



SAUDIS HALT \$4BN LEBANON AID

RIYADH CUTS MILITARY PROGRAMS OVER 'HOSTILE POSITIONS'

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said yesterday it has halted a \$3 billion program for military supplies to Lebanon in protest against Hezbollah, the group fighting in support of Syria's regime. In light of positions taken by Hezbollah, the kingdom proceeded to "a comprehensive review of its relations with the Lebanese republic", an unnamed official told the Saudi Press Agency. It added that the remainder of a \$1 billion financing package for Lebanese internal security forces had also been stopped, in a separate decision.

The official quoted by the Saudi Press Agency said the kingdom had noticed "hostile Lebanese positions resulting from the stranglehold of Hezbollah on the state". The official cited by Saudi Press Agency said Lebanon had not joined condemnation of the attacks on its diplomatic missions in Iran, either at the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He also deplored the "political and media campaigns inspired by Hezbollah against Saudi Arabia", as well as the group's "terrorist acts against Arab and Muslim nations". — Agencies

US STRIKES IS IN LIBYA, 41 DEAD

TRIPOLI: A US air strike on a jihadist training camp in Libya killed dozens of people yesterday, probably including a senior Islamic State group operative behind attacks in Tunisia, officials said. It was the second US air raid in the violence-racked North African country targeting the fast-expanding jihadist group in the past three months. The strike early yesterday against an IS camp near the city of Sabratha "likely killed" IS operative Nouredine Chouchane, a US official said.

A jihadist safe house was destroyed in the dawn raid about 70 km west of Tripoli, according to Hussein Al-Dawadi, an official in Sabratha near the border with Tunisia. "The raid killed 41 people who were all inside the house," Dawadi told AFP. "The vast majority of those killed were Tunisians who were probably members of IS." A suspect wounded in the strike said he had been taken to the camp blindfolded to train in combat, Dawadi added. Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook noted that Chouchane's death would be a significant blow to IS in Libya, adding he had been planning attacks against US and other Western interests. — AFP

'MOCKINGBIRD' AUTHOR HARPER LEE DIES AT 89

NEW YORK: Harper Lee, who wrote one of America's most enduring literary classics, "To Kill a Mockingbird," and surprised readers 55 years later with the publication of a second book about the same characters, died at the age of 89 yesterday. A statement from Tonja Carter, Lee's attorney in her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, said Lee had "passed away early this morning in her sleep" and that the death was unexpected. For decades it had appeared that Lee's sole literary output would be "To Kill a Mockingbird" and the July 2015 publication of "Go Set a Watchman" was a surprising and somewhat controversial literary event.



Harper Lee

For many years, Lee, a shy woman with an engaging Southern drawl who never married, lived quietly and privately, always turning down interview requests. After suffering a stroke and enduring failing vision and hearing, she spent her final years in an assisted living residence in Monroeville.

Nelle Harper Lee was born April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, the youngest of four children of A C and Frances Finch Lee and a descendant of Civil War General Robert E Lee. Lee rarely made public appearances, but in Nov 2007 went to the White House to accept a Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W Bush, who called her book "a gift to the entire world". — Reuters

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KUWAIT CELEBRATES CROWN PRINCE'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait celebrates today the tenth anniversary of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption of the senior post. On February 7th, 2006, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued an Amiri Order, naming His Highness Sheikh Nawaf as Heir Apparent. On February 20th, he was sworn in during an extraordinary National Assembly's session, with the MPs unanimously declaring allegiance to His Highness. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf, during that parliamentary session, stated that although Kuwait is small a country, it succeeded in overcoming major ordeals and obstacles due to the people unity and loyalty to their leadership.

"National unity constitutes a fence that protects Kuwait in face of hostilities," His Highness the Crown Prince stated during the historic session. "I bow in awe to this great country, its faithful people, being commanded by this enlightened leadership of His Highness the Amir," he announced.

National service

Sheikh Nawaf has served Kuwait for more than half a century, at various levels. His national service started following Kuwait's independence in 1961, when he was named Hawally Governor. He continued in this post till 1978, when he was appointed Minister of Interior; later he became Minister of Defense, in January 1988.

Some of his major achievements was establishment of the legal affairs department at the Mol, the mayors' affairs department, election department in addition to his contributions to overhauling the police department. At the MoD, he created special contracts and legal affairs' departments. Following Kuwait's liberation in 1991, after he was appointed Minister of Social Affairs and Labor (between April 20, 1990 and October 17, 1992), Sheikh Nawaf set up a special care hospital and created a new post; assistant undersecretary for legal affairs.

In October 1994, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf was named Deputy Chief of the National Guards, serving in the Guards till July 2003, when he was re-appointed as Minister of Interior, as well as the First

Deputy Prime Minister. He continued holding these posts till he was proclaimed Heir Apparent in 2006.

'Kuwaitization'

Sheikh Nawaf has encouraged young citizens to join military ranks, played a major role in the 'Kuwaitization policy,' staffing the administrations with nationals, replacing expatriates. Among his major accomplishments was transformation of Hawally, which was a small village, into a residential district bustling with commercial and economic facilities. Since he had taken the interior portfolio, His Highness had been preoccupied with maintaining the homeland security and stability.

The Mol during his era witnessed a wide-scale overhaul covering security and police sectors, in addition to drawing up an integrated security strategy aimed at combating crime. He had also worked out a strategy for protecting the borders, national sea territorial waters and the islands. At the defense level, His Highness the Heir Apparent embarked on a major upgrading plan, equipping the forces with modern arms and equipment.

Also locally, Sheikh Nawaf attended and patronized a series of events. On January 6th, 2014, he patronized the 24th conference of the National Union of Kuwait Students. On January 27th, he sponsored the horse race tournament (2013-2014). On February 3rd, he inaugurated the new Mol's headquarters (Nawaf Al-Ahmad Headquarters) in Subhan. On March 5, he sponsored a ceremony for distribution of academic and higher studies' certificates (2012-2013). His Highness the Crown Prince, in his capacity at the time as Deputy Amir, attended Kuwait Housing Conference on March nine. The next day, he patronized graduation of the 25th officers' batch at Saad Al-Abdullah Security Sciences Academy.

On March 12, he sponsored a ceremony, honoring excellent graduates of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), 2012-2013. On March 17, he sponsored Kuwait University's 43rd graduation ceremony (2012-2013). On March 31, he patronized the 41st educational conference.



KUWAIT: His Highness Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah takes the constitutional oath at the National Assembly on February 20, 2006. — KUNA

On May 18, Sheikh Nawaf sponsored a ceremony for scientific excellence. On October 14th, he received Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who was on a visit to the country. On October 21, he chaired the first meeting of the National Security Council, and on November 18th, he sponsored the 11th GCC nursing forum. On December 20th, His Highness the Crown Prince sponsored the 21st Waqf Meeting. On December 22nd, he patronized a ceremony for honoring excellent Kuwaiti athletes. He had also patronized a number of other events. In 2005, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf personally commanded a raid on terrorists who had threatened the homeland.

Regional

At the regional level, he played a noticeable role in realizing security integration among GCC countries. During the Iraqi aggression on Kuwait in 1990, he sought to re-organize national military ranks abroad, in preparation for the war of liberation. He visited Saudi Arabia, in January, to offer con-

lences on demise of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz.

He had been an active participant in GCC inter- or ministerial meetings, with aim of realizing maximum security coordination among the security apparatuses of the Council member states for facing dangers against the region — namely terrorism. He had declared that the Arab security is inseparable. His deliberations with his Arab peers resulted in Arab unanimity in fighting terrorism and reaching a consensus on other crimes and perils such as money laundering and corruption.—KUNA

Sheikh Nawaf aspires that Kuwait be an oasis of security and stability, where the Kuwaiti youth abide by religious principles, adopt moderation, embrace moralistic values, arm themselves with knowledge and science as well as remain abreast of various global scientific innovations. He believes that power should be employed for supporting the weak and the oppressed. Such are traits of a genuine Arab leader who advocates placing all people equal under the law. Sheikh Nawaf, born in 1937, had studied at Kuwaiti schools. He is father of five, and his main hobby is horse riding. — KUNA

CROWN PRINCE A TRUE STATESMAN: INFO MINISTER

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, through his long and illustrious career, has reflected how a true statesman should act in service of his country, said Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah yesterday. Speaking to KUNA on the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Crown Prince assumption of post, Sheikh Salman said His Highness Sheikh Nawaf has always left a strong impression throughout his career as a statesman.

His Highness Sheikh Nawaf played an integral part in the development of Kuwait in the previous half century, said the minister, adding that the Crown Prince benefited greatly from the experience of former leaders of Kuwait, namely His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness Father Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.

His Highness Sheikh Nawaf played an important role in the development of Hawally when he was governor in the 1960s and played a major role in safeguarding Kuwait against the threat of terrorism during the 1980s, and has continued to carry on the responsibility of leading the country towards further development, said the minister. Alongside His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf is taking Kuwait into the future, said Sheikh Salman.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said His Highness the Crown Prince is a strong and true visionary leader. Sheikh Meshaal lauded Sheikh Nawaf's efforts in laying the cornerstone of the security apparatus and system in Kuwait, affirming that decisions undertaken by His Highness came as a result of his strong and decisive judgment which always focused on benefiting of Kuwait and its people.

His Highness Sheikh Nawaf comes from a line of

great Kuwaiti leaders whom he had learned a lot from, said the senior official. He affirmed that His Highness the Crown Prince, along with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, will continue to lead Kuwaiti into a bright hopeful future.

Successful leader

Also yesterday, Chairman of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) said that His Highness the Crown Prince is an icon of devotion, giving and faithful-

ness in service of the homeland and citizens. His march is a blend of sacrifices and giving for Kuwait's promotion and prosperity as well as for goodness of the country's sons, said Sheikh Mubarak Duaij Al-Ibrahim Al-Sabah, also General Director of the national news network.

Mentioning some of his traits, Sheikh Mubarak said His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf is distinguished with high morals, great heart and pure soul, while caring for sons of Kuwait, noting his devotion and hard work for service of the country and the natives. In addition to his great tolerance, he is firm, wide and shrewd leader at crises' times. He is a successful leader, hardened with experience and stands, Sheikh Mubarak said, succeeding since his youth times in making a series of great accomplishments that would go down in history with appreciation and recognition.

Sheikh Mubarak noted that Sheikh Nawaf started his career with the country's independence, when he was chosen Hawally Governor, noting his success in developing the region into a booming business and amusement district. He also noted his major role through the posts he had held in protecting the country against terrorism. His Highness the Crown Prince believes in the youth capacities in rising up to challenges facing the country, he said, noting his efforts to elevate level of skills among the security and military personnel. —KUNA



Information Minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah



Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah



KUNA Chairman Sheikh Mubarak Duaij Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as defense minister.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the National Assembly at the first parliamentary elections in Kuwait.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as defense minister, with then Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as interior minister.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the National Assembly during the 1980s.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as defense minister.

SHEIKH NAWAF HELD SERIES OF SENIOR POSTS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has served the homeland, Kuwait, for more than half a century, leading a life marked with hard work, accomplishments and generous giving in various sectors. Throughout the long years, he had held a chain of senior posts till he was proclaimed the Heir

Apparent of the State of Kuwait.

- On February 21, 1961, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf was assigned as Governor of Hawally Governorate.
- On March 19, 1978, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf became Interior Minister.
- On February 26, 1988, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf took the position of Defense Minister.

- On April 20, 1991, Sheikh Nawaf became Minister of Social Affairs and Labor.
- On October 16, 1994, he was assigned to the post of Deputy Chief of the National Guard.
- On July 13, 2003, he was re-assigned as Minister of Interior.
- On October 16, 2003, an Amiri Decree was issued assigning His Highness Sheikh Nawaf as

- First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.
- On February 7th, 2006, an Amiri Decree was issued nominating him for the position of the Crown Prince. The National Assembly (Parliament) unanimously voted in favor of the motion on February 20th of the same year. —KUNA



ANKARA: Iyad Al-Kharafi (center) is pictured during a ceremony to honor former speaker of Kuwait National Assembly, Jassem Al-Kharafi. —KUNA



A special demonstration during former speaker of Kuwait National Assembly Jassem Al-Kharafi's honoring ceremony.

FORMER, LATE SPEAKER OF KUWAIT PARLIAMENT HONORED IN TURKEY

ANKARA: West Mediterranean Development Agency (Baka) has held an honoring ceremony for the former speaker of Kuwait National Assembly, Jassem Al-Kharafi, who passed away in May 2015. The ceremony was attended by local officials including the gov-

ernor, Menderes Turel, a representative of the premier, son of the deceased Iyad Al-Kharafi and Turkish businessmen. Kharafi in a statement during the ceremony, held late on Thursday, lauded ties between Kuwait and Turkey, namely at the tourist and

trade levels, however he indicated that these relations could be expanded further. He also indicated that Al-Kharafi Group would ponder launching investments in Antalya. Baka is an official organization that promotes investment in the West Mediterranean

Region of Turkey. It promotes, fosters and facilitates international investment and business development in the West Mediterranean region. Al-Kharafi Group, established in 1965, deals in construction, communication, capital markets and investments. —KUNA

25 YEARS LATER, KUWAITIS STILL GRATEFUL TO US-LED COALITION

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Twenty-five years after liberation, Kuwaitis are still thankful and emotional when talking about it, US Ambassador to Kuwait Douglas Silliman said at a forum organized by the US Embassy at the Gulf University for Science and Technology Wednesday evening. Speaking at the forum, which was also attended via Skype from Washington by former US Ambassador to Kuwait Edward 'Skip' Gnehm. Silliman noted that when he attends diwanis at schools and NGO events here, he is always reminded and thanked by many Kuwaitis for the role the United States played during the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

"They talk about their own stories. Some are stories told to them by parents and by family members, and the gratitude accorded to the US-led coalition which liberated Kuwait has not been lessened. They are still expressing the same warmth and gratitude 25 years later," Silliman said. The forum, attended by GUST students, faculties and invited guests the under theme 'Liberation Day, 25 Years Later: Recollections of two American Ambassadors', was moderated by Mohamed Al-Ghanem, CEO of Alghanim and Sons.

Recalling the events which took place



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Douglas Silliman speaks during the forum. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

immediately after Iraqi forces retreated from Kuwait, Gnehm noted how gloomy and ugly the scene was, with many buildings and vehicles on the main highways on fire amidst

celebrations on the streets of Kuwait, when it was finally liberated from Iraqi forces. Gnehm was the US ambassador to Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation and immediately after liberation. "I landed at the US embassy by helicopter, and before landing, I saw the gloomy face of Kuwait at that time. I was privileged to raise the American flag then - it was the greatest moment of my life. Outside the embassy was a parade of people celebrating and thanking us and the coalition forces. Our embassy at that time was next to the Kuwait Towers, so we were pretty close to the people, who were chanting 'We are free! Thank you coalition forces!' They were really excited," he recalled.

Silliman recalled his visits to Kuwait before and after the occupation. "I first came to Kuwait in 1988; then a few times in the 1990s and 2000s as a junior diplomat, so I have a sense of what it was to be in Kuwait. It's like coming home, especially now that I am the ambassador. The first impression, the friendliness and hospitality of Kuwaiti people 25 years later is very much alive when I visit Kuwaiti homes, schools and diwanis. Though the issues are much different now - not about rebuilding the country but more about economic and regional politics - the legacy of liberation and goodwill remains," he said.

Silliman was asked how the US government managed to convince the public that liberating Kuwait and military action was essential and a just cause. "It was difficult at first - there was no support from the US Congress and the public. There were lots of disagreements - the people and Congress wanted to pursue diplomatic efforts. The president was very adept and realized he did not have any backing, so he began working to change the attitude of people. Sheikh Sabah had been travelling around the world meeting leaders, and he and Washington gained the support of the public and many countries to pursue military action," he pointed out.

When the coalition was building, dialogue and coordination was very pivotal to the success of the operation. Gnehm was very active during the occupation, visiting the Kuwaiti government-in-exile and coordinating with then US President George Bush. "I met President Bush at the White House and then Sheikh Sabah (the then Kuwaiti foreign minister). It is still vivid in my mind when President Bush asked Sheikh Sabah: 'Is there anything I can do for you,' and Sheikh Sabah responded, 'Yes, please help me plan for the rebuilding and reconstruction of my country and my people,' so we organized and readied the plan," he said.

BRITISH EMBASSY MARKS KUWAIT NATIONAL DAYS

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah spoke highly of the deep-rooted friendly relations and cooperation between Kuwait and the United Kingdom in all domains. "The close relationship was crystal clear in the UK prominent contribution to Kuwait liberation war against the Iraqi invasion," he said on Thursday evening at a reception, hosted by the British Embassy. The reception was to mark the 25th Kuwait Liberation Day, the 55th Independence Day and the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption of power.

Sheikh Khaled said: "The multi-faceted defense cooperation between the two countries covers such areas as weaponry and military training," lauding as exemplary the Joint Services Command and Staff College. He

recalled the role of the UK in the seven-month military campaign by the 34-member international coalition against Iraqi invasion of Kuwait which left extensive destruction and one of the world's worst environment disasters. "We always remember our great friends, whether governments and peoples, men and women from across the world, who stood by us in getting rid of that brutal invasion," Sheikh Khaled added.

Meanwhile, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah said the bilateral ties, particularly in the defense field, have grown steadily since the signing of the protection treaty in 1899.

He paid homage to several attendees at the celebration who contributed to Kuwait liberation, calling on the new generations to take lessons from the bitter experience of the Iraqi invasion while working to promote the culture of peace on the local, regional and international levels.

British Ambassador to Kuwait Matthew James Lodge said meanwhile that the celebration was part of the long-standing friendship and partnership which grew remarkably over the last 25 years. He said he was pleased to see Kuwait so free, progressed and lively today.

Ambassador Lodge congratulated His Highness the Amir and the government and people of Kuwait on the national days. The reception also gathered Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and Chief of General Staff of the Kuwaiti Army Lieutenant General Staff Mohammad Khaled Al-Khodr, as well as military top brass and diplomats based in Kuwait. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and British Ambassador to Kuwait Matthew Lodge are pictured during a reception hosted by the British Embassy. —KUNA



KUWAIT: French Ambassador to Kuwait Christian Nakhle (third from left) attends a diwaniya titled 'Free Kuwait, 25 Years Later.' —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

FRENCH EMBASSY HOLDS DIWANIYA

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The French Embassy in Kuwait in collaboration with the French Institute and the French Research Center in Kuwait (CEFAS) held the first Cross-Cultural Diwaniya titled 'Free Kuwait, 25 Years Later' at the French Institute in Jabriya on Wednesday. Dr Mohammed Al-Fili, professor of law at Kuwait University, Dr Mohammed Al-Wahab, professor of philosophy at Kuwait University, Dr Faisal Al-Fuhaid, founder of the Cross-Cultural Diwaniya, and Michel Mouton, Director of CEFAS, participated in the diwaniya.

Topics of discussion

The four speakers discussed the passing of 25 years since the war and liberation, how this affected Kuwait's culture and rights, way of thinking, the need for opening up and the youth. The diwaniya was also about how the community looks to the past and future. "It also discussed relations between Kuwait and its neighbors after the invasion and liberation, and the relations amongst the Kuwaiti community, especially since there is great diversity in this community that includes Bedouins and Hathar (urbanites)," said Christian Nakhle, French Ambassador to Kuwait.

"How did the invasion affect the founding of modern Kuwait after the liberation? Some say we should not forget the past and we should remember what happened. Others say we are not moving with the future as we haven't forgotten the past. We as

Europeans were amazed that when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, he didn't find even one person to cooperate with him. And we really praise this national unity. After last year's bomb attack on the Sadeq Mosque, Kuwaitis were all united - Shiites and Sunnis - which proves they didn't forget their unity during the invasion. The question is how we are looking to the future," said Nakhle.

A main member

France was one of the main members of the alliance during the liberation. "France, as a member of the United Nations Security Council, was keen to participate in liberating Kuwait, as we respect international legislation and borders and are completely against any invasion of these borders. France alone sent 19,000 soldiers to Kuwait. As a diplomat, I care about bilateral relations, which should always be friendly, strategic and cooperative. Also, 174 Kuwaiti officers are studying in France at the military academy this year," concluded Nakhle.

Fuhaid noted that this was the first edition of the Diwaniya. "These diwanis are the key to making any human being - not just Kuwaitis - much more understanding and think things through different social ways and not just their own way. This is why I held this diwaniya to see things from different angles. We get different opinions together from all perspectives and seek how to make Kuwait united and the development of youth," he told Kuwait Times.



KUWAIT: Sheikha Fadiya Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah is pictured with winners at the ceremony. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

'IBTIKAR AL-KUWAIT' HOLDS AWARD CEREMONY

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Ibtikar Al-Kuwait for Innovation held an award ceremony on Thursday at the Gulf University for Sciences and Technology (GUST). During the ceremony, the organizing committee announced the three winners on the local level in both the high school and intermediate school categories. Twelve innovative projects participated in this competition.

The Ibtikar Al-Kuwait competition was first launched in 1999 with participants only from Kuwait, and later expanded to include other GCC countries in 2011. In 2014, the competition transformed into a part of an initiative to develop the scientific abilities of female students in Kuwait's public schools, with the intention of training them to participate in the competition.

Opportunity

The Ibtikar initiative gives the girls an opportunity to express their skills through their inventions. "Tonight we are celebrating the creativity and innovations of the participating girls from Kuwait schools, and the winners announced today will compete with GCC participants in the final stage. Today, we have reached the halfway stage of this year's competition. We have the opportunity to see their inventions, which expresses the combination of education with thinking, skills with analysis, and ideas with applications. Their inventions show how an idea can be transferred into reality. Their inventions serve the community and solve problems of people. In addition, it also highlights the ability of women and girls to positively develop the community," said Sheikha Fadiya Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, founder of Ibtikar Al-Kuwait, during the awards ceremony.

The competition is growing and developing every year. "This year we added intermediate schools that are participating for the first time in this competition. Through this activity, we aim to empower Kuwaiti women, especially with the difficult situation of the region and particularly the drop in oil prices. So we should focus on training girls. I would like to thank HH the Amir for supporting this competition," she added. "There are many examples of young ladies who had leading roles in different situations, which reflects their strong will and hard work to achieve their goals. And tonight, we are witnessing women excelling in the field of innovation and creativity, which is the weapon of the 21st century. Through Ibtikar Al-Kuwait, we encourage innovation and creativity from the early grades," concluded Sheikha Fadiya.

Innovation

Dr Donald Bates, President of GUST, noted that the Ibtikar competition is hosted and partially sponsored by GUST. "Ibtikar means innovation, and innovation with science and technology makes a perfect match. When this university was founded in 2002, it had a vision to become the place where upcoming generations could build their futures through pathways that are increasing in importance - science, technology, innovation and creativity," he pointed out. "Today we are honoring an exceptional collection of students who are putting together the building blocks of a better tomorrow. I commend each of you on your hard work, determination and will to find solutions to everyday problems," added Bates.

General Director of the initiative Dr Fatma Al-Hashim said that through this initiative, we can support youth and help them spend their free time in useful activities. "This initiative made the girls express their creativity and ideas through the inventions they presented. This competition encourages girls to learn and invent. It also proves that inventing is not limited to men only. I hope that their ideas and inventions will be realized in projects, from which the government will benefit," she stated.

A short documentary about Ibtikar was presented during the event, which was followed by awarding not only the winners, but all the participants in this competition, including the girls and their supervising teachers.

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KUWAITI WORLD CUP HEROES SEEK TO GET FIFA BAN LIFTED

DUBAI: Four of Kuwait's 1982 World Cup heroes are touring the Gulf region lobbying soccer chiefs in an attempt to have a FIFA ban on the country's football association overturned. World soccer's governing body suspended the Kuwait Football Association (KFA) in October after a deadline to change a government sports law was not met.

Kuwait, home to influential sports power broker Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, is now banking on former soccer stars to get back into the sporting fold. A delegation led by Kuwaiti MP Abdullah Al-Maayouf, who played for the country at their only World Cup finals, has already met senior soccer officials from Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to push Kuwait's case for reinstatement.

"All of these guys promised to help Kuwait and support Kuwait," Maayouf told Reuters by telephone. "We tell them we are not from the government. We are working for the public," said Maayouf, who is also head of the Kuwaiti parliament's youth and



MP Abdullah Al-Maayouf

sports committee.

Maayouf travelled with Saad Al-Houthi, Mohammed Karam and Naeem Saad - also members of Kuwait's only World Cup squad to date-in the hope of garnering support for

their case for reinstatement. Kuwait was banned by FIFA because of government interference in the running of the country's football association.

Its Olympic committee has also been suspended by the International Olympic Committee-its second such ban in five years-over government interference, putting Kuwait's participation at this year's Rio de Janeiro Olympics in doubt.

Maayouf said the four-man delegation was independent from the state. "We don't want [the government] to be involved," he said. "We paid for our tickets, we paid for our hotels, we paid for our food. We want to be honest. We paid from our own pockets."

He said the group, which also plans to visit Oman, Jordan, Egypt and Algeria, was acting without any outside influence. FIFA will elect a new president on Feb. 26, with Bahrain's Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa regarded as one of the frontrunners to replace suspended president Sepp Blatter. — Reuters

MINISTRY EMPLOYEE HELPS TRANSFER 12 VISAS ILLEGALLY

KUWAIT: A security source said residency affairs department's detectives received information that the visas of 12 Egyptian nationals were transferred from their original employer who owns farms to a car leasing company. A team was formed and found out that the transfers were done illegally. The files of the transfers were not available, so orders were given to arrest all people involved. The 12 workers were arrested and they all admitted that each has paid KD 700 each to a bedoon man who runs a farm to make the transfer. The bedoon man was arrested and confessed to receiving bribes and forgery charges. He said that he had made an agreement with an employee at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, who helped by not registering the irregular work permits in the ministry's database. The suspects were sent to the public prosecution to face charges. Owners of farm licenses benefit from special conditions to recruit laborers from outside, compared to other employers. A work visa on a

farm cannot be transferred to the file of a private company or a government facility, according to labor regulations.

Forgery

A citizen in his forties accused a Syrian man working for him at a real estate office of forging official documents, adding that he escaped when he confronted him about the issue. The citizen told Fahaheel police that he discovered that his employee had forged his signature. When he asked him about it, the man denied forging the documents. He then disappeared, the employer told police. Ahmadi detectives are looking for the alleged suspect.

Physical assault

A citizen called police for help, saying that a person stormed his diwaniya and brutally assaulted him before escaping. The citizen gave Ali Sabah Al-Salem police the identity of a Kuwaiti man he has some unsettled disputes with. He said that the man beat him

up viciously inside his diwaniya before escaping. The man handed police a medical report stating his injuries. Ahmadi detectives are looking for the culprit.

Driver mugged

An Indian man said that three men wearing national Kuwaiti dress beat him up and stole his rented car. A security source said that the victim told Fintas police that while he was driving in the area, three men stopped him, forced him out of his vehicle then beat him up before driving off with the car. Detectives are working on the case.

Alcohol consumptions

Special task forces arrested two people, Kuwaiti and Saudi, in south Surra who were under the influence of alcohol. A bottle of imported liquor was found with them along with seven envelopes containing heroin and drug paraphernalia. Both were sent to Drugs Control General Department. — Al-Rai

REDUCTION OF TRAFFIC FINES BASELESS INFORMATION: MOI

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior (MOI) refuted news reports circulated in the social media outlets over reduction of traffic fines value or the possibility of making partial payments for such violations. The Ministry described in a statement such news as 'baseless.' The Security Media Department at the ministry said in a press statement yesterday that such traffic citations are the state's right where in any way can be reduced except through a court ruling. It recalled the earlier-issued decision to unblock some of the traffic citations on the occasion of the national holidays, excluding severe violations including reckless driving, high speed, driving with no license and exposing drivers or passengers to risk. The ministry called on social networking sites to not being misled by the rumors and the false gossip, urging all to derive their information from reliable and responsible sources. — KUNA

KRCS STRESSES ITS COMMITMENT TO AID SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday stressed it would stand by its commitment to aid the Syrian people and to continue provision of humanitarian aid to a number of Syrian families in Lebanon.

Head of the Social Committee in the KRCS Fawzia Al-Nassar told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) following her arrival in Lebanon heading a women delegation from the KRCS that the delegation would provide relief supplies to some 1,500 Syrian families in Lebanon in coordination with the Lebanese Red Cross. She said she will also visit a number of wounded, displaced people in Lebanon to provide humanitarian assistance to them in addition to holding a concert for Syrian children. She pointed out that the visit is an opportunity to see the situation of displaced Syrians in Lebanon closely, especially after the blizzard that swept through a number of areas of Lebanon recently, saying that about 3,000 parcels of food stuffs and cleaners would be distributed to the Syrian families as part of the KRCS' continued humanitarian programs. Lebanon now hosts more than one million Syrian refugees. — KUNA



BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society's team. — KUNA

Crime

Report

Abducting women harbored by medical companies

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Residency Affairs Department detectives arrested 24 Asian women reported absconding by their sponsors. The arrest came following information that medical companies are harboring a group of absconding domestic helpers, some of whom are wanted by authorities. A police team was formed to carry out the operation of finding and arresting the suspects. The women and suspects harboring them were sent to concerned authorities for further action.

Rabiya events explained

A security source gave full details of events that happened in Rabiya Thursday night, and denied that the suspects had any relations with the Islamic State (IS) group. The source said that a citizen was arrested with possession of bullets near Rabiya police station. The man confessed during questioning that he has a firearm at home which he used along with another man in thefts, in which they stole vehicles and electric generators. The man led officers to a location in Salmi where he said his accomplice was hiding, but the suspect was nowhere to be found. Police found another weapon and a large number of stolen material at the location. The second suspect was later located in Rabiya, so detectives went there, but his family enabled him to escape. Detectives asked for choppers to help in searching for him. The source said the suspect's brother was arrested, then was allowed to call his brother and convinced him that he will enable him to escape. The brother and detectives went to Salmi where the second suspect was arrested.

THIRD CONSTITUENCY BY-ELECTION DUE TODAY

KUWAIT: The third constituency by-election will be held today with the participation of 81,218 male and female voters selecting an MP from 34 candidates. Some 20 election polling stations were erected in public schools located in the third constituency. The National Assembly called for by-election for the third constituency to fill in the vacant seat left by the late MP Nabil Al-Fadhli who passed away in December 2015. Polling stations will open at 8:00 am and voting will proceed till evening. Several state bodies expressed their readiness to co-organize and provide various services during the course of the event with a full media coverage expected for the election day. — KUNA

International

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HAWAII: In this image taken from video, a helicopter crashes near Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on Thursday, Feb 18, 2016. The private helicopter with five people aboard crashed and sunk into the water, leaving a teenage passenger in critical condition. —AP

HELICOPTER FALLS INTO PEARL HARBOR

PEARL HARBOR: Shawn Winrich, visiting Hawaii from Madison, Wisconsin, was taking photos of Pearl Harbor when he saw a helicopter “essentially coming straight at us” at a popular tourist destination that attracts thousands of visitors daily. He switched to video, recording as the helicopter appeared to lose altitude and get closer to the water. “I thought it would be great video, whatever it is, and all of a sudden it essentially just fell out of the sky and crash-landed in the water,” he said.

He stopped filming and jumped in to help. The heads of three adults popped up, and then a fourth surfaced. He heard people saying a fifth occupant was trapped. The Bell 206 aircraft made a hard landing and sank near the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center Thursday morning, US Navy spokeswoman Agnes Tauyan said.

The names of the five people on board were not immediately released. “We are told bystanders jumped in to help rescue these patients from the water,” said Shayne Enright, spokeswoman for Honolulu Emergency Services Department.

One of them was Chris Gardner, a tour guide with Keawe Adventures who was with a group of

tourists at the visitor center when he heard the crash. “I took off my shirt and dove in,” he said, describing how he, a Navy sailor, a federal police officer and another man took turns diving to the submerged helicopter and trying to free a passenger with a knife. “He was strapped into his seat in the back of the aircraft.” They eventually freed the teenage passenger. The helicopter crashed about 20 feet offshore, right next to the visitor center’s lawn, said Winrich’s daughter, Justice Winrich. She watched as it “plopped down” into the water.

“I saw it like as it was coming in, and it looked pretty normal. It didn’t look like it was shaking or anything,” Winrich said. “It just started like getting really close this way and started going down.” She thought it was strange that the helicopter was that close to people. As it got closer to the water, she saw some dark some coming out of the back of the helicopter, and it started shaking slightly. Winrich saw three people get out of the helicopter immediately and start swimming to shore. “I was like, oh my God, I can’t believe this just happened. It was crazy,” she said.

“You go on vacation and you never think you’re going to see something like that.” Her

father’s footage shows the helicopter heading toward the water and then crashing down. The blades stop spinning as it turns over in the water. Local author Allan Seiden was signing books at the visitor center when someone told him a helicopter crashed. He rushed over to where people were gathered, but by then the helicopter wasn’t visible. “I think it sunk instantly,” he said. Seiden watched as the helicopter’s occupants— including a man in a neck brace— were carried away on stretchers. “People were very calm. ... You could tell everyone was very shocked,” he said.

Federal records show the helicopter is registered to Jeffrey Gebhard of Kailua, Hawaii. He couldn’t immediately be reached for comment. The Navy said in a statement that the helicopter reportedly belongs to Genesis Aviation. A website for Genesis Helicopters says it conducts helicopter tours over Oahu and that Gebhard started Genesis in 1999. Honolulu paramedics treated the 16-year-old passenger and took him to a hospital in critical condition, Enright said. It was a team effort and we pray that he’s OK,” Gardner said of the teen he helped free from the helicopter.

“It’s part of the instinct growing up in Hawaii,” he said of jumping in to help. Hour after the crash,

his eyes were still burning from the fuel in the water, he said. A 45-year-old woman and a 50-year-old man were taken to the hospital in stable condition. Details on the two other people on board, including the pilot, weren’t immediately available. Operations at the visitor center, including visits to the nearby USS Arizona Memorial, were suspended, the Navy said. The memorial honors the 1,177 sailors and Marines killed on the ship in the Dec 7, 1941, attack by Japan.

Partial operations at the visitor center will resume Friday, the National Park Service said. The theater and boat trips to the Arizona Memorial will be suspended until further notice. The visitor center grounds, museums, snack shop and bookstore will be open. Federal Aviation Administration investigators were on their way to the crash site. A National Transportation Safety Board investigator was expected to arrive yesterday. It was the second major crash this year involving helicopters on Oahu. Twelve Hawaii-based Marines were killed when two military helicopters crashed during nighttime training on Jan 14. Both aircraft were CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters that were part of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 463. —AP

SYRIA FIGHTING RAGES DESPITE HOPED-FOR CEASEFIRE

BEIRUT: Fighting raged on in Syria yesterday, as a hoped-for ceasefire failed to materialize and Turkey intensified its shelling of Kurdish-led forces. Further dampening hopes for an end to the conflict, the UN peace envoy admitted a February 25 date for a resumption of stalled peace talks was no longer "realistically" possible. Key regime backer Russia meanwhile warned that recent comments by President Bashar Al-Assad about retaking all of Syria were out of step with Moscow's diplomatic efforts.

On the ground, Turkey intensified its nearly week-long shelling of positions in Aleppo province, where it has sought to halt the advance of a Kurdish-led alliance

against rebel forces. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said Ankara's overnight bombardment was the heaviest since it began targeting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) today. Turkey also expanded its fire, the Britain-based monitoring group said, hitting the Kurdish town of Afrin for the first time, where two civilians were killed and 28 wounded. Ankara has been angered by the SDF's operation in Aleppo province, where it has seized key territory from rebel forces supported by Turkey.

Ankara considers the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) that dominate the SDF to be an affiliate of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has

waged a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state. It accuses the YPG and PKK of being behind a bombing that killed 28 people in the Turkish capital on Wednesday night, a claim denied by the Syrian Kurdish group. Ankara fears the SDF advance in Aleppo province is intended to connect Kurdish-held areas in northern and northeastern Syria, creating an autonomous Kurdish region extending along most of its southern border.

Kurdish-led force battles IS

Further east, SDF forces were advancing against the Islamic State group in Hasakeh province, the Observatory said. The monitoring group said the alliance

was now just five kilometers from the IS stronghold of Al-Shadadi, and had cut two key routes leading from the town to Mosul in neighboring Iraq and to Raqa, the jihadists' de facto Syrian capital. The advance was assisted by heavy air strikes by the US-led coalition fighting IS, the Observatory said. The coalition has backed the Kurdish-led SDF against IS, but Washington has cautioned the alliance against taking "advantage" of the situation in Aleppo, wary of angering its Turkish ally. Ankara is allowing the coalition to fly sorties from its Incirlik base, and has complained several times about Washington's close relations with the Syrian Kurds. — AFP



CAIRO: Egyptian mourners carry the coffin of Mohamed Ali Sayed Ismail, who was allegedly shot dead by a policeman over a fare dispute the day before, during his funeral yesterday in the capital Cairo. — AFP

SISI PROPOSES LAW TO CURB POLICE ABUSES

POLICE SHOOTING SPARKS OUTRAGE

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi will ask parliament to amend the law to toughen sanctions for police abuses, his office said yesterday, a day after a police shooting sparked outrage. The statement from his office came as dozens of demonstrators gathered outside Cairo police headquarters chanting: "The Interior Ministry are thugs," after an officer killed a driver over a fare dispute. Earlier yesterday, the interior ministry announced that the policeman, who was badly beaten by a crowd after the killing, had been arrested in hospital.

Police have been on the defensive after a string of deaths in custody over the past year, redolent of the abuses that fuelled an 18-day uprising which ousted president Hosni Mubarak in 2011. "These actions must be stopped and the perpetrators held to account," Sisi told Interior Minister Magdy Abdel Gaffar, according to the statement. "This may require some legal amendments, or new laws, that regulate police performance on the street, and that ensure all who violate the rights of citizens will be held to account." Sisi will present the amendments to parliament within 15 days. Before march-

ing to Cairo police headquarters, hundreds of mourners turned out for the funeral of the driver, Mohamed Ali Sayed Ismail. Outside the headquarters, a neighbor of the slain driver accused the government of allowing police to do as they wish. "We are here because next time it will be our turn, each one of us. (Ismail) was a young respectful man just trying to make a living," said the protester, who gave his name only as Tarek. "The government has given police a free hand. A dog has more value than Egyptian citizens."

'Egyptian lives matter'

Ismail's killing sparked fury on social media, coming after a series of deaths in detention and accusations of police involvement in the torture killing of Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni. "Do we need an 'Egyptian lives matter' campaign again?" asked one prominent Egyptian blogger, who goes by the name Zeinobia. The interior ministry had all but collapsed during the uprising against Mubarak, with protesters ransacking police stations across the country. But it had regained popularity after the overthrow of

Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, even as it carried out a deadly crackdown on Islamists that killed hundreds of protesters. Scores of policemen have been killed in attacks since, and the Egyptian media has been reluctant to criticize the force. Sisi, who as army chief led Morsi's ouster, won a presidential election the following year.

He has support among the many Egyptians who say the country needs a firm leader, but he has also faced mounting criticism over police abuses and crackdowns on dissidents. Over the past year, several policemen have been detained for violence against prisoners, and some have been given jail sentences. Last week, thousands of doctors held a protest against the police after officers allegedly assaulted two doctors in a hospital. Police have also been on the defensive after the Italian student Regeni was found dead in Cairo on February 3 bearing signs of brutal torture a week after his disappearance in the capital. Italian media have reported suspicions that he was killed by Egyptian security services. The interior ministry said it was not involved and was investigating his death. — AFP

TURKS, KURDS IN SWEDEN FEAR TIT-FOR-TAT VIOLENCE

BOTKYRKA: Turks and Kurds have lived peacefully side by side for years in Sweden-but two incidents within a week are fuelling concern of tit-for-tat violence, amid heightened tensions in the Middle East. In the Stockholm suburb of Botkyrka, a powerful blast at a Turkish cultural centre destroyed two offices Wednesday evening, leaving broken glass and blackened walls. It came just four days after a man was shot at a pro-Kurdish rally in the same neighborhood southwest of Stockholm. "I have many young people who are worried now, they say 'maybe the Turks will come to my house and shoot me'," said Yilmaz Zengin, a 55-year-old of Turkish and Kurdish origin who runs the nearby Botkyrka Youth Centre. "We worry, more than anything, that the violence will increase," he said outside the centre.

Tensions in Turkey

Botkyrka's Fittja neighborhood is home to both Turks and Kurds where roughly 90 percent of the population is of foreign origin. The incidents came as a surprise to most Turkish and Kurdish residents, and Interior Minister Anders Ygeman called them worrying. "We do not want any escalating conflict between different groups in Sweden, no matter who they are," he told the Swedish news agency TT. Turkish ambassador Kaya Turkmen visited the scene of the blast and spoke to members of both the Kurdish and the Turkish communities. Several locals voiced fears that the blast was the result of a hand grenade, but police are still investigating.

"Turks and Kurds have been friends and lived in peace in Sweden and we can be grateful they decided not to be a part of this dirty game," Turkmen said as he surveyed the damage at the cultural centre. "There are tensions in Turkey, so they are related. I hope there is no more violence" said Turkmen who also visited the Kurdish Cultural Centre, called the Anatoliska Kurdiska, some 100 meters away. Wednesday night's explosion came on the same day that 28 people were killed in a bomb attack in the capital of Turkey, which-according to Ankara-has been targeted by Islamist and Kurdish groups since it started fighting them in neighboring Syria.

Ankara has been waging an all-out assault on Kurdish groups it says are allied to outlawed domestic separatists, including shelling their positions in the north of its war-torn neighbor. Umut Ozkirimli, a professor of political science at Lund University's Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, said that he was worried that violence might spread to other countries in Europe. "It's not looking good to be honest. If these things are getting out of hand then I would expect Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands to follow," he said, given the large Kurdish and Turkish populations of those countries.

We've grown up together'

Mehmet Kayhan, who runs the Turkish cultural centre, said he feared Fittja was seeing conflict exported from the Middle East. Kayhan said there had been a fight between Turks and demonstrating Kurds in front of the centre just before the shooting today. But according to Kayhan and other witnesses at the Turkish and the Kurdish cultural centers, the demonstrators were not from the Fittja neighborhood. "A crowd of maybe 150 Kurds marched in front of the centre and taunted us until a fight began. There were many of them, so we had to run into the building and barricade the doors and call the police," he said. "These people were Kurds from Iran and Iraq. I heard them speak," said Ismail Zengin, 57, who runs the centre along with Kayhan. His opinion was echoed by groups of men at the nearby Anatoliska Kurdiska who said locals would not have attacked each other. Kurdish groups also confirmed that Kurds from Iran, Iraq and Syria were all present at the demonstration, which had nothing to do with the centre. — AFP

TRIBESMEN CLASH WITH JIHADISTS INSIDE IS-HELD FALLUJAH

BAGHDAD: Rare clashes erupted yesterday inside the jihadist stronghold of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, between the Islamic State group and Iraqi tribesmen, officials and a tribal leader said. The shootout pitted fighters from multiple tribes against IS members known as Al-Hisba, who are responsible for enforcing religious strictures in the city, sources said. "Clashes took place between sons of the Al-Mahamda and Al-Juraisat tribes against the Al-Hisba group," Issa Sayir, the exiled official responsible for the Fallujah area said.

Sayir said the gunfight reflected ten-

sions resulting from increasingly difficult living conditions caused by Fallujah's isolation by the security forces. A police lieutenant colonel gave a different account, saying the clashes started after Al-Hisba members accused a woman in Al-Nizaiza market in central Fallujah of misconduct because she had failed to cover her hands with gloves.

The officer said that members of a third tribe, Al-Halabsa, were also involved in the clashes against IS, and that sporadic fighting was ongoing. Sheikh Majeed Al-Juraisi, a leader in the Al-Juraisat tribe, described the clashes

as an uprising against IS in the city and called on the government and security forces to help residents who are fighting the jihadists. Tribesmen have seized part of Al-Jolan, an area in northwest Fallujah, Juraisi said. The Iraqi interior ministry also issued a statement on the fighting, saying that tribesmen had seized parts of Al-Jolan and its outskirts but that IS later regained control.

Citing intelligence information, the ministry said the clashes began as a fight between members of the Al-Juraisat tribe and the Al-Hisba in Al-Nizaiza market. The fight escalated

into a shootout in which light and medium weapons were used, and Al-Mahamda and Al-Halabsa tribesmen backed Al-Juraisat fighters. Fallujah, which is located about 50 kilometers west of Baghdad, has been held by anti-government forces since the beginning of 2014, and is now one of two Iraqi cities still under IS control. IS launched a sweeping offensive in June 2014 that overran large areas north and west of Baghdad, but security forces and allied fighters have pushed the jihadists back with support from US-led air strikes. — AFP



NIAMEY: Supporters of Niger's incumbent president and presidential candidate Mahamadou Issoufou attend a presidential campaign rally at the Seyni Kountche stadium in Niamey. — AFP

SECURITY, TENSIONS CLOUD NIGER'S PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

NIGER STANDS LAST IN UN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

NIAMEY: Niger will hold an election tomorrow in which President Mahamadou Issoufou is running for a new term with a vow to crush an Islamist militant threat, but the opposition accuses him of another type of crackdown — against them.

Issoufou has pledged to modernize security and defense forces in the West African state if voters grant him a second term, and develop gold and phosphate sites in a bid to improve living standards in one of the world's poorest countries. Niger produces uranium and oil but is ranked last in the UN's Human Development Index and has one of the world's highest fertility rates. Issoufou has also said he will promote family planning during his second term. "We will beat them, our adversaries, and with a knock-out blow that will be a historical milestone, since it will be the first time that a candidate will win in the first round," Issoufou told a rally of up to 30,000 supporters on Thursday. Issoufou faces 14 candidates, four of them members

of an opposition coalition led by Seyni Oumarou, to lead a country that views itself as an island of stability amid neighbors such as Mali, Libya and Nigeria who are confronting Islamist militants. Niger is not immune, however. Boko Haram, based in Nigeria, has been blamed for a series of suicide bombings and other attacks in recent months, forcing authorities to declare a state of emergency in the southeastern region of Diffa.

Critics say Issoufou has resorted to repression of political rivals, arresting opposition supporters for participating in unregistered protests over the arrest of one of their leaders, and banning a rally last November and in January. In addition, one major opposition candidate, Hama Amadou, a former parliament head and one-time Issoufou ally, has spent the campaign in jail on charges related to a baby-trafficking ring. He denies the charges and says they are politically motivated. The government says it respects the rule of law. In another sign of increased tension,

anti-riot forces are stationed at intersections in the capital Niamey and conduct night patrols in the wake of what the government said was a coup attempt in December.

Campaign posters

The walls of streets in the capital Niamey are plastered with photographs, pennants and banners of the candidates, but municipal authorities, citing security concerns, have banned the parades of cars common on the campaign trail. Hamadou Saley, an opposition supporter, said Niger has no history of electoral violence. "We can protest peacefully to show our disapproval but things can only degenerate if authorities unjustly employ brutal force," said Saley. Issoufou, who was born in 1951, won an election in 2011, a year after a coup. Under election rules, a run-off will be held if no candidate secures an outright victory tomorrow, and opposition leaders acknowledge they face an uphill struggle. — Reuters

KILLING OF 2 BLACK FARM WORKERS EXPOSES SOUTH AFRICA FAULTLINES

PARYS: Two black men are beaten to death in the middle of a cattle pasture in South Africa after white farmers hunt them down to avenge an attack on an elderly landowner. A month later, four of the farmers stand squeezed in the dock of Parys town magistrates court, charged with the double murder. Outside the court, about 200 black protesters chant "Kill the farmers" at khaki-clad white protesters who vow to defend themselves against what they say is a "genocide" of their people. The killing last month of Seun Tangasha, 29, and Samuel Tjexa, 35, has lit a tinderbox of anger over racism, crime, poverty and land ownership issues that afflict modern South Africa.

For many blacks, the court case has highlighted the alleged mistreatment of workers by white farmers, who stand accused of forming vigilante groups to carry out extrajudicial murders. For many whites, it is about how farmers are forced to fight back against a deadly crime wave of "farm attacks" that left many landowners in fear of their lives. Anna Jubeba, Tangasha's aunt said that his "family are very angry and very sad" over his killing.

"These farmers must go to jail for life," she said, speaking in their sparsely-furnished house in an impoverished township on the outskirts of Parys. "The courts see these guys killing black people, but they are let out on bail because they are white. No one has come to help us. The police haven't even come to our house." The upcoming murder trial will rest on the events of January 6, when Tangasha and Tjexa arrived at an isolated farm where they worked as casual laborers for Lodewikus van der Westhuizen, 73.

'Left to die'

According to the police, the two men demanded that van der Westhuizen hand over 20,000 rand (\$1,250) in what may have been a long-running dispute over unpaid wages. When he refused, Tangasha and Tjexa allegedly hit him over the head with a gun before he pressed a panic button that alerted neighboring landowners who rushed to his aid. The two men then fled on foot as between 40 and 60 farm vehicles joined a high-speed hunt to catch them across the huge fields and straight dirt roads of Free State province. "The farmers found Tjexa and Tangasha eight kilometers away from van der Westhuizen's farm," police said in a statement. "The two were subsequently beaten up and left to die." Tangasha also known as Simon Jubeba was declared dead on arrival at hospital, while Tjexa died soon after. Accused of their murder are van der Westhuizen's son Boeta, his cousin Anton Loggerberg, and their neighbors Stephanus and Johannes Cilliers. Outside the court hearing, police erected barbed wire fences to separate a handful of white protesters and two rival black protests by the ruling ANC party and the opposition EFF party.

"We have to show that we support the accused men because of all the farm attacks. Farmers are killed constantly," said Andre Pienaar, 55, who goaded black protesters as they abused him across the wire barricade. "There is a genocide going on to wipe out our farmers. We are demonstrating that we are not scared," added Pienaar, a farm security consultant dressed in para-military fatigues. Some white protesters waved flags of the old Boer Republic from more than 100 years ago — symbols of their contempt for the new post-apartheid South Africa. Adding further fuel to the explosive case, Hendrick Prinsloo, a white policeman, was recently added to the list of accused murderers. Police investigators allege that Prinsloo "joined in the feast" of beating Tangasha and Tjexa, instead of rescuing them. — AFP

TACTICAL TRIUMPH OR ROAD TO RUIN FOR ITALY'S FIVE STAR?

ROME: Italy's populist Five Star Movement has thrown down the gauntlet to the government in an unexpected political manoeuvre that could not only endanger a bill allowing gay civil unions but risks crippling the party, experts say. The anti-establishment party had promised Prime Minister Matteo Renzi it would support the bill legalizing gay relationships. But in an unexpected about-turn, this week it refused to green-light a motion to speed up the draft law's adoption, opening the door to a series of wrecking amendments by opponents.

Enraged grassroots supporters accused the party known as M5S of betraying their wishes in order to spite Renzi's centre-left Democratic Party (PD). "The civil union bill was an unmissable moment to put Renzi in difficulty," Franco Pavoncello, political science professor at John Cabot University in Rome, told AFP, though he warned the M5S could face "fallout" over the perceived betrayal. Italy is the last major country in Western Europe not to offer gay civil unions. Close ties with the Vatican have

sunk all previous attempts.

This time the bill has met more fierce Catholic opposition over its allowing gay couples to adopt under certain circumstances. M5S, founded in 2009 by Italy's famous acerbic comic Beppe Grillo, celebrated a shock success in the 2013 general election when it snapped up 25.5 per cent of the vote, becoming the second biggest political force behind the PD. Grillo, 67, announced last year that he was taking his bushy beard and trademark rants back to showbiz. His name has gone from the Five Star logo and he brought a new stand-up routine to Rome this week.

'Jackals, traitors, cowards'

His sharp-suited heir apparent, Luigi Di Maio, 29, defended M5S's political move on Twitter, saying it was protecting parliamentary debate—a line which sparked cat-calls from Internet users who branded the party "jackals", "traitors" and "cowards". Gay rights groups were also fur-

ous, with protesters holding a sit-in outside Grillo's show in the Italian capital. "It was a tactical move against the PD, but they (M5S) also want to arrive at the local elections without angering the right", where votes are up for grabs, said Francesco Maesano, Five Star expert for La Stampa daily. Political commentator Andrea Scanzi described the move as "cutting off your balls to spite your wife".

"If they vote for the bill they clash with half of their electorate. If they don't vote for it they make the country miss a great chance to be less bigoted," he said in *Il Fatto Quotidiano*. Guido Moltedo, founder of online political magazine *Ytali*, told AFP the movement was "just like the scorpion in the fable" where he stings and kills the frog carrying him across a river because, despite his promises, he cannot help himself. The party, born as a protest group, won votes from across the political spectrum with its platform against corruption and in favor of a euro-membership referendum and refuses to make pacts with parties on the right or left.—AFP



BRUSSELS: British Prime Minister David Cameron arrives for an EU summit at the EU Council building in Brussels yesterday. —AP

BATTLE TO NAIL DOWN 'BREXIT' DEAL DRAGS INTO SECOND DAY

'STILL NO DEAL' AS EU SUMMIT RUNS OVERTIME

BRUSSELS: Prime Minister David Cameron admitted there was "still no deal" yesterday as he headed into a second day of talks after all-night negotiations failed to deliver an agreement to stop Britain crashing out of the EU. A string of European leaders have dug their heels in over Cameron's demands, which include reducing welfare payments to EU migrants and opting out of a commitment to ever-closer union, forcing him into a corner.

"We've made some progress but there is still no deal," Cameron said as he entered fresh talks at the Brussels summit, five hours after the previous night's negotiations broke up. "As I have said, I would only do a deal if we get what Britain needs, so we are going to get back in there." A source in Cameron's Downing Street office said there were "some signs of progress but nothing yet agreed and still a lot to do". Under pressure from eurosceptics in his Conservative Party and an anti-EU popular press, Cameron wants sweeping reforms to the 28-member bloc which

he hopes will stop Britain from becoming the first nation to leave the EU in a membership referendum likely in June.

The Brussels deadlock threatens to derail Cameron's plan to announce the date of the referendum in London yesterday after securing a deal and flying home for an emergency Cabinet meeting. Cameron was set to hold further talks with EU president Donald Tusk at 11:45am. The British premier has hit opposition from France and Belgium over his bid to make clear Britain is not committed to ever-closer union and ensure that the City of London financial district is not bound by rules governing the euro single currency area. Going into the talks, Hollande again made clear his objection, saying he wanted a single rule book to "fight financial crises together".

'Breakfast' becomes lunch

On day one of the meeting Thursday, Cameron urged his fellow EU leaders to reach a "credible" reform deal and called for a "sort of live and let live" approach to allow different visions of EU member-

ship. He added that the issue of Britain's place in Europe "has been allowed to fester for too long" and there was now a chance "to settle this issue for a generation". Cameron says he will back a "Yes" vote in the referendum if he can cut an acceptable deal in Brussels but aides say he is prepared to walk away if not.

Officials are refusing to rule out the possibility that Britain could become the first country to leave the EU in its more than 60-year history. In the early hours of yesterday, Tusk warned there was much more to do to bridge these sharp differences. "For now I can only say that we have made some progress but a lot needs to be done," he said. The timetable for the summit is slipping amid the disagreements—EU officials had hoped talks would begin with an "English Breakfast," with a deal served up for final approval. However, as talks got bogged down, that became an "English Brunch" and now an "English Lunch" is on the menu at 1330 (1230 GMT) with a string of bilateral meetings beforehand.

RIFT WIDENS AS AUSTRIA SNUBS EU WITH MIGRANT CAP LAUNCH

SPIELFELD: Austria yesterday introduced a new daily cap on asylum seekers which could trigger a domino effect of border clampdowns on the Balkan migrant trail from Greece up to northern Europe. The move sparked anger from the European Union which hopes on sealing a pact with Turkey to stem the migration crisis at a special summit in early March. A maximum of 80 migrants per day are now being allowed to claim asylum in Austria. Vienna is also limiting the daily number of people transiting through to seek asylum in a neighboring state to 3,200.

Brussels on Thursday slammed the "unilateral actions" as "incompatible with European Union law". Instead EU leaders, spearheaded by Germany, are supporting a deal with Ankara under which Turkey would close its borders and then fly refugees to Europe for resettlement under a quota plan. "We agreed that our joint action plan with Turkey remains a priority and we must do all we can to succeed," European Council President Donald Tusk said early yesterday at a two-day EU summit. Big rifts have opened up in the 28-member bloc as the continent grapples with its biggest migration crisis since World War II. Pressure to enforce the EU plan is growing as thousands of migrants and refugees are still crossing the Aegean daily from Turkey after more than one million braved the perilous journey last year. Most are refugees fleeing war and violence in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the so-called Visegrad Four (V4) - Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary—have already rejected the EU resettlement plan. They want Macedonia and Bulgaria to seal off their frontier with Greece, effectively excluding Athens from Europe's passport-free Schengen zone and leaving thousands of people stranded.

'Put on the breaks

Austria, which has joined the V4 in their call for tighter Schengen border controls, warned yesterday it could lower its daily cap even further. "We need to put the brakes on," Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner said. Once the limits at Austria's main border crossing with Slovenia have been reached, "the borders will be closed," police spokesman Fritz Grundnig said yesterday morning. However, "not a single migrant has arrived since yesterday (afternoon) and we don't expect any to arrive today because of the bad weather," he added. The daily limit on asylum claims is in line with Austria's announcement last month that it would only take in 37,500 asylum seekers this year—sharply down from the 90,000 it accepted in 2015, making it one of the bloc's highest recipients on a per-basis capita. Like the V4 bloc, Vienna wants to see the number of asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to drop from as many as 2,000 a day to just a few dozens. Last year we had "more asylum requests than Italy and much more than France. And everyone who looked at a map knows that these two countries are much bigger than Austria and have more inhabitants as well," Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann said Thursday in Brussels.

Germany—which took in more than one million asylum seekers in 2015 — acknowledged that the EU "must see quickly if measures work" under a plan, in which Turkey agreed late last year to cut migrant flows in exchange for three billion euros in aid. A meeting of the leaders of 11 EU countries with Turkey had been planned before the two-EU summit on Thursday, but was cancelled after Turkey's premier Ahmet Davutoglu pulled out following a bomb attack in Ankara.—AFP

PAKISTAN LODGES CASE AGAINST UNNAMED AIR BASE ATTACKERS

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistan police spokesman said yesterday a case has been lodged against unnamed perpetrators of a deadly attack on an Indian air base last month that has renewed tensions between the rivals.

The Jan 2 attack on the Pathankot air base, in which seven Indian security personnel were killed, has stalled hopes of revived peace talks between the nations after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise visit to his counterpart Nawaz Sharif in December.

India said it gave actionable intelligence to Pakistan in the weeks following the attack, but Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar suggested on Thursday Pakistan was slow to act. "The government of India has been continuously giving evidence of so many things," Parrikar said in a televised interview on India Today. "If someone is serious, he can definitely act."

Foreign secretary level talks between the nuclear-armed neighbors had been scheduled for last month. On Thursday, Pakistan's Foreign Office said a new date should be decided "as early as possible". Counter-terrorism police in Pakistan's Punjab province on Thursday filed a case against the alleged air base attackers and "their alleged abettors" belonging to a banned militant group, a spokesman said in a statement.

It did not give the number or names of the accused, or which group they belonged to. Last month, Pakistan detained Maulana Masood Azhar, head of Jaish-e-Mohammad, or Army of Mohammad, a militant group that Indian officials blamed for the attack. Pakistan authorities sealed offices and shut several religious schools run by the group, but security officials said a special team set up to look into the attack found no evidence implicating Azhar or associates in the January raid.

Yesterday, Pakistani officials said a new joint team of military and civil intelligence agencies would look into the freshly lodged case, and that any non-state actor found to be involved would be brought to justice. "The registration of this case shows that there is full commitment and earnestness," Punjab's law minister Rana Sanaullah told reporters. "If you want to make your image before the world better, and to dispel the propaganda of other countries that our commitment is questionable, then we have to do things like this," he said.

India has long accused Pakistan of using Kashmir-based militants such as Jaish-e-Mohammad as a proxy to mount attacks on Indian soil. Pakistan and India have fought three wars since becoming separate countries in 1947, two of them over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir. —Reuters

FOUR MAOIST REBELS KILLED IN GUNFIGHT

NEW DELHI: Indian security forces killed four Maoist rebels, including a woman, in an overnight gun battle in India's eastern Jharkhand state, a senior police officer said yesterday. Police said they ambushed a group of 40 armed rebels late Thursday as they passed through a village in Taimara Ghati valley area, close to the state capital Ranchi.

The nine-hour gunfight ended Friday morning after police recovered four bodies from the spot. "We presume other members have fled but a search operation is on," Ranchi police chief Kuldeep Dwivedi said. Two paramilitary personnel were also injured in the gunfight. India's long-running Maoist insurgency began in the 1960s, inspired by

Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, and has cost thousands of lives. The rebels, described by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as India's most serious internal security threat, say they are fighting authorities for land, jobs and other rights for poor tribal groups. The rebels operate in at least 20 Indian states but are most active in the forested, resource-rich areas of Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Indian lawyers shout slogans and carry an effigy as they take part in a demonstration. —AFP

DEFIANT LAWYERS MARCH AGAINST ALLEGED 'ANTI-INDIA' PROTESTERS

ESCALATING ROW OVER FREEDOM OF SPEECH

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of lawyers marched through the streets of the Indian capital yesterday pledging to attack anyone found to be "anti-national", after some were accused of assaulting a student arrested for sedition.

Student leader Kanhaiya Kumar's arrest over a rally at which anti-India slogans were shouted has triggered a week of mass protests, in an escalating row over freedom of speech in the world's largest democracy. In a brazen show of strength, lawyers wearing black courtroom robes marched past the iconic India Gate monument in New Delhi yesterday waving the Indian tricolour and shouting nationalist slogans in counter-protest.

They defended outbreaks of violence at court hearings earlier in the week that saw right-wing lawyers attack 32-year-old Kumar as he entered the court and stones thrown at journalists covering the case. "We will keep attacking the anti-nationals

no matter what," one protesting lawyer was quoted by Press Trust of India as saying. "We will not tolerate any insult to our motherland. Let police issue summons against us," the lawyer said.

Lawyers for left-wing student leader Kumar had applied for bail at the Supreme Court fearing a repeat of the chaos of earlier in the week. But yesterday the court kicked the hearing to the lower Delhi High Court, where it was then postponed. "There was an issue with paperwork and the bail application will likely be heard on Monday (by the Delhi High Court)," a member of Kumar's legal team told AFP.

Clamping down on dissent

Kumar was arrested on February 12 after a rally at Delhi's prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University called to mark the 2013 hanging of Kashmiri separatist Mohammed Afzal Guru over a deadly 2001 attack on the Indian parlia-

ment. Former Delhi University lecturer S.A.R. Geelani, who was arrested in connection with another event marking Guru's death, was ordered to remain behind the bars till March 2, his lawyers said yesterday.

He had applied for bail at Patiala House Court in Delhi. Kumar, in judicial custody since Wednesday, has denied shouting anti-India slogans and so has Geelani. Some rights campaigners say the Hindu nationalist government is using the British-era sedition law to clamp down on dissent. Protests against Guru's execution have regularly been held in Kashmir, where many believe he was not given a fair trial. Guru always denied plotting the attack, which was carried out by Kashmiri militants. Sedition charges have been used in the past against supporters of independence for the disputed territory of Kashmir, which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in full by both. —AFP

CASTE BENEFITS PROTEST TURNS VIOLENT IN INDIA

NEW DELHI: India's paramilitary forces shot and killed one person yesterday as protests for government benefits turned violent in northern India, police said. Thousands of people belonging to the Jat agricultural community were protesting in Rohtak and other towns in Haryana state, to demand an increase in their caste quota benefits, which include guaranteed government jobs or university spots.

Police officer Saurabh Singh says up to 20 people were injured in the clashes in Rohtak as protesters also fired and hurled rocks at paramilitary forces. The town is 70 kilometers west of New Delhi. The injured included one paramilitary soldier hit by a bullet fired by a protester, Singh said. New Delhi Television news channel said the protesters also burned cars,

police jeeps and trucks, blocked traffic and even attacked a state minister's home and tried to set it on fire. State authorities asked the Indian army to deploy soldiers to control protests which have spread to Jind, Bhiwani and some other towns in the state. The protesters demand that the state government raise their caste quota benefits from existing 10 percent.

Supplies of milk, vegetables, cooking gas and petroleum products have been disrupted in the towns affected. Rail services also were disrupted in Haryana state. India's constitution includes a system of affirmative action for people in the lowest castes to help them overcome discrimination. The government has expanded the number of groups qualifying for quotas, called reservations. —AP

OBAMA SLAPS NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST N KOREA OVER NUKES

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama slapped North Korea with more stringent sanctions Thursday for defying the world and pushing forward with its nuclear weapons program, weeks after it launched a satellite-carrying rocket into space and conducted its fourth underground nuclear test.

Both actions led to worldwide condemnation of the reclusive country and fueled fears that it continues to move toward building an atomic arsenal. Democratic and Republican lawmakers, many of whom argue Obama hasn't been tough enough with North Korea, overwhelmingly approved the bill last week and sent it to the White House. The House voted 408-2, following a unanimous vote by the Senate.

Obama signed the legislation away from the news media and issued no statement. Up until Wednesday, the administration had said it didn't oppose the bill but declined to say whether Obama would sign it into law.

The expanded sanctions are being imposed as the US and China are in delicate negotiations over a United Nations Security Council resolution on new sanctions. China, North Korea's most important ally, has raised concerns about measures that could devastate North Korea's economy.

The new measures are intended to deny North Korea the money it needs to develop miniaturized warheads and the long-range missiles required to deliver them. The legislation also authorizes \$50 million over the next five years to transmit radio broadcasts

into North Korea, purchase communications equipment and support humanitarian assistance programs.

'Authoritarian regime'

"This is an authoritarian regime. It's provocative. It has repeatedly violated UN resolutions, tested and produced nuclear weapons, and now they are trying to perfect their missile launch system," Obama told "CBS This Morning" after North Korea launched the long-range rocket, Sen Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat and sponsor of the bill, said he hoped the UN Security Council and China, in particular, will "take notice of this strong showing of US leadership" and work to put in place similar measures.

"Let's stand together with a single voice and one clear message: Any provocation will be met with consequences that will shake the Kim regime to its foundations," Menendez said. Obama consulted with Chinese President Xi Jinping after the Jan. 6 nuclear test, and separately with the leaders of Japan and South Korea after the Feb. 7 rocket launch to reaffirm the US commitment to their security. The US has also opened talks with South Korea about developing more missile-defense systems to eliminate the possibility that a North Korean missile could reach US facilities. Japan announced new sanctions last week that include expanded restrictions on travel between the two countries and a complete ban on visits by North Korean ships to Japan.—AP

REVERSAL: CHINA ACCUSES US OF MILITARIZING SOUTH CHINA SEA

GROWING CONCERNS OVER PEACE AND STABILITY

BEIJING: China yesterday accused the US of militarizing the South China Sea, just days after it was revealed Beijing had deployed surface-to-air missiles on an island in the hotly disputed area. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told reporters that patrols by US military aircraft and Navy vessels, along with joint exercises involving regional partners were the true reason why concerns were growing over peace and stability.

"The above actions have escalated tensions in the South China Sea, and that's the real militarization of the South China Sea," Hong said. US and Taiwanese officials this week confirmed commercial satellite images showing the missiles placed on Woody Island in the disputed Paracel chain.

China has not denied the appearance of the missiles, but says it is entitled to defend its territory and points to the construction of lighthouses, weather stations and other infrastructure undertaken to provide more "public goods and services to the international community."

The deployment follows China's building of new islands by piling sand atop reefs and then adding airstrips and military installations. The buildup is seen as part of Beijing's efforts to claim virtually the entire disputed sea and its resources. Vietnam, which along with Taiwan also claims the Paracels, issued a diplomatic note to the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi yesterday to demand a stop to what it called "China's infringement of Vietnam's sovereignty" over the islands.

'Peace and stability'

China's action "have also threatened peace and stability in the region as well as security, safety, and freedom of navigation and aviation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Hai Binh told reporters. The Philippines, which claims waters and features east of Woody island, yesterday said it was "gravely concerned" by reports of the missile deployments.

"Such actions negate China's earlier commitment not to militarize the South China Sea," the Department of Foreign Affairs said in a statement. Although not one of the six gov-



MAKATI CITY: A protester displays a placard during a rally near the Chinese Consulate in the financial district of Makati city, Philippines, to denounce the alleged deployment of surface-to-air-missiles by China on the disputed islands off South China Sea. — AP

ernments with claims in the South China Sea, the US says it has a national interest in the region's stability and freedom of navigation and overflight in and above what are some of the world's busiest sea lanes.

Secretary of State John Kerry has suggested that the positioning of missiles and other signs of increasing militarization contradicted a public assurance from Chinese President Xi Jinping when he visited the White House last September.

Hong's comments represent China's attempt to turn that accusation back on Washington, a cause to which it has rallied its entirely state-controlled media outlets. China's "defensive deployment on Yongxing targets external military threats," the Communist Party newspaper Global Times said in an editorial, using China's name for Woody Island. "The US is bold about imposing pressure on China, and China must make an appropriate response." — AP

MYANMAR OPIUM FIELDS DESTRUCTION BLOCKED

YANGON: Anti-drug activists said yesterday the military and local police are preventing them from destroying fields of opium poppies in northern Myanmar, a major cultivation area for the drug that can be made into heroin.

The Pat Jasan group has more than 1,000 members engaged

in the current eradication campaign and is affiliated with Christian churches of the Kachin ethnic minority. The effort it started in late January is opposed by farmers and militias that profit from drug trafficking. Three Pat Jasan activists have been injured by land mines and one 19-year-old member has been shot dead. The

group claims to have destroyed many acres (hectares) of poppies. They say they were told that the military would not provide security for any future attempts at clearing the poppies because Pat Jasan is not a registered organization. Officials with the state anti-drug police did not respond to requests for comment Friday.

Myanmar is the world's second-biggest producer of opium after Afghanistan. Most opium is produced in Shan and Kachin states, and in Kachin state, drug use is especially common among the young and among migrants who scavenge the detritus from gem mines.

The area is part of the infamous Golden Triangle, the drug-producing area where the frontiers of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand meet. The Myanmar government and local authorities in 1999 launched a 15-year plan to eliminate opium poppy cultivation, but last year the deadline was extended to 2019.

Military has profited

Although there are accusations that the military has profited, the drug trade has flourished largely because of political considerations. In some cases, ethnic minority groups fighting the government have helped finance their struggles through the drug trade, but in others the government has ignored the trade in exchange for ethnic militias' loyalty. Pat Jasan was formed two years ago when community anti-drug activists joined hands with the Kachin Baptist Convention, the state's most influential civil institution.

The Pat group had been on its way to destroy poppy cultivation in Sadon-Kambaiti, in northeastern Kachin state bordering China, when they were stopped earlier this week in Wai Maw township outside the state capital Myitkyina. "All we wanted is to stop poppy production and drug addiction among young people," said Tang Gun, a leader of Pat Jasan. "We are losing our society and this is why we are campaigning against poppy production." "We don't understand why we are banned from destroying poppies," he said. "The authorities should actually ban the poppies from being grown, not us. The poppy fields are in their area of control." — AP



KACHIN STATE: In this Tuesday Jan 26, 2016 photo, armed soldiers of the Border Guard Force (BGF) accompany community based anti-narcotic campaigners (right) from Hkam Ju Village to Lone Zar Village. — AP

CLINTON QUESTIONS SANDERS' TIES AS RACE TIGHTENS

HILLARY TAKES ONE OF HER TOUGHEST SHOTS AT RIVAL

LAS VEGAS: Fighting for a victory just days before Nevada's caucuses, Hillary Clinton took one of her toughest shots at rival Bernie Sanders, questioning the long-time independent's devotion to the Democratic Party he's running to lead.

Clinton accused Sanders of attacking the two most recent Democratic presidents - President Barack Obama and her husband, former President Bill Clinton - both of whom remain popular political figures among Democratic voters. "I just don't know where all this comes from," she said at a televised forum hosted by MSNBC on Thursday night. "Maybe it's that Sen. Sanders wasn't really a Democrat until he decided to run for office."

Clinton is hoping to use a win in Nevada on Saturday as a springboard into the primary race in South Carolina on Feb 27 and a slate of Southern primaries on Super Tuesday on March 1, where she's favored because of her strength among African-Americans.

Minority voters play a far bigger role than in the recent contests in Iowa and New Hampshire. That will be a test for the Republicans as well going into today's primary in South Carolina, where brash billionaire Donald Trump remains the front-runner. Sanders has kept

the Democratic race closer than expected, and a win in Nevada after his strong win in New Hampshire would indicate that the contest is far from over.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday afternoon, Sanders described some of President Bill Clinton's biggest achievements, the North America Free Trade

Agreement and welfare overhaul, as "disastrous." He later said his critique was prompted by a question from a reporter and that a member of Congress can disagree with a president from his own party.

Immigration system

Both candidates vowed to make reforming the country's

immigration system a top priority of their administrations, should either win the White House. Clinton said she'd take up the issue in the first 100 days of her presidency. Clinton was pressed on why she has refused to release transcripts of the paid speeches she delivered to some of the country's largest financial institutions.

Clinton said she's happy to make those available, as long as other candidates do the same.

Some of Clinton's top Latino backers raised questions about Sanders' advocacy for immigrants, saying the Vermont senator repeatedly voted against immigration legislation. About one-quarter of Nevada's population is Hispanic. Clinton's campaign has long argued that Sanders appeal is limited to white liberals, a relatively limited portion of the Democratic party. A victory on Saturday would show that the breath of his support is more like the coalition that twice boosted Obama to the White House.

Trump faces a similar situation in the Republican race. A win in South Carolina after his New Hampshire victory would give him staying power and worry some in the party establishment who think a more mainstream candidate is needed to win the White House.

Trump on Thursday softened his rhetoric on Pope Francis after blasting the Catholic leader earlier in the day for suggesting that Trump's plan to build a wall along the US-Mexico border made him "not Christian." Trump said during a town hall event on CNN that he believed the pope's remarks were "probably a little bit nicer" than first reported. —AP



LAS VEGAS: Democratic presidential candidate former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton greets supporters during a "Get Out The Caucus" event. —AP

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CIUDAD JUAREZ: This handout picture released by the Vatican press office shows Pope Francis flanked by the President of Mexico Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife Angelica Rivera during a farewell ceremony as he leaves Mexico. —AFP

POPE VS TRUMP: NOT CHRISTIAN TO ONLY BUILD BORDER WALLS

COMMENTS SPARKS BACKLASH FROM PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis has questioned Donald Trump's Christian faith over his vow to build a border wall to keep out immigrants, sparking a backlash from the Republican presidential candidate. "Anyone, whoever he is, who only wants to build walls and not bridges is not a Christian," the pontiff told journalists Thursday during his return journey from a trip to Mexico.

He was responding to a question about the billionaire's anti-immigrant stance. "Vote, don't vote, I won't meddle. But I simply say, if he says these things, this man is not a Christian," Francis said. "We need to see if he really said them and for this I will give him the benefit of the doubt."

After initially launching into an audacious denunciation of Francis, Trump later softened his tone dramatically. "For a religious leader to question a person's faith is disgraceful," Trump said in a statement delivered on a campaign stop in South Carolina, which holds its Republican primary this weekend.

But hours later, at a townhall event, the real estate tycoon heaped praise on the pontiff. "Oh, the pope is a wonderful guy," Trump said, suggesting the media had hyped and exaggerated the tone of his earlier statement. "I have a lot of respect for the pope. I think he's got a lot of personality, he's very different, a great guy, and I think he's doing a very good job, he has a lot of energy."

Misinformed pontiff?

Trump said the pontiff was misinformed, unaware of the impact of the drugs coming into the United States and a range of security issues that make it necessary to build a wall. The leading Republican presidential candidate also

said he would welcome an opportunity to meet the pope. Trump has gained popularity by claiming Mexico is sending criminals to the United States, and last week he accused the pope of visiting the border between the two countries at the bidding of the Mexican government.

Francis was speaking after concluding a five-day trip to Mexico, where he delivered a mass before 300,000 people near the US border and decried the "human tragedy" of migrants fleeing violence worldwide. In a highly symbolic gesture, the pontiff climbed a ramp facing the Rio Grande and looked out across the border into US territory, where hundreds of migrants waved at him.

Trump has vowed to build a wall on the US southern border to keep migrants from illegally crossing into the United States, a pledge that has caused a firestorm in the presidential campaign where immigration is a hot-button issue. "If and when the Vatican is attacked by ISIS, which as everyone knows is ISIS's ultimate trophy, I can promise you that the pope would have only wished and prayed that Donald Trump would have been president because this would not have happened," Trump said.

'Pope used as pawn'

Propagandists for ISIS—one of several names for the Islamic State extremist group that controls swathes of Syria and Iraq—have issued threats that their fighters will plant their flag on the top of St Peter's basilica. But Italian officials have insisted they have no knowledge of any credible threat to the Vatican or the pope. Trump said Mexican authori-

ties had told the pope only "one side of the story."

"He didn't see the crime, the drug trafficking and the negative economic impact the current policies have on the United States. "They are using the pope as a pawn and they should be ashamed of themselves for doing so, especially when so many lives are involved and when illegal immigration is so rampant." It was not the first time Trump had issued the pawn jibe, and Francis was asked about it on the plane.

"Am I a pawn of the Mexican government? I leave that to your judgment, to the people to judge," he said. The 79-year-old Argentine, a fervent critic of the freewheeling capitalism espoused by Trump, also said he was proud to have been branded a politicized pontiff by the tycoon. "Thanks be to God if that is what he said, because Aristotle defined man as a political animal: at least (it means) I am a human person," the pope said.

Trump has promised to end illegal immigration by building a wall along the Mexican border, which stretches more than 3,100 kilometers — a third of it currently covered by high-security fencing. One of Trump's Republican rivals, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, was charitable towards him in remarks addressing the contretemps. "I don't question anybody's Christianity, because I honestly believe that's a relationship you have with your creator," Bush, a devout Catholic, told reporters. Speaking of building a wall and other forms of border control, he added: "That's not an un-Christian thing to do, to make sure people don't come across our border illegally. That's a just thing to do." —AFP

THEATER VERSUS THUG LIFE FOR EL SALVADOR'S YOUTH

SAN SALVADOR: The children and teens held hands in a circle in front of Mayan ruins west of El Salvador's capital, budding actors whose passion, officials hope, may keep them from the clutches of Central America's gangs.

Mixing acting with music, singing and dancing, the production's young stars, aged nine to 18, and their teachers are part of an initiative pitting theater against the thug life in a country where youths too often are swept up into crime and violence. Their show, "La Cucarachita Martina Pide la Convivencia y la Paz"—"The little cockroach Martina demands coexistence and peace"—was backed by El Salvador's President, Salvador Sanchez Ceren.

He brought in a Cuban troupe, La Colmenita, that he observed on a recent visit to Havana to coach 144 children and adolescents to perform the play in the country's top venues. "We didn't bring over the theater and music with the intention that the kids make a living from it, but rather so that they can learn to live better," La Colmenita's director, Carlos Cremata, said.

Tide of viciousness

The aim is to nip in the bud the dark tendency of many Salvadoran youths to fall in with the gangs that have turned the country into the deadliest on the planet outside of war zones. Last month, there were 783 murders, more than double what was recorded in January a year earlier.

For all of 2015, there were a staggering 6,657 killings—a rate of more than one murder for every 1,000 residents. Most of the victims are young, aged between 15 and 29. That tide of viciousness and loss is what the government is trying to battle. Part of its efforts are focused on muscular security crackdowns by heavily armed police and soldiers that some see as exacerbating the violence. But others, like the theater initiative, try for a softer approach.

"We share a method that is not acting as such, but more staging a game to create values. It's a form of educational artistic expression," Cremata said. It goes beyond simply putting on a show to applause and praise. The young Salvadorans who take part in the play will be sent back to their towns and districts—including some that are among the most violent in the country—to replicate the experience.

Thirteen-year-old Karen Ramos, who plays the lead role as Little Cockroach Martina, said she was "so happy" to be chosen as the lead. "It's fantastic to interact with the other kids," she said. The story of the play they are in, though dressed up as a fable, is simple and clear to young and old: Martina the cockroach is wooed by several suitors who offer her various material gifts. But it is the love and peace offered by a noble-hearted rat named Perez that wins her over.

Swap guns for violins

El Salvador's government is also deploying other artistic initiatives to show children that they can aim for loftier goals than those attainable through the barrel of a gun. One such group, a youth orchestra formed a year ago in the western town of Sonzacate, has played concerts all over the country.

"It was difficult, but the orchestra project has managed to change the mentality of young people so they drop the gun or the knife for a violin, a trumpet or a saxophone," its director, Ovidio Aguirre, said. In the words of Andrea Elas Mendez, a 14-year-old girl who plays the violin in the orchestra: "Art and culture open up the soul." —AFP

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SINGAPORE: Boeing Commercial Airplanes senior vice president of sales in the Asia-Pacific and India, Dinesh Keskar (right), CEO of Papua New Guinea airline Air Niugini Simon Foo (center), and Frederick Reiher (left), chairman of Air Niugini, pose with signed documents after a signing ceremony at the Singapore Airshow yesterday. — AFP

'MUTED' ORDERS AT SINGAPORE AIRSHOW AIRLINES SLASHING TICKET PRICES TO KEEP MARKET SHARE

SINGAPORE: The value of deals at Asia's biggest airshow fell sharply as mammoth plane orders of the past thinned due to airline overcapacity and a global economic slowdown, organizers and analysts said yesterday. Despite growth in Asia's passenger air traffic, seats remain in surplus with regional carriers continuing to take delivery of planes they had ordered during the past few years, analysts said, as the show's trade portion wrapped up in Singapore. It opens to the public at the weekend.

Airshow organizers said 10 deals announced at the biennial event had a total value of \$12.3 billion, well below the record \$32 billion reached in 2014. However, there were 40 deals whose values were not disclosed, organizers added. In the 2012 airshow, transactions totalled \$31 billion, a threefold increase over 2010. "This airshow has been the most quiet and most muted in terms of sales and buzz," said Shukor Yusof, founder of Malaysia-based aviation consultancy Endau Analytics. "There are far too many aircraft orders already from the region, so we are seeing airlines do the sensible thing and not getting carried away by placing more orders," he told AFP.

Because of the overcapacity, airlines are slashing ticket prices to keep market share, putting downward pressure on yields, Shukor said. "There are indications that while passenger traffic remains very

robust, airlines are not extracting the gains that they should be because there are far too many seats available," he said. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have slashed their outlook for global economic growth, notably in China, where the economy is slowing down and the stock market has recently taken a beating. "Looking at the next 18-24 months, it doesn't look very positive in terms of the global financial sector and the economy," Shukor said.

The biggest deal announced at the show was a \$3.04 billion order from Vietnamese budget carrier VietJet Air for Pratt & Whitney engines to power the 63 Airbus A320neo and A321neo aircraft it has purchased. Philippine Airlines, flag-carrier of one of Asia's fastest growing economies, ordered six A350-900s from Airbus in a deal worth \$1.85 billion. Chinese carrier Okay Airways committed to buy 12 aircraft from US-based Boeing for \$1.3 billion.

Japan's Mitsubishi Aircraft Corp won 20 orders from a US leasing company for its new regional passenger plane, a transaction potentially worth around \$940 million. The deal for the MRJ90 jets - Japan's first domestically-made commercial aircraft for about half a century - is a major boost for Mitsubishi after postponed delivery of the plane in December, a little more than a month after the maiden test flight.

Yesterday, Boeing said it had won a \$440 million contract with Papua New Guinea's flag carrier, Air Niugini, for four 737 MAX 8 planes.

Plunging Oil Prices

Rajiv Biswas, chief Asia-Pacific economist at IHS, said despite the lack of big-ticket purchases, aircraft manufacturers still "have a long pipeline of aircraft deliveries to absorb over the next four years" because of previous large orders. Qatar Airways chief executive Akbar Al-Baker said the plunge in oil prices to below \$30 a barrel was hurting businesses in general, including airlines. Premium traffic has declined after companies curbed business class travel for employees, he said. "I don't think such low oil price is good for business," Baker told reporters at the airshow. "An oil price of between \$50 and \$60 a barrel is really where it should be," he added.

Airbus' chief salesman John Leahy remained optimistic about the industry's outlook, saying Asia's burgeoning middle class will drive growth. Passenger air traffic in China is expected to grow 10 percent per year in the next five years, said Leahy. Airbus chief executive Fabrice Bregier said the company's order book remains full, adding: "We've never been so healthy. And we are planning for more efficient aircraft deliveries which go well beyond 2020." — AFP

FIRMING US INFLATION KEEPS FED RATE HIKE ON THE TABLE

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX UNCHANGED IN JANUARY

WASHINGTON: Rising rents and health-care costs lifted underlying US inflation in January by the most in nearly 4-1/2 years, signs of a pick-up in price pressures that could allow the Federal Reserve to gradually raise interest rates this year. The Labor Department said yesterday its Consumer Price Index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, increased 0.3 percent last month. That was the biggest gain since August 2011 and followed a 0.2 percent rise in December.

"It is a policymaker's dream come true, they wanted more inflation and they got it. The stronger inflation report puts a rate hike back on the table at the March meeting," said Chris Rupkey, chief economist at MUFJ Union Bank in New York. Tighter financial market conditions in the wake of a recent sharp stock market sell-off and slowing domestic and global growth have wiped out bets for a rate increase at the US central bank's March 15-16 policy meeting. Markets also see the probabilities of an increase in borrowing costs for the rest of the year as slim.

The Fed lifted its benchmark overnight interest rate from near zero in December, the first rate hike in nearly a decade. While Fed officials have worried about inflation being too low, they have also maintained that the factors holding back inflation are transitory. Still, significant gains remain a challenge against the backdrop of very low inflation expectations by households, renewed weakness in oil prices and a buoyant dollar.

The firming in the core CPI, together with a strengthening labor market suggest further monetary policy tightening this year cannot be ruled out. US stocks were trading lower on the data and weaker oil prices. The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies and prices for US Treasury debt were mostly softer. In the 12 months through January, the core CPI advanced 2.2 percent, the largest rise since June 2012 and exceeded the 1.9 percent average annualized increase over the last 10 years. The core CPI was up 2.1 percent in December from the year earlier. The Fed has a 2 percent inflation target and monitors a price measure that is running well below the core CPI.

Broad-Based Increase

Underlying inflation was last month boosted by a 0.3 percent increase in tenants' rent, which followed a similar gain in December. Medical care costs rose 0.5 percent, with prices for prescription drugs also increasing 0.5 percent. The cost of doctor visits edged up 0.1 percent after falling 0.2 percent in December and hospital costs rose 0.4 percent. Apparel prices shot up 0.6 percent, the largest gain in two years, after falling for four straight months. The increase in apparel is surprising as retailers have been offering deep discounts to sell unwanted inventory. Prices for new motor vehicles advanced 0.3 percent. There were increases in the cost of tobacco and recreation, but prices of household fur-

nishings dipped.

"This was a firm, broad-based rise in core inflation that should dispel the notion, evident in market-based measures of inflation compensation, that the economy can't generate any inflation," said Omair Sharif, rate sales strategist at SG Americas Securities in New York. Though some economists were skeptical that the rise in core CPI would be sustained, revisions to the inflation data showed underlying inflation a bit firmer in the last months of 2015 than previously reported.

Following the strong core CPI reading, economists said they expected the Fed's preferred personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, excluding food and energy, to increase 0.2 percent in January after slipping 0.1 percent in December. The core PCE was forecast rising 1.6 percent in the 12 months through January after increasing 1.4 percent in December. The Commerce Department will release the January PCE data next Friday.

The overall CPI was unchanged in January after slipping 0.1 percent in December. The CPI increased 1.4 percent in the 12 months through January, the biggest rise since October 2014, after gaining 0.7 percent in December. The year-over-year inflation rate is rising as the oil price-driven weak readings in 2015 wash out of the calculation. Gasoline prices fell 4.8 percent in January, while food prices were unchanged. —Reuters

OIL PRICES SET TO END WEEK HIGHER

LONDON: Oil prices fell yesterday but are set for their first weekly increase this month as talk of a coordinated plan by producers to freeze output levels was tempered by a record build in US crude inventories. Brent futures were down 45 cents at \$33.83 a barrel by 1236 GMT, with US crude falling by 46 cents to \$30.31. Oil prices had risen by more than 14 percent earlier in the week on Saudi Arabia and Russia's agreement to freeze output at January levels. While Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh welcomed the plan, he fell short of committing to it and Iranian sources told Reuters that capping output is not enough to rebalance the market.

Saudi Arabia repeated that it had no plans to cut output and would continue to protect its market share. "If other producers want to limit or agree to a freeze in terms of additional production, that may have an impact on the market, but Saudi Arabia is not prepared to cut production," foreign minister Adel Al-Jubeir told Agence France-Presse in an interview on Thursday. Russia's first deputy-energy minister Alexey Texler said on Friday an output freeze deal could clear half of a global oversupply of 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd).

"The OPEC output freeze, coupled with very affordable retail gasoline fuel prices, should help push oil back to \$47 by June," Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a note yesterday. Iraq's oil minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said on Thursday talks would continue between OPEC and non-OPEC members to find ways to restore "normal" oil prices after a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday.

A record build in US crude inventories last week stoked concerns over persistent global oversupply. Crude stocks rose by 2.1 million barrels to a peak of 504.1 million, data from the US government's Energy Information Administration (EIA) showed on Thursday. The recovery at the back end of the WTI curve this week is prompting US shale producers, for the first time in months, to inquire and place new hedges to lock in 2017 prices of around \$45 a barrel. The activity reflects expectations of growing investor and lender pressure to safeguard heavy debt requirements down the road, as well as declining drilling costs, allowing companies to break even at lower prices. —Reuters

GOLD RETREATS

LONDON: Gold fell yesterday as a steadier tone to stocks and a firmer dollar helped erode some of the previous day's 2 percent gains, but held above \$1,220 an ounce as investors bet on a continuation of rock-bottom interest rates. European shares held steady at the end of a strong week, their best since January 2015, while the dollar rose 0.1 percent against the euro. That halted a four-week rally in gold prices, which are set to fall 1.4 percent this week.

Spot gold was down 0.9 percent at \$1,221.42 an ounce at 1032 GMT, while US gold futures for April delivery were down 0.3 percent at \$1,222.30. The metal hit a one-year high at \$1,260.60 an ounce last week as turmoil in the wider financial markets fuelled interest in gold as a store of value, and dented expectations that the Federal Reserve would further hike interest rates this year. It remains 14 percent higher than at the start of the year.

"Gold moved up pretty sharply, and a period of reflection and sideways trading would seem appropriate," Simon Weeks, head of precious metals at the Bank of Nova Scotia, said. "As a safe haven, it is definitely coming into play again. We've had negative interest rate announcements around the world... so perhaps people felt they'd got a little ahead of themselves in terms of their optimism about the economic recovery."

As a non-yielding asset, gold benefits from a lower rate environment. The metal has been supported by inflows into gold-backed exchange-traded funds (ETFs), holdings of which have already risen this year by more than they fell in the whole of 2015. Holdings of the world's top gold ETF, SPDR Gold Shares, rose another 0.38 percent to 713.63 tonnes on Thursday. "Gold remains in demand in the current market environment, characterized as it continues to be by high levels of uncertainty," Commerzbank said in a note.

In the physical markets, Asian gold demand slowed this week as consumers opted to wait out the metal's biggest price rally in years, with discounts in key consumer India hitting a record high as some investors cashed out holdings. Among other precious metals, silver was down 0.7 percent at \$15.30 an ounce, while platinum was down 0.4 percent at \$936.49 an ounce and palladium was up 0.3 percent at \$503 an ounce. —Reuters

GLOBAL STOCKS SLUMP

NEW YORK: Global equity markets stumbled yesterday as oil prices retreated from strong gains earlier in the week, while US bond prices rose as economic data raised the possibility of an interest rate hike by the Federal Reserve this year. Brent futures slumped 3.7 percent to \$33.03 a barrel while US crude was down 4.7 percent at \$29.32. Advances earlier in the week sparked by moves by oil producers, including Saudi Arabia and Russia, to cap output were erased after a record buildup in US crude stockpiles kindled worries over persisting global oversupply. Brent is now down 1.3 percent for the week, while WTI crude is off 0.5 percent.

"There is still a perception there is a supply issue, there is still a perception there is a demand issue," said Brian Nick, head of tactical asset allocation for UBS Wealth Management Americas in New York. "Until you start to see less skittishness about the global economy, oil is going to get hit from both sides of the equation." The weakness in oil prices bled over into US stocks, with the S&P energy index shedding more than 2 percent as the worst performer of the 10 major S&P indexes.

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 90.88 points, or 0.55 percent, to 16,322.55, the S&P 500 lost 9.02 points, or 0.47 percent, to 1,908.81 and the Nasdaq Composite dropped 3.16 points, or 0.07 percent, to 4,484.38. The S&P 500 has gained 2.8 percent for the week, putting it on pace for its best weekly performance of the year. The pan-European FTSEurofirst 300 index of leading shares was down 1.4 percent on the day, weighed by weakness in oil, bank and auto shares, but was still up nearly 4 percent for the week.

US Labor Department data showed the consumer price index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, increased 0.3 percent last month, in a sign of a pick-up in



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past a share prices board showing movements of the Tokyo Stock Exchange yesterday. —AFP

price pressures that could allow the Federal Reserve to gradually raise interest rates this year. Assets perceived as safe havens did well, as benchmark 10-year Treasuries were up 7/32 in price to yield 1.738 percent while yields on shorter-dated US Treasury debt rose after the CPI data, with two-year Treasury notes down 2/32 in price to yield 0.7378 percent.

The yen rose 0.49 percent against the dollar to \$112.68, and the greenback dipped 0.17 percent against a basket of major currencies. MSCI's index of world shares was 0.68 percent lower, but was up 3.3 percent for the week, putting it on pace for its best week since October. The weekly jump came after gains in oil eased some of the deflation concerns in the developed world earlier in the week. The global oil market is oversupplied by around 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd), but that glut could be halved if a deal to freeze oil production at last month's levels takes effect, a top Russian energy official said yesterday. —Reuters

RUSSIA'S VIMPELCOM TO PAY \$835M OVER UZBEKISTAN BRIBES

WASHINGTON: Russia's VimpelCom has agreed to pay \$835 million to settle US and Dutch charges it paid massive bribes to get into the Uzbekistan telecommunications market, the US Justice Department announced Thursday. The huge Russian mobile phone operator was accused under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) of paying more than \$114 million to a "relative" of Uzbek President Islam Karimov between 2006 and 2012 for mobile phone licenses and frequencies.

Billionaire Mikhail Fridman's LetterOne has a significant - 47.85 percent - voting stake in VimpelCom. The Justice Department also said it had moved to seize \$850 million in Swiss and other European accounts controlled by the relative that came from bribes paid by VimpelCom, its subsidiary Unitel and other companies doing business in Uzbekistan. US officials declined to identify the relative involved in the VimpelCom case. Karimov's eldest daughter Gulnara Karimova was placed under house arrest two years ago as she was probed for corruption.

The settlement includes \$167.5 million for the US Securities and Exchange Commission, \$230.1 million for the Justice Department and \$397.5 million to the Public Prosecution Service of the Netherlands. "VimpelCom made massive revenues in Uzbekistan by paying over \$100 million to an official with significant influence over top leaders of the Uzbek government," said Andrew Ceresney, director of the SEC's Enforcement Division. VimpelCom, based in Amsterdam, is the world's sixth largest telecommunications company. Its shares are traded on the New York Nasdaq exchange, subjecting it to SEC regulations.

'Hit Them in their Pocketbook'

US officials said their investigation involved authorities in numerous countries, including Switzerland, the Netherlands, Latvia, Norway and others such as the Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands known as hubs of banking secrecy and money laundering. "These cases combine a landmark FCPA resolution for corporate bribery with one of the largest forfeiture actions we have ever brought to recover bribe proceeds from a corrupt government official," said Assistant Attorney General Leslie Caldwell. Caldwell said the fines could have been much heavier but VimpelCom earned a "discount" for cooperating in the investigation and acknowledging criminal responsibility. The \$850 million in bribery proceeds the Justice Department is seeking to forfeit is among the largest sums it has ever sought to recover from a government official. The funds, held in accounts in Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg, were moved through US financial institutions before being deposited in those countries, placing the money under US jurisdiction. "We think it's very important to separate officials from the bribes that they take... and hit them in their pocketbook," said Caldwell. The US officials declined to name any figures linked to the cases, suggesting they were still preparing criminal charges on some of them. Caldwell noted that the bribes paid in the VimpelCom case, by their sheer size, were likely not simply the actions of low-level company operatives.

The announcement returned the spotlight to Gulnara Karimova, a flamboyant figure who once served as the country's envoy to the United Nations, as well as dabbling in fashion design and pop music. She was once seen as a successor to her father, a strongman who has led Uzbekistan since 1991. Anti-corruption group Transparency International ranked the country 153rd out of 168 in its 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, labeling it one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Karimova "is suspected of receiving more than \$1 billion worth of shares and payments from mobile phone companies in exchange for her influence," the group said in a September report. —AFP



BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan: This file photo taken on Nov 2, 2013 shows a model of rocket blasting off from a courtyard of the International Space School near the well-known Russian leased cosmodrome on Nov 2, 2013. —AFP

RUSSIA PLANS RETURN TO MARS, MOON DESPITE MONEY WOES

MOSCOW HAS AMBITIOUS NEW PLANS

MOSCOW: Visitors are rare these days to the museum of Russia's Space Research Institute in Moscow even though it holds gems like the model of the Soviet Lunokhod, the first ever space rover to land on the Moon, in 1970. While the Cold War space race fired such cutting-edge projects, Russia's planetary exploration has stalled for the past three decades - until now. Under an ambitious plan with the European Space Agency (ESA), scientists have new hope of again sending missions to the Moon and to Mars. "The last decade was truly difficult for us," the institute's director Lev Zeleny told AFP.

Among the biggest blunders was the tragic Phobos-Grunt probe, which in 2011 failed to reach its planned course to one of the moons of Mars and crashed back to Earth over the Pacific Ocean. "But now the program is entering a new stage for this decade." Next month, a Russian Proton rocket is scheduled to launch the first of two missions under ExoMars, a joint venture with the ESA, to snoop out possible life, past or present, to the red planet.

Zeleny's hopes are high that this will return Moscow to its glory days of space exploration - if the project actually gets off the ground. In

the first mission, an orbital spacecraft will search for traces of methane in the atmosphere of Mars - possible evidence of biological activity. For the second part in 2018, Russian engineers are to build a complex landing system to drop an ESA-built Martian rover to the planet's surface, a platform not only to ensure a soft landing but also to serve as "a science lab in itself" for inspecting the landing site, said Zeleny. "If we manage this, it will be a major breakthrough," he said.

Financial Limbo

The ambitious plan, however, has caused jitters among some observers and is dismissed as a pipe dream by others. In January, the ESA already warned that the 2018 mission could be delayed due to cash flow problems. With the economic crisis, the Russian government is likewise pressed to make budget cuts and space exploration is far from one of its priorities. The Russian Federal Space Agency, Roscosmos, is itself in financial limbo but went ahead and announced its program for the next decade in January, though the plan has yet to be confirmed, said Igor Marinin, editor of Space News magazine.

"Now there is no plan, so there is no financing and Roscosmos is taking out loans just to pay salaries," he told AFP. "For this reason, I'm sceptical, and I don't think we will make a good landing platform in the time that's left." Roscosmos chief Igor Komarov last month admitted that Russia "does not have financial capabilities for advanced space projects." He also complained that it was difficult to import some critical components, a problem caused by Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's intervention in Ukraine. While sanctions "are not fatal," conceded Zeleny, they "are rather like an ant crawling under your collar - they tickle and distract you." Beyond the money issues, sceptics note that Russia has not carried out a Mars landing since the 1970s and a failure could destroy ESA's rover. This would be disastrous since the ExoMars-2018 rover is "the most expensive European planetary spacecraft under development for almost two decades," said Anatoly Zak, the editor of RussianSpaceWeb.com, a website that tracks the country's space industry. But if the landing does succeed, "it could serve as a model for the future cooperation with Europe in deep-space exploration," Zak said. —AFP

HALF OF OIL GLUT TO VANISH IF DEAL WORKS

KRASNOYARSK, Russia: The global oil market is over-supplied by around 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd), but that glut could be halved if a deal to freeze oil production at last month's levels takes effect, a top Russian energy official said yesterday. Leading OPEC member Saudi Arabia, non-OPEC member Russia, Qatar and Venezuela this week agreed to freeze output at January levels if others joined in. Iran welcomed the move but stopped short of pledging to act itself and it is unclear whether the freeze will actually happen.

"If the agreement is properly fulfilled and it definitively enters into force then around half of that excess supply may be removed from the market," Alexey Texler, Russia's first deputy energy minister, told reporters in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. "Even without Iran there will be an effect from the agreement. But Iran ... might also be interested in such a deal," he said, noting Tehran had a choice of increasing output at a time of falling prices, or joining the production freeze and potentially getting a higher price for current volumes. "We are opti-

mistic," he added. Russia and OPEC were both pumping oil at near record volumes last month, with Russia reaching another post-Soviet high of 10.88 million bpd. "We are talking about freezing January production levels. It would be higher than the annual average for 2015 by around 1.5 percent," Texler said. Oil production in Russia last year averaged 10.72 million bpd.

Other Countries

The first mooted global oil pact in 15 years will depend on other producers, but it remains unclear which other countries need to sign up for the deal to be implemented. Asked if Russia will talk to the United States, Brazil, Mexico and Norway, Texler said: "Any country may join. But we are realists and, in general, we understand which countries it will be. Many of those you named, obviously, will not do that." He added that some producers, still, were uniting round the idea. Texler did not name them. —Reuters

LAGARDE NAMED FOR SECOND TERM TO LEAD IMF

WASHINGTON: France's Christine Lagarde, who battled financial fires across Europe as managing director of the International Monetary Fund, was officially named yesterday to a second five-year term. "In taking this decision, the board praised Ms Lagarde's strong and wise leadership during her first term," said Aleksei Mozhin, the dean of the Fund's Executive Board. "During turbulent times in the global economy, Ms Lagarde strengthened the Fund's ability to support its members with policy advice, capacity building, and financing."

Lagarde, 60 and formerly France's finance minister, faced no opposition for the job, after successfully restoring the reputation of the global crisis lender's leadership following her predecessor Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who resigned under the cloud of a sex scandal in 2011. But she also built respect for leading the IMF through tough, huge rescues of Greece, Ireland, and Portugal in the

European economic crisis.

And she managed to advance reforms of the Fund which elevated the status of the new emerging economic powers like China after decades of domination of the Fund by Europe, the United States and Japan. Lagarde has "played a critical role in revitalizing the Fund's relations with its global membership, including its emerging market and developing members," noted Mozhin.

Lagarde said she was "delighted" to accept a second term to lead the IMF, which represents 188 member countries. "Over the past five years, the IMF has adapted and strengthened its capacity to respond to its members' needs and is well-prepared to help them meet the challenges of the future," she said. "The Fund remains committed to its fundamental goal of helping to ensure global economic and financial stability through international cooperation." — AFP



WASHINGTON: IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde smiles during a press conference at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) yesterday. — AFP

BIG BANKS SEE THE NEED TO SHRINK BUT FACE OBSTACLES

NEW YORK/LONDON: When the US Federal Reserve's newest policymaker Neel Kashkari dropped a bombshell with a call to break up big banks on Tuesday, it was met with a predictably indignant response from their lobbyists. One described his comments as "blind". But while no one in the executive suites of major global banks would want authorities to force them to split up or downsize, many top bankers acknowledge that their institutions might be better off smaller and simpler. They just worry that any major restructuring could go all wrong because of the way post-financial crisis regulations are applied.

In interviews with Reuters, six senior bankers said they are struggling with the costs and restrictions they face as a result of new regulations, as well as a weak global economy and troubled financial markets. The bankers, who are or recently were in positions ranging from business division head to CEO, spoke on the condition of anonymity so they could be candid without upsetting regulators or investors.

"Fundamentally, the business has to change," said one veteran banker who was on the executive committee of a major European bank until recently. Big banks' shareholder returns have sunk "too low," he said. These problems are not new, but they have fresh relevance as Deutsche Bank AG confronts questions about its capital adequacy, Barclays PLC faces pressure to break up and CEOs of big US banks struggle with a loss of investor confidence in their stocks.

Management teams in the US and Europe are now taking a hard look at dramatic business model changes, but none of the options are particularly attractive, the bankers said. Merging to cut costs and improve margins is out of the question, given the hurdles banks would likely face from regulators who do not want "too-big-to-fail" institutions getting any bigger. Splitting apart is complicated by capital requirements that would make stand-alone trading businesses economically unfeasible - and by the fact that there are few, if any, buyers for the assets banks want least.

Some top bankers say they are left with little choice but to muddle through what they fear will be a long, dark period of weak earnings, angry shareholders and gradual shrinkage. The problem has gotten so bad that Deutsche Bank CEO John Cryan recently said on a public conference call that he'd much rather be CEO of a simpler, retail-focused bank like Wells Fargo & Co, which has only a modest investment banking operation. "Unfortunately," he said, "there are lots of things I wish for that are not going to come true."

Ratcheting Up Capital

Kashkari's comments, in his first speech as head of the Minneapolis Fed, were surprising because he is a former Goldman Sachs banker, a Republican, and was a senior Treasury official in President George W Bush's administration during the financial crisis. They partly echoed the stance of Bernie Sanders, who has also called for big bank breakups and criticized Hillary Clinton, his rival in the struggle to be the Democratic presidential candidate, for being too close to Wall Street. Some of those vying for the Republican nomination have also criticized regulations brought in after the crisis, saying they would repeal the Dodd-Frank reform law. In an interview with Reuters on Wednesday, Kashkari criticized Dodd-Frank's so-called "living will" rule, which requires banks to show how they can be dismantled in an orderly way if they fail, without creating risk to the broader financial system. Kashkari said he believes the rule would not work in a crisis scenario - that banks would simply be bailed out again. "I challenge anybody who thinks, in a stressed time, we would put these banks through resolution," he said. "I really don't think it will happen."

One way to force large financial firms to break up is to "aggressively ratchet up" their capital or leverage requirements, Kashkari said. He warned, though, that banks would likely fight hard against any such proposal. Indeed, Tony Fratto, who worked with Kashkari at the Treasury Department and is now a bank lobbyist at Hamilton Place

Strategies, said his former colleague's comments were out of touch with reality. "This is something like re-opening the barn door after the horse is in the stable," Fratto said. "Love or hate Dodd-Frank, it's simply blind to say that it hasn't significantly improved safety and soundness."

Out of Arrows

Securities analysts and consultants say that banks are in an unenviable position because moves they might have made in the past to improve profitability have been hindered by regulation. As a result, they have struggled unsuccessfully for years to get their returns on equity above single digits. "In some ways, banks have become bad utilities," said Fred Cannon, a bank stock analyst with KBW. "With utilities, you have strict regulation in what you can do and charge, but in the end investors get a reasonable return. With banks, that last piece hasn't happened."

Bank executives have long argued that weak returns are a "cyclical" issue that should go away when markets begin to flourish again. But as the industry approaches the eighth anniversary of the financial crisis's nadir, questions about whether they face a secular rather than a cyclical profit problem have only grown louder. And top bankers are now wondering how they can possibly grow revenue under a sprawling set of global financial regulations that limit what they do, and sometimes conflict with one another.

One common example raised is how new capital rules can penalize banks for being big but also discourage them from getting smaller. For instance, due to their size, the eight largest US banks must collectively hold \$200 billion in extra capital, which weighs on shareholder returns. Included in the capital requirement is a fixed amount each bank must hold to represent "operational risk". Although the Fed does not explain exactly how it comes up with that figure, it is not just a function of size: Bank of America Corp must hold 25 percent more operational risk capital than JPMorgan Chase & Co, the biggest bank in the country. — Reuters

TUNISIA TO ISSUE €750M-1BN BONDS

TUNIS: Tunisia is preparing to issue euro-denominated bonds worth as much as 1 billion (\$1.12 billion) within a few weeks, a government official said yesterday, as it looks to cover part of its budget deficit. The North African state is struggling with dwindling tourism revenue after three militant attacks last year, protests over unemployment and slow progress on the economic reforms and cuts in public spending demanded by international lenders.

"We will go to the international market in few weeks ... it should be between mid-March and May 2016, for between 750 million euros and 1 billion euros," the official told Reuters, asking not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media. He said the financing would help cover part of the budget deficit and the Finance Ministry had asked the central bank to start with the technical procedures for the bond operation. Tunisia last went to the international market a year ago, with a \$1 billion bond.

Tunisia's economy has lagged since the 2011 uprising against autocrat Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali that sparked the Arab Spring revolutions across North Africa and the Middle East. Two attacks last year by Islamist militants targeted its tourism industry. Protests over a lack of jobs that erupted in several towns last month also underscored demands for more economic opportunities in under-developed areas and among disenfranchised youths who see the revolution brought them little benefit.

Unemployment stood at 15.3 percent in 2015, up from 12 percent in 2010. Last October, the government said it expected the country's 2016 deficit was expected to narrow to 3.9 percent of gross domestic product from an estimated 4.4 percent in 2015. The Finance Ministry said at the time Tunisia needed around 6 billion dinars in total financing, including \$1.53 billion, or 3 billion dinars, in external financing. Economic growth slipped to 0.8 percent last year mainly because of the impact of the militant attacks.

An International Monetary Fund team began talks with Tunisia on Thursday over a new credit program, tied to measures to strengthen its economy and finances and likely to be worth at least \$1.7 billion over four years. Tunisia will also get a loan of €500 million (\$550 million) from the European Union to support the economy, and former colonial ruler France last month pledged €1 billion in aid over five years. — Reuters

US GUN INDUSTRY MARKETING TO KIDS

WASHINGTON: The American firearms industry is targeting children as young as six with brightly colored guns and encouraging parents to let children take up shooting at an early age, according to a report released Thursday. The Violence Policy Center, which aims to stop gun violence, said in its report that gun manufacturers are marketing to the youngest consumers because their primary market - white men - is ageing.

"The firearms industry has set its sights on America's children. Much like the tobacco industry's search for

replacement smokers, the gun industry is seeking replacement shooters," the group said in a statement. "Along with the hope of increased gun sales, a corollary goal of this effort is the creation of the next generation of pro-gun advocates for future political battles."

Examples of "aggressive efforts" to market to children include rifles made with plastic parts so they are easier to handle, with less weight and recoil, the report said. Some manufacturers sell firearms in a variety of kid-friendly bright colors, including

pink for girls. The report also pointed out that the firearms industry and its lobby want parents to let their children "access guns at the earliest possible age".

The National Rifle Association, the main gun lobby in the US, previously had a website for its junior members, divided into "Under 8" and "8 and Up", the Violence Policy Center said. Now called "NRA Family," the website's content includes a 2014 article reviewing the Thompson/Center HotShot youth rifle, calling it "a tiny gun intended for the very youngest

shooters - the ultimate first gun." The article cited the manufacturer as saying the rifle is targeted to kids aged six to 12.

Gun violence is rife in the US, where a third of children live in a household with at least one weapon, according to the group Everytown for Gun Safety. Its statistics show that seven children and teens are killed with guns in the US on an average day. The National Rifle Association did not immediately respond to an after-hours call seeking comment Thursday evening. — AFP



LONDON: Traders operate in the Ring, the open trading floor of the new London Metal Exchange (LME) in central London on Thursday. — AFP

EUROPE'S LAST OLD-SCHOOL TRADING FLOOR MOVES HOME

LONDON METAL EXCHANGE STICKS TO CRIES

LONDON: London's metal traders used to conduct their business in a rowdy coffeehouse. Two centuries later, they are still shouting across Europe's last open-outcry trading floor but in a plush new hi-tech office. The heart of the operation is a circle of red-leather benches - the "Ring", where stressed-out traders crowd round to buy and sell and in the process set daily global prices for copper, aluminium or zinc.

The "Ring" tradition dates back to the early 19th century when a trader would draw a circle in the sawdust on the floor of the Jerusalem Coffee House in the City and take bids from surrounding merchants. The London Metal Exchange was formally established in 1877 and initially occupied offices above a hat shop, using a telegraph for its international contacts. The world's top metals trading floor has moved four times since then, with its latest incarnation in a newly-

opened three-floor office on Finsbury Square in central London.

"LME was growing from 82 people in 2011 to 350 today," said Garry Jones, the LME's chief executive. Every day between the trading hours of 11:40 am and 5:00 pm dozens of traders - most of them men in suits - can be seen shouting out their buy and sell orders. Access to the "Ring" is restricted to nine "Category 1" trading houses including Sueden Financial, Triland Metals and China's GF Financial Markets (UK).

Electronic trading, which is now standard practice on US commodity trading floor, is available here too but Jones said: "We will not close the 'Ring'". "We are an industrial market and people trade in different ways," he said. Hong Kong Exchanges & Clearing Limited bought the LME in Dec 2012 and promised to keep the tradition of open-outcry trading until at least 2015.

It has since said it will continue it indefinitely.

The new trading floor was thought of as an "integrated structure" allowing different markets - physical, phone and electronic - to connect. "The markets are symbiotic and that needs to happen much more efficiently than it used to," said Stuart Sloan, the LME's chief operating officer. Every base metal traded - mainly copper, aluminium, nickel, tin, zinc and lead - gets its price fixed daily within a few minutes in a flurry of activity.

When the shouting in the "Ring" gets too intense, traders outside it resort to elaborate hand gestures to make themselves understood. "It allows the people in the Ring to hear each other," said Peter Childs, head of price discovery at the LME. "It's a way of reducing the noise level behind the 'Ring' and getting orders back quickly." — AFP

GERMANY DOUBLES WEAPONS EXPORTS

BERLIN: Germany doubled its arms exports last year to around eight billion euros (\$8.9 billion), government figures showed yesterday, in contradiction to Berlin's pledge to rein in the amount of weapons Europe's biggest economy sells abroad. The increase was driven largely by "special factors," Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel explained when presenting the data. The economy ministry is in charge of approving arms exports and Gabriel had promised to limit them when he took up his position at the end of 2013.

In particular, Berlin wanted to curb exports of light weapons and track them closely once they had left the country. Gabriel cited big-ticket contracts for tanker airplanes to Britain and guided missiles to South Korea among the "special factors". The volume of exports was also inflated by a delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to Qatar, a contract approved by the previous government in 2013, the minister explained. If it had been up to him, "I would not have approved them," he insisted.

Before Gabriel's Social Democrat SPD party agreed to share power with Angela Merkel's conservative CDU party, the CDU had been in a coalition with the liberal FDP. Gabriel accused the previous administration of "not applying the rules as they should have been applied." Overall, Gabriel insisted the government was making progress in achieving its declared goals and in 2014, the exports of light weapons had dropped sharply. Detailed arms exports figures for 2015 are to be released in June. — AFP



BERLIN: German Vice Chancellor, Economy and Energy Minister Sigmar Gabriel arrives to give a press conference yesterday. — AFP

CHINA ART HOUSE PROMISES INVESTMENT PLATFORM

HONG KONG: As China's economy wheezes to a 25-year low, investors who once collected stocks and property are turning to what they are willing to believe will become a new safe haven market - a trading platform for fine art. Even as the global fever among connoisseurs cools for Chinese art, Hong Kong-based Takung Art Co said its revenue and profit jumped along with rampant growth in valuations for a portfolio of paintings, jewelry and precious gems. Via Takung's platform, investor-enthusiasts can partly own, buy and sell Chinese art pieces over a 10-year period.

Earlier this week, the small US-listed firm said thousands of customers like Shenzhen-based finance professional Zhou are boosting trading of units in artwork listed on its platform. Takung said the notional value of its portfolio of contemporary pieces has surged over 700 percent to \$179 million since it launched the platform at the end of 2013.

"We all want an easy, safe place to earn

money," said Zhou, 37, who declined to give his full name. Formerly a stock investor, Zhou said he researches art trends personally and currently has around 400,000 yuan (\$61,360) tied up in Takung's platform: "Here I know my assets are safe, and for a long time."

Online art marketplaces have proliferated as the Internet has grown, with sites from Beijing's Hihey.com to New York-based Artspace offering art lovers an alternative to traditional auction houses. Giants of e-commerce are also in on the act - Amazon.com Inc operates Amazon Art, featuring \$200,000 oil paintings.

But traditional art auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's International have seen overall sales slow of late amid global economic uncertainty. By 2014 the global auction market for Chinese art and antiques had slid to \$7.9 billion, nearly a third below its 2011 peak, according to a joint survey by online auction platform Artnet and the Chinese Association of Auctioneers.

Philip Hoffman, chief executive of the Fine Art Fund Group in London, said he would be very surprised if Takung's model was translated outside China as the mode of investing was risky. "A lot of these people (using the online platform) simply have the financial approach with no art understanding whatsoever," said Hoffman, whose fund manages \$350-500 million in art assets.

Art for HK\$1 per Unit

Takung's model is a first for Hong Kong. The brainchild of 40-year-old Chairman and Chief Executive Di Xiao, Takung neither buys nor sells art on its own account, but charges a percentage fee for owners to list works that will be traded on the platform for a guaranteed 10 years, as well as trading commissions.

The art's price tag is then broken down into a large number of small 'units' - for example, a painting valued at HK\$1.2 million may be divided into 1.2 million units at HK\$1 a piece. Platform users then trade

units, the price changing according to demand - and so far, every work on the platform has appreciated in their notional on-screen value, often by huge multiples.

This week Takung reported revenue more than doubled to \$11.3 million and net profit nearly quadrupled to \$5.4 million. "We believe that our sharp increases in revenue and profitability validate the soundness of our shared fine art ownership model," Di Xiao said in a statement. After trading on the platform for 10 years, Takung said works will be sold "in any way available at the time, including auction house, galleries and/or a 1-to-1 transaction platform that we are developing".

The first such sale is due in Dec 2023, with proceeds to be distributed among the shared ownership. Asked what might happen if the art fetched less than its on-platform valuation, Takung said, "As a product approaches the end of the 10-year period, the on-platform valuation will converge to the expected valuation of selling the piece as a whole." — Reuters



VANCOUVER: Microsoft inventor Alex Kipman demonstrates a HoloLens device at TED2016-Dream at the Convention Center on Thursday. — AFP

AR LOOKING TO FUTURE WHERE SCREENS VANISH

AUGMENTED REALITY HERE FOR REAL

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft inventor Alex Kipman was joined by holograms at a renowned TED gathering here on Thursday as he gave a glimpse into a future where computer screens are relics. Kipman slipped on HoloLens augmented-reality (AR) headgear that his team is readying for market and became a wizard of sorts, calling forth magical landscapes, cold-hard data, and even summoning the hologram of a NASA scientist for a chat.

Kipman spoke of HoloLens and other augmented-reality devices as a step in an evolution to a time when pecking at smartphone screens or computer keyboards are tales from generations past. "I am talking about freeing ourselves from the two-dimensional confines of traditional computing," said Kipman, the creator behind Kinect motion-tracking accessories for Xbox video game consoles. "We are like cave people in computer terms; we barely

discovered charcoal and started drawing the first stick figures in our cave."

Walking on the Moon

He touted the HoloLens headset he wore as the first fully-untethered holographic computer; not relying on a connection to a smartphone or computer. A camera showed the TED audience what Kipman saw through HoloLens as he used gestures to turn the space around him into a cave, a fantasy land and even the surface of the moon. He made a virtual television screen appear in the air, demonstrating how augmented-reality gear could eliminate the need for real TV sets. "Computers give us superpowers," Kipman said as he transformed the world around him with holograms. "In digital space, we have the power to displace space and time."

With another gesture, he launched a video phone call to his family in the US. "I

believe our children's children will grow up in a world devoid of two-dimensional technology," Kipman said. "I can see holographical telepresence in our future." To prove his point, Kipman had Jeff Norris of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory appear on stage in the form of a hologram seen through HoloLens. HoloLens is already being used on the International Space Station and by NASA scientists, according to Norris.

"For decades, we have explored from a seat, behind screens and keyboards," Norris said. "Now, we are leaping over all of that... the antennae, the satellites and the vast space between worlds to step on the landscape as though we were really there." Microsoft has made HoloLens kits available to developers for \$3,000 a piece but has remained mum regarding when versions of the AR visors will be sold to consumers or at what price. — AFP

CREDIT SUISSE TO FAST-TRACK JUNIORS TO RETAIN TALENT

LONDON/NEW YORK: Credit Suisse will establish a fast-track program for top-performing investment banking juniors, sources familiar with the situation told Reuters, as major banks step up efforts to attract and retain in their lower ranks. The investment bank told analysts on Thursday that it would make changes to its promotion cycle in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, bringing it in line with the United States where the practice was introduced in summer 2013, sources familiar with the situation told Reuters. A spokeswoman for Credit Suisse confirmed the plans.

The program, due to start in July, will enable top-performing analysts - the first rung on the investment banking ladder - to become associates in just two years rather than three, meaning they can reach vice-president level after 5-1/2 years rather than 6-1/2. Credit Suisse's moves are part of a trend among investment banks. A spokesman for Deutsche Bank said the lender told staff in October it would shift its promotion cycle so analysts move up after 2-1/2 years rather than three.

Citigroup Inc also plans to announce a similar initiative related to junior bankers in the coming weeks. "Citi considers talent to be among our highest strategic priorities. We have conducted an extensive, holistic review of our talent management practices, and we plan to announce some inspiring changes and enhancements in the coming weeks," a bank spokesman said. "Promoting people more quickly is a retention tool as the chances of the superstars leaving become slim," said Jeanne Branchover, leader of global financial services at executive search firm Boyden in New York. "If you're aggressive and good you'll be promoted faster and you may not want to leave."

Before the global financial crisis, pay packets were larger and promotion time frames more flexible. But since then banks have been struggling to retain juniors, who have been increasingly lured into other industries including technology and private equity, in search of shorter hours and higher wages. Regular rounds of redundancies at banks in recent years and the lengthy working hours of junior bankers have dented banking's allure.

Wall Street bank Goldman Sachs unveiled in November a series of changes designed to retain junior bankers, including promoting them more quickly and encouraging mobility within the firm. Credit Suisse will review its analyst class of 2014 around May or June this year, before launching the fast-track program in July, one of the sources said. It will also broaden its mobility program, currently generally available to more senior bankers, to allow more junior staff more options to move around and gain different experiences within the investment banking and capital markets business, the source said. — Reuters

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Kipling to Jinnah: Mumbai's crumbling colonial homes

SEE PAGE 27

A model presents a creation by Ralph Lauren during the Fall 2016 New York Fashion Week on February 18, 2016, in New York. —AFP (See Pages 28 & 29)



Bieber called 'irresponsible' for monkey pets

The 'Sorry' singer previously had capuchin monkey OG Mally as his primate pal but the animal was taken off him by officials when he travelled to Germany in March 2013 and put into quarantine. Bieber has since insisted he had the "right papers" for Mally - who was a birthday gift - when it was confiscated by customs officers and has admitted he'd like to get another monkey but he would keep the creature at his home in America. He said: "Monkeys are awesome. If you could get a monkey, well, you would get a monkey, too ... I just gotta make sure I got a house and it stays in the house ... I'm not gonna bring him to Germany." Now NAPSA has issued a statement urging Bieber, 21, to turn his attention to a different pet as he cannot provide the correct care a monkey needs to live. The statement reads: "Please do not repeat this foolish endeavor. It is simply not possible to fulfill the unique needs of your monkey within a private home ...

It will prove dangerous to both you and your monkey, as well as irresponsible when it comes to your public following." Recalling what happened when OG Mally was seized from him, Bieber said: "Everyone told me not to bring the monkey. Everybody told me not to bring the monkey. I was like, 'It's gonna be fine, guys!' It was the farthest thing from fine. In Germany, that monkey's endangered or something ... but I had the papers. I even had it written out that he was a circus monkey and he could travel. I had all the right papers. Things get twisted." Bieber was given until May 7 2013 to produce the proper paperwork for his monkey, but after he failed to respond, German officials demanded \$8,000 to cover the cost of relocating OG Mally to a zoo, and the creature now lives at the Serengeti Park in Copenhagen.

Kid Rock grandkids give him 'redneck street cred'

The 45-year-old musician's friends all tell him he is "lucky" to be such a young grandparent as he won't miss any of his granddaughter's milestones and though he admits the situation is "crazy", he is very proud of his son Robert Jr., who he has raised as a single parent. Asked about becoming a grandfather at 43, he said: "Well, it keeps my redneck street cred in good standing, right? Maybe even my hip-hop street cred, if I have any of that left. "I'm enjoying it. "Listen, my son graduated college and he has a job. That alone, as a parent, is such a relief. I can't imagine what I put my parents through. "Now I have a beautiful granddaughter, on top of it? It's pretty crazy. "My friends say, 'How lucky are you, to be able to see your granddaughter do so much stuff? You'll be at her wedding.' "So many things you might not see if you have kids later in life, which seems to be the trend now for most responsible adults." After all his years in the music industry, the 'All Summer Long' hitmaker - whose real name is Robert Ritchie - has learned to be "cool" with everyone, even if he doesn't appreciate what they do, and only wants to hang out with good people. Asked his life lessons, he told Rolling Stone magazine: "Don't be a dick. I try to be cool with everybody. Even if it's somebody where you don't really appreciate what they do, like if it's a band whose music you don't like. "I think I got all of that out of my system when I was young anyway."



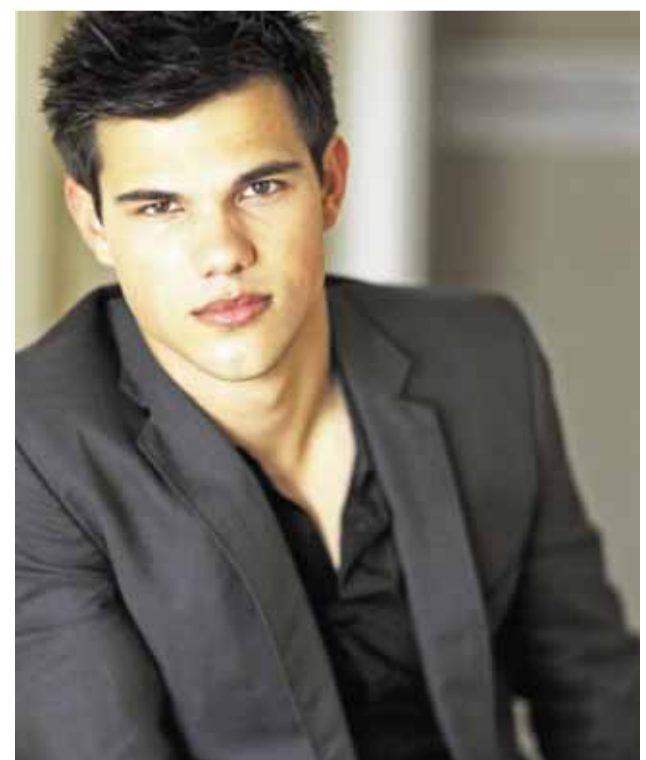
Minogue

reportedly engaged

The 'Spinning Around' hitmaker fuelled speculation she is planning to wed actor Joshua Sasse when she stepped out at the NME Awards on Wednesday wearing a huge diamond ring, and the 28-year-old actor was gushing about their relationship at the after-party, describing the 47-year-old singer as his "fiancee". A source told The Sun newspaper: "Kylie may be keeping tight-lipped, but Josh isn't as keen to keep it a secret. "He was proudly speaking about his fiancee to several guests and even joked that being with her meant he wouldn't have any problem getting into parties. "Kylie was presenting an award and didn't join him much as she didn't seem as bothered about having a wild night out." Joshua is believed to have proposed during a two-week skiing holiday over the Christmas period. Kylie - who previously dated model Andres Velencoso, actor Olivier Martinez and singers Jason Donovan and the late Michael Hutchence - has previously insisted getting married has never been important to her. She said: "I don't know if I'll be walking down the aisle one day, but I've never really seen it." But the 'Wow' singer described Joshua - who she met on US TV series 'Galavant' last September - as the "love of her life" recently. She said: "We completely fit together. He gets me, I get him. "I have a love of my life. I am kind-of on cloud nine because of Mr Joshua Sasse, my beau. "People can see that we just work together. There's birds flying around my head all the time."

Lautner struggles to understand British slang

The former 'Twilight' actor - who was raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan - spends a lot of time in the UK filming for his role in BBC comedy series 'Cuckoo' and although he loves life in Britain he can't always understand what people are saying to him, despite Americans sharing English language with their cousins across the pond. During an interview on 'The Jonathan Ross Show', he said: "I'm not sure what 'cheeky' means. I hear it used so much and in so many different ways, I can't identify the real meaning of it. I don't even know if it's a good or a bad thing! I had to adjust to the kind of comedy here, it's a little more sarcastic, a little dry but I'm learning and I love it." Fellow guest Rob Brydon then explained to him: "You might describe Jonathan as cheeky, it's warm..." Host Jonathan added: "You could also have a cheeky pint." Taylor also revealed he is a martial arts expert and started training in the art of self-defense when he was just six years old The 24-year-old hunk - who is famed for showing off his ripped torso on screen - said: "I started extreme martial arts when I was six years old and it basically is the marriage of traditional karate, acrobatic gymnastics. My weapon that I did was the bo staff."



Moretz obsessed with vintage t-shirts



The 19-year-old actress owns “hundreds” of retro garments and can’t stop herself from buying more. Asked her wardrobe staple, she said: “Vintage t-shirts. I own, like, hundreds of really, really rad vintage t-shirts. That’s, like, my one thing.” While she owns hundreds of t-shirts, the ‘5th Wave’ actress finds her one favorite leather jacket goes a long way. She told PopSugar: “I bought this leather jacket and I literally put it on with any outfit. You can go out to any restaurant, any date, and you can also dress it up and make it more of a midday thing.” Chloe has also been embracing a trend for scarves. She said: “I’ve honestly been wearing a ton of little scarves around my neck — little ones that you tie. “That’s kind of something that I’ve been doing a lot of recently and I feel like a lot of people have been doing it, too.” When it comes to her everyday wardrobe choices, Chloe opts for garments that are comfortable and practical. She explained: “I just try and dress in something that makes me feel like I’m being my best self.” Something that’s comfortable that I can run around in, because I’m usually going all over LA and New York all day long running errands. I honestly just try and keep it comfortable and keep it low-key.”

West only ‘wants the best’ for Taylor Swift

The ‘Only One’ hitmaker has praised the ‘Shake It Off’ star just days after he released a song claiming he “made her famous”. Speaking in a video obtained by X17, he said: “I want the best for that person. But it’s people going through real issues out here. It’s people that’s out of work. It’s people that’s in debt that can’t make it out of the debt. There’s people in debt that don’t have a shoe. There’s people that’s in debt that don’t have a hit album out also. “The media tries to make this ongoing story and everything for hits. I don’t think people care about me or her in that way. People care about their families, their kids. If you like my music, listen to it. If you like her music, listen to it.” Meanwhile, the 38-year-old rapper previously took to Twitter to insist he didn’t “diss” the 26-year-old singer in his song. In a series of tweets, he wrote: “I did not diss Taylor Swift and I’ve nev-

er dissed her ... First thing is I’m an artist and as an artist I will express how I feel with no censorship ... 2nd thin I asked my wife for her blessings and she was cool with it ... “3rd thing I called Taylor and had a hour long convo with her about the line and she thought it was funny and gave her blessings.



Martin never wanted a ‘battle’ with Gwyneth Paltrow

The Coldplay frontman split from the 43-year-old actress in 2014 after almost 10 years of marriage but worked hard to “maintain a friendship” so their children Apple, 11, and Moses, nine, would never have to read negatives stories about their relationship. He said: “If you have kids and they start reading about their parents not liking each other, that’s not good. “We just spent a long time trying to maintain a friendship so there wouldn’t have to be any kind of battle.” Despite the high profile of their marriage breakdown, the 38-year-old singer managed to avoid reading media coverage of their split as he felt there would be “no good” in doing so. He told NME magazine: “Of course, village gossip, we all like to know what everyone’s up to ... But once you start being in it you realize, well, this isn’t really based on any truth. “Especially if you go through a big break-up, there’s no point reading about it. There’s just

no good gonna come from it.” Meanwhile, the ‘Adventure of a Lifetime’ singer singled out playing Chuck Berry’s ‘Johnny B. Goode’ with actor Michael J. Fox - who suffers from Parkinson’s disease - as the highlight of his career. He said: “He has a Parkinson’s benefit every year and ‘Back To The Future’ is my favourite film. “He said, ‘Would you do some music at the event?’ So I said, ‘Yes, of course. I’d love to, but is there any way you could come on stage and we could re-create my favourite scene in film history?’ “And he said yes! He said, ‘I’ll time my medication so I’m most able to play [guitar] at that time.’ “So we started playing ‘Earth Angel’, the ballad they’re playing in the film when he first joins the band and his pictures are disappearing, and then he came on and people went crazy and we played ‘Johnny B Goode’. My life just felt complete.”



Hudson considering a career in music

The 36-year-old actress admits she has always written her own tracks but isn’t sure if she’s “comfortable” enough to share her music with the masses. She said: “I

always have written music. There was a moment in my life where it was like which way am I gonna go ... ‘cause I grew up with musical theatre as my thing ... I love musical theatre. Singing and dancing to me is as much fun as acting. “I don’t know if I’d do anything with it, I’d have to see what it turned out like. If I liked it, if I was comfortable sharing it.” And Kate - who has sons Bingham, four, and Ryder, 12 from previous relationships - is good pals with songstress Adele and has revealed the pair bonded over her love of the ‘Hello’ hitmaker’s “beautiful vocal instrument”. Speaking on SiriusXM Stars 109, she added: “She’s great. I love her. She’s a wonderful, brilliant. We drank ... I love music, and I sing. “And so I have such a love of people with an amazing instrument, a beautiful vocal instrument just touches my heart ... it’s such a gift from God.” — bangshowbiz





This photo provided courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox shows cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, left, and Forrest Goodluck as Hawk on set for the film, "The Revenant," directed by Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu.



Cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki on set for the film, "The Revenant".

At Oscars, the name on lips and envelopes is 'Chivo'

No name resonates in Hollywood right now quite like "Chivo." That's the nickname of the famed cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki, whose acrobatic long-takes and luminous images of natural light have made him revered like few others - and may make him a three-peat Oscar winner.

Lubezki is behind some of the most dazzling film photography in recent years: the asteroid storm hurtling through the vast 3-D space of "Gravity," the seemingly continuous backstage sweep of "Birdman," the elemental beauty of Terrence Malick's films. His audacious, real-time sequences have made him synonymous with a seamless magic not before seen in cinema.

"I think it was John Huston who said, 'When I shoot a whale, I shoot the face and then I cut and I shoot the tail. And everybody understands there's a whale,'" says Lubezki. "But sometimes when you show the entire whale and when you show the parts that seem not as important, there's a deeper connection."

After winning Academy Awards the last two years for Alfonso Cuaron's "Gravity" and Alejandro Inarritu's "Birdman," Lubezki is up this year for Inarritu's frontier epic "The Revenant," and he's expected to win. Much of the film's acclaim (it leads with 12 nominations), is owed to its lush immersion in a raw, 19th century wilderness (it was shot largely in the Canadian Rockies) and its balletic single-take sequences, most famously the single-take bear attack. Yet Lubezki is as modest as the cinematography of "The Revenant" is grand.

Powerful feeling

"I don't know if I'm an incredible cinematographer but I'm definitely a craftsman that is trying to find a language for each project and that's what's really exciting for me," he says. "When you feel that it's working, it's a very powerful feeling. Sometimes you cannot even sleep at night because you're so excited."

Lubezki has worked with the Coen brothers ("Burn After Reading"), Michael Mann ("Ali") and Tim Burton ("Sleepy Hollow"). But the two directors he's most steadfastly collaborated with are Malick ("He has



Emmanuel Lubezki arrives at the 88th Academy Awards Nominees Luncheon at The Beverly Hilton hotel on Monday, Feb. 8, 2016, in Beverly Hills. — AP photos

affected me more than almost anybody," says Lubezki) and Cuaron. Lubezki and Cuaron met as teenage film students in Mexico City. Together, they frequented a local art house theater watching films by Kurosawa, Tarkovsky and Coppola that were sometimes accidentally projected in full-screen prints that showed the apparatus of moviemaking, like boom mics and lights.

Lubezki, who first wanted to be a still photographer, was converted to movies a week into film school. Cuaron recalls it as an organic marriage: "He was one with the media."

"He would be fascinated by light," says Cuaron. "What makes him among the great cinematographers is he understands film as a language. The conventional way of seeing cinematography is just a set of tools." In films like 2001's "Y Tu Mama Tambien" and 2006's "Children of Men," Cuaron and Lubezki have pushed the bounds of long, fluid takes by utilizing smaller digital cameras and the flexibility of Steadicams.

"I remember in 'Y Tu Mama Tambien,' we started talking about just letting the shot last until the natural consequence," says Cuaron. "From then on, I guess, it was very difficult to go back." Lubezki has been at the forefront of a trend in movies that favors the visceral realism of long takes over montage. Filmmakers like Steve McQueen ("12 Years a Slave") and Cary Fukunaga ("True Detective") have also pushed further than the fabled long takes of Orson Welles' "Touch of Evil" or Alfred Hitchcock's "Rope."

'This wonderful trick'

Such feats risk showiness, but in Lubezki's hands, they can be jarringly immersive, presented through a crisp digital window. Scenes like the Arikara ambush of the company of trappers early in "The Revenant" play out in real time, smack in the middle of a 360-degree storm of action. The tense silence beforehand, the mayhem of battle and the fleeing retreat down a river all unfold without a single blink.

Lubezki cautions "this wonderful trick" must always come out of the material, (in "The Godfather," he notes, it would be disastrous). And it depends on a director who knows how to block the scene. But he does sense a shift in the language of film. "When you create these long shots, it feels to me as if I was transported there. It feels more dangerous and more mysterious," says Lubezki. "Cutting and shooting with multiple cameras and so on was so effective 10 years ago but is maybe not as effective anymore as a trick. Probably this trick of the long take will become old in a few years, too, and we'll need to come up with another trick."

But Lubezki is by no means a one-trick pony. His films with Malick (including "Tree of Life" and the upcoming "Knight of Cups") are impressionistic and fragmented. Drawn to real environments and eschewing artificial light, he's ushered in a more naturalistic kind of moviemaking that can verge on the sublime. "Maybe," he says, "there's something that suddenly trickles into the movie that feels spiritual, that feels connected to something larger." — AP

Gillian Jacobs in 'Love' with her new Netflix series

Gillian Jacobs admits to warning her mother about the explicit content in her new Netflix series "Love." She didn't have to do that when she was on network TV. "The content is more adult. My mom is telling me she's telling all of her friends and family and co-workers to watch the show," explained Jacobs in a recent interview.

"I keep being like, 'But, you know, you know that there's some, you know, some adult content in here.' She's like, 'They know, they know.' I'm like, 'OK, but there's some scenes in there I don't know if I want your co-workers to see.'" "Love" follows Jacob's Mickey and Paul Rust's character, Gus, two mismatched misfits who embark on a relationship. The first season is available on Netflix on Friday.

This new gig also has Jacobs feeling like she got invited to a party with the popular kids in high school. "I went to a Netflix party recently, and I was sitting there looking around and I was like, 'I feel like I am at the cool kids table, like what is this?' and it was all

these actors from all their shows at one restaurant together and I was like, 'This feels like a mural.' It is kind of surreal."

Her last TV show, "Community," set at a community college, aired for five seasons on NBC and one on Yahoo but seemed always on the chopping block. "Love" has already been picked up for a second season before Season One is out. "I mean it couldn't be more of a 180 from 'Community,'" said Jacobs. "To have an immediate two season pick-up on Netflix? I know, the whole thing has felt like a dream."

But could there be another revival of "Community"? The phrase "six seasons and a movie" was a running joke on the show, poking fun at its unstable existence. Jacobs is open to - but not certain - of a "Community" film. "There's no script for that but I think my informal poll shows the cast would like to do the movie. We all still love and miss each other and talk all the time." — AP



Film Review



This image provided by Columbia Pictures, shows Tom Felton, left, as Lucius and Joseph Fiennes as Clavius in Columbia Pictures' "Risen." — AP

'Risen' tells resurrection tale through a skeptic

Modern faith-based films don't have a stellar track record when it comes to quality. But they seem to both serve their intended audience and make money along the way, and, because of that, are given an implicit pass to exist somewhere outside of the expectations placed on traditional films.

That's why "Risen" is such an interesting and even promising departure. It looks and feels like a film that just happens to fit into the faith-based genre instead of a faith-based infomercial that sort of resembles a film - at least at first.

That's all credit to writer/director Kevin Reynolds, whose past films include "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves," "Waterworld" and "The Count of Monte Cristo." With "Risen," Reynolds has endeavored to make a more classical biblical epic told in an original way - as a bureaucratic investigation into the resurrection.

Joseph Fiennes' Clavius anchors the story - an ambitious, unsentimental Roman soldier who is helping Pontius Pilate (a funny, exasperated Peter Firth) deal with his Nazarene problem. Clavius is just an agent of his bosses, carrying out tasks with the hopes of eventually making it to Rome, where he hopes to find wealth, power and a good family. We see him go straight from battle to the crucifixion of the man who has caused such a stir in Judea as though he's just checking tasks off a list.

Clavius speeds up with crucifixion by ordering the body punctured, which seems to be the end of it, but of course all goes to hell when Jesus's dead body (they refer to him here as either the Nazarene or Yeshua) goes missing from the tomb, and Clavius is on the hook for tracking it down. The stakes are no less than Clavius's future and Pilate's control.

The film progresses from there much like a police procedural. With a skeptical eye and a green right-hand apprentice to teach ("Harry Potter's" Tom Felton), Clavius rounds up suspects and interested parties to try to find out

what happened to the body - the feckless soldiers who were guarding the tomb, an elderly blind lady, Mary Magdalene (Spanish actress Maria Botto), and a hippie dope. There's almost a "Dragnet" wit to things as Clavius questions the eccentrics and zealots brought to tears by the mere thought of the miracle.

And it all works fairly well. Reynolds has not phoned this effort in and avoids the preachy clichés that so many modern faith-based efforts take as canon. Besides keeping a sense of humor about itself, "Risen" looks good too. Filmed in Spain and Malta, the dusty, sun-battered landscapes evoke the ancient setting of this remote outpost.

Fiennes also does a nice job of keeping things grounded, but everything changes when Clavius sees Yeshua (played by New Zealand actor Cliff Curtis) alive and well and hanging out with the Apostles he'd dismissed as quacks. He's not an immediate convert, but this begins his transition from hard-boiled cynic to weepy believer. It's in this third act that "Risen" devolves in both story and artfulness and becomes more cheesy Sunday School commercial than film.

The inevitability of Clavius's transition is perhaps to blame, making the film feel like two pieces that don't quite fit together. He stops questioning things altogether. The swift and complete transformation simply doesn't ring true for the character.

How Joe Friday found his faith is an interesting premise. "Risen" gets halfway there, but it goes into auto-pilot where it matters the most. "Risen," a Columbia Pictures release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "biblical violence including some disturbing images." Running time: 108 minutes. Two stars out of four. — AP

'Fallout 4' crowned game of the year at DICE Awards

"Fallout 4" wasted the competition at the D.I.C.E. Awards. Bethesda Softworks' role-playing video saga set in a post-apocalyptic Boston won the game of the year prize at the 19th annual D.I.C.E. Awards. "Fallout 4" was also honored with trophies for outstanding achievement in game direction and as a role-playing game of the year, while its spin-off app "Fallout Shelter" was selected as mobile game of the year.

"I get to work with some amazing people who inspire me every day," said "Fallout" creative director Todd Howard. "The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt" galloped away with three prizes at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center ceremony honoring games. CD Projekt Red's sprawling fantasy role-playing sequel picked up awards for outstanding achievement in story, technical achievement and game design.

The ethereal platformer "Ori and the Blind Forest" from Moon Studios gathered honors for outstanding achievement in animation, art direction and original music composition. Psyonix's "Rocket League," the indie title that merges soccer-like gameplay with vehicle combat, scored for sports game of the year, outstanding achievement in online gameplay and the D.I.C.E. Sprite Award, which honors games crafted with limited resources.

"Our fans really made this possible, everybody who told their friends, 'Hey, play this crazy game. Trust me! It's fun,'" said Dave Hagewood, CEO and studio director of Psyonix. The multiplayer sci-fi shooter "Star Wars: Battlefront" from Electronic Arts studio DICE earned a pair of trophies for action game of the year and for outstanding achievement in sound design.

Other winners included "Rise of the Tomb Raider" for outstanding achievement in character for Lara Croft, "Super Mario Maker" as family game of the year, "Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain" as adventure game of the year, "Mortal Kombat X" for fighting game of the year, "Forza Motorsport 6" as racing game of the year, "Helldivers" as handheld game of the year and "Heroes of the Storm" as strategy/simulation game of the year.

The late Nintendo executive Satoru Iwata was honored with the ceremony's lifetime achievement award, while "Metal Gear Solid" creator Hideo Kojima was inducted into the interactive academy's hall of fame. "From now on, I hope I can keep making games and keep dreaming of new dreams," the Japanese game designer told the crowd through a translator.

The D.I.C.E. Awards - which stands for design, innovate, communicate and entertain - honor outstanding achievements in games and are determined by votes from members of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences and the International Game Developers Association. The ceremony capped off the three-day D.I.C.E. Summit. The gam-

ing industry gathering featured talks from such luminaries as "Metal Gear" creator Kojima, "Rise of the Tomb Raider" writer Rhianna Pratchett and "Civilization" creator Sid Meier.

Kojima and del Toro reunite

Movie director Guillermo del Toro and video game designer Hideo Kojima had big plans for their top-secret interactive collaboration. "We had great ideas that I think would have done fantastic," the "Pacific Rim" filmmaker said on stage.



Guillermo del Toro, left, film director at DelToro Films and Hideo Kojima, game designer at Kojima Productions, participate in a panel discussion at the D.I.C.E. Summit.

Del Toro and the "Metal Gear Solid" creator reunited for a talk at the 15th annual gathering of elite members of the video game industry. The appearance marked the pair's first public appearance together since their collaboration, "Silent Hills," was canceled last year by publisher Konami.

The title was intended to be the next installment in the long-running "Silent Hill" horror franchise and feature "The Walking Dead" actor Norman Reedus. Del Toro and Kojima teased it last year with the release of a mysterious PlayStation 4 demo called "P.T."

"P.T." itself was meant to be sort of a decoy," del Toro said. "We were thinking it would take (players) 10 days, two weeks to solve it. They solved it in three days." The pair - fans of each other's work - first met when del Toro was in Japan to promote "Hellboy 2." They quickly became friends, and del Toro invited Kojima to his "man cave," populated with the filmmaker's games, toys and other geeky collectibles.—AP



This image provided by Crystal Dynamics shows an in-game screenshot of Lara Croft in the video game, "Rise of the Tomb Raider." — AP photos



Palestinian Mohammed Baraka, who has become something of a local hero for his strength, pulls a bus tied to a rope as he performs a trick in Deir Al-Balah, in central Gaza.



Baraka pulls tyres tied to a rope with his teeth as he performs a trick.

Pulling buses with his teeth, the **Jason Statham of Gaza**

The idea of pulling a 12-tonne bus seems a crazy one, and Mohammed Baraka takes a few minutes to prepare himself with his family and friends. Only 20 years old, Baraka is far from a professional muscleman - in fact he is a second-year student in tourism and hotels at the Palestine Technical College in Deir Al Balah, his home town in the Gaza Strip.

But he has become something of a local hero, with his feats posted on Facebook and shared widely among Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere. Baraka now dreams of leaving the blockaded territory and becoming a global star.

His strength has earned him the nickname "Gaza's Samson", after the Biblical hero given supernatural force by God to fight his enemies and perform daring feats-including one where he ripped off the city gates of Gaza. But Baraka prefers to be called "Gaza's Jason" after his favourite movie star, British action film hero Jason Statham.

For his trick, Baraka uses his teeth while strapped into a harness to heave at a 20-person bus until it moves. Next he pulls a 50-seater bus. The bus driver, Mahmud, looks astounded. "I thought he was joking, this is madness," he says. "Had I not seen it with my own eyes I wouldn't believe it." Baraka is more modest in his appraisal. "I am very happy as I managed to pull the big bus

and brought joy to the children," he says. He accepts that many think he is strange, but "if an idea comes to my mind, even if it is crazy, then I do it immediately."

Online superhero

From an early age it was clear Baraka was different. He first stood out when he jumped through fire in a school performance. Soon after he pulled a motorbike with his teeth. For his first major test, Baraka said he pulled a 13-tonne bulldozer with his arms.

Among his other hobbies are walking on nails and cracking bricks on his chest and back. He admits he has had no formal training except watching videos on YouTube and, of course, the action scenes of Jason Statham. The man himself dreams of travelling the globe to compete in international competitions. But in Gaza that is unlikely to happen any time soon.

The Palestinian enclave has been under a blockade by Israel since 2006, with severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods. The strip's border with Egypt, too, is closed the vast majority of the time, and Gazans are largely blocked from leaving. In the territory, unemployment has reached nearly 45 percent, according to the United Nations, with a senior UN official recently warning Gaza was on a "disastrous trajectory".

While his chances of leaving any time soon are limited, this only makes Baraka's story more important, according to Mohammed Al-Faleet, a friend who volunteers to help run the strong man's social media accounts. "We have thousands of admirers," Faleet says.

He sees Baraka as a symbol of what young Palestinians can achieve. "Gazans have the ability, the talent and the creativity to compete at world championships," he says. However there are few clubs or organizations sponsoring such activities in Gaza, which suffers from a lack of investment in sport as much as other sectors.

Kamal, Baraka's 55-year-old father who works at a local school, says there isn't enough equipment for those wanting to improve and calls on Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas to back Baraka's campaign. "Mohammed can raise the name of Palestine high," Kamal said. His case "highlights that the youth of Gaza are banned from travel and deprived of any chance of making a better future." Baraka agrees with his father. "Young people in Gaza have the creativity," he says. "But we need liberty and freedom of movement." — AFP



Baraka poses for a photo with his turtle.



Baraka has concrete bricks broken on his arm. — AFP photos



Indian motorists wait for the signal to turn green at the corner of the Esplanade Mansion, formerly Watsons Hotel. In arty Kala Ghoda district, a 147-year-old mansion, formerly the resplendent Watson's Hotel, frequented and written about by Mark Twain, is a ramshackle shadow of its former glory. Now called Esplanade Mansion, it shows no signs of being restored despite ten years having passed since it were placed on a global list of endangered monuments by the New York-based World Monuments Fund.



Indian students gather under the porch of the Kipling Bungalow - the birthplace of author Rudyard Kipling - inside the campus of the JJ School of Art in Mumbai. — AFP photos

Kipling to Jinnah: Mumbai's crumbling colonial homes

Hidden behind a blanket of trees at the back of a university in Mumbai lies the dilapidated, but once grand, former home of writer Rudyard Kipling. Fallen branches, discarded chairs and even empty whisky bottles surround the 19th-century building, while bird droppings mar a bust of Kipling, author of such beloved novels as "The Jungle Book" and "Kim".

"The bungalow is in very bad condition and needs desperate help," the college's principal, Rajiv Mishra said. "We feel cheated that such a beautiful monument has been neglected," he adds, pointing to a rotting wooden post, precariously supporting the historic property in south Mumbai.

The "Kipling Bungalow", as locals affectionately call it, is one of several mansions in the teeming Indian city, once associated with famous residents but now in ruin. Nearby stands the former colonial home of Lord Harris, an ex-governor of then-named Bombay, widely credited with making cricket the most popular sport in India. The gothic building housed school classrooms until four years ago, when pupils were moved out because the crumbling structure had become too weak and hazardous.

A few kilometers away in plush Malabar Hill sits the previously imposing residence of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and its first governor-general. The stately home hosted critical talks between Jinnah and India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on partition of the subcontinent, but today its downtrodden appearance belies its historical significance.

Red tape

Heritage campaigners lament the demise of such buildings, blaming red tape and claiming politicians and developers are more concerned with constructing sparkly new luxury towers than preserving Mumbai's architectural history. "The Kipling Bungalow is just a very sad reflection of bureaucratic hurdles... creating the death of a historic building," renowned architect Abha Narain Lambah, who specializes in conservation said.

The wood and stone structure, its green paint peeling, is situated on the grounds of an art school, whose first principal was John Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard's father. Built in 1882, 17 years after

Rudyard was born, the house was home to Lockwood Kipling and subsequent deans until the early 2000s, by which time it had sunk into such disrepair that it was rendered uninhabitable. "We feel that Lockwood must have had Rudyard stay here and write so we call it the 'Kipling Bungalow'," explains Mishra, who wants the Maharashtra state government to restore it without delay. He says officials plan to turn the building into a gallery



Indian students' bags sit under the porch of the Kipling Bungalow.

exhibiting students' work and that of decorated artists, and have issued a tender for the contract.

Tug-of-war

The building has been caught in a tug-of-war between the college and the government for years over what its restoration should look like, but Mishra hopes renovations will finally start in around six months. Maharashtra culture and education minister Vinod Tawde failed to respond to repeated AFP requests for comment on the issue.

A short walk away, work has already begun on the former Mumbai residence of batsman and acclaimed cricket administrator George Harris, who was governor of the city from 1890-1895. Harris captained England and during his tenure on the subcontinent "did much to lay down foundations

for the expansion of the game in India", according to Cricinfo website.

A Mumbai inter-schools cricket tournament called the Harris Shield is testament to his legacy, but his former home was allowed to come close to collapse before long overdue maintenance work started. The three-storey mansion, part of a public school, was out of use for three years until renovation began in June, and presently stands gutted,



surrounded by bamboo scaffolding. "It was basically falling apart and became too dangerous to be inside," the school's principal, Mohan Bhogade said.

Jinnah dispute

In arty Kala Ghoda district, a 147-year-old mansion, formerly the resplendent Watson's Hotel, frequented and written about by Mark Twain, is a ramshackle shadow of its former glory. Now called Esplanade Mansion, it shows no signs of being restored despite ten years having passed since it was placed on a global list of endangered monuments by the New York-based World Monuments Fund. Watson's, completed in 1869, is believed to be India's oldest cast-iron building and was the hotel of choice for colonialists and visiting dignitaries during the British Raj.

According to legend, the hotel went into decline after Indian industrialist Jamsetji Tata built Mumbai's iconic Taj Mahal Palace because he was denied entry to Watson's, which had a "Europeans-only" policy. Today the crumbling structure houses a medley of dark cubbyhole offices. A lack of funds and arguments between tenants and city authorities have been cited as contributing to its descent into ruin.



"The idea of heritage has just evaporated," says Naresh Fernandes, author of "City Adrift: A Short Biography of Bombay". AFP contacted a number of officials at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, regarding the Watson's Hotel and the Harris building, but none were available for comment. Jinnah's house has been embroiled in a long-running legal dispute over ownership between his daughter, India and Pakistan. It lies empty in thick forest behind a padlocked gate.

Lambah doesn't believe the buildings owe their dilapidation to any sort of colonial antipathy, citing well-maintained British-era relics like the Bombay High Court and the former Victoria Terminus train station. "It's just sheer neglect and bureaucracy," she says. — AFP

New York Fashion Week

Lady Gaga stuns in Marc Jacobs NY fashion finale

Lady Gaga walks the runway wearing Marc Jacobs Fall 2016 during New York Fashion Week at Park Avenue Armory on February 18, 2016 in New York City.



Lady Gaga powered down the runway for design legend Marc Jacobs in a triumphant finale to New York Fashion Week Thursday, showcasing a Gothic fantasy of oversized coats, full skirts and teetering platforms. Jacobs, the darling of the US fashion scene, prides himself on closing out the biannual Big Apple fashion bonanza by putting on extravagant spectacles — and his fall/winter collection was no exception.

He turned the Park Avenue Armory into a circular catwalk bathed in white, providing a dramatic backdrop to his meditation on black and all things Gothic, accentuated by incredible lace-up platform boots.

Lady Gaga walked the show with professional models just days after donning a Jacobs costume in her flamboyant tribute performance to the late David Bowie at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on Monday. The pop diva wore a pale green pussy bow blouse with a giant, oversized black coat with huge fur patches on the sleeves. Her blonde hair was crimped in rigid waves. Actress Maggie Gyllenhaal was among the stars sitting in the front row.

Vogue editor in chief Anna Wintour was photographed wearing a custom-made Jacobs tee-shirt in support of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. The designer shored up his reputation as the most cutting edge, daring fashion mind in contemporary America, offering up a loose, oversized look of baggy pants, full skirts and lace detail at the neck.

It was a dark and brooding show, emphasized by heavy black eye makeup and fur accessories in the look that kept the slender form of his girls almost hidden in the giant clothes. His models sported checks and there was a luxurious chessboard train, as well as plastic-looking black skirts with lace-effect cut out, and frayed hems. Splashes of purple came on small bags and his towering boots. Ralph Lauren, the last word in wearable preppy chic, kicked off the day poles apart from Jacobs with a collection blending country gentleman and cowboy dandy styles, crowned by liquid gold evening wear. British actress Sienna Miller was guest of honor, dressed in black, seated next to Wintour and Lauren's family. Lauren made extensive use of plaid and checks with signature suiting that included loose-cut pants, blazers and trench coats finished off with men's ties at the throat—a meditation in taupe, truffle and mocha. The suiting was lightened when styled with delicate cashmere knits, pleated silk crepe pants and silk shirts.



Marc Jacobs wears a "Hillary 2016" t-shirt at the end of the Marc Jacobs show. —AP/AFP photos

Liquid gold

Lauren's evening wear had its roots in a Victorian-era elegance, with frothy high-lace collars and black velvet, and a Prussian pigment printed coat that looked like a Romantic-era smoking jacket. There was a stunning black velvet evening dress finished with oversized pleated white cuffs and a white ruffle at the neck worn by supermodel Karlie Kloss. A black velvet cocktail dress was made in a similarly exquisite manner—embellished with tightly pleated black leather ruffle sleeves and a collar that defied gravity and made the outfit look like sculpture. Lauren, 76, broke new ground by finishing the show with a mikado evening dress, its billowing skirts in his trademark style, but giving off the overall effect of liquid, glistening gold.

Animal magic

Francisco Costa, the Brazilian creative director at Calvin Klein, used a sun-drenched Tribeca loft to showcase New York cool—the look that defines the label and pioneers contemporary, urban fashion. "It's the night before the morning after," Costa told AFP backstage, summing up the theme of the collection. It marked a return to tailored suiting for the brand, as well as novel use of fur for Calvin Klein. Costa said he took brand innovation further by "pushing it into crazy, very fun prints as well, which is all photographic, is



Models walk the runway wearing Marc Jacobs Fall 2016 during New York Fashion Week .

all very new to us." Sharp suits were worn with low-cut V-neck slip blouses in silk and he followed a trend also seen on the catwalk at Vera Wang and Alexander Wang by using buckle and strap accessories. There were large fur collars, another key trend of the season, and leather panels cut into skirts to create movement. Plaids were mixed and matched—with different check patterns used on the two sleeves of a dress, a third plaid on the front and yet another on the back. Fur coats were chunky with textured panels. In a slight break with the usual Calvin Klein look, Costa incorporated oversized tribal-style pendant necklaces and sewed large jewels onto the front of silk dresses. The models wore sensible loafers. —AFP



Models walk the runway wearing Marc Jacobs Fall 2016 during New York Fashion Week .

GOOGLE ACCOUNTS SHOW €11 BILLION MOVED VIA LOW TAX 'DUTCH SANDWICH'

AMSTERDAM/LONDON: Google moved 10.7 billion euros (\$12 billion) through the Netherlands to Bermuda in 2014, as part of a structure which allows it to earn most of its foreign income tax free. Accounts for Google Netherlands Holdings BV published on Thursday show the unit transferred almost all its revenue, mainly royalties from an Irish affiliate through which most non-US revenue is channelled, to a Bermuda-based, Irish-registered affiliate called Google Ireland Holdings.

The tax strategy is known to accountants as the "double Irish, Dutch Sandwich". It allows Google, now part of holding company Alphabet Inc, to avoid triggering US income taxes or European withholding taxes on the funds, which represent the bulk of the group's overseas profits.

A Google spokesman said the company follows the tax rules in all the countries where it operates. The decade-old arrangement allowed Alphabet to enjoy an effective tax rate

of just 6 percent on its non-US profits last year, around a quarter the average tax rate in its overseas markets.

Bermuda charges companies no income tax. Corporate tax avoidance has risen to the top of the political agenda in European in recent years and Google in particular has been under pressure for the low tax it pays on profits generated from sales in the continent.

Last week Google was called to testify to a UK parliamentary committee

about a 130 million pounds (\$186 million) back tax bill, agreed with the British tax authority in January, that the Opposition Labour party described as "derisive".

The deal brought Google's total British tax bill for 2005 to 2015 to around 200 million pounds, whereas its UK revenue amounted to 24 billion pounds. Google Netherlands Holdings NV, which has no employees, had a Dutch tax bill of just 2.8 million euros, its accounts showed. — Reuters



SAN FRANCISCO: People watch Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer deliver the keynote address Thursday, Feb 18, 2016, at the Yahoo Mobile Developer Conference in San Francisco. — AP

YAHOO CEO TRIES TO REASSURE MOBILE PARTNERS AMID TURMOIL

SAN FRANCISCO: Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer found herself in an awkward situation Thursday at the struggling Internet company's annual conference for the makers of mobile apps. She had to persuade an auditorium full of programmers and advertising partners that Yahoo will grow into an increasingly important player in the mobile market. This while the company is dramatically shrinking to appease restless shareholders threatening to overthrow management unless things get better.

Just before Mayer's appearance, Yahoo tried to underscore its long-term commitment to mobile by projecting this statement on a huge screen hanging above the stage: "Imagine what the next seven years will bring."

It's not even clear that Yahoo will exist in its current form seven months from now, given that some of its shareholders want the company to sell its Internet operations after 3 1/2 years of declining revenue under Mayer's leadership. Mayer and the rest of Yahoo's board is exploring "strategic alternatives" that could include a sale while the Sunnyvale, California, company sheds 15 percent of its workforce and closes unprofitable services.

Bright future

Even though she is deviating from an original turnaround plan, Mayer has stead-

fastly insisted that Yahoo Inc will still have a bright future after her latest overhaul. Mayer touched upon that theme Thursday as she emphasized that that Yahoo is still investing heavily in mobile devices despite the massive cutbacks in other areas of the company. "There is incredible potential here," she assured the mobile developers. "Together, we can build the future of mobile."

Unlike her appearance at Yahoo's inaugural mobile conference last year, Mayer gave a brief presentation before leaving most of the talking to executives that joined her management team after the company bought mobile analytics service Flurry for \$270 million in 2014. In another departure from last year, Mayer didn't hold a news conference after her onstage appearance, allowing her to avoid further questions about Yahoo's fate.

Mayer's job security is shaky because Yahoo's stock has sunk by more than 40 percent since the end of 2014, reflecting Wall Street's frustration with her inability to deliver on her promise to revive Yahoo's revenue growth. The company's revenue, after subtracting ad commissions, fell 7 percent last year.

The Flurry deal is widely seen as one of Mayer's savviest moves since she defected from Google to Yahoo in July 2012, but that acquisition still hasn't been able to provide

Yahoo with enough clout to become a major player in mobile.

Small share

None of Yahoo's apps are among the Top 70 in Apple's app store for the iPhone and its share of the mobile ad market remains small even though its revenue from smartphones and tablets is rapidly rising. Yahoo's mobile ad revenue totaled \$1.05 billion last year, a 36 percent increase from last year. Yet its share of the \$72 billion worldwide market for mobile ads decreased slightly to 1.5 percent last year to place it behind Google (with a share of nearly 34 percent), Facebook (17 percent), Alibaba, Baidu, Twitter and Tencent, according to the research firm eMarketer.

At Thursday's conference, Yahoo introduced a variety of improvements to Flurry's app and other tools in an attempt to attract more mobile advertising partners. The company is also trying to plant its search engine into more apps as a way to sell more ads.

Cheetah Mobile, a maker of device management apps such as Clean Master, has been impressed with its results since it started working with Yahoo, said marketing head David Wu. "We all read the news, so we are obviously aware of the problems at Yahoo, but all the numbers have been moving in the right direction for us, so we hope they can stick around," Wu said. — AP

N KOREA SATELLITE TUMBLING IN ORBIT AGAIN: US SOURCES

WASHINGTON: North Korea's recently launched satellite is once again tumbling in orbit, after stabilizing briefly, according to a US official and other sources. The satellite update came as a key congressional watchdog agency said the US military had not demonstrated its ability to protect the United States against a possible North Korea missile attack.

Earlier this month North Korea launched what it said was an earth observation satellite but what the country's neighbors and the United States called a missile test. It was earlier believed to have achieved stable orbit but not to have transmitted data back to Earth.

The US official, and two other sources with knowledge of the issue, said they are less concerned about the function of the satellite than with the technology involved in launching it. They added that the launch was clearly intended to demonstrate North Korea's ability to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile. The US Government Accountability Office, the research arm of Congress, highlighted concerns about missile attacks from North Korea in a report released on Wednesday.

"GMD flight testing, to date, was insufficient to demonstrate that an operationally useful defense capability exists," the GAO said. GMD is an acronym for a ground-based missile defense system. The report said that the missile defense system, or the Ground-based Midcourse Defense, had only demonstrated "a partial capability against small numbers of simple ballistic missile threats."

Ken Todorov, former deputy director of the Missile Defense Agency, said the organization faced a difficult balancing act in meeting the needs of the US military and operating with limited resources for testing.

Last month the Missile Defense Agency conducted a successful test of the ground-based US missile defense system managed by Boeing Co aimed at demonstrating the effectiveness of a redesigned "kill vehicle" built by Raytheon Co. The test purposely did not include an intercept by a ground-based interceptor but was designed to demonstrate the ability of new "divert thrusters" that were developed by Raytheon to maneuver the warhead.

The report said that while there were benefits in the way the agency was acquiring the kill vehicle, challenges remained. It added that the Pentagon's goal to reach 44 ground-based missile defense systems by the end of 2017 was based on a "highly optimistic, aggressive schedule" leading to "high-risk acquisition practices." — Reuters



SEOUL: In this Feb 7, 2016, file photo, people watch a report of a rocket launch in North Korea, at Seoul Railway Station in Seoul. — AP

GOOGLE ACCOUNTS SHOW 11 BILLION EUROS MOVED VIA LOW TAX 'DUTCH SANDWICH' IN 2014

AMSTERDAM/LONDON: Google moved 10.7 billion euros (\$12 billion) through the Netherlands to Bermuda in 2014, as part of a structure which allows it to earn most of its foreign income tax free. Accounts for Google Netherlands Holdings BV published on Thursday show the unit transferred almost all its revenue, mainly royalties from an Irish affiliate through which most non-US revenue is channelled, to a Bermuda-based, Irish-registered affiliate called Google Ireland Holdings.

The tax strategy is known to accountants as the "double Irish, Dutch Sandwich". It allows Google, now part of holding company Alphabet Inc, to avoid triggering US income taxes or European withholding taxes on the funds, which represent the bulk of the group's overseas profits.

A Google spokesman said the company follows the tax rules in all the countries where it operates. The decade-old arrangement allowed Alphabet to enjoy an effective tax rate

of just 6 percent on its non-US profits last year, around a quarter the average tax rate in its overseas markets.

Bermuda charges companies no income tax. Corporate tax avoidance has risen to the top of the political agenda in European in recent years and Google in particular has been under pressure for the low tax it pays on profits generated from sales in the continent.

Last week Google was called to testify to a UK parliamentary committee

about a 130 million pounds (\$186 million) back tax bill, agreed with the British tax authority in January, that the Opposition Labour party described as "derisory".

The deal brought Google's total British tax bill for 2005 to 2015 to around 200 million pounds, whereas its UK revenue amounted to 24 billion pounds. Google Netherlands Holdings NV, which has no employees, had a Dutch tax bill of just 2.8 million euros, its accounts showed. — Reuters



SAN FRANCISCO: People watch Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer deliver the keynote address Thursday, Feb 18, 2016, at the Yahoo Mobile Developer Conference in San Francisco. — AP

YAHOO CEO TRIES TO REASSURE MOBILE PARTNERS AMID TURMOIL

SAN FRANCISCO: Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer found herself in an awkward situation Thursday at the struggling Internet company's annual conference for the makers of mobile apps. She had to persuade an auditorium full of programmers and advertising partners that Yahoo will grow into an increasingly important player in the mobile market. This while the company is dramatically shrinking to appease restless shareholders threatening to overthrow management unless things get better.

Just before Mayer's appearance, Yahoo tried to underscore its long-term commitment to mobile by projecting this statement on a huge screen hanging above the stage: "Imagine what the next seven years will bring."

It's not even clear that Yahoo will exist in its current form seven months from now, given that some of its shareholders want the company to sell its Internet operations after 3 1/2 years of declining revenue under Mayer's leadership. Mayer and the rest of Yahoo's board is exploring "strategic alternatives" that could include a sale while the Sunnyvale, California, company sheds 15 percent of its workforce and closes unprofitable services.

Bright future

Even though she is deviating from an original turnaround plan, Mayer has stead-

fastly insisted that Yahoo Inc will still have a bright future after her latest overhaul. Mayer touched upon that theme Thursday as she emphasized that that Yahoo is still investing heavily in mobile devices despite the massive cutbacks in other areas of the company. "There is incredible potential here," she assured the mobile developers. "Together, we can build the future of mobile."

Unlike her appearance at Yahoo's inaugural mobile conference last year, Mayer gave a brief presentation before leaving most of the talking to executives that joined her management team after the company bought mobile analytics service Flurry for \$270 million in 2014. In another departure from last year, Mayer didn't hold a news conference after her onstage appearance, allowing her to avoid further questions about Yahoo's fate.

Mayer's job security is shaky because Yahoo's stock has sunk by more than 40 percent since the end of 2014, reflecting Wall Street's frustration with her inability to deliver on her promise to revive Yahoo's revenue growth. The company's revenue, after subtracting ad commissions, fell 7 percent last year.

The Flurry deal is widely seen as one of Mayer's savviest moves since she defected from Google to Yahoo in July 2012, but that acquisition still hasn't been able to provide

Yahoo with enough clout to become a major player in mobile.

Small share

None of Yahoo's apps are among the Top 70 in Apple's app store for the iPhone and its share of the mobile ad market remains small even though its revenue from smartphones and tablets is rapidly rising. Yahoo's mobile ad revenue totaled \$1.05 billion last year, a 36 percent increase from last year. Yet its share of the \$72 billion worldwide market for mobile ads decreased slightly to 1.5 percent last year to place it behind Google (with a share of nearly 34 percent), Facebook (17 percent), Alibaba, Baidu, Twitter and Tencent, according to the research firm eMarketer.

At Thursday's conference, Yahoo introduced a variety of improvements to Flurry's app and other tools in an attempt to attract more mobile advertising partners. The company is also trying to plant its search engine into more apps as a way to sell more ads.

Cheetah Mobile, a maker of device management apps such as Clean Master, has been impressed with its results since it started working with Yahoo, said marketing head David Wu. "We all read the news, so we are obviously aware of the problems at Yahoo, but all the numbers have been moving in the right direction for us, so we hope they can stick around," Wu said. — AP

HIDEO KOJIMA, GUILLERMO DEL TORO REUNITE AT GAME SUMMIT

LAS VEGAS: "Pacific Rim" filmmaker Guillermo del Toro and "Metal Gear Solid" video game creator Hideo Kojima had big plans for their top-secret interactive collaboration. "We had great ideas that I think would have done fantastic," del Toro said on stage Thursday at the Academy of Interactive Arts and Science's annual D.I.C.E. Summit.

The writer-director of such films as "Pan's Labyrinth" and "Crimson Peak" reunited with Kojima for a talk at the 15th annual gathering of elite members of the video game industry. The appearance marked the pair's first public appearance together since their video game, "Silent Hills," was canceled last year by publisher Konami.

The title was intended to be the next installment in the long-running "Silent Hill" horror franchise and feature "The Walking Dead" actor Norman Reedus. Del Toro and Kojima teased it last year with the release of a mysterious PlayStation 4 demo called "P.T."

"P.T." itself was meant to be sort of a decoy," del Toro said. "We were thinking it would take (players) 10 days, two weeks to solve it. They solved it in three days."

The pair - fans of each other's work - first met when del Toro was in Japan to promote "Hellboy II: The Golden Army." They quickly became friends, and del Toro invited Kojima to his "man cave," populated with the quirky filmmaker's games, toys and other geeky collectibles.

Kojima, who was affiliated with Konami since 1986, is being inducted this year into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame. After finishing work on "Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain," he is now working on a PS4 game with a newly formed studio, Kojima Productions.

"I feel extremely free right now," the Japanese game designer said through a translator. "I'm trying to make a very big game with an extremely small team. I am doing exactly what I want to do." Despite the duo moving on to other projects, del Toro is hopeful that he'll again collaborate with Kojima. "I'll do whatever the (expletive) he wants," the filmmaker said with a big grin, motioning to Kojima. — AP



LAS VEGAS: Hideo Kojima, from right, game designer at Kojima Productions, Guillermo del Toro, film director at Del Toro Films, and Geoff Keighley, president of GameSlice, participate in a panel discussion at the D.I.C.E. Summit Thursday, Feb 18, 2016, in Las Vegas. — AP

PROFIT OR PATRIOTISM? WHAT'S DRIVING FIGHT BETWEEN US, APPLE?

WASHINGTON: Apple Inc and the US government are making their cases before anyone steps into a courtroom over a judge's order forcing Apple to help the FBI hack into an iPhone in a terrorism case. Their legal arguments are expected to pit digital privacy rights against national security interests, and could affect millions of cellphone users. Apple has until Tuesday to protest in court the decision by a US magistrate judge in California. But the public relations campaigns are already under way.

Is Apple adequately cooperating with federal agents investigating last year's deadly attack in San Bernardino, California? Is this simply a dispute to recover information from an iPhone used by the gunman, or more broadly a fight affecting the privacy rights of citizens who use Apple's flagship product? Is this about profits or patriotism?

The Justice Department asked the judge to order Apple to create sophisticated software that the FBI could load onto the phone to bypass a self-destruct feature that erases all data after 10 consecutive, unsuccessful attempts to guess the unlocking passcode. Prosecutors said Apple could help the FBI "but has declined to provide that assistance voluntarily," and they said Apple could perform the task easily.

That point is crucial because the government can't compel a company's help in some cases if doing so would be unreasonably burdensome, even though the US would almost certainly pay Apple for the work.

Apple CEO Tim Cook distanced the company from the suggestion that it was protecting the privacy of an extremist. "The FBI asked us for help in the days following the attack, and we have worked hard to support the government's efforts to solve this horrible crime," Cook said. "We have no sympathy for terrorists."

Too dangerous

Cook also said the FBI's latest demand went beyond previous requests for help: "The US government has asked us for something we simply do not have, and something we consider too dangerous to create," Cook said. "They have asked us to build a backdoor to the iPhone."

The term "backdoor," describing a behind-the-scenes method that hackers use to gain unauthorized access, has for years colored the discussion of how the government can obtain protected information or eavesdrop on encrypted communications from criminals or terrorists.

The government is stressing that it wants help to unlock only the work-issued iPhone used by Syed Farook, who along with his wife killed 14 people in December. But Apple says helping the US bypass its encryption locks on Farook's iPhone would threaten the privacy of all its customers.

"While the government may argue that its use would be limited to this case, there is no way to guarantee such control," Cook said, adding: "Ultimately, we fear that this demand would undermine the very freedoms and liberty our government is meant to protect."

FBI Director James Comey has been slow to criticize US technology executives over such concerns, describing them as "good people" who share the bureau's commitment to public safety. But in recent months, he suggested companies have the technical capability to help the FBI but don't have a business interest.

"Lots of good people have designed their systems and their devices so that judges' orders cannot be complied with, for reasons that I understand," Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee one week after the California shootings. "I'm not questioning their motivations. The question we have to ask is, should they change their business model?" — AP

The only thing that's changed is everything



SAN FRANCISCO: In this Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2015, file photo, Apple CEO Tim Cook discusses the new iPhone 6s and iPhone 6s Plus during the Apple event at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. — AP

BIG TECH COMPANIES JOIN APPLE IN ENCRYPTION FIGHT

SAN FRANCISCO: The tech industry is starting to line up with Apple in its fight against the federal government over the encryption it uses to keep iPhones secure. Earlier this week, a US magistrate ordered Apple to help investigators break into an iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino mass shooters. Apple has until next Tuesday to challenge that ruling, setting the stage for a legal clash that could determine whether tech companies or government authorities get the final say on just how secure devices like smartphones can be.

CEO Tim Cook decried the order on Tuesday, saying it would degrade iPhone security and make users more vulnerable to spies and cyber thieves. Increasingly, other prominent tech companies agree. "We stand with @tim_cook and Apple (and thank him for his leadership)!" Twitter chief executive Jack Dorsey wrote in a tweet Thursday afternoon.

In a statement late Thursday, Facebook said it condemns terrorism and also appreciates the essential work of law enforcement in keeping people safe. But it said it will "fight aggressively" against requirements for companies to weaken the security of their systems. "These demands would create a chilling precedent and obstruct companies' efforts to secure their products," the statement said.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai had earlier voiced support for Apple in a series of tweets. "Forcing companies to enable hacking could compromise users' privacy," Pichai wrote on Wednesday, adding that the case "could be a troubling precedent."

Encryption security

Apple's recent iPhones use encryption security that Apple itself can't unlock. The government isn't asking Apple to help break the iPhone's encryption directly, but to disable other security measures that prevent attempts to guess the phone's passcode.

Cook argues that once such a tool is available, "the technique could be used over and over again, on any number of devices." Law

enforcement insists that safeguards could be employed to limit use of the workaround to the particular phone at hand. On Tuesday, Cook posted a 1,117-word open letter that contended the FBI's request might have implications "far beyond the legal case at hand."

For months, Cook has engaged in a sharp, public debate with government officials over his company's decision to shield the data of iPhone users with strong encryption - essentially locking up people's photos, text messages and other data so securely that even Apple can't get at it. Law-enforcement officials from FBI Director James Comey on down have complained that terrorists and criminals may use that encryption as a shield.

While tech companies have spoken against broad government surveillance in the past, the Obama administration has recently sought to enlist the tech industry's help in fighting terrorism. Several companies have recently heeded the administration's request for voluntary efforts aimed at countering terrorist postings on social media.

Civil liberties groups warned the fallout from the San Bernardino dispute could extend beyond Apple. "This is asking a company to build a digital defect, a design flaw, into their products," said Nuala O'Connor of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a Washington-based group that has criticized government surveillance. In a statement, the center warned that other companies could face similar orders in the future.

Similar requests

Others said a government victory could encourage regimes in China and other countries to make similar requests for access to smartphone data. Apple sells millions of iPhones in China, which has become the company's second-largest market. "This case is going to affect everyone's privacy and security around the world," said Lee Tien, a staff attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group in San

Francisco.

The case turns on an 18th-century law that the government has invoked to require private assistance with law enforcement efforts. Apple has also challenged a federal search warrant based on the same law in a Brooklyn drug case. Apple has complied with previous orders invoking that law - the All Writs Act of 1789 - although it has argued the circumstances were different.

Cook may have no choice but to mount a legal challenge, given his very public commitment to protecting customer data. Two fellows at the Brookings Institution - one of them a former lawyer for the National Security Agency - criticized that stance Thursday, writing that Apple's "self-presentation as crusading on behalf of the privacy of its customers is largely self-congratulatory nonsense."

Cook has made privacy protection a part of Apple's marketing strategy, drawing a contrast with companies like Google and Facebook that sell advertising based on customers' online behavior. Apple "can't be seen now as doing something that would make their products less safe," said Wendy Patrick, who lectures about business ethics at San Diego State University. "I think everyone saw this issue coming down the pike and Apple always knew it was going to push back when the moment came."

In doing so, Apple risks alienating consumers who put a higher value on national security than privacy. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found 82 percent of US adults deemed government surveillance of suspected terrorists to be acceptable. Apple's stance drew fire Wednesday from GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump and commentators on Fox News.

Only 40 percent of the Pew respondents said it's acceptable for the government to monitor US citizens, however. The survey also found nearly three-fourths of US adults consider it "very important" to be in control over who can retrieve personal information about them. — AP

20:00 Mostly Ghostly: Have You Met My Ghoulfriend
21:45 Blue Elephant 2
23:30 Dinosaur Island



01:00 Ouija-PG15
02:30 Robot & Frank-PG15
04:15 The Maze Runner-PG15
06:15 Dragonheart 3: The Sorcerer's Curse-PG15
08:00 Next Goal Wins-PG
09:45 The Maze Runner-PG15
11:45 The Hobbit: The Battle Of The Five Armies-PG
14:15 The Book Of Life-PG
16:00 Next Goal Wins-PG
18:00 Admission-PG15
20:00 Julie And Julia-PG15
22:00 The Invisible Woman-PG15



00:45 The Day I Almost Died
01:35 An Hour To Save Your Life
02:25 My Naked Secret
03:15 Children's Emergency Rescue
04:05 Driving Me Crazy
06:00 Say Yes To The Dress
06:25 Dare To Wear
07:15 The Autistic Gardener
08:05 Bakery Boss
08:55 Bakery Boss
09:45 Dare To Wear
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 Dare To Wear
18:05 Oprah's Lifeclass
18:55 Cake Boss
19:20 Love, Lust Or Run
20:10 Born Without Limbs
21:00 Oprah's Master Class
21:50 Oprah's Lifeclass
22:40 Long Island Medium
23:05 90 Days To Wed



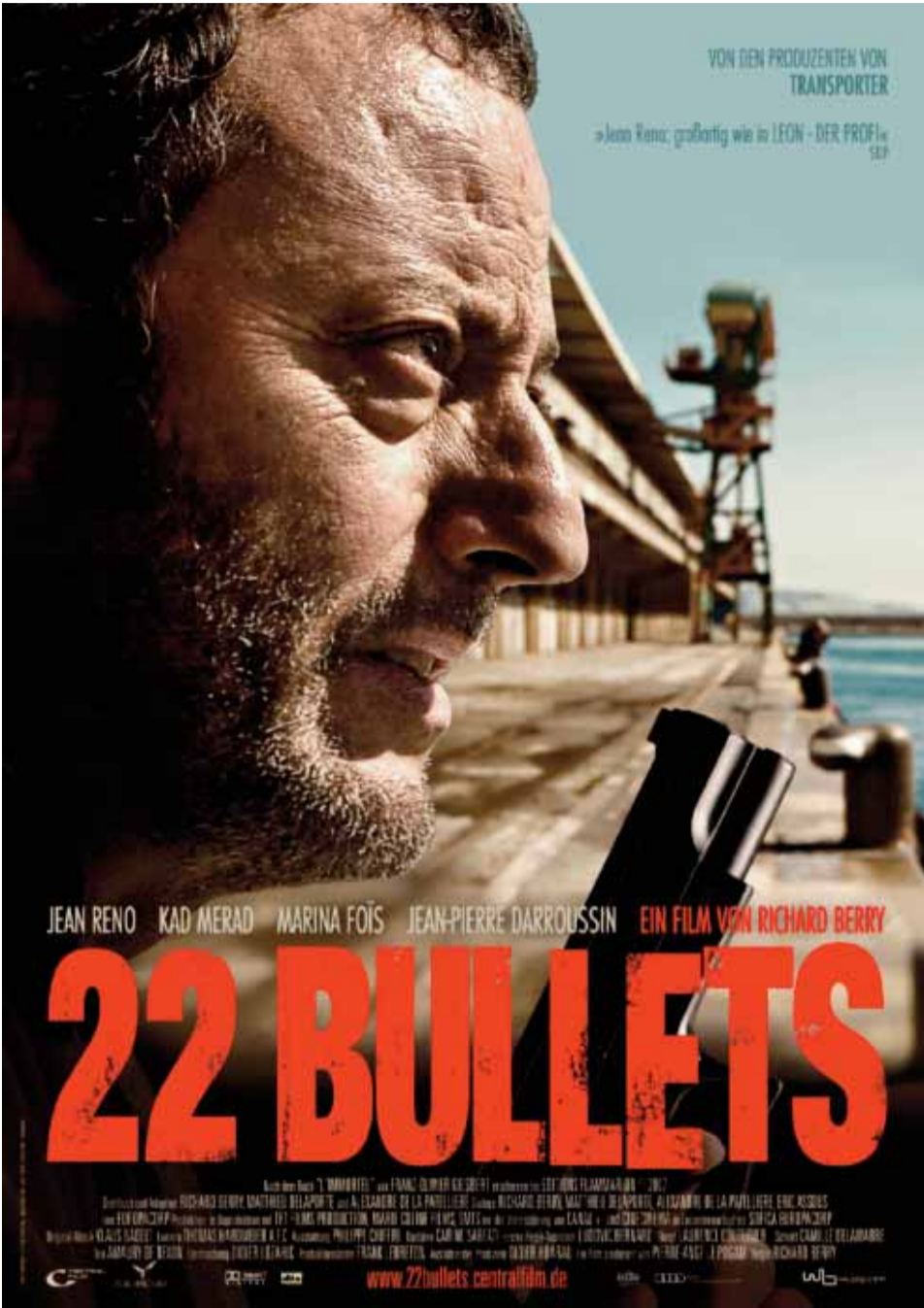
00:15 Permanent Midnight
01:45 I Love Your Work
03:35 Electra Glide In Blue
05:30 Big Screen
05:45 George Washington
07:15 Waking Up In Reno
08:50 Grayscale
10:35 Les Miserables (1998)
12:45 Big Screen
13:00 Seven Years In Tibet
15:15 Futureworld
17:05 Follow That Dream
18:55 Big Screen
19:10 Dirty Rotten Scoundrels
21:00 Breaking Bad
22:00 Venom
23:30 Swingers



00:05 Doctors
00:35 Father Brown
01:30 War And Peace
02:15 War And Peace
03:05 Stella
03:55 Doctors
08:30 Eastenders
10:30 New Tricks
12:20 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
21:50 War And Peace
22:40 Unforgotten
23:30 Doctors



00:00 Measuring Evil: Britain's Worst Killers
01:00 My Crazy Ex
02:00 The Last Goodbye
02:30 The Last Goodbye



22 BULLETS ON OSN MOVIES ACTON HD

03:00 Bill Cosby: The Women Speak
04:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
05:00 The Last Goodbye
05:30 The Last Goodbye
06:00 My Crazy Ex
07:00 The FBI Files
08:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
09:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
10:00 Killers
11:00 Killers: Behind The Myth
12:00 Killers: Behind The Myth
13:00 The First 48
16:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
17:00 I Killed My BFF
20:00 Diabolical Women
23:00 The Last Goodbye



00:40 Solved
01:30 Codes And Conspiracies
02:20 Somali Pirate Takedown: The Real Story
03:05 How The Bismarck Sank HMS Hood
03:50 Solved
04:35 Extreme Engineering
05:20 Deadliest Catch
06:05 Bizarre Foods
06:50 100 Miles From Nowhere
07:35 Origins
08:00 Deadliest Catch
10:30 Bizarre Foods
13:50 Extreme Engineering
18:00 Origins
18:50 America: Facts vs. Fiction
19:40 American Guns
20:30 North America
21:20 America: Facts vs. Fiction
22:10 Somali Pirate Takedown: The Real Story
23:00 North America

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
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
09:30 Goldie & Bear
09:45 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
10:10 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
10:35 Doc McStuffins
11:00 Sofia The First
11:30 Goldie & Bear



12:00 Miles From Tomorrow
12:25 Jungle Cubs
12:50 Jungle Cubs
13:15 Jungle Cubs
13:35 Jungle Cubs
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 Winnie The Pooh: Springtime With Roo
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



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...
10:00 Supa Strikas

10:25 Supa Strikas
10:50 Supa Strikas
11:13 Toy Story Toons
11:20 Supa Strikas
11:45 Supa Strikas
12:10 Supa Strikas
12:35 Supa Strikas
13:00 Brother Bear
14:30 Phineas And Ferb
14:45 Kickin' It
15:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
15:15 Rocket Monkeys
15:40 Wander Over Yonder
16:05 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
16:30 Kirby Buckets
20:25 Gamers Guide To Pretty...
17:19 Cars Toons
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...
20:49 Cars Toons
20:55 K. C. Undercover
21:20 Supa Strikas
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Mighty Med
22:31 Toy Story Toons
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 Charleston
09:15 Hawaii Life
09:40 Giada At Home
10:30 Beachfront Bargain Hunt
11:25 Caribbean Life
11:50 Hawaii Life
12:15 Rehab Addict
13:10 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
16:35 Rachel Hunter's Tour Of Beauty
18:15 Giada In Italy
19:05 Flip Or Flop
20:00 Extreme Homes
20:55 House Hunters
21:45 Hawaii Life
22:10 Restoration SOS Charleston
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 Alone
12:15 The Curse Of Oak Island
13:05 Aussie Pickers
13:55 Hunting Hitler
14:45 Miracle Rising: South Africa
16:25 Storage Wars Texas
16:50 Shark Wranglers
17:40 Duck Dynasty
18:30 Pawn Stars
18:55 Pawn Stars Australia
19:20 Aussie Pickers
20:10 The Curse Of Oak Island
21:00 Alone
21:50 Ax Men
22:40 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The

Superstition...
23:30 Inside Hitler's Reich
Chancellery



00:00 O'marisquino XV
00:30 American Misfits
01:00 Master Debaters With Jay Mohr
01:30 Standard Snowboard Show
02:00 O'marisquino XV
02:30 Quiksilveredition Vintage Surf Auction
03:00 2008 Wake Awards
03:30 Tampa Pro 2010
04:00 World Of X Games
05:00 Check 1,2
05:30 Alli Presents
06:30 That First Glide
08:00 Bowl-A-Rama 2015
09:00 World Of X Games
10:00 The 808
10:30 Making Of Riding Waves
11:00 Master Debaters With Jay Mohr
11:30 Quiksilveredition Vintage Surf Auction
12:00 2008 Wake Awards
12:30 Tampa Pro 2010
13:00 Master Debaters With Jay Mohr
13:30 Gymkhana Grid
14:00 World Of X Games
15:00 Slam!
15:30 Alli Presents
16:30 Best Of Absinthe: Neverland
17:30 Code Red Tahiti
18:00 World Of X Games
19:00 Punk Payback With Bas Rutten
19:30 9 Knights
20:00 Insane Cinema: Machotaildrop
21:45 Skate Paliseberg 2015
22:00 Alli Presents
23:00 King Of Wake 2013
23:30 King Of Wake 2013



01:00 Toe 2 Toe With Phil Davis
01:30 MMA Meltdown With Gabriel Morency
02:00 UFC Fight Night: Cowboy-Means Pre-Show
03:00 Fight News Now
04:00 M-1 Global: Fedor vs. Rizzo
06:00 RFA 35: Juusola vs. Castillo Live!
08:00 UFC Fight Night: Cowboy-Means Pre-Show
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 Bookie Beatdown
16:00 UFC Fight Night: Cowboy-Means Pre-Show
17:00 Fight News Now
18:00 WSOF 23: Gaethje vs. Palomino 2
20:30 Toe 2 Toe With Phil Davis
21:00 UFC Fight Night: Cowboy-Means Pre-Show
22:00 M-1 Challenge 34: Emelianenko vs. Gluhov



00:00 Revenge
01:00 The Secret Life Of The American Teenager
02:00 The Listener
03:00 The Listener
04:00 72 Hours
05:00 Happy Endings
05:30 Happy Endings
06:00 Cougar Town
06:30 Cougar Town
07:00 Switched At Birth
08:00 Grey's Anatomy
09:00 Grey's Anatomy
10:00 The Listener
11:00 The Listener
12:00 72 Hours
13:00 Happy Endings
13:30 Cougar Town
14:00 Fit For Fashion
15:00 Castle
16:00 Lost
17:00 According To Jim
17:30 How I Met Your Mother
18:00 The Walking Dead
21:00 According To Jim
21:30 How I Met Your Mother



ASSE ORGANIZES GCC HSE EXCELLENCE AWARD 2016

American Society of Safety Engineers - Kuwait Chapter (ASSE) organized ASSE GCC HSE Excellence Award 2016 event on 19th January 2016 at Hotel Safir. More than 50 HSE leaders representing different private sector companies from Kuwait and other parts of GCC participated in this launch program. American Society of Safety Engineers-Gulf Cooperation Council HSE Excellence Award recognizes leadership, excellence and encourage exceptional performance in the field of Health, Safety and Environment in private sector companies in the Gulf Region.

The American Society of Safety Engineers-Kuwait chapter instituted the award, since 2007. The award scheme is devised to recognize and reward those GCC private sector organizations who have been successful over the course of the years in managing the Occupational Health, Safety and Environment risks of workplace, development and performance of its HSE Management System.

The award is patronized by Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and endorsed by the international organizations like

International Association Of Drilling Contractors (IADC) and supported by Institution of Occupational Safety and Health UK (IOSH). The awards will be presented to the private sector organizations under five categories such as engineering and construction, manufacturing, oil and gas, facility and maintenance and sector (specific contract / project site). Based on the award criteria, Gold, Silver, Bronze and Merit awards are presented under each Category. In addition to this, special awards are also being presented under Management of Driving Safety Award, Best HSE Initiative award, Best Environmental Excellence Award, Best Corporate Social Responsibility award and Best Risk Management Award. This year award pattern is modified, so that any company can participate in any of the award whether it is a service sector or industrial depending upon on their functions related to the award title.

During the launch program, Jignesh Sha, Secretary ASSE Kuwait Chapter welcomed the gathering and Fadhel Al Ali, Chairman, ASSE Kuwait Chapter in his opening address stated that it will be a good opportunity for the private sector compa-

nies to show case their HSE performance and benchmark their position. Ali Al Kshawe, ASSE Advisory Committee member and Manager HSE, Kuwait National Petroleum Company in his address stated that ASSE GCC HSE excellence award promotes HSE culture among the companies and commended the efforts of the ASSE Kuwait Chapter. The ASSE GCC HSE Excellence Award 2016 Director Sunil N Sadanandan briefed the gathering on the award program and its benefits.

During the program, the brochure for the GCC HSE excellence award 2016 was released in the presence of invited guests from the contracting companies, ASSE Excom, ASSE Advisory members and the ASSE members. The question and answer session was held by Santhosh Kumar Shenoy, Deputy Director for the ASSEGCC HSE Excellence Award 2016. The details of the award program is available in the web site <http://www.assehseawards.com>. The last date for award submission is February 29, 2016. The list of winners under different categories will be announced at the end of March 2016 and the gala award ceremony will be on May 2, 2016 at Hotel Hilton Resort, Kuwait.





Members of the Kuwait Society for Traffic Safety and the 'Kuwait Riders' motorcyclists' team in a group picture. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



SOCIETY LAUNCHES ATV SAFETY CAMPAIGN

By Faten Omar

The Kuwait Society for Traffic Safety launched a campaign titled 'ATVs licenses' yesterday in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the 'Kuwait Riders' motorcyclists' team. The event was held to mark the 55th anniversary of the National Day, the 25th anniversary of the Liberation Day, and the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's ascension to the throne.

The campaign kicked off with participation of 150 bikers from the Society's headquarters in north Shuwaikh, and went all the way to Bnaider's open area. It included a variety of activities attended by a large group of young people.

Dr Bader Al-Mutar, Head of the Kuwait Society for Traffic Safety, confirmed that the campaign aims to raise awareness on the importance of improving good values and behaviors on the road, especially to maintain the safety of motorcycle riders in Kuwait. The campaign also aims at creating a Kuwait without traffic jams or accidents, as well as help reduce traffic accidents and protect people's lives, he said.

According to Mutar, the parade headed specifically to Bnaider, a popular camping area where many young people drive their all-terrain vehicles (ATV), in order to deliver the message to the largest number of people possible. "This parade is a new beginning of a real breakthrough to achieve the desired goals of ensuring everyone's safety and to reduce traffic accidents to a minimum," he said.



PANIC AS LIONS ON THE LOOSE IN NAIROBI

NAIROBI: Wildlife rangers yesterday hunted for two lions who escaped from Nairobi's national park and meandered into "highly populated" areas of the Kenyan capital. Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) issued an appeal, "for help to get two lionesses that strayed from the Nairobi National Park". Armed rangers, as well as KWS vets with dart guns, scoured bush and agricultural land alongside the Kibera district, one of Africa's largest slums. "Lions are dangerous wild animals. Avoid provoking the lions by confronting them," said KWS spokesman Paul Udoto.

At least two lionesses are reported to have late Thursday left the park, spread over 117 sq km, where buffalo and rhino roam just seven kilometres from the bustling high-rise city centre. Local media reported as many as six lions might be on the loose. It is not the first time lions have prowled into town. The big cats are under growing pressure as one of Africa's fastest growing cities creeps onto ancient migration routes and hunting grounds. Sometimes the lions are killed by livestock farmers protecting their



NAIROBI: A Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) officer carries a tranquilizer gun during a search of two lions yesterday who left Nairobi's national park and went into "highly populated" areas. — AFP

herds, other times they prowl leafy gardens giving residents a fright. "These are highly populated areas and that is why we are intensifying the search," Udoto said. "Anyone with information about them should share it with us immediately."

Lock up your Children

Udoto said two lionesses were last sighted around Nairobi's Langata district. "Our teams comprising veterinary officials have been in Langata looking for the animals," he

said. Rangers patrolled a narrow corridor of bush on the edge of Kibera. Its tin-roofed shacks house an estimated quarter of a million people, according to an aid agency that carried out a population study there. One fearful Nairobi resident tweeted KWS spokesman Udoto asking whether she ought to "lock my kids in". "Yes, please do until we report lions have been captured and safely returned to the park. Perils of born town lions," Udoto replied.

Lions are estimated to have declined in number by as much as three-quarters since 1980, and to occupy less than a tenth of their historic range across Africa. While the park is fenced in on the city side - some bars even have terraces where one can view animals while enjoying a cold drink - the park is open-sided elsewhere to allow the annual wildlife migration in search of grazing. But the land is under threat from increasing urbanization and more intensive agriculture, and the routes used by migrating herds in search of new pastures as well as the carnivores that follow for fresh meat are growing narrower. — AFP

WIND POWERING GREENER FUTURE FOR CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS BHUTAN

THIMPHU: From wind power to biogas, bicycles and electric buses, Bhutan is exploring new ways to play its part in the global push to keep climate change in check. Last month, two wind turbines - the Himalayan mountain kingdom's first - were inaugurated at Rubesa village in Wangduephodrang district, some 1,450 m above sea level. "Windmills are new to Bhutan, and we can easily harness wind (here) given the location of the village," said Pema Letho, an electrical engineer with Bhutan Power Corporation Limited.

The turbines are expected to generate a combined 600 kilowatts, enough to provide electricity to 300 households in the village, a four-hour drive from the capital Thimphu. Bhutan's government is promoting new sources of renewable energy amid increasing demand for electricity. It is also hoping to reduce its reliance on hydroelectricity - which can lead to power shortages in winter when water levels drop - and import less fossil fuel for transport. "The plan is to boost energy security in the country and diversify the energy supply," said Mewang Gyeltshen, acting director of the department of renewable energy. "This is being done to counter the impending threats of climate change," he said.

If the Rubesa project is a success, the department plans to install 24 more wind farms to make up for power shortages during the dry season, when hydro output drops to less than a fifth of capacity and electricity has to be imported from India. The renewable energy department is also looking at installing solar panels that would generate 1 megawatt (MW) of electricity, and plans to supply 13,500 solar cook stoves and 2,800 home biogas digesters in 20 districts by the end of 2016. Mini hydropower plants with a potential to produce 33,000 MW of electricity are also in the pipeline.

Bike-Friendly City

After the UN climate change summit in December, where some 195 governments agreed a new deal to tackle global warming based on national pledges, the tiny

Himalayan nation has begun to put its own commitments into practice. Transforming Thimphu into a bicycle-friendly city is one of Bhutan's objectives to curb planet-warming emissions from transport. The municipal corporation is planning to build dedicated cycle lanes and tracks around the city.

"The government should encourage people to ride bicycles, walk or use public transport, and switch to electric cars to cut down carbon emissions," said ardent cyclist Lungtok Tshewang Chedup, 23, as he climbed the road to Kuenselphodrang on his Trek 500 mountain bike. Bike rider and bank worker Pema Gyeltshen said the government should make sure cycling is safe and conduct awareness campaigns for motorists. "It would be easier then to encourage people to use bicycles to get to work," he said, urging the authorities to introduce more parking areas for the two-wheelers.

The number of cyclists has increased since the launch of popular races several years ago, such as the international "Tour of the Dragon" organised by the Bhutan Olympic Committee, according to cycle shop owner Ngawang Dorji. The "Giant" bicycle shop opened around a year ago, and Dorji says he has sold 150 bikes since then. Motor vehicles are going greener too. Electric cars were introduced two years ago, and four new charging stations were installed this month, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, bringing the total to 10.

'Global Solution'

"Global warming is a global problem that requires a global solution, and shouldn't be between the rich world versus the poor," Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay said in a written response to questions from the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The South Asian nation's leader has been talking to Ashok Leyland, one of India's biggest manufacturers of commercial vehicles, to test electric buses in Bhutan. And if Bhutan taps the full potential of its hydroelectric sector, it could export more clean power to its two high-emitting neighbours, economic giants

India and China, he said. According to Bhutan's environment commission, the tiny country offsets 4.4 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually by exporting hydroelectricity to India. Bhutan already sells 70 percent of the power it generates to India, while hydro provides 100 percent of electricity in its urban areas and 94 percent in rural zones.

Prime Minister Tobgay said the country is also committed to maintaining forest cover on 60 percent of its land - a goal it is exceeding with cover of more than 70 percent, thanks to regular tree planting. This and other policies, such as lowering the level of glacial lakes, could help protect vulnerable mountain communities in the landlocked country from climate change impacts, including a higher risk of landslides and flash floods.

Funding Needed

Bhutan's 11th Five-Year Plan, a national economic strategy running from 2013 to 2018, has embraced carbon-neutral development. The government also aims to integrate into its 12th Plan the climate action commitments it submitted for the UN climate deal, which will come into effect in 2020. The agriculture ministry, meanwhile, is encouraging farmers, who make up 70 percent of the population, to adopt sustainable land use and improved livestock management, and is promoting organic agriculture.

"There are no doubts about the pledges we have made, and we are working hard," said agriculture minister Yeshey Dorji, who represented Bhutan at the UN climate summit. But the success of Bhutan's commitments will largely depend on international financial and technical support to help tackle climate change and keep its progress towards sustainable development on track. While the amount of funding the country will need is unclear, it is already receiving some assistance. The Asian Development Bank and the Norwegian government, for example, agreed a \$6 million project in 2014 to boost Bhutan's clean energy development and improve energy efficiency. — Reuters



BENGKALIS, Indonesia: This picture taken on Thursday shows a sick elephant calf after its leg became entangled at the Balairaja wildlife sanctuary in Riau province. — AFP

SUMATRAN ELEPHANT FOUND WITH LEG ALMOST SEVERED

JAKARTA: A Sumatran elephant calf lies stricken in the jungle in Indonesia as conservationists fight to remove a rope tightly wound around its leg that almost caused the critically endangered animal to lose a limb. The youngster was spotted with another calf and their mother in a wildlife sanctuary in Bengkalis, Riau province, with their legs entangled in ropes that are believed to have come from traps set by locals, according to the Indonesian Mahout Association.

The calf lies on its side in the mud, as a rescuer holds an intravenous drip that is attached to the creature, during the operation to remove the tightly wound cord. His leg was saved but the other two elephants were not so lucky - the mother lost her tail and the other calf lost a leg, according to the association, which believes the elephants were entangled for several months.

After being alerted by a group of trekkers who posted pictures on social media, local conservationists tracked down the elephants and carefully removed the ropes from their legs and treated their wounds. The operation took a week due to a lack of decent equipment and ended yesterday, with all the ropes removed and the pachyderms left in the wild, according to mahout association chairman Nazaruddin, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. A mahout is an elephant keeper.

It is not clear whether the elephants were the intended targets of the rope traps or if villagers were trying to catch other animals for food, Nazaruddin said. Protection group the International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies the Sumatran elephant as critically endangered, and there are believed to be less than 3,000 remaining in the wild. — AFP

PUERTO RICO TO IMPORT ALL OF BLOOD SUPPLIES

WASHINGTON: New guidelines barring the collection of blood in areas with outbreaks of the mosquito-borne Zika virus will be put to the test first in cash-strapped Puerto Rico, where health officials have two weeks to start importing the island's supply. The US Food and Drug Administration said earlier this week that areas with active domestic transmission of Zika virus should stop collecting blood locally. Puerto Rico has reported a small number of cases of local transmission, and US health officials expect many thousands of residents to be infected once the mosquito season reaches its peak this summer.

Local health officials fear switching to imports could undermine the island's voluntary donation network, which provides the bulk of its needs. The new guidelines will require Puerto Rico to obtain its entire supply from the continental United States at a cost of up to \$100,000 a week, said Jose O. Alsina, vice president and chief operating officer of Puerto Rico's Banco de Sangre de Servicios Mutuos, the island's largest blood bank.

The U.S. territory is struggling with about \$70 billion in debt and a 45 percent poverty rate. The island has already defaulted on some debt payments and its Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla has warned that the government is close to running out of money. Alsina said its eight blood banks can't afford to buy blood and make payroll, which includes about 400 drivers, phlebotomists, nurses and others. Blood bank officials are asking the government to help pay for the imports so they can maintain their infrastructure until local collection can resume. They also have asked for extra



GENEVA: World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Director of the Outbreak and Health Emergencies Cluster Bruce Aylward holds a map showing the predicted distribution of Zika virus vector during a press briefing yesterday. — AFP

time to collect blood locally before having to import it all. "Laying off people, even for a short time, would be devastating," Alsina said. The FDA said that it recognized the new rules would create hardships but stressed they were necessary to ensure safety. The Zika virus has been found in blood, and experts are concerned about the possibility that it could be transmitted through transfusion. The FDA "is actively engaged in conversations with local health authorities and blood collection establishments in Puerto Rico in order to minimize the impact to the greatest extent possible," said agency spokeswoman Tara Goodin.

The Zika outbreak began in Brazil last year and has spread rapidly through the

Americas. The World Health Organization declared it a global health emergency earlier this month because the virus is suspected of causing microcephaly, a birth defect marked by unusually small heads that can cause developmental disabilities. President Barack Obama has asked Congress to approve \$1.8 billion in supplemental emergency funding to help combat the virus, with \$250 million designated for Puerto Rico. Dr Thomas Frieden, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has told lawmakers some of the funds should finance the development of a blood screening test that he hoped could be available in six to 12 months. — Reuters

NASA TO SIMULATE GROWING POTATOES ON MARS IN PERU

LIMA: Do Peru's potatoes have the right stuff? That's the question scientists will be asking in Lima next month, when a selection of tubers will begin undergoing tests to determine whether they're fit to grow on Mars. NASA, the US space agency, is conducting the pioneering experiment together with Lima's International Potato Center (CIP). They will cultivate a hundred selected varieties already subjected to rigorous evaluation in extreme, Mars-like conditions that could eventually pave the way to building a dome on the Red Planet for farming the vegetable.

The selection was made from a total of 4,500 varieties registered at CIP, a nonprofit research facility that aims to reduce poverty and achieve food security. Of the selected candidates, 40 are native to the Andes Mountains, conditioned to grow in different ecological zones, withstand sudden climate changes and reproduce in rocky, arid terrain. The other 60 are genetically modified varieties able to survive with little water and salt. They are also immune to viruses.

Those that pass the tests must meet a final criterion - they must be able not only to grow well on Mars but also reproduce in large quantities. "We're almost 100 percent certain that many of the selected potatoes will pass the tests," said Julio Valdivia Silva, a Peruvian NASA astrobiologist who is taking part in the ambitious project. The scientists hope the experiment will also help address the earthly scourges of hunger and malnutrition by identifying varieties suited to growing in harsh conditions. "We must be prepared for the future," said virologist Jan Kreuze, a scientist at CIP. "To respond to desertification, rising temperature and high salt content in the soil."

Vegetable of the Future

The soil in La Joya Pampas - a sector of the Atacama Desert in southern Peru that's considered one of the driest places on earth - is very similar to that found on the Red Planet. The scientists plan to transport 100 kg of it to a CIP laboratory in Lima that will simulate the complex Martian atmosphere - which contains mostly carbon dioxide - and expose it to extreme ultraviolet radiation. "We'll have more concrete results in one or two years, Valdivia said, adding that it will take more than five years to launch an unmanned mission to Mars.

The potential future space crop is also one of the oldest. Records of potato cultivation date back to 2500 BC, when the indigenous Aymara Indians farmed it in modern-day Peru and Bolivia. If the varieties selected for next month's experiment don't adapt to the desert soil, the researchers will introduce nutrients and subject them to radiation. "If that doesn't work," Valdivia said, "we'll administer a new method the CIP is using called aeroponics." — AFP

CLINIC
PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF



Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
د. فهد علي المخيزيم



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Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION
In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation of bookings will help other passengers use seats

Arrival Flights on Saturday 20/2/2016				Departure Flights on Saturday 20/2/2016			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
MSC	415	Sohag	00:05	SVA	500	Jeddah	18:00
KLM	413	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:20	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	KAC	502	Beirut	18:00
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40	FDB	063	Dubai	18:05
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	ABY	123	Sharjah	18:45
THY	772	Istanbul	01:05	QTR	1080	Doha	18:55
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30	IRA	669	Mashhad	18:55
DLH	635	Doha	01:35	KAC	742	Dammam	19:05
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	01:45	KAC	614	Bahrain	19:10
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00	IRM	1188	Mashhad	19:15
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30	KAC	774	Riyadh	19:25
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
JZR	555	Alexandria	02:45	KAC	176	Geneva/Frankfurt	19:35
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	618	Doha	19:35
FDB	067	Dubai	03:05	CLX	856	Luxembourg	19:35
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10	KAC	104	London	19:40
QTR	1076	Doha	03:15	KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
KKK	6507	Istanbul	03:20	MSR	618	Alexandria	20:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:25	KNE	480	Taif	20:10
JZR	503	Luxor	05:15	FDB	061	Dubai	20:20
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:40	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55	KAC	786	Jeddah	20:30
FDB	5061	Dubai	06:30	ABY	121	Sharjah	20:35
BAW	157	London	06:40	FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
JZR	529	Asyut	06:50	DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:55
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	06:55	JAI	572	Mumbai	20:55
KAC	416	Jakarta/Kuala Lumpur	07:15	QTR	1088	Doha	21:00
KAC	412	Manila/Bangkok	07:20	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
KAC	204	Lahore	07:40	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
QTR	1086	Doha	07:40	ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
FDB	053	Dubai	07:45	UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
KAC	382	Delhi	08:00	KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
KAC	206	Islamabad	08:25	QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
KAC	352	Kochi	08:30	KLM	415	Amsterdam	22:05
KAC	344	Chennai	08:30	AIC	987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:25
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	KAC	564	Amman	22:25
KAC	284	Dhaka	09:10	FDB	059	Dubai	22:30
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:20	JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
QTR	1070	Doha	09:25	FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	THY	764	Istanbul	23:50
OMA	641	Muscat	10:05	JZR	125	Bahrain	23:55
IRC	526	Mashhad	10:20	JAI	574	Mumbai	23:55
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	MSC	403	Asyut	23:55
UAE	873	Dubai	11:05				
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15				
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30				
IAW	157	Al Najaf	11:50				
NIA	151	Cairo	11:55				
SAW	701	Damascus	12:20				
FDB	075	Dubai	12:25				
JZR	241	Amman	12:50				
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50				
MRJ	4815	Mashhad	13:00				
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00				
IRC	6511	ABD	13:05				
JZR	779	Jeddah	13:35				
KNE	460	Riyadh	13:50				
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00				
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10				
FDB	057	Dubai	14:10				
FBA	831	Al Najaf	14:15				
JZR	175	Dubai	14:45				
TBM	6313	Mashhad	14:45				
KAC	512	Mashhad	14:50				
KAC	788	Jeddah	14:50				
KNE	462	Madinah	14:55				
GFA	221	Bahrain	15:00				
KNE	472	Jeddah	15:05				
NIA	251	Alexandria	15:30				
OMA	645	Muscat	15:30				
KAC	562	Amman	15:40				
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45				
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:45				
JAD	301	Amman	15:55				
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10				
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10				
JZR	357	Mashhad	16:30				
FDB	051	Dubai	16:30				
KNE	474	Jeddah	16:35				
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	16:40				
KAC	542	Cairo	16:55				
RJA	640	Amman	16:55				
SYR	341	Damascus	17:00				
SVA	2650	Jeddah	17:10				
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15				
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30				
KNE	470	Jeddah	17:45				
KAC	540	Sharm el-Sheikh	17:45				
JZR	325	Al Najaf	17:50				
MSR	614	Cairo	17:50				
KAC	118	New York	17:55				
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:55				

Word Search Puzzles

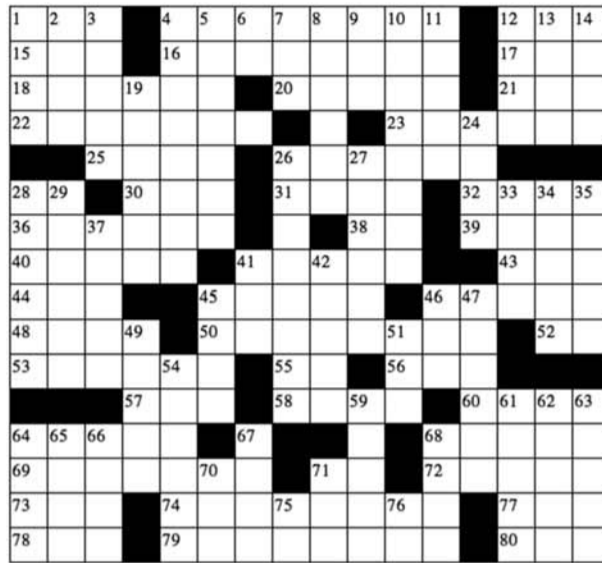
USA Presidents Word Search

Find and circle all of the United States Presidents that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an Abraham Lincoln quotation.

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

- | | | | |
|------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| WASHINGTON | TAYLOR | B HARRISON | KENNEDY |
| J ADAMS | FILLMORE | MCKINLEY | L JOHNSON |
| JEFFERSON | PIERCE | T ROOSEVELT | NIXON |
| MADISON | BUCHANAN | TAFT | FORD |
| MONROE | LINCOLN | WILSON | CARTER |
| J Q ADAMS | A JOHNSON | HARDING | REAGAN |
| JACKSON | GRANT | COOLIDGE | G H W BUSH |
| VAN BUREN | HAYES | HOOVER | CLINTON |
| W HARRISON | GARFIELD | F D ROOSEVELT | G W BUSH |
| TYLER | ARTHUR | TRUMAN | OBAMA |
| POLK | CLEVELAND | EISENHOWER | |

CROSSWORD 1174



ACROSS

- Piece of solid food for dipping in a liquid.
- A sheath for a sword or dagger or bayonet.
- Anterior pituitary hormone that stimulates the function of the thyroid gland.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- 1 species.
- (informal) Of the highest quality.
- A tenant in someone's house.
- The 1st letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- The month following February and preceding April.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- (used of arms and legs) Bent outward with the joint away from the body.
- A white crystalline double sulfate of aluminum.
- A soft silver-white or yellowish metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- A chronic skin disease occurring primarily in women between the ages of 20 and 40.
- A beautiful and graceful girl.
- Severe diabetes mellitus with an early onset.
- An official or legal cancellation.
- An informal term for a father.
- An elaborate song for solo voice.
- (Norse mythology) God of light and peace and noted for his beauty and sweet nature.
- A transuranic element that has not been found in nature.
- One of the most common of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
- Immense East Indian fruit resembling breadfruit of.
- Crowned with or as if with laurel symbolizing victory.
- The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
- Reduction or lack of an immune response to a specific antigen.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).

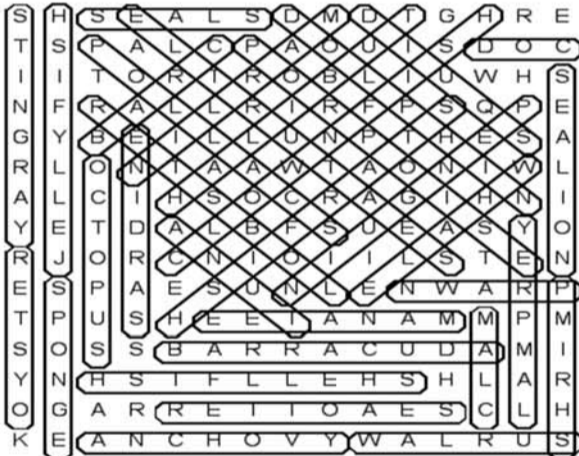
DOWN

- Minute floating marine tunicate having a transparent body with an opening at each end.
- A slender double-reed instrument.
- A genus of Ploceidae.
- Capable of reflecting light like a mirror.
- Having the color of caramel.
- A colorless and odorless inert gas.
- An undergarment worn by women to support their breasts.
- Any fungus of the family Boletaceae.
- Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment.
- Of or relating to or located on the banks of a river or stream.
- The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
- Russian physicist (1895-1971).
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- A man distinguished by exceptional courage and nobility and strength.
- Having the deep slightly brownish color of gold.
- A monocotyledonous genus of the family Iridaceae.
- Small flower of usually perennial herbs having deep woody taproots and flower heads of umbels or cymes.
- Perennial northern temperate plant with toothed leaves and heads of small purplish-white flowers.
- 40th President of the United States (1911-).
- Beat thoroughly in a competition or fight.
- A Nilotic language.
- A Nilotic language.
- A point located with respect to surface features of some region.
- The cry made by sheep.
- (Old Testament) The wife of Abraham and mother of Isaac.
- (Welsh) Corresponds to Iris Ler.
- Call upon in supplication.
- A port city in southwestern Turkey on the Gulf of Antalya.
- A village of huts for native Africans in southern Africa.
- A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
- French mathematician who described the conditions for solving polynomial equations.
- An ancient Assyrian city on the River Tigris and traditional capital of Assyria.
- A feeling of strong eagerness (usually in favor of a person or cause).
- The Oceanic language spoken by the Maori people in New Zealand.
- (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
- A sudden short attack.
- A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
- Predatory black-and-white toothed whale with large dorsal fin.
- Lacking in liveliness or charm or surprise.
- A transuranic element that has not been found in nature.
- A fatal disease of cattle that affects the central nervous system.
- A heavy brittle metallic element of the platinum group.
- A state in New England.

Yesterday's Solution

Marine Life

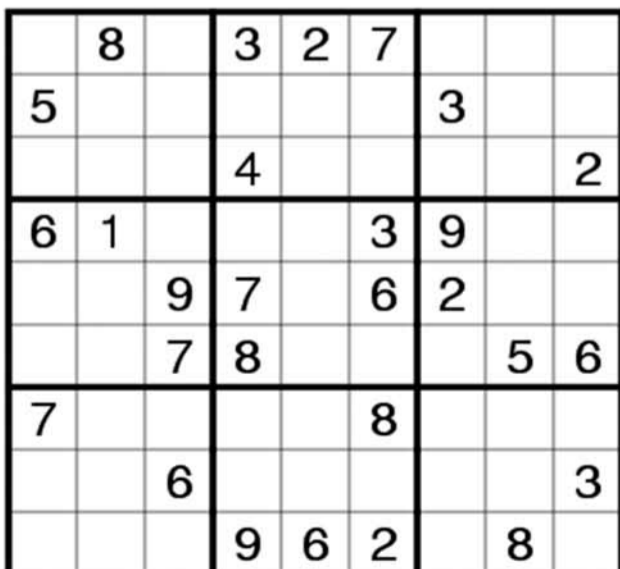
This is the solution to the puzzle located here.



- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| ANCHOVY | MANATEE | SEA TURTLE |
| BARRACUDA | MARLIN | SEALS |
| CLAM | OCTOPUS | SHELLFISH |
| CLOWNFISH | OYSTER | SHRIMP |
| COD | PENGUIN | SPONGE |
| CRAB | PORPOISE | SQUID |
| DOLPHIN | PRAWN | STARFISH |
| HALIBUT | SARDINE | STINGRAY |
| JELLYFISH | SCALLOP | TUNA |
| LAMPREY | SEA LION | WALRUS |
| LOBSTER | SEA OTTER | WHALE |

The hidden message is: GREAT WHITE SHARK

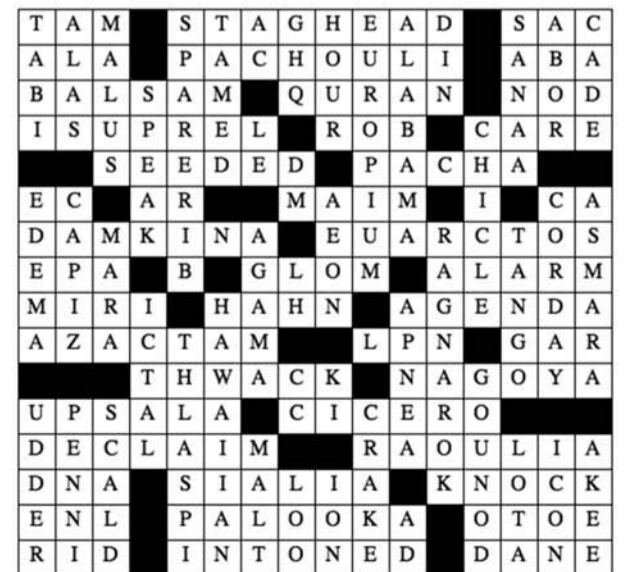
Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Yesterday's Solution





FLORIDA: Florida Panthers left wing Garrett Wilson (left) collides with San Jose Sharks defenseman Justin Braun (61) during the second period of an NHL hockey game on Thursday, Feb 18, 2016. — AP

CAPITALS BEAT ISLANDERS

NEW YORK: Washington's Justin Williams scored in overtime to lift the Capitals over the New York Islanders 3-2 on Thursday, maintaining their healthy lead atop the NHL's Metropolitan Division. The Capitals are 16 points clear of the New York Rangers and 21 above the Islanders, and seem certain to top the season-ending standings both in the division and the Eastern Conference.

Among other key results, St. Louis won in overtime against Pacific Division leader Los Angeles and made up ground on Dallas in the Central Division, as the Stars lost heavily at Arizona, while Florida eked out its lead in the Atlantic Division by taking a point from a shootout loss against San Jose. Washington's Alex Ovechkin scored twice in 87 seconds early in the second period and Braden Holtby stopped 20 shots for the Capitals to get his league-leading 36th win of the season. The Capitals have won all three meetings with the Islanders this season.

John Tavares and Frans Nielsen scored for

the Islanders, who lost at home for the first time in five games, and now face an onerous schedule of 12 road games from their next 14. St. Louis' Jaden Schwartz scored the overtime winner to give the Blues a 2-1 victory against Los Angeles. Brian Elliott was sharp again in goal, making 34 of 35 saves, while Robby Fabbri scored a power-play goal in the first period for St. Louis, which has at least a point from six successive games. Tyler Toffoli scored for the Kings, who have lost three straight, and are now just two points ahead of local rival Anaheim in the fight for top spot in the Pacific.

Dallas may lead the league in goals this season, but they got a taste of their own medicine in a 6-3 loss at Arizona. Maxi Domi had two goals and an assist and linemate Anthony Duclair had three assists for the Coyotes, who scored a half dozen for the second straight games. Domi scored both his goals in the second period, sandwiched around one by Michael Stone. Martin Hanzal

scored to open the third, Tyler Gaudet added his first NHL goal and Antoine Vermette capped it with an empty-netter. Tyler Seguin had his 31st goal of the season, Jamie Benn notched his 30th and Ales Hemsky also scored for Dallas. San Jose's Joe Pavelski scored the winning goal in the shootout to lift the Sharks to a 2-1 win at Florida.

Joonas Donskoi also scored in the shootout for the Sharks. Nick Bjugstad had a shootout goal for Florida, but San Jose's Martin Jones stopped Jussi Jokinen in the third round to seal it. Logan Couture scored in the third period for the Sharks, who have won three in a row. Jaromir Jagr scored for the Panthers. Pittsburgh's Phil Kessel scored twice to lead the Penguins past Detroit 6-3. Sidney Crosby had a goal and an assist, Matt Cullen added a goal and an assist, Ben Lovejoy picked up his first goal since November and Scott Wilson collected the first goal of his career for the Penguins, who have won seven of their past eight home games.

Rookie Dylan Larkin boosted his team-leading goal total to 19 for Detroit while Tomas Jurco and Henrik Zetterberg also scored for the Red Wings. Nashville's Filip Forsberg had a goal and an assist as the Predators beat Boston 2-0 to cost the Bruins a chance of making up ground in the Atlantic. Pekka Rinne made 29 saves in the shutout and Craig Smith had the other goal for the Predators. Anaheim's Ryan Getzlaf, Rickard Rakell and Sami Vatanen each had a goal and an assist as the Ducks beat Vancouver 5-2 to complete an impressive road trip with a 5-1-1 record.

Ottawa's Cody Ceci scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period to help the Senators defeat Carolina 4-2. New York's Derek Stepan scored with 1:31 remaining and Derick Brassard added an empty-netter for his second goal of the game to lift the Rangers over Toronto 4-2. Tampa Bay blew a three-goal lead before Steven Stamkos spared the Lightning's blushes and scored in the fifth round of the shootout to secure a 6-5 win against Winnipeg. Minnesota's Matt Dumba, Thomas Vanek and Mikael Granlund each had a goal and an assist as the Wild beat Edmonton 5-2 to win its third straight under interim coach John Torchetti. — AP

SHIBUTANI SIBLINGS WIN ICE DANCE AT FOUR CONTINENTS

TAIPEI: American ice dancers Maia and Alex Shibutani continued their winning streak by taking gold at the Four Continents Figure Skating Championships in Taipei yesterday. The sibling team cinched the victory after their free dance to "Fix You" by Coldplay, a boost of confidence for the newly crowned US National Champions. "We were very excited to win the national title for the first time and that has a level of confidence that comes with it that we've taken into this week of our skating," said older brother Alex, 21. "We feel like we're just starting to scratch the surface of what our potential can be so we're really looking forward to the lead up to 2018," added Maia, 21.

They scored a personal best of 108.76 points in their free dance performance for an overall total of

181.62 points. Fellow American skaters Madison Chock and Evan Bates scored an overall 174.64, leaping their way to silver after a disappointing fourth place in Thursday's short program. Last year's Four Continents champions Kaitlyn Weaver and Andrew Poje failed to defend their title, finishing third with an overall 173.85 points. "I did stumble in the program a couple times," Canadian Poje, 28, said, referring to Friday's free dance in which they ranked fourth. "I'm not proud of that. I'll go home and work on that in making sure that doesn't happen again." The men's short program will be taking place later. Defending champion and Olympic medallist Denis Ten withdraw from the competition earlier this week citing knee pain. — AFP

FELIX FIXES FORMULA FOR RARE 200-400 METERS OLYMPIC BID

NEW YORK: Allyson Felix is honing in on her quest for a rare shot at gold in both the 200 and 400 meters at the Rio Olympics, tailoring her training to simulate the stress of her bid and leaning some who have achieved the feat. A four-time Olympic champion and nine-time world champion in the sprints, Felix is seeking to become only the fourth athlete to sweep the distances at an Olympics.

Felix, in New York to compete in the 60-yard dash indoors at the Armory in today's 109th Millrose Games, attempted the feat at the 2011 world championships where she finished second in the 400 meters and third in the 200 meters. "It was a huge learning experience for me because it was my first time trying to do it," Felix, 30, told Reuters on Thursday. "I learned that I needed more speed. When I came to the 200 I was feeling flat, and not like myself."

Felix said her sprinting speed is her strength and she must have faith that her distance training would provide the endurance she needs in the 400 to match Valerie Brisco-Hooks (1984) and France's Marie-Jose Percec (1996). Michael Johnson became the first men's 200-400 double winner at the 1996 Atlanta Games. "Obviously, (her coach) Bobby (Kersee) has been my biggest wisdom in the area and Valerie, she's someone who I'll continue to talk to. She's worked with us for years," said Felix, whose coach Kersee worked with Brisco-Hooks at the LA Games.

"I have a great relationship with her. I've picked her brain a little bit, and I'm definitely going to continue to do that throughout the year." An Olympic schedule change has provided more time between the races in Rio this year but the reigning 200m champion said she needs to work on quick turnarounds for the Summer Games should she qualify to represent the US in both distances. "Training is going well. It's intense and it's heavy right now," Felix said. "A lot of running with very short recovery and two races overlapping. Just being able to do that workload in practice and have that turnaround is the biggest difference."

"It's about having intense days back-to-back. I think one of the biggest concerns is that there is a late night (400) semi-final, (followed by) an early morning 200 round and late night (400) final. "So being able to kind of simulate that in practice that's a big thing," she said, adding that late night workouts were in the master plan. Felix said an encounter with Johnson at last October's Hall of Fame induction in the Armory further motivated her. "He was just saying he wanted me to go for it and was interested as a fan of track and field to see the outcome," beamed Felix. "Of course, he's a huge inspiration." — Reuters

OIL TANKERS SHOOTING TOURNAMENT

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Oil Tankers Shooting Tournament will be concluded today at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. The tournament was organized by Kuwait Shooting Sports Club. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations praised the role of KOTC and the support it gives to shooting sports and shooters. He also lauded the participation of a large number of club and National Guard shooters - bringing it to a total of 80. Al-Otaibi thanked the administrative and technical staff for their efforts. Results of the tournament's first day are as follows: 10m pistol (men) - Mideth Al-Sahly, Hassan A-Mulla and Saad Al-Mane. 10m air rifle (men) - Abdallah Al-Harby, Mohammad Abdelrahman and Suleiman Al-Asousi.

12TH WIN GIVES 'ROBOT' TAKANASHI THIRD WORLD CROWN

LAHTI: Japan's teenage ski jumping star Sara Takanashi is guaranteed her third overall World Cup title after earning her 12th victory of the season yesterday to leave her rivals trailing. The 19-year-old leapt 99.5m on her second jump on the Lahti hill to win with a total of 251.3 pts ahead of Slovenia's Maja Vtic (238.7pts) and Japan's Yuki Ito (232.2). It means Takanashi now has an insurmountable lead of 431 points ahead of her nearest rival, Austria's Daniela Iraschko-Stolz, with only four events left of the season which would bring a maximum total of 400pts. "I'm very happy. This season is nearly perfect," said Takanashi after her 12th win in 15 competitions.

Ten of her victories this season were consecutive, which has never been done before, and she jumped an unofficial world record of 137.5m on February 4 in Oslo. Takanashi, whose worst result all season was fourth in Ljubno, Slovenia, earlier this month, can still beat her record of 15 wins in a single season, which she set in 2013-14

and has her rivals in awe. "She jumps like a robot," according to last season's overall World Cup winner Iraschko-Stolz, who Takanashi has dethroned, while Germany's Olympic champion Carina Vogt offered: "Sara simply doesn't make mistakes".

She is just 1.52m tall (4 feet, 11 inches) and weighs only 45kgs (seven stones, one pound), but is a giant in the World Cup having always finished in the top three overall since her debut in the 2011/12 season. She is peerless, having won 42 of her 75 World Cup competitions and finished on the podium an incredible 62 times. But there is a significant gap in her career as she is yet to win a world championships or Olympic title. She finished a disappointing fourth at both the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and 2015 world nordic championships in Sweden. "She has showed some nerves at the major events, but in the World Cup she has won everything, it's not a challenge for her anymore," said Germany's coach Andreas Bauer. — AFP



LAHTI, Finland: Sara Takanashi of Japan celebrates after winning the ladies' FIS Ski Jumping World Cup HS100 competition at the Lahti Ski Games yesterday. — AFP

PACQUIAO DOUBLES DOWN ON GAY SLURS

MANILA: Philippine boxing great Manny Pacquiao doubled down yesterday over gay slurs that have tarnished his reputation and cost him millions in endorsements, insisting God was on his side.

The eight-division world champion smiled and joked through a training session in his hometown of General Santos, then told reporters he had no intention of bowing to his critics. "What I am saying is right. I mean I am just stating the truth, what the Bible says," said Pacquiao, 37. Pacquiao, who converted from Catholicism to an evangelical Protestant faith late in his boxing career, ignited a global controversy this week when he described homosexuals as worse than animals.

"It's common sense. Do you see animals mating with the same sex? Animals are better because they can distinguish male from female," Pacquiao told Filipino television station TV5. "If men mate with men and women mate with women, they are worse than animals." An even more incendiary quote from the Bible was posted on his Instagram account early Thursday. The quote read: "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads". The post was quickly deleted, but not before local media outlet ABS-CBN captured and published a screen shot.

A Pacquiao aide in General Santos confirmed the post went on his Instagram account. Pacquiao issued an apology on social media on Tuesday, shortly after the initial controversy broke. But Pacquiao, who intends to retire after his April fight against American Timothy Bradley to pursue a career in politics, signaled yesterday his apology was qualified. "What I did wrong was just comparing the people to animals, but you know what I am telling is the truth," he told reporters. "I mean I am just telling what the Bible says. We believe God and then we should honor the word of God."

'Happy with God on my side'

Pacquiao also said he was unfussed by the controversy, and that it had not affected his training or dampened his morale. "I'm happy. I'm



GENERAL SANTOS: Philippine boxing great Manny Pacquiao (center) jogs along the sports complex in General Santos on the southern island of Mindanao yesterday, as part of his training ahead of his bout with Timothy Bradley in April. — AFP

always happy because God is with me," he said. One of Pacquiao's media handlers told reporters at the training session yesterday that they were not allowed to ask him any questions about the controversy. However Pacquiao appeared eager to show he remained firm in his religious convictions, and happily accepted questions on the controversy. Nike, Pacquiao's major global sponsor, cancelled its endorsement deal with him this week, describing his comments as "abhorrent".

"Nike strongly opposes discrimination of any kind and has a long history of supporting and standing up for the rights of the LGBT community... we no longer have a relationship with Manny Pacquiao," the statement said. Pacquiao, one of the world's highest paid athletes for more than a decade, continued to wear his Nike apparel at yesterday's training session. Many prominent fig-

ures in the United States, where same-sex marriage is enshrined in law, also expressed revulsion this week. Jason Collins, the first openly gay athlete in the NBA, dismissed Pacquiao as "bigoted". "I lost all respect for you," Collins wrote on Twitter. "Bigoted people like you (& yes you are one) should never hold an office in politics." Pacquiao's long-time rival, Floyd Mayweather—who out-classed the Filipino in their money-spinning mega-fight last year—also took aim at the remarks. "We should let people live their lives the way they want to live their lives. To each his own," Mayweather was quoted by TMZ Sports as saying. While homosexuality is not criminalized in the Philippines, gay marriage is outlawed due to strong opposition from the Catholic Church. Eighty percent of the Philippines' 100 million people are Catholics. — AFP

DEL POTRO POWERS INTO DELRAY BEACH QUARTERS

DELRAY BEACH: Injury-nagged 2009 US Open champion Juan Martin Del Potro advanced Thursday to the quarter-finals of the ATP Delray Beach Open by defeating Australian qualifier John-Patrick Smith 6-4, 6-4. In only the second match of his comeback after sitting out for nearly a year, the 27-year-old Argentine wildcard entrant booked a last-eight date with French fifth seed Jeremy Chardy, who ousted American wildcard Noah Rubin 6-4, 6-2 in another second-round match. "We've known each other since we were kids. He's a good friend of mine," Chardy said of Del Potro. "I was really happy for him to come back. For a tennis player, the worst is to be injured. We need players like him on the tour."

Del Potro, ranked 1,042nd in the world after missing most of the 2014 and 2015 seasons with a left wrist injury, underwent surgery last June and had not played an ATP match since last March until this week. Smith, a left-hander ranked 135th in the world, was broken in the last game of the first set. He broke to lead 2-1 but Del Potro broke back in the fourth game. The South American broke to lead 5-3 and served for the match but Smith broke back and served to pull level, only to have Del Potro end matters after 77 minutes when the Aussie netted a forehand.

Del Potro and Chardy, ranked 30th, have split two career meetings. Del Potro won a 2012 Cincinnati quarter-final but the Frenchman took a five-set triumph in the third round of the 2013 Australian Open. US wildcard Tim Smyczek rallied to upset US seventh seed Donald Young 1-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, setting up a quarter-final matchup against another compatriot, Sam Querrey. Querrey went down a break early in each set but fought back both times for a 6-4, 6-3 triumph over American left-hander Austin Krajicek. Other quarter-finals will see French eighth seed Adrian Mannarino face Bulgarian fourth seed Grigor Dimitrov while American Rajeed Ram plays Germany's Benjamin Becker. — AFP

VILLEGAS LEADS BY THREE; STRUGGLING SPIETH CARDS 79

PACIFIC PALISADES: Colombia's Camilo Villegas rebounded from missed cuts in his last four PGA Tour starts to seize a three-shot lead at the Northern Trust Open on Thursday, while world number one Jordan Spieth made a terrible start. Villegas soared to the top of the leaderboard with an eight-under-par 63 at Riviera Country Club as Spieth spluttered to a 79 that included eight bogeys and a double on his final hole. "I've shot in the 80s a couple times on Tour," Spieth told reporters after carding his worst opening round on the PGA Tour. "In the course of a career, I imagine it's going to happen. Just unfortunate when it actually does."

"I just played really poorly from good positions off the tee and didn't strike the iron shots bad either," added Spieth, who tied for fourth last year. "I just overdraw it when you can't be left and I overcut it when you can't be right. Just bad timing." The Masters and US Open winner said he had struggled adapting to a Riviera layout that had run firm and fast earlier in the week before being softened by overnight rain. "I found it very difficult to trust the way the golf course is playing,"

explained the 22-year-old, who missed putts from eight and then four feet to run up his double bogey at the par-four 18th. "I've never played the golf course soft."

While Spieth sunk like a stone to near the bottom of the leaderboard, Villegas seized control with a storming back nine highlighted by four consecutive birdies before he ran up his only bogey of the day on his final hole. "Things were going good there," said Villegas, a four-times winner on the PGA Tour whose most recent victory came at the 2014 Wyndham Championship. "Obviously the rain yesterday made the golf course a lot more accessible."

"It was pretty stress-free today. I hit the ball good, I kept it in play. I didn't put myself in tough positions on a golf course where you can put yourself in tough positions, and here we are, nice little 63 to get started."

The Colombian's nine-birdie round left him three strokes clear of 2014 champion Bubba Watson, Chez Reavie and Luke List. World number three Rory McIlroy, making his first PGA Tour start of the year, was a further stroke back with



CALIFORNIA: Camilo Villegas of Colombia tees off on the ninth hole during round one of the Northern Trust Open at Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California. — AFP

six other players after opening with a 67. "I felt for the most part I played well," said McIlroy, a four-times major champion. "I felt like my pace on the greens was good ... and I lag-putted well. All of the things that you need to do around this

golf course, I did pretty well today." Play was suspended for the day in fading light with 14 players still out on the course, South African Tyrone Van Aswegen the best placed at four under with two holes to complete. — Reuters

HOLMAN REMAINS IN FRONT IN MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR: Unheralded Nathan Holman of Australia used flawless putting down the stretch to widen his lead to two strokes at the midway point of the Maybank Championship Malaysia yesterday. The strapping 24-year-old, who is ranked 176th in the world, manhandled the tree-lined fairways of the par-71 Royal Selangor Golf Club for a second straight day. His six-under-par 65 followed an opening 64 and took him to 13-under for the tournament.

Earlier in the day, England's world number 13 Danny Willett had caught Holman on the leaderboard at eight-under. But Holman, who teed off later, fired on all cylinders again to pull away. Besides driving the ball an average of 300 yards, his putting was superb, particularly down the stretch. He holed three straight one-putt birdies from 15 through 17 to put some daylight between himself and the pack. Holman is now two strokes ahead of England's Richard Bland and five shots clear of a group of four golfers led by Willett. "When I saw I was three shots clear after the turn there were a few nerves but I handled myself well and managed to pick up a couple of birdies coming in," Holman said. Holman is seeking his second career win after lifting the Australian PGA trophy in December. Prior to that victory, he had never cracked the top ten in any event in four years as a pro, according to the European Tour. "After winning at home my next aim was to win a tournament overseas. So it's great to have the chance to tick that one off the list so soon," he said.

Willett wilts

Willett entered the new tournament



KUALA LUMPUR: Nathan Holman of Australia watches his shot during day two of the Maybank Championship golf tournament in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia yesterday. — AP

the hot favorite after winning the Dubai Desert Classic two weeks earlier. That win was the latest step forward in a run of improving play that has

catapulted him up golf's world rankings. Starting yesterday just a stroke behind Holman, he played well again but was unable to match his opening 65 due to some late miscues. Willett confessed to fatigue after a whirlwind couple of weeks including the Dubai win, a celebratory week off at home in England, and the long trip out to Malaysia and its hot, humid environment. "My energy levels collapsed on the back nine and I started making a few silly mistakes," he said.

He finished yesterday with a two-under 69. Also in the hunt are three-time former Asian Tour Order of Merit winner Thongchai Jaidee of Thailand, who was six shots behind Holman, and former British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen, who was a further two shots back. Those failing to make the cut for the weekend included two-time Major winner and former world number one Martin Kaymer of Germany. The \$3 million tournament, co-sanctioned by the European and Asian Tours, is the successor to the longtime Malaysian Open, which has been discontinued due to a sponsorship shift. — AFP

AGELESS MATTHEW JOINS CLYBURN IN JOINT LEAD IN AUSTRALIAN OPEN

ADELAIDE: Veteran Scot Catriona Matthew rolled back the years to join England's Holly Clyburn in the halfway lead of the LPGA-sanctioned Australian Open at The Grange in Adelaide yesterday. The 46-year-old Matthew, who won the event 20 years ago, peeled off a three-under 69 to join Clyburn at eight-under 136 after 36 holes. Jack Nicklaus, who won the Augusta Masters in 1986 at the same age, gave his support for Matthew in her quest for a second Australian Open title. "Hang in there and don't give up, finish strong! Everyone wrote me off at 46!" Nicklaus tweeted.

Matthew wasn't daunted by her age some 20 years after she won the title at Melbourne's Yarra Yarra in 1996. "I think that's the beauty of golf, you can play, it doesn't matter what your age is as long as you can hit the golf ball and still get it in the hole," she said. "Age isn't a barrier." Matthew hit 16 greens with the highlight an eagle three at the first. "I'm delighted. When I played my practice round on Tuesday I thought it was a tricky course," she said. "Some of the fairways are quite generous but you've really got to try and hit the greens, and that's what I've done the first few days." Clyburn, 25, began her day with an eagle at the par-five first hole, turned in 30 and ended her round with a birdie at the 18th for a 65, the day's low round.

China's Xi Yu Lin, Germany's Caroline Masson, South Korean Jenny Shin and Japan's Haru Nomura are next best at seven under. Australia's five-time winner Karrie Webb is at six under, two shots from the lead, while New Zealand's world No.1 Lydia Ko is four shots back after a second-round 70. Ko, the defending champion, said the breezy conditions made it tough to decide whether to attack or play safe. First-round leader Kim Soo-Bin fell away, adding a 77 to her opening course record 63, leaving her tied 11th at four under. Among the prominent players to miss the two-over-par 36-hole cut were American Cheyenne Woods and Briton Laura Davies. — AFP



CLEVELAND: Chicago Bulls' E'Twaun Moore (left) and Derrick Rose put pressure on Cleveland Cavaliers' Kyrie Irving in the first half of an NBA basketball game on Thursday, Feb 18, 2016. — AP

CAVALIERS OVERPOWER BULLS

WASHINGTON: LeBron James scored 25 points, grabbed nine rebounds and passed out nine assists Thursday to spark the Cleveland Cavaliers over Chicago 106-95, handing the Bulls their fifth consecutive loss. Kyrie Irving added 19 points, while Tristan Thompson contributed 16 points and 10 rebounds and Kevin Love produced 15 points and 15 rebounds for the host Cavaliers (39-14). Chicago beat Cleveland in two prior meetings this season, the first in the season opener and the other last month, just one day after Tyrone Lue replaced Dave Blatt as coach. "In the first two games we didn't match their intensity and got beat," James said. "Today, I think we answered the call."

Cleveland's win streak stretched to four games and their overall margin atop the Eastern Conference improved to 3 1/2 games over Toronto. "I thought our physicality won the game," Lue said. "I thought we were physical at every position." At 27-26, the Bulls fell into a tie with Charlotte for the final two East playoff berths, only one half-game ahead of Detroit. Four-time NBA Most Valuable Player James, who hit 11-of-19 shots from the floor, passed Moses Malone (9,435) for 19th on the all-time baskets list. James jammed in a slam dunk off a lob pass from J.R. Smith for a 65-48 lead and celebrated by dancing

with the crowd.

Bulls star Joakim Noah has expressed his annoyance with James dancing in the past, but Noah was out with an injury as was Jimmy Butler and Nikola Mirotic. Derrick Rose led Chicago with 28 points while Spain's Pau Gasol added 14 points and nine rebounds. "We've got to stay together through the good, the bad and the ugly—and it's the ugly right now," Rose said. Australian Matthew Dellavedova scored seven points in 16 minutes for the Cavaliers after missing the past five games with a hamstring injury. James was lamenting the loss of Brazilian center Anderson Varejao, his teammate for eight seasons with the Cavaliers who was traded to Portland on Thursday as part of a deal to obtain guard Channing Frye from Orlando.

WIZARDS 103, JAZZ 89

Marcin Gortat had 22 points and 10 rebounds and John Wall added 17 points and 11 assists to help Washington beat Utah. Rescheduled from Jan. 23 because of a snowstorm, the game was first of three in three days for Washington following the All-Star break. Hours before the start, the Wizards acquired forward Markieff Morris from Phoenix at the trade deadline in an attempt to boost their playoff

hopes. Gordon Hayward scored 19 points and Rodney Hood added 18 points for Utah.

CLIPPERS 105, SPURS 86

Chris Paul had 28 points and 12 assists hours after attending a funeral in Oklahoma, and the Clippers led all the way to snap the Spurs' six-game winning streak coming out of the All-Star break. Reserve Jamal Crawford added 19 points and JJ Redick had 17 points for the Clippers, who saw their 20-point lead whittled to five in the fourth quarter before they exploded offensively. Paul scored 18 points in the quarter when he also set up some nifty assists on a 3-pointer by Crawford and a monster dunk by DeAndre Jordan. Just before the game, Paul returned from Oklahoma City where he attended the funeral of Ingrid Williams, wife of Thunder assistant coach Monty Williams. She was killed in a car accident at age 44. Clippers coach Doc Rivers and his son Austin, along with Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, Tim Duncan and David West also traveled to the funeral. Tony Parker scored 14 points and West had 12 for the Spurs, whose 45-9 record is second-best in the NBA. Duncan had two points on 1-of-6 shooting and grabbed six rebounds in 20 minutes. — Agencies

MOTOR RACING - ROSSI LOSES OUT TO INDONESIA BUT STILL HOPEFUL

JAKARTA: American Alexander Rossi said he lost his chance of racing for Manor in Formula One this season because Rio Haryanto's Indonesian backers had offered the team more money, but was hopeful the dream was not over. "I always knew going up against a country was going to be impossible," said the Californian who raced for the team in five grands prix last year.

"We couldn't match some of what they were willing to do and sign and (Indonesia) really wanted him to be there so more power to them," he told racer.com in a story that was subsequently withdrawn from the website and replaced by a different version. Haryanto, who is backed primarily by Indonesian state oil and gas company Pertamina, was confirmed by the team on Thursday. The company's chief executive told reporters in Jakarta that Pertamina had contributed five million euros (\$5.55 million) towards securing the seat.

Rossi told Reuters that, while he had felt 'kind of helpless' in the face of Indonesia's support for Haryanto, some of his other comments to Racer had been misconstrued. "At the end of 2015 I felt I was in a very strong position to be in one of the race seats in 2016 but obviously being a very attractive team with the Mercedes power, it was always going to be a challenge," he said. "I feel we did a very good job from our end to try to make it happen. But unfortunately the way the sport sometimes works, all the cards don't fall in your favor." Rossi said he was still in "very positive discussions" with Manor about the future and hoped to return to Formula One "as soon as possible."

The team, who competed as Marussia last year and have the smallest budget in the sport, have always been open about their need for drivers to bring financial backing to secure the seat. They went into administration at the end of the 2014 season before emerging under new ownership, and money remains tight. Their other driver is Mercedes reserve Pascal Wehrlein, with the German manufacturer and reigning champions also providing the team's engines. "We are trying to keep my hat in the ring in Formula One and keep the relationships alive," said Rossi. "The relationship I have with Manor is very strong but...it's no secret I have to look at other disciplines and see what other opportunities exist out there." — Reuters

WILLIAMS UNVEIL NEW CAR FW38

LONDON: Williams unveiled its FW38 ahead of the upcoming Formula One season yesterday as they look to continue their recent upturn in fortunes. The new car, that will keep the iconic blue, red and white stripes for a third successive season, will make its debut in the pre-season testing event at Barcelona on Monday. Despite having a smaller budget than some of their rivals, the British team have finished third in the constructors' championship for the past two seasons.

But founder and team principal Frank Williams concedes that it will be difficult to stay as the 'best of the rest' behind Mercedes and Ferrari for another year. "Williams has started to cement our position back amongst the front running teams after finishing third in the Championship in the past two seasons," Williams said. "This has been a great achievement given the resources of those around us. Staying where we are will be a challenge in itself, but we are determined to keep improving because only winning will ever be good enough." Brazilian Felipe Massa and Finn Valtteri Bottas, who has finished fourth and fifth in the last two years, will team up as the team's two drivers for a third campaign in a row.

At a time when their competitors are changing the men in the car, Williams thinks this gives his team a boost. "We have a very stable team going into 2016, with Felipe and Valtteri teaming up for a third successive season," he added. "They work well together and both have the ideal blend of speed and consistency." Bottas himself thinks that Williams can actually build on their successes and win races, after four podium finishes in 2015. "As a team we need to be able to win races, which is what we are always trying to do," the 26-year-old said. "I'm sure we have made improvements everywhere as a team, so we're definitely looking to fight for better results this year." — AFP

BRUMBIES 'ALMOST' GENERATION SET FOR LAST HURRAH

SYDNEY: The ACT Brumbies are looking to ride the wave of Australia's World Cup success into the Super Rugby season and send a string of stalwarts off to pastures new on a high, according to coach Stephen Larkham. The Canberra-based outfit, who reached the 2013 final and the semi-finals in the last two seasons, are among the pre-season favorites to win the newly expanded competition. Scrumhalf Nic White and fullback Jesse Mogg have headed to France but otherwise they have retained a squad rich in test talent for the new campaign. At the end of the season, however, totemic captain Stephen Moore is off to Queensland, flyhalf Matt Toomua to Leicester, winger Joe Tomane to France, while flanker David Pocock looks set to take a sabbatical.

"We've spoken about this a little bit, it is a last chance," Larkham told Reuters this week. "This group's been together for four years now, this really is the last opportunity as a group to achieve something and they're highly motivated. "There is a bit of expectation, and we want to achieve

something as a group but the best way to do that is not focus on the finals, but on winning the first game." Larkham, of course, was a standout in the team's golden era, steering the Brumbies backline from flyhalf as they reached four finals in five years and won the title twice.

World Cup lift

It has not escaped his notice that their 2001 and 2004 triumphs came in the wake of the Wallabies reaching the 1999 and 2003 World Cup finals—a feat they matched in England last year. "I've been thinking about that a lot over the last month," the pensive and quietly spoken 41-year-old said. "I think there is a flow-on effect to the Super Rugby sides. It was a good journey for the boys who were involved and I think we surprised a few people. "Rugby's at a peak in Australia at the moment and the boys are certainly riding on that."

The Brumbies had the best defensive record in Super Rugby in 2015, conceding just 21 tries in 16

games, but after losing a few tight matches last year, Larkham knows that might not be enough to take the final couple of steps to the title. "That's obviously something we're very proud of but we can't rest on that," he added. "The biggest thing we have to improve is our attacking game, we've been tinkering with our attacking style, not only from set piece but also from multi-phase, so that'll be biggest change you'll see."

Larkham, who is also out of contract at the end of the year, was part of the Wallabies' journey to October's World Cup final as attack coach under Michael Cheika. Seen by many as Cheika's long-term successor as head coach, Larkham said he was still "weighing up" whether he could continue combining the role with his duties at the Brumbies. And whatever happens in the new season, which starts for the Brumbies next Friday with a rematch of last year's semi-final against the Wellington Hurricanes, he looks unlikely to be leaving Australia's capital any time soon. "I'm certainly keen to stay with the Brumbies," he said. —Reuters

ITALIAN LEAGUE PREVIEW

NAPOLI 'ALIVE AND KICKING' AHEAD OF AC MILAN CLASH

MILAN: Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis said the title-chasers are "alive and kicking" as they look to stop Juventus opening up a four-point lead with a win against AC Milan this weekend. Napoli, bidding for their first Serie A title in 26 years, slipped to second place at one point behind Juve after the latter's 1-0 victory in Turin last week. With the Bianconeri hosting Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday, Massimiliano Allegri's men have the luxury of meeting Bologna away. A win at the Dall'Ara stadium would see the Old Lady stretch their lead to four points, and heap further pressure on Napoli before meeting a Milan side buoyed by a string of positive results of late. But Napoli, who on Thursday lost 1-0 to Villarreal in the Europa League, have no intention of lamenting their loss to Juve, says De Laurentiis. "We have to get over it, not cry about it," De Laurentiis told Radio Kiss Kiss. "This is a defect we all have in the south (of Italy), we cry over things like there's been a death. We are alive and kicking!"

Milan are unbeaten in nine outings in all competitions and visit the San Paolo looking for their fifth win in their past seven league games—two of which came against Fiorentina and Inter. A 2-1 win over Genoa at the San Siro last week left Sinisa Mihajlovic's men in sixth place and Milan are now only two points behind city rivals Inter, who host Sampdoria at the San Siro today. Mihajlovic is set to be without Slovakian midfielder Juraj Kucka as he recovers from a muscle problem, but apart from a spat with Mario Balotelli last week has no major concerns.

Bacca staying put

Striker Carlos Bacca took his league goals tally for the season to 13, leading to speculation he could become Robert Lewandowski's replacement at Bayern Munich if the Poland striker decides to quit the Bundesliga giants. Bacca, however, said Thursday: "I'm happy here, I've got a five-year contract with the club and everything's going fine." Asked about the trip to Napoli, he added: "It won't be easy, either for us or them. We want a result, but it won't be easy because although they got beat at Juventus, they're second in the table and a very strong side."

Balotelli is expected to start on the bench after angering Mihajlovic by failing to carry out instructions in a cameo appearance against Genoa, meaning M'Baye Niang should partner Bacca at the San Paolo. Mihajlovic refused to single out Balotelli last week, but delivered a warning to all of his players when he said: "I'm not naming any names. All I can say is I made a mistake and that from now on, any player who doesn't give it everything until the 94th minute of the game doesn't play again." Although Napoli are widely expected to maintain their unbeaten home record on Monday, Inter will be watching proceedings closely after welcoming Sampdoria and a few other notable guests—to the San Siro. —AFP

SCOTTISH PREMIER LEAGUE PREVIEW

CELTIC URGED TO REMAIN FOCUSED

GLASGOW: Celtic midfielder Stuart Armstrong says the Hoops have to concentrate on their own performances as they prepare to host Inverness Caledonian Thistle at Parkhead. Nearest rivals Aberdeen, who fell to a surprise 3-1 loss to Inverness on Monday, have a chance to draw level with the Glasgow giants at the top of the Scottish Premiership if they can defeat Partick Thistle at Firhill today.

But Armstrong, who helped his side get back to winning ways in the league with a win against Ross County last weekend, insists Aberdeen's results will not affect the way Celtic approach the match against Inverness. "It's important just to keep an eye on them but we always focus on ourselves," the midfielder said. "That's the way it's always been and that's the way it will continue." Armstrong netted twice on Inverness' last visit to Celtic Park in August when the Hoops ran out 4-2 winners.

The midfielder would be happy with a repeat performance today but knows the Highlanders will be on a high following their win over Aberdeen. "They've been up and down but I saw the clips of their win over Aberdeen and it's good that they held on to Greg Tansey in the transfer window, I think he's a very good player," Armstrong said. "They're a good footballing team and it's always difficult every time I've played them with Dundee United and Celtic. It's always been tough and if you get three points, you've really got to earn them."

Griffiths targets more goals

One player who will be gunning for Inverness is striker Leigh Griffiths, who netted his 30th goal of the season in last weekend's win against County. "I was brought here two years ago to score goals and that's what I have done so far, and I won't stop," Griffiths said. "My next target is 35. I will just keep playing well and if the chances keep falling my way, I will try and keep scoring goals. "When the boys click it's a joy to watch. It

can be frustrating at times for the fans but we want to keep the ball as much as possible and make the opposition run about and when the spaces open up, we will try to exploit them. "Inverness will be similar to Ross County. They will come and try to attack us and try and counter-attack, but if we play like that, especially as we did in the second half, I'm sure we will have no problems."

Elsewhere today, Dundee United, who are now 13 points adrift at the bottom of the league following their 3-0 home loss to Motherwell in midweek, host high-flying Hearts at Tannadice. Kilmarnock will attempt to move out of the relegation play-off place when they welcome Dundee to Rugby Park. Killie, who lost 2-1 at home to Rangers in their Scottish Cup fifth-round replay in midweek, will be playing their first league game since the appointment of former Huddersfield Town, Birmingham City and Blackpool boss Lee Clark as their new manager. While United have been left adrift, just six points separate Killie in 11th from Ross County in fourth. —AFP

Scottish Premiership table

GLASGOW: Scottish Premiership table ahead of this weekend's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Celtic	25	18	4	3	66	21	58
Aberdeen	26	17	4	5	45	29	55
Hearts	24	12	8	4	45	24	44
Ross County	26	10	3	13	40	42	33
Dundee	25	8	9	8	39	41	33
Inverness CT	24	8	8	8	33	33	32
St Johnstone	24	9	5	10	39	40	32
Motherwell	26	8	5	13	29	41	29
Hamilton	26	7	8	11	30	45	29
Partick	23	7	7	9	22	28	28
Kilmarnock	26	7	6	13	29	48	27
Dundee Utd	25	3	5	17	24	49	14

French League Preview

REIMS OUT TO INFLICT EUROPEAN HANGOVER ON PSG

PARIS: Unbeaten runaway leaders Paris Saint-Germain return to Ligue 1 duty against struggling Reims today, four days after earning a narrow first-leg advantage over Chelsea in the Champions League last 16. Edinson Cavani made an immediate impact as a substitute on Tuesday by netting a 78th-minute winner at the Parc des Princes after John Obi Mikel had cancelled out Zlatan Ibrahimovic's deflected free-kick to hand Laurent Blanc's side a 2-1 edge. The Uruguayan has started just twice in the league in 2016 after losing his place as a regular starter, but Cavani could well return to the line-up with Blanc preparing to rotate his side this weekend. Reims are one of the few teams to frustrate PSG this season, with the capital club needing another late goal from Cavani to rescue a point in a 1-1 draw back in September.

"Even if it's PSG, a big European team, we're not going there as victims. We always want to show what we're capable of doing against the big teams," said Reims defender Abdelhamid El Kaoutari. "I think (the outcome) will depend on what Paris have to offer. If it's the PSG from Tuesday (against Chelsea), there are few teams who can stand up to them," added Reims coach Olivier Guegan, whose side enter the weekend two points above the drop zone. Paris on the other hand are unbeaten in 35 league games and cruising towards a fourth straight French title, with a mammoth 24-point gap separating themselves and nearest challengers

Monaco, who are at home to bottom side Troyes this weekend.

Back in contention

Lyon were in crisis mode less than a month ago, but three convincing wins in a row have propelled Bruno Genesio's side right back into contention for a top-three finish. OL travel to Lille on Sunday with the visitors trailing third-place Nice and bitter rivals Saint-Etienne by just a point in the race for France's final Champions League berth. "It's the start of a run we have to continue with a couple of difficult matches coming up. We have to keep on working with the same spirit," said Genesio in the wake of last weekend's 4-1 demolition of Caen. Lyon will be without influential midfielder Corentin Tolisso for several weeks after he hurt his hamstring in training, but there was a welcome sight as Nabil Fekir, out since September with a knee injury, stepped up his road to recovery in midweek.

Saint-Etienne secured a 3-2 victory at home to Basel in the last 32 of the Europa League on Thursday having thrown away a two-goal lead, with Christophe Galtier's men facing a quick turnaround as they head to Marseille this weekend. Early-season surprise packages Angers and Caen will bid to turn around their fading fortunes at home to Montpellier and Rennes respectively, with both sides losers of their last three matches. —AFP

French Ligue 1 Table

PARIS: French Ligue 1 table ahead of this weekend's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Paris SG	26	22	4	0	63	12	70
Monaco	26	12	10	4	37	29	46
Nice	26	11	7	8	39	30	40
Saint-Etienne	26	12	4	10	31	29	40
Lyon	26	11	6	9	38	28	39
Nantes	26	10	9	7	26	24	39
Rennes	26	9	11	6	34	31	38
Angers	26	10	7	9	25	24	37
Bordeaux	26	9	9	8	36	39	36
Caen	26	11	3	12	27	35	36
Marseille	26	8	11	7	36	27	35
Bastia	26	10	4	12	25	29	34
Lille	26	6	13	7	20	20	31
Lorient	26	7	10	9	35	38	31
Guingamp	26	8	7	11	28	34	31
Montpellier	26	8	5	13	30	31	29
Reims	26	7	8	11	27	34	29
Gazélec Ajaccio	26	6	9	11	27	37	27
Toulouse	26	4	9	13	25	44	21
Troyes	26	2	8	16	19	53	14

WENGER TARGETS CUP BOOST BEFORE BARCA SHOWDOWN

LONDON: A daunting Champions League showdown with Barcelona quickly follows Arsenal's FA Cup fifth-round clash with Hull City, but Arsene Wenger is unlikely to make too many changes to his preferred line-up today. Wenger's side are the Cup holders after successfully retaining the famous old trophy last season by thrashing Aston Villa 4-0 in the final.

And for a third season in a row Hull, now in the Championship, will be aiming to knock them out. The Gunners came back from 2-0 down to beat them 3-2 in the 2014 final at Wembley and then won 2-0 in last year's third round. With Spanish giants Barca due to face Arsenal in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Tuesday, it would hardly be surprising if Wenger was planning to rest the majority of his starting line-up when Hull visit the Emirates Stadium this weekend.

But the Arsenal manager insisted he would send out a strong team in a bid to secure a morale-boosting win before Lionel Messi and company arrive in north London. "I will, as always, play a team who has a good chance to qualify," he said. "The normal squad is involved today. It is a normal squad and we'll play a usual strong team." One player who is set for a rare chance to impress is January signing Mohamed Elneny, who has yet to feature in the Premier League. The Egypt midfielder made his debut in the 2-0 victory over Burnley in the previous round but the man recruited from Basel has not been used since, partly because of fitness concerns.

Testing times

"Elneny is fit. He is one of the players who could get a run there," Wenger confirmed. "He's mobile, he's a very good player. He's adapting at the moment and I think he's there now. We'll certainly see him against Hull. He has a chance to start." Wenger ruled out centre-back Gabriel Paulista because of a



Arsene Wenger

hamstring problem at a time when Laurent Koscielny is not yet fully fit. The Frenchman could be pressed into action anyway however. "Koscielny is doing well," Wenger said on Thursday. "He has a test this morning and he looks positive." Hull manager Steve Bruce also has a need to keep his squad fresh for more testing times as the Tigers are aiming to get back into the Premier League at the first time of asking.

Chuba Akpom and Isaac Hayden cannot play as they are on loan from Arsenal but Eldin Jakupovic, Harry Maguire, Ahmed Elmohamady, David Meyler and Adama Diomande are expected to come into the side that moved two points clear at the top

of the Championship with a midweek draw against Brighton. Abel Hernandez, Hull's 17-goal top scorer who has found the net nine times in the last 11 games, is among those expected to be rested, along with Scotland international Robert Snodgrass. "We've got at least 16 games to go and a fully-fit squad to choose from, which is not something I've had here at this stage before as we head into a vital part of the season," Bruce said. "That bodes well for us in our aims for the remainder of the season but what we must do now is to maintain the high standards we've set in recent weeks because whatever side Arsene Wenger puts out, it will be a difficult one to beat." — AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLAND FA CUP

Arsenal V Hull City	15:45
beIN SPORTS	
Watford V Leeds United	18:00
beIN SPORTS	
Reading V West Brom	18:00
beIN SPORTS	
Bournemouth V Everton	20:15
beIN SPORTS	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Las Palmas V Barcelona	18:00
beIN SPORTS	
Espanyol V Deportivo	20:15
beIN SPORTS	
Real Betis V Sporting	22:30
beIN SPORTS	
Tomorrow	
Celta de Vigo V SD Eibar	0:05
beIN SPORTS	

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Hellas Verona V Chievo	20:00
beIN SPORTS	
Inter V Sampdoria	22:45
beIN SPORTS	

GERMAN LEAGUE

Hoffenheim V FSV Mainz 05	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Ingolstadt 04 V Bremen	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Bayern V Darmstadt	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Hertha Berlin V Wolfsburg	17:30
beIN SPORTS	
Monchengladbach V Koln	17:30
beIN SPORTS	

FRENCH LEAGUE

PSG V Stade de Reims	19:00
beIN SPORTS	
Angers V Montpellier	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
Toulouse V GFC Ajaccio	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
AS Monaco V ES Troyes	22:00
beIN SPORTS	
Lorient V Guingamp	22:00
beIN SPORTS	

Spanish League Preview

ON-FIRE BARCA EYE COMMANDING LA LIGA LEAD

MADRID: Barcelona can open up a nine-point gap at the top of La Liga ahead of their return to Champions League action against Arsenal next week when they travel to Las Palmas today. The European champions extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 31 games with a seventh consecutive La Liga win thanks to a brilliant Lionel Messi double and Luis Suarez's 40th goal of the season in a 3-1 victory at Sporting Gijon on Wednesday.

That match had been postponed from December due to Barca's commitments in the Club World Cup and, having finally got their games in hand out of the way, Luis Enrique's men can pile the pressure on pursuers Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid, who face on paper tougher tests tomorrow. "There is still a long way to go and, therefore, nothing is done yet," said Barca midfielder Ivan Rakitic.

"Now we have to focus on the game we have this weekend. The unbeaten record motivates us, but what counts is what you win at the end of the season. We need to remain humble and keep working hard." Luis Enrique is expected to rotate once more with the trip to the Emirates in Tuesday in mind. Sergio Busquets is suspended, while Javier Mascherano, Jordi Alba and Dani Alves are expected to return after being rested in midweek. However, the star front three of Messi, Suarez and Neymar are expected to start. Zinedine Zidane's dream start to life as Real Madrid coach continued in midweek on his debut in the Champions League with a 2-0 win at Roma.

The Frenchman has now won six of his seven games in charge and has refused to give up in the title race despite now trailing Barca by seven points back in third place. "It will be difficult, but we will go for it," said Zidane. Madrid also face a tougher schedule in the league in coming weeks as they travel to Malaga-who held Real to a 0-0 draw earlier this season at the Santiago Bernabeu-before hosting Atletico in a Madrid derby next weekend. "We need to rest well and think about the game in Malaga. Tomorrow, we will do everything we can to get the points," added Zidane.

Atletico, meanwhile, face the biggest week of their season so far as they aim to remain in the title race and progress to

Spanish La Liga Table

MADRID: Spanish Primera Liga table before this weekend's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Barcelona	24	19	3	2	65	19	60
Atletico Madrid	24	17	3	4	35	11	54
Real Madrid	24	16	5	3	70	23	53
Villarreal	24	14	6	4	30	18	48
Sevilla	24	11	7	6	34	24	40
Eibar	24	10	6	8	38	31	36
Athletic Bilbao	24	10	5	9	35	34	35
Celta Vigo	24	10	5	9	35	42	35
La Coruna	24	6	14	4	33	30	32
Real Sociedad	24	8	6	10	34	34	30
Malaga	24	8	6	10	21	21	30
Valencia	24	6	10	8	28	25	28
Getafe	24	7	5	12	26	36	26
Real Betis	24	6	8	10	18	33	26
Rayo Vallecano	24	6	6	12	32	49	24
Sporting Gijon	24	6	5	13	27	41	23
Espanyol	24	6	4	14	21	48	22
Las Palmas	24	5	6	13	23	38	21
Granada	24	5	5	14	25	49	20
Levante	24	4	5	15	21	45	17

the last eight of the Champions League for the third consecutive year. Diego Simeone's men host fourth-placed Villarreal tomorrow before travelling to PSV Eindhoven on Wednesday and finally facing Madrid next weekend. "They are three great games and we have to try and win all of them," Atletico's top scorer Antoine Griezmann told the club's website. Villarreal look well set for a return to the Champions League as they hold an eight-point lead over Sevilla in the race for fourth place thanks to an 11-game unbeaten run in the league.—AFP

German League Preview

BAYERN EYE CLUB RECORD AT HOME TO DARMSTADT

BERLIN: Bayern Munich could make club history today as a clean sheet against Darmstadt in the Bundesliga would see Pep Guardiola's side go a record six home games without conceding a goal. Arsenal were the last club to score against Bayern at Munich's Allianz Arena back in November when Olivier Giroud scored the Gunners' consolation in a 5-1 loss. Since that Champions League group game, Bayern have won all five of their home games in all competitions without conceding a single goal and hold an eight-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga.

Guardiola's team are in no mood to give Darmstadt any hope of a first win in Munich in their final match before their Champions League last 16, first-leg clash at Juventus next Tuesday. Especially as Darmstadt have picked up 17 of their 24 points this season away from home. "They will play very deep and very compact," said Bayern midfielder Xabi Alonso. "We will have to be patient and it'll be important to get the first goal. It's all about Darmstadt for now, we want to keep our eight-point lead. Only afterwards will we think about Juventus." With 21 goals to his credit, Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski has scored almost as many goals as the 22 the entire Darmstadt team has managed. The visitors' cause is not helped by a raft of suspensions. Peter Niemeyer, Jerome Gondorf, Aytac Sulu, Marcel Heller and Konstantin Rausch are all banned after each picked up yellow cards in last Saturday's 2-1 defeat to Bayer Leverkusen. "We have registered that. However, I believe that no one wants to miss this chance to play in front of an audience of millions," said Darmstadt coach Dirk Schuster confidently. Guardiola hopes to have centre-backs Medhi Benatia and Serdar Tasci fit as he was unable to play a single central defender in last weekend's win at Augsburg after Holger Badstuber fractured an ankle.

Dortmund will be looking to make it nine games undefeated at Leverkusen tomorrow. Thomas Tuchel's Dortmund are in impressive form as last Saturday's 1-0 win over bottom side Hanover 96 left them 13 points clear of third-placed Bayer. Having sat out the Hanover win, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang will be looking to add to his 20 goals in as many league games to rival Lewandowski. The last time Leverkusen beat Dortmund at the BayArena was in May 2007, but Roger Schmidt's men have picked up 14 of a possible 18 points and are undefeated in their last six games.

Leverkusen will again be without striker Javier Hernandez after the Mexican tore a buttock muscle in their German Cup defeat to Werder Bremen 10 days ago. Cologne fans plan a protest before kick-off of today's match at Borussia Moenchengladbach over the restricted number of away fans allowed. Gladbach will be without centre-back Martin Stranzl, who tore his right calf in training on Wednesday as they look to bounce back from Sunday's shock defeat to Hamburg. Fresh from their Champions League last 16, first-leg win at Gent, Wolfsburg are at Hertha Berlin today without defender Sebastian Jung.—AFP

German Bundesliga Table

BERLIN: German Bundesliga table ahead of this weekend's games (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Bayern Munich	21	18	2	1	53	10	56
Borussia Dortmund	21	15	3	3	53	24	48
Bayer Leverkusen	21	10	5	6	31	22	35
Hertha Berlin	21	10	5	6	29	23	35
Schalke 04	21	10	3	8	30	28	33
Mainz 05	21	10	3	8	27	25	33
Moenchengladbach	21	10	2	9	42	38	32
VfL Wolfsburg	21	8	6	7	31	28	30
Cologne	21	7	8	6	24	27	29
VfB Stuttgart	21	8	3	10	33	41	27
Hamburg	21	7	5	9	25	30	26
Ingolstadt 04	21	7	5	9	14	23	26
Darmstadt 98	21	6	6	9	22	31	24
Augsburg	21	5	6	10	23	31	21
Eintracht Frankfurt	21	5	6	10	27	37	21
Werder Bremen	21	5	5	11	25	42	20
Hoffenheim	21	2	9	10	19	31	15
Hannover 96	21	4	2	15	19	36	14

THREATS MOUNT AS FIFA FACES DAY OF RECKONING

CRIMINAL CASES, POWERFUL CLUBS, MATCH-FIXING ALL THREATEN FIFA

ZURICH: The spotlight at next week's FIFA Congress will fall on the presidential election - but the real key to the future of soccer's beleaguered governing body is embedded in a document with the unglamorous title "Draft statutes - Congress 2016". Drawn up over the last eight months, it suggests changes to stop the scandals that have left the organization supposed to lead the world's most popular sport facing its greatest threat for decades.

The most obvious challenge is criminal investigations in the United States and Switzerland that have already resulted in the indictment of several dozen soccer officials for corruption, many of them serving or former presidents of national or continental associations. US prosecutors have continued to call FIFA a victim of corrupt individuals. But if FIFA as an organization were criminally charged, sponsors and other partners might be reluctant to do business with it.

But that is not the only concern. In the last month, talk has resurfaced among Europe's most powerful clubs of a breakaway European Super League, as well as complaints about the amount of time players spend with national teams. National team competitions depend on a calendar agreed between FIFA and the clubs, which commit to release players to their national teams on certain dates. If the clubs, which are always eager for more opportunities to play lucrative friendlies abroad, were to pull out, it would throw international football into chaos.

There was similar discontent in the 1990s, when European soccer's governing body UEFA became deeply critical of Joao Havelange, the Brazilian president of FIFA at the time. UEFA produced proposals that included handing more power to the continental confederations, rotating FIFA's presidency and limiting it mainly to organising the four-yearly World Cup. Leading clubs including AC Milan and Manchester United then sought to build support for a breakaway

league, and top players found themselves in a tug-of-war as clubs refused to release them for internationals.

Old and new challenges

FIFA's response was to threaten national associations (FAs), clubs and players with suspension if they linked up with the proposed league, and UEFA quelled the threat by reorganizing its competitions. But FIFA now faces similar challenges, added to the menace of match-fixing organized by illegal betting syndicates, all while trying to shake off a series of scandals that have seen FIFA president Sepp Blatter banned for ethics violations and cast a shadow over the awarding of at least three World Cup finals.

Clearly, it cannot afford to get its reforms wrong. "If there is not a strong FIFA, football will be grabbed by a lot of people who have no interest in the game and want to use the game for other reasons - political, business or even criminal," said Jerome Champagne, one of five candidates for president. The reform proposal on the table includes term limits for top officials, to avoid another 18-year presidency such as Blatter's, as well as disclosure of their salaries.

More radically, it would take responsibility for everyday business decisions away from the "political" representatives of national associations. These would sit on a new-look 36-member FIFA Council, which would have at least six female members, and set a broad strategy for world soccer. Day-to-day management would instead pass to a new, professional general secretariat, more akin to a corporate executive board, which, like the Council, would be overseen by a fully independent Audit and Compliance Committee. The proposals also place a greater onus on continental confederations and national associations to police themselves. The 209 national associations, who ultimately hold the power in FIFA through the Congress, and vote for the president, are often seen as a significant part of the problem.—Reuters

Sports



Cavaliers down Bulls as Wizards beat Jazz

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HERNING: Manchester United's goalie Sergio Romero fails to save a winning goal from Paul Onuachu of Midtjylland at MCH Arena in Herning, Denmark on Thursday, Feb 18 2016. — AP

UNITED'S EUROPA MISERY WORSENS VALENCIA THRASH RAPID VIENNA 6-0

LONDON: Manchester United's hopes of salvaging their season in the Europa League suffered a stinging setback when they lost 2-1 at Danish side Midtjylland in the first leg of their last-32 clash on Thursday. With the triple European Cup winners already immersed in a pall of gloom after a hugely underwhelming campaign, their best hope of returning to the Champions League next season is now in peril. It should have been as straightforward an evening for United as it was for Borussia Dortmund and holders Sevilla who were among the high-profile clubs to secure comfortable wins as the Europa League's knockout stages got underway.

There was rare joy for former United stalwart Gary Neville when his Valencia side crushed Rapid Vienna 6-0. Tottenham Hotspur drew 1-1 at Fiorentina while Liverpool were held 0-0 at Augsburg. United conceded the winner in the 77th minute when substitute Paul Onuachu pinched the ball on the edge of the area and swiveled before firing home a low bouncing drive. It was another cruel blow for United. Their poor season has left them fifth in the Premier League although the club's financial might dwarfs the meager resources of Midtjylland.

According to their latest annual report, the value of the entire Midtjylland squad is 55.6 million Danish crowns (\$8.27 million) —

United spent around 18 times that amount on close-season transfers. One of the Old Trafford club's biggest close-season acquisitions Memphis Depay, bought from PSV Eindhoven for 20 million pounds, put them ahead in the 37th minute. Midtjylland replied a minute before halftime when Pione Sisto pounced on a mistake from United captain Michael Carrick and scored with a low shot. "Our performance was nowhere near good enough and it has to be better," said Carrick. "We caused a lot of our own problems."

Llorente double

Sevilla's grip on the trophy showed no sign of loosening as their bid for a third straight triumph began with a 3-0 victory at home to Norway's Molde. Fernando Llorente netted twice for the holders who, like United, were playing their first game in this season's competition having dropped into it after failing to reach the knockout rounds of the Champions League. Sevilla, who beat Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk in the final in Warsaw in May, opened the scoring against Molde when Llorente fired a pinpoint effort into the net off the post 10 minutes before halftime.

The Spain striker doubled his tally when he held off his marker and blasted the ball into the roof of the net four minutes after the

restart. Kevin Gameiro made it 3-0 with 18 minutes to go. Lukasz Piszczek and Marco Reus were on target for Dortmund who recorded a 2-0 win at home to Porto on a night when the fixture list had an alluring look. So often derided as a poor cousin of the Champions League, Europe's second tier competition returned with a high-profile lineup including five former European Cup winners. One of those, Olympique Marseille, suffered disappointment as they were beaten 1-0 at home by Athletic Bilbao while Bayer Leverkusen notched an impressive 1-0 win at Portuguese giants Sporting.

Tottenham's Nacer Chadli scored a priceless away goal from the penalty spot before Fiorentina leveled through Federico Bernardeschi in one of the evening's more glamorous ties while Villarreal overcame Napoli 1-0 in Spain. Valencia coach Neville has endured plenty of misery since taking over in December but, having claimed his first La Liga victory at the weekend and, on his 41st birthday, his side ran riot against Rapid Vienna as Santi Mina scored twice and set up three others. "We came out like a hurricane and settled it quickly," Santi Mina said after Valencia went 5-0 up by half-time. St Etienne beat Basel 3-2, Anderlecht downed Olympiakos Piraeus 1-0, Galatasaray and Lazio drew 1-1 while Shakhtar Donetsk and Schalke 04 shared a goalless draw. — Reuters