, as the military continues to review Obama administration plans that would reduce the American presence in the country to about 5,500 by the end of the year. Shoffner said the Afghans need to increase recruiting to

fill a shortfall of about 25,000 troops in the Army. The Army is training up to 4,000 recruits a month, far short of its 6,000 goal.

Afghan forces also need time to retrain and rest between fighting deployments, and should replace weak leaders, he said. The fourth key change, he said, would be to reduce the number of checkpoints that Afghan security forces are staffing. Too many of the checkpoints can be overtaken by the Taliban, so the Afghans should readjust by focusing on fewer checkpoints that they can effectively control, Shoffner said. Asked when the US would begin withdrawing troops to meet the 5,500 goal by year's end, Shoffner said discussions are ongoing, but the reduction is small enough that it will be "much less of a challenge" than previous drawdowns. At the war's peak, the US had about 100,000 forces in Afghanistan.—AP

STANDOFF OVER GUNS AT TENNESSEE LEGISLATIVE OFFICE COMPLEX

NASHVILLE, Tennessee: If it's up to the Republican speakers of the state House and Senate, the more than half-million Tennesseans with permits will soon be able to carry guns inside the legislative office complex. The proposal announced Thursday comes as lawmakers in Arizona, Florida and Wyoming are also considering loosening gun restrictions at their statehouses this year. But Republican Gov Bill Haslam's administration is raising concerns about the proposed change in Tennessee. Haslam said in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday that he wants to keep the gun ban within the state Capitol building, which is connected to the Legislative Plaza via an underground tunnel.

"We don't think that people should be able to bring weapons in here," Haslam said. "This is a secure building. We've got metal detectors; we've got troopers with guns." Haslam said it would create a logistical problem in figuring out how to rescreen visitors to the legislative office complex when they enter the Capitol building. Senate Speaker Ron Ramsey, R-Blountville, and House Speaker Beth Harwell, R-Nashville, wanted to change the gun policy as early as the start of the year. But the Tennessee Highway Patrol, which operates security in and around the Capitol, asked for time to study how it would have to revise its protocols before putting the change into effect.—AP

BUSINESS

Kuwait Times

EQUATE net profit
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anti-dumping probes

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steady amid global turmoil

20

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016



Grexit' fears loom without
solid Greek reforms: IMF



SYDNEY: A woman looks at the screens at the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) during early trading in Sydney yesterday. The Australian market has been under pressure this week due to concerns of a global recession. — AFP

BREXIT WILL HIT BRITAIN'S ECONOMY: ECONOMISTS

MAJORITY SAY TRADE, BOP DEFICITS WOULD WIDEN

LONDON: Britain's economy would be worse off if voters decide the country should leave the European Union, according to an overwhelming majority of economists polled by Reuters who also gave it a 40 percent chance of happening. All but one of 28 economists in the poll taken this week said the Britain would take a hit if the vote - which could take place by June - meant exiting the EU. The sole dissenter said the economy would be unimpaired, not better off.

Arguments about the economy are central to the debate. Supporters of Britain leaving the EU say companies would be less bound by red tape, the country would be able to strike its own free trade deals and its existing EU partners would not want to hurt bilateral trade.

But analysts at some of the world's biggest banks said an exit could shrink Britain's economy by as much as 2 percent over the next couple of years and could take as much as 10 percentage points off GDP over the next decade. Most of the mainly UK-based market and academic economists polled expected trade to worsen with Britain struggling to negotiate a favourable trade deal with its former EU partners after renouncing membership of the world's largest trading bloc.

Against this backdrop, a slim majority of economists see Britain's hefty current account deficit widening, underscoring a risk highlighted by the Bank of England.

Britain has been among the fastest-growing rich economies in recent years. But economists worry that an exit from the EU could hurt its prospects if exporters face higher barriers, a weaker pound makes imports more expensive and uncertainty over the shape of a post-EU Britain curbs investment.

"A Brexit outcome will make me more pessimistic for our growth prospects in the second half of 2016 and the medium term," Costas Milas, professor of finance at the University of Liverpool, said. He said it would trigger "huge" investor uncertainty and make it more expensive for the government to sell British debt.

"This higher yield will add to the cost of borrowing that companies face and will delay their investment decisions." As well as the risk of Britain losing its unfettered access to its biggest trading partner, its companies might find it harder to tap into the pool of potential employees in the rest of the EU to fill their vacancies. Britain could also end up outside an area that accounts for just under a third of the value of all

cross-border investment.

Even though some analysts said an exit could prompt a fall in sterling and make British exports more attractive abroad, 23 out of 28 economists expected it to hurt British trade, while 15 said Britain's current account deficit could widen.

At 3.7 percent of GDP, the deficit is already large by international standards. BoE Governor Mark Carney highlighted the risk in January when he said that "relying on the kindness of strangers" in the current "febrile" global economic environment was not optimal.

"Brexit could generate a UK balance of payments crisis," Daniel Vernazza, lead UK economist at UniCredit, said. "It's an illusion to think that the UK can retain access to the single market and have more flexibility."

UniCredit estimates that the value in trade would fall by one-eighth if Britain left the EU and joined the European Free Trade Association, costing Britain 6 percent of GDP over the next decade or so.

HIGHER INTEREST RATES?

Uncertainty could also prompt the Bank of England to wait until the outcome of the referendum to move on interest rates.

Out of the 28 economists polled, 21 expected the BoE to hold off raising interest rates until after the vote, just as more costly imports put upward pressure on inflation.

Inflation has hovered near zero for months and wage growth is slowing, which together with a weak global economy, has made the BoE reluctant to deliver its first hike in nearly a decade. But a sharp depreciation in sterling post-Brexit and rise in import prices could see the BoE rushing to move rates higher. Tony Yates, professor of economics at the University of Birmingham, said he sees a risk of an "an emerging-economy-style 'sudden stop'" where capital flows out of Britain, particularly out of the financial sector. "In that event, monetary policy would face a hard choice between tightening interest rates to defend sterling, and ward off the inflation that a large depreciation would imply, and not wishing to provoke another recession," he said.

Public opinion polls on the EU referendum question give a confused picture. Polls done by telephone suggest the "in" camp is ahead by a double-digit margin, while online polls show a tight race that the "out" camp could win. — Reuters

EGYPT CB INJECTS \$14BN IN THREE MONTHS TO EASE DOLLAR CRUNCH

CAIRO: Egypt's central bank has injected over \$14 billion dollars into local banks over the past three months to facilitate import activity and curb inflation on essential goods, a government statement said yesterday. Egypt has been facing an acute dollar shortage that has hampered import activity and sapped industrial production ever since a 2011 uprising drove away foreign investors and tourists, key sources of dollars.

The government has in recent months applied various measures, from import restrictions to higher tariffs, to conserve scarce dollars while the central bank has injected foreign currency into the banking system to free up essential imports.

"The central bank and Egyptian banks have embarked on an urgent plan to facilitate foreign trade in order to provide for production and for essential consumer goods for Egyptian citizens," a central bank report cited in the statement said.

"To this end the central bank has provided more than \$14 billion over three months and this has had an immediate impact on foreign trade and industrial activity," it continued.

The dollar injections have helped push down prices on essential food items by 25 to 35 percent, the statement added. Egypt's annual urban consumer inflation fell to 10.1 percent in January from 11.1 percent the previous month, the statistics agency CAMPAS said earlier in the week.

The central bank report said the dollar injections did not affect its level of foreign reserves, which have remained steady around \$16 billion dollars in recent months, or roughly enough for three months of imports. "In the context of increasing confidence in the Egyptian economy, and the investment environment in Egypt, the central bank has been able to preserve the level of international reserves despite making the necessary monetary payments alluded to," the statement said, without further explanation.

Egypt's central bank has been rationing dollars and keeping the pound artificially strong at 7.7301 per dollar through weekly dollar auctions. In a move seen by economists as a way to limit dollarization ahead of a potential currency devaluation, Egypt's state banks in November raised interest rates on certificates of deposit to 12.5 percent from about 10 percent.

The CD rate hike "led to inflows of more than 120 billion Egyptian pounds (\$15.33 billion) into these instruments," the statement said. —Reuters

DEBT DEAL FOR DUBAI'S LIMITLESS CLOSER AFTER SILVER POINT SALE

DUBAI: A debt restructuring for Dubai-based developer Limitless moved closer after Silver Point Capital sold its share of the 4.45 billion dirham (\$1.2 billion) debt last month, two sources involved in the process said.

US hedge fund Silver Point, one of a minority of creditors holding up a deal, sold half of its roughly \$80 million loan to Dubai-based lender Mashreq and the other half to Massar Investments, an investment firm controlled by Mashreq's owners. A deal can only be agreed once all Limitless creditors have given their assent.

The Silver Point move will increase pressure on Saudi Arabian lender Arab National Bank, another creditor that had not agreed to the plan as of late last year, to review its position, one of the sources said. The current status of the bank's position on Limitless was unclear and nobody was available to comment at the bank. Limitless has been seeking to rebuild its finances after an earlier restructuring triggered by a downturn in the emirate's property industry at the end of the last decade.

Another market slowdown has made this more pressing for the Dubai government-owned company, whose projects include a 200-hectare mixed-use development in Dubai's Jebel Ali, as well as, according to its website, schemes in Vietnam and Russia.

Silver Point, Mashreq and Massar Investments all declined to comment. A Limitless spokeswoman declined to comment, beyond saying private discussions with creditors were continuing. In June 2015, the company said it had won the approval of almost 90 percent of banks to a repayment plan involving 1.9 billion dirhams of bank debt. In return, Limitless is asking its 18 creditor banks to agree to extend the term of its debt by two years to December 2018. —Reuters



MANAMA: A general view shows the Bahrain Financial Harbour building in the capital Manama. Five years after the popular uprising was harshly repressed, the Kingdom of Bahrain is locked in a political stalemate coupled with an economic crisis that underline the urgency of a compromise between the rulers and the opposition, according to experts. — AFP

EQUATE NET PROFIT \$739 MILLION IN 2015

HUSAIN HAILS HUMAN CAPITAL AS 'PARTNERS IN SUCCESS'

KUWAIT: EQUATE Petrochemical Company, Kuwait's first international joint-venture in this industry, said yesterday the company achieved a net profit of \$739 million for the fiscal year ending 31st of December 2015, in comparison to \$1.04 billion achieved in 2014. EQUATE President and CEO Mohammad Husain said, "EQUATE's human capital exemplified being 'Partners in Success' throughout all challenges in 2015.

Their sustainability-based innovative approach and strategic outlook served the benefits of all stakeholders," Husain added. Husain noted they "achieved excellent results in industrial operations, production, maintenance, as well as overall reliability in our human capital, processes and equipment. In addition, EQUATE achieved the objective of going global by acquiring MEGlobal, an international petrochemical company with global presence and growth opportunities."

Husain added "other highlights include EQUATE achieving a total sales revenue exceeding USD 2.3 billion, and strengthening its presence in several markets by enforcing its customer-base, both locally and globally. EQUATE has contributed to the growth of the local plastics industry by over 400 percent from 1998 to 2015, and has supported Kuwaiti plastic converters to launch

export operations of their products to several countries around the world.

Additionally, our 2014 Sustainability Report has set precedence in Kuwait by completing Global Reporting Initiative's Materiality Disclosures Service regarding the feedback of EQUATE's stakeholders on its sustainability efforts and other applicable items."

Husain added that "during 2015, the global economy witnessed a number of serious challenges due to the drop of energy prices. Such a decrease impacted several business sectors, including the petrochemical industry. Petrochemical markets throughout the world, including Kuwait, went through serious fluctuations due to oil prices falling below USD 30 for an average of less than \$50

throughout 2015. Our per-ton budget forecast for our products was an average of nearly \$960, yet the actual global market price averaged at about \$870."

Husain also expressed his "utmost appreciation and gratitude to EQUATE's shareholders, Board of Directors, all employees and everyone who contributed to the Company's overall achievements through embodying "Partners in Success." Established in 1995, EQUATE embodies its "Partners in Success" slogan through the partnership between Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC), The Dow Chemical Company (Dow), Boubyan Petrochemical Company (BPC) and Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company (QPIC). — KUNA

KUWAITI OIL PRICE DOWN 80 CENTS TO \$22.70 PB

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down 80 cents Thursday to settle at \$22.70 per barrel after being at \$23.50 the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday.

At the global level, the price of oil went up by five percent after news

began to circulate on OPEC's intention to hold talks on curbing supplies with other oil exporters. Meanwhile, the price of the Brent mix was up \$1.37 to reach \$31.43 per barrel, a similar case for the West Texas Intermediate crude price which went up \$1.21 to reach \$27.42 pb. — KUNA

UK COMPETITION AUTHORITIES FINE GSK \$54.5 MILLION

LONDON: Britain's competition authority has fined drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline plc 37.6 million pounds (\$54.5 million) for stalling the potential entry of generic competitors of an antidepressant drug Seroxat into the marketplace. The fine levelled yesterday is the largest since the Competition and Markets Authority's inception in 2014. "Today's decision sends out a strong message that we will tackle illegal behavior that is designed to stifle competition at the expense of customers - in this case, the (National Health Service) and, ultimately, taxpayers," said Michael Grenfell, the authority's executive director for enforcement.

"This investigation shows our determination to take enforcement action against illegal anti-competitive practices in sectors big and small."

The authority fined the pharmaceutical company for making payments and other transfers of more than 50 million pounds to generic suppliers of the drug, also known as paroxetine. The authority says that GSK first sued generic drugmakers Generics (UK) Limited and Alpharma Limited, but later settled, paying for them to delay their entry into the market.

The generic companies were also fined. In all, the authorities leveled 45 million pounds in fines connected to the matter. GSK said it disagreed with the ruling and that the agreements were made to "settle costly, complex and uncertain patent disputes." The company argued that the agreements allowed the companies to enter the marketplace early and ultimately enabled savings of 15 million pounds for the National Health Service. "GSK is considering its grounds for appeal," the company said in a statement. — AP

RENAULT PROFIT UP BUT HEADLIGHTS ON STRUGGLING RUSSIAN UNIT

PARIS: Renault said yesterday net profit for 2015 was up nearly 50 percent to 2.96 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) despite a hit from its Russian subsidiary which Renault said it may recapitalize and take over to save it from collapse.

The French carmaker said it was in talks with the holding company of its Russian unit, Aftovaz, after it took a 620 million euro loss in Russia as the economy slowed drastically.

The talks were being held "with a view to a recapitalisation which could lead to the consolidation of the company by Renault", the company said in a statement.

Aftovaz warned in a separate statement that without assistance, market conditions "create a material uncertainty that gives rise to significant doubt about the group's ability to continue as a going concern".

Aftovaz, which makes Lada cars, said it would further "optimise the workforce" as part of its "anti-crisis plan" to improve finances in 2016, having already switched all of its employees and management to a four-day week in February last year.

The Russian car market slumped 35 percent in 2015 as international sanctions over Ukraine and the crash in oil prices took their toll. Aftovaz, based on the Volga river in the city of Togliatti, has been majority-owned since 2013 by Renault and Renault's global partner Nissan and it employs 44,000 people, not counting jobs it generates for its suppliers.

'Confidence' in Russia, Brazil

Globally, the success of new models such as the new Captur and Kadjar SUVs allowed Renault to hit profitability targets two years early. The company exceeded its 5.0 percent target for operational profitability the 5.1 percent it registered was a marked improvement on the 3.9 percent in 2014.

Turnover surged 10.4 percent to 45.3 billion euros, with net profits up 48.1 percent. Chief executive Carlos Ghosn said 2015 had been "a good year". "On the basis of these results, we can look forward to 2016 with a certain degree of confidence," he said. Ghosn said he was confident the global car market would grow between 1.0 and 2.0 percent this year and said he was counting on Russia and Brazil-another developing market that slumped in 2015 — picking up. "We remain convinced that these markets will grow in the future and we will be ready when that happens," he said. Renault will take on 1,000 employees on full-time contracts in France in 2016 "to underpin the growth of the group and meet our ambitions", Ghosn told a press conference. Shares were flat at 68.97 euros at 1030 GMT, having earlier dropped as low as 67.50. — AFP



ATHENS: Farmers set burning barricades near the Agriculture ministry in Athens during a demonstration against the pension reform. — AFP

GREXIT' FEARS LOOM WITHOUT SOLID GREEK REFORMS: IMF

GREEK POLICE FIRE TEAR GAS AT ANGRY FARMERS

WASHINGTON: Fears that Greece will exit the eurozone, a "Grexit", could revive if Greek authorities do not come up with "credible" reforms, notably on pensions, a senior IMF official said Thursday.

"We have yet to see a credible plan for how Greece will reach the very ambitious medium-term surplus target (excluding debt)," said Poul Thomsen, head of the International Monetary Fund's European department.

"A plan built on over-optimistic assumptions will soon cause Grexit fears to resurface once again and stifle the investment climate," he said in an IMF blog.

In the first half of 2015, fears that heavily indebted Greece would have to leave the eurozone mounted when the cash-strapped country defaulted on a debt payment to the IMF.

Since then, the European Union has given Greece a new massive financial aid program-which the IMF has not joined-in exchange for economic measures and pension reform, which are subject of an intense debate in Greece.

"The IMF does not want Greece to implement draconian fiscal adjustment in an already severely depressed economy," Thomsen said.

But he said that reform of the pension system was crucial to making the country's debt "sustainable".

Thomsen said the pension reform must be accompanied by debt relief

from the Europeans. "There is no doubt that both Greece and its European partners will face politically difficult decisions in the coming months to arrive at a program that is viable-one that adds up," he said.

The IMF repeatedly has said it would not participate in this third European bailout of Greece since 2010, after doing so in the prior two rescues, unless the Greek government proposes credible reforms and the Europeans ease Greece's debt burden.

Farmers protest

Greek riot police fired tear gas at farmers protesting against pension reform plans yesterday who hurled stones at the agriculture ministry in central Athens ahead of a major demonstration outside parliament scheduled for later in the day.

Under the planned reform of the pension system demanded by Greece's international lenders, farmers face a tripling of their social security contributions and higher income tax. They have been blockading motorways across Greece for over three weeks. Greece's left-leaning government says the step is necessary to ensure future pensions for the group, whose benefits have so far been almost completely subsidised by the state.

About 800 farmers from the island of Crete arrived in Athens early on Friday and rallied outside the agriculture ministry waving Greek flags and

chanting: "They won't make us bend".

Riot police guarding the entrance to the ministry fired teargas to disperse farmers who hurled tomatoes and stones at the building smashing windows and used shepherd's crooks to repel police during the tense but brief scuffles.

More farmers were heading to the capital to join the main rally, which was scheduled for the evening and was expected to test Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's resolve to push through unpopular reforms. Some of the farmers started setting up tents on Syntagma Square, the scene of many violent clashes during anti-austerity protests over the past few years.

Police said they would not allow farmers with tractors to drive into Athens. The pension reform is a key term of Greece's bailout review, but has triggered anger among professional groups including lawyers, teachers, doctors and actors.

Tsipras, who was elected last year promising to end austerity but was then forced to accept a third bailout in July, is feeling the pressure as he struggles to conclude a bailout review with lenders and also convince angry Greeks that their sacrifices will pay off. He has a tiny parliamentary majority.

Earlier this week, Tsipras said he was willing to hold talks with the farmers on possibly amending the pension reform bill to lessen the pain, but they rebuffed his overtures. — Agencies

JAPAN GDP IN FOCUS FOR TOKYO INVESTORS NEXT WEEK

TOKYO: Japan's fourth-quarter GDP data will be a key trading cue for Tokyo investors after a tumultuous holiday-shortened week that saw the benchmark Nikkei index plunge more than 11 percent. Economists are widely expecting a contraction in the world's number three economy when the figures are published on Monday.

That would deal a big blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's nearly three-year-old Abenomics growth blitz, as a surging yen hurts Japan's exporters and share markets plunge. Traders will also be keeping tabs on the latest US data, including industrial production and housing starts, after Federal Reserve chief Janet Yellen warned over global growth.

In Japan, markets will be keeping a close eye out for signs Tokyo is intervening in currency markets for the first time since 2011 to stem the yen's rise.

Such moves "may not be well received" at a G20 meeting this month, amid fears of a currency war in which countries beat down their units to boost their exporters,

said Cameron Umetsu, London-based chief Japan fixed income strategist for Mizuho Securities. "Such action could invite a lot of criticism," he said. Yesterday, the Nikkei dropped 4.84 percent, or 760.78 points, to close at 14,952.61, shedding more than 11 percent in a holiday-shortened week. The broader Topix index of all first-section shares plunged 5.43 percent, or 68.68 points, to 1,196.28. It lost more than 12 percent since Monday, marking its biggest weekly percentage loss since the 2008 financial crisis.

Before a one-day public holiday on Thursday, the Nikkei closed at its lowest since October 2014, when the Bank of Japan unleashed a second wave of monetary stimulus that sparked a big stock rally.

'Pricing in a recession'

"We've entered a different phase in the market," Juichi Wako, a senior strategist at Nomura Holdings, told Bloomberg News.

"We're not simply in a risk-off mode, the market's fallen to the point of pricing in a recession in the US. "The market is saying



TOKYO: People walk past an electronic stock board showing Japan's Nikkei 225 in Tokyo, yesterday. Jitters over the global economy and steep declines in bank stocks knocked US stocks lower for the fourth day in a row Thursday. — AP

we're worried no matter what (Federal Reserve Chair Janet) Yellen says and their reaction shows there can be no real relief until we can truly see what's happening in

the US economy." Yellen's less-than-optimistic assessment sparked more yen buying as traders flocked to a currency seen as a safe haven in times of turmoil. — AFP

EU HITS CHINA WITH STEEL ANTI-DUMPING PROBES

UNFAIR COMPETITION WON'T BE ALLOWED

BRUSSELS: The EU launched new probes yesterday into imports of Chinese steel, warning it would not allow "unfair competition" to threaten Europe's industry already crumbling under a flood of cheap imports. European steelmakers are reeling from a global glut and last week Luxembourg-based world leader ArcelorMittal blamed China for a colossal \$8-billion loss in 2015 while thousands of jobs are being cut.

"We cannot allow unfair competition from artificially cheap imports to threaten our industry. I am determined to use all means possible to ensure that our trading partners play by the rules," EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem said in a statement.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, had opened an investigation into imports of seamless pipes, heavy plates and hot-rolled flat steel from China, the statement said.

The Commission separately imposed anti-dumping duties on cold-rolled flat steel imports from China and Russia. It recalled that it recently also imposed anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel bars used in the construction industry.

EU urges China output cut

Malmstroem last month urged China to cut output for everyone's sake.

"In the wake of a worrying trend, I urge you to take all appropriate measures to curb

the steel overcapacity and other causes aggravating the situation," Malmstroem wrote in a letter to Chinese Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng.

The letter also warned China that it faced new probes if nothing was done after its steel exports soared 50 percent in 2015, destabilising the global market and the EU in particular. China accounts for half of global steel production but internal demand has slowed sharply along with the economy, forcing it to look overseas.

Beijing has announced plans to cut production by as much as 150 million tonnes over the next five years but this is far short of the 340 million tons that experts say the country is overproducing every year.

Long history of disputes

The latest measure on steel comes amid a growing stand-off between the EU and China, which are major trading partners but which have also had many trade disputes in the past, most bitterly over solar panels which continues to rumble on.

In a separate statement Friday, the Commission said it was extending existing anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures on imports of Chinese solar modules and cells via Taiwan and Malaysia.

It said an investigation showed that China was getting around duties by transshipping the goods via Taiwan and Malaysia. Tensions with China have also grown as Beijing presses the EU to recognise it as a fully market based economy, not a communist, state controlled giant which now ranks second in the world only after the United States.

China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 as a developing country, a status giving it 15 years to progressively remove government controls. Beijing insists it has done just that and should now be recognised as a market economy but many in Brussels disagree. — AFP

ITALY RECOVERY STALLS, THREATENING DEBT PLAN

ROME: Italy's recovery from recession virtually stalled towards the end of 2015, complicating Italian efforts at debt reduction, worse-than-anticipated growth figures indicated yesterday. National statistics body Istat said total GDP for 2015 was up 0.7 percent on the previous year.

The Bank of Italy had last month forecast an expansion of 0.8 percent for 2015 with growth accelerating to 1.5 percent in both this year and 2017, broadly in line with the government's figures.

Istat said GDP expanded by only 0.1 percent from the third to the fourth quarter of last year. That produced an annualised rate of one percent in the final three months of the year, significantly below most analysts' predictions of quarterly growth around 0.3 percent and an annual rate closer to 1.2 percent.

Slower-than-anticipated growth could threaten Italy's pledge to start reducing its

2.2 trillion debt mountain this year and exacerbate festering tensions with Brussels over economic policy.

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi defied the European Commission's advice at the end of last year by pushing through a tax-cutting expansionary budget which means Italy's deficit will be reduced at a slower pace than previously agreed. The government's projected deficit of 2.2 percent of GDP is well under the ceiling of three percent set in the EU's Stability Pact.

But economists have warned that any slippage could push back the point at which the country's debt, equivalent to more than 130 percent of GDP, begins to fall. Renzi has regularly derided what he sees as the EU's misplaced emphasis on 'austerity' economics, arguing that the focus should be on bolstering demand to stimulate growth rather than cutting spending. — AFP

INDIA LENDERS NEED 'DEEP SURGERY', SAYS CB CHIEF

MUMBAI: The head of India's central bank has said the country's lenders may need to perform "deep surgery" to sort out bad loans and clean up their balance sheets.

Reserve Bank of India governor Raghuram Rajan, who famously predicted the 2008 world financial crisis, has set Indian banks a deadline of March next year to tidy up their non-performing assets. And he told a gathering of banking leaders in India's commercial capital Mumbai on Thursday that getting those stressed loans in order "may require deep surgery" not "band aids".

"Existing loans may have to be written down somewhat because of the changed circumstances since they were sanctioned," said Rajan, a former International Monetary Fund chief economist.

"But to do deep surgery such as restructuring or writing down loans, the bank has to recognise it has a problem-classify the asset as a non-performing asset (NPA)," he added.

Bad debts and poor loan provisions, especially among India's state-owned banks, are hampering investment at a time when Asia's third-largest economy needs more lending to boost economic growth. Encouraging banks to identify loans that are in default or close to increases transparency and means the government can force lenders to make provisions to cover them where necessary, making the banks more stable in the long run. Rajan is known for his outspoken nature, breaking the mould of central bankers globally who are generally extremely guarded. "Think therefore of the NPA classification as an anaesthetic that allows the bank to perform extensive necessary surgery to set the project back on its feet," he said. "If the bank wants to pretend that everything is all right with the loan, it can only apply band aids-for any more drastic action would require NPA classification," the governor added. — AFP



MUMBAI: An Indian man watches stock prices on a digital broadcast on the facade of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) building in Mumbai yesterday. A more than five percent plunge in Tokyo led another Asian rout yesterday, bringing to an end one of the most painful weeks for investors as fears about the global economy — and possible recession — stalk trading floors. — AFP

COMMERZBANK QUADRUPLES PROFITS IN 2015

FRANKFURT: Commerzbank, Germany's second biggest bank, said yesterday that its profits quadrupled in 2015 and it would resume dividend payments as it expects to see further profit growth this year.

Investors welcomed the strong 2015 showing by Germany's second-biggest lender which posted a net profit of 1.06 billion euros (\$1.2 billion), compared with 266 million euros the year before.

"2015 has shown that our strategy is right and that the implementation has been successful," boasted chief executive Martin Blessing. "For the first time in five years we have attained a net profit of more than one billion euros and have seen further significant strengthening of our capital base," Blessing said.

The profits were slightly bigger than analysts had expected and sent Commerzbank shares soaring on the Frankfurt stock exchange.

Commerzbank shares were the biggest gainers on the blue-chip DAX 30 index, jumping 14.1 percent to an intraday high of 7.29 euros in the first few minutes of

trading. Commerzbank said in a statement that revenues totalled 9.8 billion euros last year, an increase of 11 percent year-on-year, and underlying or operating profit tripled to 1.9 billion euros.

The group said investment in its retail or high-street banking business was paying off, with underlying profits in that division doubling last year.

The retail banking division, vastly expanded by the acquisition of rival Dresdner Bank in 2008-2009, had long weighed on Commerzbank's profitability.

Commerzbank said it slashed loan risk provisions last year to 696 million euros from 1.14 billion euros in 2014. On the back of the jump in profits, the management board will propose a dividend per share of 0.20 euros for 2015, the first payout since 2008.

Looking ahead, Commerzbank said that "2016 will be a challenging year due to the geopolitical and macroeconomic environment."

Commerzbank said it expected a "moderate increase in loan loss provisions. From



FRANKFURT: The headquarters of Germany's second biggest bank Commerzbank where is taking place Commerzbank's annual press conference is pictured yesterday in Frankfurt. — AFP

today's perspective we expect a slight increase in net profit in comparison with this year's result." Frankfurt-based Commerzbank was severely hit by the financial crisis, having to be rescued by the

state in 2009, and the government still holds a 15-percent stake in the bank. After thousands of layoffs and a strict cost-cutting drive, it has since managed a successful turnaround. — AFP

GERMAN ECONOMY NOTCHES UP 'SOLID' GROWTH AT END OF 2015

DOMESTIC DEMAND HELPS GROWTH MOMENTUM

FRANKFURT: Robust domestic demand enabled the German economy, Europe's biggest, to shrug off external headwinds and notch up "solid and continuous growth" at the end of last year, official data showed yesterday.

The federal statistics office Destatis said that Germany's gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 0.3 percent in the period from October to December, the same rate of growth as in the preceding three months. "The economic situation in Germany was characterised by solid and continuous growth in 2015," Destatis said.

The strong German engine offered a rare piece of good news in a week when global markets had been hammered over fears about the health of the world economy. Following GDP growth of 0.4 percent in both the first and second quarters, the German economy grew by 0.3 percent in both the third and fourth quarters.

That resulted in expansion of 1.7 percent across the whole year, the statisticians said, confirming a preliminary estimate released last month. "Positive impulses came primarily from domestic demand," Destatis said. State spending increased sharply and private household was up modestly. "On top of this, investments also developed positively, with construction investment increasing significantly compared with the third quarter," the statistics office said.

At the same time, foreign trade had a dampening effect on growth due to lower exports, it added.

Defying global turmoil

Analysts were cheered by the latest GDP data. "Today's Q4 GDP raises hopes that the German economy is strong enough to defy the turmoil in the global economy and financial markets," said analysts at Natixis.

"We expect that the pace of growth to

maintain going into Q1, as the underlying drivers of growth are here to stay," they said. Sustained low oil prices and inflation are expected to fuel private

consumption, they said, particularly in an economy where wages are rising and unemployment is falling. Public spending on refugees are also expected to provide a boost, they note.

ING DiBa economist Carsten Brzeski acknowledged that the growth rate of 0.3 percent was slightly lower than expected and was "probably the result of an entire batch of disappointing hard December data." Nevertheless, "without any doubt, the performance of the German economy since 2009 has been impressive. In 27 quarters, the economy only shrank three times," he said.

Moreover, the German economy had moved from being almost totally reliant on exports to much more balanced growth, with domestic factors currently

shielding the economy against external headwinds, he noted.

Looking ahead, 2016 could be more challenging, Brzeski continued. The refugee crisis, the economic slowdown in China and other emerging markets low oil prices and the possible weakness of the US economy "could all give the German economy a hard time," he warned.

Andreas Rees, chief German economist at UniCredit Research, was also cautious, warning that prolonged upheaval in world markets could start to chip away at German growth.

"The longer the turmoil continues, the higher the likelihood of negative feedback effects on the real economy - in Germany and abroad," he said. "If there were negative spillover effects from financial markets we think that they will not affect economic activity in Germany already in the first quarter but only from spring onwards," he warned. — AFP



HAMBURG: An Airbus A320neo plane with the logo of German airline Lufthansa stands on the factory site of Airbus yesterday in Hamburg, northern Germany. The first Airbus A320neo plane was delivered to German airline Lufthansa. — AFP

BANKS AGREE BREXIT WILL BE BAD FOR UK GROWTH, STERLING. BUT HOW BAD?

LONDON: Economists at some of the world's biggest banks are unanimous that Britain's economy and sterling will suffer if the country votes to leave the European Union in a referendum widely expected to be held in June.

But how bad would the damage be? Below is a snapshot of estimates from eight non-UK banks on the potential impact of "Brexit" on UK growth and the value of the pound, and the three major credit ratings agencies on the impact on the Britain's rating.

This will be updated as and when new forecasts are published. Here is a link to a Reuters poll of economists for a broader view on Brexit's potential impact.

SOCIETE GENERALE:

GDP growth could be 0.5-1.0 percentage points per year lower on average for a decade.

MORGAN STANLEY:

A "significant" consumption and investment shock leading to a 1.3 percentage points hit to growth in 2016-17. A 5 percent decline in sterling/dollar, falling to \$1.39 initially "with weakness persisting". UK stocks could underperform global peers by up to 20 percent.

CREDIT SUISSE:

"In its most extreme that could mean a level drop in GDP of 1 percent to 2 percent in the short term due to the toxic blend of depressed business confidence, tightening financial conditions, higher inflation and falling real income."

The pound would fall to 83 pence per euro and \$1.20 per dollar if euro/dollar pushes lower towards parity.

CITI:

GDP growth cut by 1-1.5 percentage points for 2017, 2018, and 2019, giving a total GDP loss of around 4 percent relative to potential. Sterling could fall 15-20 percent from current levels.

UNICREDIT:

Brexit would cost the UK economy "around 6 percent of GDP" over the next decade or so, risk a balance of payments crisis.

GOLDMAN SACHS:

Trade-weighted sterling would fall 15-20 percent, potentially dragging sterling/dollar down to around \$1.15-\$1.20 and lifting euro/sterling to around 90-95 pence.

NOMURA:

"An unwillingness of external investors to finance the current account on current terms could cause a collapse in the currency of 10-15 percent over several months." — Reuters

QUESTIONS GROW OVER BANKS AS PROFIT WARNINGS PILE UP

PARIS: Questions are growing over the financial health of banks, particularly in Europe, as they face a toxic mix of low economic growth, bad loans and squeezed earnings. France's Societe Generale became on Thursday the latest bank to issue a confidence-shattering profit warning, which helped trigger a new sell-off in financial stocks. The bank saw its share price stumble 12 percent and major rivals like Deutsche Bank and UniCredit saw losses of nearly 10 percent.

European banks are not the only ones to suffer. Japanese bank Mitsubishi Financial fell 7 percent on Thursday. In the US, Morgan Stanley is down 22 percent so far this year.

Among the top concerns is that the global economy will weaken more than expected, souring some of the loans that banks have issued to companies around the world - particularly in distressed sectors like the energy

industry. Mike van Dulken, head of research at Accendo Markets, says the latest weakness in bank stocks stems from US Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen "warning on current financial market turbulence and suggesting further rate hikes could be delayed, which added to already raised anxiety about the health of the global economy."

On Wednesday, Yellen cautioned that global weakness and falling financial markets could depress the US economy's growth and slow the pace of Fed interest rate hikes. That's a particular concern as the US economy has been one of the few bright spots in the global economy, which is seeing a slowdown in China and stagnation in Japan and Europe.

The fact that many central banks keep cutting interest rates, pushing down market lending rates, is further hurting banks by squeezing their profits. Banks mainly make money by lend-

ing, so as rates drop, so do earnings.

The situation is worsened in some regions, particularly the eurozone and Japan, where the central banks charge commercial banks to deposit money with them.

Analysts at Capital Economics say that if the European Central Bank cuts one of its key interest rates further below zero, "this could have adverse effects on banks' profitability."

Citing ECB chief Mario Draghi's recent statements that the central bank could take more action in March, the analysts said the ECB "seems prepared to squeeze banks' profitability further in the short term in order to support the economy."

The Stoxx index of European bank shares is down 20 percent in the last month, when Draghi first mentioned chance that the ECB might try to offer more stimulus in March to lower market rates.

In some markets, bad loans are

already piling up - or have not been dealt with effectively since the global financial crisis. That's the case in Italy, where banks are estimated to hold some 350 billion euros in soured loans, or more than 30 percent of the eurozone's total. The government is trying to mop up those bad loans, but the banks are seeing their shares slide in the meantime. Banca Monte dei Paschi, which was down 9 percent on Thursday, is down 60 percent so far this year.

More narrowly, some banks are being targeted for complex financial investments they have made in recent years. That's the case of Deutsche Bank, which has seen the value of its so-called contingent convertible bonds fall sharply. The bank has some 350 million euros in payments on such bonds due by April 30, and had to issue a statement Monday evening assuring it had the money to pay. — AP

EUROZONE ECONOMY HOLDS STEADY AMID GLOBAL TURMOIL OUTLOOK REMAINS CLOUDED AMID CHINA CRISIS

BRUSSELS: The eurozone economy held steady in late 2015 despite the buffeting from global market turmoil and a sharp slowdown in China, official data showed yesterday, but the outlook is clouded. Analysts said the figures were "something of a relief" after recent weakening data had suggested a modest recovery in the 19-nation single currency bloc was running out of steam.

At the same time, the report also pointed up the risks and the European Central Bank, which has launched an unprecedented one-trillion-euro stimulus program, may have to do even more to get the economy back on track, they said.

The Eurostat statistics agency said the eurozone grew 0.3 percent in the last three months of 2015, the same pace as in the previous quarter and in line with analyst forecasts.

For all 2015, it expanded 1.5 percent, coming in short of the 1.6 percent estimate given by the European Commission last week. Among the major eurozone economies, Germany gained 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter, unchanged from the third, while France slowed to 0.2 percent from 0.3 percent.

Italy also slowed, to just 0.1 percent from 0.2 percent as Spain led the pack with another gain of 0.8 percent.

Bailed out Greece showed a distinct improvement from a negative 1.4 percent to minus 0.6 percent but Athens remains saddled with a huge mountain of debt and it is struggling to meet the tough terms laid down in a third debt rescue agreed with its international creditors last year.

Outside the eurozone, Britain rose to 0.5 percent from 0.4 percent. For the full 28-nation European Union, the economy gained 0.3 percent in the fourth quarter, down from 0.4 percent



BRUSSELS: President of the Euro Working Group Thomas Wieser (L) talks with Luxembourg's Finance minister Pierre Gramegna prior to the start of the European Union Eco-Finance Council meeting at the EU Councilbuilding in Brussels yesterday. — AFP

in the third, and expanded 1.8 percent for the year.

Risks mounting, ECB must do more

Howard Archer at IHS Global Insight said that while the 2015 growth rate of 1.5 percent was the best since 2011, the fourth-quarter performance was only "lacklustre" and the outlook was not promising.

"We have been expecting eurozone growth to improve modestly to 1.7 percent in 2016 but this is currently looking ever more questionable and may well need to be revised down," Archer said in a note. "There are clearly mounting downside risks to the eurozone growth outlook coming from global growth problems and financial market weak-

ness and volatility," he said.

Other analysts were equally guarded.

"The fact that eurozone growth did not slow in the fourth quarter provides little comfort in the current environment of global market turmoil and does not preclude the need for further decisive policy action from the ECB," Capital Economics said.

Capital Economics even warned that it may have to cut its already low 1.2-percent growth forecast for this year. "We have pencilled in growth of 1.2 percent in 2016 but the recent turmoil in global financial markets and signs of renewed stress in peripheral eurozone (countries) have increased the downside risks even to our forecast," it said. — AFP

EU OFFICIALS URGES ECB TO STUDY SECURITY RISKS OF 500 EURO BANKNOTE

BRUSSELS: The European Central Bank should make proposals on how to reduce security risks linked to the 500 euro note which can be used for the financing of terrorism, the head of euro zone finance ministers said yesterday.

Almost 30 percent of the more than 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) of cash in circulation last year was hoarded in 500 euro notes, ECB data show. The banknote is one of the most valuable worldwide, with a value more than five times higher than the largest US equivalent currently in circulation, the \$100 bill.

"We are going to ask the ECB to look at cash money and the accessibility of the 500 euro note," Dutch Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem told reporters ahead of a meeting of EU finance ministers in Brussels.

"There are risks that large notes and large cash amounts can be easily used for terrorism financing," Dijsselbloem, who is permanent head of eurozone finance ministers, said.

The request for a probe on the 500 euro note comes amid an EU clampdown on all means of payment that may be used to finance terrorist acts. It was triggered by the attacks in Paris last November by Islamic State militants that killed 130 people.

The European Commission, the EU executive arm, proposed last week to increase controls on prepaid payment cards, virtual currencies such as bitcoin and other possible source of financing for terrorist organizations. It also warned about the risks of 500 euro notes, mulling possible ceilings on cash payments. The ECB is in charge of making decisions on the euro banknotes in circulation.

The 500 euro note has raised concerns also in relation to fraud and corruption. In an interview in January, the top EU anti-fraud official called for the banknote to be withdrawn.

When euro notes and coins began to circulate in 2002, Germany was among the main supporters of having a 500 euro banknote to match the value of its 1,000-mark note, and cater to Germans' traditional preference for cash over electronic money. — Reuters

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016



First Arab contender in 20 years opens Berlin film fest race

People buy flowers to celebrate the upcoming Valentine's Day in Islamabad, Pakistan, yesterday. Celebrating Valentine's Day is considered un-Islamic in Pakistan, but many still buy flowers and exchange gifts with others at this time of year. — AP

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Tunisian director Mohamed Ben Attia poses during a photo shoot at a movie theatre in Tunis. (Right) Actors Majd Mastoura, Rym Ben Messaoud, director Mohamed Ben Attia, actress Sabah Bouzouita and producer Dora Bouchoucha Fourati, from left, pose for the photographers during a photo call for the film 'Inhebbek Hedi' at the 2016 Berlinale Film Festival yesterday. — AP / AFP

First Arab contender in 20 years opens Berlin film fest race

A love story set against the aftermath of Tunisia's watershed revolution kicked off the competition at the Berlin film festival yesterday as the first Arab contender in two decades. Hailing from the North African country that triggered the Arab Spring, "Hedi" is the debut feature-length film of Tunisian filmmaker Mohamed Ben Attia. It is the first film in Arabic and set in the Arab world since 1996 to vie for prizes at Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year. "It's not that I'm not ambitious, but I never imagined going to Berlin! All of us are surprised," Ben Attia told AFP. It is a rare achievement for any first-time filmmaker to be invited to the Berlinale competition.

The only other debut feature in the race this year-British theatre director Michael Grandage's "Genius"-has an all-star cast including Colin Firth, Jude Law and Nicole Kidman. "Hedi" will have its world premiere as one of 18 films from around the world vying for the festival's Golden Bear top prize, with three-time Oscar winner

Meryl Streep heading up the jury. Its tale of "emotional upheaval" echoes Tunisia's recent history, said Ben Attia, who turns 40 this year. But rather than impart a political "message", his movie describes a kind of personal revolution.

Wake-up call

The film's main character Hedi-whose name means "serene" in Arabic-"isn't unemployed, his family doesn't have any money problems... but he feels out of place in society", Ben Attia said. When he meets a tour guide called Rim and love strikes, Hedi (played by Majd Mastoura) begins to ask serious questions about the man he wants to be and his role in society. Ben Attia said he himself used to be a "conformist", selling cars for a living before launching into filmmaking. The wake-up call came on January 14, 2011 standing in the crowd outside the interior ministry demanding the removal of longtime dictator Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. It was the end of an era "under censorship



Tunisian director Mohamed Ben Attia poses during a photo shoot at a movie theatre in Tunis.

that we thought was only political, but in fact was (also) sedating everybody", he said. Protests swept Tunisia in late 2010 after the death of a street vendor who set himself on fire in protest at unemployment and police harassment, leading Ben Ali to flee the country. In his own "emotional upheaval" alongside the tumult wrought by the revolution, Hedi "dis-

covers himself through a love story" and "detaches himself from conventions". He realizes "he has another choice-but then, after the euphoria, he discovers it's not all that easy", Ben Attia said.

'Bit of a hangover'

Tunisia is hailed as a rare success story of the Arab Spring, although

authorities have failed to improve the economy or do much to ease social exclusion. Authorities last month imposed a nationwide curfew to curb some of the worst social unrest since the revolution. "It's true we have a bit of a hangover," Ben Attia said. "We thought he (Ben Ali) just needed to leave for it all to get better. "We truly believed in this radical change, just as Hedi wants to believe in his love story." Political instability and jihadist attacks have taken their toll on Tunisia's vital tourism sector.

In the film, after Rim (played by Rim Ben Messaoud) loses her job, the lovers start thinking about quitting the country. But the director said he has never contemplated leaving, especially as Tunisian films make waves abroad. "Tunisian cinema has been on the move. We've seen films that stand out, that are well received abroad and at home," he said. Tunisian director Leyla Bouzid's film "As I Open My Eyes" won the top award for fiction feature at the Dubai Film Festival in December. —AFP

Make them an offer they can't refuse: Puzo archive for sale

Make them an offer they can't refuse and a massive collection of "The Godfather" author Mario Puzo's papers can be yours. The 45-box archive, which includes multiple drafts with handwritten revisions to both the novel and the screenplay, is being sold by Boston-based RR Auction on Feb 18. The collection covering Puzo's entire career includes manuscripts of his early books and late-career screenplays, and even his old typewriter. But there's no doubt that its thousands of pages of "Godfather" documents are the highlight.

They shed light on the creative process, including the back and forth between Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola as they collaborated on the screenplay. "This is one of the neatest things I have ever seen in my job," said Tricia Eaton, RR's director of specialty catalogs. The scripts include some of Puzo's own scribbles and thoughts on what the



In this July 25, 1996 file photo, author Mario Puzo talks during an interview in New York.

American Film Institute called the second most famous movie quote of all-time, Marlon Brando, as Don Vito Corleone, saying: "I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse." (The most famous movie quote is, "Frankly,

my dear, I don't give a damn," from "Gone with the Wind.")

In one manuscript, Puzo makes a change to the line: "He's a businessman. I'll make him an offer he can't refuse," scratching out the phrase "He's a businessman" and scrawling in: "I'll reason with him." In another, Puzo intensifies the famous line's ominous finality by crossing out a line of dialogue immediately following it. "It seems that Puzo and Coppola together simplified a lot of the dialogue from the book for the screen," Eaton said. "The way it came out in the movie makes it a little more like everyday gangster slang." Another fascinating piece of the collection is a letter from Puzo to Brando dated March 1970. Puzo envisioned Brando playing Corleone in the 1972 movie, but it almost never happened. Apparently thinking that Brando was out of the project, Puzo wrote the letter expressing his disappointment. —AP

Swift irked by 'Misogynistic' West lyrics

Taylor Swift is not amused with Kanye West's "famous" new lyrics. According to the pop star's publicist, Swift didn't approve of the new song "Famous," which debuted during West's "Yeezy Season 3" event on Thursday. The track includes a few digs at Swift: "I feel like me and Taylor might still have ***. Why? I made that **** famous."

"Kanye did not call for approval," her spokesman said of the track. "But to ask Taylor to release his single Famous on her Twitter account. She declined and cautioned him about releasing a song with such a strong misogynistic message. Taylor was never made aware of the actual lyric, 'I made that **** famous.'"

The lyrics raised a few eyebrows on social media after debuting on Tidal's live stream. Swift's younger brother, Austin, was among Kanye's biggest critics, posting a clip of himself throwing out a pair of Yeezy shoes on Instagram with the caption: "Getting a head start on some spring cleaning. Here we go again." In 2009, West famously interrupted Swift during her win at the MTV Video Music Awards, but the two seemed like they made up at last year's Grammy Awards. West's new album, "The Life of Pablo," has not been officially released despite playing in its entirety at the Madison Square Garden event on Thursday. — Reuters



Models wear fashion from the Yeezy collection at a presentation and album release for Kanye West's latest album, "The Life of Pablo," Thursday at Madison Square Garden in New York. — AP photos



Caitlyn Jenner, second row from left, Kourtney Kardasion, Kendall Jenner, Khloe Kardashian, Kylie Jenner and Kim Kardashian West appear at the Yeezy presentation and album release.

Kanye West unveils new album, Yeezy 3 line at NY fashion week

Kanye West is many things: Rap megastar, fashion designer, husband of Kim Kardashian. On Thursday, his worlds collided in front of more than 15,000 people at New York's Madison Square Garden. West unveiled his new album and latest fashion collection before a packed crowd at the massive arena in the most hyped event of fashion week in the Big Apple. The 38-year-old, self-styled modern renaissance man dressed in a red sweat shirt and black hat spent an hour singing from "The Life of Pablo," while models showcased pieces from his Yeezy Season 3 line.

Standing or seated, some with naked torsos, his models did not move, nor smile nor look at anyone. The only flash of movement was a fleeting appearance from British supermodel Naomi Campbell. "I feel so happy to be able to follow my dream and create as an artist," West told the audience. His reality star wife Kim was there with platinum blonde hair and dressed in fur. The couple's daughter North and the rest of her family were also along for the ride, including Kim's sisters Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian and supermodel half-sister Kendall Jenner.

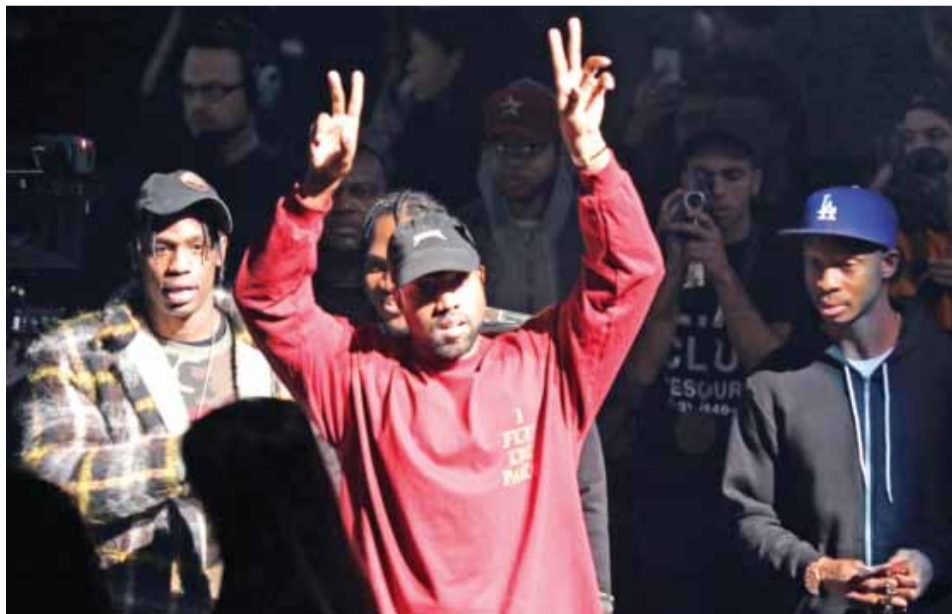
"Tell me how you all feel about the clothes this season!" shouted the mercurial musician. "Make them cheaper!" shot back one spectator. West offered sports-inspired apparel with large sweaters, military-style boots and jackets, each generally in one tone from a neutral palette of olive, beige, yellow, gray and white. West partners with Adidas for the collection. The queue outside stretched more than 100 yards (meters) to see the boundary-pushing rapper, who has in the past compared himself to Michelangelo and floated an apparent bid for US president in 2020.

'So happy'

"Did I live up to my promise on that album?" he asked to cheers. "This is really a gospel album," he said. "I feel so happy." The music blended powerful women's voices with frequent changes of rhythm, pushing distinctive West traits to new levels. "It's really progressive," enthused Nathan Neal, a teenager, when asked what he thought of the album. And the show? "It was excellent." West spoke of his happiness in straddling the



Lamar Odom, second left, hugs Kylie Jenner as Caitlyn Jenner, left, Khloe Kardashian Odom, center, Kim Kardashian, Kendall Jenner, North West and Kourtney Kardashian (both out of spotlight) attend the unveiling of the Yeezy collection and album release.



Kanye West gestures to the audience at the unveiling of the Yeezy collection and album release for his latest album, "The Life of Pablo."

fashion world, saying that his dream is to be creative director of French fashion house Hermes. Members of the fashion pack have lauded the Chicago-born superstar with doing much to make interest in men's fashion mainstream. "A lot of people got into fashion because of him, because he made it cool," said Ryan Sukram, a member of the audience in his 20s. "I already bought a lot of his stuff, shoes and everything," he said. He also liked the album, saying: "It's universal. Look at this line. There are black people, Asian people, white people, everything." Noah Zagor, the owner of Meyvn, a menswear store in Chicago, praised West for doing much for fashion. "He opened up the minds of younger guys who may not necessarily be into fashion but care about what's cool in lifestyle, in culture and he's produced a line that represents that," he told AFP. "I think what he does brilliantly is put together a spectacle. The show, the scene, the marketing, the concept, it's amazing. He commands attention with what he does," he added.

Whimsy from BCBG Max Azria

West's show was broadcast in cinemas across the planet, busting out of the more traditional confines of a fashion audience as seen at Nicholas K and BCBG Max Azria on Thursday, the opening day of New York fashion week. BCBG unveiled its fall/winter collection at Moynihan Station, which last season became the new fashion week headquarters, saying its muse was a performer with "individualistic style" and "artistic ingenuity." It unveiled a rich winter palette of light grey, cream and camel paired with merlot, ink blue and carbon.

There was lots of layering, knits and denim, with color-blocked bags and shearling-trimmed footwear to emphasize the "whimsical carefree spirit" of the muse. A total of 147 designers are on Fashion Week's official roster this February, with 97 catwalk shows and 50 presentations. Still more designers will present their creations independently. Some of the biggest names to watch are Jason Wu, Prabal Gurung, Alexander Wang, Altuzarra, Victoria Beckham, Diane Von Furstenberg, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Marc Jacobs.— AFP



Models walk the runway at the Ev Bessar "Firebird" fashion show during Fall 2016 New York Fashion Week at Gotham Hall yesterday in New York City. —AP/AFP photos



The BCBG MAX AZRIA Fall 2016 collection is modeled during Fashion Week in New York.



80s-inspired fashion show draws four-legged models



A dog presents an outfit on the ramp. — AFP photos



A man carries his dogs on the ramp to present outfits during the Pet Fashion Show in New York on Thursday.



A dog walks on the ramp to present an outfit.



A cat presents an outfit on the ramp.

Donning frocks and fabrics of all colors, dogs, cats, chickens and even a lizard strutted to 80s music at a US charity event Thursday. With hits blaring in the background, the peculiar scene unfolded at the New York Pet Fashion Show—a fundraiser for animal rescue groups. The event, in its twelfth year, falls during New York Fashion Week and

just before the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club dog show. “Unofficially, we kick off Westminster weekend,” said Gregg Oehler, the event’s emcee, who wore a white suit and shades inspired by the iconic 80s television series, “Miami Vice.”

Proceeds from the event go to the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals, a nonprofit

umbrella organization of 150 shelters throughout the New York area. Among this year’s models was Asiago, a 10-year-old Yorkshire Terrier who was given up by his owner to a no-kill shelter that is part of the Alliance. Asiago was presented in an elaborate hand-built carriage and shown by Stephanie Mattera, a spokeswoman for the

alliance. Like other models, he is looking for his “forever home,” as organizers put it. Asiago was poised throughout his cruise on the catwalk and waited patiently as Mattera spoke with a reporter.

“These events really give these animals a spotlight so they can get the homes they deserve,” Mattera said. — AFP



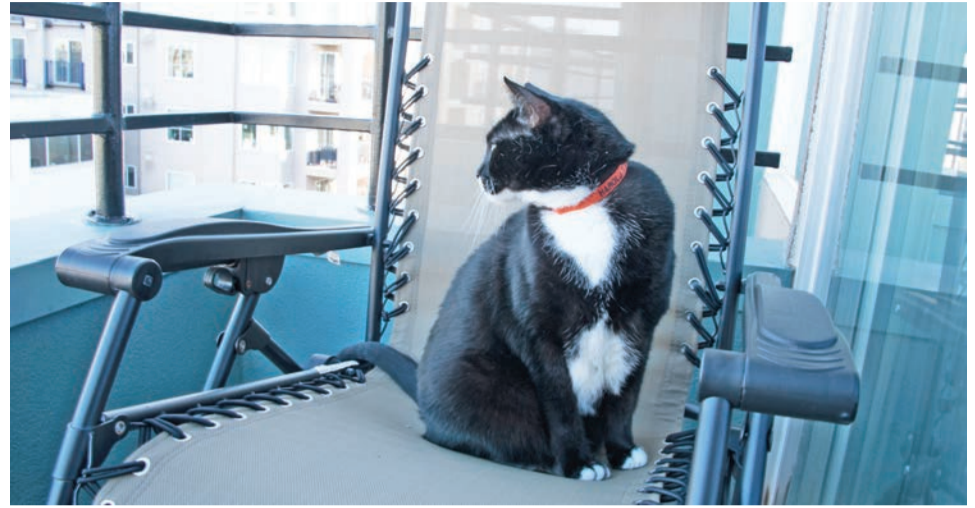
A dog walks on the ramp wearing an outfit.



A man carries his dogs on the ramp to present outfits.



A woman walks a dog on the ramp.



This photo provided by Matt Hucke shows his cat, Harold, wearing an orange Kitty Convict Project collar in Seattle. — AP

Orange collar project aims to get lost cats home

Cartoonist Matthew Inman would like to see every housecat wearing an orange collar with its name and number on it. Then if the cat gets loose or lost, by escape or mistake, the collar will signal, "Help me!" Inman calls the collar campaign the Kitty Convict Project, and its aim is to up the percentage of cats that can be reunited with owners. While loose dogs are often picked up on the assumption that they're lost, loose cats are usually ignored on the assumption that they're either allowed outside by their owners or that they are feral. "We want to change what people see when they see a cat," said Inman, Seattle-based author of The Oatmeal blog.

This isn't Inman's first venture into the feline world. Inman was part of a trio that created the popular Exploding Kittens card game, now an app. "It was a horrible name for a game," said Inman, adding that the Kitty Convict orange collar project is cat atonement (he calls it catonement). Fifteen percent of pet-owners have lost a dog or cat, according to the ASPCA's most recent study on the topic. Of those lost pets, 85 percent are recovered - 93 percent of dogs but just 74 percent of cats, according to Dr. Emily Weiss, vice president of ASPCA shelter research and development. "People look for their cats differently

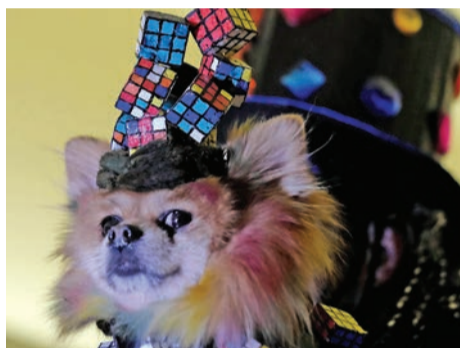
than their dogs," Weiss said. "Overall use of collar IDs is lower for cats than dogs. And the likelihood of you being reunited is lower if it's a cat. People wait longer to look and about 25 percent don't come home."

Weiss said she was astonished by the findings of a 2011 study about collars and identification tags. Over 80 percent of pet owners said it was extremely important for pets to have them, but only 30 percent of those same owners said their pets wore them. Matt Hucke lives in a small apartment in Seattle and has put the Kitty Convict orange collars on his cats, Harold, 6, and Harold's mom Maude, 9.

"Because they have always been indoors, they don't really know what to do when they are outside," he said. The collars, he says, provide "assurance they will be safe" in case they ever do get out. Inman said thousands of the orange collars have been sold. They're available on Amazon.com for \$14, a price subsidized by the \$9 million raised on Kickstarter for Exploding Kittens, said Inman, who created the game with Elan Lee and Shane Small. The collars are custom-stitched with the cat's name and a contact phone number. But no matter what color a collar is, if you see a cat outside, said Weiss, "see if you can him get home." — AP



A woman walks on the ramp with her pet chicken.



A dog is carried on the ramp to present an outfit.



A dog walks on the ramp wearing an outfit.

Sleep in a replica of Van Gogh's bedroom for \$10

Have you ever stared at a painting and wished you could slip inside? You may have a chance. The Art Institute of Chicago has recreated Vincent Van Gogh's bedroom in an apartment and is renting it out for \$10 a night. "This is so perfect I'm literally crying," art student Genevieve Marie Gualtiere wrote on the museum's Facebook page. "Staying here would be my dream! I need it." Art lovers have already snapped up all available dates in February, but will have more chances to book as the museum releases more dates on Airbnb.

"We're hoping it will inspire people to think in new ways about the painting," said Amanda Hicks, a spokeswoman for the Art Institute of Chicago. "Our version of Van Gogh's bedroom is so popular and well-loved and well-known that this gives you a chance to think about it and walk in it and live in and just experience with fresh eyes this iconic work." A group of local artists helped to recreate in painstaking detail the simple wooden furniture and rich colors of Van Gogh's "The Bedroom," one of his most recognizable works.

It is a remarkable experience, Hicks said, to walk through a modern Chicago apartment, open a door and be "transported across the threshold into Van Gogh's Bedroom." Reservations will be restricted to just a single



These images are courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago (left) of Vincent Van Gogh's, The Bedroom, 1889; and a recreation of the painting (right). — AFP

night and will include two tickets to the museum and a special exhibit which brings together all three versions of Van Gogh's "The Bedroom." The Art Institute owns one and the others are on loan from the Musee d'Orsay in Paris and the Van Gogh Museum in

Amsterdam. The exhibit also includes a recreation of "The Bedroom" and as visitors move through the gallery they will walk over a blueprint of Van Gogh's home in Arles, France. It opens on Sunday and runs through May 10. Those wishing to rent the room should watch

the museum's Facebook page for an announcement of when more dates will become available. There are no plans to make it available after the exhibit closes. "We're not planning on getting into the recreation of bedrooms business," Hicks told AFP. — AFP



This file photo shows skiers sit on a ski lift over the Darbandsar ski resort, 60 kms northeast of Tehran.—AFP photos

Iran

seeks tourism millions as nuclear chill ends



Skiers ascending a slope on ski lift at the Darbandsar ski resort.

Long seen as a destination strewn with shortcomings, Iran is making a fresh pitch for tourists, with the recent lifting of economic sanctions providing an opportunity to cash in. The tourism industry has been overlooked by successive governments in Tehran but the deal Iran struck with world powers over its nuclear program last summer could change that. Along with nine companions including Americans and Germans, China-based Frenchman Yannick Lequelenec said he aims to make "one unique journey" every year. For 2016, he chose Iran. "My family told me I was crazy, but people have been welcoming and very friendly," he said in Tehran of his one-week trip taken over the Chinese New Year holidays.

Tourists, and the healthy revenues they could generate, are among the huge economic changes stemming from the nuclear deal. Ski resorts, UNESCO-listed world heritage sites and deserts combine with cities steeped in Middle Eastern grandeur and tradition. A tourism push

was launched after President Hassan Rouhani came to power in 2013, ending the hardline era of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during which Iran's international isolation deepened. Entry procedures have been simplified, meaning visitors from only 11 countries are not eligible for a visa on arrival. The United States, Britain, Canada and France top the exclusion list but some people will not be put off by the restrictions.

Skiing and ancient cities

"The first thing we did was to go skiing in Tochal," said Rachel Punter, a 41-year-old British teacher based in Shanghai who was among Lequelenec's group. The ski resort is one of several close to the capital. That outing was followed by trips to Isfahan, Shiraz and Yazd, cities considered much more beautiful and relaxed than Tehran. Among the popular sites in Isfahan is Imam Square, second in size only to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, but with water fountains and impressive architecture the

Iranian site is much more attractive.

For Rouhani, tourism offers a way to offset falling oil prices that have slashed government income. The goal is 20 million tourists annually by 2025 which would provide \$30 billion a year, a fivefold increase in current revenues from foreign visitors. It comes as tourists shun many parts of the Middle East because of war and a recent wave of jihadist attacks in countries including Egypt and Tunisia. International credit and debit cards still do not work in Iran, but arriving with foreign currency and converting it into a large bundle of local rial notes does not seem a handicap. There have been 4.16 million visitors in the first nine months of the Iranian year, which started in March 2015, up five percent from a year earlier, according to the tourism ministry.

Two thirds of them come from neighboring countries, such as Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Afghanistan or Pakistan, predominantly religious pilgrims visiting the holy Shiite cities of

Mashhad, northeast of Tehran, and Qom, south of the capital. Western tourists currently number only five percent but the trend is upward, according to Ebrahim Pourfaraj, head of Pasargad Tour Agency and president of the Association of Iranian Tour Operators. "For tourists, the sense of security and peace is very important. The nuclear deal and the trips of President Hassan Rouhani to Italy and France have reinforced this phenomenon," he said.

Facilities still sparse

Those visits underlined Iran's acceptance and willingness to trade with Europe after the nuclear deal. But after decades of inadequate investment, facilities and capacity are sparse. Of the country's 1,100 hotels, only 130 are four or five star — 400 more would be needed to accommodate 20 million tourists annually. Azam Ayoubian, owner of the 2001 travel agency in Tehran, also said demand far exceeds supply.—AFP

Consider Grand Bahama for a quiet island getaway

By Glenn Adams

Looking for a low-key winter getaway or quiet spring break destination? Grand Bahama may be your place. It's one of the main islands of the Gulf Stream-warmed Bahamas archipelago of 700 islands, cays and inlets sprawling across the waters off southeastern Florida. Our February trip saw temperatures locked between 70 and 80 degrees, with an occasional spurt of rain at night.

At restaurants, it wasn't unusual for the three of us - my wife, brother-in-law and me - to be the only ones there, although some places buzzed with activity. With the exchange at 1:1 US dollar to a Bahamian dollar, the prices all seemed reasonable, and the practice of factoring tips into the bill made transactions even simpler. Beaches in many areas were quiet, with an occasional trickling of cruise ship passengers now and again making their way across the glistening sand, wading out to reefs and checking out ships dotting the horizon. This was the case at Gold Rock Beach at Lucayan National Park, which at \$5 per head is a don't-miss stop just a few miles east of Freeport along the Grand Bahama Highway.

Tour companies and taxis make trips to the park, which features trails to an under-

water cave system where pre-Columbian artifacts have been discovered. Another part of the park (be careful crossing the highway) offers trails whose meandering boardwalks lead through a mangrove ecosystem featuring saltwater fish, waterfowl and wading birds.

Tour companies also offer activities including kayak trips through a mangrove forest, sightseeing by bike or Jeep, all-terrain vehicle rides, snorkeling and birding. For the more adventurous, there's parasailing and even (gasp!) shark feeding dives. We spent a week in a rented house in Freeport's Xanadu Beach area, noted for the 13-story resort once owned and inhabited by Howard Hughes and haunted by Hollywood jet setters. Now the high-rise stands eerily silent, its once-vibrant surroundings looking desolate as we looked on from the quiet white-sand beach. Same at Freeport's International Bazaar, a marketplace of shops and boutiques - now mostly abandoned, shuttered, silent. Under the shade of a palm tree near its main gate, a checkers board, pieces still set on squares, lay untouched as if waiting for the next move.

Rice-and-beans

But we found our bliss at Albertha Cooper's restaurant. It's a bit out of the

way, but worth the expedition. At the far eastern end of the island in McLean's Town, a seaside village known for its annual conch-cracking contest, we happened upon Cooper's tidy little drive-up restaurant. There was no menu to be seen, but she gladly obliged us with her specials for the day. I chose the fried conch plate. Asked where the conch was caught, she pointed to the turquoise cove a few hundred yards to our backs.

"Right there," she said with a smile. The conch came with a helping of rice-and-beans and coleslaw. My wife chose three lobster tails with sides, and her brother chose the ribs plate. Add a couple of beers and a rum and Coke for drinks, \$52 total for our feast for three. On another outing, we drove to the west side for a day of snorkeling and relaxing at Paradise Cove, a friendly and informal resort near Dead Man's Reef, 15 miles from Freeport.

Getting around the island was easy, though driving itself is a bit of a challenge: You drive on the left side of the road, but many cars also have steering wheels on the left - different from both the U.S. and British systems. Of course Grand Bahama is but one of the islands in the Bahamian chain. Nearby Paradise Island and Nassau (the Bahamian capital on New Providence island), offer more night life. —AP



A man walking along Gold Rock Beach in Lucayan National Park on Grand Bahama island.

West Virginia: Watch glass being made by hand at Blenko



Stained glass on display at Blenko Glass.



Vases on display at Blenko Glass.



This photo shows glassware on display at Blenko Glass in Milton, WV.—AP photos

At Blenko Glass, you can watch glass being handcrafted the way it's been done for more than 100 years. The company's famous glassware has been bought, collected and recognized around the world. Blenko stained glass was used in New York's St Patrick's Cathedral. Blenko tableware is in the White House as well as in various museums. Blenko also designed the trophy for the Country Music Awards.

The Blenko factory, located in Milton, West Virginia, a few minutes off Interstate 64, has an onsite museum displaying some of its innovative designs, along with an observation area. Here visitors may watch, up close, as workers heat, shape, blow and cut colorful glass pieces into vases, bottles and other items. A series of signs explains the process. There are several jobs involved in producing a piece. One worker is responsible for gathering just the right amount of hot glass. Another blows, shapes and molds the glass. Then the piece is removed from the blowpipe, and a finisher completes the piece by cutting off ragged edges and working with the soft glass so that it matches a master design. Because each piece is made by hand, no two pieces are exactly alike.

The company was founded by William J Blenko, an immigrant from England. He set up his first factory in Indiana in the 1890s but was not initially successful. In that era, Americans did not want domestically made glass; they wanted glass made in Europe. After several ups and downs, he moved to Milton in the early 1920s partly because of the abundance of cheap, local natural gas, used to fuel the furnaces. Blenko eventually expanded from producing sheet glass and stained glass to tableware. The switch was prompted by the Great Depression, when a downturn in cathedral and church-building ravaged the market for stained glass.

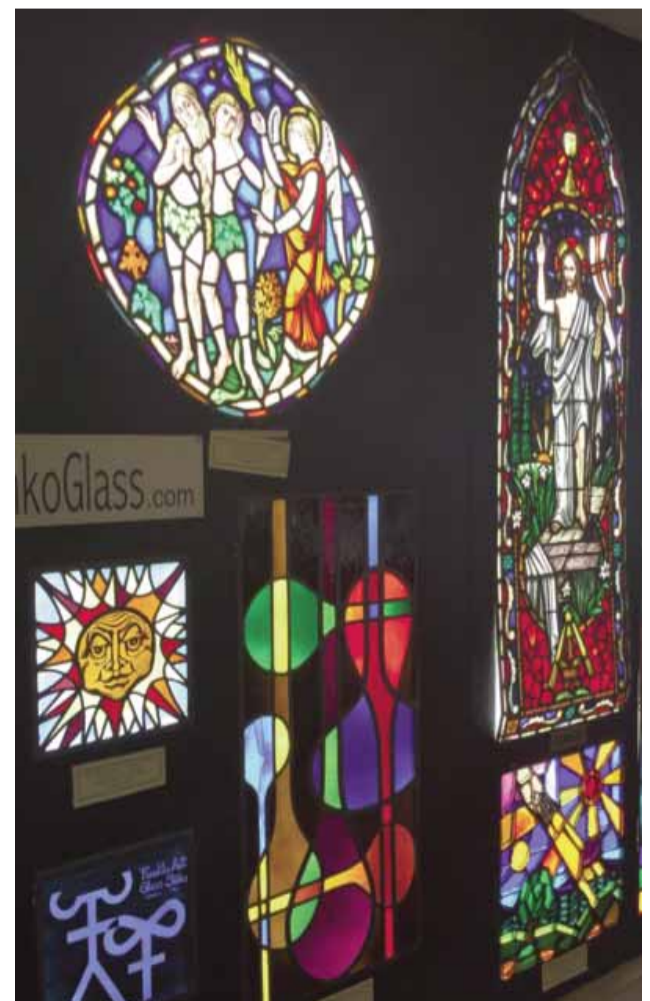
Small statues

In the mid-20th century, the company's innovative

craftsmen began to be recognized with design awards for their handcrafted tableware. Despite that recognition, the company has not always prospered. It recently emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The onsite gift shop offers many types and colors of vases, bottles, glasses, bowls and other items. You'll also find handmade Christmas ornaments, small statues and even a bit of jewelry. Most of the items are made by Blenko, but a few (such as jewelry items) are produced by others. Vases are priced \$30 to \$100. The museum displays are upstairs from the gift shop.

I purchased one of my favorite bowls at Blenko, a dark blue piece that looks beautiful with strawberries in it. The variations in color remind me that it's handmade. The company also hosts monthly events focused on glass. A paperweight collectors meeting takes place onsite March 11-12, and an annual glass festival is scheduled for Aug 5-6. The events are free, with vendors and demonstrations. Classes are often offered during the events for a fee.

Blenko's biggest annual event is keyed to the anniversary of the date West Virginia became a state, June 20, 1863. The company creates a unique commemorative glass piece in a numbered limited edition to mark the event each year, and the sale of the pieces is held on the Saturday nearest the anniversary (June 18 this year). Collectors begin camping in the company parking lot the Monday before the sale just to get a space in line. The number of pieces and their price is determined by the year of the birthday: This year, on the 153rd celebration, the company will produce 153 pieces priced at \$153 each.—AP



Stained glass on display at Blenko Glass in Milton.

AS INDUSTRY SHIFTS, LAS VEGAS CABS DO SOME SOUL-SEARCHING

LAS VEGAS: The arrival of Uber and Lyft in Nevada last fall and a state audit accusing regulators of allowing cabs to charge \$47 million in excessive fees each year have the powerful Las Vegas taxi industry and its overseers in the hot seat, facing down a recommendation that the agency be disbanded and its duties passed to another entity.

Nevada lawmakers met this week to discuss the fate of the Nevada Taxicab Authority, which regulates cabs in the Las Vegas area, and get its board members' side of the story. Legislators are postponing any decisions about whether to abolish the agency until a second, taxi company-funded audit is complete, but the meeting laid bare how cabs are struggling to keep pace with new technology and increased competition.

"Transportation is changing. Technology is changing. The public has many choices now," said Bruce Breslow, director of Nevada's Department of Business and Industry, an umbrella organization over taxi regulators. "It's a tough industry. It's tough for the drivers now. It's tough for the longtime owners ... and it's going to tougher." Nevada opened the door in September to ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft, who have signed up about 19,000 drivers so far. In Clark County, home of Las Vegas and the majority of Nevada's population, there are about 10,000 taxi drivers, and state officials say it's getting tougher for companies to recruit drivers in light of the competition.

The latest shakeup came a few weeks ago, when state auditors slammed the Taxicab Authority and recommended its

duties roll over to an agency that regulates cabs throughout the rest of the state. Among other things, the scathing audit criticized the agency for greenlighting a \$3-per-transaction credit card fee on top of cab fares that hover average about \$17 apiece in Las Vegas. Nevada Sen. James Settelmeyer took the flak on that one, saying the Nevada Legislature approved the surcharge six years ago as a way to cover processing cards when credit cards were perhaps less ubiquitous than now. Cabs take in about (\$27 million) a year in the fees, according to the audit.

But the fee looks increasingly antiquated for a customer base accustomed to using their credit card account fee-free to pay Lyft or Uber fares. Taxi drivers themselves showed up to the Tuesday meeting with lawmakers to complain about the fee,

saying they're not getting a cut of that money and customers forget to tip the cabbie on the assumption that the fee is a tip.

Lawmakers also drew attention to another way cabs are behind their competition. The Taxicab Authority offers no way for customers to rate their cab driver online - a feature popular in Uber and Lyft apps that incentivizes good service. "It's like you're walking into the precinct from Barney Miller where everybody's still working on four copies of paperwork," Breslow said, referring to a TV show from the 1970s. "Modernization is a top priority." The cab industry lost its fight in the Nevada Legislature last year to subject ride-hailing companies to the strict regulations it faces, including limits on the number of cabs on the road at any given time. — AP

CONGRESS GIVES FINAL OK TO BANNING INTERNET TAXES

LAWMAKERS OPPOSE LEVIES ON ONLINE SERVICE

WASHINGTON: Congress voted Thursday to permanently bar state and local governments from taxing access to the Internet, as lawmakers leapt at an election-year chance to demonstrate their opposition to imposing levies on online service.

On a vote of 75-20, the Senate gave final congressional approval to the wide-ranging bill, which would also revamp trade laws. The White House said President Barack Obama will sign it. "The Internet is a resource used daily by Americans of all ages," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who brokered an agreement with a Democratic leader earlier this week that helped clear the way for passage. "It's important that they be able to do all of this without the worry of their Internet access being taxed."

The ban on local Internet access taxes had broad support. Even so, some lawmakers remained unhappy over its trade provisions and because the measure omitted a separate, more controversial proposal to let states force online retailers to collect sales taxes for their transactions.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-

Nev., said the bill was full of "missed opportunities and half-measures." Since 1998 in the Internet's early days, Congress has passed a series of bills temporarily prohibiting state and local governments from imposing the types of monthly levies for online access that are common for telephone service. Such legislation has been inspired by a popular sentiment that the Internet should be free, along with Republican opposition to most tax proposals.

Until now, states that imposed Internet access taxes have been allowed to continue. Under the approved bill, those states would have to phase out their taxes by the summer of 2020. Seven states - Hawaii, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin - have been collecting a combined \$563 million yearly from Internet access taxes, according to information gathered by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Forty-nine Republican and 26 Democratic senators backed the legislation Thursday while 17 Democrats and three Republicans voted "no." The House

approved the compromise in December with the backing of nearly all Republicans but just 24 Democrats. Although Obama planned to sign the bill, the White House took issue with a provision opposing the "boycott, divestment and sanctions" movement against Israel that uses the phrase "Israeli-controlled territories." White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the provision contradicts U.S. policy toward Israeli settlements. US policy considers Israeli settlements in the disputed West Bank to be illegitimate.

"As with any bipartisan compromise legislation, there are provisions in this bill that we do not support," Earnest said.

The legislation, especially its trade provisions, has pitted the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business groups supporting the bill against opponents including the AFL-CIO and other labor organizations. Supporters say the measure would strengthen U.S. trading by improving protections for American intellectual property like copyrights and trademarks and upgrading trade law enforcement at the country's borders.

They also cite provisions reinforcing the government's ability to head off China and other countries from manipulating their currency to make their exports more affordable, cracking down on imported products made with child labor and accelerating investigations into companies accused of evading the payment of duties.

Democratic critics complained that its trade protections were insufficient and said negotiators who wrote the compromise weakened it significantly, including the currency manipulation language.

Democrats also disliked provisions barring trade agreements that would curb some efforts to restrict greenhouse gas emissions, a major contributor to climate change, or would force the US to revamp its immigration laws. For years, the drive in Congress to permanently bar taxes on Internet service has languished alongside another effort to empower states to require online retailers to collect state and local sales taxes for online purchases. Supporters of enhancing the collection of online sales taxes say without that, brick-and-mortar stores face a competitive disadvantage. — AP

NYPD HAS USED CELL TRACKING TECHNOLOGY 1,000 TIMES SINCE '08

NEW YORK: The New York Police Department has used secretive cellphone tracking technology more than 1,000 times since 2008, according to data released Thursday by the New York Civil Liberties Union.

A cell-site simulator, also known as a Stingray, is a suitcase-sized device that can sweep up basic cellphone data from a neighborhood by tricking phones into believing it's a cell tower, allowing it to identify unique subscriber numbers. The data are then transmitted to the police, helping them determine the location of a phone without the user even making a call or sending a text message. Police records show the technology has helped catch suspects in kidnappings, rapes, robberies, assaults and murders. Missing people have been discovered. In some cases, no arrest was made or the phone was located but had been ditched. Officers with warrant squads, robbery squads and homicide units all used the technology, according to the records.

Federal law enforcement in September said it would be routinely required to get a search warrant before using the technology - a first effort to create a uniform legal standard for federal authorities. But the policy applies only to federal agencies within the Justice Department and not, as some privacy advocates had hoped, to state and local law enforcement whose use of the equipment has stirred particular concern and scrutiny from local judges. The NYPD would be required to get a warrant if the investigation was a joint effort with federal officials.

The NYPD said it has no written policy for use of the technology, according to the records released by the NYCLU, but general practice is to obtain a "pen register order" - a court order with a lower standard than a warrant.

Larry Byrne, the deputy commissioner of the police department's legal bureau, said police only use the Stingray technology to retrieve cellphone numbers of calls to and from a particular phone, not the content of those communications. He said it was used only after a detective, appearing alongside an assistant district attorney, persuaded a state judge to grant the court order.

The civil liberties union urged the department to create a strict policy on use of the technology and to obtain a warrant.

"New Yorkers have very real concerns about the NYPD's adoption of intrusive surveillance technology," NYCLU Senior Staff Attorney Mariko Hirose said in a statement. "The NYPD should at minimum obtain warrants before using Stingrays to protect the privacy of innocent people." The police have already been adhering to the higher legal standard used by federal law enforcement when applying for a court order, even though state law requires the police present less, said Byrne, who added his office would put the policy in writing.

"Our practice is consistent with what the FBI and the other federal agencies now do," he said. The NYCLU requested documents under the Freedom of Information Law and received the first round of information that it asked for in November. Last year, the NYCLU released records showing the Erie County sheriff's office used Stingrays 47 times in the past four years and indicating that the office obtained a pen register order only once, the agency said. — AP



PARIS: Newly-appointed French Minister of State for Cities, Youth and Sports, Helene Geoffroy (right) and French Sports Minister Patrick Kanner visit the R2K digital school in Paris yesterday. — AFP

GOOGLE SELF-DRIVING CAR EFFORT EXPANDS HIRING

36 JOBS RELATED TO GOOGLE X CAR PROJECT LISTED

SAN FRANCISCO: Alphabet Inc's self-driving project is advertising dozens of jobs on its website with a special focus on manufacturing expertise. Thirty-six jobs related to the Google X car project were listed including engineers working on motion control, displays, robotics and sensors as well as managers charged with operations, materials and marketing.

Google, which declined to comment, has denied in the past that it had any interest in making cars. Many industry experts believe the tech giant will partner with an established carmaker, supplying the software that will pioneer the fully autonomous vehicle. But the jobs listed provide a window into how much hardware Google may build to contribute to the cars of the future. Developing self-driving cars has been a key priority of traditional carmakers, technology companies like Apple Inc ,

Uber Technologies Inc and auto suppliers.

A manufacturing process engineer job listing says the post is responsible for "designing factory assembly stations, optimizing production floor layout, automating critical manufacturing processes and approving fixture designs used in the assembly of electronic modules for the self-driving car."

A manufacturing supplier quality engineer will create and approve "manufacturing inspection processes, equipment, tools gauges and fixtures for raw material, mechanical components and mechanical assemblies."

A mechanical global supply chain manager, meanwhile, is responsible for manufacturing development execution, among other tasks. In January, president of the Google self-driving car project, John Krafcik, said he wanted to form partnerships with established carmakers

and suppliers in 2016 to accelerate work.

When he was hired in September, Krafcik's prior experience at Hyundai and Ford fueled speculation that Google planned to build its own cars. Google posted other jobs outside of manufacturing that provided clues as to the scope of the growing project.

A marketing manager position posted nine days ago requires someone to "shape go-to-market strategy and storytelling to win hearts and minds of community members, influencers and governments."

The company is even searching for a head of real estate and workplace services, suggesting that hiring may continue to rise. Google currently tests its prototype cars in its home base of Mountain View, California and Austin, Texas. It announced last week it would expand testing to Kirkland, Washington later in February. — Reuters



LAS CRUCES: Josephine Sheehan (left) and Hannah Starlet use Google virtual reality headsets to view a rainforest scene in class in Las Cruces, New Mexico. — AP



LAS VEGAS: Matthew Taylor paints in 3D virtual reality at the Intel booth using HTC Vive virtual reality goggles at CES International, in Las Vegas. Oculus founder Palmer Luckey and other pioneers of modern virtual reality technology from such companies as Google and Sony were gathering for a summit on Wednesday about the immersive medium in Hollywood. — AP

ITALY OPENS TAX PROBE ON GOOGLE MANAGERS

MILAN: Italian prosecutors are investigating at least three managers at Alphabet Inc's Google as part of a probe into the company's suspected evasion of taxes worth 227 million euros (\$257 million), investigative sources said on Thursday.

Lawmakers across Europe are looking for ways to change tax rules which allow multinationals to shift untaxed profits into low-tax jurisdictions. Meanwhile, tax authorities in some countries, including Italy, are also trying to use existing tax rules to force companies to pay more tax on the profits generated by sales in their countries.

In response to a request for comment on the investigation, Google said in a statement, "Google complies with the tax laws in every country where we operate. We continue to work with the relevant authorities."

It made the same statement in response to reports last month that the Italian authorities were accusing the company of evading paying 227 million euros in taxes between 2009 and 2013.

The individuals under investigation by a prosecutor in Milan sit on the board of Google Ireland, the company's regional base, the sources said. Italy believes the company failed to declare some 100 million euros in revenues over five years which would have fallen into a 27 percent corporate tax bracket, investigative sources said in January. Finance police also suspect the company should have disclosed some 600 million euros of royalties which would have led to a tax demand for some 200 million euros.

During a parliamentary hearing in London on Thursday, Google declined to confirm Italy's tax claims and a simi-

lar discussion in France. Google has based its regional headquarters in Dublin, where corporate tax rates are much lower than in Italy. The firm says its Italian presence merely provides consulting and marketing services for Google Ireland, the Middle East and Africa. In January Google agreed to pay the British government 130 million pounds (\$188 million) in back taxes in a deal which was widely criticised as being too little.

Last year Apple, which also has its European base in Ireland, agreed to pay Italy's tax office 318 million euros to settle a tax dispute, a source with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The European Union is now expected to bring forward new rules on tax and financial disclosure to curb corporate avoidance which the European Parliament estimates costs the bloc 70 billion euros a year. — Reuters

MYSPACE STILL EXISTS? YES, AND NOW TIME INC OWNS IT

NEW YORK: Myspace still exists? It does, and the company that owns the once-ubiquitous social network is being bought by Time Inc. to help the magazine publisher target ads.

Time Inc. did not say Thursday what it paid. The publisher of People, Sports Illustrated and Time magazines was spun off from entertainment company Time Warner in 2014. It is facing a decline in print ad dollars and posted an \$881 million loss last year.

Myspace's parent company is Viant, which says it provides marketers with access to over 1.2 billion registered users. That's the number of people who have signed in to Myspace since it was created in 2003. Myspace peaked in 2008 with some 76 million US visitors before losing ground to Facebook. News Corp. sold it in 2011 to Justin Timberlake and digital ad company Specific Media, which was founded by brothers Tim, Chris and Russell Vanderhook, for \$35 million, a fraction of News Corp.'s \$580 million purchase.

Today, Myspace is an entertainment-focused site that plays music videos and songs. Chris Vanderhook, now Viant's COO, says the site gets about 20 million to 50 million unique views a month. Travis DeLingua, a spokesman for Viant, declined to give a more precise estimate, saying in an email, "That's accurate but we don't have a more precise number than that."

As a comparison, Facebook has more than a billion monthly active users. Chris Vanderhook says Viant has used Myspace's data files to attract marketers who want demographic information like age, gender and geographic location on online users, and that targeting ability is what attracted Time Inc.

And Timberlake? Tim Vanderhook, Viant's CEO, said the pop star has "been an equity owner the whole time," but declined to say if he still is after the deal with Time Inc. — AP

PANDORA SHARES LEAP ON REPORTS IT MAY BE FOR SALE

SAN FRANCISCO: Shares of Pandora jumped yesterday on unconfirmed reports that the leading Internet radio service might be for sale. Pandora shares that seasawed through the day were up more than eight percent to \$9.11 at the close of official trading, only to see much of that gain vanish in after-market trades that followed release of its latest quarterly earnings figures.

Pandora Media shares ignited after a New York Times report cited unnamed sources as saying that the company is working with Morgan Stanley to meet with potential buyers.

In response to an AFP inquiry, a spokesman for Pandora said the company declined "to comment on rumor or speculation." The California-based firm is the world's largest Internet radio service, based on the number of subscribers, but has come under increasing pressure from rivals such as Spotify and Apple.

Pandora reported that its revenue climbed to \$336 million in the final three months of last year in a 25 percent rise from the same quarter a year earlier, but that it logged a \$19.4 million loss. Revenue for the full year was \$1.16 billion as compared to \$920.8 million in 2014, but Pandora reported a loss of \$169.7 million as compared to a loss of \$30.4 million.

Last year, Pandora made "substantial investments" in building "the world's go-to music destination for listeners and artists alike," chief executive Brian McAndrews said in the earnings release. He contended that this was a year for Pandora to continue investing in positioning the company for "revenue acceleration" in 2017. — AFP

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:50 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)
 01:45 Swamp Brothers
 02:15 Swamp Brothers
 02:40 Big Fish Man
 03:35 Tanked
 04:25 Roaring With Pride
 05:15 Gator Boys
 06:02 Treehouse Masters
 06:49 Big Fish Man
 07:36 Swamp Brothers
 08:00 Swamp Brothers
 08:25 Bad Dog
 09:15 Treehouse Masters
 12:55 Austin Stevens: Snakemaster
 13:50 Gangland Killers
 14:45 Roaring With Pride
 17:30 Gangland Killers
 19:20 Rugged Justice
 20:15 Wild Capture School
 21:10 Treetop Cat Rescue
 22:05 Dr. Dee: Alaska Vet
 23:00 Rugged Justice
 23:55 Austin Stevens: Snakemaster

Discovery CHANNEL HD

00:20 World's Scariest
 01:10 Fast N' Loud
 02:00 Street Outlaws
 03:40 How Do They Do It?
 06:00 Fast N' Loud
 10:10 Gold Rush
 11:00 Gold Divers
 11:50 Pacific Warriors
 12:40 The Liquidator
 14:45 Auction Hunters: Pawn Shop Edition
 16:50 Siberian Cut
 17:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 18:30 Mythbusters
 19:20 You Have Been Warned
 21:00 Edge Of Alaska
 21:50 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 22:40 Railroad Alaska
 23:30 Chaos Caught On Camera
 23:55 Chaos Caught On Camera

Discovery SCIENCE

00:35 Weird Or What?
 01:20 How It's Made
 02:08 Alien Mysteries
 02:55 Space Pioneer
 03:42 Mythbusters
 04:29 Weird Or What?
 05:16 Alien Mysteries
 06:03 Space Pioneer
 06:50 Prototype This
 07:37 How Do They Do It?
 08:23 How It's Made
 12:08 How Do They Do It?
 12:53 Food Factory
 15:32 Food Factory
 15:57 How The Universe Works
 16:44 Space Pioneer
 19:50 Strangest Weather On Earth
 20:40 Storm Chasers
 23:00 Strangest Weather On Earth
 23:45 Mythbusters

ID. INVESTIGATION DISCOVERY

00:40 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
 01:30 The Haunted
 02:20 Ghost Lab
 03:10 Serial Killers
 04:00 Deadly Devotion
 04:45 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
 05:30 The Haunted
 06:20 Fatal Encounters
 07:10 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
 08:00 Fatal Encounters
 08:50 Disappeared
 10:30 On The Case With Paula Zahn
 12:10 The Will
 13:50 California Investigator
 14:40 Dr. G. Medical Examiner
 15:30 On The Case With Paula Zahn
 17:10 Disappeared
 18:50 California Investigator
 19:40 Deadly Affairs
 23:00 A Haunting
 23:50 Deadly Sins



RUSH HOUR 2 ON OSN MOVIES ACTON HD

Disney CHANNEL HD

00:00 Violetta
 00:45 The Hive
 00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 01:40 Hank Zipzer
 02:05 Binny And The Ghost
 02:30 Violetta
 03:15 The Hive
 03:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 04:10 Hank Zipzer
 04:35 Binny And The Ghost
 05:00 Violetta
 05:45 The Hive
 05:50 Mouk
 06:00 Lolirock
 06:25 Sofia The First
 06:50 That's So Raven
 07:15 Gravity Falls
 07:40 Jessie
 08:05 Shake It Up
 08:55 That's So Raven
 09:45 Jessie
 10:10 I Love Violetta
 10:25 Let It Shine: Rap Battle Edition
 12:00 Violetta Recipes
 12:15 Whisker Haven Tales
 12:20 Jessie
 12:45 Jessie
 13:10 Liv And Maddie
 14:00 Austin & Ally
 14:55 I Didn't Do It
 15:45 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
 16:35 Best Friends Whenever
 17:00 Girl Meets World
 17:50 I Love Violetta
 18:00 Lion King 2: Simba's Pride
 19:30 Gravity Falls
 19:55 Dog With A Blog
 20:20 Mako Mermaids
 20:45 Good Luck Charlie
 21:10 Good Luck Charlie
 21:35 H2O: Just Add Water
 22:00 Binny And The Ghost
 22:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 22:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
 23:10 Hank Zipzer
 23:35 Binny And The Ghost

EHD

00:00 House Of DVF
 00:55 The Grace Helbig Show
 01:25 Hollywood Cycle
 02:20 E! News
 03:15 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 04:10 E! Entertainment Special
 06:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 06:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 07:50 Style Star
 08:20 E! News
 09:15 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
 11:10 New Money
 12:05 E! News
 13:05 Botched
 14:05 Hollywood Cycle
 16:00 WAGS
 18:00 E! News
 19:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 20:00 Dash Dolls
 21:00 Christina Milian Turned Up
 22:00 E! News
 23:00 House Of DVF

food

00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 01:00 Ching's Amazing Asia
 02:00 Australian Food Adventures With Matt Moran
 03:00 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
 04:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 05:00 Iron Chef America
 06:00 Chopped
 07:00 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
 08:00 Chopped
 09:00 Amazing Wedding Cakes
 10:00 The Pioneer Woman
 11:00 Siba's Table
 12:00 Chopped
 13:00 Guy's Big Bite
 14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 17:00 Chopped
 18:00 Siba's Table
 19:00 Staten Island Cakes
 20:00 Chopped
 21:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 22:00 Man v Food
 22:30 Man v Food
 23:00 BBQ Crawl

itv CHOICE

02:00 Tales From Northumberland With Robson Green
 02:30 Emmerdale
 05:00 Coronation Street
 07:05 Shetland
 08:00 The Royal Variety Performance 2015
 10:10 Cilla
 11:00 Midsomer Murders
 12:35 The Chase: Celebrity Specials
 13:25 The Jonathan Ross Show
 14:15 Shetland
 15:10 Vera
 16:45 The Jonathan Ross Show
 17:40 Chasing Shadows
 18:35 Tales From Northumberland With Robson Green
 19:00 Vera
 20:45 The Jonathan Ross Show
 21:40 The Chase: Celebrity Specials
 22:30 Tales From Northumberland With Robson Green
 23:00 Coronation Street

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL HD

00:10 4 Babies A Second
 01:00 Mystery Files
 02:00 Survive The Tribe
 02:55 Locked Up Abroad
 03:50 Lockdown: Scam City
 04:45 Beyond Magic
 05:40 How To Win At Everything
 06:35 Drain The Titanic
 07:30 Survive The Tribe
 08:25 Dog Whisperer
 09:20 4 Babies A Second
 10:15 Lawless Island
 11:10 Big Fish, Texas
 12:05 Cold Water Gold
 13:00 Drain The Titanic
 14:00 Mega Factories: Supercars
 15:00 Inside Korea's Garden Of The Gods
 16:00 How To Win At Everything
 17:00 Beyond Magic
 18:00 The Border
 19:00 Lockdown: Scam City
 20:00 How To Win At Everything
 20:25 How To Win At Everything
 20:50 Beyond Magic
 21:40 The Border
 22:30 Lockdown: Scam City
 23:20 Locked Up Abroad

OSN FIRST HD COMEDY

01:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
 04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 06:00 Til Death
 06:30 Community
 07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 08:30 Cristela
 10:30 Community
 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 13:00 Cristela
 13:30 Community
 17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 18:00 The Muppets
 18:30 Dr. Ken
 19:00 Last Man Standing
 19:30 Life In Pieces
 20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 22:00 Saturday Night Live
 23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers

OSN FIRST HD

00:00 The Strain
 01:00 Grey's Anatomy
 02:00 Dominion
 04:00 Good Morning America
 06:00 Parenthood
 07:00 Backstrom
 08:00 The Player
 09:00 American Idol
 11:00 Backstrom
 13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 14:00 American Idol
 16:00 Live Good Morning America
 17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 18:00 The Player
 19:00 Grey's Anatomy
 20:00 Stitches
 21:00 Criminal Minds
 22:00 The Blacklist
 23:00 Minority Report

OSN MOVIES ACTION

00:00 Fury
 02:00 Twixt
 04:00 Hercules
 06:00 Breakdown
 08:00 Marvel's Next Avengers: Heroes Of Tomorrow
 09:30 Rush Hour
 11:15 The Hulk
 13:45 The X Files
 15:45 Breakdown
 17:30 Rush Hour 2
 19:15 The Hulk
 21:45 Guardians Of The Galaxy

OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

00:00 Twixt-PG15
 02:00 Hercules-PG15
 04:00 Breakdown-PG15
 06:00 Marvel's Next Avengers: Heroes Of Tomorrow-PG
 07:30 Rush Hour-PG15
 09:15 The Hulk-PG15
 11:45 The X Files-PG15
 13:45 Breakdown-PG15
 15:30 Rush Hour 2-PG15
 17:15 The Hulk-PG15
 19:45 Guardians Of The Galaxy
 22:00 Death Race-18x

OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

00:00 22 Jump Street
 02:00 The Brass Teapot
 04:00 Vampire Dog
 06:00 Encino Man
 08:00 The Love Punch
 10:00 Vampire Dog
 12:00 Tooth Fairy
 14:00 Streetdance: All Stars
 16:00 The Love Punch
 18:00 Man Of The House
 20:00 Life Of Crime
 22:00 The Inbetweeners Movie 2

OSN MOVIES DRAMA

01:00 Won't Back Down-PG15
 03:00 Goodbye World-PG15

05:00 Foreverland-PG15
 07:00 Atlas Shrugged Part 2: The Strike-PG15
 09:00 Paranoia-PG15
 11:00 Foreverland-PG15
 13:00 Step Up All In-PG15
 15:00 Wrath-PG15
 17:00 Paranoia-PG15
 19:00 Scenic Route-PG15
 21:00 Deadfall-PG15
 23:00 Maps To The Stars-18

OSN MOVIES HD FESTIVAL

01:00 Great Expectations
 03:15 Short Term 12
 05:00 Won't Back Down
 07:00 October Sky
 09:00 The Nightmare Before Christmas
 10:30 Won't Back Down
 13:00 Grace Of Monaco
 15:00 Against The Ropes
 17:00 The Nightmare Before Christmas
 19:00 A Mighty Heart
 21:00 Blue Ruin
 23:00 The People vs Larry Flynt

OSN MOVIES HD

01:15 Ashes-PG15
 03:00 Kon-Tiki-PG15
 05:00 Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2-PG15
 07:00 Make Your Move-PG15
 09:00 Draft Day-PG15
 11:00 The Hundred-Foot Journey
 13:15 The Good Lie-PG15
 15:15 Louder Than Words-PG15
 17:00 Pompeii-PG15
 18:45 Kingsman: The Secret Service
 21:00 Accidental Love-PG15
 23:00 The Gambler-18

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

01:00 Blackie And Kanuto
 02:45 Delhi Safari
 04:30 Cher Ami
 06:00 The Flintstones & WWE: Stone Age Smackdown
 07:45 Goat Story 2
 09:30 Tarzan
 11:15 Echo Planet
 12:45 Delhi Safari



THE GAMBLER ON OSN MOVIES HD

14:30 Bolts And Blip
16:00 Jungle Shuffle
18:00 Tarzan
20:00 Miffy The Movie
22:00 Bolts And Blip
23:30 Jungle Shuffle



01:00 Selma-PG15
03:30 Knight Rusty-PG
05:30 Get On Up-PG15
08:00 Song For Marion-PG15
09:45 Marvel's Hulk vs. Thor & Wolverine-PG
11:15 Les Miserables-PG15
14:00 The Single Moms Club-PG15
16:00 Song For Marion-PG15
17:45 Blackhat-PG15
20:00 The Imitation Game-PG15
22:00 Dallas Buyers Club-18



00:45 The Day I Almost Died
01:35 An Hour To Save Your Life
02:25 My Naked Secret
03:15 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners...
04:05 Secret Eaters
05:00 Secret Eaters
06:00 Say Yes To The Dress
06:25 Dare To Wear
07:15 The Autistic Gardener
08:05 Catwalk 30+
08:55 Catwalk 30+
09:45 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners...
10:35 7 Little Johnstons
11:25 Jon & Kate Plus 8
13:30 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
14:20 Belief
15:10 Cake Boss
17:15 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners...
18:05 Oprah's Lifeclass
18:55 Cake Boss
19:20 Curvy Brides
19:45 No Limbs, No Limits
21:00 Belief
21:50 Oprah's Lifeclass
22:40 Long Island Medium
23:05 90 Days To Wed



00:15 Lords Of Dogtown
01:55 Silent Witness
03:25 Flesh + Blood
05:30 The Indian Fighter
07:00 Alexander The Great
09:15 Earthbound
10:50 Everybody's Fine
12:30 Still Life: A Three Pines Mystery
14:00 Earthbound
15:35 Les Miserables (1998)
17:45 Mannequin
19:15 A Guy Thing
21:00 Fear The Walking Dead
22:00 Breaking Bad
23:00 Cold Mountain



00:25 Doctors
00:55 Doctors
01:25 Father Brown
02:15 War And Peace
03:55 Doctors
08:30 Eastenders
10:00 Eastenders
10:30 New Tricks
13:15 Casualty
14:10 Doctors
15:10 The Musketeers
18:00 Doctors
18:30 Eastenders
19:00 Moone Boy
19:25 Father Brown
20:15 Dickensian
21:00 Dickensian
21:50 War And Peace
22:35 Unforgotten
23:25 Doctors
23:55 Eastenders
00:25 Doctors
01:25 Father Brown
02:15 War And Peace
03:55 Doctors
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21:00 Dickensian
21:50 War And Peace
22:35 Unforgotten
23:25 Doctors
23:55 Eastenders
00:25 Doctors
01:25 Father Brown
02:15 War And Peace
03:55 Doctors



00:40 Solved
01:30 Before We Ruled The Earth
02:20 Mile Wide Tornado: Oklahoma Disaster
03:05 Skyfighters
03:50 Solved
04:35 Extreme Engineering
05:20 Deadliest Catch
06:05 Bizarre Foods
06:50 Alps From Above
07:35 Origins
08:00 Deadliest Catch
10:30 Bizarre Foods
13:50 Extreme Engineering
18:00 Origins
18:25 Origins
18:50 America: Facts vs. Fiction
19:15 America: Facts vs. Fiction
19:40 Shadow Ops
20:30 North America
21:20 America: Facts vs. Fiction
21:45 America: Facts vs. Fiction
22:10 Mile Wide Tornado: Oklahoma Disaster

23:00 North America
23:50 How We Built The Bomb



00:00 Measuring Evil: Britain's Worst Killers
01:00 My Crazy Ex
02:00 The Last Goodbye
03:00 Ms. Homicide
04:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
05:00 The Last Goodbye
06:00 My Crazy Ex
07:00 The FBI Files
08:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
10:00 Killers: Behind The Myth
11:00 Killers
12:00 Killers
13:00 The First 48
16:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
17:00 I Killed My BFF
20:00 Broadmoor: A History Of The Criminally Insane
21:00 Monster In My Family
22:00 Monster In My Family
23:00 The Last Goodbye



00:05 Henry Hugglemonster
00:20 Calimero
00:35 Zou
00:50 Loopdidoo
01:05 Art Attack
01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
01:45 Calimero
02:00 Zou
02:15 Loopdidoo
02:30 Art Attack
02:55 Henry Hugglemonster



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

03:05 Calimero
03:20 Zou
03:30 Loopdidoo
03:45 Art Attack
04:10 Henry Hugglemonster
04:20 Calimero
04:35 Zou
04:45 Loopdidoo
05:00 Art Attack
05:25 Henry Hugglemonster
05:35 Calimero
05:50 Zou
06:00 Loopdidoo
06:15 Art Attack
06:35 Henry Hugglemonster
06:50 Calimero
07:00 Zou
07:20 Loopdidoo
07:35 Art Attack
08:00 Calimero
08:10 Zou
08:25 Loopdidoo
08:40 Miles From Tomorrow
09:05 Sofia The First: The Floating Palace
09:45 The Wizard Of Dizz
10:35 Doc McStuffins
11:00 Sofia The First
11:30 Goldie & Bear
12:00 Miles From Tomorrow
12:25 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
12:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
13:15 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
13:35 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
14:00 Sofia The First
14:25 Goldie & Bear
14:50 Doc McStuffins
15:15 Zou
15:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
15:55 Loopdidoo
16:10 Miles From Tomorrow
16:35 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
17:00 Sofia The First
17:25 Lion King 3: Hakuna Matata
18:40 Goldie & Bear
19:05 Miles From Tomorrow
19:30 Sofia The First
19:55 Doc McStuffins
20:10 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
20:35 Miles From Tomorrow
21:00 Goldie & Bear
21:30 Sofia The First
22:00 Jungle Cubs
22:25 Aladdin
22:50 Gummi Bears
23:20 Lilo And Stitch
23:45 Cars Toons
23:50 Zou



00:00 Programmes Start At 7:00am
KSA
07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:25 K. C. Undercover
07:50 Supa Strikas
08:15 Annedroids
08:40 Lab Rats
09:10 Kirby Buckets
09:35 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
10:00 Supa Strikas
10:25 Supa Strikas
10:50 Supa Strikas
11:20 Supa Strikas
11:45 Supa Strikas
12:10 Supa Strikas
12:35 Supa Strikas
13:00 Pants On Fire
14:30 Phineas And Ferb
14:45 Kickin' It
15:10 Mickey Mouse
15:15 Rocket Monkeys
15:40 Wander Over Yonder
16:05 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
16:30 Kirby Buckets
16:55 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
17:25 K. C. Undercover
17:50 Supa Strikas
18:15 Lab Rats
18:40 Mighty Med
19:10 Annedroids
19:35 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
20:00 Kirby Buckets
20:25 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:55 K. C. Undercover
21:20 Supa Strikas
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Mighty Med
22:40 Super Matrak
23:05 Super Matrak
23:30 Boyster



00:45 Caribbean Life
01:10 Hawaii Life
01:35 World's Most Extreme Homes
02:00 House Hunters
02:55 Rehab Addict
04:10 Fixer Upper
05:05 Caribbean Life
05:30 Hawaii Life
05:55 Extreme Homes
06:45 Million Dollar Rooms
07:35 Rehab Addict
08:00 Extreme Homes
08:50 Restoration SOS Buffalo
09:15 Hawaii Life
09:40 Giada At Home
10:05 Giada At Home
10:30 Beachfront Bargain Hunt
11:00 Beachfront Bargain Hunt
11:25 Caribbean Life
11:50 Hawaii Life
12:15 Rehab Addict
12:40 Rehab Addict
13:10 Curb Appeal
13:35 Curb Appeal
14:00 Junk Gypsies
14:25 Junk Gypsies
14:50 Cousins On Call
15:15 Killer Kitchen Makeover
15:45 Giada's Weekend Getaways
16:10 Giada's Weekend Getaways
16:35 Rachel Hunter's Tour Of Beauty
17:25 America's Most Desperate Kitchens
18:15 Giada In Italy
18:40 Giada In Italy
19:05 Flip Or Flop
20:00 Extreme Homes
20:55 House Hunters
21:45 Hawaii Life
22:10 Restoration SOS Buffalo
22:35 Rehab Addict
23:00 Million Dollar Rooms



00:20 Hoard Hunters
01:10 Leepu & Pitbull
02:00 Counting Cars
02:25 Counting Cars
02:50 Big Rig Bounty Hunters
03:15 Big Rig Bounty Hunters
03:40 Swamp People
04:30 Storage Wars Texas
05:00 Sean Bean On Waterloo
06:00 Shark Wranglers
06:50 Ax Men
07:40 Duck Dynasty
08:05 Duck Dynasty
08:30 Counting Cars
08:55 Swamp People
09:45 Down East Dickering
10:35 Hunting Hitler
11:25 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The Superstition...
12:15 The Curse Of Oak Island
13:05 American Pickers
13:55 Hunting Hitler
14:45 The Great Martian War 1913
16:25 Storage Wars Texas
16:50 Shark Wranglers
17:40 Duck Dynasty
18:05 Duck Dynasty
18:30 Pawn Stars
18:55 Pawn Stars
19:20 American Pickers
20:10 The Curse Of Oak Island
21:00 Outlaw Chronicles: Hells Angels
21:50 Ax Men
22:40 Miracle Rising: South Africa



01:00 Toe 2 Toe With Sam Stout
01:30 MMA Meltdown With Gabriel Morency
02:00 Copa Podio
03:00 Fight News Now
04:00 Hard Knocks Fighting 48
06:30 WSOF 22: Palhares vs. Shields
09:00 Best Of TKO
10:00 Best Of Gladiator Challenge
11:00 Best Of SportFight
12:00 Pancrase Classics
14:00 Fight News Now
15:00 Hard Knocks Fighting 48
17:30 MMA Meltdown With Gabriel Morency



KTS 10TH YEAR PONGAL VIZHA CELEBRATION

Kuwait Tamil Sangam organized, New Year and Pongal Vizha program on 22nd January, 2016 at American International School, Hawally, Kuwait. The program started off at 5:15 PM with lighting up of the Kuthu Villakku by Deputy GM of Aquasan Co. Jaseem Al Aidan, and Country Manager of Srilankan Airlines Anthoni Pillai. Followed by a welcome address by the KTS president Chelladurai. The chief guest of the program was the Indian

Ambassador to Kuwait His Excellency Sunil Jain and Jasim Al Nouri, Managing Director, Nouri Industrial Est, who very well appreciated the show and Pongal decoration done by KTS committee members. A video was played about KTS role in relief operations for the suffered peoples in devastating flood in Chennai and Cuddalore districts in Tamil Nadu during December, 2015. KTS has donated 10 lakhs and the benefits reached 900 families

directly. KTS appreciate the volunteers / friends, who joined their hands in helping for the suffered families. Pongal Live orchestra was performed by "Vijay TV Super singer fame" Mani & band along with cine playback singers Srinivas, Santhosh, Sharanya, Ranina. "Manada Mayilada fame" Gokul and Zoo Zoo showcased their wonderful performance in the stage. Actress Rohini was the special guest for the evening.





AL MULLA EXCHANGE AWES GUESTS WITH CHANNAUPULI SHOW IN COOPERATION WITH THE SRI LANKAN EMBASSY

Kuwait's leading exchange company, Al Mulla Exchange, organized a cultural fare for the Sri Lankan community in Kuwait at the American International School on Saturday, as part of the Sri Lankan festive week tied to the country's National Day on Feb 4.

Sri Lankan Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Kandeepan Bala, was the chief guest at the show, which was organized in association with the Sri Lankan Embassy in Kuwait, and co-sponsored by Sri Lanka's leading bank, Commercial Bank.

The main highlight of the show was the ChannaUpuli Dance Ensemble, who through their extraordinary performances, have brought international fame to Sri Lanka. The ensemble has had the privilege of performing in many famous theatres, including Sadler's Well Theatre and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in the UK, as well as the Sydney Opera House and the Regent Theatre in Australia. In 1998 this troupe had the privilege of performing in the presence of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at the Presidential House when Sri Lanka celebrated its 50 years of Independence.

ChannaUpuli won the first place out of 178 countries participating in the Lions Parade at the International Lions Convention in Denver in 2003. They also participated in the International Lions Convention in Hong Kong in 2004, Chicago in 2007 and Thailand in 2008.

Talking about the show, Al Mulla Exchange's General Manager, Rakesh Joshi, said that the cultural event is dedicated to their customers, especially to the Sri Lankan community in Kuwait. "We are proud to have been part of such a prestigious event, presenting a world-renowned dance troupe and an amazing visual and aural treat to the people."

The GM concluded on the note that Al Mulla Exchange will continue to organize such exclusive programs in Kuwait to entertain its customers, while continuing to provide world-class products and services to them.



INDONESIA BANS 'GAY' EMOJIS ON MESSAGING APPS

JAKARTA: In the latest crackdown on gay rights in Indonesia, the government has demanded all instant messaging apps remove same-sex emoticons or face a ban in the Muslim-majority country. The emojis—which are available on the popular apps LINE and Whatsapp as well as Facebook and Twitter—depict same-sex couples holding hands and the rainbow flag, commonly used to symbolize the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

“Such contents are not allowed in Indonesia based on our cultural law

and the religious norms and the operators must respect that,” Ismail Cawidu, spokesman for the Communication and Information Ministry said yesterday. He said of particular concern was that the colorful emojis and stickers could appeal to children. “Those things might be considered normal in some Western countries, while in Indonesia it’s practically impossible,” he said.

Cawidu said the ministry had contacted all companies that used such content, including Twitter and Facebook, and failure to comply with the request to remove the emojis could

lead to the apps being banned in Indonesia. LINE Indonesia has already removed its gay emojis from online stores and issued an apology. “LINE regrets the incidents of some stickers which are considered sensitive by many people,” the messaging app said in a statement. “We ask for your understanding because at the moment we are working on this issue to remove the stickers.”

While homosexuality is not illegal in Indonesia, the topic remains a controversial subject. In January, the University of Indonesia told a support

group providing sex education and counseling for LGBT students that they did not have permission to hold meetings on campus. And last year Aceh, the only province in Indonesia which implements sharia law, introduced caning as a punishment for gay sex. Prominent gay activist Hartoyo said the move to ban the emojis was symptomatic of a wider crackdown on LGBT rights. “This is just the latest in a series of incidents that have happened recently,” he said. “The government has let this ignorance go on for far too long and it has put our nation in danger.” — AFP

‘GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER’ IS JAPAN’S LOW AUTOPSY RATE HIDING KILLERS?

TOKYO: Dubbed the “Black Widow” after the mate-eating spider, Chisako Kakehi awaits trial: Initially arrested on suspicion of murdering eight lovers for insurance payouts, her case is notorious in Japan as much for its body count as the shortcomings of the investigation. No autopsies were reportedly performed on six of those eight at the time of death, a situation experts say is indicative of Japan’s flawed system, warning the country’s low post mortem exam rate may mean criminals are getting away with murder.

In 2014, 11.7 percent of “unusual deaths”—the term used for cases in which cause is not immediately clear—resulted in autopsies, National Police Agency (NPA) figures show. That compares with 40 percent in England and Wales in 2014. And in Sweden, autopsies are performed on 95 percent of “unclear” deaths, according to the National Board of Forensic Medicine. “The low autopsy rate means there is a higher chance crimes are being overlooked,” said Hirotaro Iwase, professor at the forensic medicine department of Chiba University.

Despite government pledges to increase the autopsy rate to 20 percent by this year, the figure remains around half that. Iwase attributes this to a shortage of forensic specialists as well as budget cuts at public universities, which carry out the majority of the crime-related procedure. Some university forensic departments are on the verge of collapse - 20 out of Japan’s 47 provinces have only one professor performing autopsies, according to the Japanese Society of Forensic Medicine.

In the Kakehi case, police initially determined her previous partners died from illness. Her arrest only came after police discovered her most recent husband, 75-year-old Isao Kakehi, died from cyanide poisoning and began looking into the earlier cases and found a pattern. The 69-year-old has been charged

with three murders and one attempted murder. Police investigated four other cases but ultimately could not find sufficient evidence to charge her, according to local media reports.

‘Crime is being overlooked’

According to OECD data on safety published in 2015, the homicide rate, which is the number of murders per 100,000 people, was only 0.3 in Japan while it was 5.2 in the US, 0.6 in France and 0.5 in Germany. There were 933 murder and attempted murder cases in 2015 in Japan, according to police, with the number on a declining trend since 2004, but the low autopsy rate may be hiding the true figure, experts say. “I believe crimes would be less overlooked if there is a system where autopsies are conducted on bodies where the cause of death is unclear even if the cases are not suspicious,” explained Professor Shinichi Kubo, a forensic scientist at Fukuoka University.

Hidemichi Morosawa, an expert on police investigation at Tokiwa University, said he suspects part of the problem is that officers likely prefer to avoid the demands of murder cases, a huge burden on workloads. “Police should send as many bodies as possible for autopsies” to increase the chance of determining possible foul play, he said. But due to the shortage of qualified forensic staff, police with more than one corpse needing urgent examination often have to drive hours to neighboring provinces for autopsies to be performed.

It took three deaths for police to arrest Kanae Kijima in 2010, who allegedly killed her boyfriends through carbon monoxide poisoning—she burned charcoal inside after giving the men sleeping pills to knock them out. Police initially determined the first victim had committed suicide therefore did not conduct a postmortem examination. Kijima was found guilty and sentenced to death. And in 2007,

when teenage sumo wrestler Takashi Saito died during training, police concluded he had succumbed to heart failure. His parents, suspicious of the circumstances around his passing, demanded an autopsy, which determined he was beaten to death.

Toxicology tests

Performing autopsies is arduous and can take up to two days if a body is badly damaged, Iwase said, adding that specialists face a high risk of contracting Hepatitis C or HIV. And despite such challenges, forensic scientists on university salaries often earn less than doctors working at even small hospitals and also must juggle autopsies with academic research and teaching. Police have been beefing up the number of officers qualified to conduct visual postmortem inspections, jumping to 340 last year from 160 in 2008, according to the NPA. They must have more than 10 years of experience in murder cases as well as 10 weeks of special training, said Kazuhito Shinka, who heads the NPA division supervising post mortem inspections. “It’s important for police to cooperate with doctors with forensic knowledge,” he said.

But Shinka added thorough investigations of relatives of the dead are needed to ascertain any motives for murder. Iwase says authorities have “lost their motivation” to improve the situation. “Ministries are running away from their responsibilities and they’re avoiding budget requests. As a result, the autopsy rate does not improve,” he said. In a sign lessons are being learned from the Kakehi case, from April, police will conduct toxicology tests on all bodies that they handle. Iwase added toxicology tests were also necessary to help determine the cause of death. He explained: “You cannot detect crimes just by conducting an autopsy. You need to fully carry out a toxicology test as well. Otherwise you’ll miss crimes.” — AFP



WEETHALLE: Photo shows a dead brown snake strung up on a spider’s web with a ‘daddy long legs’ spider by its tail in Weethalle, about 400 kilometers west of Sydney. — AFP

NOT SO INCY WINCY: SPIDER KILLS SNAKE

SYDNEY: A plucky little spider has once again proved that size doesn’t matter by taking on—and beating—a much larger venomous snake, in a very Australian telling of the story of David and Goliath. The spindly Daddy Long Legs spider appeared to have come out on top after going head-to-head with a brown snake in rural New South Wales.

Farmer Patrick Lees said he was astonished to discover the expired reptile dangling from a web at his outback home in Weethalle, about 400 kilometers west of Sydney. “The snake was already dead, I made sure of that before I took the photo,” he said, referring to the creature’s reputation for its deadly venom and quick bite. Lees’ photo, posted on his Aussie Farmer Facebook page, has proved a huge hit in a country well known for its array of fearsome animals.

Many Australians take Mother Nature in their stride, but visitors to the vast island country marvel at its range of dangerous wildlife, from gargantuan saltwater crocodiles to the deadly Sydney Funnel Web Spider. Brown snakes are common in eastern Australia, and can be as much as two metres (six feet) long when fully grown, according to the website of the Australian Museum. Their bite, which delivers a potent mix of neurotoxins and coagulants, can be fatal to humans. Lees said that after taking his photograph, he left the determined little arachnid to enjoy its moment. “I can’t deny the spider its victory,” Lees said. “I’m not sure if it killed it but it definitely won in the long run.” — AFP

FAREWELL PHILAE!

EARTH SAYS GOODBYE TO COMET PROBE

PARIS: Scientists gave up yesterday trying to contact robot lab Philae, stubbornly silent on the surface of a comet streaking through space-closing a captivating chapter in an historic quest. "Time to say goodbye to Philae," announced the German Aerospace Center DLR, and said it "will no longer be sending any commands." Philae's comet host is moving further and further away from the Sun and its battery-boosting rays, and by this point "there is indeed little hope to still get a signal," project manager Stephan Ulamec said.

The probe was "probably" covered with comet dust, and shaded on the craggy surface of its alien home-comet 67P/Churyomov-Gerasimenko. Comet-orbiting mothership Rosetta will continue listening for Philae for a month or two, until it can no longer spare the energy required. But Ulamec insisted: "to be honest and to be realistic: It's really not likely that we will hear anything any more." The washing machine-sized probe's exploits captured the hearts and minds of thousands, hardened scientists and children alike, who followed its every move via social media and fretted when it fell silent.

Philae touched down on November 12, 2014, after a 10-year, 6.5-billion-kilometre (four-billion-mile) odyssey through space, piggybacking on Rosetta. Placing a probe on 67P marked a breakthrough moment in the European Space Agency's mission to prod a comet for clues to the origins of life on Earth. The months that followed yielded exciting scientific finds, and more than a little drama, as Philae intermittently phoned home between long

bouts of sleep. The lander "tweeted" about its exploits, also captured in a cartoon depicting Philae as an intrepid adventurer with a hard hat and studded boots-Rosetta's brave little "brother".

Permanent hibernation

Philae last phoned home on July 9 last year as the comet closed in on its closest and most sunbathed point, or perihelion, reached on August 13. Looping out again on its 6.5-year orbit, the comet by now is some 350 million km from the Sun, likely too far and much too cold for Philae to recharge and reboot. Once out of the Sun's reach, Philae "will go into permanent hibernation," according to the DLR, which hosts the lander control centre in Cologne. "Still listening, but I fear @Philae2014 is facing tough conditions on #67P..." Rosetta "tweeted" yesterday.

The tweet sported a drawing of a worried-looking Rosetta imagining Philae in a thought bubble-a cute box-shaped character asleep on a mat on the ground in complete darkness between cliffs, little fingers gripping a blanket. "... we can't prove anything, but certainly the suggestion is that the lander is either dead or broken," European Space Agency (ESA) senior science adviser Mark McCaughrean said. "In July-August, we tried very hard with Rosetta to make contact, including flying trajectories close enough and in the same direction as those where we did hear from Philae previously," but to no avail.

General consensus: 'It's over'

The absence of a signal does in

itself not prove the lander is dead, as it may simply be unable to make contact with Rosetta. But after seven months of silence, "I think the general consensus is that it's over," said McCaughrean. Philae's landing 15 months ago was bumpy-the lab bounced several times before ending up at an angle in shade.

But this also changed its mission specs. If it had been out in the open, as planned, Philae would likely have overheated around April 2015, as 67P approached the Sun. Instead, the probe entered standby mode on November 15, 2014 after sending home data from some 60 hours of comet sniffing and prodding with eight of its 10 instruments. It awoke on June 13, and "tweeted": "Hello Earth! Can you hear me?" After eight brief contacts, the lab fell silent again. In January this year, ground controllers relayed commands for Philae to activate an onboard instrument in the hopes this would shake dust from its solar panels and better align the robot.

They heard nothing back. Rosetta will continue its comet observations, said ESA, moving in closer and closer until September when it will join Philae on the surface of 67P in an endless loop around the Sun. Just before touching down, Rosetta will try and spot Philae, allowing scientists to finally pinpoint its exact location and recalibrate some of the data it had sent home. "We should not be too sad about what we could not achieve, but should be happy about what we could achieve," Ulamec said. "We knew there was an end to the mission." — AFP

INDIAN STATE GOA THREATENS TO RECLASSIFY PEACOCKS AS VERMIN

MUMBAI: India's popular tourist state of Goa has ruffled a few feathers with its proposal to reclassify the national bird the peacock as vermin, making them easier to cull, reports said yesterday. The move comes just weeks after Goa's legislative assembly caused similar consternation when it ruled that the resort state's beloved coconut trees were not in fact trees, but palms. "We have listed several wild species including wild boar, monkey, wild bison (Gaur), peacock as nuisance animals," the Press Trust of India quoted Goa's agriculture minister Ramesh Tawadkar as saying.

"These animals are creating (a) problem for farmers and are destroying their cultivation in rural areas," he told reporters on Thursday evening, according to the PTI report. The colorful peacock is India's national bird and is protected under the country's Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. But animal rights groups fear the Goa government's proposal to reclassify the peacock as a "nuisance animal" is intended to make it easier to cull the birds. "Goa seems to be trying to... (have) India's national bird labeled this way so that they may be hunted and killed," Poorva Josphura, the CEO of PETA India said.

"If Goa wants to remain on the tourist map, people expect it to be a paradise for animals too," she added. Last month, opposition politicians in Goa reacted with outrage after the state government reclassified the coconut tree as a palm because it doesn't have any branches. Officials said it was necessary to remove the coconut from the list of protected trees to make it easier to fell "economically unviable" and dangerous trees, and replace them with newer ones. — AFP

JAPAN PATERNITY LEAVE TRAILBLAZER QUILTS OVER THE BIKINI MODEL AFFAIR

TOKYO: A Japanese politician who made headlines over his quest to take paternity leave quit yesterday after admitting to an affair with a bikini model while his wife was pregnant. Kensuke Miyazaki, 35, shook up Japan's conservative political scene when he sought to take a month's leave to help his then pregnant wife, a first for a male Japanese lawmaker. His quest drew criticism from many politicians in a country where fathers taking time off to care for children is rare.

But Miyazaki won the backing of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who supported his trailblazing idea. Yesterday, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker announced his resignation after a weekly magazine revealed his affair with the 34-year-old woman while they were in Kyoto, his constituency. He met the woman-also a professional kimono dresser-when she was helping Miyazaki and other politicians dress up in ceremonial garb for the opening of Japan's parliament last month. — AFP

CLINIC
PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (11/02/2016 TO 17/02/2016)

SHARQIA-1 THE FINEST HOURS ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: THE ROAD CHIP THE FINEST HOURS THE FINEST HOURS THE FINEST HOURS	1:00 PM 1:30 PM 3:30 PM 5:30 PM 7:30 PM 10:00 PM 12:30 AM	SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS	6:00 PM 8:00 PM 10:00 PM 12:30 AM
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SHARQIA-3 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES BROOKLYN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES BROOKLYN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES BROOKLYN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES	11:30 AM 1:30 PM 3:45 PM 6:00 PM 8:15 PM 10:30 PM 12:45 AM	AVENUES-2 BROOKLYN BROOKLYN BROOKLYN BROOKLYN BROOKLYN BROOKLYN	12:00 PM 2:30 PM 5:00 PM 7:30 PM 10:00 PM 12:30 AM
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		BAIRAQ-2 SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS SHAKET DABOUS	12:45 PM 2:45 PM 4:45 PM 6:45 PM 8:30 PM

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Kaleel S/o** Mohamed Mohideen, holder of Indian Passport No. G3449357, residing at No. 2 Samayana Sheik Mohamed Moopan Street, Melapalayam, Tirunelveli Dist., Pin-627005, Tamilnadu. Shall henceforth be known as Kaleel Rahman. **(C 5131) 11-2-2016**

I **Amir Karim Makandar** holder of Indian Passport No. F7734039,

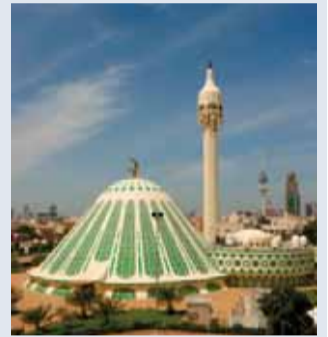
A/P - 173 Aggani Tal-khed Dist. Ratnagiri, hereby changed my name to Amir Karim Nevarekar. **(C 5129) 6-2-2019**

ACCOMMODATION

Sharing accommodation available in a C-AC flat for decent couple or working ladies at Jabriya, area 10, near Jabriya Indian school from 1st March 2016. Please contact: 99300513. **(C 5130) 7-2-2016**

Prayer timings

Fajr:	05:09
Shorook	06:29
Duhr:	12:02
Asr:	15:12
Maghrib:	17:36
Isha:	18:53



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Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

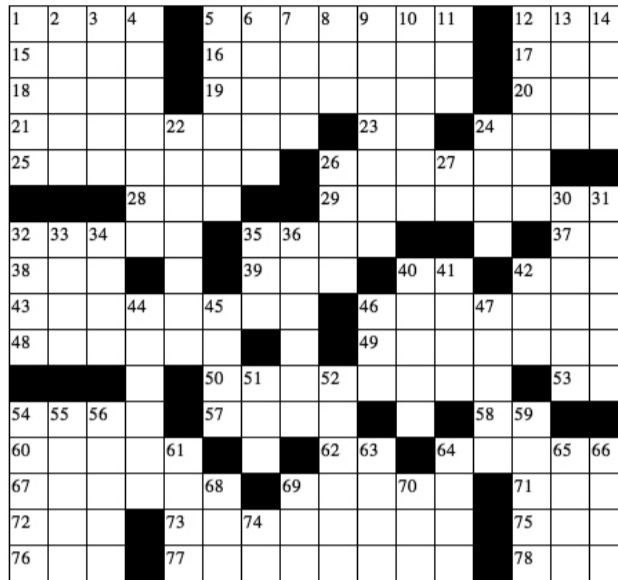
Fruit

Find and circle all of the fruit that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional fruit.

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

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| APPLES | DATE | ORANGE |
| APRICOT | FIG | PAPAYA |
| AVOCADO | GRAPEFRUIT | PEACH |
| BANANA | GRAPES | PEAR |
| BLACKBERRY | KIWIFRUIT | PERSIMMON |
| BLUEBERRY | KUMQUAT | PINEAPPLE |
| CANTALOUPE | LEMON | PLUM |
| CHERRIES | LIME | POMEGRANATE |
| CHOCHECHERRY | LYCHEE | RASPBERRY |
| COCONUT | MANGO | RHUBARB |
| CRABAPPLE | MULBERRY | STRAWBERRY |
| CRANBERRY | NECTARINE | WATERMELON |

C R O S S W O R D 1 1 6 7



ACROSS

1. A fraudulent business scheme.
5. A decorative framework to conceal curtain fixtures at the top of a window casing.
12. System of measurement based on centimeters and grams and seconds.
15. Goddess of the dead and queen of the underworld.
16. A member of a North American Plains people (now living in Oklahoma and Wyoming).
17. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
18. Any place of complete bliss and delight and peace.
19. Someone who dwells in a cave.
20. A flexible container with a single opening.
21. A skirt consisting of a rectangle of calico or printed cotton.
23. A state in the Rocky Mountains.
25. Type genus of the Fregatidae.
28. A member of the Shoshonean people of Utah and Colorado and New Mexico.
29. A mixture of gases (mostly methane) that form in coal mines and become explosive when mixed with air.
32. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
37. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
38. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
39. A rapid bustling commotion.
43. A race between candidates for elective office.
48. Small space in a tissue or part such as the area between veins on a leaf or an insect's wing.
49. The trait of lacking restraint or control.
50. A city in northwestern Mexico near the California border.
53. A state in northwestern United States on the Pacific.
54. Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
57. Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
58. Informal terms for a mother.
60. A projecting bay window corbeled or cantilevered out from a wall.
62. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
67. Make a high-pitched, screeching noise, as of a door.
71. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
72. A police officer who investigates crimes.
73. Any of several varieties of red-skinned apple.
75. The 19th letter of the Greek alphabet.
76. Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.
77. Either of two folds of skin that can be moved to cover or open the eye.
78. A belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school.

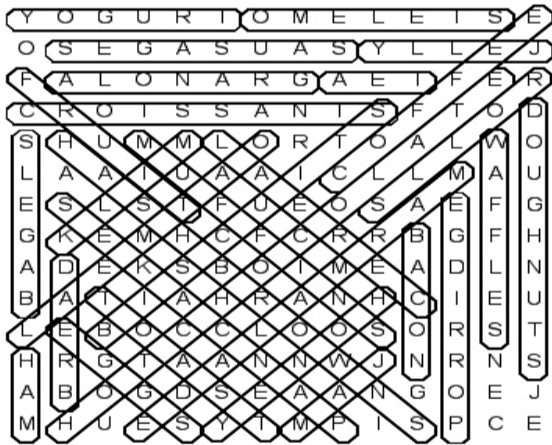
DOWN

1. A support that consists of a horizontal surface for holding objects.

2. Any of numerous trees of the family Cupressaceae that resemble cedars.
3. A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trademarks Aleve and Anaprox and Aflaxen).
4. The capital and largest city of Managua.
5. Leave voluntarily.
6. An anti-TNF compound (trade name Arava) that is given orally.
7. Rock that in its molten form (as magma) issues from volcanos.
8. Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
9. A republic in southwestern Africa on the south Atlantic coast (formerly called South West Africa).
10. A cloth used as a head covering (and veil and shawl) by Muslim and Hindu women.
11. The longest division of geological time.
12. A small tent used as a dressing room beside the sea or a swimming pool.
13. Taken or to be taken at random.
14. An narrative telling the adventures of a hero or a family.
22. Situated at or extending to the side.
24. Panel forming the lower part of an interior wall when it is finished differently from the rest.
26. A rounded thickly curled hairdo.
27. A Mid-Atlantic state.
30. A field where grass or alfalfa are grown to be made into hay.
31. A South American river.
33. British artist and writer of nonsense verse (1812-1888).
34. Willing to face danger.
35. A periodic paperback publication.
36. An accessory or adjoining anatomical parts or appendages (especially of the embryo).
40. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
41. Using speech rather than writing.
42. Either extremity of something that has length.
44. A soft thin cloth woven from raw silk (or an imitation).
45. A metrical unit with unstressed-stressed syllables.
46. British informal term.
47. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
51. Take in solid food.
52. Make lighter or brighter.
55. (architecture) Forming or resembling an arch.
56. Consisting of or made of wood of the birch tree.
59. Italian violin maker in Cremona.
61. An inhabitant of Lapland.
63. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
64. The template for protein synthesis.
65. South African term for 'boss'.
66. Starch resembling sago that is obtained from cuckoo-pit root.
68. Large brownish-green New Zealand parrot.
69. Alsatian artist and poet who was cofounder of Dadaism in Zurich.
70. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
74. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.

Yesterday's Solution

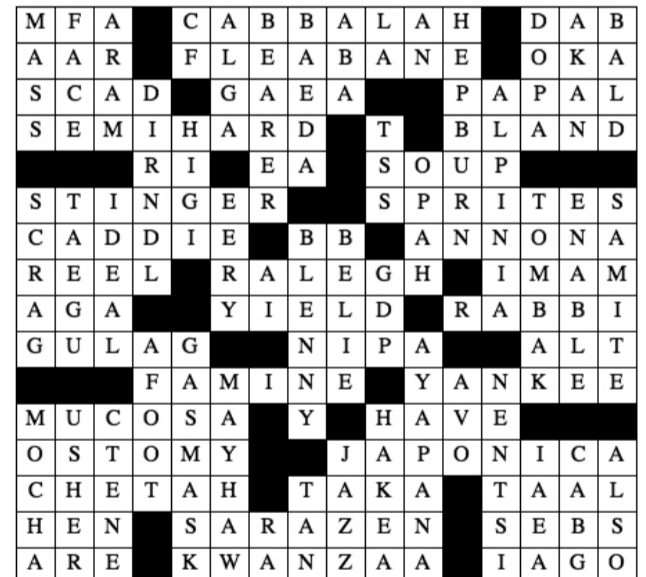
Breakfast



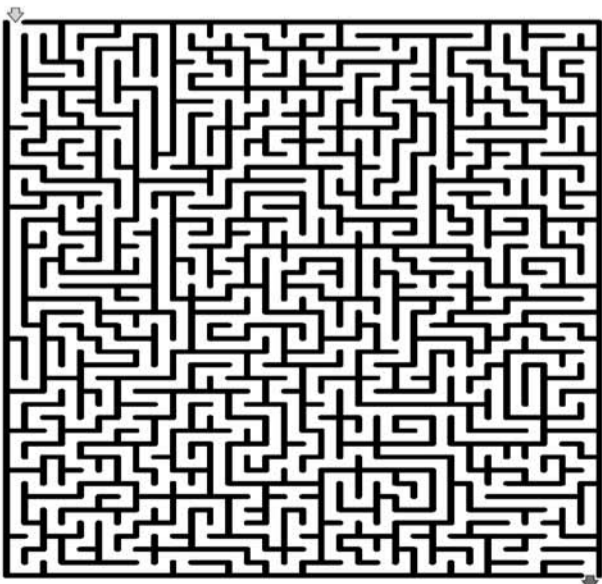
- | | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------|----------|
| BACON | EGGS | JELLY | ROLLS |
| BAGELS | FRUIT | MARMALADE | SAUSAGES |
| BISCUITS | GRANOLA | MILK | TEA |
| BREAD | HAM | MUFFINS | TOAST |
| CEREAL | HASH BROWNS | OATMEAL | WAFFLES |
| COFFEE | HONEY | OMELETS | YOGURT |
| CROISSANTS | HOT CHOCOLATE | PANCAKES | |
| DOUGHNUTS | JAM | PORRIDGE | |

The hidden message is: **ORANGE JUICE**

Yesterday's Solution



CHALLENGING MAZE



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



WADING INTO GOLFAPALOOZA: PHOENIX OPEN'S 16TH HOLE

SCOTTDALE, Arizona: John Huh studied the shot from every angle before crouching behind his ball for a last look. "It doesn't break!" a fan yelled from the bleachers. Huh then stepped to the ball and stroked a putt he thought to be true. Instead of curling into the hole, the ball held its line, spreading a grimace across Huh's face. "I told you it stayed straight," the fan chastised. "You should have listened to me."

Any other tournament, the fan would have been told to hold it down, refrain from giving away competitive information. At the Phoenix Open's 16th hole, it was a speck in the cacophony of golf's rowdiest hole. A picturesque par-3 for 51 weeks, No. 16 at TPC Scottsdale transforms into golf's version of a party cruise the week of PGA Tour's annual stop in the Valley of Sun.

With its triple-decker stands rising from the desert, booze and boos, it's more football stadium than golf hole. Quiet please? Never going to happen. "There's really nothing like it in golf," Webb Simpson said after finishing his round last Saturday.

The day at No.16 starts well before dawn, when fans line up for a sprint to get the best seats. My buddy, Curtis Burns, and I arrived later in the morning and the buzz - from the drinking and the action - was already in full bloom, like wading into the middle of a daylong rock festival.

Getting to No.16 isn't easy. A PGA Tour-record 201,003 fans showed up on Saturday and it felt as if every one of them was along for the short walk from the clubhouse to No. 16. The crowd thickened behind the grandstand of No. 16, hundreds snaking in a long line to get into the bleacher seats around the green - golf's mosh pit.

We started with a bird's-eye view of the hole from behind the tee, arriving just in time to hear 15,000 fans boo Mark Wilson for having the audacity to hit the ball 40 feet right of the hole - on the green. Tough crowd. And everyone is game, as we found out. "You need me in your panoramic," a guy hanging over the rail yelled as Burns took a photo down near the green. Ignoring him did no good.

'Every breath you make'

"I'm watching you!" he screamed from just above our heads. "Every step you take, every breath you make." The fans around Burns' stalker are among the most rambunctious on No. 16, shouting things like "You won me money!" when



SCOTTDALE: In this Saturday, Feb 5, 2016, photo, golfers and caddies gather on the 16th green during the third round of the Phoenix Open golf tournament at TPC Scottsdale. — AP

long putts fell, booing the slightest misstep. They tossed a football from one section to another as if it was one big tailgate party, cascading jeers upon anyone who failed to make a catch.

A handful of volunteers raised "Quiet please" signs every time a player was about to hit a shot. Those worked about as well as the "Slower traffic stay right" signs on Interstate 10. We didn't get to see a hole-in-one like Tiger Woods made in 1997 or one by a robot Wednesday, during a practice round. Still, there were quite a few near misses to get the crowd even more riled up - as if they needed it.

Charley Hoffman made a short birdie putt and threw the ball into the stands, setting off a Titleist feeding frenzy. Brian Harmon elicited one of the day's loudest roars by chipping in for birdie left of the green. Billy Horschel was cheered when he hit one close and booed after missing the putt. He played along by covering his face as he walked off.

Pre-tournament complaints

Up in the grandstand, it was hard to even tell a tournament was going on. Thousands of fans milled around the skyboxes, many facing away from the action or too far away to see it. No matter. At golf's largest cocktail party, being seen in a sun dress and a floppy hat or a sports coat and high-in-the-front hair is a higher priority for some. Bubba Watson changed that.

He was heckled relentlessly yesterday after making pre-tournament complaints about the course and the fans at No. 16 on Saturday rained boos upon him as he walked to the tee. Watson cupped his hand to his ear, raised his hands to get them to be louder and hit the ball around 20 feet to the right of the hole.

Still not good enough. Fans booed as Watson lined up his putt, cheered when he missed, booed again when he left for the next tee. A few groups later, Ricky Fowler walked through the tunnel onto

the tee as if he was a rock star taking the stage. He cupped his ear as a chant of "Ricky!" started, but they turned on him quickly, filling the stadium with catcalls after his tee shot rolled back into a bunker.

Normally, the final group would signal an end to the party. Not at the 16th hole. Fans lingered in the skyboxes long after the last putt, still drinking and chattering as if the tournament was still going on down below. An Anthony Michael Hall in "Weird Science" lookalike - apparently inebriated - seemed to think Burns and I were the perfect people to settle a bet for him. "Do you know who Rory McIlroy is?" he slurred. "Uh, yes?" I answered before moving to another spot, out of shouting distance.

Finally, after about 90 minutes, a group of police officers made their way through the litter of cups and food wrappers to clear out the last of the still-rowdies. "All right, everybody out," an officer said. "Party's over." Only for the day. It revved up all over again for tomorrow's final round. — AP

FLORIDA SETS SIGHTS ON 1ST NATIONAL BASEBALL TITLE

OMAHA: Florida has done everything except win a national championship in eight seasons under Kevin O'Sullivan, and here the Gators are again with a roster overflowing with talent and the consensus No. 1 ranking in the preseason polls. Is this the year?

"Do we want to win it? Absolutely," O'Sullivan said. "Do we understand that there are a lot of things that have to happen between now and then? I hope so. Unfortunately - and we've talked about this, too - the best team on paper normally does not win the national championship." That last comment was O'Sullivan's way of making sure his players don't let their heads outgrow their caps. Few teams have been so celebrated before playing their first game. Florida's 52 wins last year were one off the school record, and it was a top-eight national seed in the NCAA Tournament for the sixth time in seven years. The Gators went unbeaten through regionals and super regionals before a pair of one-run losses to eventual national champion Virginia denied them a spot in the College World Series finals.

Motivation

"Any time you get that close to something,

especially winning the national championship, which we haven't done here yet, it gets you going a little bit and gets you motivated, especially us juniors," star pitcher Logan Shore said. "We have sophomores coming off good years and freshmen coming in, and we're all ready to go. This group of guys is a championship group of guys."

Shore, AJ Puk and Alex Faedo are an imposing weekend rotation that combined for a 26-11 record last season. Brady Singer, a second-round draft pick last year, and Jackson Kowar are among the pitchers in the highly rated recruiting class.

The Gators brought back six everyday players. Center fielder Buddy Reed is a projected first-round draft pick after batting .305 with 14 doubles and 47 RBIs and stealing 18 bases. Catcher JJ Schwarz is coming off a freshman season in which he tied for fourth nationally with 18 home runs. First baseman Peter Alonso's 429-foot homer in the CWS was the longest in the five years the event has been played at TD Ameritrade Park.

O'Sullivan said there'll be internal challenges for his players to meet in addition to those presented by tough nonconference and Southeastern Conference schedules. "We have juniors who have to deal with expectations in

regard to the draft. We've got a sophomore class that contributed an awful lot last year and was successful, and we have to make sure those guys don't try to do more than what they're capable of doing," O'Sullivan said. "And then you've got freshmen. They're going to be dealing with some failures they haven't dealt with before, and being able to move on and have short memories will be important."

Vanderbilt, which edged out Florida to win the SEC East last year and was the national runner-up, still represents the Gators' biggest obstacle even though it lost No. 1 overall draft pick Dansby Swanson and its entire weekend rotation. Center fielder Bryan Reynolds has had back-to-back 90-hit seasons and is one of the nation's top offensive players, and coach Tim Corbin has a bunch of talented pitchers who have been waiting for their turn to take the spotlight. LSU and Texas A&M appear to be the best in the SEC West.

Teams to watch

Among other teams to watch are Louisville, Oregon State, Miami, Oklahoma State and California. Louisville, beaten in super regionals in 2015 after going to the CWS the previous two

years, has a veteran lineup and an offense that applies pressure at every opportunity. Oregon State was devastated by the draft in 2014 but came on strong at the end of last season to make the NCAA Tournament.

Miami brought back most of its pitching staff from the team that went to the CWS for the first time since 2008. Big 12 favorite Oklahoma State has a versatile offense and a good supply of arms. California tied a school record with 18 Pac-12 wins last season, and the entire weekend rotation and seven everyday players are back. As good as those teams and others in the Top 25 should be, Florida is considered a cut above the rest. Shore, the Gators' ace, pointed out that he and his junior teammates already have won a SEC championship, SEC tournament title and have played in the CWS. "The one thing we haven't done is win a national championship," he said. "Though that may seem stressful having that hanging over your head, we're not looking at it that way. We're looking at it more from the perspective of coming in every day, working hard, doing things right on and off the field and becoming a close-knit group of guys. If we bring our 'A' game every day, things will take care of themselves." — AP



CHICAGO: Dallas Stars right wing Patrick Eaves (right) celebrates with left wing Jamie Benn after scoring his first goal during the first period of an NHL hockey game against the Chicago Blackhawks. — AP

STARS WIN AT BLACKHAWKS TO CLOSE CENTRAL GAP TO 1 POINT

CHICAGO: Dallas' Patrick Eaves scored a first-period hat trick to set up the Stars' 4-2 win at Chicago on Thursday, slicing the gap between the top two teams in the NHL Central Division to a single point. The Stars quickly avenged a 5-1 home defeat by the Blackhawks last weekend and are well poised to leapfrog the reigning Stanley Cup champions, as Dallas has three games in hand.

Among other key results, Eastern Conference pacesetter Washington won at Minnesota thanks to an Alex Ovechkin hat trick, and the New York Islanders started with a scoring burst and

beat Los Angeles. Dallas' Eaves notched his second career hat trick and helped the Stars to a fifth win in six games. John Klingberg added a goal and an assist for Dallas.

Duncan Keith and Patrick Kane scored for the Blackhawks, who were without forward Artemi Panarin for the second straight game due to illness. Washington's Alex Ovechkin scored three times in the second period for his 14th career hat trick, helping the Capital edge Minnesota 4-3.

Ovechkin, who leads the league with 34 goals, has 13 in his past 13 games. Nicklas Backstrom had three assists and Jason Chimera added an empty-netter for Washington, which improved to a league-best 20-5-2 on the road.

5 in a row

The Capitals won their fifth consecutive game and became the first team to reach 40 victories this season. Charlie Coyle, Ryan Suter and Mikael Granlund scored for the Wild, but Minnesota lost for the 12th time in its past 13 games, including seven in a row at home. The New York Islanders scored three times inside the first 14 minutes to set up a 5-2 win against Los Angeles.

John Tavares had a goal and an assist, Johnny Boychuk, Casey Cizikas and Anders Lee all scored in the first period and Travis Hamonic added an empty-netter in the third to help the Islanders win their third straight overall and third in a row at home. Kyle Clifford and Milan Lucic scored for the Pacific Division-leading Kings, who had won their previous three home games.

Colorado snapped a four-game skid with a 4-3 win at Ottawa. Jarome Iginla had two goals and an assist to reach 15 goals in a season for the 17th time. Blake Comeau had a goal and an assist and Nathan McKinnon also netted for the Avalanche. Mark Stone, Mike Hoffman and Chris Neil had goals for Ottawa. Boston extended its run of away wins to five with a 6-2 victory at Winnipeg, led by two goals from Patrice Bergeron.

Brett Connolly had three assists, Brad Marchand had a goal and two assists, Loui Eriksson and Jimmy Hayes each had a goal and an assist, and David Pastrnak also scored for the Bruins. Bryan Little and Nikolaj Ehlers netted for Winnipeg.

Calgary scored four goals in the first period but was still forced to a shootout, when Juri Hudler scored to deliver a 6-5 win against San Jose. Columbus' Alexander Wennberg and Cam Atkinson each scored in the shootout to give the Blue Jackets a 4-3 victory over Anaheim. Philadelphia's RJ Umberger snapped a 50-game scoreless drought and Wayne Simmonds got his 20th goal of the season to help the Flyers win 5-1 and send Buffalo to a fourth straight loss. Edmonton's Connor McDavid had two goals and three assists while Jordan Eberle scored three times and added an assist as the Oilers defeated Toronto 5-2. — AP

HONG KONG'S NG ON CUE TO STORM MALE BASTION

HONG KONG: A decade after taking up the sport because she liked her father's outfit, Hong Kong's Ng On Yee finds herself on the brink of snooker history as she embarks on a mission to reach the main draw of the men's world championships.

Reanne Evans made an unsuccessful bid to achieve the feat last year and Ng, who ended the Englishwoman's 10-year reign as world champion in April, will have to beat three men to get through qualifying in Sheffield, England in April.

"When my coach told me this was a possibility I was very excited to compete in this best tournament," Ng told Reuters TV. "It will be an awesome opportunity to learn more as I always wonder what really created a gap between the men and the ladies. "I'm sure ... all the top lady players, they are very excited to see that the World Snooker Association is showing signs of moving away from past traditions and opening the door for more opportunities for ladies to play in different tournaments." The 25-year-old has come a long way since she took up the sport in her early teens, in part to avoid studying.

"My father was the manager of the snooker club, and he took me with him most of the time," Ng recalled. "One day I saw him at the competition with this uniform. And I loved this uniform very much. "And I thought it would be special if I could wear the same. Then I requested my father to teach me how to play and he was delighted." Competing at a 2006 tournament in Jordan also convinced the traveler in her that snooker could be a passport to a globe-trotting lifestyle. "When I saw other lady players who were representing their country, I wished I could be like them," she said. "To become a snooker player who can travel around the world for snooker tournaments."

Ng believes her achievements are starting to change some popular misconceptions about snooker in Hong Kong. "I think in Hong Kong snooker has always been a male sport, and many parents had the impression that snooker club is a place for bad people to hang out," she said. — Reuters

VUNIPOLA APPLAUDS BONDING AS ENGLAND TARGET ITALY WIN

MILAN: England No 8 Billy Vunipola has applauded a more relaxed approach to team bonding that has kept World Cup flops England on course for a Six Nations Grand Slam ahead of tomorrow's clash with Italy in Rome.

England's failure to get past the World Cup group stages last autumn prompted a change in management and philosophy that saw the Red Rose begin this year's Six Nations with a battling 15-9 win over Scotland last week. Although Vunipola was widely applauded after a man-of-the-match display at Murrayfield, the 23-year-old credits new coach Eddie Jones with instilling a new, more sociable approach to rebuilding England's confidence.

Vunipola says England are benefiting from being allowed to socialize more than under the previous regime run by Stuart Lancaster, when players were told not to drink. "I respond to the love and compassion Eddie shows the boys, me especially. He is very personable," Vunipola said. "We have had a few bonding sessions. It's important for me to know what someone else is about, what motivates them, whether that be their family or scoring tries. "It works better when you have a relationship with someone rather than just rocking up and playing for England." Australian Jones is expected to reshuffle England's pack for the visit to the Eternal City after releasing Gloucester openside flanker Matt Kvesic and Wasps centre Elliot Daly from his training squad earlier this week.

At the same time, he included Saracens flanker Maro Itoje and fellow back-row forward Josh Beaumont of Sale. Jones hinted England may require greater speed up front, which could open the door to Harlequins back-rower Jack Clifford, who made his debut from the bench at Murrayfield.

'Faster pitch'

"The playing conditions will be considerably different. They will be warmer, a faster pitch, different referee so I am anticipating we will be able to get our attack going a lot quicker than we did against Scotland," said Jones. "I've said it's going to be a faster game so we could pick a faster pack." Come tomorrow afternoon, England's thoughts will be focused on how to beat a promising-looking Italy side. Italy coach Jacques Brunel has made only two changes from the side that gave France a scare in a 23-21 defeat at the Stade de France last week. Wing Andrea Buondonno will replace David Odiete, who suffered a left ankle sprain, while flanker Robert Barbieri comes in for wing Leonardo Sarto, who is still out with a muscle problem. A decision will be taken on George Biagi, depending on his recovery from a muscular injury. — AFP

NHL results/standings

San Jose 5, Calgary 6 (SO); Chicago 2, Dallas 4; Ottawa 3, Colorado 4; Edmonton 5, Toronto 2; Minnesota 3, Washington 4; Winnipeg 2, Boston 6; NY Islanders 5, Los Angeles 2; Philadelphia 5, Buffalo 1; Columbus 4, Anaheim 3 (SO).

	Eastern Conference					
	W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS
Atlantic Division						
Florida	32	16	6	155	123	70
Detroit	28	18	8	137	135	64
Boston	29	19	6	163	149	64
Tampa Bay	29	20	4	142	130	62
Montréal	27	24	4	151	146	58
Ottawa	25	25	6	161	177	56
Buffalo	21	28	6	126	155	48
Toronto	19	25	9	127	154	47
Metropolitan Division						
Washington	40	9	4	178	121	84
NY Rangers	31	18	5	156	137	67
NY Islanders	29	18	6	154	134	64
Pittsburgh	27	19	7	139	138	61
New Jersey	27	21	7	124	129	61
Philadelphia	24	20	9	129	143	57
Carolina	24	21	9	130	144	57
Columbus	22	28	6	144	176	50
Western Conference						
Pacific Division						
Chicago	36	18	4	161	134	76
Dallas	35	15	5	180	149	75
St. Louis	30	17	9	136	134	69
Colorado	28	25	4	154	158	60
Nashville	25	21	8	141	145	58
Minnesota	23	21	10	133	136	56
Winnipeg	24	27	3	140	159	51
Central Division						
Los Angeles	32	18	3	148	126	67
San Jose	28	20	5	156	145	61
Anaheim	26	19	8	122	128	60
Vancouver	22	20	12	129	147	56
Arizona	24	23	6	140	164	54
Calgary	25	25	3	145	158	53
Edmonton	22	29	5	142	169	49

Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).



WELLINGTON: Adam Voges (center) of Australia is bowled but it was called a no ball during the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and Australia at the Basin Reserve. — AFP

AUSTRALIA FIRMLY IN CONTROL IN FIRST NEW ZEALAND TEST

WELLINGTON: It was supposed to be Brendon McCullum's day but it was opposing captain Steve Smith who made the right moves as Australia ended day one of the first Test against New Zealand comfortably in control in Wellington yesterday. Smith called correctly at the toss, made New Zealand bat on a green wicket and within two sessions the innings was over for 183.

Australia at stumps were 147-3, 36 behind New Zealand, with Smith making 71. Usman Khawaja was not out 57 with Adam Voges on seven. Voges was bowled by Doug Bracewell in the final over of the day only for umpire Richard Illingworth to call it a no-ball. Replays indicated it was a legitimate delivery.

When New Zealand batted, Josh Hazlewood and Peter Siddle did the damage for Smith as they ripped through the top order in conditions ripe for seam and swing. Their cause was helped by some injudicious shot selection, including by McCullum, who saw

his 100th Test celebrations fall flat when he was out for a duck. He did not get forward far enough to a Hazlewood special that came back, took an inside edge and deflected off the pads to David Warner at third slip.

After McCullum had received a rousing ovation when he walked to the middle, there was silence when he walked off after facing seven deliveries. That the New Zealand innings lasted 48 overs was thanks to lusty tail-end hitting with the last three wickets contributing 86 after Hazlewood and Siddle had reduced the side to 97-7.

Wicketkeepers' delight

All seven dismissals came from edges to the cordon behind the wicket with wicketkeeper Peter Nevill snaring four catches including a superb one-handed diving effort to remove Kane Williamson down the leg-side. New Zealand were reeling at 51 for five in the 12th over before a determined knock by Corey

Anderson, who with BJ Watling went about stopping the tumble of wickets.

Anderson then featured in a 10-over stand with Mark Craig that produced 40 runs and Craig, who had a Mitchell Marsh delivery hit his stumps but not dislodge the bails, put on 46 with Trent Boult for the 10th wicket. Craig was unbeaten on 41 at the end with Boult out for 24.

New Zealand had a glimmer of hope that their cause was not lost at the start of the Australian innings when Tim Southee snapped up two early wickets. Joe Burns went in the first over without scoring and David Warner followed soon after for five. But Smith and Usman Khawaja then took control and proved the pitch was playable as they put on 126 for the third wicket. Smith offered a chance on 18 but was dropped by Craig at second slip. Craig, however, made no mistake with the second offering from the Australian captain taking a return catch off his own bowling. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the first day in the first Test between New Zealand and Australia yesterday in Wellington, New Zealand.

New Zealand 1st innings

M. Guptill c Smith b Hazlewood	18
T. Latham c Nevill b Hazlewood	6
K. Williamson c Nevill b Siddle	16
H. Nicholls c Nevill b Siddle	8
B. McCullum c Warner b Hazlewood	0
C. Anderson c Khawaja b Lyon	38
B. Watling c Nevill b Hazlewood	17
D. Bracewell c Voges b Siddle	5
M. Craig not out	41
T. Southee c Hazlewood b Lyon	0
T. Boult c Khawaja b Lyon	24
Extras (b-4 lb-1 nb-5)	10
Total (all out, 48 overs)	183

Fall of wickets: 1-17 T. Latham, 2-38 M. Guptill, 3-44 K. Williamson, 4-47 B. McCullum, 5-51 H. Nicholls, 6-88 B. Watling, 7-97 D. Bracewell, 8-137 C. Anderson, 9-137 T. Southee, 10-183 T. Boult

Bowling:

J. Hazlewood 14-2-42-4, J. Bird 10-1-52-0 (nb-3), P. Siddle 12-5-37-3 (nb-2), M. Marsh 6-1-15-0, N. Lyon 6-0-32-3.
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Australia 1st innings

J. Burns c Watling b Southee	0
D. Warner c Watling b Southee	5
U. Khawaja not out	57
S. Smith c&nb Craig	71
A. Voges not out	7
Extras (b-4 nb-2 w-1)	7
Total (for 3 wickets, 40 overs)	147

Fall of wickets: 1-0 J. Burns, 2-5 D. Warner, 3-131 S. Smith
To bat: M. Marsh, P. Nevill, P. Siddle, J. Hazlewood, N. Lyon, J. Bird

Bowling: T. Southee 8-1-22-2, T. Boult 10-2-36-0, D. Bracewell 11-1-45-0 (nb-2), C. Anderson 2-0-9-0 (w-1), M. Craig 9-1-31-1.

REPLAY DRAMA WORKS IN AUSTRALIA'S FAVOR

WELLINGTON: Australia's players feared another backlash from New Zealand fans after a contentious no ball decision went in their favor in the final over of the first day's play of the first test yesterday. Adam Voges was batting on seven when he was bowled by Doug Bracewell with two deliveries remaining in the day's play, only for umpire Richard Illingworth to signal a no ball.

Television replays, however, showed the delivery was legal but because the no ball had been called New Zealand were unable to ask for a review. Australia finished the day on 147 for three, 36 runs behind New Zealand's first innings tally of 183. The replay had the potential to create a backlash against the Australians similar to that they experienced after the final one-day international at Seddon Park in Hamilton on Monday.

In that match, Mitchell Marsh was given not out caught and bowled on 41 with his side in charge of their run chase, only for the crowd to erupt into a chorus of boos when they saw a replay on the big screen that showed he had been dismissed. Marsh was then given out, creating an angry response from the all-rounder and batting partner Matthew Wade, while captain Steve Smith was booed at the end of the game when he questioned the decision.

Australian media criticized the Hamilton crowd, calling them 'feral', while suggesting the controversy from the underarm bowling incident from a 1981 one-day match between the two sides had now been put to bed. Unlike in Hamilton, however, the replay was not shown immediately on the big screen at the Basin Reserve yesterday. Fast bowler Josh Hazlewood said his side had been concerned about the Voges decision when they saw replays. "We were just hoping it didn't come up on the big screen too quickly," he laughed at a media conference. "(But) the umpires had made the decision. That's what they're there for, to make those tough decisions and that's how it went."

New Zealand shrugged off the decision, having not seen the replay on the field. "That's cricket I suppose. Once his arm is thrown out there's not much you can do about it. That's the way it goes, off-spinner Mark Craig said. "There was some obvious disappointment but you can't do anything about it." — Reuters

BCCI BANS PAKISTANI UMPIRE FOR BRIBERY

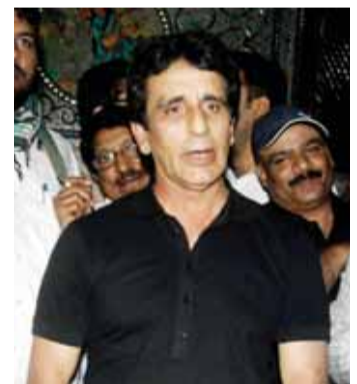
NEW DELHI: India's cricket board handed Pakistan's former Test umpire Asad Rauf a five-year ban yesterday after a tribunal found him guilty of taking backhanders from bookmakers while officiating in the IPL.

Rauf disappeared in the middle of the 2013 edition of the Indian Premier League after press allegations that he had accepted designer watches and other gifts in exchange for favorable decisions. The 59-year-old was subsequently struck off the International Cricket Council's elite panel of umpires and has not officiated outside his native Pakistan since then.

Rauf did not attend yesterday's closed-door disciplinary hearing at the Indian board's Mumbai headquarters although he had earlier denied the charges against him in a written submission. In a statement announcing its verdict, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said Rauf was "guilty of misconduct and corruption" within the terms of the board's anti-corruption code.

"Mr Asad Rauf has been banned for a period of five years from umpiring or playing or representing cricket in any form or anyway being associated with the activities of the Board and its Affiliates," the statement added. The allegations against Rauf came during the sixth edition of India's hugely popular annual Twenty20 tournament which was dogged by several fixing scandals.

Officials in two of the IPL's eight franchises were subsequently banned for betting on matches involving their own teams while the former Test player Shanthakumaran Sreesanth was sacked for deliberately bowling badly in exchange for thousands of dollars. Rauf officiated in 49 Tests, 98 ODIs and 23 Twenty20 internationals before he was struck off the ICC panel. — AFP



LAHORE: In this May 29, 2013, file photo, Pakistani cricket umpire Asad Rauf arrives to address a news conference. — AP



OKLAHOMA CITY: Oklahoma City Thunder forward Kevin Durant (35) shoots between New Orleans Pelicans guard Norris Cole, left, and Dante Cunningham (44) in the second quarter of an NBA basketball game in Oklahoma City. — AP

THUNDER DOWN PELICANS AS BOTH TEAMS PLAY WITH HEAVY HEARTS

OKLAHOMA CITY: Basketball didn't matter much to Kevin Durant on Thursday night. Thunder assistant coach Monty Williams' wife, Ingrid, was involved in a car crash Tuesday night in Oklahoma City and died Wednesday. Monty Williams coached the Pelicans last season before coming to Oklahoma City to help new coach Billy Donovan, so as his two most recent teams met, both played with heavy hearts. A moment of silence was observed before the Thunder's 121-95 victory.

Durant was distraught earlier in the day while discussing the situation after the team's shootaround, and he said it remained fresh in his mind after the game. "We love the game so much, but that's not really what's important," Durant said. "It's definitely something that we love to do, but relationships, family - those things - that's

what's most important in life, not the latest trends or the fashion world or all that stuff. It's cool and all that stuff, but the stuff that lasts forever is relationships, family and love."

Donovan wasn't sure how his team would deal with all that happened. Durant scored 23 points, Russell Westbrook had 23 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds, and Serge Ibaka added 18 points. "I really appreciated all of our guys, the way they all have handled a really difficult situation these past 24 hours and being able to go out and play," Donovan said.

Anthony Davis and Jrue Holiday each scored 23 points for the Pelicans. Davis, who was emotional on Twitter after learning of the death, still was disappointed in the way the Pelicans played. "We've got to go out there and still compete," he said. "Go out

there and play. We had a job to do tonight."

No switch-up

Oklahoma City has won 14 of 16 heading into the All-Star break to join Golden State and San Antonio as the only teams with at least 40 wins. The Thunder don't feel much needs to change to compete for the title. "No switch-up, just enhance and get better at what we do."

The Thunder led 62-53 at halftime behind 18 points from Westbrook and 17 from Durant. Westbrook got his 10th assist on Ibaka's 3-pointer that gave the Thunder a 79-65 lead. He had his ninth rebound with just under 3 minutes to go in the third quarter before heading to the bench for his usual rest and the Thunder ahead 86-68. Oklahoma City led 95-74 at the end of the third quarter.

Oklahoma City's backups expanded the lead early in the fourth quarter, and Westbrook didn't return. "I don't know what we can take out of it other than we competed like crazy in the first half," New Orleans coach Alvin Gentry said. "Tried like crazy in the second half, but when they got separation, it was really difficult." The Thunder found an escape from pain through playing. "Basketball, the effect it has, it allows you to forget about things a little bit, and it also brings you together as a group," Durant said. "Thankful for that."

Gentry, on Westbrook: "He's just a really talented guy, probably the best athlete in professional sports, and when I say that, I mean pro sports. Not just basketball. This team's playing extremely well," he said. "I know they had a tough loss against Golden State (last Saturday), but I think they're playing really good basketball, and I think, obviously, they're going to be a huge factor." Durant is averaging 30.0 points on 49 percent shooting during the Thunder's 14-2 surge heading into the All-Star break. — AP



OKLAHOMA CITY: (From left) Cameron Payne, Kevin Durant, Andrew Morrow and DJ Augustin bow their heads during a moment of silence for Ingrid Williams, the wife of Thunder assistant coach Monty Williams, who died on Wednesday. — AP

BUCKS GO INTO BREAK WITH CLOSE WIN OVER WIZARDS

MILWAUKEE: Khris Middleton's role on the Milwaukee Bucks has evolved from catch-and-shoot perimeter player to crunch-time playmaker. A matchup problem as a 6-foot-8 forward who plays in the backcourt, Middleton did more damage Thursday night against the Washington Wizards by attacking the bucket and finding open teammates.

Middleton scored 27 points, Giannis Antetokounmpo had 17 points and 13 rebounds, and the Bucks held on for 99-92 win to head into the All-Star break on a high note. "Yeah, we look at Khris as our best player, our best scorer," teammate Jabari Parker said. "He opens up a lot of areas for us, and we're going to depend on him."

Especially in the final quarter, when Middleton had 14 points and five assists. He's not just a catch-and-shoot player anymore. Expectation rose in the offseason when Middleton signed a five-year contract worth \$70 million.

Against Washington, Middleton was 1 of 3 from 3-point range, but 9 of 17 overall. Middleton also tied a season high with nine assists. "Sometimes, you want to put guys in position (for more responsibility), you want to see if they grab it - and he's grabbing it," coach Jason Kidd said. Bradley Beal scored 19 points for the Wizards, and John Wall had 15 points and 10 assists. Washington got within three when Wall made two free throws with 1:36 left.

But Middleton answered again, hitting a jumper in the lane on the next possession before setting up a drive-and-dish to Greg Monroe that gave the Bucks a 97-90 lead with 15 seconds left. "He was being aggressive," Wall said. "When a guy gets in a rhythm, it's kind of hard to stop. He's always been a person that's scored well against us."

Hitting wall

Washington's star guard played with a sore right knee after he said he collided with Milwaukee's O.J. Mayo in the first quarter. Wall said he would get treatment for the All-Star game this weekend and will play "unless he can't move." The Wizards go into the All-Star break 3-7 in their last 10 games. The Bucks will take a modest but badly-needed two-game winning streak into the break. At 22-32, Milwaukee needs to inch back closer to .500 before it can start thinking about making a run at a second straight playoff appearance.

Up and down

Sparked by better defense, the Wizards rallied from an 11-point deficit late in the second quarter to turn it into a tight contest after halftime. Milwaukee used a 25-5 surge in an eight-minute span to help build a 55-44 lead with 45 seconds left in the second quarter. Jabari Parker scored 12 points during that quarter, when the Bucks made their run using primarily a three-guard lineup that attacked with the ball. "I was just sitting here trying to contemplate on what actually happened, like how did we lose the game?" Beal said. "I feel like we came out aggressively, came out and played the right way in the first and third quarters, and I guess the second and fourth they made bigger plays than we did."

A 58-38 rebounding advantage for the Bucks hurt the Wizards, as did Washington's 6-of-32 night from the 3-point line. "We didn't attack," coach Randy Wittman said. "Bradley did the last couple of minutes and he got to the rim. We didn't do enough of that in the fourth quarter." Parker finished with 17 points and shot 7 of 11 from the field, playing a season-high 41 minutes. He's showing no ill effects from the left knee injury that sidelined him in December of his rookie season in 2014-15. — AP



MILWAUKEE: Milwaukee Bucks' Khris Middleton (22) drives against Washington Wizards' Nene Hilario during the second half of an NBA basketball game. — AP

KUWAIT SHOOTING SPORTS CLUB TO ORGANIZE CLOSING CEREMONY

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sports Club will organize the closing ceremony of the Public Authority for Sports (PAS) shooting tournament at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex at 7:30 pm tomorrow. The tournament which lasted three days in the 50m pistol, 50m prone rifle, 50m rifle 3 positions and Olympic archery for all age groups. 50 shooters both male and female participated from the club and the National Guard.



Obaid Munahi Al-Ossaimi

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Munahi Al-Ossaimi welcomed this initiative which shows PAS's interest in the sport of shooting and shooters themselves. The club is led by Chairman of the Board and Director General Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and his deputies, who do not relent in supporting the club and its activities to guarantee success and encourage shooters to continue achievements at the local, regional and continental levels.

Al-Ossaimi lauded the big participation by club and National Guard shooters in the PAS tournament, at a time when Kuwait had prepared to celebrate its national days, as KSSC takes this opportunity to congratulate HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people.

Results of Friday competition:

50m rifle prone men

- 1) Khalid Al-Subaie
- 2) Abdulla Al-Harbi
- 3) Meshref Al-Daihani

SAUDI PRINCE'S NICE BUYOUT FALLS THROUGH

NICE: The planned buyout by a mystery Saudi prince and a British businessman of French Ligue 1 side Nice has fallen through, club president Jean-Pierre Rivere revealed yesterday. The pair and their partners had been reported to have purchased 49% of the Riviera outfit with their share to eventually rise to 80%.

But Rivere told local daily Nice-Matin that the deal had not materialized, with the new investors failing to confirm by the deadline of February 12. "To date, the elements have not been confirmed by the new investors which did not allow for the immediate implementation of the policy envisaged by the club and rendered the partnership void. As a result, the parties decided to terminate their agreement," Rivere said.

"I have no regrets but I'll learn from this in the future," he added. Rivere had announced on January 29 that English businessman Edward Blackmore, the head of the Sports Investment Fund, and a Saudi prince whose identity he was not able to reveal, were interested in buying a stake in the club. According to Nice Matin, the Saudi royal was Prince Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Bin Abdullah Al Faisal. Rivere added that he had "other contacts for the sale of the club," who are currently third in Ligue 1, 30 points behind Paris Saint-Germain, but well-placed for a spot in the Champions League next season. — AFP



KIGALI: Members of the African football federation (CAF) take part in a CAF's Executive Committee meeting held in Kigali, on February 5, 2015. — AFP

FIFA CANDIDATES HEAD TO MIAMI TO MEET CONCACAF IN CRISIS

MIAMI: The five FIFA presidential candidates meet in Miami with the election's most inscrutable voters who are deep in their own leadership race amid a financial crisis. Nothing is simple these days with scandal-rocked CONCACAF which has had three recent presidents indicted by the US Department of Justice in a sprawling FIFA bribery case.

Still, the 35 FIFA voting federations from North and Central America and the Caribbean could be decisive in the Feb. 26 election. "Every member can make their own decision," Victor Montagliani, the Canadian Soccer Association's president, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "The CONCACAF executive committee is not going to issue any statement that they will support any candidate."

That freedom alone makes the region's intentions unpredictable, plus its non-aligned status with the FIFA candidates coming from Africa, Asia and Europe. They are: Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, the presumed front-runner from Bahrain who leads Asian soccer; UEFA general secretary Gianni Infantino from Switzerland; Prince Ali bin Al-Hussein, a former FIFA vice president from Jordan; former FIFA international relations director Jerome Champagne of France; and South African businessman Tokyo Sexwale, who leads FIFA's anti-discrimination task force.

Passion for the game

"I have the passion for the game and I have the experience with FIFA," said Champagne, who served in various FIFA administrative roles during an 11-year tenure that ended in 2010. "I'm here because of what's at stake. We need someone who understands FIFA, loves FIFA - one who is independent both from continental structures or vested interests or even governance."

Infantino, UEFA general secretary since 2009, does not anticipate the proximity between the European governing body and FIFA will be used as a disadvantage in his candidacy. "It is not a question of power; I am not UEFA's candidate," Infantino said. "Football is the priority."

Prince Ali had pockets of support in the region when losing to now-banned FIFA President Sepp Blatter last May, while Infantino now has pledged votes from the seven-member Central American group. Two weeks from the ballot in Zurich, FIFA politics are not the main reason for the special gathering of 41-member CONCACAF, which includes small island federations not yet affiliated to the world body.

CONCACAF, like FIFA, is pushing through wide-ranging reforms to improve governance and protect against corruption. Both soccer bodies had their leadership structures and reputations shredded last May when U.S. and Swiss investigations of corruption spanning decades were unsealed.

In an extreme scenario, both bodies risk being shut down and indicted as corporate defendants by federal prosecutors. CONCACAF members will take a position on the slate of FIFA reforms being voted on this month and update on their own revamp. "We thought it was important that we get together now rather than in Zurich," Montagliani said. "When we leave Miami we can agree to disagree on some things but at least everyone is clear."

Money talks

Money will also be a main talking point. FIFA left a \$10 million hole in CONCACAF finances when taking its audit panel's advice in December to block funding to the region. That has hurt members, some from tiny Caribbean islands, where FIFA cash generated by the \$5 billion-earning World Cup is key to survival.

"We want to get a clear indication of why it was done," said Montagliani. "At the end of the day, FIFA is there for its members. We will work it out and the money will be released accordingly." CONCACAF meets without a president until it holds a May 12 election in Mexico City. The past two elected leaders - Jack Warner of Trinidad and Tobago and Jeffrey Webb, a Cayman Islands banker living in Logansville, Georgia - and their interim successor, Alfredo Hawit of Honduras, are DoJ targets. Webb already pleaded guilty and faces sentence in

June in a Brooklyn court.

Montagliani is among four men already seeking one of the hottest seats in world soccer. The others are: FIFA appeal committee chairman Larry Mussenden of Bermuda, Gordon Derrick of Antigua and Barbuda, and Mark Rodrigues of Guyana. "It's off to a good start," said Montagliani, a fluent speaker of Spanish and French who was endorsed this week by the Central American group. "Obviously we need to get our house in order," he said. "There's a lot of good people in CONCACAF and a lot of people are upset, but I think everyone realizes the only way we get out of this is to come together." — AP

CANNAVARO SACKED BY SAUDI SIDE

RIYADH: Italian World Cup winner Fabio Cannavaro has been sacked as manager of Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr after a four-month spell in charge, the Asian Football Confederation said. Cannavaro's final game was Thursday's 4-3 loss to Najran that left the defending champions well off the pace in sixth place in the table with 10 games remaining.

The former Italian defender, who led his country to World Cup success in 2006 and played for Juventus and Real Madrid, only managed six wins in his 14 games in charge of the Saudi side, who kick off their Asian Champions League campaign later this month. It was a second successive curtailed managerial stint for Cannavaro, whose coaching debut with Chinese champions Guangzhou Evergrande ended early last year after only a few of months in charge. — Reuters

MAN UNITED SET SIGHTS ON FRAGILE SUNDERLAND

SUNDERLAND: Manchester United will face the worst defense in the Premier League today, which should have their strike-force of Wayne Rooney and Anthony Martial licking their lips in anticipation. Sunderland have conceded 49 goals so far this season—the main reason why Sam Allardyce’s side find themselves in relegation trouble inside the bottom three.

Their record at the Stadium of Light is not as troubling, with only 13 goals conceded on home turf to date. But the Black Cats are evidently vulnerable and Rooney and Martial will be looking to add to their goal tallies as United bid to keep their prospects of Champions League qualification alive.

They go into the weekend six points off the top four under Louis van Gaal, whose position remains under intense scrutiny following reports of an approach for Jose Mourinho to replace the Dutchman as manager at Old Trafford. Rooney, who scored one of the goals in United’s comfortable 3-0 home win over Sunderland in September, has netted seven times in his last eight games.

And while Martial has scored just once in seven games, the France international looks to be heading back towards top form and needs just one goal to reach double figures in his first season in England. “The amount of ability he’s got is huge. The potential is certainly there,” said Michael Carrick of 20-year-old Martial.

“It’s easy to forget the age he is and how little football he’s actually played as well. To have such an impact at this stage, with the expectations based on him and the way he’s dealt with it, has been superb. “His performances have been very good. I think we have to understand that sometimes he might not be that shining light and have days when it’s not quite happening for him, and that’s understandable. “But over time he’ll improve and I’ve seen a big improvement already in this short time. Hopefully that trend will continue and he’ll get better and better.”

‘We need six wins’

United have lost just one of their last nine games, but conceded a late equaliser in a 1-1 draw at Chelsea last Sunday that saw them slip six points behind Manchester City, who are currently fourth. Van Gaal’s side therefore have little margin for error if they are to close the gap and with the top four sides all playing each other this weekend, they must take advantage of dropped points elsewhere.

Fit-again defender Phil Jones could return after playing for United’s under-21s against Norwich City on Monday, when striker Will Keane, 23, scored five times to stake his claim for a place in the senior squad. Sunderland go into the game having sacked England international Adam Johnson on Thursday after the winger pleaded guilty to child sex charges.

Sunderland have not beaten United at home in the league for almost 19 years and Allardyce says they will have to win more games in their final 13 matches than they have in their previous 25 to have any hope of staying up. Second-bottom Sunderland have five league victories so far, but Allardyce believes it will take six more to bridge the four-point gap to safety as they bid to extend their nine-season stay in the top flight. “We’re not quite into the territory of having to win back-to-back matches at this stage,” said Allardyce, whose side fought back to draw 2-2 at Liverpool last weekend. “But looking at it, we need six wins from our last 13 matches to get us to 38 points.” — AFP



LONDON: Manchester United’s English striker Wayne Rooney(left) has a shot on goal by Chelsea’s English defender Gary Cahill during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Manchester United at Stamford Bridge.— AFP



MANCHESTER: This file photo taken on February 6, 2016 shows Leicester City’s Algerian midfielder Riyad Mahrez celebrating scoring his team’s second goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Leicester City at the Etihad Stadium. — AFP

MAHREZ THUMBS NOSE AT ENGLAND’S ARISTOCRACY

LONDON: The baton passed from Eden Hazard to Riyad Mahrez in the second minute of Leicester City’s 2-1 victory over Chelsea at the King Power Stadium in December. As Hazard ambled over to close Mahrez down on the Leicester right, the Algerian nonchalantly popped the ball between his legs before advancing and taking a shot at goal, leaving the Chelsea number 10 in his wake.

Hazard was the Premier League’s showboater-in-chief in 2014-15, but his crown has been stolen by Mahrez, whose 14 goals and 10 assists make him one of the favorites to succeed the Belgian as England’s Player of the Year. The two players were born a month apart in 1991 and both are quick, skilful forwards who learnt their trade in northern France—Hazard at Lille, Mahrez at Le Havre. But it is where their similarities end that the symbolism begins.

Hazard, a £32 million (\$46.3 million, 41.3 million Euros) signing from Lille in 2012, has become the sleep-walking incarnation of Chelsea’s slump from champions to mid-ranking also-rans. Leicester have taken their place at the summit and in the impish Mahrez, a £400,000 bargain buy from Le Havre, they possess a figure who embodies the Premier League’s startling democratisation.

He tied Manchester City in knots last weekend, inspiring Leicester to a sensational 3-1 win, and on Sunday it is Arsenal’s turn, as Claudio Ranieri’s men look to defend their five-point lead at the top of the table.

Born in Sarcelles, an ethnically diverse northern suburb of Paris, to an Algerian father and Moroccan mother, Mahrez began his career with local club AAS Sarcelles and joined fourth-tier Quimper in 2009. Frequently dismissed by coaches for being too scrawny, he cites the loss of his father when he was

15 as a moment that hardened his resolve to succeed.

“I don’t know if I started to be more serious, but after the death of my dad things started to go for me,” he told The Guardian in September. “Maybe in my head I wanted it more.” Paris Saint-Germain and Marseille, his boyhood team, watched him at Quimper, but he opted to remain in the northwest and join the acclaimed youth set-up at Le Havre, whose alumni include Juventus star Paul Pogba.

‘Genius’

Mahrez broke into the first team in 2012 and after tracking him for 18 months, Leicester made their move in January 2014. “Everybody was saying to me: ‘Riyad, England is not for you, it is too physical, too strong,’” he said. “But when I got here I really liked it. When I started training and playing games I thought to myself: ‘I was stupid to hesitate.’ “If I was still playing in the second division in France, nobody would have watched me.”

Four months after arriving in England, he was celebrating the Championship title and by the August

he was a Premier League footballer. It took him a season to find his feet among England’s elite, but since scoring twice in a 4-2 win over Sunderland on the opening day of the current campaign, the 24-year-old has been flying.

He signed a new four-year contract in August, became the first Algerian to score a Premier League hat-trick in December, with a treble at Swansea City, and was named Algerian Footballer of the Year last month. His dizzying footwork has made him a social media phenomenon and with 22 Algeria caps, he is now an established international for the land of his father’s birth.

His market value, meanwhile, has rocketed to levels approaching Hazard’s. “If Messi had done some of the things that Mahrez has pulled off, we’d be shouting genius,” says Habib Beye, the former Newcastle United right-back turned French television pundit. Jamie Vardy and N’Golo Kante have dealt out their fair share of bloody noses for Leicester this season, but it is Mahrez who Ranieri describes as the team’s “reference point”. “When we need to create,” the Italian explains, “we give the ball to him.” — AFP

English Premier League table

LONDON: English Premier League table ahead of this weekend’s matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Leicester	25	15	8	2	47	27	53	Stoke	25	9	6	10	24	31	33
Tottenham	25	13	9	3	45	19	48	Crystal Palace	25	9	5	11	26	30	32
Arsenal	25	14	6	5	39	22	48	Chelsea	25	7	9	9	33	35	30
Man City	25	14	5	6	47	26	47	West Brom	25	7	8	10	23	32	29
Man Utd	25	11	8	6	32	22	41	Bournemouth	25	7	11	29	41	28	
West Ham	25	10	9	6	38	29	39	Swansea	25	6	9	10	24	33	27
Southampton	25	10	7	8	33	24	37	Newcastle	25	6	6	13	26	44	24
Everton	25	8	11	6	46	34	35	Norwich	25	5	5	14	28	48	23
Liverpool	25	9	8	8	32	36	35	Sunderland	25	5	5	15	30	49	20
Watford	25	9	6	10	27	27	33	Aston Villa	25	3	7	15	20	40	16

BARCELONA-REAL MADRID RIVALRY SPILLS INTO COPA DEL REY FINAL

MADRID: The rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona has spilled into the Copa del Rey final, a match in which Madrid isn't even playing. Barcelona will face Sevilla in the final in May, but the discussion in Spain is about whether Real Madrid will allow the game to be played at its Santiago Bernabeu Stadium or force officials to choose a different venue.

Barcelona and Sevilla want the match at the Bernabeu, which is the biggest neutral ground, and would generate greater revenue. But Real Madrid's past decisions, and silence on the issue so far, suggest it wants nothing to do with the final, in hope of avoiding the risk of seeing its biggest rival celebrating a title on its ground.

"We want to play in the biggest stadium possible, which will be good for our fans and for our rival's fans," Barcelona vice president Carles Vilarrubi said. "We want to play in the stadium which has the best conditions and best logistics for a game of this magnitude."

Madrid hasn't officially made any com-

ments about the subject, neither opposing the game at the Bernabeu nor saying it wouldn't have a problem with it. It says there hasn't been any official request from the Spanish soccer federation asking to play the final at its venue. Its clear most Real Madrid fans don't want to see Barcelona winning a trophy in their stadium again. It happened in 1997 in the Copa del Rey final against Real Betis. Barcelona supporters filled the Bernabeu wearing their team's colors, and players lifted the trophy with the club's hymn being played loudly through the stadium's speakers.

It was the last Copa del Rey final at the Bernabeu. Real Madrid lost two other Copa finals there - to Atletico Madrid in 2013 and to Deportivo La Coruna in 2002. When Real Madrid and Barcelona met in the 2014 final, that was at Mestalla Stadium in Valencia. "Real Madrid is scared of seeing Barcelona lift the trophy," outspoken former Barcelona president Joan Gaspart told local media. "If that's

the reason, the club needs to say it, it needs to explain itself."

Decision must be made

Last year, Madrid said the Bernabeu could not be used for the final between Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao because renovation work was needed at the stadium. If Madrid again denies a request to play at the Bernabeu, the final would likely happen at Atletico Madrid's Vicente Calderon Stadium, which isn't as modern and has a capacity of only 55,000, about 30,000 less than the Bernabeu. It could also take place at Mestalla again.

The Copa del Rey is Spain's second-most important tournament, after the Spanish league. "The Copa final has to be played in a very big stadium so a greater number of fans can attend it, and I hope that this year it takes place at the Bernabeu," said Javier Tebas, president of the Spanish league. "But this is a decision that needs to be made by the clubs and I won't criticize it."

Meetings to discuss the final venue are expected to take place next week. The finalists will try to reach an agreement, and the Spanish federation then will make an official request to the stadium owner, which is not obligated to accept it.

Barcelona and the southern city of Seville are about the same distance from Madrid. The date of the final also hasn't been determined. It was originally scheduled for May 21, but it could be changed if Sevilla makes it to the Europa League final on May 18. The final is almost always in a neutral venue, but last year it took place at the Camp Nou even though Barcelona was involved, and in 2013 it was at the Bernabeu when Madrid faced Atletico. Sevilla wants a neutral venue.

"I would rather play in China than at the Camp Nou," Sevilla coach Unai Emery said after his team drew with Celta Vigo on Thursday to advance to the final. "That would be like giving them another (Lionel) Messi. I hope it doesn't happen." — AP

NAPOLI WON'T CRUMPLE, SAYS HIGUAIN, AS JUVENTUS LOOMS

MILAN: Gonzalo Higuain says Napoli have no intention of buckling under pressure as they continue their quest for a first Scudetto in 26 years with a hotly-anticipated visit to champions Juventus today. In a Serie A weekend that could also be decisive for Fiorentina and Inter Milan, who face off in Florence on Sunday, Napoli travel to Turin looking for their second victory over the Old Lady this season.

It would see Maurizio Sarri's league leaders stretch their advantage over Massimiliano Allegri's men to five points, and send the southern city of Naples into an even bigger frenzy as the dream of a first league title since the heady days of Diego Maradona draws closer to reality.

After today's clash Napoli will have 13 games to show they are worthy of succeeding Allegri's four-time defending champions. Higuain, who is looking to emulate his legendary compatriot Maradona, said Napoli's ability not to panic will be just as crucial as his goals.

"Everything depends on us, we have to keep calm and keep our feet on the ground," Higuain told the Tg1 program. "My intention is to keep on scoring. For me, obviously, but above all to help the club as we keep fighting for this important objective." With 24 goals in as many league games, it is no wonder Higuain admits he is "having the best season of my career".

He has already surpassed the 22-goal tally that earned Mauro Icardi and Luca Toni a share of last season's 'Capocannoniere' (top scorer) award and has Gunnar Nordahl's 1950 record of 35 goals in a single, 20-team season firmly in his sights. Failure to reach both or one of those goals, however, would quickly fade into insignificance if Higuain emulated Maradona, who inspired Napoli to an historic first title in 1987 and their second in 1990.

"It would be magnificent if I could emulate him and bring the title to this city. I know that, for the people of Naples, he was more than just a football talent," said Higuain. "For me, just getting close to what he achieved at Napoli fills me with pride."

A second-half winner by Higuain helped Napoli to a 2-1 victory at the San Paolo last September, but Juve were struggling for form and confidence following several key personnel changes last summer.



NAPLES: Napoli's players celebrate at the end of the Italian Serie A football match SSC Napoli vs Carpi FC on February 7, 2016 at the San Paolo stadium. — AFP

Winning run

Allegri's men have since strung 14 consecutive wins together to maintain their bid for a record-equalling fifth consecutive league title, although they have the added pressure of the Champions League to contend with. Although Napoli, who have won eight in a row, boast the most potent attack (53 goals), Juve 'keeper Gianluigi Buffon believes the league's stingiest defense (15 conceded) can thwart them.

"Both teams will be out to win, but for us it is also important not to lose," said Buffon. "Napoli have the best attack and Higuain is a real danger but 90 percent of the time the team with the best defence wins in Italy." A stalemate in Turin would be embraced by Fiorentina and Inter, who are now respectively 10 and 11 points off the pace in third and

fourth ahead of Sunday's meeting in Florence. Stunned 4-1 at the San Siro earlier this season when Nikola Kalinic hit a hat-trick for La Viola, Inter can ill afford to lose ground in their bid to secure Champions League football next season. Brazilian Joao Miranda returns from suspension in timely fashion and is set to play alongside Jeison Murillo in a centre-back partnership that, over 15 games together, has proven Inter's tightest.

AC Milan, meanwhile, will be hoping for a draw in Florence ahead of hosting Genoa at the San Siro on Sunday when influential midfielder Giacomo Bonaventura could make his return from injury. Sixth-placed Milan are unbeaten in six games, a run that has featured three wins including a 3-0 defeat of Inter last month and left them 16 points adrift of Napoli but only six behind Fiorentina. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Sunderland v Man United	15:45
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
Crystal Palace v Watford	18:00
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
Bournemouth v Stoke City	18:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
Swansea City v Southampton	18:00
beIN SPORTS 12 HD EN	
Norwich City v West Ham	18:00
beIN SPORTS 7 HD	
Everton v West Bromwich	18:00
beIN SPORTS 8 HD	
Chelsea v Newcastle United	20:30
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Real Madrid v Bilbao	18:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Villarreal v Malaga	20:15
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Valencia v Espanyol	22:30
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Sunday	
Deportivo v Real Betis	0:05
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Empoli v Frosinone	17:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
Chievo Verona v Sassuolo	20:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
Juventus v SSC Napoli	22:45
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Werder Bremen v Hoffenheim	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Wolfsburg v Ingolstadt 04	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Darmstadt v Bayer 04	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
VfB Stuttgart v Hertha	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Dortmund v Hannover	17:30
beIN SPORTS 5 HD	
Koln v Eintracht Frankfurt	20:30
beIN SPORTS 5 HD	

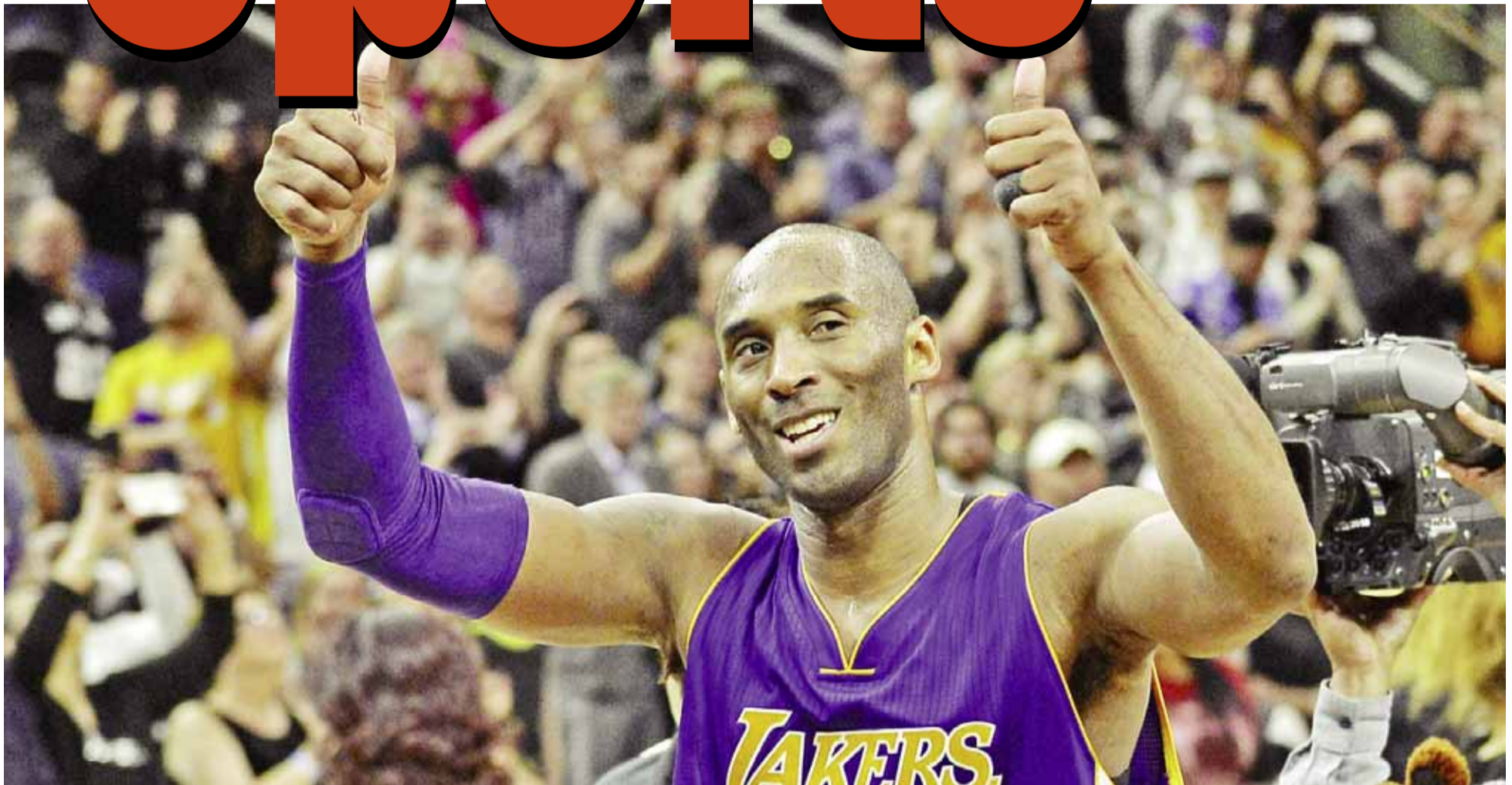
FRENCH LEAGUE

PSGermain v Lille	19:00
beIN SPORTS 6 HD	
Nantes v Lorient	22:00
beIN SPORTS 10 HD	
GFC Ajaccio v Troyes	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
Guingamp v Girondins	22:00
beIN SPORTS 6 HD	
Montpellier v Toulouse	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
Stade de Reims v Bastia	22:00
beIN SPORTS	

Sports



Mahrez thumbs nose at England's aristocracy 46



SAN ANTONIO: In this Saturday, Feb 6, 2016 file photo, Los Angeles Lakers guard Kobe Bryant gestures to fans as he walks off of the court after an NBA basketball game against the San Antonio Spurs in San Antonio. — AP

NBA ALL-STAR WEEKEND SHOWCASES CANADA'S HOOP LOVE

KOBE'S LAST, TORONTO'S FIRST

TORONTO: When Greg Anthony arrived in Vancouver to join the inaugural Grizzlies team in 1995, the cash in his pocket wasn't the only currency that he needed to exchange. Anthony was a star in college at mighty UNLV and went to the NBA to play for the Knicks, who took a backseat to nobody in New York during those playoff days.

In hockey-mad Canada, it was another story. There was no star treatment for hoop stars and no real understanding of the game. Local and national publications had to run basic tutorials that explained the rules of the basketball to fans.

"I don't want to say it was humbling, but to a certain degree it was. To go there where it was kind of a Basketball 101 for so many people," said Anthony, now an analyst for NBATV. "We all want to feel like what we do matters. It took a while for it to really matter for the vast majority of people in Vancouver." Basketball has finally carved out a much higher profile in the country's sports consciousness, albeit 20 years after Anthony first set foot in Canada as part of the NBA's initial in-roads into the country. The Grizzlies lasted only six seasons in Vancouver, but as the NBA's All-Star weekend kicks off in Toronto, it offers Canadian basketball its first opportunity to really show the rest of the world how far the game has come.

"You could put it up there with some of the biggest moments in Canadian basketball history,"

said Dan McKenzie, vice president and general manager for NBA Canada. That list isn't incredibly long. The Toronto Raptors, the other team to break into the league with the Grizzlies in '95, have lived a largely unremarkable NBA life with only one playoff series victory in franchise history.

Like the Grizzlies, the Raptors early days were difficult, with players and coaches often expressing reluctance about coming and staying north of the border. My, how times have changed. On the 125th anniversary of the invention of the game, the NBA is holding its midseason gala outside of the United States for the first time.

It comes during a period of rebirth for the Raptors, who have galvanized under the leadership of general manager Masai Ujiri and coach Dwane Casey. All-Stars in Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan have led the team to the second-best record in the Eastern Conference at the break, giving their dedicated and vocal fan base reason to pack the Air Canada Center.

There are 12 Canadian-born players in the NBA, more than any other country outside the United States. And budding young stars Andrew Wiggins and Tristan Thompson have helped put Canada's national team on the map in international competition. Television viewership of NBA games has doubled over the last three years, bolstered by an influx of immigrants from basketball-hungry nations like

China and the Philippines. "I can't express to you how far Canada Basketball has come," said Raptors guard Cory Joseph, a native of Toronto. "It's going to be a crazy atmosphere. I feel like it's going to inspire the youth around town, inspire the whole country and hopefully it just skyrockets from here even more."

Canada is home to Dr James Naismith, who invented the game, former two-time MVP Steve Nash and even, for a couple of years in his youth, reigning MVP Stephen Curry, who has emerged as the new face of the league. Curry's wife Ayesha is Canadian as well. "I'm very familiar with the entire scene there," said the Golden State Warriors guard. "I know where my house, where we used to live, Lakeshore Avenue. We drive by it from the airport to the hotel we're staying at. ... My wife's extended family all live there, she's from there, so a lot of sentimental value to going back."

World's best-kept secrets

Even Charles Barkley - noted lamppooner of NBA cities like San Antonio and Oklahoma City - likes Toronto. "I think it's one of the best-kept secrets in the world," said Barkley, the Hall of Famer and TNT analyst. "I think it's one of the best cities in the world. They're amazing fans. You saw this year in the playoffs.

You saw how crazy that place was. I think it's

going to be great to shine a light on that city." When he contemplates the moment that is about to arrive, Tas Melas - a longtime Raptors fan who now is co-host of "The Starters" on NBATV - said it sends shivers down his spine to think about where things were in the team's formative years. That's when the NBA was buried in the sports pages and deep into the nightly highlight shows in Canada.

"It's something no one saw coming 20 years ago when this all started," Melas said. "It was just a lot of dark times. ... The reputation of the city was really lousy and it was a bit of a joke in the NBA world. This is just a huge mark of validation." Most believe Vince Carter's high-flying act saved the Raptors from possible relocation at the turn of the century and got a whole generation of youngsters to pick up a basketball for the first time.

Wiggins, the NBA's rookie of the year last year who is having another strong season for the Minnesota Timberwolves, was one of those youngsters. He will participate in the Rising Stars Challenge, part of weekend of activities that could inspire the next generation of Canadians. "People (in Canada) have never got a chance to experience something like that before, especially the younger generation," Wiggins said. "Unless you're there to witness it, you don't really know how it is. It's one thing to watch it on TV and another thing watching it live in person." — AP