

Art education helps establish an empowered society



Trump Muslim remark used in jihadist recruitment video



'Unforgettable' singer Natalie Cole dies aged 65



Rooney's gem gives Van Gaal new year cheer



40 PAGES NO: 16744 150 FILS

SAUDI ARABIA EXECUTES 47 ON TERROR CHARGES

QAEDA IDEOLOGUE, SHIITE CLERIC AMONG THOSE EXECUTED



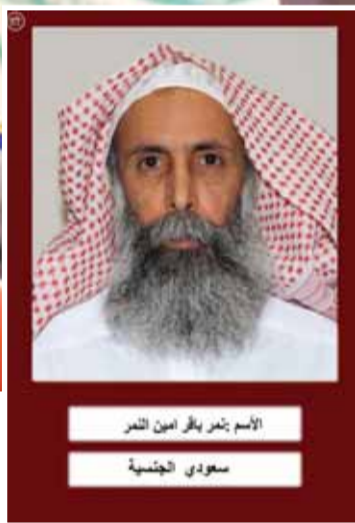
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Max 12°
High Tide 05:16 & 18:20
Low Tide 11:35

OIL OUTPUT HITS RECORD 3M BPD



KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company's crude output reached three million barrels per day at the onset of the new year, an unprecedented high level of the country's crude production. KOC said in a statement yesterday that crude oil output volume increased as part "of efforts to up productivity in a transitional fashion to 3.150 million barrels per day". "What has been achieved is crucial and constitutes a main step on this path," KOC said, affirming desire to hike Kuwaiti oil production further.

The national oil company lauded efforts of workers and contractors to "reach this encouraging result, as part of the action scheme that lifted output by 200,000 bpd within a record period of time in April 2015". Diligent efforts will proceed to reach the target of 3.650 million bpd in 2020, an objective set to meet the country's development requirements. — KUNA



RIYADH: Saudi Interior Ministry spokesman Mansour Al-Turki gestures during a news conference at the Saudi Officers Club yesterday, following the execution of 47 people convicted of terrorism, including prominent Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr (inset). — AFP

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia executed a prominent Shiite cleric and dozens of Al-Qaeda members yesterday, signalling it would not tolerate attacks, whether by Sunni jihadists or minority Shiites, and stirring sectarian anger across the region. Nimr Al-Nimr was executed along with 46 other men, including Shiite activists and Sunnis accused of involvement in Al-Qaeda killings, the interior ministry said. It prompted calls for demonstrations, but the brother of the 56-year-old cleric called for calm in oil-rich Eastern Province. "This action will spark anger of (Shiite) youths" in Saudi Arabia, but "we reject violence and clashing with authorities", said Mohammed Al-Nimr.

The interior ministry said the 47 men had been convicted of adopting the radical "takfiri" ideology, joining "terrorist organizations" and implementing various "criminal plots". A list published by the official SPA news agency included Sunnis convicted of involvement in Al-Qaeda attacks that killed Saudis and foreigners in 2003 and 2004. Some of them had been convicted of taking part in May 2003 attacks on expatriate compounds in Riyadh that killed 35 people, nine of them Americans, the ministry said.

Others were involved in attacks the following year on a housing complex in the eastern city of Khobar, in which 22 people were killed, most of them foreigners, and other assaults. Among them was Fares Al-Shuwail, described by Saudi media as Al-Qaeda's top religious leader in the kingdom. Notably absent from the list, was Nimr's nephew, Ali. He was arrested at the age of 17 and allegedly tortured during detention before being sentenced to die, sparking fury from rights watchdogs and the United States.

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7 KILLED IN INDIA AIRBASE ATTACK

PATHANKOT, India: A dramatic assault on an Indian airbase near the Pakistan border was finally declared over yesterday 14 hours after suspected Islamist militants struck, leaving three security officers dead, authorities said, an attack that threatens to undermine the countries' fragile peace process. At least four attackers also died in shoot-outs with security forces at Pathankot base in northern Punjab state, after gunmen suspected to be from the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed group infiltrated the site at 3:30 am (2200 GMT) yesterday.

The assault - a rare targeting of an

Indian military installation outside disputed Kashmir - comes a week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a surprise visit to Pakistan, the first by an Indian premier in 11 years. The possible involvement of Pakistan-based militants in the attack threatens to derail talks between the nuclear-armed rivals, who have fought three wars since independence in 1947. "I congratulate our armed forces and other security forces on successfully neutralizing all the five terrorists in 'Pathankot Operation'", Home Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted.

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PATHANKOT, India: Indian Army personnel stand alert near an air force base yesterday during an attack on the base by suspected militants. — AFP

POLICE HUNT FOR GUNMAN AFTER TEL AVIV ATTACK ARAB CABBIE KILLED

TEL AVIV: Israeli security forces pressed a man-hunt yesterday for the gunman who killed two people and wounded seven others at a Tel Aviv pub, with the motive for the attack still a mystery. The New Year's Day shooting on busy Dizengoff Street came amid a wave of Palestinian attacks on Israelis and days after the leader of the Islamic State (IS) group threatened the Jewish state with violence. Police partially lifted a gag order yesterday evening, naming the suspected shooter as Nashaat Melhem, 31, from the Arab village of Arara in northern Israel.

"Police are continuing to search for suspect who murdered two Israelis in central Tel Aviv," spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP, adding that road blocks had been set up in different parts of the city. In the hours after the attack, hundreds of police scoured the area as police helicopters buzzed overhead. Earlier yesterday, Arara's council condemned the shooting in a statement, saying residents "fiercely object to any act of violence". "This is the act of one individual who does not represent any of the town's residents," the statement said, stressing that the attack was "foreign to our culture".

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COALITION ANNOUNCES END OF YEMEN TRUCE

RIYADH: A Saudi-led coalition battling Iran-backed rebels in Yemen announced the end yesterday of a ceasefire that had been violated on a daily basis since it was declared last month. The "coalition leadership announces the end of the truce in Yemen starting from 1400" (1100 GMT) yesterday, the alliance said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. The ceasefire announced on Dec 15 had been ended due to continuous rebel "attacks on the kingdom's territories by firing ballistic missiles towards Saudi cities, targeting Saudi border posts, and hampering aid operations," it said.

The rebels have also "continued to shell residents and kill and detain Yemeni civilians in cities under their control," said the coalition. "All this shows how unserious the militias and their allies are and their disregard for the lives of civilians, and how they have clearly exploited this truce to make gains." However, the coalition "was and is still eager on creating the

suitable circumstances to find a peaceful solution in Yemen," it said.

Saudi Arabia is leading a military coalition that has been battling Iran-backed rebels in neighboring Yemen since March. The rebels intensified their rocket attacks across the Saudi border in recent days, prompting the coalition to threaten severe reprisals. The statement comes after the coalition announced that Saudi air defense forces had intercepted a ballistic missile fired from Yemen towards the kingdom's city of Abha late on Friday. The "launcher was located and destroyed in Yemen," it said.

The Saudis have deployed Patriot missile batteries designed to counter attacks and have recently been intercepting missiles fired from Yemen on an almost-daily basis. More than 80 people, most of them soldiers and border guards, have been killed in shelling and cross-border skirmishes in the kingdom's south since coalition operations began in

Yemen. On Thursday, three civilians including two children were killed in cross-border missile attacks from Yemen on a residential area in the southwestern Jazan region of Saudi Arabia. Eleven others were wounded, among them nine children, according to the Saudi civil defense. In Yemen itself, nearly 6,000 people have been killed since March, according to UN figures.

Yesterday, the coalition carried out air strikes on different parts on the country, including Sanaa province, military sources said. Clashes meanwhile raged between pro-government forces and rebels across the impoverished nation causing casualties on both sides, the sources said, without giving a toll. Rebels also fired mortars at residential areas in the besieged city of Taiz, where civilians have been suffering from a shortage in food and medical supplies, military sources there said.

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DUBAI: A fire burns on the Address Downtown skyscraper on Friday. — AP

BLAZE RAISES QUESTIONS ON SKYSCRAPER DESIGN

EMAAR VOWS TO RESTORE HOTEL

DUBAI: A blaze that engulfed a Dubai skyscraper on New Year's Eve - the emirate's third high-rise fire in three years - has raised fresh questions about the safety of materials used on the exteriors of tall buildings across the wealthy region. Hundreds of gleaming towers rose up in Gulf Arab states, especially the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, during the past decade's economic boom. Ultra-modern, flamboyant designs often involved heavy use of cladding - layers fixed to the outside of buildings for decoration, insulation or protection.

After Dubai's latest blaze, which security officials said spread up the outside of the 63-storey Address Downtown luxury hotel and residential tower, experts are asking if the layers may in some cases make buildings more vulnerable to fire. "The fires that have erupted in Dubai landmarks have raised concerns about the quality of material used to clad the emirate's buildings," The National, a leading UAE newspaper, reported yesterday.

Experts say most of Dubai's approximately 250 high-rise buildings use cladding panels with thermoplastic cores, the newspaper said. Panels can consist of plastic or polyurethane fillings sandwiched between aluminium sheets. Such cladding is not necessarily hazardous, but it can be flammable under certain circumstances and, depending on a skyscraper's design, may channel fires through windows into the interiors of buildings, said

Phil Barry, founder of Britain's CWB Fire Safety Consultants Ltd. Barry told Reuters that, working as a consultant in the Gulf in 2012, he had identified "a general trend of fires in high-rises", which in some places indicated a need for stronger regulation and tougher building codes.

Yesterday, authorities were still investigating the cause of the fire at the Address Downtown. Dubai police said 14 people were lightly injured as the building was evacuated; a medic at the scene said over 60 people were treated for mild smoke inhalation and other complaints. Mohamed Alabbar, chairman of Emaar Properties, which owns the hotel, said it had been built to the highest quality standards and following international best practice. "We are determined to restore it to all its glory, and even surpass the splendid architectural standards," Alabbar said in a statement. He did not discuss the reason for the blaze or the financial impact on Emaar, or say when the hotel might reopen.

In February last year, hundreds of people were evacuated from one of the world's tallest residential buildings when fire broke out at the Torch, a 79-storey skyscraper in Dubai. An investigation by the building's management found most of the damage was to the exterior cladding. In Nov 2012, a 34-storey residential building was partially gutted by a fire.

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In Brief

NO SOLDIER KILLED

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Defense Ministry has denied reports that a Kuwaiti soldier participating in the Operation Renewal of Hope was killed in Yemen. The ministry's Moral Guidance and Public Relations Department urged in a statement to mass media to ensure accuracy and to get information on the Kuwaiti army only from the department. —KUNA



SPEAKER IN CAIRO

CAIRO: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem arrived in Cairo on Friday for an official visit to Egypt where he will meet with President Abdelattah Al-Sisi. Ghanem is in the Egyptian capital as part of a tour that will also take him to Geneva. During his stay in Geneva, he will hold talks with officials of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). —KUNA



KUWAIT INVESTS IN ARABSAT

AMMAN: Kuwait is investing in the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (ARABSAT) as it is a renowned successful investment enterprise, with a high level of efficiency and services, said Undersecretary of the Ministry of Communications Hameed Al-Qattan. Qattan, also Arabsat Deputy Chairman, is leading a delegation to the 152th session of the Arabsat Board of Directors and the 6th meeting of its guiding committee, due on Tuesday for two days in Amman, Jordan. —KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A cat stands in the street in front of the National Assembly building in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: The Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Yasser Atif met a number of journalists recently, including Muna Al-Fuzai, representing Kuwait Times.

MINISTRY DEVELOPS ROADS LEADING TO JABER HOSPITAL

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and KUNA

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works is waiting for approvals from auditory bodies to carry out a project to develop the roads' network in South Surra in order to guarantee free traffic flow to drive to the Jaber Hospital from nearby highways. According to plans made by the Parsons Brinckerhoff office, the project includes amendments to current intersections as well as building bridges and tunnels, Assistant Undersecretary for Road Engineering Ahmad Al-Hassan said in a statement. He added that preparations are ongoing to put tenders to develop three key intersections that connect South Surra with the hospital, build a bridge that connects the Sixth Ring Road with the hospital, as well as building 14 other bridges and four tunnels, Hassan added. The Jaber Hospital project is slated

to open sometime during the first quarter of this year.

Heart diseases

In other news, Dr Mousa Akbar, head of Cardiology Unit at Sabah Hospital said that at least 1,500 people, including 700 Kuwaiti citizens, are diagnosed with heart diseases annually, while about 5,000 cases visit outpatient clinics. On the occasion of the awareness day on heart disease launched by the Ministry of Health at the Avenues mall, Akbar added yesterday that blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, obesity and other factors lead to heart diseases. He expected that the number of cases suffering from heart diseases will increase by 2030, noting that the age of cases diagnosed with these diseases in Kuwait and GCC member states is ten years less than the ones in the European countries.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) organized a walking contest on the occasion of the World Braille Day. The event took place yesterday at Kuwait University's stadium, in coordination with the Public Authority for the Disabled. —KUNA

LAWMAKERS PRAISE EXECUTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Two Islamist lawmakers yesterday praised Saudi Arabia's execution of 47 suspects on terrorism charges. MP Ahmad



MP Ahmad Al-Azmi



MP Abdulrahman Al-Jeeran

Mutae' Al-Azmi strongly praised Riyadh's role in fighting terrorism and stressed that the executions were the best deterrent to people with terrorist mindsets. Azmi also criticized some people for threatening to turn the international public opinion

against Saudi Arabia, and described them as unwise. Meanwhile, MP Abdulrahman Al-Jeeran said that what Saudi Arabia did was a clear message to the entire world, expressing Riyadh's rejection of terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism. "Saudi Arabia has every right to practice its sovereignty and authority over its subjects as well as any outlaws who call for chaos, killings, bombings and describing others as non-believers," he said.

Surveillance cameras

MP Faisal Al-Kandari stressed the need to activate a bill on installing security surveillance cameras, noting that cameras have become a must on highways. "Street wars seem to be endless and have claimed many lives," he said, calling for monitoring all roads to help identify and arrest many hit-and-run motorists, especially in accidents leading to fatalities.

Yemeni talks

The UN's envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould

Cheikh Ahmed will start contacting Kuwait this week to arrange for hosting inter-Yemeni talks in Kuwait on Jan 14, well-informed sources said. The sources stressed that Kuwait is interested in hosting these talks if the concerned Yemeni parties agree to take part according to a clear agenda with the aim of eventually achieving peace and bridging the gaps between them.

Rent allowance

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare announced that the total amounts paid to citizens in rent allowance since 1991 till the end of 2015 summed up to KD 1.9 billion. According to statistics issued by the authority, 9,376 citizens were added as beneficiaries during the fiscal year ending Dec 31, 2015, and that the total number of beneficiaries was 1,18,357 citizens. Statistics also showed that rent allowance beneficiaries increased by 24 percent in December after 928 out of 1,226 applicants were approved. Statistics also

showed that rent allowance was suspended for 298 citizens because of canceling their housing applications, having built their own houses, getting divorced or getting private sector job-provided housing.

Privatization

As part of the government's plan to privatize some of its establishments, the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) has finalized a plan to privatize the ministry's facilities and a study on that regard would be referred to the Cabinet's ministerial committee soon, well-informed sources said. The sources stressed that the committee would review the plan pending referring it to the Cabinet for approval before the summer. Further, the sources added that another plan to privatize the Ministry of Communications' services was being currently prepared and that more studies on privatizing ministries, such as the information, health, municipality, some Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Health departments would follow.

Local spotlight

LIFE WITHOUT OIL



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Oil prices have fallen rapidly. This crisis will have social, economic and political repercussions in the short term with possible negative results on the regional and international levels. But how did this happen? Will all Gulf countries face the same fate? Or will we in Kuwait be an exception because we do not know what the end of a welfare state means?

In Kuwait, most published official statements so far reflect apprehension and anxiety, with some wishes and hopes for things to go back to normal and former highs in order to live the dream. According to some Western analyses, this rapid fall in prices is linked to a variety of reasons, including the regional policies in Gulf countries. This is possible, but it might be inapplicable at this time. Because a fall in oil prices is not impossible to happen in a capitalist system. It's a major problem like any potential global crisis and recovery if possible if the state knows how to deal with the issue with minimal damage while maintaining internal cohesion.

For about 60 years in Kuwait, we were totally dependent on the sale of crude oil and there was no diversification of sources of income. This is the bitter truth. While our neighbors were competing with tourism, industries and investments, we occupied ourselves with local and regional problems. We even took sides to stand with political Islamist groups and others in total preoccupation with partisan issues, mostly personal, missing opportunities and nitpicking, distracting decision-makers with arbitration and appeasement instead of initiatives and development strategies.

Here in Kuwait, everyone has lived in the kind and generous arms of the government, yet today when we hear reports about the possibility of lifting some government subsidies on goods and services, including gasoline, and stopping some services, we do not know what to do and feel anxious.

I am a supporter of taxation systems in all modern countries. It creates the sense of making a citizen a partner in building his country and not just be a recipient of services, and this may be part of compulsory economic policies. But these reforms require decisive and courageous decisions that affect the pillars of the economic system and political cohesion among all segments of society, and sometimes there is no escape from such procedures, known as austerity or belt-tightening, and there is no better example than the increase of fuel prices in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The issue of raising gasoline prices is not a problem in itself, but this procedure is usually followed by additional duties and taxes and raising water and electricity tariffs and other prices, which will not only burden the citizen, who is used to a prosperous standard of living, but he will not know how to coordinate and organize his lifestyle and living expenses in the wake of this sudden change. This reminds me of an Egyptian play where an ordinary man was plucked from the street to sit on the throne, and thus behaved erratically and interfered in every decision issued. He was not ready!

It is the right of any government in the world to impose taxes on citizens and residents as required to liberalize the economy and diversify its functions. Such a task is presumably made by a democratic elected government, so people can hold it accountable in the event of a failure, but the subject is not debatable here, so how will it be solved? It's another dilemma facing the issue of raising the prices of services in the country today.

Some people are wondering why the total amount in the state general reserve is only KD 42 billion? And what is the government's policy in its expenses and squandering of public funds before asking citizens to pay more for gasoline? I think it's a worthy question, but it will not get an answer.

Changes in domestic economic policies need strong solidarity in the community. The isolation or retreat of some political groups here does not mean they approve of the overall situation, as the National Assembly carries the burden of public decisions affecting the state and people, so the implementation mechanism of the government and its safety measures must be transparent and under observation, and this cannot be done in this period of superficial calm.

For example, we do not know what the government's demographic strategy is, as Kuwait's population by the end of 2015 reached 4.233 million people, an increase of 31,000 citizens and 110,000 expatriates. Will expats face the same taxes and fees in light of their low and unequal salaries here? The government is in need of urgent surgery now to know how to market the idea of raising the prices of services, with a strategy on who will be their target category in society with a clear explanation on the status of expats under these new regulations.

CHILDREN ELECTROCUTED AT FATHER'S FARM

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Two Kuwaiti kids, 12 and 10, were killed when they accidentally held a live electric wire at their father's farm in Wafra, said security sources. The younger child was reportedly electrocuted when she reached out and tried to save her brother, the sources noted.

Basement fire

A fire recently broke out in the 500-square meters basement of a 10-storey building in Farwaniya, said security sources, noting that firemen immediately evacuated the building and managed to control the fire without any casualties recorded. The fire started in some flammable liquids, plastic and storage boxes, the sources added.

Drugs found in jail

Kuwait Central Jail security found drugs hidden in one of the prison's toilets, said security sources, noting that initial examination of the drugs suggests that it is pure heroin. A wide investigation is in progress to determine how the drugs got through and to whom they were smuggled.



Firefighters tackle a blaze at a basement of a building in Farwaniya.

Rumors denied

High-ranking security sources strongly denied social media reports about a policeman working at the airport who allegedly helped a wanted citizen and friend of hers to leave the country.

Search for suspect

A search is currently on for a

young man who refused to stop at a Jahra checkpoint and drove away, almost knocking over a policeman.

Suicide

Two Asian men were separately found hung by the necks to ceilings in Jahra and Fahaheel, said security sources. In both cases, the victim's room-

mate testified that he had been facing some financial problems. A suicide investigation was opened in both cases.

Landmines found

A Kuwait Army bomb squad recently dealt with two landmines found in Kabd and Mina Abdullah deserts, said security sources. The mines had been left

over since the Iraqi invasion and were washed out by the recent rain, the sources suggested.

Forgery

A citizen recently reported that an unidentified person had used his ID card, which he had lost in 2013, in getting in and out of Kuwait. The man reported that he accidentally found out when an officer at a border exit told him that his name was already registered to be out of the country. A case was filed.

Lawyer threatened

A lawyer reported that two citizens had tailed him on getting out of the Justice Palace and stopped him in Qurain, where they hit his vehicle on purpose and threatened him.

Municipality inspections

A Kuwait Municipality report showed that Hawalli municipality teams have removed 138 illegal view-blocking ad signs from various roads during November, 2015. A Hawalli municipality public relations statement added that inspection teams had inspected 395 stores, filed 146 ad licenses citations, 58 citations for opening stores without having a license in addition to removing 138 ads.



KRCS VOWS TO AID REFUGEES DESPITE SNOWY WEATHER

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced yesterday it would continue delivering aid to Syrian refugees in all Lebanese regions despite stormy and snowy weather. The Kuwaiti 'warm winter' campaign is proceeding to relieve the Syrian refugees "who are now in dire need for help for the snow storm has taken its toll on many of the refugees, particularly the elderly and children," said Musaad Al-Enezi, the KRCS envoy to Lebanon.

Braving unabated falling rain, snow and biting cold, KRCS teams have

reached the refugees' locations, distributing food, mattresses, blankets and detergents to 1,000 families in the northernmost region Akkar, Tibnin in southern Lebanon and Iqlim Al-Kharoub, a mountainous region southeast of the capital-dotted with a chain of villages and towns.

Challenging the weather

Meanwhile, Yousef Boutros, the relief coordinator at the Lebanese Red Cross, lauded the Kuwaiti teams for challenging the hard weather conditions and directly handing over the relief supplies

to the refugees. The Kuwaiti efforts will largely help the refugees, namely hundreds of families, dwellings of whom have been damaged with the piling snow.

Lebanon is currently gripped with a snow storm that resulted in various problems, particularly for the refugees who dwell in ram-shackled and ragged tents and old houses in various regions of the country. Many of the countries' roads have blocked or blanketed with snow, rendering motorists' movement extremely arduous.

300 families

On Friday, the KRCS continued its relief aid campaign for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, handing necessities and other foodstuff to 300 Syrian families in southern Lebanon. Enezi reiterated that the campaign is aiming at covering the needs to some 30,000 Syrian refugee families scattered all over Lebanon. He affirmed that KRCS's mission was in line with the Kuwaiti people and leadership's desires to help the Syrian refugees. —KUNA

COASTGUARD HOLDS LIVE AMMO EXERCISES

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's Coastguard General Department organizes live ammunition exercises on 4-6 January, 2016, from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. The exercises take place in territorial waters on the following coordinates: 048 37.5° E - 28 55.0° N, 048 30.2° E - 28 46.8° N, as well as the Qarouh and Um Al-Maradem islands. The Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department urges sea-goers to avoid the aforementioned locations during the time of the exercises.



KUWAIT: (From left) Demetra Gargasoulas, Principal of the International Creativity Academy (ICA), ICA students Abdulwahab Al-Najjar, Yousef Ghareeb and Anas Jabr, Abena Robinson, art teacher at ICA, and Matthew Neal, Superintendent of ICA and the American Creativity Academy (ACA). — Photos by Ahmad Jabr

ART EDUCATION: HELPING ESTABLISH A MORE CREATIVE, EMPOWERED SOCIETY

Building the leaders of tomorrow

By Ahmad Jabr

Creativity, thinking outside the box, determination and teamwork. Those are basic qualities that any successful arts teaching program seeks to reinforce among students, and help bring out the best in them - both in arts and in their academic classes.



Abena Robinson, ICA's art teacher.

Those same qualities are also found in common among statements of a group of sixth grade students when they talked about their unfinished projects in art class. They are building replicas of the Eiffel Tower using only toothpicks and glue.

"I challenge the kids to do some architecture, to be architects, and be able to build," said Abena Robinson, art teacher at the International Creativity Academy (ICA). Robinson, who is in her first year teaching in Kuwait after spending 16 years teaching art in the United States, believes that art education is important because it gives children a multitude of options to express themselves. For the kids, art provides them with an area where they can create and feel empowered, something that Robinson feels is important in every educational system.

"I truly believe that when a child succeeds in art, it is a catalyst for academic achievement, and there are studies on that," she said. "I always

try to have my students do their best in the art class and it shows in their academics. I would attest to a lot of times when they are proud about a certain achievement in their class that spills over into their academic achievement."

In a study conducted by Judith Burton, Columbia University, research suggests that art education can have a positive impact on other subjects such as mathematics, science, and language because they require complex cognitive and creative capacities "typical of arts learning" (Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, 1999). "The arts enhance the process of learning. The systems

build it using nothing but some packs of toothpicks, glue guns and his bare hands. "At first I thought 'Man... this is impossible,' but Ms Abena showed me some pictures, then I started thinking maybe I can do it," he said.

Values of arts

In Kuwait, the government understood the importance of highlighting the values of arts from an early stage. Art education has been a primary part of Kuwait's educational system since the state's independence. Despite that, there have been complaints about the lack of

'If today's students graduate high school, and all they know how to do is memorize and regurgitate, we've lost'

they nourish, which include our integrated sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities, are, in fact, the driving forces behind all other learning." (Jensen, E. 2001. Arts with the brain in mind. Alexandria, Va., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).

Improved abilities

Improved problem solving abilities can be seen in the students' works. "Here we made a mistake," student Anas Jabr said as he pointed to one corner of his Eiffel Tower which was slightly uneven with the other three. "Our group decided to take it (down) and start all over again with some of the bases. As you can see now, it is better."

For Anas and many of his classmates, the idea of using their creativity to build an arts project using minimum tools seemed farfetched only a year ago. But working together has taught them values of teamwork, problem solving, creativity and determination. "When we started working we felt like it was impossible," he said. "My classmates and I worked together, then we started, and eventually got to the point you are seeing."

His classmate, Yousef Ghareeb, is working on a similar project but with a different group. So far the bases for their Eiffel Tower are level. But Yousef also felt that it was an impossible task when his arts teacher told him that he had to

proper attention given to art, music and physical education subjects in recent years.

Facing this situation, there have been attempts in both public and private schools to shed more light on the importance of art education and integrate more art activities in the curricula. One of these schools is ICA, where administration and staff understand the value of incor-



Sixth grade student Anas Jabr with his unfinished project; the Eiffel Tower built using toothpicks and glue.

porating art in a balanced and comprehensive teaching program.

"It is in our name," says Matthew Neal, Superintendent of ICA and its sister school, the American Creativity Academy (ACA). "It is the nature of who we are and our mission; to provide a creative educational environment where the students are allowed to express their interests and their passion not exclusively to what we tell them they must do, but allow them safe places to explore creatively in arts programs."

"If today's students graduate high school, and all they know how to do is memorize and regurgitate, (then) we have lost," Neal said. "What we have to do as a team is to teach our students to go over to the other side of the brain. One is just memorizing and repeating. The other side of the brain is saying 'What does it mean? How do I interpret this? How do I use this in other ways? How do I learn outside of the box, or better yet, to apply outside of the box?'"



Fourth grade student Abdulwahab Al-Najjar with his art project; a 'Princess Castle' built from toilet paper rolls, thin cardboard sheets and some figures.

'We have a generation of young people who desire some level of more expression'



Student artworks displayed at ICA's Art classroom.



Imitations of famous paintings done by students in art class.

"We are allowing students to use not just eyes on learning, but manipulatives, hands-on kinesthetic learning with building and creating," Neal added.

Challenges

In ICA, teachers utilize art to help students perform better in core academic content. "The challenges are that all the students learn how to read, write and do math without exclusively focusing on these, but allowing creativity to infuse in this," Neal said. "(The goal is to get) those two aspects to mix and to have students that their art is supporting reading, and their reading is supporting art. The challenge is how do we as a school provide an environment where both the arts and core content can be in a happy, symbiotic and partnership relationship."

"Art enhances the children's creativity," says Demetra Gargasoulas, Principal of ICA. "It enriches their learning and it takes kids to a different level. I give equal value of the art lesson as I would have done with language arts, math, and science. I am a believer of integrating art into every single subject."

Becoming closer

Throughout human history, art has been a medium that brought civilizations together and improved understanding between different cultures. "I think that arts and creativity allow us to be able to connect students," Neal said. "We may have cultural differences. We may have ethnic differences, between how we were raised and where we came from, but the arts allow us to come together and elaborate and to be able to do teamwork and to focus in a way that we can say 'this is not culturally separating, it is culturally joining and aligning.'"

"Art as a concept has the deepest roots in history than often times history itself," Neal went on. "Print making; back to the days in the Chinese culture of developing print and art this way. All of our clay works and all of our hands-on are very similar to the same way that was done 2000 year ago. The big difference as of change is how students are using arts to express themselves in technology and the technology integration into art... and then how we are taking arts and creativity and using the other side of

'In Kuwait, we need to see more of (art) with the students being in the forefront'

the brain. There is a lot of study on what it means to use the right side of your brain and how do you train your right side of the brain to think outside of the box creatively, beyond just being told what to do, but to be a creative problem solver."

More receptive

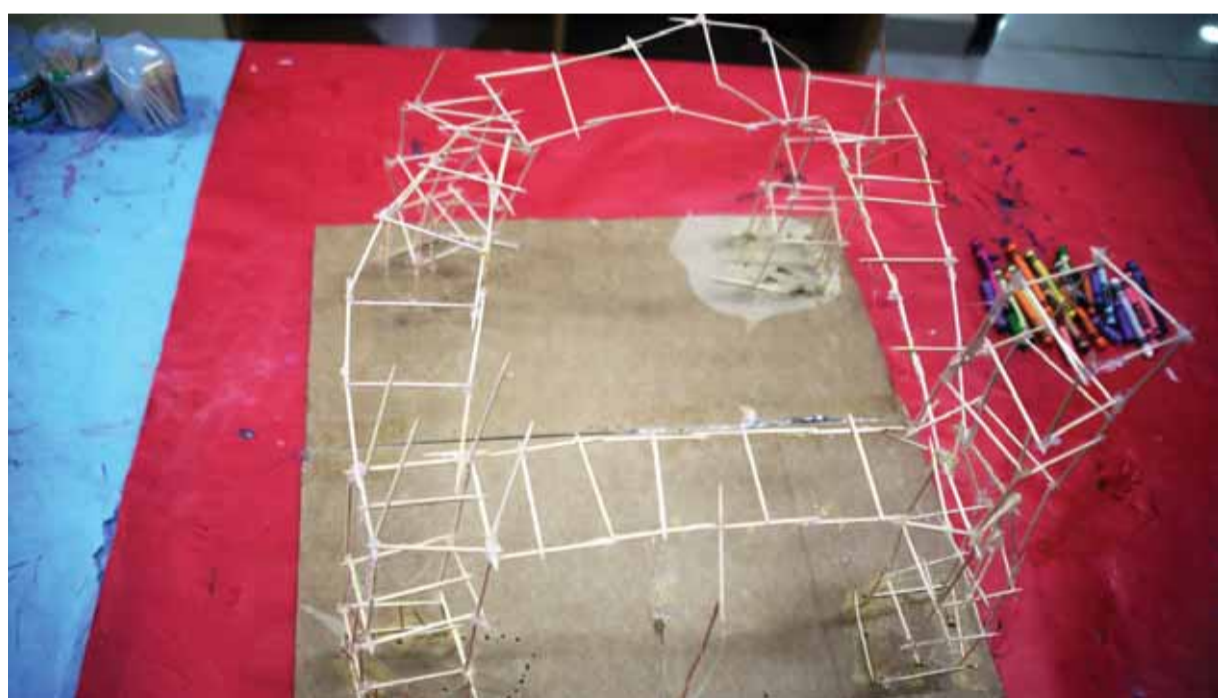
The Kuwaiti society has become more and more accepting and appreciative of the values that students are learning through art classes today. "The Kuwaiti society is becoming more receptive because now the younger generation gives greater value to the arts," Gargasoulas said. "The older generation maybe had a different mindset, but now the younger generation is more receptive."

"I think you have a generation of young people now who desire some level of more expression," Neal added. "And I think our responsibility as adults and parents in a traditional Islamic system is to help our students value traditions in the Islamic world and at the same time still be able to have some level of expression in integrating what is there in the heritage that our students have in their culture and in their traditions."

"I think our leaders of tomorrow are those students that today cannot just take what they are given and give their regurgitation answer or repeating answer," said Neal, "but to interpret it and apply it to their current culture using their values in their heritage that have brought them to this place."

A former President Elect of Dade Art Educators Association in Miami, USA, Robinson believes that art education in Kuwait has evolved, but more attention needs to be given to children's arts. "Art education today has evolved a lot," she said. "I think in Kuwait, we need to see more of it with the students being in the forefront. More student artworks being exhibited and more students identifying with a child's artwork."

"It is nice to see professional art, but (students) need to actually see other students' works. So it is important that the students can identify with other children's work," said the three-time teacher of the year.



Students projects



Inspiration through art

Giving children a platform where they can express themselves freely can bring the best out of them. One artwork that stood out in Robinson's classroom was a painting for a ninja warrior, except that his face was replaced with that of one of her students. "This is Faisal," Robinson said. "He is a cancer survivor. He made himself a superhero. The idea was to be a superhero, so he decided to make himself as a superhero. But really he is a real-life superhero."

The idea came to Robinson after last November's Paris attacks, and she encouraged her students to think of what they can do if they could do anything to help the victims. "I told them 'if you were a superhero today, would you fly to Paris and help the people there?'" she said. "(Faisal) really embodied that and he put himself as

a superhero graphic-wise, but then you could understand his thinking."

Making children understand the importance of art, music and physical education and the value of performing well creative-wise can be very powerful for them. "When they see and they accomplish a masterpiece, or they accomplish a great game; they work together as a team, or they sing a song and they are awesome at it, that empowers them to then go ahead and do really well in their academics and get really high grades," Robinson said.

"The kids today need to know that it is okay to be able to paint, draw and design buildings, design the next car, the next Kuwaiti towers or the next fantastic museum, the next building, the next hotel. We have future

presidents in this room. You never know who it is going to be," she added.

"I always tell the kids 'do your best and forget about the rest,'" Robinson said. "I know that each kid has different learning styles, so you try to give them something that all could work towards, and they can achieve it together. You have team building projects, then you have projects that are individual, but you work with the kid. Sometime that is the only place they shine; it is in the arts. It is very important. When you play classical music in the classroom, it is amazing what you could see with the kids when they are doing their arts, there is a difference."

'Kids today need to know that it is okay to be able to paint, draw and design'



القباس

Al-Qabas

THE CHRISTIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

By Dalaa Al-Moufti

Abdullah, who is a simple man living in a country named "the Christian Arab Republic", was courageous to run for parliament as he is a citizen of that country, but people became angry and held demonstrations and demanded banning, rather punishing him, because how can a Muslim man nominate himself as a candidate in a Christian republic?

Priests held a meeting and demanded the government deter Abdullah, and they doubted his patriotism and nationality too. They explained, using every means they had, that Abdullah was not a common man as they thought, because he must be seeking a shakeup of the state's entity, and the government must not naturalize anyone who is not Christian, even if he was born, lived and died in the republic.

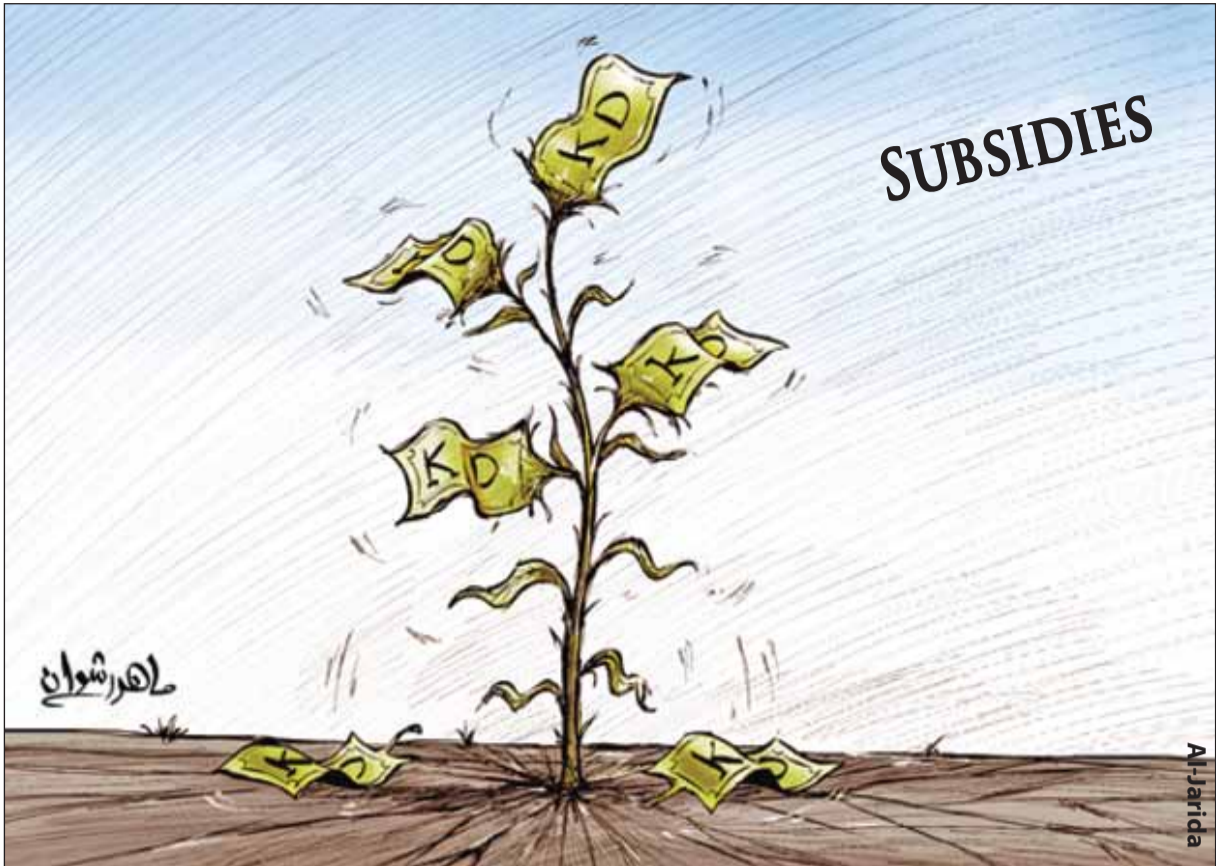
Yet, the matter did not stop here, as Christian clergymen instigated public opinion, went after all media and moved the mobs against Abdullah (and those behind him), demanding a halt to building mosques in their country and banning azan there, because, as they claim, it ridicules the official religion of the state other than being a disturbance to citizens.

Events developed quickly, as the extreme right party in the republic submitted a draft law to ban any religious practices by Muslims, both Sunni and Shiite, be it wearing the hijab, niqab or growing the beard, or praying in a public place. The party also demanded a ban on celebrating the month of Ramadan, Eid Al-Fitr and Al-Adha and the Prophet's (PBUH) birthday, and when a moderate MP argued with them about their requests, they said let them fast and celebrate in their homes. We are a Christian country, proud of our religion, and we do not accept any non-Christian appearances in our country, and if they do not like this, let them celebrate outside our borders.

The moderate MP persisted: "But this is their country too - they are citizens, they have what we have, and face what we face, and our Muslim Arab Republic neighbor approved the Christian Christmas, and we see Christmas trees and congratulations all over that country."

The rightists answered arrogantly: "Of course this is what should happen, as our religion is a right one, but we cannot do as they do." The moderate MP, who began to lose his nerve, said: "We are not taking about religions here - we are talking about a sentimental social sharing of one country, because if we are not brothers in religion, we are for sure brothers in the country and humanity. You will not only run Muslims out of our country, but even us moderate Christians. We will look for a country that is less selfish and more humane. There is no use for you." (Now you can read the column the other way round).

— Translated by Kuwait Times



الانباء

Al-Anbaa

AUCTION OF FATE

By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

This is the future that we see at the start of 2016 and end of 2015, while we read news that informs citizens of a future that has much austerity and total darkness. We read about lifting subsidies and decisions to raise prices in 2016 has arrived with a lot of distress for the citizen, who hopes that comfort will follow hardship.

Yet, where can we find comfort, after the fate of the Kuwaiti citizen has become as if it is bought and sold in an auction, but where? How? And by whom? We do not know the place! And we do not know the value! Where and who is the seller? Who is the buyer? All these are lingering questions for which we do not have answers other than rays of hope, as we are at the start of the new year.

Today, our words carry some hope, which we have the right to dream of under the umbrella of the Kuwaiti constitution. Every citizen dreams and hopes to live a

dignified life - if he gets sick, to find the right health treatment, and when he has children, he hopes that they are educated, so that education will be their shield, a residence in which he feels warm and secure with his family. These wishes are only due constitutional rights given to every Kuwaiti citizen through the 1962 constitution, and here is where our issue starts, which materializes in the dreams of every citizen, and we ask: Does every Kuwaiti citizen have what we mentioned in constitutional rights?

Our dreams today stand in front of decisions and laws to ask and say with the tongues of the majority of the society's members: Before raising prices and imposing taxes, where are your decisions towards squandering of public funds and withdrawals without supervision from the state budget? Have mercy with your decisions, proposals and laws!

— Translated by Kuwait Times

These wishes are only due constitutional rights given to every Kuwaiti citizen through the 1962 constitution

SCORES OF EXPAT JUDGES REJECT CONTRACT RENEWAL

KUWAIT: Scores of expatriate judges appointed and designated to work in Kuwait informed the Supreme Judiciary Council of their wish not to renew their contracts with Kuwait for another year, although the contracts of most of them are renewable for at least one more year, well-informed sources said.

The sources, who did not mention the exact numbers, added that judges working for the courts of cassation, appeals and comprehensive and the public prosecution's office almost had a massive agreement to end their tenures in Kuwait by July or August after settling their children's schooling and other tasks.

According to judiciary norms, the Supreme Judiciary Council annually addresses expat judges in December, inquiring about their wishes to renew their contracts. The council then contacts the justice ministry, which in turn contacts Kuwait's embassy in the judges' countries to contact the justice ministry there notifying it with the judge's wish, be it to conclude his tenure or renew his contract.

Notably, an expat judge's tenure in Kuwait is usually six years, while those who wish to leave have only worked two or four years. The sources justified



The Palace of Justice

this massive decision by the feeling of discrimination between them and Kuwaiti judges with the same or less experience, as they only get KD 1,600-2,000 (some get up to KD 2,500) plus accommodation, while their Kuwaiti colleagues get at least KD 4,000 or more. The judges also complained about getting only three months of annual leave, while Kuwaiti judges get six months leave with full pay.

"Expat judges are also deprived of many allowances their colleagues get," stressed the sources, noting that many of them made the decision in view of the government's recent austerity measures that mainly focus on expats despite their growing sufferings because of the rapidly increasing cost of liv-

ing, which is likely to skyrocket once the government plans to lift subsidies.

The sources added that many of the judges made the decision because of the recent pay hikes in their home countries, which greatly reduced the gap between their income there and in Kuwait. The sources added that some judges had contacted relevant authorities in this regard, but their grievances fell on deaf ears so far. Moreover, the sources said that the fatwa and legislation department had recently contracted some expat judges to work in Kuwait, but they did not go ahead with the procedures needed to come to Kuwait because they were now getting better salaries in their country. — Al-Rai



TUNIS: Kuwaiti sports journalist and member of the Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) Zaid Al-Sarbal was honored during a recent ceremony held in Tunisia to honor sports journalists in the Arab World.

FEMALES DOMINATE NEW YEAR NEWBORNS

KUWAIT: With the clock striking midnight on 2015, a Filipina baby was born at Farwaniya Hospital to become the first baby born in 2016. Another Kuwaiti girl was also born at Sabah Hospital, in addition to five other babies, including four girls, born at Jahra Hospital.

Head of the maternity department at Farwaniya Hospital Dr Fatima Al-Kandari said that the last baby born in 2015 was a Kuwaiti girl born at 11:35 pm, before the Filipina girl was born in a healthy condition in the very first moments of the New Year. "The second delivery was that of an Indian girl at 1:50 am," she added.

Head of the Maternity Hospital Dr Waleed Al-Jassar said that five babies

were born in the first hours of 2016, including a set of twins. "The first was a female Kuwaiti born at 12:05, then an Indian boy at 1:35 am, then a Syrian girl at 2:30 am," he said. The hospital's maternity department head Dr Jassim Al-Hajji said that six babies were born at Adan Hospital in the first hours of 2016. "The first was a Kuwaiti girl at 12:01 am followed by an Egyptian boy at 1:20 am, then a Kuwaiti girl at 3:20 am followed by three boys, a Kuwaiti, a Saudi and a Syrian," he explained. The head of the maternity department at Jahra Hospital Dr Sami Al-Taher said that four girls and a boy were born at the hospital in the very first hours of 2016. — Al-Anba



KUWAIT: The Ministry of Defense's camp in Subhan recently hosted organizers of a public campaign that launched last week to raise campers' awareness on fire safety. The campaign is organized by Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) and EQUATE.

Crime

R e p o r t

Missing body found with grieving mother

KUWAIT: An official working at Sulaibikhat cemetery called Qairawan police station on Friday morning reporting that the body of a 21-year-old woman was missing from the washing area at the cemetery and that a mobile phone was found at the place. The official said that the dead woman's uncle arrived at the cemetery and called his sister to find that it was her mobile phone that was found in the place. Two hours later, the mother arrived in a terrible state, bringing the body back. The shocked mother justified what she did by saying she wished to spend as much time as possible with her daughter before burying her.

Drug dealer caught

A bedoon man was arrested in Sulaibiya with drugs packed in small plastic bags ready for sale, said security sources. Case papers indicate that a routine checkpoint force noticed the suspect seemed nervous, and on searching him, the drugs were found. The suspect confessed to procuring it from an Asian pusher in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress.

Policeman charged

A police sergeant was arrested for robbing and assaulting a female colleague in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, said security sources. Case papers indicate that the policewoman reported that a young man had obstructed, assaulted and robbed her purse with some documents, a mobile phone, some personal photos and some money in it. She denied knowing the suspect but provided the police with a description of him and of his vehicle. She also recognized him in a lineup, denying his claims that they had been engaged to get married.

Fatal crash

A citizen was instantly killed when he lost control over his vehicle and it flipped over near Abdali farms, said security sources. An investigation was opened to determine the circumstances behind the accident.

Inspection

Weapons detectives launched an inspection campaign in Omariya, where checkpoints were set up at all entries and exits, searching all vehicles.

Fireworks

Two children were injured while lighting fireworks on New Year's Eve in Khairan, said security sources, noting that the kids were rushed to hospital for treatment.

Children 'kidnapped'

A female citizen accused her Saudi ex-husband of kidnapping her two children and fleeing the country, said security sources. Case papers indicate that the father came to see the children as per a court order but he never returned them. Checking on the father, detectives found out that he had already left with the kids. A case was filed.

Car thieves arrested

Three African men were arrested for committing several car burglaries within the Capital governorate, said security sources. Case papers indicate that several people had reported that after withdrawing money from ATMs or banks and leaving it in their vehicles, they found that the vehicles were broken into and the money stolen. Suspecting several suspects and placing them under close surveillance, detectives arrested the suspects in Hawally. The suspects confessed, telling police that they specialized in robbing people who had just emerged from banks, especially those holding large envelopes and bags. The suspects said that one of them usually got into the bank to watch possible targets, then signaled the other two suspects to follow the victims until they stopped somewhere and left the bags in the vehicles. They then broke into them and stole the money. A case was filed.

Security campaign

Policemen carried out a new security campaign in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on street markets, resulting in the arrest of a number of roaming vendors and visa violators, while large quantities of spoiled food were confiscated. A security source said the campaigns will continue in the area unannounced until it is cleansed of roaming vendors, drugs pushers and prostitutes, in addition to residency violators.

Suicide

A Bangladeshi man hanged himself in Abu Halifa. His body was recovered by the coroner. A security source said after Interior Ministry operations received a call, police and paramedics rushed to the scene and found the man had already died. Criminal evidence men were called.

Fugitive caught

A wanted Bangladeshi man failed to leave the country with a forged passport after stealing the passport of a compatriot and changed the picture. He was sent to the forgery department.

Drug possession

A drug addict failed to escape from police in Salhiya. The Kuwaiti man had nine envelopes and drug paraphernalia. He was sent to the Drugs Control General Department.

Harasser punished

Three citizens taught a harasser a lesson in a Salmiya mall and handed him to Salmiya police station. After a woman screamed because of continued harassment by the suspect, three citizens passing by told him to get away from her, but he insulted them and asked them not to interfere, which caused a fight. Mall patrons called police, who rushed to the scene and broke up the fight. The woman told police what happened, so they took the harasser to the police station, where he was charged. — Al-Rai, Al-Anbaa



China leader eyes ‘strong military’

JEAN-WEARING DEVOTEES BARRED FROM SOUTH INDIA TEMPLES



TEXAS: A demonstrator helps hold a large ‘Come and Take It’ banner at a rally in support of open carry gun laws at the Capitol, in Austin, Texas. Texas, the second-most populous state, is joining 44 other states in allowing at least some firearm owners to carry handguns openly in public places. Under the Texas law, guns can be carried by those with licenses and only in holsters. — AP

OBAMA TACKLES ‘UNFINISHED BUSINESS’ OF GUN VIOLENCE
FIREARM ‘EPIDEMIC’ CLAIMS MORE THAN 30,000 LIVES YEARLY

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama made fighting gun violence his chief resolution for 2016 in a New Year’s Day address, calling it a major piece of “unfinished business” for his White House administration.

The US leader announced he would meet with Attorney General Loretta Lynch on Monday, his first day back at work after the year-end break, “to discuss our options” in reducing the toll of deaths and injuries from firearms. As he marked the start of his final year as president, Obama expressed regret at the little progress made in the past seven years towards remedying the firearm “epidemic” that claims more than 30,000 lives in America each year, over half of them suicides.

“My New Year’s resolution is to move forward on our unfinished business as much as I can,” he said. “That’s especially true for one piece of unfinished business, that’s our epidemic

of gun violence.” With time running out on his presidency, and with little prospect of reaching common ground with Congress on the highly contentious guns issue, Obama is expected to resort to the use of executive powers that would allow him to unilaterally impose certain new anti-gun measures. The United States is one of the most gun-loving countries in the world, with more guns than inhabitants, according to a recent Congressional Research Service report.

In his New Year’s address, the president said measures to be discussed with Lynch will focus on “keeping an irresponsible, dangerous few from inflicting harm on a massive scale.” According to CNN and the New York Times, which cited gun control advocates familiar with the administration’s plans, Obama is expected to announce executive action to expand background checks on gun sales before his State of

the Union address on January 12. Reports said the measures imposed by the president could include tighter restrictions on reporting guns lost or stolen in transport, as well new licensing restrictions on small gun sellers.

‘Every single day’

Obama is taking the action against the backdrop of a relentless succession of shootings, which cast him each time in the role of “consoler-in-chief” to a grieving nation. The president has made increasingly plain his frustration at the bloodshed, faulting Congress for its lack of action to curb gun violence. “Last month, we remembered the third anniversary of Newtown,” Obama said in his address, referring to a December 2012 mass shooting at a Connecticut elementary school that left 20 young children and six adults dead.

“This Friday, I’ll be thinking about my friend

Gabby Giffords, five years into her recovery from the shooting in Tucson,” he said, speaking of a former US congresswoman and victim of another of the nation’s spasms of gun violence. “All across America, survivors of gun violence and those who lost a child, a parent, a spouse to gun violence are forced to mark such awful anniversaries every single day, and yet Congress still hasn’t done anything to prevent what happened to them from happening to other families,” the president said.

“Three years ago, a bipartisan, common-sense bill would have required background checks for virtually everyone who buys a gun,” he said, recalling that such a measure-ultimately blocked in the Senate-had the support of the vast majority of the American public, including gun owners. “Since then, tens of thousands of our fellow Americans have been mowed down by gun violence. Tens of thou-

sands,” Obama said. The issue of gun control has polarized the US legislature and divided the nation, with Americans holding radically different views on the pros and cons of gun ownership.

The depth of the schism could be seen in new laws that went into effect on Friday in Republican-red Texas and its political polar opposite states of California and Oregon. The new gun law in California would make it easier for courts to seize the firearms of people deemed to present a danger to themselves or others. In its west coast neighbor, the liberal state of Oregon, a measure took effect barring anyone convicted of certain domestic abuse offenses from having guns or ammunition. Gun-friendly Texas, meanwhile, on Friday introduced an “open carry” law meaning gun owners no longer will be required to conceal their weapons when packing heat. — AFP

‘ONE HOUR, THEN THAT’S IT’: DUBAI
FIRE SURVIVOR HANGS FROM BALCONY

DUBAI: Grasping the edge of a balcony 48 stories from the ground, just meters away from a raging fire, the photographer thought he may not live to see 2016. “One hour, then that’s it, I’m dead,” he thought as he stood on the tiny sill of a balcony in Dubai’s luxury The Address Downtown Hotel, attached by a rope to a massive window-cleaning platform.

Not long before, he had entered the balcony with a friend to take photographs of the nearby New Year’s Eve fireworks display for his newspaper. But the night suddenly changed when a huge fire erupted in the hotel below them, engulfing several floors of the huge building in the heart of the skyscraper city. “There’s a fire,” his friend shouted, rushing towards the nearest exit, before the photographer looked out and saw “smoke coming towards the balcony”.

Afraid that he would die from suffocation, and unable to see how he could escape, the photographer decided there was only one thing for it: to tie a rope from himself to a window-cleaning platform and hang off the balcony. He rolled out some 30 meters (100 feet) of a heavy-duty cable from a nearby

machine used by workers to clean the tower’s windows, attached it to his belt and photographing equipment and stepped off the edge. The rope “was my savior,” he said, asking not to be named and explaining that the fire was less than 10 meters away from him at that point.

He feared he would die from suffocation, he said. “I wasn’t sure what was happening downstairs. I was afraid I might collapse from the smoke.” Holding on for dear life outside the building, he began calling and texting his colleagues asking them to get in touch with the civil defense for help. Civil defense representatives kept him calm as he waited to be rescued. “I was telling them I hoped to survive and see my wife,” he said.

More than half an hour later, he heard rescue workers approaching his floor. “When I saw lights and heard the sounds of footsteps at the floor I was in, I started tapping on the aluminum to get their attention,” he said. “I think I was the only person left stuck that long,” he said, describing how he was led out through the smoke-filled corridors of the five-star hotel. — AFP



AGBAJA-ISU, Nigeria: A priest walks past the nine-meter tall statue of Jesus Christ carved from white marble, thought to be the biggest of its kind in Africa, in Abajah, southeastern Nigeria, on January 1, 2016. — AFP

‘BIGGEST JESUS STATUE’
UNVEILED IN E NIGERIA

IMO: Nigeria on Friday unveiled a nine-meter tall statue of Jesus Christ carved from white marble, thought to be the biggest of its kind in Africa. Standing barefoot with arms outstretched, the “Jesus de Greatest” statue weighs in at 40 tons. More than 100 priests and hundreds of Catholic worshippers attended the nine-meter (30-foot) statue’s official unveiling in the village of Abajah in southeastern Nigeria. It was commissioned by Obinna Onuoha, a local businessman who hired a Chinese company to carve it and placed it in the grounds of a 2000-capacity church that he built in 2012.

In his homily at a Mass before unveiling the statue, presiding bishop Augustine Tochukwu Okwuoma said it would be a “very great symbol of faith” for Catholic worshippers and passers-by alike. “It will remind them of the importance of Jesus Christ,” said Okwuoma. The cost of the statue has not been revealed. Earlier in the week, Onuoha said it would be “the biggest statue of Jesus on the continent.” The 43-year-old boss of an oil and gas distribution

company timed the statue’s unveiling to coincide with his parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country with 170 million people, is split between a more prosperous Christian south and a poor Muslim north—an occasional source of tension.

More than 17,000 people have been killed in Islamist group Boko Haram’s six-year quest to create an independent state but the violence has been mainly confined to Nigeria’s Muslim-majority north. And even as Nigeria rings in 2016, the ever-present threat of violence by Boko Haram hangs heavy over the country, despite official claims that the battle against the Islamist group has been “technically” won. “We think religions can exist side by side,” Onuoha said. “We hope that people can live in harmony.” He said the idea of building a giant statue of Jesus came to him in a dream nearly 20 years ago. And when his 68-year-old mother fell seriously ill a few years ago, she made him promise that he would build a church if she survived. — AFP

CROWDS FLOOD ALGERIA INDEPENDENCE FIGURE’S HOMETOWN FOR BURIAL

AIT-AHMED: Tens of thousands gathered in an Algerian village Friday for the burial of Hocine Ait-Ahmed, one of the fathers of the country’s struggle for independence and a key opposition figure. Ait-Ahmed died last week in Switzerland aged 89. His remains arrived Thursday in Algiers for a state funeral before being transferred to his home village, which bears his name. Ait-Ahmed was the last of the nine so-called “sons of Toussaint” who launched an uprising against French rule on November 1, 1954. Draped in Algeria’s national flag, his coffin was carried in an ambulance through the village as tens of thousands filled the streets.

“Today and tomorrow Hocine lives!” they chanted, and “Algeria, free and democratic!” “We are here to say that Ait-Ahmed’s battle for democracy and freedom will not have been in vain,” said one of the mourners, lawyer Mokrane Ait-Larbi. Many in the crowd surged forward to try to touch the coffin as it was

brought out of the ambulance before the burial. Ait-Ahmed was layed to rest in the town cemetery alongside several of his ancestors, including Cheikh Mohand Oulhoucine, a poet and Islamic figure who founded the village, died in 1901 and is still revered by the community. Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal was among senior officials attending the funeral.

Media reports said Ait-Ahmed had rejected an offer for a burial place at the El Alia national cemetery in Algiers, where state leaders and fellow independence figures are buried. His funeral cortege had departed from the Algiers headquarters of Ait-Ahmed’s Socialist Forces Front (FFS) and travelled 160 kilometers southeast to his village. On Thursday the government organised a state funeral for Ait-Ahmed in Algiers, which was broadcast live on state television, and later a wake was held at his party’s headquarters. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, also a veteran of

the struggle for independence from France, declared eight days of mourning following his death.

Ait-Ahmed, who was jailed by the French in 1956, was freed after a cease-fire in 1962. He went into opposition when Ahmed Ben Bella became president the following year. He was arrested in 1964 and condemned to death but later freed, and left for exile in Lausanne in 1966. He returned to Algeria in 1989 after the FFS was legalized and stood as a candidate in presidential elections in 1999, but pulled out mid-campaign arguing that the vote was rigged in favor of Bouteflika. Ait-Ahmed’s health began to fail in 2012 and he resigned the following year as head of the FFS. He died in Lausanne on December 23. French President Francois Hollande hailed Ait-Ahmed after his death as “one of the great historical figures (of Algeria), a leading architect of its independence and a committed political actor.” — AFP



AIT AHMED: Mourners flash the sign for victory as they attend the funeral procession and burial of Hocine Ait-Ahmed, one of the fathers of Algeria’s struggle for independence and a key opposition figure, in the Algerian village of Ait Ahmed. — AFP



US Navy, the aircraft carrier USS Harry S Truman transits the Strait of Hormuz. — AP

IRAN-US TENSIONS FLARE OVER SANCTIONS THREAT

NEW SANCTIONS COULD JEOPARDIZE HARD-WON NUKE DEAL

TEHRAN: Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani has denounced possible new US sanctions on his country which could jeopardize a hard-won nuclear deal due to be finally implemented within weeks. In a letter to his defense minister, Rouhani said reports that the US Treasury Department planned to blacklist companies and individuals with ties to Iran’s ballistic missile program constituted “hostile and illegal interventions” that justified a response.

The comments from Rouhani, who said the military should intensify its development of missiles, seemed to cause backtracking in Washington with reports that the White House had put the intended sanctions on hold indefinitely. In the five months since the nuclear deal was struck US officials say Iran has conducted two missile tests, one of which state media reported at the time, on October 11. Iran also recently aired television footage of an underground missile base.

The actions angered the United States and a United Nations panel found earlier this month that the tests breached previous resolutions aimed at stopping the Islamic republic from developing missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. But the threat of new sanctions-the nuclear deal is due to lift past measures that froze Iran out of the global financial system and crippled its oil exports-brought already worsening relations to a head. It also came after US officials said an Iranian vessel had test-fired several rockets near three Western warships, including the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier.

The alleged incident in the strategic Strait of Hormuz on December 26 drew denials from Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, who are responsible for protecting Iranian interests in the strategic waterway where much of the world’s oil passes. Spokesman General Ramezan Sharif accused the US of fabricating the incident as part of a “psychological operation”. The Wall Street Journal first reported Wednesday that the US was preparing fresh sanctions against companies and individuals in Iran, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates over alleged links to Tehran’s ballistic missile program. But on Thursday the newspaper said the measures had been delayed-although they remain on the table-over fears the nuclear deal could be derailed.

Warnings of reprisals

Were the Treasury to introduce the sanctions it would be a major barrier to the nuclear deal’s formal enactment, let alone its durability. Rouhani, whose government negotiated the agreement with the United States and five other world powers, warned of reprisals. Should individuals and companies be added to “the previously unjustified sanctions list, it is necessary that the production of various missiles required by the armed forces move forward with increased speed and seriousness,” said his letter to Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan.

“If such wrong and interventionist actions are repeated by the US, the ministry of defense should use all its capabilities to come up with new plans to expand

Iran’s missile capabilities,” he added. Tehran has always denied seeking an atomic weapon and argues that its missiles would never be designed to, nor ever carry, a bomb. The nuclear deal was heralded by moderates such as Rouhani, who staked his reputation on the negotiations, but hardliners in Tehran said it damaged national interests.

Republican lawmakers in the US Congress poured scorn on the agreement and tried to stop it. Several Republicans candidates for the presidency have pledged to rip it up if they are elected in November. Although Iran’s ultimate authority, supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, explicitly endorsed the nuclear accord in October, he warned that new sanctions, under any pretext, would constitute a violation. The deal is due to come into effect on “Implementation Day”, expected in January, or soon after, when UN monitors sign off that Iran has applied major curbs to its nuclear program. Rouhani further criticized the Treasury plans, stating that Iran’s domestic defense had never been within the remit of the nuclear talks. “Officials of the United States have also admitted this,” he said. Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who negotiated the deal with US Secretary of State John Kerry and counterparts from Britain, China, France, Russia and Germany, alluded to the missile row in a New Year message posted on Twitter. “Much was achieved in 2015 through diplomacy-let’s learn from history and repeat successes, not past mistakes. A Happy New Year to all,” he wrote. — AFP

‘TURKEY NEEDS ISRAEL’

ISTANBUL: Turkey must accept that it needs Israel, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday, as the two countries seek to thrash out a deal on normalizing ties. NATO member Turkey was a key regional ally of Israel until the two countries fell out over the deadly storming by Israeli commandos in 2010 of a Turkish aid ship, the Mavi Marmara, bound for Gaza. Erdogan further raised hackles in Israel with his sometimes inflammatory rhetoric towards the Jewish State. But the atmosphere has transformed following the revelation last month the two sides were making progress in secret talks to seek a rapprochement, says “Israel is in need of a country like Turkey in the region,” Erdogan said in remarks to Turkish reporters published in leading dailies yesterday.

“And we too must accept that we need Israel. This is a reality in the region,” said Erdogan. “If mutual steps are implemented based on sincerity, then normalization will follow.” Ambassadors were withdrawn in the wake of the 2010 crisis and Erdogan said Turkey’s three conditions for a normalization were clear-a lifting of the Gaza blockade, compensation for the Mavi Marmara victims and an apology for the incident. Israel has already apologized and negotiations appear to have made progress on compensation, leaving the blockade on the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip the main hurdle.

Indicating possible progress on the blockade, Erdogan said Israel had suggested it would allow goods and construction materials into Gaza if they came via Turkey. “We need to see a written text to ensure there is no deviation from the agreement,” he said. Analysts have suggested that Turkey’s rapprochement with Israel has been accelerated by the need for Ankara to make up for its crisis in ties with Moscow after the shooting down of a Russian warplane. Erdogan last month held closed-door talks with Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal but it was never disclosed what the president discussed with the leader of the Palestinian Islamist movement. Israel also wants Turkey to prevent senior Hamas operative Salah Aruri from entering its territory

and acting from there. Ankara has never confirmed his presence in Turkey.

‘Pay the price’

In another development, Erdogan yesterday backed the opening of a criminal probe into the leaders of Turkey’s main pro-Kurdish party, saying they should “pay the price” for remarks pressing for autonomy for the country’s largest ethnic minority. Erdogan also suggested Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag-the co-leaders of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) should have their parliamentary immunity removed for the investigation into their “constitutional crime”. Turkish prosecutors last week opened a criminal probe against Demirtas for his comments at a conference and then opened a similar investigation against Yuksekdag.

Making no pretence at staying away from judicial matters, Erdogan said: “What the two co-leaders said is definitely a constitutional crime.” The closure of the party should not be on the agenda but MPs and local mayors needed to be investigated, Erdogan told reporters on board his presidential plane in remarks published in leading newspapers including the Hurriyet daily. “They should pay a price for it,” he said “I believe that the lifting of immunity of those against whom the cases have been initiated will help the atmosphere in our country in the fight against terror in a positive way.” “We cannot accept statements calling for the country to be broken up. We will never agree to a state within a state.”

Demirtas said last weekend that Kurds in Turkey had to decide whether to live in autonomy or “under one man’s tyranny”, in an apparent reference to Erdogan. His remarks outraged nationalists who believe any degree of autonomy for Turkish Kurds in the southeast would undermine the unitary nature of the modern Turkish state set up by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923. The Turkish strongman had earlier condemned the remarks as “treason” but this is the first time he has suggested Demirtas and Yuksekdag should stand trial. — Agencies

ISRAEL RETURNS BODIES OF 23 PALESTINIAN ATTACKERS

JERUSALEM: Israel handed over to their families Friday the bodies of 23 Palestinians killed during recent attacks on Israelis, the army said, in an apparent bid to ease tensions. Palestinian medical sources in Hebron said 17 bodies to be buried in the area had already been received. Six others were handed over in the northern West Bank. A spokeswoman for the army said the operation had been completed. The army said its ambulances had met Red Crescent ones at checkpoints, and the bodies were transferred and taken to Palestinian hospitals for identification before being given to the families.

Since a wave of violence erupted at the start of October, 138 Palestinians

have been killed by Israeli forces, according to an AFP count, most while carrying out attacks on Israelis. Israel does not always immediately return the bodies of slain attackers. Twenty Israelis, an American and an Eritrean have also been killed in the unrest. The military spokeswoman said that after Friday’s handovers the army would have returned a total of 76 bodies and was still holding two. Police could also be holding more bodies, she said. Palestinian sources said the Israelis were still holding a total of 17 bodies. Police and internal security ministry spokespersons did not immediately respond to AFP questions regarding numbers. — AFP



JERUSALEM: A copy of ‘Mein Kampf’, Hitler’s anti-Semitic rant, which he wrote from prison in the early 1920s, is seen displayed at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. — AFP

IN ISRAEL, ADOLF HITLER ‘MEIN KAMPF’ AN ENDURING TABOO

JERUSALEM: The controversy over the upcoming re-publication of Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” in Germany is having particular resonance in Israel, where memories of the Holocaust run deep and the book remains taboo. Hitler’s anti-Semitic rant, which he wrote from prison in the early 1920s, loses its copyright in Germany on Friday, and the country’s first release of it since 1945 is due out soon in the form of an extensively annotated version.

The copyright had been held by the German state of Bavaria, to which it was granted by the victorious Allies after World War II, and now enters the public domain. New versions are expected in many countries, sparking fierce debate over how one of the most controversial books in history should be treated. Mein Kampf-which means “My Struggle”-does not face a total legal ban in the Jewish state, but any large-scale publication remains forbidden, the Israeli culture ministry says.

Even if there were no restrictions at all, publishers say there is still stigma around the book in a country formed after the Holocaust inspired by Hitler’s writings. According to the Foundation for the Benefit of Holocaust Survivors in Israel, 180,000 of them live in the Jewish state. Murray Greenfield, founder of

Gefen Publishing, which specializes in works about Judaism and its history, said he wouldn’t publish it “even if they paid me.” “My wife is a Holocaust survivor,” he said. “We have a built-in censorship on this book, in spite of being very much against censorship (generally).”

In many countries, including some of Israel’s Arab neighbours, copies of the book are widely available. It can also be found on the Internet, including in Israel, so those keen to access it are able to do so. “The book is available online,” Dan Michman, head of the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research, pointed out. “Many copies are to be found. Some 12 million copies were printed in German, so it is not rare.” But the book is also available in a shortened version in Hebrew in Israeli universities, the result of a campaign in the late 1980s by Holocaust survivor Dan Yaron.

‘No publisher will do it’

Yaron, who died in 1999, fought for the book, totally forbidden until then, to be published in Hebrew for educational purposes. “He said it was important for the people to know and to prevent future such events by reading what the (Nazi) leader was saying,”

Michman said, saying Yaron approached him to publish it but there was no money at the time. In the end, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem financed the project, and a condensed version of the rambling 720-page original is available in Israeli universities and research institutes.

The taboo status of “Mein Kampf” is special among anti-Semitic writings, said Meir Litvak, an expert on Holocaust texts. “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”-a fictional book from the early 1900s claiming to document a Jewish plan for global domination that allegedly inspired Hitler-is available across Israel, Litvak said. “The book is common, even though it was the most popular anti-Semitic tract of the 20th century.”

For “Mein Kampf”, however, “there is an emotional rejection,” he said. “No publisher will do it.” Michman was involved in drafting the 3,500 explanatory notes for the annotated German reprint, expected out in the coming days, and the book will remain outlawed if it is not contextualised. Michman said it is positive to put the book in a wider context. “It will include a lot of issues around the text-where Hitler took his ideas from (and) when he suggests something it explains if and how it was translated into deeds.” — AFP

UPROOTED BY WAR, COLOMBIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE DOUBT PEACE

BOGOTA: When Delfina Wazorna thinks back on the home she left behind, she remembers machine guns, armed men and death threats. It makes the Embera indigenous woman skeptical of the peace deal that Colombia's government and its main rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), have vowed to sign in the first three months of the New Year. "There will never be peace," said Wazorna, 54, who fled her ancestral lands eight years ago with her family after they found their house surrounded with explosives.

They drifted from city to city before finally landing at a shelter in the capital Bogota set up to accommodate members of her indigenous community uprooted by the half-century conflict. "It's all lies. These people don't forgive. The guerrillas told me, 'You can hide for 30 years, but if you come back you'll die,'" a traditional healer named Ariel said at the same shelter. Ariel, who declined to give his last name, also fled in 2004 after someone put a machete into the wall of his house with a death threat hanging from the blade. The Embera, whose lands lie mainly in the tropical forests of the Choco and Risaralda departments of western Colombia, have been trapped in the crossfire



BOGOTA: Lisandro Nacavera (right) and his family remain in their room in a shelter for Embera natives displaced by the armed conflict and resettled in Bogota. — AFP

of Colombia's messy, many-sided war.

The conflict, which has killed more than

220,000 people and displaced six million, has drawn in several leftist rebel groups, right-wing

paramilitaries and drug traffickers since the Marxist FARC was launched in 1964. The Embera say they have been terrorized by the FARC, the National Liberation Army (ELN), a rival rebel movement that has yet to join the peace process, and other armed groups. More than 1,000 Embera have fled to Bogota over the years, where they get by however they can—often by begging. Many try to return after a period of urban exile. But their homecoming is complicated by lingering violence and a lack of infrastructure. "There are still risks in Embera territory," said Julia Madariaga, who runs the ethnic affairs unit at the government agency set up to help victims of the conflict.

From jungle to street

Since the shelter in Bogota was created in 2011, it has hosted 1,098 Embera. Of those, just 87 remain today. But not all have managed to return home. Authorities say there are currently 370 Embera holed up in cheap hotels in the capital, paying \$2 to \$7 a night. "I could say I'm going home, but where?" said Norbey Giraldo, 23, who tried to go back to Risaralda with a group of 112 families four years ago, but ended up back in Bogota.

The influx was too large for the indigenous reservation, and the government resettled some of the families elsewhere. Giraldo, who first arrived in Bogota as a boy about 12 years ago and left as a married man with three kids, said he was taken to a plot of land with no house whose previous owner had left after his two children were killed. "We received threats by armed men from I don't know which group. They told us, 'Get out of here. This isn't your land,'" Giraldo said.

"They gave us until December 15 to leave."

He and his family didn't wait around until then. "The homecomings have been awful," said Alberto Wazorna, an Embera who sits on Colombia's National Indigenous Organization. He said there was not enough health, education and housing infrastructure in place for returnees. Unable to go home because of lingering guerrilla activity, Lisandro Nacavera, a 50-year-old Embera who fled 16 years ago, is working on setting up a new reservation on private land. He said it saddens him to see the way his people live in the city. "They've gotten used to begging instead of farming their land," he said. "An Embera without land isn't an Embera." — AFP

2 INDEPENDENT TALLIES REVEAL EXTENT OF KILLINGS BY US COPS
'ABOUT THREE KILLED A DAY'

WASHINGTON: Two independent studies have for the first time laid bare how many civilians died at the hands of US police over the course of a year: about three a day. The tallies, carried out by The Washington Post and the Guardian newspapers, are likely to fuel simmering outrage in many US communities that feel police officers are too quick to use deadly force. America has in recent years been shaken by a series of fatal police shootings that have prompted calls for reforms of law enforcement tactics.

Some of the highest-profile incidents have involved white officers killing unarmed black men or youths, with many of the deaths caught on video camera. The shootings have galvanized the Black Lives Matter national movement, which has helped raise awareness around the disproportionate rate at which unarmed black men are killed by police. Because the Federal Bureau of Investigation only tallies "justifiable homicides" of felons by police officers, and not the overall number killed, the US edition of the Guardian and the Post set about keeping their own counts.

The FBI's official tally of justifiable homicides in 2014 was 444 (2015 is not yet available). The agency's national tally is also incomplete because reporting is voluntary, and not all police departments submit data. US Attorney General Loretta Lynch has announced plans to improve data collecting for use-of-force incidents involving police, calling it "vital for transparency and accountability."

Three a day

According to The Counted, the Guardian's site, 1,130 people had as of Thursday been killed by police in 2015 — more than three a day on average. The Post, which only counted people killed by gunshot, put the number at 979. The Post found most of those were either armed, had mental troubles or were fleeing officers who had told them to stop. In the bulk of cases where officers killed an armed suspect, the individual was white, the newspaper notes, adding that 36 officers have been shot and killed in 2015.

However, when it comes to unarmed suspects, black men are disproportionately impacted. The Post found that though black men make up only six percent of the US population, they made up 40 percent of the cases in which police killed an unarmed man in 2015. Yet another high-profile case unfolded Saturday in Chicago, when police fatally shot Bettie Jones, 55, a mother of five, and Quintonio LeGrier, a 19-year-old engineering student. Both died after police came to a private residence in response to a domestic violence call. The city's mayor, Rahm Emanuel, said more police should be armed with Taser stun guns and given additional training. "There's a difference between whether someone can use a gun and when they should use a gun," Emanuel said, after cutting short his vacation and returning to the city.



CLEVELAND: Protesters lie down on the ground near the home of Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Tim McGinty in Cleveland on Friday, Jan 1, 2016. Protesters upset by a decision not to indict two white police officers in the shooting death of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old black boy who had a pellet gun, marched to the home of the Cleveland prosecutor on Friday and repeated calls for him to resign. — AP

'Public health concern'

The shootings come with Chicago's police already under federal investigation over a video that shows a white police officer, Jason Van Dyke, shooting a black teen 16 times, with most of the gunshots fired as the boy was lying motionless on the ground. Van Dyke has pleaded not guilty to murder. The shooting of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, which took place in 2014, has triggered a federal civil rights probe into the police and calls in some corners for the resignation of Emanuel—a former top White House aide to President Barack Obama.

In the rare cases where police are charged with wrongdoing in shootings, they are often cleared, as they only need to show they felt their lives were in danger at the time of the incident. Because so many people in America have guns, officers are trained to assume every suspect could be armed. In a recent study in the Public Library of Science (PLOS), researchers from Harvard University urged better national counting of police killings. "Law-enforcement-related deaths, of both persons killed by law enforcement agents and also law enforcement agents killed in the line of duty, are a public health concern," the study notes. — AFP

CLINTON RAISES \$55M IN FOURTH QUARTER

WASHINGTON: US Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton raised \$55 million in the last three months of 2015, her campaign said on Friday. The latest haul for Clinton, 68, brings her 2015 fundraising total to \$112 million, and gives her one of the best-funded campaign treasuries in the race for the November 2016 US presidential elections. "At the beginning of this campaign, Hillary Clinton set a goal of \$100 million in primary contributions for 2015 and blew past that goal, raising more than \$112 million in primary money for the year," her campaign said in a statement.

It said she had raised \$37 million for the primary campaign, the most for any non-incumbent in a non-election year, and \$18 million for the Democratic Party in the fourth quarter. Clinton has prided herself on raising funds from women and donors of small amounts. In the most recent quarter, 94 percent of donations received were \$100 or less, her campaign said. The most recent filing comes just weeks before the first-in-the-nation ballots will be cast in the Democratic nominating contest, and Clinton's latest grab provides a much-needed cushion of support as she battles for support in key early voter states.

Clinton's deep-pocketed repository reflects a heightened confidence in the Democratic front-runner's electability, having spent the summer months dogged by controversy surrounding her use of a private email server during her time as US secretary of state under President Barack Obama. Clinton, who has led the Democratic pack with little interruption since her announcement of candidacy in April, spent the summer months battling accusations of inappropriate use of a personal email server during her time as secretary of state, throwing an unexpected wrench in what was initially seen as a clear path to the nomination.

But following a marathon, 11-hour hearing on the national security ramifications of her personal server use, Clinton emerged from the scandal relatively unscathed, and her campaign reported their most lucrative fundraising hour in the hour after the hearing. According to a Reuters/Ipsos survey

that ended on Dec. 24, Clinton leads the Democratic pack with 60 percent of possible support in the nominating contest. Sanders received 28 percent support and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley finished third with less than 4 percent possible support.

'Biggest jerk'

Who is the biggest jerk in US diplomacy? America was left guessing after a tantalizing near-revelation in the latest batch of Hillary Clinton's emails to be made public. The State Department has been releasing the totality of Clinton's work emails from her time as US top diplomat, amounting to tens of thousands of missives peppered with sometimes quirky insights. "Just for the record, if she does not already know, is one of the biggest jerks in the foreign service," the US ambassador to Germany John Kornblum is quoted as saying in a newly-released email from Clinton advisor Sidney Blumenthal.

Dated March 31, 2011 the partially-redacted message warns Clinton about a possible candidate to succeed William Burns as US under secretary for political affairs. "Not only can he not get along with people or think clearly on anything, he also went over totally to the dark side during the Bush administration," the then ambassador is quoted as saying of the candidate, whose name is blacked out. "He once literally shouted me down at a conference where I suggested the Bush administration was hurting US relations with Europe."

The frank missive was part of a batch of 5,500 emails made public on New Year's Eve, in line with a court order triggered by Clinton's use of a private email as secretary of state in 2009-2013. The State Department is required to release all 55,000 pages of Clinton's work-related emails by January 20. Clinton has acknowledged she exclusively used a private email account and private server while secretary of state, opting against a government account despite official recommendations. The issue erupted into a scandal as the Democratic frontrunner was kicking off her 2016 presidential campaign, and remained a Republican talking point for months. — Agencies

TRUMP'S MUSLIM REMARK IN ISLAMIST PROPAGANDA VIDEO

NAIROBI: Republican White House frontrunner Donald Trump's call for a 'shutdown' on Muslims entering the US have been used by Somalia's Shebab in a jihadist recruitment video, a US group that monitors extremist propaganda said yesterday. The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Shebab use an excerpt from Trump's December 7 speech calling for a "total and complete shutdown" on Muslims entering the US to try woo Muslims in the West to wage jihad, the SITE Intelligence Group reported.

In the speech Trump proposed barring Muslims from entering the US until the US was "able to determine and understand this problem" of Islamist violence, following the killing of 14 people by a radicalized couple in California. In the Shebab video, the Trump soundbite is preceded by a speech by US-born radical imam Anwar al-Awlaki calling on Muslims in America to "flee the oppressive Western atmosphere for the lands of Islam."

Al-Awlaki, who Washington alleges was a senior Al Qaeda operative, was killed by a US drone strike in Yemen in September 2011. The Shebab video was uploaded onto Twitter by the Al-Kataib Media Foundation, a regular conduit for the group's propaganda material, SITE said. The Shebab was born out of the Islamic Court Union, which controlled central and southern Somalia for six months in 2006, including the capital Mogadishu. The insurgents, who were driven out of Mogadishu in 2011, are fighting to overthrow Somalia's internationally-backed government, which is protected by 22,000 African Union troops. — AFP

WEIRD WEATHER BRINGS WARM WELCOME TO 2016

LONDON: With temperatures above freezing at the North Pole, deadly tornadoes in Texas, extreme heat in Australia and floods in Britain and Missouri, the world is beset by extreme weather events as it welcomes 2016. A powerful and destructive low-pressure system in the North Atlantic has pushed the mercury up to two degrees Celsius (35.6 Fahrenheit) at the pole, 20 degrees above the seasonal norm. The Arctic has borne the brunt of global warming, with temperatures three degrees higher than the pre-industrial era.

But linking the current mild conditions to climate change is premature, warned Natalie Hasell, meteorologist at the Canadian Department of the Environment, saying that scientists do not base their conclusions "on one anomaly". The North Atlantic depression also brought eastern Canada an unusually warm holiday period, with temperatures hitting 15.9 degrees Celsius in Montreal on Christmas Eve, around 20 degrees above the seasonal average.

This was followed by heavy snowfall that covered the country's eastern half. In the United States, tornadoes and floods left at least 49 dead. The waters of the mighty Mississippi River have already exceeded overflow levels by four meters in some areas, claiming 13 lives. In the south, spectacular tornadoes devastated parts of Texas. The common cause of the unusual events is a particularly strong El Nino system, amplified by global warming, according to scientists.

El Ninos, which emerge every four to seven years on average and run from October through January, are triggered by a shift in

trade winds across the Pacific around the Equator. However, the 2015 episode is "probably the strongest in the last 100 years," said Jerome Lecou, forecaster at Meteo-France. "There is no simple answer" to explain the exceptional conditions, he added.

Strawberries at Christmas

Although centred on the Pacific Ocean, El Nino "has an impact on a global scale," Jean Jouzel, former vice president of the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said. "Generally, El Nino years are warmer than average," he said. In Australia, scorching heat has led to large forest fires and temperatures are forecast to soon hit 38 degrees Celsius in the south. In France, the unseasonably warm weather has baffled Mother Nature with Perigord strawberries, Alsatian asparagus and mimosas all flourishing on the French Riviera. In Spain, higher temperatures and low rainfall have led to an unusual outbreak of wildfires in



MISSOURI: Lawn chairs are tangled in a tree along with other debris after floodwaters recede in Pacific, Missouri. — AFP

the north.

Several Italian cities have introduced traffic restrictions to combat fine-particle pollution, which has been worsened by the dry and calm conditions. Record rainfall has brought unprecedented flooding to the north of England, leaving the historic city of York under feet of water and thousands evacuated over December. Stormy weather buffeting the North Sea has brought havoc to oilfields on New Year's Eve, with one man reported killed by a giant wave hitting a rig, and hundreds of workers evacuated after a huge barge broke its moorings and began drifting. "There is no doubt in my mind that climate change is partly responsible for the flooding across the north of England," said Piers Forster, professor of climate science at Leeds University. Britain's mean December temperature was a record-breaking eight degrees Celsius, smashing the previous high of 6.9 degrees set in 1934, according to the Met Office.

It was also the wettest December on record for Scotland and Wales and one of the top 10 wettest in Britain as a whole. Worldwide, temperatures between January and November have already broken records, suggesting that 2015 will be the hottest in modern history, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "On a global level, we really are in an exceptional year as it is just over a tenth of a degree warmer than 2014, which itself was a record year," said Jean Jouzel. "This is a real leap, one tenth of a degree from one year to another," he added. With El Nino showing little sign of running out of steam, he predicted that 2016 could be warmer still, but that following years may be less extreme. — AFP

FRANCE QUARRELS OVER REVOKING CITIZENSHIP OF TERRORISTS

PARIS: The push by France's Socialist government to revoke the citizenship of convicted terrorists with dual nationality after the Paris attacks has turned into a harsh political dispute, with the far right applauding the move while some on the left express indignation at what they call a divisive measure. French President Francois Hollande submitted the proposal three days after the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris that left 130 dead, in a shift toward a hard line on security. The idea appears to have strong support in French public opinion. Several polls over the past week suggest that 80 to 90 percent of the French are in favor of the measure.

Under current French law, citizenship revocation can only be applied to people who have been naturalized, not if they are French-born, and the procedure is rarely implemented. The new rules would extend it to all dual nationals,

but cannot be applied to people who are only French citizens, as France's obligations under international law prevent it from leaving a person stateless. Opponents of the measure consider it would create two classes of citizens - dual nationals who could lose their citizenship and others who cannot - in opposition to the principle of equality set out in France's constitution. French authorities have not said how many of those arrested over the Paris attacks are dual nationals.

Prominent Socialist Party figures, including former Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, have publicly expressed their disapproval, but Hollande has stuck to his guns. "France must take the good decisions beyond traditional party divisions," the president said in his New Year's Eve speech. While the left is divided, Hollande is getting

unusual support from the right. The far-right National Front has claimed it is at the origin of the idea. "Terrorists don't deserve French citizenship, because French citizenship is an honor," vice president of the party Florian Philippot told France Info radio. Members of the conservative opposition, including former President Nicolas Sarkozy, have also largely supported the proposal - while also calling for more security measures.

The government says the new measure would apply to a very small number of people. The issue remains highly sensitive in France as some have compared it to the revocation of citizenship of Jews and members of the French Resistance during World War II, when the government led by Philippe Petain collaborated with German authorities. The Vichy regime revoked the citizenship of more than 15,000

naturalized and 500 French-born people - including General Charles de Gaulle. "It's dangerous because you start wanting to revoke the citizenship of some people, then take a step further," said Socialist senator Samia Ghali.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls defended the action this week. "This is a strong symbolic act that punishes those who excluded themselves from the national community. Nothing less, nothing more," he said in a written statement. France first adopted the revocation of citizenship in 1848 for those who refused to accept the abolition of slavery, Valls recalled. The constitutional change, to be debated in Parliament in February, requires a three-fifths majority vote from lawmakers. About 50 human rights and anti-racist organizations and unions have launched a petition to reject the measure.

Some human rights defenders consider the proposal implicitly targets France's Muslim community, the largest in Western Europe - including many French-born with Moroccan, Tunisian or Algerian origins who have both citizenships. The Paris attacks, which left 130 dead and hundreds wounded, were carried out in the name of the Islamic State group largely by French and Belgian extremists. Some of them were of Moroccan descent. The possibility of revoking the citizenship of all dual nationals - not only the naturalized ones - already exists in Britain, Canada and the Netherlands. In the US, a person can have his naturalization revoked for being a member of the Communist party, another totalitarian party or a terrorist organization within five years of his or her naturalization. The measure does not apply to natural-born US citizens. —AP

SYRIAN AND IRAQI MILITANTS PLOT ATTACK IN GERMANY

POLICE RECEIVE TIP WITH NAMES OF SUSPECTS

MUNICH: Germany received a tip hours before midnight that named militants from Iraq and Syria were planning attacks in Munich but police have been unable to find the suspects and are not even sure if they exist or are in the country, the Munich police chief said on Friday. Hubertus Andrae told a news conference that German officials had received a "very concrete" tip that suicide attacks were planned on New Year's eve at two train stations.

Police closed the stations about an hour before midnight, and reopened them hours later. "We received names. We can't say if they are in Munich or in fact in Germany," Andrae said. "At this point we don't know if these names are correct, if these people even exist, or where they might be. If we knew this we would be a clear step further. We have no information that these people are in Munich or in Germany," he added. Bavaria Interior Minister

Joachim Herrmann has said the tip, which media reports said came from French intelligence, indicated that the Islamic State militant group was behind the planned attacks.

The shutting down of the stations added to jitters in many capitals as Europe ushered in the New Year with heightened security after a year of militant attacks, the biggest of which killed 130 in Paris in November. The stations that were shut were Munich's central

station and Pasing station, some 8 km (5 miles) away. Andrae said the security alert level in Munich remained the same as it was before German authorities received the tip. On their Twitter feed, Munich police said: "Good morning to those, who spent the night out in #munich! Thanks for staying calm and for your understanding concerning our measures."

Police said they had received information that five to seven suicide bombers were planning to take part in the attack. The Munich alarm followed days of security warnings in Europe. On Dec. 26, police in the Austrian capital Vienna said a "friendly" intelligence service had warned European capitals of the possibility of a shooting or bomb attack before New Year. That tip, too, had included the names of several suspects.

In Belgium, authorities on Wednesday called off the usual New Year's Eve fireworks display in the capital, citing fears of a possible militant attack. Police said on Thursday they were holding three people for questioning over an alleged plot. The US Justice Department said on Thursday that a 25-year-old man accused of planning to attack a restaurant in upstate New York on New Year's Eve had been arrested and charged with attempting to provide material support to Islamic State. In New York city, police tightened security for the traditional New Year's Eve dropping of the crystal ball in Times Square, where more than a million people hailed the arrival of 2016. —Reuters



BRUSSELS: People walk near the central square in Brussels. Battling terror on two fronts, Belgian police are holding eight people over an alleged New Year plot in Brussels and also arrested a tenth suspect over last month's massacre in Paris. —AFP

BELGIUM ARRESTS FIVE OVER 'NEW YEAR PLOT'

BRUSSELS: Belgian police were holding five people yesterday over an alleged New Year plot in Brussels and also arrested a 10th suspect over last month's attacks in Paris. Both Brussels and Paris cancelled annual New Year's Eve fireworks displays as soldiers and police ramped up security in European capitals over perceived terror threats. There were instead plenty of private firework displays throughout the Belgian capital at midnight, accompanied by cheers and loud music, but the celebrations were vastly diminished compared to last year's.

"People are scared. They are staying home and avoiding public places," taxi driver Abdullah said in the Ixelles neighborhood as he waited for customers who he estimated have dropped 40 percent this year. Police detained six people Thursday for questioning over an alleged plot to strike "emblematic sites" in Brussels during the year-end festivities. But three of them were released after interviews and the others were ordered provisionally held for another 24 hours as the investigation continues, the federal prosecutor's office said.

The prosecutor's office also said two men, whom they identified as Said S, 30, and Mohammed K, 27, had already been formally charged with terrorism-related offences and remained in custody. The men's lawyers said their full names are Said Saouti and Mohammed Karay, whose arrests were announced Tuesday following police raids in and around Brussels and the eastern city of Liege. The men denied the charges against them, the lawyers added.

Police seized military-style training uniforms, computer hardware and Islamic State propaganda material in the earlier raids. In Thursday's raids, they found computer equipment, mobile phones and airgun equipment, the prosecutor's office said. A source close to the investigation told AFP that officials were trying to determine whether members of a motorcycle gang called the "Kamikaze Riders" were involved in the year-end plot.

'Terrorist murder'

Brussels has been on high alert since it emerged that several of the attackers involved in the Paris carnage on November 13 had links to the Belgian capital. Prosecutors said Thursday they had arrested a 10th suspect over the attacks in Paris claimed by the Islamic State group that killed 130 people and wounded many more. They charged him with terror offences. The Belgian national, identified only as Ayoub B., was detained on Wednesday during a raid on a house in the troubled Brussels immigrant neighborhood of Molenbeek, the federal prosecutor's office said.

He has been charged with "terrorist murder" and involvement in the activities of a terrorist group, it said, adding that he would appear in court again within five days for a custody hearing. Molenbeek is home to the Paris attacks fugitive Salah Abdeslam and has served in the past decades as a haven for jihadists. Brussels Mayor Yvan Mayeur said Wednesday that fireworks and related events in the central square of Place de Brouckere had been cancelled because it was not possible to "guarantee that we can check everyone coming to the event". Last year, some 100,000 people turned out to watch the traditional New Year's Eve fireworks display.

'Terrorists are winning'

Alex, another taxi driver said that "the terrorists are winning" as business had dropped by about half this year while some cafe owners said they were closing several hours early for lack of customers. It is not the first time the official New Year's Eve fireworks have been cancelled as the authorities made the same decision in 2007 because of another terror threat. Officials said the plot revealed Tuesday was not directly linked to the wave of bombings and shootings on a Paris concert venue, bars, restaurants and the national stadium. —AFP



MUNICH: Police patrol at the main railway station in Munich, southern Germany yesterday. Police are maintaining a heightened presence following warnings of a planned attack on New Year's Eve. —AP

DEFIANT PARISIANS BID ADIEU TO 2015

PARIS: Parisians bid goodbye to a year of unprecedented terror attacks when clocks chimed midnight Friday, as thousands of defiant revelers thronged the Champs-Elysees for New Year's Eve celebrations. While the traditional fireworks display was cancelled this year over fears of a terrorist attack, crowds still filled the iconic boulevard lined with trees donning sparkling garlands to welcome 2016. "It's New Year."

We wanted to have fun as usual, in spite of everything, so we came on the Champs as this is the perfect place for it," said Joy along with her friend Rebecca, in their 20s, who came for the celebrations. "I'm not particularly scared," said Joy. "An attack can happen anywhere at any time. But that can't stop us from living." Behind her, Western tourists uncorked a bottle of wine while some Asian visitors took a photo and several older couples danced.

The festivities are the largest public gathering since jihadists killed 130 people in Paris in November in a wave of gun and suicide bombings

claimed by the Islamic State group. "After what our city has lived through, we have to send a signal to the world," said Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, promising a "somber and dignified show". In the Place de la Republique square in central Paris, visitors flocked to an open air shrine for the victims of the November 13 attacks. Lila Rehane, a 49-year-old from the southern French city of Marseilles who came to pay homage at the site, said she wanted to see peace return in 2016 after a year of "anguish".

'Crappy year'

A few hundred meters away, Walid Abdelhamid, a 28-year-old trader, said he hopes "the mood will improve," and that "people will stop and think when it comes to questions about religion." "When the religious question is settled, everything will be settled, even the economic problems," Walid said, predicting that many French will remember 2015 as a "crappy year". Ten minutes before midnight on the Champs-Elysees, the Arc de Triomphe was illuminated in the French flag's colors of red, white

and blue, while the national anthem rang out to applause from the crowds. A giant video screen then showed people smiling with images of famous Parisian landmarks, finishing with a virtual firework display. "It's a shame they cancelled the fireworks, it almost like giving in to the terrorists," said Oceane, 14, standing near one of the many screens lining the avenue.

The diminished revelry took place under the watchful eye of some 1,600 police and security officers deployed around the Champs-Elysees where all visitors' bags were searched. And while an estimated 600,000 people gathered for the celebrations, the crowd seemed smaller than the previous year. "I didn't want to stay at home alone with my daughter," said Oceane's mother Sandrine. "So we came here, with the families in mourning (after the attacks) in our thoughts." At five past midnight, with the video show over, the crowd began to leave. "It was a bit cheap, but good given the circumstances," joked Arthurn, a student. "Now we are going home to finish the party." —AFP



PARIS: People gather to watch the parade along the Champs-Elysees in Paris, on January 1, 2016, to celebrate the New Year. —AFP

BOKO HARAM THREAT HANGS HEAVY OVER NIGERIA IN 2016

KANO: As Nigeria rings in 2016, the ever-present threat of violence by Boko Haram hangs heavy over Africa's most populous country, despite official claims that the battle against the Islamist group has been "technically" won. After setting a December 31 deadline to rid his country of Boko Haram, President Muhammadu Buhari told the BBC: "I think technically we have won the war because people are going back into their neighborhoods."

In his New Year message to the nation, Buhari commended the military for "significantly curtailing the insurgency" but acknowledged there was "still a lot of work to be done in the area of security". "This government will not consider the matter concluded until the terrorists have been completely routed and normality restored to all parts of the country that have been adversely affected by the Boko Haram insurgency," he said. But despite the official assurances, violence and fear continue to stalk several major cities in Nigeria's troubled northeast.

Late last month, more than 50 people were killed in a 48-hour wave of attacks in the mainly Muslim region that were

blamed on the jihadists. Boko Haram has resorted to suicide bombers-many of them young children to wage its war for an independent Islamic state in the country. The extremist group has also spread its bombing campaign to neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. "Boko Haram is still a big threat despite the government's claim that the group has been weakened," said Ibrahim Kulo, 47, a resident of the violence-wracked northeastern city of Maiduguri.

"One cannot venture 10 kilometers outside the city without the fear of Boko Haram ambush. We live in real danger of Boko Haram," he said. Sanusi Ahmad, 33, voiced similar fears. "Boko Haram remains a threat. I don't believe it when the government says they have defeated Boko Haram," said the resident of the northern city of Kano. "I agree that the military has made substantial progress in the fight against the group," he said. "But the fact that Boko Haram can still carry out attacks like the ones... last week is an indication that they are still a serious threat. Although there has been a lull in attacks in Kano, the threat still remains." "We don't know when and where the next attack will occur." —AFP

JEAN-WEARING DEVOTEES BARRED FROM SOUTH INDIA TEMPLES

NEW DELHI: Hindu temples in southern India began turning away devotees wearing western clothes Friday after a court order banning jeans and shorts as “inappropriate” for spiritual worship came into effect. In December the Madras High Court ordered temple authorities in Tamil Nadu state to refuse entry to anyone wearing jeans, bermuda shorts, skirts, short-sleeves or tight leggings to “enhance spiritual ambiance.”

Hundreds of staff members in the coastal state’s 6,000 temples, ranging from small shrines to major religious sites, remained on alert Friday for people flouting the ban, which came into force on January 1. “We have enforced

the court order from today. A few people were politely turned back for not wearing the prescribed dress,” a superintendent at the Arulmigu Ramanatha Swami Temple in Rameswaram district said, asking not to be named.

The dress code applies to both locals and foreigners visiting the temples, some of which are major tourist attractions. Arulmigu Ramanatha Swami temple alone receives more than four million visitors each year, the official said. Men are allowed to wear dhoti-a traditional long lower garment-or pyjamas with a cloth top or formal pants and shirts, while women are allowed to wear sarees or half sarees with a blouse. “We should dress for public worship in a way

that is generally considered appropriate,” the court said in the order.

Several Hindu temples and other religious sites in India restrict devotees from entering the premises on pretext of dress, eating habits-some do not allow non-vegetarians to enter-as well gender. In Mumbai a women’s rights group is fighting a legal battle to overturn a four-year ban on entry of women to Haji Ali Dargah, a Muslim shrine, where menstruation was cited as the reason for the restriction. While in urban centres such as New Delhi and Mumbai many people, especially men, wear western clothes, in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala traditional garments are more popular.— AFP



TAMIL NADU: An Indian Hindu Sadhu (Holy man) prays at the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, some 475 kms southwest of Chennai. Hindu temples in southern India began turning away devotees wearing western clothes on January 1, 2016, after a court order banning jeans and shorts as ‘inappropriate’ for spiritual worship came into effect. — AFP

PUTIN NAMES US ‘AMONG THREATS’ IN NEW RUSSIAN SECURITY STRATEGY

MOSCOW: A new appraisal names the United States as one of the threats to Russia’s national security for the first time, a sign of how relations with the west have deteriorated in recent years. The document, “About the Strategy of National Security of Russian Federation”, was signed by President Vladimir Putin on New Year’s Eve. It replaces a 2009 version, endorsed by then-President Dmitry Medvedev, the current prime minister, which mentioned neither the United States nor NATO.

It says Russia has managed to heighten its role in solving global problems and international conflicts. That heightened role has caused a reaction by the West, it says. “The strengthening of Russia happens against the background of new threats to the national security, which has complex and interrelated nature,” the document says. Conducting an independent policy, “both international and domestic” has caused “counteraction from the USA and its allies, which are striving to retain their dominance in global affairs.”

That in turn is likely to lead to “political, economical, military and informational pressure” on Russia, the document says. Relations between Russia and the West

reached a low after Russian forces annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014, after protests in Ukraine forced its pro-Moscow president to flee to Russia. Since then, the West has accused Russia of aiding insurgents in eastern Ukraine. Moscow denies actively assisting the rebels. The United States and the European Union have since imposed wide-ranging sanctions against Russian individuals and companies. Moscow has reacted by restricting food and other goods from the EU.

The document says that the United States and the EU have supported an “anti-constitutional coup d’etat in Ukraine”, which led to a deep divide in Ukrainian society and a military conflict. It also names the expansion of NATO as a threat to Russia’s national security and said that the United States has expanded its network of military-biological laboratories in neighboring to Russia countries. The document, which serves as a basis for planning strategy related to national security by different state bodies, does not mention Syria. On Sept 30, Russia began air strikes against anti-government rebels opposed to the government of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, a Russian ally.— Reuters



KABUL: Afghan residents gather in front of the wreckage of an entrance gate, the day after a suicide car bomb attack at a French restaurant- Le Jardin in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

NEPAL FORMER CHILD SOLDIER BLAZES ULTRA RUNNING TRAIL

KATHMANDU: As a child soldier with Nepal’s Maoists, Mira Rai learned to fire guns, disarm opponents and race down trails, little imagining her guerrilla drills would help make her one of the world’s top ultra runners. “It is like a dream, beyond anything I ever imagined. I was just a girl from a village,” Rai said. The daughter of a poor Nepali farmer, Rai was only 14 when she ran away from home to fight alongside Maoist rebels seeking to overthrow the government. “In our society, girls are supposed to behave in a certain way. I didn’t want to be confined by that,” said Rai, now aged 26.

She chafed at the rules she was expected to obey as a teenage girl living in a patriarchal country and the Maoist call for revolution resonated with her. “The Maoists gave opportunities to women, they treated us equally. I saw that women could fight like men, be brave. I built up my confidence there,” Rai said.

She practiced firearm drills and competed with other cadres in running contests designed to build endurance. “I did very well, I even used to outrun the boys,” she recalled. Today, Rai ranks among the world’s leading ultra runners after a record-breaking win in the 80-kilometre (50-mile) Mont Blanc race in Chamonix, France, last June, when she beat her nearest rival by 22 minutes.

But when the decade-long insurgency ended in 2006, Rai, like many Maoist foot soldiers, was left with little in the way of cash or career prospects. Desperate for work, she prepared to leave Nepal for a job in a Malaysian electronics factory before being scouted by a Kathmandu-based karate instructor, Dhurba Bikram Malla, who urged her to stay. Rai gave up her plans and started training-initially doing practice runs on the capital’s congested roads because she could not afford the 15-cent bus fare to the nearest stadium. “She was very single-minded. If you told her to do something, she would just do it,” Malla said. “She is very consistent in her speed (and) never seems to get tired.”



KATHMANDU: Nepalese athlete Mira Rai stretches before a training session on the hills surrounding Kathmandu. — AFP

Running in \$4 shoes

Rai made her racing debut in March 2014, running a steep 50-kilometre course along the hills overlooking the Kathmandu valley. Dressed in a cheap t-shirt and shoes that cost \$4, she ran for hours before she felt dizzy and stopped. “I borrowed money to buy juice and noodles and started running again,” she said. Soon, Rai crossed the finish line, winning her first race and prizes that included a new pair of running shoes. Since then, she has notched up an impressive set of victories, bagging gold in 13 of the 20 national and international races she has taken part in, including Italy’s 83-kilometre Trail Degli Ero.

Her victory at Chamonix vaulted her to second place among female ultra runners in the Skyrunners World Series which involves races in five continents. Although Nepal is considered an ideal spot for trail running, racing remains a niche activity with the Himalayan nation hosting just a handful of events each year, including the world’s highest marathon held in the foothills of Mount Everest. Other Nepali athletes are making their mark in ultra running, with soldier Samir Tamang crowned Asian men’s skyrunning champion after winning this year’s 50-kilometre MSIG Sai Kung 50 in Hong Kong.

Both Rai and Tamang are supported by Trail Running Nepal, an organization that promotes ultra running, but finding sponsors is a challenge for local athletes. “Sponsorship is near impossible,” Richard Bull, founder of Trail Running Nepal said. “For trail running to grow in Nepal, we need people to organize (more) races. If it grows, then finding sponsors will be easier.” Rai, now sponsored by the multinational sports equipment company Salomon, is a rare success story, with a recent race yielding \$1,500 in prize money, double Nepal’s annual per capita income. Yet she shrugs off her accomplishments, insisting she has been lucky. “I have been fortunate to get opportunities... I want to inspire other women, tell them that nothing is impossible if we work hard,” she said. “There must be so many other Mira Rais in Nepal.” — AFP

SHOCK AND ANGER AFTER TALEBAN ATTACK ON KABUL FRENCH EATERY

AFGHAN FORCES FREE 59 PRISONERS FROM TALEBAN JAIL

KABUL: Emotions ran high yesterday in a Kabul neighborhood where a Taliban suicide bomber struck a French restaurant popular with expats, killing two people including a 12-year-old boy hit by flying shrapnel. Friday’s powerful bombing of Le Jardin, the second Taliban attack in Kabul in a week, reduced a building to smoldering rubble and left the residential neighborhood strewn with debris and wrecked cars. Shopkeeper Ahmed Massoud’s cousin, a guard at the Afghan-owned restaurant, was killed as the bomber detonated his suicide vest when he stopped to frisk him. The intensity of the blast blew out windows and left a 12-year-old Afghan boy dead on the doorstep of an adjacent grocery shop. “I saw a huge flame and was knocked unconscious for a few minutes,” said Massoud, 21, pointing at a pool of dried blood on the floor. “Everyone in this neighborhood knew this restaurant was a high-value target. And we paid a huge price for it.” His comment typifies what many in Afghanistan feel, seemingly trapped in a hopeless quagmire after 14 years of war, with civilians increasingly caught between the government and a resurgent Taliban. The Taliban, who vowed to safeguard lives of ordinary Afghans before launching their annual summer offensive last year, typically attack places with a high density of civilians.

The Taliban were unable to breach Le Jardin—a popular hangout for foreigners and wealthy Afghans—but the bombing at the entrance left the working-class neighborhood of Qala-e-Fathullah reeling in shock. “High-ranking officials came to the restaurant in their big cars with body guards in tow,” fumed 40-year-old taxi driver Mohammed Haidar. “The blast devastated my taxi, left my house badly damaged and my wife and daughter are injured. Now where should I go? If Le Jardin’s owner was here I would grab him by his collar and demand an answer.” The owner of Le Jardin, which sports a large garden festooned with rose bushes, is said to be Hamid Akram, the powerful governor of Kabul, who was not available for comment.

The bombing evokes painful memories of an attack in January 2014 on a Lebanese restaurant in Kabul that left 21 people dead. The raid on Taverna du Liban saw gunmen mowing down diners and staff, including 13 foreigners enjoying an evening out at a low-key social venue. The latest bombing comes despite a renewed international push to revive peace talks with the Taliban. President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday announced a first round of dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and China on January 11 to lay out a comprehensive roadmap for peace. Pakistan—the Taliban’s historic backers—hosted a milestone first round of talks in July but the negotiations stalled when the insurgents belatedly confirmed the death of longtime leader Mullah Omar.

Prisoners freed

In another development, Afghan Special Forces freed 59 prisoners from a Taliban jail in

Helmand, officials said yesterday, as government troops redouble their efforts to drive back the insurgents who have seized large parts of the volatile southern province. Islamist militants have launched a series of attacks in the capital, Kabul, in recent weeks and a tough fight is underway in key districts in the south, just as attempts have been made to revive a stalled peace process.

Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said 37 of the captives freed from the jail, which was just to the north of the Helmand provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, were soldiers. Another seven were policemen and the rest civilians. The operation to free the prisoners followed months of fighting in which the Taliban has seized several district centers in Helmand, a major centre of opium cultivation and one of its traditional strongholds.

Waziri dismissed suggestions that Helmand could fall to the Taliban entirely but said government forces faced a serious battle against insurgents who have grown in

strength since foreign troops ended most combat operations a year ago. “We have to accept that there is a fight going on in Afghanistan,” he told reporters in Kabul. The Helmand operation unfolded late on Friday night, just as a Taliban suicide bomber attacked a French restaurant in Kabul popular with foreigners and government officials, killing two people and wounding 18.

The Taliban claimed in a statement that “dozens of foreigners” had been killed or wounded, although the Islamist group often exaggerates casualty figures in attacks on foreign or government targets. That attack, and an all-night battle at a Spanish embassy guest house in Kabul last month, highlighted the Taliban’s strategy of seeking high-profile targets in the capital while at the same time stepping up its campaign to seize district centres in provinces such as Helmand. It is also a stark reminder of the difficulty Afghan officials face in their attempts to revive the stalled peace process, which broke down in July.—Agencies

PARAGUAYAN VILLAGERS HEAP SANDBAGS; FLOOD THREATENS

ALBERDI: Residents of a Paraguayan village that risks being submerged in floodwater were defying authorities’ calls to evacuate as a nearby dike threatened to burst, officials said. The Paraguay River bordering Argentina has broken its banks at various points in recent rainstorms, forcing 130,000 people from their homes. But in the southeastern village of Alberdi, many of the 10,000 locals were hunkering down rather than shipping out. Floodwater has transformed the village into an island. “The dike is leaking. Water is gushing out of it and our experts say there is a big risk that it will burst open like a tsunami,” the country’s emergencies minister Joaquin Roa said. “There is a wall of water heading south. We cannot wait any longer. We have to evacuate.”

Experts say the tropical extreme weather phenomenon known as El Nino and unseasonably hard rain are to blame for widespread flooding in South America in recent weeks. Floods have displaced 170,000 people overall in Paraguay, neighboring Brazil and Argentina, and Uruguay, officials say. At least 12 people have been killed by flooding in Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. Despite the risks, Alberdi’s mayor, Federico Centurio, said about 50 families were not heeding his calls for them to evacuate. “We are in the hands of God and the Virgin.”

Fearing a flood ‘tragedy’

Instead of fleeing, residents were piling up sandbags to protect their homes. “The inhabitants of Alberdi do not want to believe that the dike can collapse,”

Centurio said. “The speed of the water is striking. Added to that are the waves caused by big container boats that are constantly passing along the river. All of that is putting pressure on the dike.” One resident, shopkeeper Gabriela Gonzalez, reckoned however that “the authorities are exaggerating.” Disembarking from a boat in Alberdi with bags of merchandise, she said the water will not burst through the dike.

One of the soldiers helping evacuate villagers, Lieutenant Colonel Catalino Benitez, said they were meeting resistance among locals. “They tell us, ‘What happened in such-and-such a year was worse. That is their consolation,’” he said. “They don’t even like us to be here, although we have come to help.” Among those who did heed the warnings was Juana Vargas, who agreed to flee with her family across the river to the Argentine city of Formosa. “We have not had a good Christmas,” she said.

“We have children. They are playing in the mud. There are mosquitoes. It’s not safe to drink the water so they are getting sick,” she said. “I’m afraid there’ll be a flood in the night while we are sleeping.” Roa said that if the river kept rising, he would “be obliged to apply to state prosecutors to order the use of force” to evacuate residents. “If the dike breaks during the night, there will be a tragedy.” El Nino strikes every few years, associated with a sustained period of warming in the central and eastern tropical Pacific. Last month, the UN’s World Meteorological Organization warned the current El Nino was the worst in more than 15 years, and one of the strongest since 1950.—AFP



HEILONGJIANG: Novice soldiers run along a road during a test of military skills in Heihe in northeastern China's Heilongjiang province. China has created three new military units as part of reforms to modernize its military and improve its fighting capacity. —AP

CHINA RESTRUCTURES MILITARY XI EYES 'STRONG ARMY'

SHANGHAI: China has unveiled changes to the structure of its military, adding three new units, described by President Xi Jinping as "a major policy decision to realize the Chinese dream of a strong army", state media reported. The formation of the new units, which follows Beijing's announcement

The latest reforms announced late Friday will see a new army unit set up to oversee China's arsenal of strategic missiles. Besides the "Rocket Force", the PLA also unveiled an army general command to serve as the headquarters for land forces and a support unit to assist combat troops, the official Xinhua news

modern military before 2020 by cutting troops and improving the quality of combat personnel, Xinhua said. The announcements come with China also expanding its naval capacity by building a second aircraft carrier. The nation's first such vessel, the Liaoning, is a secondhand Soviet ship built more than 25 years

affect its international position and other countries' attitude toward China," it said in an editorial posted on its website yesterday. "With a strong army, China can be more politically appealing, influential and persuasive."

Beijing's forces have been involved in sometimes tense confrontations with Japanese and Philippine units over maritime disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea respectively, prompting fears that the disputes could result in armed clashes. The new PLA Rocket Force, meanwhile, is tasked with maintaining conventional and nuclear weaponry with the ability to both deter and strike, Xi told a ceremony for the founding of the three new organizations, according to Xinhua. But a spokesman for China's Ministry of Defense denied any shift in the country's nuclear weapons policy. "China's nuclear policy and nuclear strategy are consistent, there has been no change whatsoever," spokesman Yang Yujun said Friday, according to a transcript posted on the ministry's website.

The new unit would take over from the Second Artillery Force, he said. At a military parade in September, China showed off "carrier-killer" missiles, including the land-based DF-21D intermediate-range type which is thought to be equipped with onboard terminal guidance systems that give it the unprecedented ability to attack a moving target. A Chinese analyst said the latest moves were aimed at modernizing the military. "For a long time, China had no overseas interests, the navy, air force and guided missile units were relatively weak compared with the army," Ni Lexiong, a professor at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law said. "To catch up with European and American powers... China must raise the modernization level and combat strength of the army." —AFP



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping (front left) gives a military flag to Wei Fenghe, commander of the Rocket Force of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), and Wang Jiasheng (front right), political commissar of the Rocket Force, in Beijing. —AP

that it was building a second aircraft carrier, comes with China acting more aggressively in territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea, drawing the ire of its neighbors and the United States.

Beijing in November said it planned sweeping changes in a move intended to enhance the ruling Communist Party's control over the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

agency said.

Xi, who is chief of the Communist Party and also serves as head of the military, has previously announced plans to slash China's number of troops by 300,000 to roughly two million to craft a more efficient fighting force. China's Central Military Commission, which Xi chairs, on Friday also released guidelines to help build the country's vision of a

ago that was commissioned by China in 2012 after extensive refts.

'Influential and persuasive'

The Global Times newspaper, known for its nationalistic editorial stance, said new conditions required a strong army and cited the United States as a reason. "If China has a big gap with the US in terms of military prowess, this will

ANOTHER BOOKSELLER GOES MISSING IN HK

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong employee of a publishing firm known for producing books critical of the Chinese government has gone missing, his wife said, following the earlier apparent disappearance of four colleagues. It is the latest incident to fuel growing unease in Hong Kong at the erosion of freedoms in the semi-autonomous Chinese city, with fears that the five men may have been detained by Chinese authorities.

Lee Bo, the chief editor of a publisher which produces books on Chinese politics, was a colleague of the four others. A source said Lee, 65, was last seen in Hong Kong on Wednesday at the publisher's warehouse, which he is in charge of. Lee's wife Sophie Choi also said he was in Hong Kong Wednesday but went missing that night. "I started looking for him when he didn't come home for dinner that night at around 7 pm," Choi said. "He called me that night at around 10 pm to tell me that everything was all right," Choi said.

But she said the number from which Li was calling her did not belong to him and originated from the neighboring mainland Chinese city of Shenzhen. Choi said she reported the case to Hong Kong police on Friday. Police said the incident had been listed as a "missing persons" case. "It is a very difficult time for me... I'm not sure what has happened, these are not things that normal people know about," Choi said. The source said that Lee was last seen in the publisher's warehouse in Hong Kong at 5pm on December 30th. "Apparently he met some-

body and subsequently disappeared. This is very shocking if it is true."

Hong Kong was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 under a "One Country, Two Systems" arrangement. It enjoys liberties not seen on the mainland, including freedom of the press and publication, but there are fears these are under threat. When the four other publishers disappeared last autumn Lee had said he was a shareholder in the Mighty Current publishing company. "I think (it has happened) probably because of publishing matters... political books banned on the mainland," he said at the time. The other men who went missing are Gui Minhai, a Swedish national and co-owner of the Mighty Current publishing company. Local media said he failed to return from a holiday in Thailand in October.

The publishing company's general manager Lui Bo, an employee Cheung Jiping and bookstore manager Lam Wing-kei are also reportedly missing after disappearing in southern China in October. Rights groups had expressed concern at the previous disappearances, with Human Rights Watch saying there was a "concerted effort" by the mainland to prevent Chinese political books travelling from Hong Kong to China. Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian, who was due to release a dissident's book about Chinese President Xi Jinping, was reported to have been detained for almost three months in January 2014. In May 2014 Yao, then 73, was sentenced by a Chinese court to 10 years in jail for smuggling. —AFP



BEIJING: A couple and a child wait in the street of Beijing. Married couples in China will be allowed to have two children, after concerns over an ageing population and shrinking workforce ushered in an end to the country's controversial one-child policy. —AFP

CHINA'S NEW TWO-CHILD POLICY LAW TAKES EFFECT

BEIJING: Married couples in China (from Friday) will be allowed to have two children, after concerns over an ageing population and shrinking workforce ushered in an end to the country's controversial one-child policy. The change, which was announced in October by the ruling Communist Party, takes effect from January 1, 2016, Beijing's official Xinhua news agency reported over the weekend. The "one child policy", instituted in the late 1970s, restricted most couples to only a single offspring through a system of fines for violators and even forced abortions.

For years, authorities argued that it was a key contributor to China's economic boom and had prevented 400 million births. Rural families were allowed two children if the first was a girl, while ethnic minorities were allowed an extra offspring, leading some to dub it a "one-and-a-half child" policy. But it also led to heart-rending tales of loss for would-be parents, and prompted sex-selective abortions or

infanticide targeting girls because of a centuries-old social preference for boys. China's population—the world's largest at 1.37 billion—is now ageing rapidly and has severe gender imbalances, all while the country's workforce is shrinking.

Under the new law, married couples are now allowed to have a second child, but the legislation maintains limits on additional births. Around three million extra babies will be born each year over the next five years as a result, officials from the National Health and Family Planning Commission predicted at a briefing in November. This would add a total of about 30 million people to the labor force by 2050, officials said. Still, experts say the shift is likely too little, too late to address China's looming population crisis. Others warn that many Chinese couples do not want more children, particularly given the expense, and the effects of the change remain unclear. —AFP

KIM JONG-UN VOWS TO RAISE LIVING STANDARDS, WARNS 'PROVOCATEURS'

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un said raising living standards was his top priority in a low-key annual New Year's address on Friday that avoided any explicit reference to the country's nuclear weapons program. The 30-minute televised speech was not without the normal bellicose rhetoric-threatening a "sacred war" if provoked and stressing the need to develop "varied" military strike options-but the clear thrust was economic development in the isolated, cash-strapped state.

"The Workers Party of Korea gives top priority to the issue of improving people's living standards among millions of other national tasks," Kim said. "We must create a turnaround in economic development," he added. Kim has issued similar calls in his three previous New Year addresses and, as on those occasions, Friday's speech offered little in terms of specific policy for achieving his economic objectives. On relations with South Korea, Kim said he was open to talks but warned Seoul against any activity that might threaten a tentative cross-border agreement reached in August to reduce tensions. In particular, he stressed the provocative dangers inherent in the South's annual joint military exercises with the United States—a perennial thorn in North-South ties.

'Merciless, sacred war'

"If aggressors and provocateurs touch us even slightly, we will not hesitate to respond with a merciless sacred war for justice and national reunification," he said. His speech came a day after the state funeral of North Korea's top official in charge of relations with South Korea, Kim Yang-Gon, who state media reported as having died in a car accident on Tuesday. Kim had long been the North's point man on cross-border affairs, and his death was seen as a further setback to efforts to improve the always volatile relations between Seoul and Pyongyang.

Kim Jong-Un, wearing black-rimmed glasses and his trademark black Mao suit, delivered his speech from behind a lectern in a wood-paneled room in the ruling Workers' Party Central Committee Office Building in Pyongyang. No audience was shown although the address was regularly interrupted by what appeared to be canned applause. There was no mention of the nuclear arsenal or ballistic missile program that has made the North the target of multiple international sanctions over the years, although Kim did stress the need to "develop more varied means of military strikes". "The overall tone was quite low-key, and the emphasis was clearly on the economy, rather than political or military issues," said Yang Moo-Jin, a

professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

Looming party congress

"Possibly he wanted to avoid irritating China and others in the region ahead of the crucial party congress in May," Yang said. The Workers' Party congress will be the first of its kind for 35 years, and is expected to offer some clarity on the current leadership's policy direction. Since taking over power following the death of his father Kim Jong-Il in late 2011, Kim has prioritized economic development in a way that his father, with his "military first" policy, never did. In his very first public address, at a military parade in April 2012, Kim had said he was determined that North Koreans would "never have to tighten their belts again". He has relaxed some controls on farmers and state-run firms, and set up more than a dozen special economic zones.

And a closely monitored but tolerated grassroots capitalism, born out of a spirit of survivalist self-sufficiency that got many through the catastrophic failure of the state distribution system in the famine years of the mid-to-late 1990s, has given rise to a growing entrepreneurial class. While North Korea does not release official economic data, South Korea's central bank estimated its economy expanded 1.0 percent in 2014. —AFP

PHILIPPINE NEW YEAR MAYHEM KILLS TWO

MANILA: Stray bullets and exploding firecrackers have killed two and injured hundreds in the Philippines, authorities said, amid the country's traditional riotous New Year celebrations. A drunk man died after he embraced a giant firecracker, called "Goodbye Philippines", as it was about to explode, health secretary Janet Garin told reporters.

"His jaw was shattered. He was so intoxicated he hugged the Goodbye Philippines," Garin said, adding the man was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Eighty percent of the country's 100 million people are Catholic but Filipino superstition dictates making ear-shattering noises during New Year's Eve to ward off bad luck. Revelers set off firecrackers and shoot guns into the air to celebrate the December festive season. The health department listed 380 injuries due to fireworks and four others due to stray bullets.

In many hospitals across the country, firecracker victims rushed into emergency rooms grimacing in pain as they held their bloodied limbs. An eight-year-old boy in the northern

farming province of Nueva Vizcaya had three of his fingers amputated after a firecracker exploded in his hands, Garin said. At least nine children had their fingers amputated due to firecracker injuries, she said. In a Manila shantytown, a lit firecracker started a slum inferno, which quickly spread, fire bureau spokesman Renato Marcial said.

The blaze destroyed a cramped maze of wood and cardboard huts in the early hours of Friday, leaving 3,000 people homeless, city disaster officer Johnny Yu said. Panicked and weeping residents fled their burning homes carrying clothes and furniture while men, many of whom were drunk from a night of merrymaking, desperately tried to put out the fire with buckets of water, an AFP photographer at the scene saw. A 65-year-old woman died from a heart attack as she watched her house burn, Yu said. Many Filipino civilians keep licensed guns in their homes to protect themselves in a high-crime society and most firecrackers are legal and easily available. The 384 injuries recorded so far for 2015 are up from 354 in 2014. —AFP



Palestinians spend time at Gaza Port at sunset in Gaza City yesterday. — AP

BLAZE RAISES QUESTIONS ON SKYSCRAPER DESIGN

Continued from Page 1

An investigation blamed a discarded cigarette butt that fell on a pile of waste; the blaze swept through cladding panels on the tower.

The UAE revised its building safety code in 2013 to require that cladding on all new buildings over 15 m tall be fire-resistant. But the new rules do not apply to buildings erected before that year, and Barry noted that the vast majority of the country's skyscrapers fell out-

side the regulations; the Address Downtown was completed in 2008.

In an article published soon after last year's Torch fire, Barry Greenberg and Michael Kortbawi at UAE law firm Bin Shabib & Associates said the cost of replacing cladding on skyscrapers with safer materials would be "prohibitive". But they added that the cost of not acting could prove even larger. "Total loss of a supertall building - requiring demolition and replacement - is a distinct possibility in the event of a fire," they wrote. — Reuters

SAUDI ARABIA EXECUTES 47 ON TERROR CHARGES

Continued from Page 1

All those executed were Saudis, except for an Egyptian and a Chadian. Some were beheaded with a sword while others were shot by firing squad, said ministry spokesman Mansour Al-Turki. Executions have soared in the country since King Salman ascended the throne last January, with 153 people put to death in 2015, nearly twice as many as in 2014.

Saudi Arabia's top cleric Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh said the executions were carried out in line with Islamic law and the need to safeguard the kingdom's security. He described the executions as a "mercy to the prisoners" because it would save them from committing more evil acts and prevent chaos. Mustafa Alani, a security analyst close to the Interior Ministry, commented: "There is a huge popular pressure on the government to punish those people. It included all the leaders of Al-Qaeda, all the ones responsible for shedding blood. It sends a message."

Analysts have speculated that the execution of the four Shiites was partly to demonstrate to Saudi Arabia's majority Sunni Muslims that the government did not differentiate between political violence committed by members of the two sects. That point appeared to be bolstered by the state-affiliated Al Arabiya channel, which throughout yesterday showed graphics comparing Nimr and Shuwail, describing them both as "inciters".

Yesterday's executions were condemned by Iran and Iraq as well as the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, and drew protest calls. "The Saudi government supports terrorist movements and extremists, but confronts domestic critics with oppression and execution," said Hossein Jaber Ansari, spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry. It will "pay a high price for following these policies," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying. Turki described Iran's reaction as "irresponsible". "We are completely confident with what we're doing and we believe in it and do not care how others view our procedures, whether on justice or implementation of sentences," he said. Tehran ally Hezbollah denounced Nimr's execution as a "heinous crime". Saudi justice ministry spokesman Mansur Al-Qafari said "interference in the kingdom's judiciary is unacceptable".

Rights groups have repeatedly raised concern about the fairness of trials in Saudi Arabia, where murder, drug

trafficking, armed robbery, rape and apostasy are all punishable by death. Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa director Philip Luther told AFP the kingdom was using "the guise of counter-terrorism" to clamp down on dissent. The trials "were politicized on the one hand and grossly unfair, because the international standards for fair trial were grossly flouted".

Iran's Basij student militia, connected to the country's elite Revolutionary Guards, called for a demonstration yesterday outside the Saudi embassy in Tehran. In Saudi ally Bahrain, police used tear gas to disperse dozens of youths from the majority Shiite population protesting the executions. And prominent Iraqi Shiite lawmaker Khalaf Abdelsamad called for the closure of Riyadh's embassy and urged the government to expel its ambassador. "The execution of Sheikh Al-Nimr will have serious consequences and bring about the end of the Al-Saud (royal family's) rule," his office said.

In Yemen, where the kingdom is leading a coalition against Shiite rebels, the religious scholars association controlled by them condemned the execution. Reactions will not be limited to "angry protests; they will turn into a sweeping revolution," said the statement published on the rebels' sabanews.net website. Nimr's brother said he had hoped that "wisdom and a political solution" would prevail to spare the cleric's life. And he warned that his execution could trigger "negative reactions" inside and outside Saudi Arabia. "But we hope for peaceful reactions". The Bahraini government and the United Arab Emirates voiced support for the conservative kingdom, saying the executions were necessary to confront extremism.

Nimr was arrested in 2012, three years after calling for Eastern Province's Shiite-populated Qatif and Al-Ihsaa governorates to be separated from Saudi Arabia and united with Bahrain. The interior ministry had described him at the time of his arrest as an "instigator of sedition". A video on YouTube in 2012 showed Nimr making a speech celebrating the 2012 death of then-interior minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz. "Let the worms eat him," Nimr had said, while also criticizing the rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The anti-government protests that erupted in eastern Saudi Arabia five years ago coincided with a Shiite-led protest movement in Bahrain that was later crushed with help from Saudi troops. — Agencies

COALITION ANNOUNCES END OF YEMEN TRUCE

Continued from Page 1

Fighting has escalated in Yemen since the coalition entered the war to support President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's internationally recognized government in March. The UN Security Council last month urged Yemen's warring parties to respect the ceasefire and to resume their inconclusive peace talks. The truce was declared as talks between the government and rebel representatives opened in Switzerland, and it was later extended by a week.

But the fighting never stopped on the ground and

coalition air strikes continued, while the talks ended with no major breakthrough six days after they had started, with both sides saying they would meet again in January. In May, a five-day pause in fighting proposed by Saudi Arabia allowed some aid into Yemen before the coalition resumed air strikes, blaming the rebels and their allies for violating the ceasefire. The rebels seized Sanaa in Sept 2014 and then advanced south to second city Aden, forcing Hadi to flee last year to Saudi Arabia. Following territorial gains by loyalists, Hadi returned to Aden in November after six months in exile. — AFP

POLICE HUNT FOR GUNMAN AFTER TEL AVIV...

Continued from Page 1

Rosenfeld said there was a "strong possibility that this was a terrorist attack but we haven't ruled out criminal motives". He did not elaborate. Members of his family told media Melhem had been suffering mental issues, and had been imprisoned for attacking an Israeli soldier in what he said was an attempt at revenge over the death of a relative shot by police in 2006. Security camera footage from a nearby store showed a bespectacled young man with a backpack calmly pretending to shop before going to the exit, placing the backpack on a trolley, removing what looked like a submachine gun and opening fire in the street.

One of those killed was identified by his father as Alon Bakal, a law and business student who was a manager at Simta, the pub that was targeted. Police named the second fatality as Shimon Ruimi from southern Israel. They issued a gag order on the investigation, as well as the one into the death of an Arab Israeli taxi driver found shot in north Tel Aviv a short while after the shooting rampage. They have refused to say whether the attacks were linked.

In a recording released a week ago and attributed to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the secretive IS leader pledged to attack Israel. Baghdadi said IS has "not forgotten Palestine for a single moment". "And soon, soon with God's permission, you will hear the footsteps of the mujahedeen... We are getting closer to you day by day," he said. — AFP

7 KILLED IN INDIA AIRBASE ATTACK

Continued from Page 1

Security officials only confirmed that four attackers had died. An Indian army source said "at least three security personnel have died" in the incident, with at least three others injured, adding that officers were still combing the base for residual explosives. Modi, on a visit to the southern city of Mysore, responded to the attack on Twitter yesterday evening. "Enemies of humanity who can't see India progress, such elements attacked in Pathankot but our security forces did not let them succeed," he tweeted.

Pakistan also moved to condemn the attack, and voiced optimism over continued dialogue with its long-time foe. "Building on the goodwill created during the recent high-level contacts between the two countries, Pakistan remains committed to partner with India... to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism afflicting our region," Islamabad's foreign ministry spokesman said.

The Pathankot air base houses dozens of fighter jets and is important for its strategic location about 50 km from the Pakistan border. "They are from Jaish, Jaish has claimed responsibility," Indian army Lieutenant General Satish Dua told reporters of the attackers. AFP was not able to verify the alleged claim of responsibility. Jaish-e-Mohammed,

which is banned in Pakistan, fights against Indian rule in the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir, where a separatist conflict has claimed up to 100,000 lives.

While Punjab has largely been spared such violence, however, it has not been immune. In July, three gunmen said to be Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba militants killed seven people, including four policemen, in an attack in the Sikh-majority state. Modi's Dec 25 visit to the Pakistani city of Lahore to meet his counterpart Nawaz Sharif indicated a potential thaw in tensions, and the foreign secretaries of both countries are to meet in Islamabad this month. Pakistan opposition senator Sherry Rehman said the attack must not disrupt the planned dialogue. "#Pathankot is about derailing peace. Don't let terror define our agenda. Pak-India talks must go on."

But Modi's friendly outreach to Pakistan had prompted critics to warn of retaliation by militants. "Our prime minister visited and after that the terrorists came here. They want friendship with Pakistan but look what they are doing to us," said Ashok Kumar, 52, a shopkeeper in Pathankot. A protest broke out on the road leading to Pathankot base in the early afternoon as angry residents burned effigies apparently intended to resemble Pakistani militants, an AFP journalist said. — AFP

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Focus

BAGA A GHOST TOWN A YEAR AFTER BOKO HARAM MASSACRE

By Aminu Abubakar

One year after a massive attack ranked among the worst in Boko Haram's six-year insurgency, the residents of Baga in northeast Nigeria say their home is a ghost town. The militants razed the fishing hub on the shores of Lake Chad in a four-day assault beginning Jan 3 last year, forcing thousands from their homes and killing hundreds of others. Unlike other Boko Haram attacks, which often go virtually unnoticed outside Nigeria, the Baga massacre made headlines around the world after it was reported 2,000 people lost their lives in the raid and Amnesty International released satellite images showing the ravaged town.

With its charred houses and shuttered businesses, it is hard to believe Baga used to be a lively trading centre of 200,000 people, where merchants would travel to sell cattle, leather goods and trade fresh produce. "Baga is still deserted, we are all living in camps and homes of friends and relatives in Maiduguri because we are scared of returning home," Muhammad Alhaji Bakar, a displaced Baga resident, told AFP.

The Nigerian military reclaimed Baga in March and troops patrol its dusty streets today. But the town's enduring emptiness - under 1,000 people are living there now - highlights how difficult it is to get people back home and restore peace to the battered northeast region. In June, destitute residents of Baga and surrounding villages started trickling back to fish, encouraged by military victories winning territory back from the jihadists. The fisherman would sell their catch of catfish and African bonytongue in the key northeast city of Maiduguri, the spiritual home of the insurgency and the restive capital of Borno state.

In the window of calm, about 5,000 residents returned to Baga. But the peace did not last long. In July, Boko Haram ambushed a lorry carrying people returning home, killing eight Baga residents. In the days that followed, the militants slit the throats of several fishermen and killed farmers who had returned to harvest their melons.

'We Can't Return'

The Nigerian army and forces from neighboring countries, have over the past year been able to flush Boko Haram out from captured towns, but is not able to stop the jihadists from regrouping in the surrounding villages and bush. Spurned not crushed, the militants had found cover near Baga in the little islands lined with tall grass that dot the freshwater lake. As Bakar Kori, head of the Baga's traders union, put it: "We can't return to Baga yet, it is still not safe, especially with Boko Haram lurking on nearby islands."

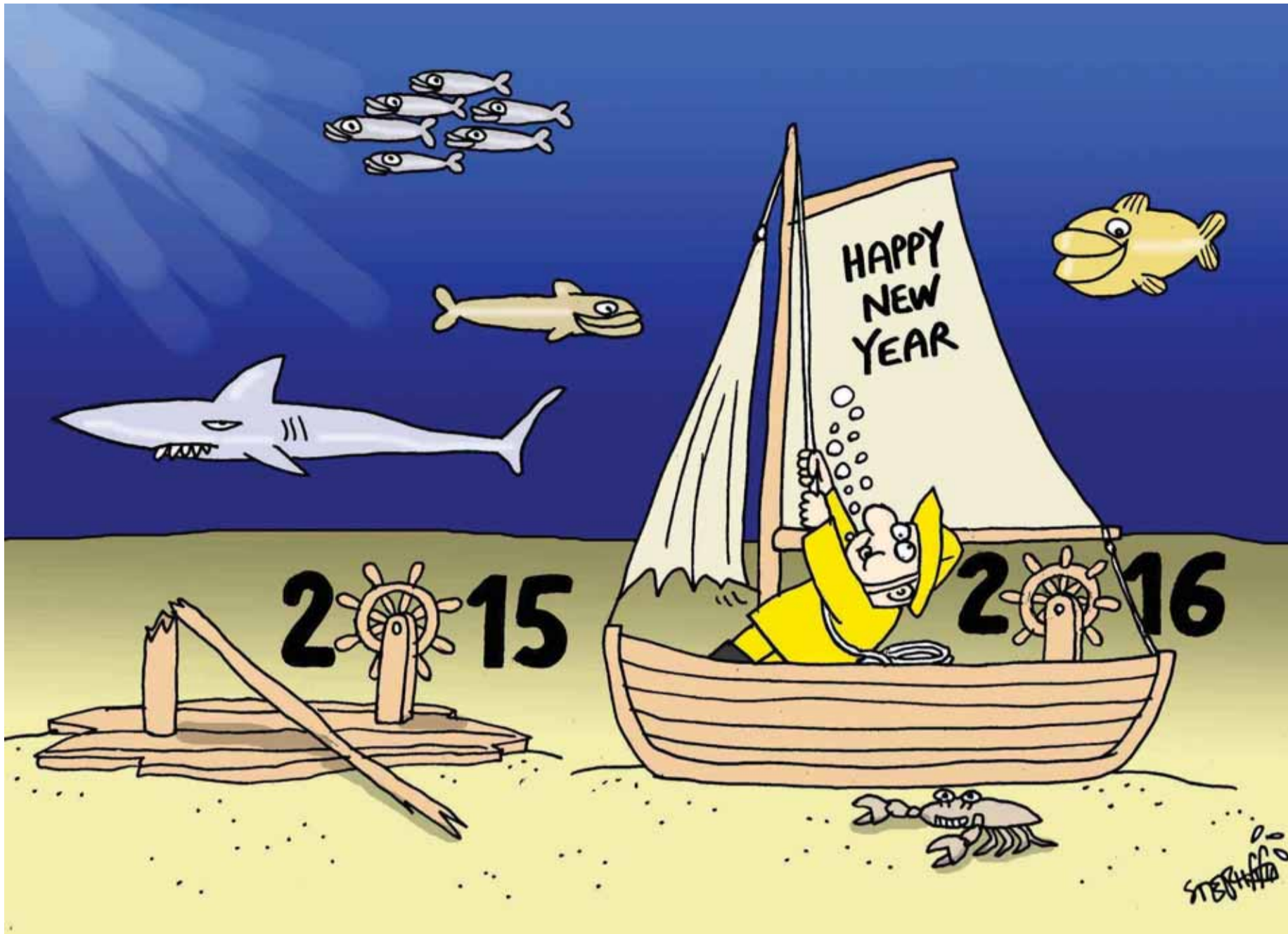
Today, an estimated 700 people are living in Baga, with the majority the town's former residents staying in Maiduguri. Its population has almost doubled from two million since 2009, when Boko Haram embarked on its bloody quest to establish an independent Islamic state in Nigeria. The extremist insurgency has forced over 2.5 million people - just over the population of Paris - living in the Lake Chad Basin to flee from their homes, according to a December report issued by USAID, a United States government humanitarian agency.

While the Nigerian government insists that Boko Haram has been "largely" defeated going into 2016, the jihadist group continues to wreak havoc by sending out suicide bombers, sometimes in droves. Last Sunday in an attack lasting 48 hours, the militants invaded Maiduguri unleashing "dozens" of suicide bombers, killing 22 people.

The Nigerian government has acknowledged the monumental task of getting displaced people like those in Baga back home, but has not yet given a concrete plan on how to tackle the issue. "There is still a lot of work to be done in the area of security," President Muhammad Buhari said in a New Year's statement. "This government will not consider the matter concluded until the terrorists have been completely routed and normalcy restored to all parts of the country."

Boko Haram's insurgency has killed 17,000 people in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, damaging millions of dollars of infrastructure at a time when the country is facing a cash crush as a result of the plunging price of oil. —AFP

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Washington Watch

THE 'NEW NORMAL'

By Dr James J Zogby

The twin conflicts raging in Iraq and Syria have unleashed an unsettling dynamic that is transforming both the Middle East and the world beyond this deeply troubled region. What is clear is that there is no end in sight to either of these conflicts and that the consequences of the continuing fighting are so profound that there is no simple solution that will, any time soon, restore normalcy to either country or to the broader region. As difficult as it may be to ingest, it is imperative to recognize that a "new normal" has been created which policy makers must recognize and to which they must respond accordingly.

Even before the advent of ISIS, Iraq had already experienced massive population transfers that occurred during the civil war that followed America's foolish invasion and occupation of the country. A Shia-led sectarian government had been ushered in by the US, giving Iran new influence over Iraqi affairs. Sunni and Shia neighborhoods had been largely "ethnically cleansed". Minority communities had been removed from ancestral homes. And the Kurdish controlled region had been given all but formal independence over its internal and external affairs. Meanwhile the disenfranchised Sunni Arab population had become so marginalized and embittered by the behavior of the Shia-led government that many felt prey to the lure of the extremist militias.

At the peak of the conflict, one-fifth of Iraq's population had become either refugees or internally displaced persons (IPD). Since then, some Iraqis have returned to their country though not to their homes, but recent fighting has created a new wave of both refugees and IDPs. At present, about one half million Iraqis are registered as refugees, while almost four million are IDPs. It was a massive and prolonged drought that first displaced large segments of Syria's population. It was this displacement and the mishandling of it by the corrupt and brutal regime in Damascus that precipitated that country's now four-year long war. Like Iraq, Syria's war has become a sectarian conflict.

At last count, one-half of Syria's population have become refugees or IDPs, with over four million having left the country and nearly eight million displaced within Syria. More than two million have fled to Turkey, more than one million are in Lebanon, and about three-quarters of a million are in Jordan.

While most of these Syrians are housed in camps in Turkey and Jordan, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have settled in Turkey's larger cities where they have opened businesses and are attempting to create a new life for their families. In addition, the fighting in Syria

has unsettled the Kurdish regions of both Syria and Turkey. Kurdish victories against ISIS in Syria have provoked the Turkish government which has long opposed any moves toward Kurdish independence. This has spawned increased repression against Turkey's Kurds. This conflict has created new refugees and IDPs.

The situation in Lebanon is quite different. Because that country did not authorize the creation of formal camps, the Syrians who flooded across Lebanon's borders have spread out across the country renting apartments or setting up informal structures. They have found work and are sending their children to school. The pressures on tiny Lebanon have become enormous - straining the country's capacity and its infrastructure to its limit. Schools are overcrowded, medical services and social services are in short supply, as are water and electricity. In addition, Lebanon's population, at first receptive to the influx of their neighbors fleeing war, have become resentful as they have witnessed increases in prices for basic commodities, housing shortages, and dramatic increases in Lebanese unemployment and poverty.

So unbearable has the situation become for Syrians and Iraqis fleeing their countries' conflicts that many have sought to make their way to Europe. They have joined Afghans, Palestinians, and Libyans and other Africans who have risked all attempting to reach Europe, by land or sea, in order to start a new life. This flow of humanity has grown into a massive wave with best estimates putting the number of refugees in Europe at one million and growing each month.

In addition to this migration of refugees northward has been a steady southward flow of thousands of alienated and radicalized Europeans seeking to join the extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. Nativists have sought to conflate the two population flows in an effort to buttress their anti-immigrant/Muslim campaign resulting in the growth of right-wing xenophobic movements across the continent.

New Realities

All too often, when refugee crises occur, they are seen as short-term problems requiring temporary solutions. However, all signs point to the fact that this will not be the case with regard to Syria and Iraq. These crises will not end any time soon and the new realities that have been created are not easily reversible and will only grow as the conflicts continue.

Syria and Iraq will not return to the status quo ante. If peace is restored in either country, they will, at best, be imperfect and tentative arrangements. ISIS must be defeated, but there are dozens of other armed sectarian gangs that are currently the dominant

forces on the ground in several parts of both countries that will not be inclined to support the emergence of a tolerant, welcoming pluralistic social and political order. In the best case scenario, Iraq and Syria will remain divided countries. It will take decades to reconstruct their infrastructures and economies and even longer to build inter-communal trust and social cohesion.

As difficult as it will be for the neighboring countries to accept, the bulk of refugees currently in their midst will remain. Tens of thousands of Syrians and Iraqis are being born each year in these countries and hundreds of thousands of children are growing up knowing no home but those they have found in exile. Lebanon and Jordan, for example, will need to accommodate themselves to the long-term, and even permanent presence of Syrian communities within their nations. And Turkey is going to have to come to grips with long-repressed Kurdish aspirations for self-determination.

Europe, too, must deal with the reality of this "new normal". The refugees who are within their borders are not going to disappear and despite the ranting of European nativists it will neither be possible to stop the flow of new refugees coming across their borders or to "put them on trains and send them back".

Europe will also need to recognize that it is not migration that breeds extremism, it is the failure of many countries to fully incorporate immigrants as productive equal citizens in their societies. Persistent discrimination and unemployment are the drivers that breed the alienation that makes young European, immigrants susceptible to the lure of radical ideologies. This problem will only be exacerbated by the rightward drift of some European governments.

It is important that international coalitions have formed to defeat ISIS and to find political solutions to Iraq and Syria. But as President Obama has proposed, the United Nations should also convene an emergency summit to address the challenges that have been created by the refugee crisis. In addition to addressing the material needs of the refugees, attention must be paid to the material and political needs of the host countries to assist them in adapting to the pressures resulting from the "new normal". With or without peace, the refugee flows have created new realities that are changing the demographic maps of the Middle East and Europe. The sooner we recognize and address the requirements of accommodating ourselves to these new realities the better it will be for the refugees and for their host countries.

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

COSBY FACES FINANCIAL THREAT FROM LAWSUITS

By David Ingram, Noeleen Walder and John McCrank

Civil lawsuits accusing Bill Cosby of sex abuse and defamation could do major damage to the entertainer's wealth, regardless of how a criminal prosecution plays out, lawyers who have handled similar cases said on Thursday. Cosby, who has been accused by more than 50 women of sexually abusing them in incidents dating back decades, was charged in suburban Philadelphia on Wednesday in the only criminal case he has faced. The actor and comedian is charged with aggravated indecent assault against one of the women, a second-degree felony carrying a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

The financial assets of the entertainer, who personified the model American family man in a long-running hit television show, are more at risk from at least seven ongoing civil suits that have been filed or joined by 13 women. Cosby, 78, has denied the criminal and civil allegations. He has sued some of his accusers for defamation, and his lawyers have questioned their motives, suggesting they are after money.

A loss in the civil litigation could be very costly for Cosby, whose career made him one of the wealthiest people in the US entertainment industry, several plaintiffs lawyers not involved in the suits said. Jury awards in cases where a person has claimed sex abuse or defamation can run into the tens of millions of dollars, not including his legal fees. "This is going to be enormously expensive for Cosby," said Paul Callan, a New York lawyer who successfully represented the estate of retired

American football player O J Simpson's ex-wife in a civil case after Simpson was acquitted in her killing.

Particularly Vulnerable

In a statement on Wednesday, a lawyer for Cosby, Monique Pressley, denounced the charges as unjustified and said Cosby would be exonerated. A spokesman for Cosby declined to comment on Thursday. The allegations against Cosby - with so many accusers claiming they were drugged before he allegedly sexually assaulted them - mean he is particularly vulnerable to civil punitive damages, the lawyers said. Punitive awards are meant to punish and deter a defendant, while compensatory awards cover actual costs of plaintiffs.

Various media estimates have put Cosby's net worth at between \$380 million and \$450 million in recent years. His ability to pay is likely to be a factor in a civil award or settlement, lawyers said. "Any jury assessing this starts with, what amount of money punishes him given his net worth?" said Brad Edwards, a Florida lawyer who represents sex abuse plaintiffs. "Even if you said \$20 million, you're talking about a fraction of his net worth," he added, so a jury could go even higher in determining a punitive award.

Big US jury awards have to survive review by judges. Some states cap awards, and a punitive award generally must be less than 10 times the compensatory award. In court papers filed on Dec 14 in one suit, Cosby's

lawyers said women suing Cosby in Massachusetts are "engaged in a campaign to assassinate Mr Cosby's reputation and character" in order to "extract financial gain."

Lower Standard of Proof

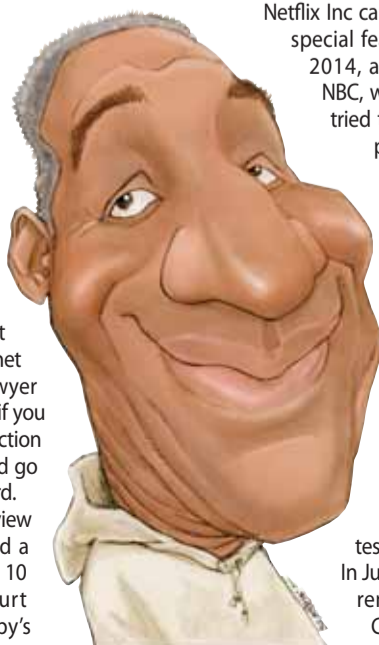
The mounting allegations harmed Cosby's finances long before the criminal charge this week. Television networks have pulled reruns of the once wildly successful sitcom "The Cosby Show", streaming video service Netflix Inc canceled a planned special featuring Cosby in 2014, and the network NBC, which Cosby once tried to buy in 1992 as part of a group of investors, canceled plans for a new television show featuring him.

Several stops on Cosby's early 2015 comedy tour, titled "Far From Finished", were canceled, while others attracted protesters and hecklers. In July, Walt Disney Co removed a bust of Cosby from its

Hollywood Studios theme park near Orlando, Florida. Two of the pending civil suits allege that Cosby abused women. They were filed in California. Five others filed in California, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania say Cosby defamed women by denying what they said publicly. One suit has seven plaintiffs.

Plaintiffs in civil suits have a lower standard of proof to meet than prosecutors do in criminal cases. If Cosby loses a defamation case it could be just as costly as the loss of a sex abuse case because a jury would see defamation as "revictimization", said John Manly, a California lawyer who represents sex abuse plaintiffs. "For a trial lawyer, it's a distinction without a difference," he said. Cosby could ask that the civil suits be put on hold pending a criminal trial, but judges might not agree, in part because Cosby counter-sued some accusers, said Edwards, the Florida lawyer.

In July, a New York jury rejected allegations by a woman that the chief executive of her former investment firm had assaulted her, but the jury still awarded her \$18 million after agreeing she had been sexually harassed, retaliated against and defamed. A win in the criminal case would not mean Cosby is off the hook. Manly, the California lawyer, said it could even add to public outrage and prompt a jury to award large damages. If his financial future were under serious threat from the civil cases, Cosby may not find that bankruptcy court offers much protection. Court judgments based on intentional actions do not get wiped away like other debts, the lawyers said. —Reuters



GARDE WON'T QUIT IF VILLA GO DOWN

LONDON: Aston Villa manager Remi Garde insists he won't quit even if his struggling side are relegated from the Premier League. Villa are rooted to the bottom of the table as they prepare to face fellow strugglers Sunderland. They are 11 points from safety thanks to an 18-match winless streak and Garde has overseen eight of the games during that miserable run, which has put Villa on course to drop out of the top flight for the first time since 1987. However, the former Lyon boss, who took over in November, says he is willing to stay to guide Villa out of the Championship if they are relegated because he is sure the club will still want him. "Yes - both answers are yes," Garde told reporters on Friday. "I have got a very good feeling in my mind. "In every football club there are some difficulties and problems. "Of course I thought we would have won earlier, but I knew when you come to a club that has played 11 and lost nine you don't expect to find everything going well. "If they are, you do not get the call to come in. "I knew it would be difficult but now I am full of confidence." — AFP



MANNING SET FOR BACKUP ROLE IN SEASON FINALE

DENVER: Peyton Manning was expected to be backup quarterback for the Denver Broncos in their regular season finale against the San Diego Chargers today after being listed as probable on Friday's injury report. The 39-year-old has been sidelined since Nov. 15 because of a torn plantar fascia in his left foot but looked close to full fitness after taking part in practice this week. Manning took reps with the second-string offense on Friday and helped run the scout team while starting quarterback Brock Osweiler ran the first team. "He was good, he practiced well," Broncos coach Gary Kubiak told reporters about Manning. "It was a good week. We move forward with this weekend." Manning, a 14-time Pro Bowl selection and five-time NFL MVP, had been struggling through a sub-par season with multiple injuries before his lengthy absence. He has thrown for just nine touchdowns in nine games to go along with a league-high 17 interceptions. Manning has not been active for Denver since he completed just 5-of-20 passes for 35 yards against the Kansas City Chiefs on Nov. 15 before being benched following his fourth interception.

AUCKLAND DRAW KIND FOR VENUS WILLIAMS

WELLINGTON: Former world number one Venus Williams begins fine-tuning for the Australian Open against a player barely half her age when the WTA Auckland Classic begins tomorrow. Williams, the defending Auckland champion, found herself on the right side of the draw released on Saturday with a first-round match against 18-year-old Russian Daria Kasatkina. The other former world number ones in the tournament, Ana Ivanovic from Serbia and Dane Caroline Wozniacki, are both in the bottom half of the draw. Wozniacki, who lost to Williams in the final last year, will play big-hitting American Sloane Stephens in the first round with Ivanovic's opponent to be drawn from this weekend's qualifying tournament. Williams, who arrived in Auckland on the comeback trail last year and ranked 47th in the world, has since regained a place in the top 10 for the first time since 2011 and returns at number seven in the rankings. She turned professional in 1994, three years before the 75th-ranked Kasatkina was born. —AFP



TITANS, BROWNS LEAD RELUCTANT RACE TO TOP 2016 DRAFT PICK

NASHVILLE: With the teams trying to clamp down the final playoff spots today, the Tennessee Titans and Cleveland Browns find themselves at the other end of the NFL spectrum.

They lead the procession tumbling toward next year's No. 1 draft pick. The Titans and Browns are 3-12, and chances are one of them will wind up with the No. 1 pick overall in the 2016 NFL Draft. In the reluctant race to the bottom of the standings, they have a slight edge over San Diego, Dallas and San Francisco - all tied at 4-11.

That leaves some Titans and Browns fans in the peculiar position of rooting for a loss Sunday that would put their team in line for the top pick. Players and coaches have been saying it's about now, not next

year. "Obviously, you'd like to walk away a winner and feel good about yourself for all the hard work," Titans interim coach Mike Mularkey said. The Browns beat Tennessee 28-14 in Week 2, but head-to-head isn't the tiebreaker used to determine draft order. Instead, opponents' strength of schedule is key with the edge given to the team playing weaker competition. Playing in the AFC South where only Houston has as many as eight wins would give the Titans that tiebreaker if both teams lose Sunday.

Victories by Cleveland and Tennessee will certainly make things more complicated as the strength of schedule tiebreaker will be affected by nearly every game today. Both teams will be without their Heisman Trophy winning quarterbacks

because of injuries. Marcus Mariota will miss his second straight game with a sprained right knee, giving Zach Mettenberger the start today in Indianapolis (7-8). Mettenberger is winless in nine career starts, while the Titans haven't won in Indianapolis since 2007.

Johnny Manziel is out with a concussion, so Austin Davis will start for the Browns against Pittsburgh (9-6). Cleveland has beaten the Steelers only six times since 1999. When a team is 3-12, there are a lot of holes to fill. Here are some of the needs the Titans and Browns have entering the 2016 draft.

BROWNS

With coach Mike Pettine's future in doubt, the Browns go in a number of

directions with the No. 1 or No. 2 overall pick. Ohio State defensive end Joey Bosa, with his comparisons to J.J. Watt, would seem to fit into any defensive system. Bosa offers the added bonus of a built-in fan base with his Buckeye backers.

Manziel improved enough on the field to provide some hope, but he remains a headache off the field. If the Browns decide to add Manziel to list of former first-round QBs who didn't work out - see Brady Quinn and Brandon Weeden - they could be interested in making either Paxton Lynch of Memphis or Cal's Jared Goff their fourth quarterback drafted in the first round since 2007. If the Browns keep Manziel, they have enough needs that trading for extra picks could help. Then they could

only hope Dallas wants insurance for Tony Romo or another team refuses to wait for a quarterback. Depending on how far down the Browns traded, wide receiver Laquon Treadwell of Mississippi or linebackers like Notre Dame's Jaylon Smith or Louisville's James Burgess could be options.

LAST NO. 1 PICK

2000. Cleveland chose defensive end Courtney Brown.

TITANS

Mariota has filled Tennessee's need at quarterback. Now the Titans still need to fix an offensive line that couldn't keep him healthy despite drafting linemen with their first-round pick two of the past three years. That makes Laremy Tunsil of

Mississippi their best option if they wind up at No. 1.

Tennessee also has enough holes that a trade would be an appealing option, and any deal netting two first-round picks would be ideal. The Titans would love to add a player like Nashville native and Florida State cornerback Jalen Ramsey to bolster their secondary. Any deal that also netted Treadwell as the second part of that combo, giving Mariota another target, would be an attractive scenario. Running back also is a big need.

LAST NO. 1 PICK.

1978. The then-Houston Oilers traded with Tampa Bay for the right to draft running back Earl Campbell. —AP

NORTHAMPTON DOWN EXETER TO GET BACK ON TRACK WITH 8-3 WIN

LONDON: Northampton put their bid to win the English Premiership title back on course with an 8-3 win over Exeter in front of a record Franklin's Gardens crowd of 15,430. Saints hooker Mike Haywood scored the game's only try after 17 minutes before the encounter turned sloppy as rain lashed down in the second half.

JJ Hanrahan added a first-half penalty to put the hosts in command. Gareth Steenson scored three points for Exeter seven minutes from full-time, but they never threatened to complete the comeback as Northampton climbed up to fifth in the table.

Northampton director of rugby Jim Mallinder is set to meet England boss Eddie Jones next week to discuss his controversial approach for Saints assistant coach Alex King. Mallinder recently accused the English Rugby Football Union of making an unofficial approach for King and, speaking after Northampton's 8-3 win over Exeter on Friday, he said he still doesn't know any more about the move. Jones met with King before Christmas after identifying him as his potential attack coach, having

already adding scrum coach Ian Peel to his backroom staff following the appointments of Steve Borthwick and Paul Gustard. Mallinder said the club had still not had any contact from the RFU and added: "Eddie is coming back next week and coming into the club to see me for a chat, so hopefully I will know a bit more then."

Jones is also believed to be keen on naming Dylan Hartley as England captain, but Mallinder admitted the 29-year-old has a fight on his hands to win a starting place at Northampton after picking Mike Haywood ahead of him and then seeing the academy product score the only try of the game against Exeter in an impressive performance.

"Mike Haywood was a big call, to start him above Dylan - but again he showed what he can do," Mallinder said.

"Mikey, over the last few years, has played well for us. When we won the Premiership Mikey was a massive part of that and started when we won the final.

"We are absolutely delighted we have got two players like them and when Dylan came on he was excellent as well." — Agencies

MCCAW AWARDED NZ'S HIGHEST HONOUR

WELLINGTON: World Cup-winning captain Richie McCaw has been given his country's highest honour, being appointed to the Order of New Zealand (ONZ). McCaw, who turned 35 on Thursday, is just one of 19 members of the ONZ. It is restricted to 20 living people. He is the youngest member of the group with the majority having been former civic and business leaders, scientists or representatives from the arts.

"It's an incredible honour to receive the Order of New Zealand," McCaw said on Facebook. "To join the list of some truly great New Zealanders is exceptionally humbling." McCaw retired from rugby after leading the All Blacks to successive World Cup victories this year.

"The Order of New Zealand honour does not come with a title. I've never been comfortable with titles, it's not who I am," McCaw added. "I just see myself as an ordinary boy from Kurow who has been able to live a dream." The openside flanker retired

following a 14-year international career with a world record for test caps (148), victories (131) and as captain (110).

He was named world player of the year three times and is widely considered to be the best player to have represented the All Blacks. Meanwhile, Wales lock Jake Ball looks likely to miss most of the Six Nations championship due to a knee injury that may require surgery. "He's got a bit of a tear and he'll see a consultant to get an accurate view," Llanelli Scarlets head coach Wayne Pivac told the BBC on Wednesday. "With any luck it's just a rehab job." The injury will probably sideline the 24-year-old for 10 weeks, with Wales starting their Six Nations campaign against Ireland in Dublin on Feb. 7 and ending against Italy on March 19. Ball, whose family emigrated to Australia when he was a teenager, has 15 caps and last played for Wales in a 54-9 World Cup victory against Uruguay at the Millennium Stadium in September.—Reuters



PASADENA: Head coach David Shaw of the Stanford Cardinal holds up the Rose Bowl trophy after defeating the Iowa Hawkeyes 45-16 in the 102nd Rose Bowl Game on Friday at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. —AFP

STANFORD ROMPS TO VICTORY OVER IOWA IN ROSE BOWL

PASADENA: Stanford showed why it finished just outside the final four in the College Football Playoff and romped to a 45-16 victory over Iowa in the Rose Bowl on Friday. Christian McCaffrey caught a 75-yard touchdown pass on the opening snap and later returned a punt 66 yards for another score while setting the Rose Bowl record with 368 all-purpose yards, propelling the Cardinal to their second Rose Bowl win in three trips over the past four years.

In Friday's other bowl games, Ezekiel Elliott's four touchdowns led Ohio State to victory over Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl, Mississippi dominated early in beating Oklahoma State in the Sugar Bowl, Michigan's defense was outstanding against Florida to take out the Citrus Bowl, and Tennessee swept past Northwestern in the Outback Bowl.

Stanford quarterback Kevin Hogan passed for 223 yards and three TDs in his final game for the Cardinal, but it was McCaffrey who led the team to victory.

The running back, who finished second behind Alabama's Derrick Henry in the Heisman voting for college football's player of the season, left no doubt about his brilliance with one of the most dynamic performances in the 102-game history of the Rose Bowl. He had 172 yards rushing, 105 yards receiving and 91 on kick returns, putting an appropriate cap on the season in which he set the NCAA

record for all-purpose yards. McCaffrey also became the first player ever to rack up more than 100 yards rushing and 100 yards receiving in a Rose Bowl.

RECORD

It was the first trip in 25 years for the Hawkeyes (12-2), who followed up their 12-0 regular season with two postseason losses. Ohio State's Ezekiel Elliott ran for 149 yards and matched a Fiesta Bowl record with four touchdowns to lead the Buckeyes past Notre Dame 44-28.

Ohio State (12-1) rolled past the Fighting Irish (10-3), quick-hitting its way to one scoring drive after another and 496 total yards. Elliott was Ohio State's drive capper in the first half, scoring on three short runs. He turned into the show stopper in the second, leaving Notre Dame defenders flailing as he raced for a 47-yard score. The Fighting Irish had some good offensive moments behind DeShone Kizer, but couldn't keep up. Mississippi quarterback Chad Kelly threw for 302 yards and four touchdowns - three to Laquon Treadwell - to lead Ole Miss to a 48-20 win against Oklahoma State. Ole Miss (10-3) jumped out to a 34-6 lead by halftime. The highlight of that onslaught came late in the second quarter when left tackle ran in for a touchdown after a lateral pass from Kelly to a teammate who then threw downfield.

STRONG SEASON

Oklahoma State (10-3) lost its final three games after 10 straight wins. The Cowboys fell into a 41-6 hole midway through the third quarter and never mounted a legitimate challenge. Kelly's four touchdown passes and Treadwell's three touchdown catches tied Sugar Bowl records. Michigan beat Florida 41-7 in a Citrus Bowl that was billed as a clash of two strong defenses, but only one showed up.

Jake Rudock threw for 278 yards and three touchdowns but it was the defense of the Wolverines (10-3) that earned most credit, holding the Gators (10-4) to 28 total yards in the second half. Michigan (10-3) had three touchdown drives of at least 70 yards and finished with 503 yards of offense against a Florida defense that entered the game ranked sixth nationally. Leading by 10 at the half, Michigan scored on each of its first two possessions in the third quarter to take a 31-7 lead.

Tennessee capped a strong season by cruising past Northwestern 45-6. Joshua Dobbs threw for 166 yards and ran for two touchdowns, while Jalen Hurd ran for 130 yards and one touchdown for the Volunteers (9-4). They finished with at least nine wins for the first time since 2007.

Northwestern (10-3) failed in a bid to finish with a school-record 11 victories. — AP



ROSARIO: The Dakar Rally director Etienne Lavigne (L) speaks with the youngest driver of the history of the Dakar Rally, US Gordini's Sheldon Creed during a briefing before a prologue of the Dakar 2016 between Buenos Aires and Rosario, in Rosario, Argentina, yesterday. — AFP

DJOKOVIC BEGINS 2016 SEASON IN QATAR

DOHA: Six weeks after completing one of the greatest seasons in tennis history, Novak Djokovic begins his 2016 campaign and warm-up for his Australian Open defence in Qatar. The Serbian, also current holder of Wimbledon and the US Open, heads a strong field at the Qatar Open starting in Doha tomorrow, which also includes Rafael Nadal, Tomas Berdych and defending champion David Ferrer. All eyes though, at least at the start, will be on Djokovic to see if he can maintain the exceptional heights he achieved last year and to gauge his form ahead of the first Grand Slam of the year, which begins in Melbourne on January 18.

The 28-year-old dominated men's tennis last year, all but sweeping away the

competition to take three majors, make 15 consecutive tour finals and win more than \$21 million (19 million euros) in prize money. He also became the third man to reach all four Grand Slam finals in a year, losing out only in the French Open to Stan Wawrinka. Given his achievements last season, Djokovic must be looking to become the first player since Rod Laver, in 1969, to win all four Grand Slams in a single season.

There is also the extra prize of a "fifth major" this season, with an Olympics gold medal up for grabs in Rio in August. "Here we come again to a new season," Djokovic said in an upbeat statement before arriving in Qatar on December 30.

"I'm so excited to come back and per-

form at my best in this season opening tournament, stay tuned!"

Last year though, Doha represented one of his rare failures. The big serving Croatian Ivo Karlovic beat him in three seats in the quarter-finals.

The other big story in Doha is Rafael Nadal. Now the world number five, Qatar should give some indication if the Spaniard is returning to form as he suggested he might be at the end of last season. Nadal said he's had a great pre-season training at home in Mallorca and told journalists in the UAE at the end of last month that he aims to be "very competitive" during 2016.

He is the number two seed in Doha and could barely do worse than he did 12

months ago when he crashed out in the first round, losing to Germany's Michael Berrer in three sets.

The previous year, Nadal, 29, had won in Qatar.

BIG PRIZE MONEY

This year's defending champion is Nadal's dogged compatriot David Ferrer, so he may feel himself a little unlucky to be seeded fourth. Ferrer beat the Czech Berdych, this year's number three seed, in straight sets in January 2015, one of five tournaments he won last year as the 33-year-old showed no signs of slowing down.

"I will be there to defend my title and I hope I will be able to do so," he said in a

statement released ahead of the tournament. Also playing this year are the world number 29 Andreas Seppi and Argentina's Leonardo Meyer, ranked 35.

The Qatar Open is played outdoors on a hard court and lasts from January 4-9.

Temperatures for the week are predicted to be around the low 20s Celsius, (high 60s, low 70s Fahrenheit).

Given the riches of Qatar, it is unsurprising that total prize money for the event is \$1,189,605, the largest purse for an ATP World Tour 250 event. The draw for the first round takes place on January 2. The tournament has been held since 1993 when a 25-year-old Boris Becker triumphed beating Goran Ivanisevic in the final in three sets. — AFP

TOUGH TENNIS ACT TO FOLLOW: CAN SERENA DOMINATE AGAIN?

BRISBANE: There may be no tougher act to follow in any sport in 2016 than Serena Williams' attempt to match her nearly perfect season of tennis last year.

Williams, who won the first three majors in 2015 and lost in the US Open semifinals - 26 consecutive wins in majors, just missing a calendar-year Grand Slam - will begin that attempt when she teams with Jack Sock for the American team at the Hopman Cup in Perth, Western Australia.

The Americans play their first match Monday against Ukraine. The tournament is part of the Australian Open Series that includes the Brisbane International, which begins today and includes defending champions Roger Federer and Maria Sharapova, and next week's Sydney International and Hobart International, culminating in the start of the Australian Open on Jan. 18 at Melbourne Park.

In between, Auckland, New Zealand will also host separate women's and men's tournaments over the next two weeks. This week, Shenzhen, China hosts a WTA tournament and Doha, Qatar (Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal are the headliners) and Chennai, India (with Stan Wawrinka) hold ATP events.

Last year, Williams began her 53-3, five-title season with a win over Sharapova in the Australian Open final. She followed that with a win on clay in the French Open and on grass at Wimbledon before losing in a shocking upset to Roberta Vinci in the US Open semifinals.

Williams and playing partner John Isner lost in the Hopman Cup final last year. Her singles opponent in Perth on Monday, Elina Svitolina, is winless in three matches against

Williams, who was named Associated Press female athlete of 2015. The Ukrainian, who will team with Alexandr Dolgoplov, says it's always best to try to get to Williams early in a match.

"Sometimes she starts slowly," Svitolina said. "It makes it really tough because you never know if she's going to serve an ace, or a double fault, or it's going to be a normal point."

HIGH-QUALITY MATCH

Andy Murray and Heather Watson, representing Britain, also play their opening match Monday against France's Caroline Garcia and Kenny De Schepper. The Hopman Cup begins today when the Australia Green team - Nick Kyrgios and Daria Gavrilova - play Germany's Sabine Lisicki and Alexander Zverev. In the other match, the Australia Gold team, featuring Lleyton Hewitt, who will retire after the Australian Open, and Jarmila Gajdosova, play Karolina Pliskova and Jiri Vesely of Czech Republic.

At Brisbane, top-seeded Federer and second-seeded Kei Nishikori are among those with first-round byes, while Sharapova will play fellow Russian Ekaterina Makarova in a replay of last year's Australian Open semifinal.

"For a first match, it's a pretty high-quality match against a pretty tough opponent," Sharapova said.

Sharapova and top-seeded Simona Halep are both in the top half of the Brisbane draw. Halep, after a first-round bye, could face two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, who plays a qualifier in the first round, in the second round. Garbine Muguruza is the No. 2 seed. Sharapova said the hot and humid weather in subtropical Brisbane is the perfect preparation for the often scorching conditions in Melbourne during the Australian Open.

"I started this event quite late in my career, but once I did I just felt it was the best preparation I could have going into the first Grand Slam," Sharapova said. Federer arrived in Brisbane yesterday. The 34-year-old Swiss, winner of a record 17 Grand Slams, won his last major at Wimbledon in 2012. Novak Djokovic won three Grand Slam titles last year while Federer's best efforts were reaching the Wimbledon and US Open finals.

"I've come so close, I've played very well, but I don't feel any frustration because of it," Federer said. "I'm still happy with how I'm playing. It was Novak's year ... " "But at the same time I don't feel sorry for myself. I've won so much throughout my career, I feel like if I keep pushing forward it might happen. If not, it's OK." — AP



FOXBORO: Tuukka Rask #40 of the Boston Bruins makes a save in the third period against Paul Byron #41 of the Montreal Canadiens during the 2016 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic at Gillette Stadium on Friday in Foxboro, Massachusetts. — AFP

CANADIENS SPOIL BOSTON'S OUTDOOR PARTY IN 5-1 ROUT

FOXBOROUGH: Boston native Mike Condon stopped 27 shots to lead the Montreal Canadiens to a 5-1 victory over the Boston Bruins on Friday in the Winter Classic at the home of the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots.

Paul Byron scored twice, and Brendan Gallagher returned from two broken fingers and had a goal and an assist for Montreal. David Desharnais and Max Pacioretty also scored for the Canadiens.

Tuukka Rask stopped 25 shots for the Bruins, and Matt Beleskey scored in the third period to avert the first shutout in Winter Classic history. The four-goal win was the largest for the event since it began in 2008.

Before a crowd of 67,246 on a cloudy day with the temperature for the opening faceoff at 40 degrees, the teams dodged the slushy ice that has greeted other Winter Classic events, including the old-timers and women's exhibitions on Thursday. Organizers compensated for the lack of snow in the Boston area so far this winter by spreading white, puffy fabric over the football field.

Both goalies paid tribute to the Patriots and quarterback Tom Brady on their masks, and coach Claude Julien worked the Bruins bench in a hoodie straight from the wardrobe of his NFL counterpart, Bill Belichick.

CANUCKS 2, DUCKS 1, SO

Alexandre Burrows scored in the first round of the shootout and Jacob Markstrom made 27

saves to help Vancouver beat Anaheim.

Burrows whipped a shot past Frederik Andersen, and then Markstrom stopped Ryan Kesler, Jakob Silfverberg and Corey Perry to end Anaheim's three-game win streak.

Christopher Tanev tied it with 9:36 left on a wrist shot from the blue line that slipped through traffic and past Andersen. Tanev had missed the previous two games with a foot

injury.

Kesler, a former Canuck, put Anaheim ahead 7:24 into the second period on a power play. Kesler was checked down by Matt Bartkowski while taking in a feed from Chris Stewart atop the crease but still tipped the puck in past Markstrom.

The Canucks won for the first time this season when trailing after two periods. — AP

NHL results/standings

Vancouver 2, Anaheim 1 (SO); Boston 1, Montreal 5															
Eastern Conference							Western Conference								
Atlantic Division							Pacific Division								
W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS		Dallas	28	8	3	137	98	59		
Montreal	22	15	3	116	99	47	St. Louis	23	13	4	100	96	50		
Florida	21	12	4	101	84	46	Chicago	22	13	4	108	97	48		
Boston	20	13	4	116	102	44	Minnesota	20	10	6	98	85	46		
Detroit	18	13	7	96	103	43	Nashville	18	13	7	101	101	43		
Ottawa	18	14	6	111	115	42	Colorado	18	17	3	109	106	39		
Tampa Bay	18	16	4	97	93	40	Winnipeg	17	18	2	99	109	36		
Toronto	14	15	7	95	102	35	Central Division								
Buffalo	15	19	4	88	101	34	Los Angeles	24	11	2	102	82	50		
Metropolitan Division							Arizona	18	16	3	104	118	39		
Washington	28	7	2	117	78	58	Vancouver	15	15	9	95	110	39		
NY Islanders	21	12	5	105	89	47	San Jose	18	16	2	100	102	38		
NY Rangers	21	13	4	112	100	46	Anaheim	15	15	7	69	89	37		
New Jersey	19	14	5	90	92	43	Calgary	17	18	2	97	121	36		
Pittsburgh	18	15	4	86	91	40	Edmonton	15	21	3	97	119	33		
Philadelphia	15	14	7	78	100	37	Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).								
Carolina	16	17	5	91	108	37									
Columbus	14	22	3	98	123	31									



ABU DHABI: Spanish player Rafael Nadal returns the ball to Canadian player Milos Raonic during the final match of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi yesterday. Nadal won the match 7-6, 6-3. — AFP

FEDERER LOOKS TO BRISBANE TITLE AS 2016 LAUNCH-PAD

BRISBANE: Roger Federer said yesterday he was looking at defending his Brisbane International title as a launch-pad to the new season. The 17-time Swiss grand slam champion arrived in Australia yesterday with today's Brisbane International tournament as his lead-up to this month's Australian Open in Melbourne.

Federer, 34, who won six titles including Brisbane last year and reached the final of both Wimbledon and the US Open, is up against world No.8 Kei Nishikori, No.14 Milos Raonic and No.28 Grigor Dimitrov in this year's Brisbane tournament.

"The likes of Nishikori, Raonic and Dimitrov want to move now finally into the top four or five and for us, the top guys, it's about hanging on where we are right now," Federer told reporters.

"I've been playing really well for over one and a half years - ever since I came back from my back problems in 2013. "That's been very encouraging and now I'm just more confident than I was maybe a year ago as well."

Federer won the last of his 17 grand slam crowns at Wimbledon in 2012 and he still believes he has another major title within him. Novak Djokovic dominated last year with three grand slam titles, and while the wait for an 18th slam title is stretching out, Federer said he was not overly concerned.

"I've come so close, I've played very well, but I don't feel any frustration because of it," he said. "I'm still happy with how I'm playing. It was Novak's year, he played so well there's only so

much (you can do) if somebody's so dominant and he's got sky-high confidence.

"It's unfortunate, a pity for me, but at the same time I don't feel sorry for myself. I've won so much throughout my career, I feel like if I keep pushing forward it might happen.

"If not, it's okay." It is Federer's third trip to the

Brisbane International and not only did he win last year's title but he joined rare company by picking up the 1000th match win of his ATP career in the process.

Federer has a bye into the second round this year where he is due to face either Australian wildcard Ben Mitchell or a qualifier. — AFP



ABU DHABI: Spanish David Ferrer returns the ball to Swiss Stan Wawrinka during their match for 3rd place at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi, yesterday.— AFP

WINDIES TAKE CONFIDENCE OUT OF TEST ROUTS: HOLDER

SYDNEY: The West Indies have gained some confidence out of their series loss to Australia and are looking to finish their underwhelming tour on a high in the final Sydney Test, captain Jason Holder said yesterday.

The eighth-ranked Windies were trounced in the first two Tests in Hobart and Melbourne with the Australians yet to be dismissed and conceding only 10 wickets in the thumpings.

The West Indies, who will be playing in their first Test at the Sydney Cricket

Ground in 15 years, symbolising their declining reputation, will be trying to prevent the Australians from sweeping the series and possibly returning to the top of the Test rankings.

Sunday's final Test will be the Windies' chance to show they have been improving on tour, although they have a scant winning chance against Steve Smith's team.

In a sign of the vast gulf between the two sides in this series, Australia have scored 131.30 runs per wicket loss to

the West Indies' 24.31. "We fought really well in the last two days of the last Test match and it gives us some confidence going into this one," Holder told reporters.

"It is important that we build on that and make sure we finish this Test match on a high." "It just shows what we can do when we actually stick it out," Holder said his bowlers needed to improve for the Sydney finale.

"We have basically leaked runs both sides of the wicket," he said. "We need

our bowlers to be a lot more disciplined. I have spoken about it from the first Test match and we got a little better in the second Test match but we are nowhere near where we are supposed to be.

"We need to be disciplined for longer periods of time and then you will see those attacking fields," Holder said an injury to Devendra Bishoo means the tourists have only one recognised spinner to take into the Sydney Test, while Australia will play two spinners in Nathan Lyon and Stephen O'Keefe for

the first time in a home Test in a decade at the SCG.

"We have been accustomed to a lot of spin in the Caribbean so hopefully our batsmen can get into that a lot better than we have during this series," Holder said.

"We are basically down to one spinner with Bishoo being unavailable for this Test match. So we just have to work with what we have. "I'm sure Kraigg (Brathwaite) might have to come in and bowl some more overs." —AFP

SMITH YET TO CONFIRM CONSULTING ROLE WITH SOUTH AFRICA TEAM

CAPE TOWN: Former South Africa captain Graeme Smith said yesterday an announcement on his rejoining the team in a consulting role to help boost confidence and impart ideas was premature and he was still considering the offer.

Smith worked with some of the under-pressure team's batsmen on the eve of the second test against England at Newlands after their 241-run defeat in the first test in Durban, where he had been critical of their form in his radio and television analysis.

"They are low on confidence," he said of South Africa's current batsmen, "and I was asked after Durban to come down and work with them.

"I've since been offered an extended role but it is something I need to consider as I already have commitments. The way it was announced was not right," he told BBC's Test Match Special, where the 34-year-old former test opener is serving as a pundit.

South Africa's test side are ranked top in the world but have not won in their last seven tests, hammered in India in

November and comprehensively beaten by England in Durban on Wednesday.

"I was trying to find a feel good factor as they are low on confidence," said Smith of his work on Friday. "If you are out of form you can spend too much time over-analysing and working yourself over mentally."

Smith said it was key South Africa's top six batsmen share the pressure.

"You've got to almost bat for the guy on the other end," he advised. South Africa captain Hashim Amla on Friday said Smith would be with the team for the rest of the four-test series, which his former skipper has since denied.

"He was a wonderful captain and he knows more than most guys how to play test cricket and how to deal with tough times," explained Amla at a media conference at Newlands on Friday.

"He had a few crushing defeats early in his career so he is well aware how important it is as a team to reassess and get back to form. That type of experience is invaluable and that's why we've tried to draw on it." — Reuters



CAPE TOWN: England's batsman Benjamin Stokes (C) plays a shot during the day one of the second Test match between England and South Africa at Newlands stadium yesterday in Cape Town, South Africa. —AFP

BEN STOKES ATTACKS TO GIVE ENGLAND THE EDGE

CAPE TOWN: Ben Stokes unleashed a flurry of attacking strokes late in the afternoon to give England the edge on the first day of the second Test against South Africa at Newlands yesterday. England were 317 for five at the close, with the left-handed Stokes on 74 not out.

An injury-depleted South African bowling attack, spearheaded by Kagiso Rabada, kept England in check for much of a hot, cloudless day on a batsman-friendly pitch.

Rabada, 20, playing in his first home Test, took three for 74. The match seemed evenly poised when Joe Root was dismissed for 50 by new cap Chris Morris. But Stokes and Jonny Bairstow (39 not out) put on an unbeaten 94 for the sixth wicket.

Stokes was particularly aggressive against the second new ball, hitting the first two deliveries from Morris for fours to post a 70-ball half-century. He hit two more fours and a single in the same over. By the close he had faced 93 balls and hit 11 fours and a six. "It was a great finish for us," said Hales. "The second new ball was going to be a key period for us and the way Stokesy and Jonny attacked them and took the game to them has probably given us the upper hand. It was evenly poised going into about the 70th over."

Hales said Stokes was the sort of player who got his teammates excited. "Stokesy is a maverick player. All the bowlers snoozing on the physio bed come out to watch him play."

FIERY FIRST SPELL

England opener Alex Hales, who made 60 and shared two half-century partnerships at the start of the day, was impressed by Rabada. "He

bowled really well. His first spell had really good pace and control. He's an attacking bowler who looks to bring the edges into play and he has a quick bouncer. He's got all the tools to be world-class." Rabada said bowling conditions had been tough. "It's a good cricketing wicket but the margin for error is small. I haven't been match bowling fit so it was a bit of a fight out there - but it went okay." But Rabada said he was comfortable having to play a senior role, with Morne Morkel being the only specialist bowler who had played in more than three Tests. "I don't feel any pressure at all," he said. "It's an opportunity to go and play, so I am going to try to make the most of it." Hales and Root hit half-centuries, while Nick Compton made 45 after England won the toss and made first use of a pitch with good bounce but minimal sideways movement.

Hales, playing in his second Test match, hit 60 — his maiden Test half-century-and shared stands of 55 with opening partner Alastair Cook and 74 for the second wicket with Compton.

Cook made 27 before edging Rabada low to third slip where Morris dived far to his left and held the ball centimetres above the ground. Compton was out in the last over before tea when he pulled a ball from Rabada and was well caught by a diving Temba Bavuma at midwicket. Rabada made it two wickets in two balls when he dismissed James Taylor with the first ball after tea but Root and Stokes put on 56 for the fifth wicket before Morris claimed his first wicket in Test cricket when Root edged an attempted cut to wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock. Fast bowlers Rabada and Morris were playing in place of Dale Steyn and Kyle Abbott, who suffered shoulder and hamstring injuries respectively during South Africa's 241-run defeat in the first Test in Durban.

Rabada and off-spinner Dane Piedt were both playing in their fourth Test match, leaving Morkel, in his 69th Test, as the only experienced member of the South African bowling attack. —AFP

SCOREBOARD

CAPE TOWN: Scoreboard at stumps on the first day in the second Test between South Africa and England yesterday in Cape Town, South Africa.

England 1st innings		Extras (b-10 lb-1 nb-4 w-7)	22
A. Cook c Morris b Rabada	27	Total (for 5 wickets, 87 overs)	317
A. Hales c de Villiers b M. Morkel	60	Fall of wickets: 1-55 A. Cook, 2-129 A. Hales, 3-167 N. Compton, 4-167 J. Taylor, 5-223 J. Root.	
N. Compton c Bavuma b Rabada	45	To bat: M. Ali, S. Broad, J. Anderson, S. Finn	
J. Root c de Kock b Morris	50	Bowling: M. Morkel 18-3-51-1 (w-1), C. Morris 22-3-99-1, K. Rabada 19-2-74-3 (nb-4 w-2), D. Piedt 21-5-63-0, S. van Zyl 5-0-12-0, D. Elgar 2-0-7-0.	
J. Taylor c de Kock b Rabada	0		
B. Stokes not out	74		
J. Bairstow not out	39		

PAKISTAN TO USE PINK BALL IN FIRST-CLASS FINAL

KARACHI: Pakistan will experiment with the pink ball in the final of its premier first-class cricket tournament in preparation for a possible day-night Test against Australia later this year, a cricket official said yesterday.

"We had experimented with the orange ball in the final of the trophy in 2011 and then with a pink ball in 2012 so the latest final will help us further assess the pink ball as Australia have offered us to play a day-night Test later this year," Pakistan Cricket Board's committee head Shakil Sheikh told AFP. Pakistan has already imported pink balls from Australia for the final. The Quaid-e-Azam trophy final between Pakistan Test captain Misbah-ul-Haq-led Sui Northern Gas Pipelines and Younis Khan-skipped United Bank will be played at the National stadium from Sunday. "We are ready to experiment at the highest level and this final will help the players and the board to consider the day-night Test offer, after which we will finalise our plans," added Sheikh. Australia and New Zealand played the first-ever day-night Test in Adelaide in November last year, an experiment initiated to lift waning interest in the five-day format of the game. The International Cricket Council termed the day-night Test a "success", while Cricket Australia announced a record-breaking crowd for non-Ashes Test matches at the

ground. The Pakistani Test players expected to participate in the match are: Mohammad Hafeez,

Azhar Ali, Umar Akmal, Mohammad Rizwan, Shan Masood, Wahab Riaz and Ehsan Adil. —AFP



KARACHI: In this photograph taken on January 1, 2016, cricketers from United Bank play with pink cricket balls during a practice session at the National Stadium in Karachi. Pakistan will experiment with the pink ball in the final of its premier first-class cricket tournament in preparation for a possible day-night Test against Australia later this year, a cricket official said. — AFP



NELSON: New Zealand's Kane Williamso bats against Sri Lanka in the fourth one-day international cricket match at Saxton Oval in Nelson, New Zealand, yesterday. —AP

ANDREWS SCORES 35, WASHINGTON BEAT NO. 25 UCLA 96-93 IN 2OT

SEATTLE: Andrew Andrews matched his career-high with 35 points, including five straight points midway through the second overtime, and Washington held on to beat No. 25 UCLA 96-93 in double overtime on Friday night in a game that featured 64 fouls.

Washington (9-4, 1-0) held on in the closing seconds of the second overtime to win the Pac-12 Conference opener for both schools on a night where the sounds of the officiating whistles dominated.

The teams combined to shoot 90 free throws and five players fouled out. UCLA (9-5, 0-1) forced both overtimes on 3-pointers by Bryce Alford. He hit the first with 7 seconds left in regulation to tie the game at 71 then hit another with 13 seconds left in the first overtime to pull the Bruins even at 83. Alford finished with 30 points despite missing his first 11 shots to start the game.

Washington had five players in double figures including 15 points from reserve Malik Dime, who scored eight straight for Washington midway through the second half when the Huskies were trying to hold their lead. Matisse Thybulle and David Crisp both



WASHINGTON: Washington guard Andrew Andrews reacts after making a three-point shot against UCLA during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game Friday, in Seattle. Washington won 96-93, in double overtime. — AP

had 13 points including key 3-pointers in each overtime. Crisp's 3-pointer with 38.8 seconds left in the second overtime gave the Huskies a 93-89 lead.

Thomas Welsh added 19 points for UCLA, but was on the bench with foul trouble for much of the game. Isaac Hamilton added 15 points and Tony Parker had 11. Andrews finally gave Washington a little space with a 3-pointer from the wing, and a steal and dunk for a 90-85 lead with 2:05 remaining. Two free throws from Alford and a putback by Welsh pulled the Bruins within 90-89, but Crisp's third 3-pointer pushed the lead to four.

Parker scored quickly for UCLA, but the Bruins had to foul. Murray missed both free throws with 16 seconds left but Hamilton's driving attempt to pull even bounced off the rim. Thybulle grabbed the rebound and was fouled, hitting one of two with 5.9 seconds remaining.

Washington learned its lesson, fouling Alford with 1.8 seconds left. He hit both - the second an accident when he was trying to purposely miss - and Andrews added two more free throws for the final margin.

UCLA rallied from six points down in the closing minutes of the second half, forcing overtime on Alford's fallaway 3-pointer with 7 seconds left. The Bruins scored the first three points of overtime but

Crisp's 3-pointer pulled Washington even at 74. The teams remained even until Alford's layup with 1:50 left for an 80-78 lead. Thybulle quickly answered with his 3 and UCLA missed three times around the basket on its next two possessions and was left to foul Andrews with 21 seconds left. Andrews hit both but Washington again failed to keep Alford from getting a look and his third 3-pointer with 13 seconds left tied the game at 83. Andrews had a look to win it, but his 17-footer rimmed out.

TIP-INS

UCLA: The Bruins lost its Pac-12 opener for the second straight season. Both were on the road. ... The Bruins were called for just nine fouls in their last game against McNeese State on Dec. 22. They were whistled for 15 in the first half on Friday.

Washington: Dime had a season-high 17 points in his last game against UC Santa Barbara. He's scored in double figures in three straight. Andrews scored 35 points last season against Washington State. — AP

BENITEZ SUPPORTS 'SERIOUS KID' RODRIGUEZ

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Rafael Benitez has backed star playmaker James Rodriguez after the Colombian was followed to the club's training ground by police accused of speeding at up to 200 kilometres an hour.

Madrid sports daily AS published photos and a video of an unmarked police car following the top scorer at the 2014 World Cup to the entrance of the club's Valdebebas training ground on Friday.

However, Benitez hinted Rodriguez will be involved when Madrid travel to Valencia in a crucial La Liga clash today. "Evidently, we are talking about a private matter. James is a good kid, he is serious, he has given us his explanations about what happened and there is no more to say," Benitez said yesterday.

"I repeat he is a serious kid and what we have to do is wait and see." The incident is just the latest off-field embarrassment for Madrid with striker Karim Benzema facing an official investigation in his native France for charges relating to a blackmail attempt on international teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

Benitez and Rodriguez haven't had the best relationship since the Spaniard took charge of Madrid six months ago with Rodriguez often showing his frustration at being substituted or even left out of the starting line-up. Rumours in recent weeks have even suggested that Benitez could be just one defeat away from the sack after a

run of three defeats in seven league games which has left them third in the table.

However, Benitez is confident he will remain in the Madrid hot seat with victory on his first return to Mestalla since winning two league titles as Valencia coach over a decade ago.

"I arrived at Real Madrid on a career path where I have won many titles and hired by the president, as I have said before, with an idea and a project and we need to give time to that project. The evaluations will be made at the end (of the season)," he added.

"I have full confidence that the team will win and you can continue to ask me these questions (about my future) in two or three years." Benitez will face a familiar foe in Valencia coach Gary Neville, who captained Manchester United during Benitez's time at Liverpool. Neville is looking for his first league win as Valencia boss at the fourth attempt after a 1-0 defeat to Villarreal on Thursday left his side 11 points adrift of their target of a top-four finish. Benitez is expected to get a warmer reception from the Valencia fans than he has in recent weeks from the Madrid faithful, but Neville wants to pile the pressure on his counterpart with another defeat. "I think it is right that the Valencia fans show their gratitude," he said. "But once the match starts we forget about gratitude. We have to win the game." — AFP

EVANS CUTS 10-MAN STOKE DOWN TO SIZE



WEST BROMWICH: Jonny Evans struck a scrappy injury-time winner as West Bromwich Albion ended Stoke City's run of good form with a 2-1 victory at The Hawthorns yesterday.

Stoke substitute Jon Walters looked to have rescued a point when he cancelled out Stephane Sessegnon's opener, but Geoff Cameron's 83rd-minute dismissal handed West Brom the initiative and they prevailed at the death.

Evans's goal, his first in the club's colours, gave manager Tony Pulis victory over his former club and saw West Brom close to within two points of Mark Hughes's Stoke, who remain 10th.

Stoke had won their two previous games, against Manchester United and Everton, in stylish fashion, but they were once again undone by their indiscipline against West Brom. They had fallen 1-0 to Pulis's men at the Britannia Stadium in August when both Ibrahim Afellay and Charlie Adam were sent off for the home side. Pulis made two changes here, Craig Gardner and Rickie Lambert replacing hamstring injury victims Jonas Olsson and

Victor Anichebe, and they made the early running through the unlikely figure of Evans.

The former Manchester United centre-back had a penalty claim turned down after appearing to be pushed in the back by Cameron and then just failed to get enough on a flick-on by Gareth McAuley.

Stoke, who were unchanged, came back into the game, with West Brom goalkeeper Boaz Myhill forced to parry a left-foot shot from Glen Johnson before fielding an under-hit effort by the out-of-sorts Marko Arnautovic.

But the best opportunity of the first half fell to West Brom captain Darren Fletcher, who shanked wastefully wide from 12 yards three minutes before half-time. There was a glimpse of Stoke's impressive recent form early in the second period, but after a neat exchange between Johnson, Arnautovic and Xherdan Shaqiri, the latter rolled a tame shot straight at Myhill.

Within minutes West Brom were ahead, Sessegnon firing high into the net from James Morrison's pass after Fletcher had recovered possession and surged upfield.

Stoke equalised in the 81st minute when Joselu crossed from the left with the outside of his right foot for fellow substitute Walters to head home.

But four minutes later Cameron was sent off for shoving Claudio Yacob to the ground after the ball had gone and Evans made West Brom's numerical advantage count when he stabbed in following a late corner. — AFP



MIAMI: Miami Heat forward Chris Bosh (1) drives past Dallas Mavericks forward Dwight Powell (7) in the second half of an NBA basketball game, Friday, in Miami. Miami won the game 106-82. — AP

WHITESIDE SCORES 25, HEAT ROLL PAST MAVERICKS 106-82

MIAMI: Hassan Whiteside had 25 points and 19 rebounds, Gerald Green added 19 points off the bench and the Miami Heat rolled past the Dallas Mavericks 106-82 on Friday night to snap a two-game slide. Chris Bosh scored 16 and Goran Dragic had 15 points and seven assists for the Heat. Miami adjusted its starting lineup shortly before tip-off when Dwyane Wade was stricken by flu-like symptoms. Wade got some intravenous fluids and checked in early in the second quarter, just his 10th time playing off the bench in his 13-year career. He finished with 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting. Whiteside made 12 of 16 shots, and the Heat enjoyed their biggest victory margin of the season. Dallas had 10 points in the first quarter - its low for any period this season - and shot just 36 percent for the game, compared to 56 percent for Miami. Zaza Pachulia led the Mavericks with 14 points and 13 rebounds. Dallas' four-game winning streak was snapped.

BULLS 108, KNICKS 81

Jimmy Butler scored 23 points, and Nikola Mirotic had 17 points and seven assists to help Chicago beat New York. Pau Gasol added 17 points and eight rebounds as the Bulls won for the fourth time in five games while avenging a blowout loss at New York on Dec. 19. Rookie reserve Bobby Portis had 16 points and 10 rebounds in his third consecutive game scoring in double figures. The Bulls blew a 17-point lead before pulling away from the Knicks in the fourth quarter. Carmelo Anthony scored 20 for New York, which has dropped five of six. Chicago played without Derrick Rose, who missed his second straight game due to right hamstring tendinitis.

RAPTORS 104, HORNETS 94

DeMar DeRozan had 23 points and Kyle Lowry added 18 points and 11 assists as Toronto rallied to beat Charlotte. It was the fourth double-double of the season for Lowry, who helped

the Raptors come back from a seven-point deficit entering the fourth quarter and average a 109-99 loss in Charlotte last month. DeMarre Carroll and Patrick Patterson both added 14 points for Toronto. Kemba Walker had 18 points for the Hornets.

WIZARDS 103, MAGIC 91

John Wall scored 24 points with 13 assists, Otto Porter had 20 points and 11 rebounds, and Washington extended its dominance of Orlando. The Wizards won their 11th straight game over the improving Magic, who entered with a 13-5 record since Nov. 25, best in the Eastern Conference. Wall had 12 points in the fourth quarter and Kris Humphries scored 11, all in the final period. Humphries' jumper with 7:38 to play started the Wizards on a 15-3 run that gave them a 93-81 lead with 3:51 left. Victor Oladipo

led Orlando with 20 points.

LAKERS 93, 76ERS 84

Lou Williams scored 12 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter against his former team and Jordan Clarkson added 19, leading Los Angeles over Philadelphia. Rookie forward Larry Nance Jr. had a season-high 14 rebounds and eight points for the Lakers on his 23rd birthday while playing on a tender right ankle. Julius Randle scored 15 off the bench for Los Angeles in a matchup between teams with the NBA's two worst records. Kobe Bryant didn't play for the Lakers (7-27) against his hometown team because of a sore right shoulder. Nerlens Noel had 15 points and 12 rebounds for the Sixers (3-32), who tied an NBA record with their 0-18 start before beating the Lakers on Dec. 1 at Philadelphia. — AP

NBA Results/Standings

LA Lakers 93, Philadelphia 84; Miami 106, Dallas 82; Toronto 104, Charlotte 94; Chicago 108, New York 81; ashington 103, Orlando 91.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
Atlantic Division					Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB	Oklahoma City	23	10	.697	—
Toronto	21	13	.618	—	Utah	14	17	.452	8
Boston	18	14	.563	2	Portland	14	21	.400	10
New York	15	19	.441	6	Denver	12	21	.364	11
Brooklyn	9	23	.281	11	Minnesota	12	21	.364	11
Philadelphia	3	32	.086	18.5	Pacific Division				
Central Division					Golden State	30	2	.938	—
Cleveland	21	9	.700	—	LA Clippers	21	13	.618	10
Chicago	19	12	.613	2.5	Sacramento	12	20	.375	18
Indiana	18	14	.563	4	Phoenix	12	23	.343	19.5
Detroit	18	15	.545	4.5	LA Lakers	7	27	.206	24
Milwaukee	13	21	.382	10	Southwest Division				
Southeast Division					San Antonio	28	6	.824	—
Atlanta	21	13	.618	—	Dallas	19	14	.576	8.5
Miami	19	13	.594	1	Memphis	18	16	.529	10
Orlando	19	14	.576	1.5	Houston	16	18	.471	12
Charlotte	17	15	.531	3	New Orleans	10	22	.313	17
Washington	15	16	.484	4.5					

SUNDERLAND SINK VILLA IN RELEGATION SCRAP



SUNDERLAND: Jermain Defoe scored twice as Sunderland beat Aston Villa 3-1 at the Stadium of Light yesterday to boost their own Premier League survival hopes and leave Villa further marooned at the bottom.

Defoe struck twice in the last 20 minutes after Patrick van Aanholt's first-half opener for the home side had been cancelled out by a spectacular Carles Gil strike. The win ended a run of five successive defeats for Sunderland and lifted Sam Allardyce's side to within four points of safety, although they remain second from bottom.

In stark contrast, Villa are now seven points adrift at the bottom of the table and remain 11 points from safety as their long run without a win goes on. They have still not secured a victory since the opening weekend of the campaign and manager Remi Garde has failed to win any of his nine matches in charge.

Villa's hopes of taking anything from this encounter were not helped by the absence of the suspended Jordan Ayew, scorer of five of their 15 league goals coming into this weekend.

Jordan Veretout forced an early save from Vito Mannone in the home goal as Villa started brightly enough but they found themselves behind on the half-hour mark when a Van Aanholt shot ended up in the back of the net via a huge deflection off Micah Richards.

On a dreary day in the north-east of England, Villa gave themselves some hope when the Spaniard Gil marked his return to

the side with a stunning hit to equalise just after the hour. Adama Traore crossed from the right and Gil met the ball with an acrobatic first-time volley on his left foot that gave Mannone no chance. However, Sunderland were back in front in the 72nd minute thanks to Defoe, who got away from Joleon Lescott

and beat Brad Guzan at his near post. The former England striker then wrapped up the points and rubbed salt into Villa's wounds when he made it 3-1 at the death, converting Ola Toivonen's pass for his second of the afternoon and sixth of the season in the Premier League. — AFP



SUNDERLAND: Sunderland's Jermain Defoe, right, celebrates his goal during the English Premier League soccer match between Sunderland and Aston Villa at the Stadium of Light, Sunderland, England, yesterday. — AP

NORWICH EDGE SOUTHAMPTON



NORWICH: Southampton's mid-season slump continued at Carrow Road yesterday after they suffered a late red card minutes before Alexander Tetley clinched the winner in a 1-0 victory for hosts Norwich.

The Canaries have now picked up nine points from a possible 12 over the holidays and in doing so Alex Neil's charges have climbed to within a point of Southampton.

A depleted Southampton side, with top scorer Graziano Pelle and full-back Cedric both out injured while Oriel Romeu is banned, have now won only once in their last eight Premier League games, a stun-

ning 4-0 thumping of Arsenal on Boxing Day. And they dominated in Norfolk until their tough tackling Kenyan midfielder Victor Wanyama was sent off for a second bookable foul on 72 minutes. He would hardly have had time to get to the dressing room before the stands erupted with joy as Tetley lashed a left-footed drive which Saints stopper Maarten Stekelenburg could only watch fly into the top-left corner.

Southampton coach Ronald Koeman threw on a couple of substitutes, including Senegalese winger Sadio Mane, who he'd dropped after being late for a team meeting, but Norwich held firm over the last 15 minutes to continue their climb away from the relegation zone.

Confident enough to beat Manchester United recently they are now unbeaten in their last five home Premier League games and with the league's top assist man Wes Hoolahan and roving target man Dieumerici Mbokani they appear to have the talent to steer clear on a relegation fight. — AFP



CORNELLA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (L) falls as he vies with a RCD Espanyol's midfielder during the Spanish league football match RCD Espanyol vs FC Barcelona at the Power8 stadium in Cornellà de Llobregat yesterday. — AFP

ESPANYOL PUT BRAKES ON FREE-SCORING BARCELONA

BARCELONA: Barcelona drew for a third time in four rounds of the Spanish league after being held to 0-0 at crosstown rival Espanyol yesterday. Espanyol's defense limited Barcelona to Lionel Messi's free kick that hit the goal frame in the first half, and Luis Suarez's shot which went off the post 10 minutes into the second half.

Espanyol succeeded where 30 consecutive league rivals had failed to hold Barcelona scoreless. The last opponent to do so was Malaga in a 1-0 win over Barcelona on Feb. 21 last season.

Espanyol also ended a run of 11 straight games of at least one goal from a member of Barcelona's strike trio of Messi, Suarez and Neymar, who combined for 137 goals in 2015.

"They played well and with the intensity we expected," Barcelona coach Luis Enrique said. "Espanyol always plays with that level of physicality, and it is always easier to destroy than create. The result was fair given what both teams generated, even though we had our chances."

Barcelona has a one-point lead and a game to play, but the defending champions' latest stumble gave second-place Atletico Madrid the opportunity to provisionally move to the top of

the table with a win over bottom side Levante late. The slip, which came after draws at Valencia and against Deportivo La Coruna - followed by a victory over Real Betis in the last round - also let Real Madrid stay close. Third-place Madrid trails Barcelona by three points before visiting Valencia today.

Espanyol's pressure succeeded in disarming Barcelona's talented attack for most of the match. "We have drawn against the best team in the world," said Espanyol coach Constantin Galca, whose team provisionally edged into 11th place after his third match in charge.

"I'm satisfied with our work in defense, but we are still lacking in attack," the former Espanyol player said. "We have to create more scoring chances." In one of its most subdued halves this season, Barcelona could seriously threaten Pau Lopez's goal only late in the first half when Messi earned a foul and proceeded to curl his free kick off the corner of the goalframe.

Otherwise, the opening stretch was controlled by Espanyol's defense, with tempers momentarily flaring between Alvaro Gonzalez and Barcelona's Javier Mascherano as both were booked for shoving. The tone changed

briefly after halftime when Suarez dribbled through the area and laid off for Neymar, whose shot from close range was blocked by defender Victor Alvarez.

Messi was next to fire a shot off a defender, before Hernan Perez created Espanyol's only scoring chance all alone when he dribbled by two Barcelona players before sending his shot just wide of the post.

Suarez squandered a great opportunity when he struck the upright from an angle after dribbling past Lopez. Espanyol then settled down at the back and gave its fans the chance to celebrate the stalemate against its powerful neighbors like a victory.

Barcelona won't have to wait long to avenge the lost points. The Catalan capital's first-division teams will play again in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday and Jan. 13.

"We didn't play well, but these derbies are played to the limit, and we have taken note for the cup," Barcelona's Andres Iniesta said. "We keep adding up points, we have a game in hand, and there is a long way to go. This isn't a setback." Celta Vigo also visited Malaga late. —AP

POGBA SAYS MAN UTD WAS HOLIDAY COMPARED TO JUVE

ROME: French star Paul Pogba says his time at Manchester United was like being on holiday in comparison to the work he has to do at Juventus.

Pogba, who has helped Juve win three consecutive league titles since controversially quitting United in 2012, made the remark in a wide-ranging interview with Turin daily La Stampa in which he also tips Argentinian team-mate Paulo Dybala as a future winner of the Ballon d'Or.

"People need to know that nothing at Juve is easy," Pogba said. "There is a different culture of work compared to elsewhere. I was at Manchester: it seemed like being on holiday. "Here we work so much. All these titles, we didn't steal them. It was by working right to the end." Pogba, who joined United as a 16-year-old academy trainee, was accused of a lack of respect by former United boss Alex Ferguson after refusing to sign a long-term contract at the club following his promotion to the first team squad, for whom he made only three appearances.

And he will not have helped his standing with United fans by letting slip that the teams he chooses to play on PlayStation include local rivals Manchester City but not his former team-mates at Old Trafford.

"I pick Juve, Barca, Madrid and City," he said. "I even play by myself and sometimes get annoyed because the Pogba in the video game plays better than me."

Pogba, a regular subject of speculation about a mega-transfer back to the Premier League, also revealed that City midfielder Yaya Toure is one of the players he spends most time watching in a bid to improve his

central midfield performances, along with Barca's Andres Iniesta and Bayern Munich's Arturo Vidal, a former Juve team-mate.

Playstation also provides Pogba with his nickname for team-mate Dybala, a 32-million-euro summer signing from Palermo who has struck eight goals in 16 Serie A appearances at Juve. Asked if Dybala, also 22, had the potential to emulate his compatriot Lionel Messi and win the European player of the year award, Pogba replied: "He can get there.

"Do you know what I call him? Square R2, the button that you have to push on a Playstation to do a shot on the turn: he always gets goals like that.

"Has he surprised me? No, because I always said he was a phenomenon. To do what he has done, playing for Juve, is something phenomenal."

Having dominated Serie A since Pogba's arrival in 2012, Juventus have found the going tougher this season following the departures of Carlos Tevez, Andrea Pirlo and Vidal. But after a disastrous start, Massimiliano Allegri's men have recently hit form, reeling off seven wins on the trot to move to fourth in the table and within three points of leaders Inter Milan.

"It is different (without Pirlo etc)," Pogba said. "There is more responsibility on other players and we've had to think about playing together even more." As well as targetting a fourth Scudetto, Pogba is expected to be one of the stars of Euro 2016, a tournament he believes France can win. "With the squad we have we can go a long way. I am not saying we will win for sure but we can do it. Italy, too, can go a long way." — AFP

CARROLL HEADER SEALS WEST HAM WIN OVER LIVERPOOL



LONDON: Andy Carroll scored with a trademark towering header to sink his former employers as West Ham United got 2016 off to a flying start with a 2-0 Premier League win over a typically inconsistent Liverpool yesterday.

Carroll rose to meet a precise cross from Mark Noble 10 minutes into the second half, doubling the hosts' advantage after Michail Antonio had headed them into an early lead.

West Ham moved up to fifth in the table, two points above Liverpool whose frailties were exposed again at Upton Park.

Having won their last two games by narrow margins, Juergen Klopp's side looked more like the team that took a solitary point from their previous three, with little threat in attack and familiar vulnerabilities in defence.

Carroll, who remains Liverpool's record signing when he joined the Anfield club for 35 million pounds (\$51.6 million) in 2011, almost made it 3-0 when he had another header saved by Liverpool keeper Simon Mignolet.



EAST LONDON: West Ham United's English striker Andy Carroll (R) vies with Liverpool's Australian defender Brad Smith (L) during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Liverpool at The Boleyn Ground in Upton Park, East London yesterday. — AFP

The visitors, however, were largely restricted to shots from distance and two half-hearted penalty appeals for handball as they tried in vain to reduce the deficit.

Substitute Joe Allen sent a header narrowly wide at the death, a rare clear-cut chance on an otherwise disappointing day for Klopp.

"I'm really angry today because we could have got so much more," the German told the BBC. "Today, we deserved to lose. "We always had the ball, we could have made much more chances but we didn't. We have to again accept that we didn't play like we should."

Liverpool were unhappy with West Ham's opener as Alberto Moreno appeared to be fouled running down the left flank before the hosts countered with Antonio running the length of the pitch before launching himself at a deep cross to head past Mignolet.

There was an inevitability about the second from the moment Noble shaped to cross the ball with Carroll hovering at the far post. The England striker rose high above anybody else to direct his header back across goal and into the far corner of the net to ensure West Ham did the double over Liverpool, having won 3-0 at Anfield in August. "Each game you want to win and score goals, it doesn't matter if it is against a side you have played for," Carroll told BT Sport. "We don't want to get ahead of ourselves, we just want to keep winning games." —Reuters



LEICESTER: Leicester wasted a chance to keep the pressure on Premier League leaders Arsenal as Artur Boruc saved Riyad Mahrez's penalty to give 10-man Bournemouth a 0-0 draw yesterday. Claudio Ranieri's side kicked off 2016 behind Arsenal only on goal difference, but they fell two points adrift of the Gunners at the end of a frustrating afternoon at the King Power Stadium. Bournemouth defender Simon Francis was sent off in the second half after conceding a penalty, only for Mahrez to see his spot-kick kept out by Boruc. After a superb run in the first half of the season, Leicester are enduring a rare stumble and Ranieri's team have now gone three games without a win or a goal.



LEICESTER: Leicester City's Argentinian striker Leonardo Ulloa runs with the ball during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Bournemouth at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England yesterday. — AFP

LEICESTER HELD AS BORUC SAVES MAHREZ PENALTY

Bournemouth's defeat at Arsenal on Monday ended a six-match unbeaten run that lifted them out of the relegation zone, but they bounced back impressively with a gritty display that leaves them four points above the bottom three. Eddie Howe's men had a penalty appeal turned down in the second minute when Junior Stanislas's cross struck Wes Morgan.

Algeria winger Mahrez led Leicester's response with a brilliant bicycle kick that flashed just over from Marc Albrighton's cross. Bournemouth were undeterred by that moment of magic and Josh King should have put them ahead moment later when he headed tamely wide after Stanislas hooked a cross into the six-yard box.

Leicester striker Jamie Vardy started despite struggling with a virus all week and he still looked under the weather when he missed a golden opportunity to open the scoring.

Leonardo Ulloa's long-range effort was scuffed into Vardy's path, but the Premier League's joint-top scorer could only poke a mis-cued shot against the woodwork from close-range before kicking out at a post in frustration.

King cleverly tricked his way past Robert Huth to set up a chance for Dan Gosling, yet the Bournemouth midfielder couldn't hit the target. Ranieri sent on winger Nathan Dyer for Ulloa at half-time and the Foxes looked more menacing as a result.

Vardy had a curling strike superbly pushed away by Boruc, while Morgan should have done better than volley over from close-range soon after. Leicester's pressure seemed to have paid off when Vardy surged clear and was fouled by Francis on the edge of the penalty area, earning a spot-kick and a red card for the Bournemouth defender. Bournemouth protested that Francis won the ball and that the challenge was outside the area. But Mahrez wasted the opportunity in any case as Boruc plunged to his left to keep out the penalty.

Leicester pressed to make amends and Japanese forward Shinji Okazaki volleyed wide from a Vardy knock down before N'Golo Kante flicked his shot narrowly off-target. Mahrez was denied by Boruc again in the closing stages and Vardy glanced the resulting corner wide as Leicester ran out of time. —AFP

Sports

Canadiens
spoil Boston's
outdoor
party in 5-1 rout



Espanyol put
brakes on
free-scoring
Barcelona



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BEN STOKES ATTACKS TO GIVE ENGLAND THE EDGE Page 17



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Wayne Rooney, centre, is brought down by Swansea City's Leon Britton, left, as Federico Fernandez looks on during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Swansea City at Old Trafford Stadium, Manchester, England, yesterday. —AP

ROONEY'S GEM GIVES VAN GAAL NEW YEAR CHEER



Man United 2



Swansea 1

MANCHESTER: Wayne Rooney eased the pressure on Louis van Gaal as the Manchester United captain's superb backheeled strike secured a hard-fought 2-1 win over Swansea City yesterday.

Rooney's 77th-minute moment of magic took him ahead of Denis Law to become the second-highest goalscorer in United's history and he is now also the second-highest scorer in the Premier League era with 188 goals.

But even more significantly the England forward's first league goal since October gave United their first win in nine matches and moved them up to fifth place.

It was a badly needed three points for United manager van Gaal, who had been forced to deny he was considering quitting over Christmas.

Four defeats and two draws in December had contributed to a barren run which had seen United go out of the Champions League and slip out of the Premier League's top four during the club's worst run since 1990. They could ill-afford another setback and Anthony Martial headed United in front as they scored only their 11th goal in 15 games.

United's goal and points tally had been their lowest ever in the first half of a Premier League season and when Gylfi Sigurdsson headed Swansea level with 20 minutes to go

another winless afternoon threatened.

But van Gaal's men managed to find the route to goal once more thanks to Rooney's third league goal of the season as relief flooded around Old Trafford.

As they had done against Chelsea in their previous home stalemate, United tried to show more attacking intent from the start with van Gaal employing a three-man defence and Ashley Young and Anthony Martial as wing-backs in a bid to set up a first home win since November.

Young helped provided an attacking threat but with only one out-and-out striker in Rooney, United still found genuine chances hard to come by before half-time.

Morgan Schneiderlin made a rare foray forward inside the first minute to get in a shot which was blocked by Federico Fernandez, but it was another 20 minutes before United

had another sight of goal as Rooney fired into the side-netting.

Having kept the home side at bay, Swansea winger Wayne Routledge tested David de Gea with a volley and frustration began to grow around Old Trafford.

But two minutes into the second half United finally went in front to change the context of the afternoon.

Again Young was involved in a telling capacity as his cross was perfectly delivered for Martial, who had drifted into a more central position, to score with a powerful downward header from eight yards which bounced up and past Lukasz Fabianski to give the young Frenchman his eighth goal of the season.

With nothing to lose, Swansea began to impose themselves. Andre Ayew's header against a post from Sigurdsson's cross raised

the anxiety levels and with 20 minutes to go United were pegged back. Substitute Modou Barrow gave Swansea an extra cutting edge and, from his cross, Sigurdsson glanced home the equaliser with a header which looped beyond David de Gea.

Suddenly United were back to square one but just when they needed him Rooney delivered. When Martial beat Angel Rangel and drove the ball low across the six-yard box, Rooney flicked the ball home with the inside of his foot to claim one of the more important goals of his long United career.

United still had 12 minutes and four of stoppage time to hold out, but with de Gea making a fine save from Ashley Williams and goalkeeper Fabianski coming up from a corner to head just wide with the final touch of the match, van Gaal was at last able to celebrate a win. — AFP

KOSCIELNY DOWNS NEWCASTLE AS ARSENAL MOVE AT THE TOP



Arsenal 1



Newcastle 0

LONDON: Arsenal moved two points clear at the top of the Premier League table after Laurent Koscielny's second-half winner secured an unconvincing 1-0 win over Newcastle United yesterday. The Frenchman's 72nd-minute winner masked a stuttering display, but if the sign of an effective team is that they win even when below their best, then Arsenal justified their status as favourites to take the title. Mesut Ozil, featured on the programme cover celebrating his goal in the 2-0 win against Bournemouth in the final match of 2015, did his best to inspire his teammates again, but Arsenal were flat and uninspired. However, though lacking their usual fluency and looking vulnerable once again in defence, they rode their luck and dug out a victory while Leicester City, level on points at kick-off, could only draw with Bournemouth. Newcastle, who had conceded 14 goals in their previous three visits to the Emirates Stadium, had the majority of the chances this time, but found Petr Cech unbeatable. They remain in the relegation zone. After a minute's applause for former Newcastle goalkeeper Pavel Srnicek, who died on December 29, Arsenal gave Rob Elliot, his succes-

sor, an easy first half, their midfield misfiring and their final ball often inaccurate. A perfect example was a diagonal pass from Theo Walcott towards Olivier Giroud that almost sent the France striker through on goal, but was just too close to Newcastle captain Fabricio Colocini, who intercepted. When Arsenal gave them the ball, the visitors seized any chance to venture forward and after 15 minutes Cech had to dive to his right to parry a header by Georginio Wijnaldum from a right-wing cross by Moussa Sissoko. Aleksandar Mitrovic returned the loose ball into the centre, but Jack Colback's scooped effort was easily held by Cech. That made the crowd uneasy, and they were worried again after 25 minutes when Ayoze Perez shot a foot over Cech's crossbar from an angle.

Just before half-time, Cech had to save twice, first from an overhead kick by Mitrovic as Hector Bellerin's attempt at a clearing header dropped short and then after Koscielny miskicked, the goalkeeper rushing out to block from Wijnaldum.

The first-half statistics showed four efforts on target by Newcastle and none from Arsenal and it was five by the Magpies soon after half-time as Cech raced out of his goal again to smother a shot from Wijnaldum. Moments later, the Czech could only watch as Mitrovic volleyed wide from Perez's flick when scoring looked easier.

Arsenal's first shot on target arrived in the 50th minute, Elliot saving Aaron Ramsey's effort from Ozil's pass. The Arsenal fans, to their credit, continued to back their team, preferring to take out their frustrations on referee Anthony Taylor for what they regarded as leniency towards time-wasting by Newcastle.



LONDON: Newcastle United's Dutch midfielder Vurnon Anita clashes with Arsenal's French striker Olivier Giroud during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Newcastle United yesterday. —AFP

And finally, in the 72nd minute, they had the reward for their patience. As Ozil's corner curved in from the right, Giroud missed his first attempt at a header, but won the second, and with the ball looping towards goal, Koscielny stole in behind Perez to volley home his third goal of the season. Nacho Monreal almost doubled the lead with a fierce shot that was blocked by a knot of defenders, while Mitrovic headed onto the roof of the net as Newcastle looked for an equaliser. — AFP

TOURE AND AGUERO FIRE MAN CITY'S TITLE HOPES



Watford 1



Man City 2

WATFORD: Manchester City maintained their Premier League title challenge after ending their away-day blues with a stirring late comeback that saw them win 2-1 at Watford yesterday.

Two goals in as many minutes from talismans Yaya Toure and Sergio Aguero kept City in touch at the top of the table when it appeared that they were destined for defeat. Aleksandar Kolarov had headed Ben Watson's corner into his own net and the visitors were struggling for ideas before Toure and Aguero struck in quick succession to steal victory. It was City's first win on the road since September 12 and kept them three points behind leaders Arsenal.

Despite the shadow of Pep Guardiola looming large over Manuel Pellegrini, the Manchester City manager has been tipped by his Watford counterpart Quique Sanchez Flores to win the league title.

Whether the Chilean will still in be in charge at the Etihad Stadium come next

season, with or without winning the championship, remains to be seen. But his team find themselves playing catch-up after a woeful away run that had seen them collect just three points from their previous six games on the road.

They knew they could ill-afford a repeat failure against a Watford side who have surprised many this season. But Almen Abdi, one of the few Watford goal-scorers this season other than the prolific pairing of Troy Deeney and Odion Ighalo, sounded an early warning when he drove just over within two minutes.

Ighalo almost began the new year how he had ended 2015 when he came close to scoring for the seventh game in succession in the 13th minute.

The Nigerian striker's clever turn saw him wriggle clear of Nicolas Otamendi, but his low shot was kept out by Joe Hart's outstretched foot.

City boast a plethora of attacking options, but were struggling to find any fluency or provide Aguero with any service. However, the Argentine striker was inches away from handing the visitors a 19th-minute lead when he narrowly failed to connect with a header after Watford goalkeeper Heurelho Gomes repelled a shot by Kevin De Bruyne. The visitors were slowly finding their feet, Fernando seeing his close-range shot blocked by Gomes following David Silva's slalom run. — AFP



SEOUL: Staff members of the Korea Exchange applaud as they threw confetti for the media during the year's market closing ceremony near a screen showing the Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) in Seoul on Wednesday. Asian shares were mixed in Wednesday trading, with only some markets cheered by an overseas rally. — AP

OIL PRICES COULD HIT RECORD LOWS IN 2016: BP CHIEF

BLACK GOLD ENDS 2015 BATTERED AS SUPPLY GLUT CONTINUES

LONDON: Struggling oil producers could suffer even more pain in 2016 with further plunges in already record-low prices, BP Chief Executive Bob Dudley warned yesterday. "A low point could be in the first quarter," Dudley told BBC radio. Oil prices fell by 34 percent in 2015, battered by prolonged global oversupply and a slowdown in energy-hungry China's economy. Dudley predicted that prices could stabilize towards the end of the year, but would remain low for the foreseeable future.

"Prices are going to stay lower for longer, we have said it and I think we are in this for a couple of years. For sure, there is a boom-and-bust cycle here," Dudley said.

Prices have particularly slumped since December 4 when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries decided against limiting production as members fight to keep market share. Potentially adding to the supply worries was action by the US Congress last month to end the 40-year-old ban on exports of crude oil produced in the country.

Supply glut

Oil prices pared losses Thursday but ended 2015 sharply lower as the "black gold" was battered by prolonged global oversupply and a slowdown in energy-hungry China's econo-

my. North Sea Brent, the European benchmark for oil, dropped almost 35 percent over the year, while the US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) fell 30 percent. "With Brent crude oil hovering near 11-year lows and WTI not faring all that much better, the markets are ending the year on a somber note, consistent with what we see as ongoing physical oversupply," said Tim Evans of Citi Futures.

The key futures contracts finished Thursday with modest daily gains. WTI for delivery in February rose 44 cents to close at \$37.04 on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

In London, Brent for February delivery rose 82 cents to \$37.28 a barrel. The modest rebound Thursday may stem from investors trying to minimize risks after betting on prices to fall ahead of the long New Year's weekend, said Andy Lipow of Lipow Oil Associates. Markets are closed Friday.

"It could be simply end-of-year short-covering because the market has been so bearish," he said, "and people squaring their positions." Crude futures have dived from more than \$100 a barrel in mid-2014 as abundant supplies were exacerbated by strong output by OPEC and the United States.

Prices have particularly slumped since December 4 when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries decided

against limiting production as members fight to keep market share.

Also weighing on market sentiment was China as growth slowed in the economy of the world's largest energy consumer. And OPEC member Iran was poised to boost crude exports after sanctions are lifted, part of its landmark nuclear agreement with major powers.

"We know the market is oversupplied and as we go into 2016 the market will await the return of Iranian oil," Lipow said. Potentially adding to the supply worries was action by the US Congress earlier this month to end the 40-year-old US ban on exports of crude oil produced in the country.

NuStar Energy and ConocoPhillips announced Wednesday they were loading "what they believe to be the nation's first export cargo of US-produced light crude oil" since the ban was lifted.

Russia output up

Russia pumped a record 534 million tons of crude oil in 2015 even as it reeled from a fall in oil prices caused by a supply glut, energy ministry data showed yesterday. The country's oil and gas condensate production last year increased 1.4 percent year-on-

year, with output reaching 10.73 million barrels per day, a post-Soviet record, according to data cited by Interfax news agency.

The slide in oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis have pummeled the oil-dependent Russian economy in recent months. The ruble lost around half of its value in 2014 but recovered slightly as energy prices stabilized last year. But the recent renewed slump in oil prices-with Brent crude falling to an 11-year low last month-casts a shadow on the prospect of economic recovery. "All states, including OPEC countries, have concentrated on increasing their output and turning out as much oil as possible not to lose their market niches, not taking note that they are driving prices down," energy consultant Mikhail Krutikhin said yesterday on Russian radio. "It appears that Russia is also following this path."

Russia's Central Bank predicted that if oil prices remain at their current level, GDP could shrink 2 percent in 2016. President Vladimir Putin assured at his annual press conference earlier last month that the country was prepared for any economic situation, despite the volatility in oil prices. Russia's 2016 budget had been calculated on the basis of an oil price of \$50 per barrel, a figure Putin said was an "optimistic" assessment of the situation, with the price now hovering around \$37. — Agencies



QINGDAO: Cargo trucks drive through a container pool at a seaport in Qingdao in eastern China's Shandong province. A monthly survey shows that a contraction in Chinese manufacturing eased slightly in December, while service industries continued to expand. — AP

CHINA'S MANUFACTURING

ACTIVITY SHRINKS IN DEC

BEIJING: China looked set for a soggy start to 2016 after activity in the manufacturing sector contracted for a fifth straight month in December, suggesting the government may have to step up policy support to avert a sharper slowdown. While China's services sector ended 2015 on a strong note, the economy still looked set to grow at its slowest pace in a quarter of a century despite a raft of policy easing steps, including repeated interest rate cuts, in the past year or so.

The world's second-largest economy faces persistent risks this year as leaders have pledged to push so-called "supply-side reform" to reduce excess factory capacity and high debt levels. The official manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) stood at 49.7 in December, in line with expectations of economists polled by Reuters and up only fractionally from November. A reading below 50 suggests a contraction in activity, while a higher one indicates an expansion.

Still, economists seemed to find some comfort that there were no signs of a sharper deterioration which has been feared by global investors.

The slight pickup in the manufacturing PMI "suggests that (economic) growth momentum is stabilising somewhat ... however, the sector is still facing strong headwinds, said Zhou Hao, China economist at Commerzbank in Singapore.

"In order to facilitate the destocking and deleveraging process, monetary policy will remain accommodative and the fiscal policy will be more proactive," Weak demand from at home and abroad has weighed on China's factories, exacerbating the problem of excess capacity and forcing them to cut prices of their goods, eating into their profits and adding to deflationary pressures in the economy. Total new orders - a proxy for both domestic and foreign demand - rose to 50.2 in December from November's 49.8, the PMI survey showed. But export orders shrank for the 15th straight month, albeit at a less severe pace. The sub-index inched up to 47.5 from November's 46.4. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said that although oil prices were very low at present, cash at the end of the year was tight for factories, putting relatively large pressure on manufacturers.

A CHALLENGING 2016

China's economic growth is expected to cool from 7.3 percent in 2014 to 6.9 percent in 2015, the central bank said in a recent work paper, its slowest pace in 25 years. It said growth could ease further to 6.8 percent in 2016. Some China watchers, however, believe real growth levels are already much weaker than official data suggest.

Leaders at the annual Central Economic Work Conference last month pledged to make monetary policy more flexible and expand the budget deficit in 2016 to help underpin growth and reforms.

Indeed, China could run its biggest budget deficit in half a century this year as leaders turn to more government spending to arrest the slowdown in the economy, policy advisers say, after disappointing returns from a year of policy easing.

The PBOC has cut interest rates six times since November 2014 and reduced banks' reserve requirement ratios (RRR), or the amount of cash that banks must set aside as reserves.

The government has also stepped up spending on infrastructure projects and eased restrictions on home buying to boost the sluggish property market. The central bank is widely expected to cut interest rates and banks' reserve requirement ratios further this year.

A similar official survey on the services sector showed activity there quickened in December, again helping to ease fears of a hard landing for the economy this year. The services sector has been the lone bright spot in the economy in the last few years, helping to offset prolonged weakness in the vast manufacturing sector, though financial markets tend to focus more closely on factory readings.—Reuters

THINGS TO DO ON BAYT.COM TO ADVANCE YOUR CAREER IN 2016

Bayt.com is more than a job site; it's your constant companion during the job search. There are many features on Bayt.com that you can use in order to enhance your online presence and establish yourself to employers as well as other professionals in your network.

Here are seven things you should be doing on Bayt.com this year if you want to advance your career.

1. Create a Bayt.com public profile

Your Bayt.com public profile is very similar to an online business card. It's akin to having your own personal brand that readily grabs the attention of employers and other professionals. In fact, when asked about the extent to which an online personal brand can help a career, an overwhelming 92% of respondents in the Bayt.com 'Personal Branding in the Middle East and North Africa' poll, September 2013, said that a good personal brand can help you get more interviews and grow in your career.

2. Connect with people

The Bayt.com People Search tool allows you to

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connect with other people on Bayt.com and contact them directly. You can search for peers and employers in companies around the Middle East region and then get in touch with them. This is a great way to network with people who might be far beyond your reach! If you upgrade to the Premium account, you can use the advanced form of People Search. You will get more contact credits and additional search filters will be added to your account to help you find the exact person you're looking for at any given time.

3. Join in discussions on Bayt.com Specialties

With Bayt.com Specialties you can establish your presence as an expert in your field through community discussions. Get noticed by employers, clients and colleagues by asking intelligent questions related to your industry and giving intelligent replies to their questions. You can expand your circle of connections and use it as an effective way to network online. Through your discussions, you can get endorsed by other experts

as well as get ranks and badges on your CV.

4. Follow companies

Bayt.com has a large directory of well-known employers registered on the site. These employers have company pages where they share their updates, display stories about the company culture, and list their latest news and job openings. In fact, company pages show all job vacancies available, so if you have a target company or a dream job, what better way to learn about them than follow their page? It's also a great way to research the company before going to the job interview.

5. Apply for jobs

Lastly, the most obvious way to use Bayt.com is to apply for jobs. 75% of companies are expected to be hiring in a year's time, according to the Bayt.com Middle East Job Index survey, August 2015, so now is a good time to apply for the jobs you like. With thousands of job postings on Bayt.com every day, it can get very difficult to

track all the new and relevant jobs.

6. Take a course

This section on Bayt.com helps you find out about relevant courses, conferences, seminars, and education programs provided by the best learning providers in the Middle East. It doesn't really matter if you are looking to upgrade your skills, advance your career, finish your degree, or simply start a new one - a course is a sure-way to boost your career in the right direction.

7. Take a test

It is a compelling and fundamental issue today for jobseekers to be able to ensure their prominence with the right set of skill for their target job. Taking tests on Bayt.com is the best way to show employers that you are the person with the correct skillset - quickly, easily, and cost-effectively. It works simply: recruiters can qualify candidates by choosing from a wide range of tests made by experts, on a wide array of topics that include testing candidates' IQ, personality, and technical skills.



KUWAIT: Stock market traders monitor the prices on the trading floor of Kuwait Stock Exchange on the last trading day of 2015 on Thursday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KSE ENDED 2015 TRADING ON A MIXED NOTE

KUWAIT: Al-Oula Brokarege Company announced yesterday that Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) ended the last week of trading in 2015 on a mixed note in the performance of the

three indices due to speculative operations.

Al-Oula said in its special report published yesterday that the pace of pressured sales continued on many popular stocks, especially low-

value ones, which were trading under the roof of 50 fils in the majority of the sessions amidst profit-taking operations by the individual investors of short-term trading.

It explained that the market closed trading on the price index rising by 2.6 points to reach the level of 5615 points, while the weighted and (Kuwait 15) indices dropped 0.14 and 1.8 points respectively.

It pointed out that the disparity in the performance of the Kuwaiti stock market continued in the pace of transactions which reflected on the movement and stimulated thoughtful buying on selected stocks of the leading sectors as well as sectors that include cheap stocks.

It reported that the movement of portfolios and funds toward improving their financial statements coinciding with the year-end closings contributed to the increase in trading activity and the stock market performance even with the low levels of the cash trading.

It said that the KSE trading witnessed a mass declines, especially in the first three sessions, while some stocks, especially the leading ones, adjusted their tracks in the last two sessions either by being stable or rising, thanks to the positive repercussions. — KUNA

GULF BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF AL-DANAH DAILY DRAWS

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 27 December 2015 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 20 December - 23 December 2015. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws each and every working day for two prizes of KD1,000 per winner.

The winners are:

(Sunday 20/12): Abdulaziz Mosa Abdulaziz, Sultan Nawaf Saeed Al-Suwaiji Al-Mutairi

(Monday 21/12): Abdullah Ahmed Essa Mohammed, Bashar Abdulaziz Fahad Al-Al-Fulaij

(Tuesday 22/12): Mohammed Ashraf Toema Al-Garf, Khaleefa Ahmad Saleh Al-Qallaf

(Wednesday 23/12): Ahmad Ali Taher Al-Sayegh, Menera Soud Mohammed Al-Ajmi

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 2015 draw lineup includes daily draws (2 winners per working day each receive KD1,000). The final Al-Danah draw for One Million Dinars will be held on 7 January 2016. The Al-Danah millionaire will be announced alongside winners of KD250,000 and KD50,000 cash prizes.

Five reasons why the Al-Danah account is the Best:

1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million

2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000

3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day

4) The most opportunities to win (64 draws a year, and up to 532 winners)

5) Only Bank that transfers your chances to win from year to year

Win big, live big, with Al-Danah 2015.

Al-Danah also offers a number of unique services including: the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card which helps account holders deposit their money at their convenience; as well as the Al-Danah calculator to help customers calculate their chances of becoming an Al-Danah winner.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaitis and all residents of Kuwait. Customers who open an account and/ or deposit more will enter the draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2015 upcoming yearly draw, customers must have an Al-Danah account containing at least KD 200. To be part of the Al-Danah draws, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, transfer on line, or call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805 for assistance and guidance. Customers can also log on to www.e-gulf-bank.com/aldanahwinners, to find out more about Al Danah and its winners.

IDB GROUP APPOINTS AL-WOHAIB AS ISFD CHIEF

RIYADH: The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group has announced the appointment of Dr Waleed Al-Wohaib as Director General of its poverty-alleviation arm, the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD). Al-Wohaib was the Chief Executive Officer of the IDB's trade-financing arm, the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) till the end of December 2015.

He took part in founding and managing the ITFC since it was established in 2007. IDB President Dr. Ahmad Mohammed Ali Al-Madani announced the appointment during a ceremony attended by the Group's senior officials. He said that Al-Wohaib had realized great achievements, namely founding and running the ITFC that has come to be a major institution for fostering trade among the member states.

A top ITFC achievement under Al-

Wohaib was its effective efforts to realize the goal it was established for, boosting the trade among member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), from 13 percent in 2013 in 2005 to 19.3 percent in mid-2014.

This is close to the target of 20 percent in 2015, as defined by the 10-year program of action adopted by the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit in Makkah, 2005, to meet the challenges facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st century, Al-Madani said. Addressing the ceremony, Al-Wohaib said that he would do his best to fulfil his "great" mission.

Previously Al-Wohaib occupied the post of Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Trade and Industry in 1994, and was also Secretary General of the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program. — KUNA

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.531
Indian Rupees	4.602
Pakistani Rupees	2.903
Srilankan Rupees	2.120
Nepali Rupees	2.881
Singapore Dollar	216.643
Hongkong Dollar	39.299
Bangladesh Taka	3.880
Philippine Peso	6.509
Thai Baht	8.467

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.270
Qatari Riyal	83.386
Omani Riyal	788.462
Bahraini Dinar	809.353
UAE Dirham	82.974

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	37.270
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	38.968
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.422
Tunisian Dinar	151.166
Jordanian Dinar	429.710
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.031
Syrian Lira	2.172
Morocco Dirham	31.081

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.600
Euro	334.603
Sterling Pound	454.768
Canadian dollar	220.965
Turkish lira	104.279
Swiss Franc	308.925
Australian Dollar	225.860
US Dollar Buying	303.400

GOLD

20 Gram	216.710
10 Gram	111.050
5 Gram	56.210

UAE EXCHANGE CENTRE WLL

CURRENCIES

Australian Dollar	213.08
Canadian Dollar	223.37
Swiss Franc	311.14
Euro	335.85
US Dollar	304.55
Sterling Pound	454.36
Japanese Yen	2.56
Bangladesh Taka	3.882
Indian Rupee	4.586
Sri Lankan Rupee	2.122
Nepali Rupee	2.871
Pakistani Rupee	2.903
UAE Dirhams	0.08287
Bahraini Dinar	0.8094
Egyptian Pound	0.03880
Jordanian Dinar	0.4331
Omani Riyal	0.7908
Qatari Riyal	0.08397
Saudi Riyal	0.08118

TELEX TRANSFER PER 1000

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer

US Dollar	304.400
Canadian Dollar	222.240
Sterling Pound	455.735
Euro	334.985
Swiss Frank	301.790
Bahrain Dinar	805.305
UAE Dirhams	83.120
Qatari Riyals	84.335

Selling Rate

Saudi Riyals	81.850
Jordanian Dinar	428.810
Egyptian Pound	38.763
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.123
Indian Rupees	4.594
Pakistani Rupees	2.901
Bangladesh Taka	3.867
Philippines Peso	6.440
Cyprus pound	579.790
Japanese Yen	3.510
Syrian Pound	2.380
Nepalese Rupees	3.865
Malaysian Ringgit	71.725
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	47.470
Thai Bhat	9.415
Turkish Lira	104.405

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.441823	0.450823
Czech Korune	0.004160	0.016160
Danish Krone	0.040182	0.045182
Euro	0.324825	0.332825
Norwegian Krone	0.030240	0.035440
Romanian Leu	0.072947	0.072947
Slovakia	0.009097	0.019097
Swedish Krona	0.031943	0.036943
Swiss Franc	0.297195	0.307395
Turkish Lira	0.099817	0.110117

Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.213695	0.225195
New Zealand Dollar	0.201970	0.211470

America		
Canadian Dollar	0.213989	0.222489
US Dollars	0.300250	0.304750

US Dollars Mint	0.300750	0.304750
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Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003478	0.004078
Chinese Yuan	0.045432	0.048932
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037168	0.039918
Indian Rupee	0.004224	0.004614
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002443	0.002623
Kenyan Shilling	0.003163	0.003163
Korean Won	0.000248	0.000263
Malaysian Ringgit	0.067196	0.073196
Nepalese Rupee	0.002885	0.003055
Pakistan Rupee	0.002655	0.002935
Philippine Peso	0.006397	0.006677
Sierra Leone	0.000070	0.000076
Singapore Dollar	0.211140	0.217140
South African Rand	0.013627	0.022127
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001749	0.002329
Taiwan	0.009142	0.009322
Thai Baht	0.008125	0.008675

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.800404	0.808404
Egyptian Pound	0.034551	0.037677
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000201	0.000261
Jordanian Dinar	0.425272	0.432772
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021552	0.045552
Nigerian Naira	0.001258	0.001893
Omani Riyal	0.784099	0.789779
Qatar Riyal	0.082886	0.084099
Saudi Riyal	0.080273	0.081223
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.147053	0.155053
Turkish Lira	0.098717	0.110117
UAE Dirhams	0.081882	0.083031
Yemeni Riyal	0.001376	0.001456

EU-UKRAINE TRADE DEAL COMES INTO FORCE

RUSSIA STARTS FOOD EMBARGO AGAINST KIEV

KIEV: Ukraine's free-trade deal with the EU comes into effect Friday, coinciding with the start of Moscow's food embargo against Kiev that will force the impoverished former Soviet republic to revisit its economic model. The free-trade accord is part of the broader EU Association Agreement signed at the end of June 2014 — and stands at the heart of the drastic deterioration of Ukraine's relations with Russia, furious at seeing its Soviet-era satellite turn to the West.

Ukraine, whose market has been traditionally oriented toward Russia, will now have to turn itself toward the European market and abide by its rules.

"The agreement will contribute to the modernisation and diversification of the Ukrainian economy and will create additional incentives for reform," the European Commission said in a statement on

Thursday.

Brussels also said the deal would help Ukraine improve its business climate and attract foreign investment, a view shared by Yegor Pereygin, an analyst at UniCredit bank.

The road to Ukraine's adoption of the deal has been peppered with obstacles. In November 2013, Ukraine's then pro-Kremlin president Viktor Yanukovich rejected the association agreement, triggering pro-European protests that led to his downfall and eventually to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, which has left more than 9,000 people dead.

Retaliatory measures

Fearing the deal could see its market flooded with European goods, Russia has taken retaliatory measures, suspending its free-trade agreement with Ukraine and

banning the import of Ukrainian food starting on Friday. Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk has put the cost of Moscow's measures to his country at some \$600 million.

President Petro Poroshenko admitted earlier this month that Russia's retaliatory move would cause "damage" to Ukraine's economy but said he was "ready to pay the price" and press on with efforts to join a European Union free-trade zone. He blasted the embargo in his New Year address, saying Moscow was trying to "economically strangle" Ukraine. "Moscow closing its market to Ukrainian merchandise, a powerful economic attack, is another part of the war (...) against us," Poroshenko said.

Kiev has vowed to strike back with its own measures and is expected to announce a list of banned Russian products in the near future.

'Very competitive' Ukraine

Ukraine mostly exported agricultural products, vegetables, fruit, dairy and sweets to Russia, with the countries' trade ties shrinking by 70 percent compared to 2011, according to Russia's deputy minister of economic development Alexei Likhachev.

"This (the Russian embargo) will of course be a problem for Ukrainian food producers, but let's not forget that many of them have already entirely or partially reoriented their production toward alternative markets: the EU, Africa, Kazakhstan, China, the Middle East," said UniCredit analyst Pereygin. The impact of European products flooding onto the Ukrainian market remains unclear according to investment specialist Olexandra Brovko, with other analysts saying the effects of the deal will only be tangible in the long term given

the current economic slowdown in Europe.

"It's difficult to predict how competition will be established and what consequences this will have on Ukrainian producers," said Brovko, who works for a Ukrainian NGO that aims to facilitate business and investment in the country.

Brovko added that the arrival of European products on Ukraine's would not necessarily dampen demand for Ukrainian goods.

"It's possible that certain European products will find buyers and find a niche on the market where there are no competitors," she said.

According to economist Olexandr Valchyshev of Investment Capital Ukraine, the free-trade agreement with the EU will boost investment in the country given the "very competitive" cost of Ukrainian labour. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA DEC EXPORT TUMBLE CAPS DISMAL 2015

NO QUICK TURNAROUND EXPECTED

SEOUL: South Korea's exports fell for a 12th straight month in December, capping its worst yearly trade performance since the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, and the government warned there was no quick turnaround in sight. Low oil prices, slowdowns in China and other emerging economies and weakness in Europe sent global trade plunging this year, dealing a sharp blow to trade-reliant Asian countries which rely heavily on exports of manufactured goods such as petrochemicals and electronics.

South Korea's exports in December fell 13.8 percent in dollar terms from a year earlier, while imports slumped 19.2 percent, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy said on Friday, both lagging forecasts in a Reuters poll and weaker than declines of 4.8 percent and 17.6 percent in November.

Exports for all of 2015 dropped 7.9 percent - the worst since a 13.9 percent decline in 2009 - but are expected to rise 2.1 percent in 2016, the ministry said, while adding there were downside risks to the forecast. "Sluggish growth in China, sustained low oil prices and stunted growth in emerging economies due to higher rates in the US pose risks to exports this year," the ministry said in a statement. South Korea is the world's sixth-largest exporter and the first major country to publish December trade figures.

Its sales to China dropped 5.6 percent in 2015, sales to the European Union fell 6.9 percent and shipments to the United States slipped 0.6 percent. The three markets take nearly half of South Korea's total exports.

Oil-related products accounted for 64 percent of the decline in South Korean

exports this year, the trade ministry said. Asia, which accounts for more than one-third of global exports by dollar value, saw a 7 percent drop in exports in the first nine months of 2015, against a 13 percent fall in global exports, World Trade Organization data showed.

Data on Friday showed activity in China's vast manufacturing sector contracted for a fifth month in a row in December, reinforcing fears the world's second-largest economy may be stuck in a protracted slowdown despite a flurry of stimulus measures.

In December alone, South Korea's shipments to China dropped 16.7 percent on-year in their worst fall since May 2009. In 2016, exporters of household electronics, semiconductors, ships, steel products and flat screen displays are all likely to suffer, according to the ministry's forecasts, but oil product exporters could see sales pick up from weak 2015 levels.

"Considering recent data, fourth-quarter growth will probably be worse than the Bank of Korea's expectations while first-quarter growth is also unlikely to be rosy," said Park Sang-hyun, chief economist at HI Investment & Securities.

Still, Park believed the central bank will keep interest rates on hold at a record low of 1.50 percent throughout 2016, albeit with a slight easing bias in the first quarter.

Concerns about high household debt levels and corporate debt pressures in the face of rising interest rates abroad could stay the Bank of Korea's (BOK) hand, Park said. The BOK cut rates four times between Aug. 2014 and June 2015 by a total of 100 basis points. The BOK currently sees 2015 growth at 2.7 percent. — Reuters

RAUL DESCRIBES AS POSITIVE 4% ECONOMIC GROWTH IN 2015

HAVANA, Cuba: The 4 percent increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) this year is a good result, in spite of the international economic crisis and the persistent economic, financial and commercial blockade of the United States, asserted on Tuesday Army General Raul Castro, President of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers.

Raul delivered the closing speech at the Sixth Regular Period of Sessions of the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly of the People's Power, in which he also mentioned the worsening of external financial restrictions in the second half of 2015.

He pointed out that next year the GDP will continue to increase but at a slower pace, two percent, as a result of planned financial restrictions associated with the fall of incomes in traditional export lines due to a decrease in their prices on the world market, such as nickel.

In his address to the MPs, the Army General called to an international mobilization in defense of the progressive governments of Latin America and the Caribbean, so acts of interference cease.

Amid the international context he described, the President of the councils of State and Ministers championed the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States as an essential mechanism to achieve the regional consensus of the 33 nations in the region.

Likewise, he said he was optimistic about the peace talks between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government, a process that is closer than ever to reaching an agreement to end the armed conflict that has existed in that country for half a century, and reiterated that Cuba will continue its impartial work as guarantor and venue of the talks.

In connection with the thousands of Cubans who for over a month now are in Costa Rica, where they arrived from other countries in the region with the intention of



Army General Raul Castro, President of the Cuban councils of State and Ministers.

traveling to the United States, he said that the Cuban government has been in contact with the region's governments from the start of this situation, in search for a suitable and quick solution.

In another moment of his speech, he referred to the visit to Cuba of Pope Francis, precisely in the year when the 80th anniversary of uninterrupted bonds between the Holy See and the Caribbean nation was celebrated.

He further stressed that this year bilateral political dialogues with many countries strengthened, as evidenced by the visits to Cuba of 184 foreign delegations, 25 of which were led by Heads of State or Government from all regions.

The Cuban President reiterated that to nor-

malize bilateral relations with the United States the blockade must be lifted and the territory occupied by the Guant-namo Naval Base returned.

He also referred to the progress made in the negotiations of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between Cuba and the European Union, as well as in bilateral relations with its Member States.

He announced that in February he will pay an official visit to France, in reciprocity to that made by President Francois Hollande to Cuba. At the 7th Regular Period of Sessions of the 8th Legislature of the Cuban Parliament, deputies met at Havana's Convention Center approved on Tuesday the name of 2016: Year 58 of the Revolution. — Embassy of Cuba.



MACAU: Visitors trying out gaming machines at the Global Gaming Expo Asia in the world's biggest gambling hub of Macau. It was reported yesterday that Macau's gambling revenue ended 2015 with a whimper, falling for a second straight year as China's corruption crackdown continued to keep high rollers from the Asian gaming hub. —AFP

MACAU GAMING REVENUE DECLINES 34% IN 2015

HONG KONG: Macau's gambling revenue ended 2015 with a whimper, falling for a second straight year as China's corruption crackdown continued to keep high rollers from the Asian gaming hub.

Revenue slid 34.3 percent to a five-year low of 230.84 billion patacas (\$28.92 billion), according to numbers released by Macau's Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau. Gaming revenue fell 2.6 percent in 2014. December saw gaming revenue fall 21.2 percent, declining for the 19th consecutive month as China suffers a painful growth slowdown and Beijing's hard-hitting campaign against corruption has hammered Macau's key VIP sector. The figure for 2015 was in line with expectations of nine analysts polled by Bloomberg News who predicted a decrease of 35 percent.

The city's VIP section is also expected to fall 13 percent in 2016, analysts told Bloomberg. "Macau has been hit hard by China's anti-corruption campaign which

has deterred wealthy customers from visiting Macau," Aaron Fischer, head of consumer and gaming research at CLSA, told AFP on Saturday.

"2016 is not likely to be a very good year. However, after a 34 percent decline in 2015, consensus expects revenues to be roughly flat, which is a big improvement," Fischer added. The slowdown in Macau, a semi-autonomous Chinese city, has been in part attributed to a high-profile corruption crackdown led by Chinese President Xi Jinping with Beijing making it clear it wants the former Portuguese colony to move away from gambling.

Casino operators in Macau—the only place in China where casino gambling is allowed—are trying to lure mass market visitors to make up for the drop in high-roller gamblers who comprise the bulk of the city's gaming income.

This has led to a slew of mega-projects on former swamp land on the coastal Cotai strip. The latest launch was of the

Studio City hotel and casino resort in October featuring the world's first figure-of-eight rollercoaster that was fronted by Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese, Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio.

Wynn Resorts founder billionaire Steve Wynn has previously said the situation in Macau was "uncertain". "There's no question that uncertainty is the plaguing word of the day in Macau," he said in April. Wynn Resorts in November said the opening of its new \$4.1 billion Wynn Palace—a floral-themed 1,700-room resort featuring a lake with gondolas—would be delayed by three months to June 25, 2016.

Macau soared past Las Vegas as the world's gambling capital after opening up to international operators in 2001 and raked in more than seven times its US counterpart in 2014.

However, it is now being forced to follow Vegas' lead and transform from a hard-core gambling hub into a destination with much broader appeal. — AFP

CHINA NEW HOME PRICES EDGED UP IN DECEMBER

BEIJING: China's new home prices increased in December for the fifth straight month, a survey showed Friday, following a series of stimulus measures aimed at boosting lending. The gains come as authorities have vowed to stabilize China's property market—a key pillar of the world's second-largest economy.

The average price of a new home in China's 100 major cities rose 0.74 percent month-on-month in December to 10,980 yuan (\$1,686) per square metre, the China Index Academy (CIA) said in a report, marking a pick-up from

November's 0.46 percent rise.

On a year-on-year basis, prices increased 4.15 percent. China's property sector has come under pressure in the past two years as new buyers were priced out of the market while the economy falters. Home sales fell 7.8 percent in value in 2014.

The economy grew at its slowest pace for 24 years in 2014 and has eased further this year, raising concerns on global markets. The country logged its worst economic performance since the global financial crisis in the third quarter, with growth of just 6.9 percent.

In the 12 months the central bank cut interest rates six times and slashed the amount of cash bank's must keep in reserve in a bid to ramp up lending to reinvigorate the economy.

And at a policy conference last month the government pledged to encourage property developers to "moderately cut housing prices" and ordered local authorities to "revoke obsolete restrictive measures". The CIA said it expected policies generated by the conference to "effectively adjust market supply and demand and further ease pressure on inventory". — AFP

HOW MUCH MONEY YOU JUST SAVED ON GAS IN 2015

NEW YORK: US drivers saved a bunch of money on gasoline this past year, as Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members kept the pumps going in the face of low oil prices. Massive stockpiles of crude globally turned 2015 into the year of the pain-free fill up. More of the same is expected for 2016 as oil prices remain low. Here's a quick breakdown of the numbers, courtesy of the AAA.

ONE FOR THE OIL MAN, TWO FOR ME

Americans saved a collective \$115 billion plus this year on trips to the gas station. The average licensed driver pocketed more than \$550, enough to cover a lease payment or two. The average price for a gallon of gas never broke \$3 in 2015, and it dipped below \$2 in December, the first time that's happened since the Great Recession in 2009.

HOW ABOUT A NEW YEAR'S ROAD-TRIP?

You'll likely be paying less on

average this New Year's Day than on the past seven. The national average price for a gallon of gas is \$2, the lowest since 2008. But you'd likely pay less. About 71 percent of gas stations are selling gas for less than \$2 per gallon, and 16,000 stations are charging less than \$1.75. But you'll pay up if you drive to California, Nevada, Washington, Alaska - or rent a car in Hawaii. Those are the five states where gas costs \$2.47 or more.

CALIFORNIANS PAY MORE

No one paid as much as Californians for gas, the first time that's ever happened. The culprit: unplanned maintenance at some major refineries. Still, the average price in the state of \$3.16 per gallon was cheap compared with \$3.79 in 2014. On the opposite end of the spectrum and the country, the Southeastern US is rolling in gas savings. For the fourth year in a row, South Carolina was the lowest coun-

trywide, at an average of \$2.10 per gallon. Other states where the savings were grand included Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Louisiana.

LOOKING AHEAD

AAA estimates that the annual average price of gas in 2016 will be between \$2.25 and \$2.45 per gallon, which would be cheaper or at least comparable to the 2015 average of \$2.40 per gallon. Some industry analysts believe that cut-backs by US producers will trim the huge surplus in oil, and gasoline prices will rise as a result. But remember, oil is priced globally and with sanctions being eased, Iran could add to the glut and further pressure prices. During a two-day conference in November, some 50 major oil, gas and petrochemical projects were introduced in Tehran. That, for anyone who buys gas, points to a buyer's market in 2016. — AP

WALL STREET CAPS A VOLATILE YEAR

MARKET ENDS 2015 FLAT AFTER TAKING INVESTORS FOR A WILD RIDE

NEW YORK: The US stock market took investors for a wild ride in 2015, but in the end it was a trip to nowhere. Despite veering between record highs and the steepest dive in four years, the stock market ended the year essentially flat, delivering the weakest performance since 2008. That means if you invested in a fund that tracks the Standard & Poor's 500 index, you have little to show for the past 12 months.

"It's been mildly disappointing," said Michael Baele, managing director at the Private Client Reserve at US Bank. "Any time that you come in toward the end of the year close to flat you always want a little bit more."

Markets overseas had their own challenges. China's market surged in the late spring and then fell sharply in the summer despite several efforts by China's government to stem the decline. The Shanghai Composite Index ended the year up 9.4 percent. Japan's market finished flat after that country's government stepped up its economic stimulus program. In Europe, Britain's market ended the year down about 5 percent, while indexes in Germany and France turned in healthy gains of 9.6 percent and 8.5 percent, respectively.

In the US, the market got 2015 off to a slow start as investors worried about falling crude oil prices, flat earnings growth and when and how quickly the Federal Reserve would begin raising interest rates. By May, the major indexes were hitting new highs. Even the Nasdaq bested its dot-com high-water mark set in March 2000.

The market didn't stay in milestone territory for long, though. Worries about slowing growth in China and elsewhere gave reason for the Fed to pause and for investors to fret, even as the US economy continued to create jobs and consumer confidence improved. Weak company earnings, largely due to the strong dollar and falling oil prices, didn't do much for the market's confidence.

By August, the anxiety had deepened and the market dropped sharply. The three major US indexes went into a correction, commonly defined as a loss of at least 10 percent from a recent peak, for the first time in four years.

That slide didn't last long, either. Within several weeks, the market had mostly bounced back. The Nasdaq composite returned to positive territory for the year, while the Dow average and S&P 500 remained slightly in the red until December.

In the weeks that followed, the S&P 500 inched back into positive territory, leaving the Dow as the only major market indicator negative for the year. That held true until the last day of the year, when the S&P 500 index slipped

back into the red. The Dow ended down 178.84 points, or 1 percent, to 17,425.03 on Thursday. The S&P 500 index lost 19.42 points, or 0.9 percent, to 2,043.94. The Nasdaq composite fell 58.43 points, or 1.2 percent, to 5,007.41.

The S&P 500 ended the year with a slight loss of 0.7 percent. Once dividends are included, it had a total return of 1.4 percent. That's its worst

overnight borrowing rate higher, its first increase in interest rates in nearly a decade.

The Fed made it clear that it was expressing a vote of confidence in the US economy by doing so and that future increases would be gradual. That helped reassure investors that the Fed wouldn't raise rates too quickly and thereby stunt the economy's growth.

another, less steep drop in late September, the market began to struggle higher. By late November it had recouped all the losses from its late summer swoon.

Once investors determined that China's slowdown would not spillover to the US and European economies, "then we had a very rapid recovery from that very sharp decline," Jeremy Zirin, chief equities strategist at UBS

Google's parent company.

"There's only been a handful of really strong performers on a market cap-weighted index that have driven us to performance while the majority of the indices and the majority of the stocks are actually negative for the year," said Darrell Cronk, president of Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

Slow growth economy

The US economy didn't do the stock market any favors in 2015. It expanded at a slight 0.6 percent annual rate in the first three months of the year, depressed by unusually severe winter weather and disruptions at West Coast ports. The economy revved up in the next quarter, growing at an annual rate of 3.9 percent, but slowed to a gain of 2.1 percent in the July-September quarter.

Consumer spending remained a bright spot, however. That's one reason why consumer discretionary stocks, a category that includes big retailers and car makers, were the biggest gainers in the S&P 500.

S&P 500 goes red

The stocks closed lower on Thursday, capping the worst year for the market since 2008. The Standard & Poor's 500 index ended essentially flat for the year after the day's modest losses nudged it into the red for 2015. Even factoring in dividends, the index eked out a far smaller return than in 2014.

The Dow Jones industrial average also closed out the year with a loss. The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite fared better, delivering a gain for the year. "It's a lousy end to a pretty lousy year," said Edward Campbell, portfolio manager for QMA, a unit of Prudential Investment Management. "A very unrewarding year."

Trading was lighter than usual on Thursday ahead of the New Year's Day holiday. Technology stocks were among the biggest decliners, while energy stocks eked out a tiny gain thanks to a rebound in crude oil and natural gas prices.

The Dow ended the day down 178.84 points, or 1 percent, to 17,425.03. The S&P 500 index lost 19.42 points, or 0.9 percent, to 2,043.94. The Nasdaq composite fell 58.43 points, or 1.2 percent, to 5,007.41. For 2015, the Dow registered a loss of 2.2 percent. It's the first down year for the Dow since 2008. The Nasdaq ended with a gain of 5.7 percent.

The S&P 500 index, regarded as a benchmark for the broader stock market, lost 0.7 percent for the year. The index had a total return for the year of just 1.4 percent, including dividends. That's the worst return since 2008 and down sharply down from the 13.7 per-

cent it returned in 2014.

While US employers added jobs at a solid pace in 2015 and consumer confidence improved, several factors weighed on stocks in 2015.

Investors worried about flat earnings growth, a deep slump in oil prices and the impact of the stronger dollar on revenues in markets outside the US. They also fretted about the timing of the Federal Reserve's first interest rate increase in more than a decade.

The uncertainty led to a volatile year in stocks, which hit new highs earlier in the year, but swooned in August as concerns about a slowdown in China's economy helped drag the three major stock indexes into a correction, or a drop of at least 10 percent. The markets recouped most of their lost ground within a few weeks.

"The market didn't go anywhere and earnings didn't really go anywhere," Campbell said. On Thursday, nine of the 10 sectors in the S&P 500 index ended lower, led by a 1.4 percent decline in technology stocks. Energy stocks, which had been battered recently as commodities prices sank, rose 0.3 percent as oil prices rebounded. The sector still closed out the year down nearly 24 percent, making it the worst performer in the S&P 500.

Crude oil and natural gas prices recovered some of their losses from the day before. Benchmark US crude climbed 44 cents, or 1.2 percent, to close at \$37.04 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price international oils, gained 82 cents, or 2.2 percent, to close at \$37.28 a barrel in London.

In other energy trading in New York, wholesale gasoline rose 3.7 cents to \$1.267 a gallon, heating oil rose 2.2 cents to \$1.101 a gallon and natural gas rose 12.3 cents to \$2.337 per 1,000 cubic feet.

European stocks

In Europe, Britain's FTSE 100 dropped 0.5 percent, putting it down 4.9 percent for the year. France's CAC-40 fared better in 2015, with an 8.5 percent gain after slipping 0.9 percent on Thursday. Germany's main stock market, which was closed Thursday for the holiday, ended the year with a 9.6 percent gain. In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.9 percent, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.1 percent. Precious and industrial metals prices ended mixed. Gold rose \$40 cents to \$1,060.20 an ounce, silver fell 4 cents to \$13.80 an ounce and copper slid 1 cent to \$2.14 a pound. Bond prices rose. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 2.27 percent from 2.30 percent a day earlier. In currency markets, the dollar fell to 120.19 yen from 120.55 yen, while the euro fell to \$1.0859 from \$1.0924. — AP



NEW YORK: In this Dec 16, 2015, file photo, Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen's Washington news conference is shown on a television screen on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Wall Street watched few things more closely this year than the Federal Reserve. Despite veering between record highs and the steepest dive in four years, the stock market is on track to end the year essentially flat. — AP

showing since 2008, when it slumped 37 percent in the midst of the financial crisis. That figure also includes dividends.

"There was a lot of news that kept hitting the market and the market kept shrugging it all off and hung in there," said J J Kinahan, chief strategist at TD Ameritrade. "I'd say, given all that the market faced this year, it was pretty strong." These were some of the key factors driving US markets in 2015:

Waiting for the Fed

Wall Street watched few things more closely this year than the Federal Reserve. Traders had been predicting early on that the central bank would begin raising its benchmark interest rate as early as March. When that didn't happen, investors turned their focus to June, only to be disappointed again. Eventually, in December, the Fed took action. It nudged its benchmark

"It really was central banks looming large over the market," Baele said. "The market had a fair amount of fear that the Fed raising rates was a risk to the market. It's turned around now."

Correction arrives

The bull market had racked up six years of annual gains by the time the calendars turned to 2015. The last time it had a correction was 2011. Historically, that's an unusually long time for the market to go without a meaningful pullback. That plus a string of record highs in late 2014 led many to think the market was overdue a drop.

The long-awaited correction finally arrived in August. Late in the month indexes dropped sharply as investors worried that a slowdown in China's huge economy could spread to other countries. Yet after an 11 percent plunge between Aug. 17 and 25, and

Wealth Management Americas.

EARNINGS DRAG

A big reason why the market finished flat in 2015 is that company earnings growth has also been largely flat. That was due primarily to the impact of falling oil prices on energy sector earnings. Also, the rapid appreciation of the dollar constrained earnings for companies that do a lot of business overseas, including Procter & Gamble, Tiffany, Gap and Avon.

As a result, earnings growth for companies in the S&P 500 index went from 7 percent in 2014 to essentially zero in 2015, Zirin said. Excluding energy, earnings for the rest of the S&P 500 would be up about 7 percent this year, Zirin said. With so few companies producing meaningful growth, investors homed in on those that did. Among the biggest gainers: Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Alphabet,

EUROPEAN SHARES END 2015 WITH GAINS BUT BELOW PEAKS

LONDON: European shares ended 2015 mostly higher than where they started, but well below their peaks after weak commodity prices weighed on markets in the final quarter.

Britain's blue-chip FTSE 100 index shed 0.5 percent on Thursday and France's benchmark CAC-40 index was down 0.9 percent, while Germany's DAX was closed for a public holiday and other markets had half-day sessions. Brent crude oil prices stayed near 11-year lows, with falls in oil companies such as BP and Total. Shares have retreated from record highs reached in April, pulled down partly by concerns about a slowdown in China, the world's second-biggest economy and a major

consumer of commodities such as metals and oil.

But economic stimulus measures from the European Central Bank have prevented markets from losing too much ground, with the main German and French markets both up some 10 percent overall in 2015. However, the FTSE has underperformed its European rivals and is down around 5 percent for the year, partly because commodity-related stocks account for a bigger part of the market in Britain than in France and Germany.

The FTSE, DAX and CAC ended the year down 12 percent, 13 percent and more than 11 percent, respectively, from their April peaks. A Reuters poll earlier this month forecast that while European stocks

would rise in 2016, they would not get back to the highs of 2015.

Admiral Markets' Darren Sinden said that despite some lingering concerns about debt-ridden European economies such as Greece, European stocks still promised better returns for investors than the low yields on offer in bond markets.

"European stocks are still probably the best choice in a limited range of options," said Sinden. "There's not much incentive to hold bonds, and the US is at the tail-end of a bull run, so it's hard to justify putting your money there. Nevertheless, in Europe, I still have some concerns about the domestic European economic recovery," he added. — Reuters



NEW YORK: In this March 15, 2007 file photo, former US Congressman and Chairman of the House Financial Services Committee Michael G Oxley attends the opening bell at the Nasdaq stockmarket in New York. Oxley, who helped write a landmark business regulatory law following the collapse of Enron Corp and WorldCom Inc has died. Mikey Oxley was 71. Oxley's wife, Patricia, says her husband died in his sleep early Friday, Jan 1, 2016, in northern Virginia. — AP

A BREAKDOWN OF THE S&P 500'S SECTORS IN 2015

NEW YORK: While the Standard & Poor's index is finishing 2015 around where it started, the index has been sharply divided between winners and losers. Four of the index's 10 sectors rose, while energy and five others lost ground.

CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY: Up 8.4 percent. These stocks had by far the best year on the market. The sector was driven higher by big gains from Netflix and Amazon, the only S&P 500 stocks that doubled in value this year. Starbucks, Cablevision and Expedia all did well. The S&P's consumer discretionary index has risen for seven years in a row.

HEALTH CARE: Up 5.2 percent. Health care stocks rose thanks to gains in drug companies, such as the macular degeneration drug maker Regeneron, and Botox maker Allergan, which combined with Actavis early in the year. A wave of consolidation lifted health insurers.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Up 4.3 percent. Video game makers Activision Blizzard and Electronic Arts surged, while Google parent Alphabet and chip designer Nvidia also made significant gains. Facebook hit an all-time high and

Microsoft reached its highest price since 2000 as it transitioned to new leadership.

CONSUMER STAPLES: Up 3.8 percent. Even though shares of Wal-Mart had their worst year in four decades, consumer staple stocks edged higher on gains from Spam maker Hormel, Monster Beverage and Corona distributor Constellation Brands. The \$54 billion combination of Kraft and Heinz also helped the sector.

TELECOM: Down 1.7 percent. Shares of Frontier Communications and CenturyLink tumbled this year, counteracting a small gain from telecom giant AT&T and a 10-percent jump for Level 3 Communications.

FINANCIALS: Down 3.5 percent. Financial stocks slipped as losses from Goldman Sachs, Berkshire Hathaway and student loan processor Navient canceled out gains from E-Trade Financial and property and casualty insurer Chubb. Investors expected the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates this year, but it waited until December to do so. Higher interest rates mean banks can make more money on loans.

INDUSTRIALS: Down 4.7 percent. The

strong dollar and a slowing global economy, particularly in China, hit industrial stocks. Engine maker Cummins, railroad operator Union Pacific, machinery maker Caterpillar and truck maker Paccar all pulled the sector lower.

UTILITIES: Down 8.4 percent. Utility stocks are seen as stable investments that pay steady dividends, and the utilities sector had risen five out of the last six years. With interest rates about to start rising, investors sold utility stocks this year.

MATERIALS: Down 10.4 percent. The prices of gold, silver and copper slid to six-year lows in 2015 as the global economy cooled. That battered stocks of mining and metals companies like Freeport-McMoRan and Alcoa as well as glass container maker Owens-Illinois and fertilizer maker Mosaic.

ENERGY: Down 23.6 percent. With worldwide oil supplies building up and demand slumping, the price of oil hit its lowest level since early 2009 and natural gas fell to its lowest price since 1999. Energy companies cut tens of thousands of jobs as they scrambled to reduce spending, and earnings plunged. — AP



TOKYO: Photographers shoot the last trading day of 2015 at the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo on Thursday. Tokyo's shares ended the year on a high note, climbing more than nine percent in 2015 to rank among the world's top-performing major markets. On December 30, the Nikkei ticked up 0.27 percent, or 51.48 points, to close at 19,033.71. — AFP



TISSOT OPENS NEW TIMES SQUARE BOUTIQUE JUST IN TIME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

NEW YORK: Swiss Watchmaker Tissot officially opened the doors to their new Times Square boutique located on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets, just in time for the holidays. This marks the third boutique in New York City to be opened within the last year, with a fourth scheduled to open in World Trade in April 2016.

The Times Square Boutique will be the first to launch the new Tissot PRC 200 NBA Special Edition Watch as part of Tissot's new role as Official Timekeeper of the NBA. Additionally, the Tissot Times Square boutique will unveil special collections for Tissot Official Team Partners, including the Chicago Bulls, Los Angeles Lakers, Miami Heat, New York Knicks and San Antonio Spurs.

The Times Square Boutique adds to Tissot's significant presence in New York. The brand has been the Official Timepiece of Madison Square Garden since 2012, and

the Official Timekeeper of the New York Knicks since last month.

"Tissot opened its third New York Boutique in Time Square just in time for the holiday season," said François Thiébaud, Tissot President. "Times Square is one of the world's most iconic destinations, and Tissot will now make it an even more desirable location for tourists and New Yorkers alike."

The boutique will offer guests an informative and enjoyable experience with a broad watch selection from Tissot's many collections; Touch Collection, T-Sport, T-Lady, T-Classic, Heritage, T-Gold, T-Pocket and Special Collections. A historical exhibition featuring vintage Tissot timepieces will also be on display.

It's the Swissness at the very heart of Tissot that makes the brand such a distinguished one. The + in the Tissot logo is the same as the Swiss flag, symbolising the quality and the reliability that watchmakers

have proudly demonstrated since 1853. The innovative brand remains in its home in Le Locle in the Swiss Jura Mountains, keeping its Swiss identity at its core. Tissot watches are authentic and accessible, using special materials, advanced functionality and meticulous design detail to create pieces that are both precise and stylish.

The high calibre of the brand has been repeatedly recognised, as in its illustrious history Tissot has been named Official Timekeeper and Partner of the NBA, FIBA, CBA, MotoGP, FIM World Superbike, AFL, RBS 6 Nations Rugby and the World Championships of cycling, fencing and ice hockey. Tissot, which sells its timepieces in more than 160 countries round the world, is a member of the Swatch Group, the world's largest watch producer and distributor of Swiss watches. As it continues to create pioneering creations, Tissot stands by its signature, "Innovators by Tradition."



KALYAN JEWELLERS FELICITATES BENTLEY CAMPAIGN WINNER FATEMAH ARAFAH

KUWAIT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted jewellery brands, felicitated Fatemah Arafah, winner of the prestigious Kalyan Jewellers Bentley Campaign, at the flagship

showroom in Kuwait City. N R Venkatraman, Head Overseas Operations, Kalyan Jewellers, handed over the shining white Bentley car key to a beaming Fatemah. Fatemah Arafah, an Egyptian

national was declared the winner of the prestigious Bentley Campaign post the mega draw held earlier.

Acknowledging the winner of

brates this win. It gives us immense pleasure and we feel blessed that winning with Kalyan Jewellers is such a happy occasion in the lives of our patrons. It is heartening to



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brates this win. It gives us immense pleasure and we feel blessed that winning with Kalyan Jewellers is such a happy occasion in the lives of our patrons. It is heartening to

know that we are making aspirations come true." The "Win a Bentley" campaign concluded on November 21, 2015 across all Kalyan Jewellers outlets in Kuwait. Customers who made a

minimum purchase of KWD 75 were entitled to enter the mega draw to win a Bentley. Those who bought gold received one coupon, while those buying diamonds received two coupons. A special 'Scratch and Win' feature was also built into the coupons, enabling buyers to win an instant prize of diamond jewellery worth KWD 65.

Within a short span of time, Kalyan has made a strong impact in the GCC, expanding its presence in the UAE with 10 showrooms and Kuwait with three showrooms. Kalyan Jewellers has a total of 86 showrooms spread across India and West Asia. The brand has acquired a loyal customer base of over 250,000 customers in a short span of less than two years in the GCC and has been aggressively rolling out a slew of initiatives to establish a strong proposition.

Headquartered in Thrissur in the state of Kerala, Kalyan Jewellers is one of the largest jewellery manufacturer distributors in India. The company leverages its strong roots, of over a century, in the business of textile trading, distribution and wholesaling. Starting with the first jewellery showroom in 1993, Kalyan Jewellers has enjoyed a long-standing presence in the market of over two decades. It has set an industry benchmark in quality, transparent pricing and innovation. Kalyan offers an array of traditional and contemporary jewellery designs in gold, diamonds and precious stones catering to the distinct needs of the customers. Kalyan Jewellers has grown to 86 showrooms across India and West Asia. Kalyan Jewellers continues to adhere to the founding principles of its forefathers of pursuing fair and ethical business practices.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS STATEMENT ON GERMAN COURT RULING

ABU DHABI: Etihad Airways is deeply disappointed by the German court's decision handed down on December 31. We are reviewing the judgement and will file an appeal against the decision early next week.

Etihad Airways owns 29.2 per cent of airberlin, Germany's second largest airline. The social and economic damage to Germany by this decision is significant.

The withdrawal of approval for codeshare services on 29 routes materially reduces competition and consumer choice within and beyond Germany and causes inconvenience to passengers.

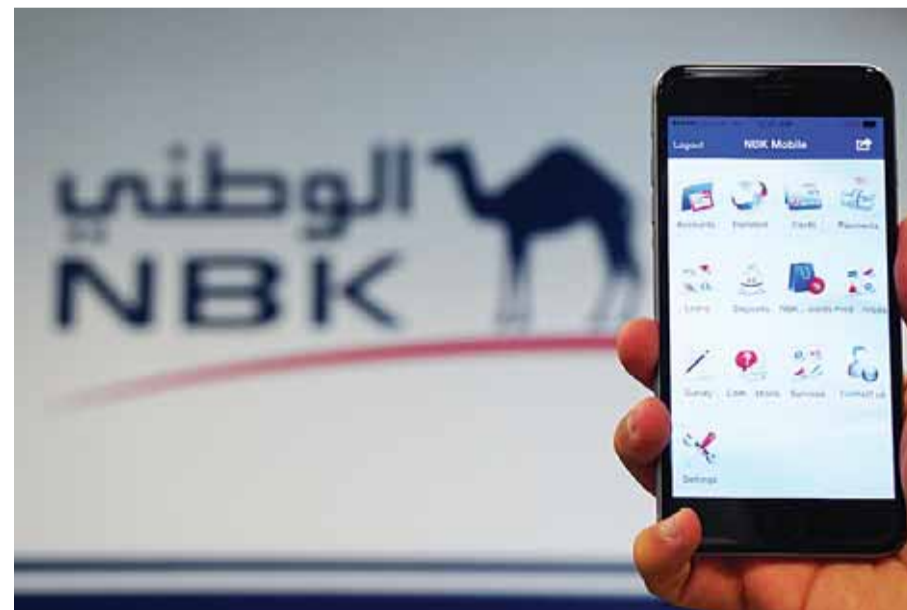
Notwithstanding, we will continue to stand by our partner, airberlin, to promote competition and offer a superior product and travel experience.

We will continue to honor all booked itineraries.

Etihad Airways began operations in 2003, and in 2014 carried 14.8 mil-

lion passengers. From its Abu Dhabi base, Etihad Airways flies to or has announced plans to serve 113 passenger and cargo destinations in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Americas. The airline has a fleet of 120 Airbus and Boeing aircraft, and more than 200 aircraft on firm order, including 66 Boeing 787s, 25 Boeing 777Xs, 62 Airbus A350s and five Airbus A380s.

Etihad Airways holds equity investments in airberlin, Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Alitalia, Jet Airways, Virgin Australia, and Swiss-based Darwin Airline, trading as Etihad Regional. Etihad Airways, along with airberlin, Air Serbia, Air Seychelles, Alitalia, Etihad Regional, Jet Airways and NIKI, also participate in Etihad Airways Partners, a new brand that brings together like-minded airlines to offer customers more choice through improved networks and schedules and enhanced frequent flyer benefits.



NBK SERVICES AVAILABLE DURING NEW YEAR HOLIDAY

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has taken all necessary measures to ensure providing customers with the best services during the New Year holiday throughout Call Center, Mobile Banking (Android, Apple and BlackBerry), Online and ATM services.

NBK Branch at Kuwait International airport is open 24 hours a day and is fully equipped to ensure customers are able to carry out their transactions easily. All other NBK branches will resume work on Monday 4th of January 2016.

NBK Call Center, NBK Online and ATM will be available 24 hours and ready to

serve customers. Customers can also conduct all their transactions through NBK Mobile Banking application and web-page. Customers may call 1801801 or visit www.nbk.com for further information.

For customers outside Kuwait, NBK's largest international presence with more than 170 branches worldwide spans many of the world's leading financial centers including London, Paris, Geneva, New York and Singapore, as well as China (Shanghai). Meanwhile, regional coverage extends to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey.

MALAYSIA MAY SUSPEND BAUXITE MINING

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is pushing to suspend bauxite mining due to concerns about its impact on the environment, a cabinet source said yesterday, threatening to interrupt supply of the aluminum-making ingredient to China. The largely unregulated industry has grown rapidly in the last two years to meet Chinese demand. Bauxite mining was blamed for turning the waters red on a stretch of coastline and surrounding rivers in eastern peninsula Malaysia after two days of heavy rain earlier this week.

The cabinet wants to temporarily halt bauxite mining until regulations, licensing and environmental protection can be put in place, the source told Reuters yesterday. "The idea is to suspend it for a time until all this is sorted out, but ultimately the prerogative for licensing lies with the state," the source told Reuters on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to media.

Prime Minister Najib Razak has asked the resource minister to resolve the issues with the government of Malaysia's third-largest state and key bauxite producer Pahang, the source said.

Waters and seas near Pahang's state capital Kuantan ran red earlier this week as downpours brought an increase in run-off from the ochre-red earth at the mines and the stockpiles, stoking environmental concerns. The state official in charge of the environment Mohd Soffi Abd Razak, however, said the pollution was caused by illegal mine operators and not by mines run by companies approved by the state government, according to local media reports.

"We believe the illegal miners are causing the waters to be murky," local daily Malay Mail quoted the official as saying. Bauxite mines have sprung up in Malaysia since late 2014, notably in Kuantan, which faces the South China Sea.

The mines have been shipping increasing

amounts of the raw material to China, filling in a gap after Indonesia banned bauxite exports in early 2014, forcing the world's top aluminum producer, China, to seek supplies elsewhere. In the first 11 months of 2015, Malaysia exported more than 20 million tons of bauxite to China, up nearly 700 percent on the previous year. In 2013, it shipped just 162,000 tons.

But the frantic pace of mining in Kuantan has brought in its wake a growing clamor of voices complaining of contamination of water sources and the destruction of the environment. Natural Resources and Environment Minister Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar had previously said that Malaysia has come up with a raft of new regulations and guidelines for the industry, but needs the consent of the state government to impose them. The minister could not be immediately reached for a comment by Reuters yesterday. —Reuters

DIGITAL MEDIA TRENDS THAT WILL DEFINE 2016

LOS ANGELES: Unlike the mega-M&A that dominated digital media in 2014 (Disney/Maker Studios, Apple/Beats Music, Facebook/Oculus), one story dominated digital media in 2015: Netflix and an increasing number of premium content-focused over-the-top video services ascended and accelerated the unbundling of decades-old pay TV packages and business models. A seemingly endless stream of new OTT services, including those backed by traditional media companies, finally followed Netflix into the digital-first world and offered consumers a barrage of choice like never before.

Many like Netflix are subscription video on demand, some are advertising-driven, and an increasing number delivered internationally, leveraging the digital promise and global opportunity of the borderless Internet. All are driven by the now widely held reality that cord-cutters and cord-nevers are here to stay, as their numbers grew significantly faster this year than most expected - which isn't all bad for cable companies that feed voracious consumer demand with faster and higher margin pipes.

The recent Golden Globe nominations

punctuated this new media reality, as OTT-first "television" programming dominated like never before. Pay-TV darling HBO was not immune, as Netflix stole the longtime nomination leader's crown for the first time in 14 years. This is a remarkable achievement, since Netflix borrowed HBO's "originals" playbook just a couple years back - a strategy at which many (if not most) industry insiders scoffed then. Well, they aren't laughing now. Netflix continues to confound, with 70+ million paid subs worldwide and a \$50 billion market cap-virtually identical to Time Warner's.

Amongst traditional media, Comcast/NBC Universal is perhaps the poster child for 2015's new video reality, as the giant struck out into the digital wild with full force, particularly in the second half of this year. Not only did NBC Universal invest \$200 million into Vox Media and another \$200 million in BuzzFeed one week later, it went all-in with OTT. First, parent Comcast launched its mobile and millennial-focused short-form video platform "Watchable". And, in case that weren't enough, NBCUniversal separately announced a longer-form stand-alone subscription service, Seeso,

which launches January 7th.

And let's not forget about Hulu, in which Comcast/NBCU is a joint venture partner with Disney and Fox. Hulu upped the ante significantly in its exclusive premium content war against Netflix. Other traditional US-based media companies have followed suit and are now very much in the unbundled stand-alone OTT world. These include CBS (All Access), Viacom (Nickelodeon's Noggin), Dish Networks (Sling TV), Univision (Univision Now), Showtime (Showtime Anytime), and HBO (HBO Now). The list goes on and on and extends to non-traditional new media companies like Otter Media, The Chernin Group and AT&T's joint venture, which backs Fullscreen, and telco behemoth Verizon, which recently launched Go90.

The line between last year's headline-grabbing multi-channel networks and OTT also blurred as they morphed into multi-platform networks that moved beyond YouTube into the land of Facebook and Snapchat. Most major MPNs delved into the vertically focused HBO-like premium original programming game. There's gold in those mobile-first vertical hills populated by a particularly

rabid and underserved digital-native customer base.

Virtual Reality

Virtual reality grabbed its own share of 2015 headlines in digital media. VR's promise, which most media execs considered fringe (and perhaps even fad) just last year, became very real indeed, setting the stage for expected early mainstreaming of VR in 2016. VR may become next year's digital media headline story.

We all know about Oculus Rift after Facebook acquired it for \$2 billion in 2014. But, Oculus is not alone - far from it. Virtually all major consumer electronics giants will soon flood the market with millions of premium VR headsets at price points that will drive adoption akin to the early days of game consoles. For major studios and the creative community in general, VR presents a tantalizing new mega-commercial opportunity to thrill consumers with new forms of storytelling. After all, VR is not just about games, although game-focused VR will dominate in 2016. Live-action VR is now in focus, even as the language to direct those experiences is still itself in develop-

ment.

Virtually all major studios at least smartly dabbled in VR this past year. But Jaunt, a Bay Area company that closed another massive round of \$65 financing in 2015 from the likes of media giants Disney and ProSieben, made the biggest splash on the creator side. Jaunt opened its LA-based production studio this year.

Apart from VR, what else will dominate the headlines for digital media in 2016? Expect consolidation. The number and pace of M&A deals will increase significantly. So will their sheer size, as traditional media scrambles to connect with digital-first, mobile-driven millennials who matter most to marketers. But which companies will come together? What VR productions will succeed? How many of these paid subscription services can the market take? These questions are all part of the great unknown. We're still early and market "noise" is great, so there will be blood. But, in the immortal words of Yoda, "try you must!"

NOTE: Csathy is CEO of Manatt Digital Media, a fully-integrated digital media/tech-focused business consulting and legal services firm. — Reuters

LOOK BACK AND TECH WISH LIST FOR 2016

By Anick Jesdanun

NEW YORK: This past year brought lots of new products, services and features - including a few that even managed to improve everyday life. For instance, a double tap of the home button on Samsung's newest phones instantly launches the camera, so you're less likely to miss that magical moment. TiVo has a smart way to skip commercials and speed up video playback so that you can watch TV shows and movies in half the time. But there's plenty more for tech companies to do. Here's a wish list for 2016:

Pick and Choose Online Television

In 2015, HBO and Showtime freed themselves from traditional television shackles. Both now offer app subscriptions directly to consumers - with no cable or satellite TV service required. It's a start, but lots of worthy channels, including ESPN, remain locked up in packages filled with channels not everyone wants. Even though Dish's Sling TV offers ESPN over the Internet - Sony's PlayStation Vue will also do so soon - you can get it only as part of larger packages. I'd love to get AMC, ABC Family and Comedy Central as stand-alone subscriptions, for instance.

Managing Your Shows

With lots more online viewing options, we need better ways to keep track of what to watch and when shows expire from streaming services. I kept forgetting to watch that "Unauthorized Melrose Place Story" on Lifetime, and now it's too late. Streaming TV devices from Apple, Roku, Amazon and Nvidia let you search multiple services at once to see what's available, but you don't have any way to add shows to a universal queue. Instead, you have to go to Netflix to see your list of flagged shows on that service, HBO to see its list, and so on. It's as if you needed separate video recorders for each channel. TiVo comes closest to offering a universal queue with its OnePass feature, but it has relatively few streaming TV apps.

Enough with Passwords

Passwords are difficult to manage, which is one reason so many are trivial to guess ("password12345" anyone?) and so many people reuse the same weak passwords across multiple services. Yahoo has an easier way to sign in to its services. Using Account Key, you confirm who you are through a text Yahoo sends to your phone. Google is testing something similar. Other services tap the fingerprint ID technology found on iPhones and some high-end Android

phones. A touch of the home button bypasses the password by confirming you're the one holding the phone. We need more such mechanisms that offer both simplicity and security.

Getting Along

Companies are getting better at acknowledging their rivals. Microsoft, for instance, made its Office apps for iPhones, iPads and Android before tackling its own Windows phone system. Samsung smartwatches now work with non-Samsung phones, while Apple made its music service available on Android.

It's a start. But animated photos taken with Apple's new iPhones can be viewed only on other Apple devices. And streaming devices made by Apple, Google and Amazon typically won't play video bought from each other, at least not without using a backdoor relay feature such as AirPlay. So if you have Amazon video, you're stuck with Amazon's device. Amazon even stopped selling Apple TV and Google's Chromecast on its website.

Getting Around with No Internet

Google Maps for Android and iPhones now works without an Internet connection, so long as you download mapping data ahead of time. That's helpful when you find yourself trying to leave a remote national park or an underground parking garage - both areas where cellular service is spotty or non-existent. But the offline feature doesn't work with walking or transit directions, so it's not as useful for wilderness hikes or in many subway stations.

Speaking of maps, all services could do better at directing motorists to rental-car centers at airports. Typing in the three-letter airport code assumes you're getting dropped off at the main terminals. The rental-car location might be miles away, perhaps off a different highway exit. It would be nice to see the rental-car location more prominent in map searches. Better yet, how about the closest gas station to refill your tank?

Oops ... I Dropped it Again

Motorola may have cracked the problem of shattered phone screens. Its Droid Turbo 2 phone ditches glass for shatterproof plastic. While the glass used in most leading phones is chemically strengthened, it will still crack if it hits a hard surface with enough force. In testing, the Turbo's screen withstood normal drops, though plastic does make the device more prone to scratching. Sure, there's a trade-off, but it's time to stop assuming that cracked screens are just something we have to learn to live with. — AP

GADGETS AROUND US WILL KEEP GETTING SMARTER, LIKE IT OR NOT

NEW YORK: Our cars, our homes, our appliances and even our toys: Things around us are going to keep getting smarter. In 2016, we'll entrust even more of our lives and their intimate details to machines - not to mention the companies that run them. Are we ready for that?

You might, for instance, like the idea of turning on your TV with a spoken command - no more fumbling for the remote! But for that to work, the TV needs to be listening all the time, even when you're not watching. And even when you're discussing something extremely personal, or engaged in some other activity to which you'd rather not invite eavesdroppers.

How much should you worry? Maybe your TV never records any of your casual conversations. Or maybe its manufacturer is recording all that, but just to find ways to make the TV better at understanding what you want it to do. Or maybe it retains everything it hears for some other hidden purpose.

You may never know for sure. At best, you can hope the company keeps its promises on privacy. More important, you have to trust that its computer systems are really secure, or those promises are suddenly worthless. That part is increasingly difficult to guarantee - or believe - as hacking becomes routine. And here's the chief quandary: Every technological benefit comes with a cost in the form of a threat to privacy. Yet not paying that price has its own cost: an inability to participate in some of technology's greater achievements.

Because smart gadgets thrive on data - data about you and your habits, data about what large numbers of people do or say or appear to want in particular situations - it's difficult not to share pretty much everything with them. Doing otherwise would be like turning off your phone's location services, which disables many of its most useful features.

The consequences aren't restricted to phones and TVs:

- Kids will be able to talk to more toys and get personalized, computer-generated responses. Does the "don't talk to strangers" rule apply if the stranger is the Hello Barbie talking doll or Dino, the dinosaur powered by IBM's Watson artificial-intelligence system?

- Cars will work with GPS technology and sensors in parking meters, roads and home appliances to help route you around traffic and turn on your living-room lights as you approach the driveway. But that can also generate a detailed record of your whereabouts.

- Thermostats from Nest and others will get smarter at conserving energy when you're away. Potential burglars

might find that information handy.

- Home security cameras are getting cheaper and more plentiful, but they're sometimes insecure themselves, especially if you set them up clumsily. There's already a website devoted to showing video from cameras with no passwords. Though they are mostly outdoor or business cameras, one was trained on a baby's crib, and another in a living room.

- Wearable health devices will track your heart rate, fitness levels and more - and share achievements with friends and family. But slacking off may carry a heavier cost than those extra holiday pounds, particularly if your insurance company yanks discounts for meeting fitness goals.

- Software from Google and Facebook will get even more refined to help you cut through the noise. That's great if Facebook is showing you posts from friends you already interact the most with, but will a long-lost friend's plea for help go unanswered because you don't see it?

The pending onslaught of privacy trade-offs might seem trivial when it comes to a talking - and listening - Barbie. But maybe it's less so when your phone knows enough about you to remind you it's time to leave for an important interview (if the alternative



NEW YORK: In this Feb 14, 2015 photo, Hello Barbie is displayed at the Mattel showroom during the North American International Toy Fair. — AP photos

would be losing a shot at that job) or your smart home can really tell you if you turned off the oven before leaving for an international trip. "The encroachments on our privacy are often self-inflicted in the sense that we will accept the trade-off one bit at a time," says John Palfrey, co-author of "Interop: The Promise and Perils of Highly Interconnected Systems."

And these trade-offs can be quite subtle. Technological advances typically

offer immediate, tangible benefits that, once you've put enough of them together, can indeed revolutionize daily life. Can you imagine living your life without a smartphone? A few years from now, you might goggle at the thought of managing your day without constant advice from Siri or "OK Google."

As for the risks, they'll tend to be diffuse, abstract and often difficult to ascertain even if you're paying attention - and most people won't. In a study released Wednesday, the Pew Research Center says about half of American adults have no confidence that they understand what's being done with their data, and about a third are discouraged by the amount of effort needed to get that understanding.

Convenience

In short, convenience usually wins. Shiny new things are inherently attractive, and it takes a while for some of us to get uneasy about the extent to which we may be enabling our own surveillance. Humans have made this bargain with technology for some time. When cameras were invented, legal scholars debated how far you can go snapping pictures of people in public. That's no longer an issue - although the camera on a drone in your backyard is.

Over time, manufacturers will get better at putting in safeguards, and consumers will get better at setting boundaries and taking charge. For instance, this holiday season's Hello Barbie talking toy won't listen in until your kid presses its belt buckle. Though it does store conversations between kids and their dolls to improve speech-recognition technology, its maker says there's little personal information tied to those conversations - no first or last names, no ages, no gender. — AP



PALO ALTO, California: This Sept 10, 2015 photo shows the Nest Cam at Nest Labs, a home security camera that can stream video to a laptop or mobile device.

NEW YORK PAYPHONES BECOME WI-FI HOTSPOTS



NEW YORK: In this photo taken on Dec 31, 2015, people walk near a covered wireless kiosk at an intersection. — AP

NEW YORK: Operator, won't you help me replace this call? A 9-foot-tall, narrow structure installed this past week on a Manhattan sidewalk is signaling a plan to turn payphones into what's billed as the world's biggest and fastest municipal Wi-Fi network. The first of at least 7,500 planned hotspots are due to go online early next year, promising superfast and free Wi-Fi service, new street phones with free calling, ports to charge personal phones and a no-cost windfall for the city. With some cities nationwide making renewed pushes for public Wi-Fi after an earlier wave of enthusiasm faded, New York officials say their project is democratizing data access while modernizing outmoded street phones. For now, the first hotspot is still being tested and sits under a gray cover. But some passers-by like the sound of what's in store. "It's always helpful" to have Wi-Fi to reduce the bite that apps and web-surfing take out of cellular data service, which is capped in many consumers' plans, Jack Thomas said this week while texting near the

dormant kiosk.

But others have qualms about New Yorkers linking their devices to a public network as they stroll down the street, though the city has said data will be encrypted and any information harvested for advertising will be anonymized. "I think it makes us all more vulnerable to wrongdoers," Bee Mosca said as she eyed the future hotspot. Payphones may seem like telecom relics when 68 percent of Americans own smartphones, according to the Pew Research Center on Internet, Science & Technology. But about 8,200 payphones still dot New York streets. Some were pressed into service amid outages after 2012's Superstorm Sandy, but their numbers and usage have declined overall, and 37 percent of those inspected last year were inoperable.

The city experimented with providing Wi-Fi from a few payphones in 2012, then hatched the current, eight-year "LinkNYC" plan. A consortium of companies, including wireless technology player Qualcomm Inc, is to pay the esti-

mated \$200 million installation cost and take half the revenue from the kiosks' digital advertising, projected at \$1 billion over 12 years. The city gets the other half, more than doubling the \$17 million a year it gets from payphones now.

Win-Win

Each hotspot covers about a 150-foot radius with what's pledged as one-gigabit-per-second service, about 20 times the speed of average home Internet service. Officials have said the service is intended for outdoor use; it's not clear whether it might extend inside some businesses and homes. Though many Americans now carry Internet connectivity in their pockets, the network "can be a win for users who can save on their data plans, and it can be a win for (cellular) networks if they're really overtaxed," said Erik Stallman, general counsel of the Center for Democracy and Technology, a group that advocates for Internet liberties and access.

Tourists without local cellular service also could benefit, noted John Breyault,

a National Consumers League vice president. LinkNYC isn't without opponents: A payphone company has sued the city, saying it created a monopoly for the new consortium. The city has said it believes the arrangement is legal. Many US cities strove to cover themselves in Wi-Fi in the early 2000s. But a number of the plans foundered as home access proliferated, usage and ad revenues disappointed and some Internet service providers complained the city networks were unfair competitors.

But some cities have recently recast and reinvigorated their efforts. Boston is working to expand a "Wicked Free WiFi" network with over 170 hot spots, and Los Angeles is encouraging private companies to provide free basic wireless to all homes and businesses, with outdoor coverage as a goal. Still, some question whether it's wise for city governments to get into offering Wi-Fi, rather than leaving it to businesses. But "New York is not a typical city," said Jeff Kagan, a telecommunications analyst and consultant. — AP

US HEALTH CARE ‘REPEAL VOTE’ TO OPEN A POLITICAL YEAR

WASHINGTON: It's been like a long-delayed New Year's resolution for Republicans. But 2016 will finally be the year when they put legislation on President Barack Obama's desk repealing his health care law. The bill undoing the president's prized overhaul will be the first order of business when the House reconvenes this coming week, marking a sharply partisan start on Capitol Hill to a congressional year in which legislating may take a back seat to politics.

There are few areas of potential compromise between Obama and the GOP majority in the House and Senate in this election year, but plenty of opportunities for political haymaking during the presidential campaign season. Obama will veto the health law repeal bill, which also would cut money for Planned Parenthood. The measure already has passed the Senate under special rules pro-

tecting it from Democratic obstruction. But that's the point for Republicans, who intend to schedule a veto override vote for Jan. 22, when anti-abortion activists hold their annual march in Washington to mark the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in 1973 that legalized abortion.

Despite dozens of past votes to repeal the health law in full or in part, Republicans never before have succeeded in sending a full repeal bill to the White House. They insist that doing so will fulfill promises to their constituents while highlighting the clear choice facing voters in the November presidential election. Every Republican candidate has pledged to undo the health law. The Democrats running for president would keep it in place. "You're going to see us put a bill on the president's desk going after Obamacare and Planned Parenthood so we'll finally

get a bill on his desk to veto," House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., told conservative talk host Bill Bennett over the holidays.

An 'audit'

"Then you're going to see the House Republican Conference, working with our senators, coming out with a bold agenda that we're going to lay out for the country, to say how we would do things very differently," Ryan said. In the Senate, which reconvenes Jan 11, a week later than the House, early action will include a vote on a proposal by Sen Rand Paul, the Kentucky Republican who is running for president, for an "audit" of the Federal Reserve. Democrats are likely to block it. But, like the health repeal bill in the House, the vote will answer conservative demands in an election year.

Also expected early in the Senate's year

is legislation dealing with Syrian refugees, following House passage of a bill clamping down on the refugee program. Conservatives were angry when the year ended without the bill advancing. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky promised a vote, though without specifying whether it would be the House bill or something else. The House Benghazi committee will continue its investigation of the attacks that killed four Americans in Libya in 2012, with an interview of former CIA Director David Petraeus on Jan 6.

That comes amid new Democratic accusations of political motives aimed at Hillary Clinton after the committee chairman, Rep Trey Gowdy, R-SC, endorsed Sen Marco Rubio, R-Fla. for president. Clinton, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, was secretary of state at the time of the Benghazi attacks. The

bold agenda promised by Ryan after succeeding former Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, as speaker last fall will begin to take shape at a House-Senate GOP retreat this month in Baltimore. Thus far Ryan has pledged efforts to overhaul the tax system and offer a Republican alternative to the health overhaul.

In the Senate, McConnell's primary focus is protecting the handful of vulnerable Republican senators whose seats are at risk as Democrats fight to regain the Senate majority they lost a year ago. That means weighing the political risks and benefits of every potential vote to endanger incumbents in Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire. That could determine whether McConnell allows criminal justice overhaul legislation - the one issue cited by Obama and lawmakers of both parties as ripe for compromise - to come to the floor.—AP

SWIMMER MAULED IN A SHARK ATTACK

SYDNEY: A swimmer suffered wounds to his arms and legs yesterday after he was mauled in a suspected shark attack off Queensland state on Australia's east coast, officials said. The latest reported attack comes during the busy summer season, and as authorities in neighboring New South Wales implement a range of shark-prevention measures to reduce encounters after a spate of maulings in the state last year.

The 30-year-old man was swimming off Rosslyn Bay some 670 kilometers north of Brisbane just before 12:00 pm when he was believed to have been bitten by a shark, the state's ambulance service said. "(He has) lacerations to the arms and legs," an ambulance spokesman said. "He is still being assessed. He's just arrived to the shore now and will be transferred to Rockhampton Hospital shortly."

The swimmer was in a stable condition and would be transferred to another hospital in Brisbane later Sunday, a

Rockhampton Hospital spokesman said. The man was believed to have been snorkelling off Miall Island near Rosslyn Bay, a local coast guard officer told Brisbane's Courier Mail newspaper. "From what I understand he was snorkelling a bit off the beach and said he saw a lot of fish and then the shark came out of nowhere," Yeppoon Coast Guard flotilla commander Arthur Hunt said.

"It's the first shark attack we've had up here in a while-I've been (with the coast guard) for seven years and this is my first." There were 14 attacks in New South Wales last year-include the fatal mauling of a Japanese surfer-compared to three in 2014, according to data compiled by Sydney's Taronga Zoo. In Queensland, there were four attacks in 2015, compared to one in 2014, taking last year's national toll to 22, it said. Experts say attacks are increasing as water sports become more popular and bait fish move closer to shore, but fatalities remain rare.—AFP

EUROPE WINTER WARMTH PUTS NATURE IN TAILSPIN

ROME: The daffodils are out in London, plum trees are blossoming in Milan and asparagus tips are pushing through the soil in eastern France. Across Europe, unseasonably warm winter weather has left the natural world in a spin with plants, insects and animals convinced Spring must be just around the corner. The disruption of established weather patterns has put strawberries on festive menus in France, ensured an abundance of game in Germany's woodlands and seen tomatoes ripen for an exceptional third time this year on Italian balconies. With grass still growing in the north of Scotland well into December, the famous Royal Dornoch links put the traditional switch to winter greens on hold and kept its mowers buzzing into the final days of 2015. But alongside the serendipitous consequences for gourmets and golfers, unusual climatic conditions have also been linked to more unsettling trends.

Scientists and gardeners alike fret over whether this year reflects a worrying new normal created by global climate change. More than 2,000 wildfires have ravaged swaths of northern Spain in recent weeks thanks to a combination of unusually warm weather and high winds. Farmers across Europe meanwhile are grappling with the hard-to-predict implications of conditions which, while boosting the production of some crops, may reduce yields of others and allow pests to thrive later in the year due to the absence of a sustained winter cold spell to kill them off.

Strawberries for Christmas

"It is strange to see how certain plants are already flowering crazily," said Hans-Jurgen Packheiser, a 76-year-old beekeeper from Halver in Germany's North Rhine-Westphalia region. "Some of the bees in my hives are already out and about looking for nectar. They think winter is already finished." In the Dordogne region of southwestern France, strawberry producers were surprised to see plants that would normally have to be protected from frost from mid-November onwards continue to bear fruit right up to Christmas.

"Even my father-in-law, who has been producing strawberries since 1956, has never seen anything like it," said Patricia Rebillou, the president of the local producers' association. It is a similar story in Alsace,

where amateur gardener Rene Wolfhugel was able to harvest enough asparagus for his Christmas Eve dinner, four months earlier than normal for a vegetable that traditionally heralds the arrival of Spring.

"When I saw the tips pushing through, I could hardly believe my eyes. I had to call my neighbors to come and see," Wolfhugel said. "They were excellent, just as good as in the Spring." For French market gardener Jean-Louis Durrieux, the disruption of seasonal rhythms is less welcome. "I have been doing this for 30 years and I've never seen lettuces so far advanced at this time of year. Salad leaves that we would normally harvest in mid-January were ready at the start of December." With similar conditions across Europe, the result was a glut of ready-to-harvest plants which had left him with no choice but to throw away 60 percent of his October plantings, Durrieux said.

Year-round eggs

It has been a similar story for wild or ornamental plants. On the French Riviera and in the Basque country straddling Spain and France, Mimosas which would normally not flower until the end of January are already in full bloom, disconcerting florists who struggle to sell them at this time of year. "They are magnificent this year," said Valerie Torres a grower in Bormes-Les-Mimosas. "But the season for them is going to be shortened because they don't sell particularly well over Christmas." Wild Fuchsia, which normally stops flowering in the autumn on the Atlantic coast of Britain and Ireland, remains in full bloom on the Isle of Lsley, off the west coast of Scotland.

Local residents Steve and Mary Bavin were half-astonished, half-delighted when their hens resumed laying on November 30. "It is nice to have fresh eggs in the winter but it is also worrying because along with the higher temperatures we also seem to be getting a lot more rain and wind," said Steve Bavin. Stephane Longuepez, an official with the northern French city of Lille's parks and gardens department, also indicated that a precocious Spring was not to be welcomed. "It is easy to think that with the good weather, everything will grow better," he said. "But bulbs like tulips might not all flower this year because they need a cold winter spell for their development which they won't have had."—AFP



NEW DELHI: An Indian civil defense personnel stands at a traffic intersection in New Delhi. More than a million private cars were banned from New Delhi's roads as authorities began trialing drastic new measures to cut smog in the world's most polluted capital. —AFP

SMOG-SHROUDED DELHI PULLS CARS OFF ROADS

OVER A MILLION PRIVATE CARS BANNED FROM DELHI ROADS

NEW DELHI: More than a million private cars were banned from New Delhi's roads on Friday, as authorities began testing drastic new measures to cut smog in the world's most polluted capital. For 15 days from January 1, private cars will only be allowed on the city's roads every other day to try to reduce pollutant levels, which regularly hit 10 times the World Health Organization's safe limits. Cars with odd-numbered licence plates will be allowed on the roads on odd-numbered dates, and those with even-numbered plates on the other days.

As the restrictions came into force on Friday morning, overall pollutant levels hit a "hazardous" 429 on the US embassy's air quality index, meaning everyone is at risk of respiratory problems and children and older people should stay indoors. Hundreds of traffic police and volunteers took to the streets to enforce the scheme, including dozens of children wearing smog masks and holding banners urging drivers to comply. Most drivers appeared to be sticking to the rules Friday, with Delhi's usually clogged roads flowing relatively freely.

"Delhi has done it!" tweeted the city's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who said he was carpooling with colleagues to get to work. "Reports so far v encouraging," he added. One early violator caught driving a car with an even-numbered licence plate on a busy stretch of road was fined 2,000 rupees (\$30) and ordered to return home. "I would have expected to catch at least dozens in the first half an hour, but surprisingly most people are obeying," said Ankit Kumar, a traffic policeman. The restrictions, which run until January 15 on a trial basis, are part of a wider drive aimed at cutting pollution that also includes shutting some coal-fired power plants and vacuuming roads to reduce dust.

Schools have been ordered to remain closed for the period so that their buses can be used to ferry commuters to work. The Delhi government says the measures could be introduced on a more permanent basis if successful, although some believe residents could try to get around the restrictions by forging number plates or buying second cars. The scheme will be truly tested on Monday, when millions of commuters will have to find alternative ways to get to work after the long New Year weekend.

'Health concern'

In the evening, the Delhi government claimed the car rationing order was successful and praised residents for supporting it. "The response is beyond expectations," Satyendar Kumar Jain, a local government minister, told reporters, adding that just one percent of drivers had broken the rules. Many residents AFP spoke to said they were willing to do their



NEW DELHI: An Indian civil defense personnel stands at a traffic intersection in New Delhi. — AFP

part. "We are ready to travel in public transportation as long as there aren't any hassles," said Pallavi Agarwal, a 37-year-old doctor, as she stepped out of her SUV with her four-year-old son and husband. "Pollution is a real health concern and we have to do something." Yet critics say the restrictions do not go far enough, with motorcyclists and women driving alone exempt. Campaigners say motorbikes create up to 31 percent of pollution from vehicles.

Others remain skeptical that drivers will observe the restrictions for long. "Just wait for Monday, people are going to be back to their old habits. Delhiites are too used to their cars," said Kirti Lal, who commutes by bus. A 2014 WHO survey of more than 1,600 cities ranked Delhi as the most polluted, partly because of the 8.5 million vehicles on its roads. Car sales

are soaring as incomes rise, with 1,400 extra vehicles pouring onto the city's already crowded roads every day. India's capital has been shrouded in a toxic blanket of smog in recent weeks as cooler temperatures trap pollutants in the atmosphere, pushing harmful PM 2.5 levels sky-high.

These fine particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter are linked to higher rates of chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and heart disease after settling into lungs and passing into the bloodstream. On Friday the US embassy figures put PM 2.5 levels at 264 micrograms per cubic meter in Delhi, well above the WHO safe limit of 25. In a measure of mounting concern, India's Supreme Court recently ordered a temporary ban on large new diesel cars in Delhi and doubled a tax on diesel trucks.— AFP

ITALY CONFIRMS HIGHER CANCER AND DEATH RATES FROM MOB DUMPING

ROME: An Italian parliament-mandated health survey has confirmed higher-than-normal incidents of death and cancer among residents in and around Naples, thanks to decades of toxic waste dumping by the local Camorra mob. The report by the National Institute of Health found "critical" rates of babies in the provinces of Naples and Caserta being hospitalized in the first year of life for "excessive" instances of tumors, especially of the central nervous

system. The report, which updated an initial 2014 one, blamed the higher-than-expected rates on "confirmed or suspected exposure to a combination of environmental pollutants that can be emitted from illegal dump sites of dangerous waste or the uncontrolled burning of such waste." Residents have long complained about adverse health effects from the dumping, which has poisoned underground wells that irrigate farmland.— AP



TBILISI: A street vendor sells tangerine at a street market in Tbilisi, Georgia. Georgians will celebrate their winter holidays, New Year and Christmas which is celebrated on Jan 7 in accordance with the Julian calendar.— AP

US TUNA FLEET SHUT OUT OF LUCRATIVE PACIFIC REGION

MAJURO: The US tuna fleet has been blocked from fishing in the lucrative western Pacific for the first time in three decades as a conflict over fees remains unresolved. The US Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has told all US vessels they are prohibited from fishing in the region from January 1 until new licences are issued. Nearly 40 US vessels usually work in the region and are estimated to catch US\$300-\$400 million worth of tuna annually. Mike Tosatto, Honolulu director of the NMFS confirmed Friday he had written to tuna fleet operators to get out of the water by New Year's Day if the agreement to pay was not honored. He told the Los Angeles Times the fishing region was very productive for the United States and the dispute "will have a significant impact."

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), an umbrella group representing the island states, is refusing to issue new licences because the US tuna industry will not make a quarterly payment of US\$17 million due Friday for 2016 fishing access. The US industry agreed in August to buy

5,000 "fishing days", but when some companies said they could not afford their share, the US government asked the FFA in November to take back 2,000 days. The island nations refused, saying they warned the United States in August they did not need so many days and that the US had gone ahead and booked them.

Countries involved in the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), which control waters covering more than half the world's skipjack tuna, the most commonly canned variety, say it is up to the United States to resolve the issue. "The ongoing default really affects a component of the US fleet that says they cannot pay for days that they asked for. They insisted on asking for more days than they needed," Transform Aqorau the PNA chief executive said. The problem would not be fixed by allowing in the boats willing to pay to fish, he added. "The problem with allowing some vessels to fish is that we are effectively giving in to the US to return days. "The Pacific Island parties have rejected this because as they said, a deal is a deal that should be respected." —AFP

US POLICE GET LITTLE TRAINING TO HANDLE CRISES WITH MENTALLY ILL

NEW YORK: Most US police receive little or no training on how best to handle crises involving the mentally ill despite the growing frequency of such encounters and the fatal results in a number of recent cases. Although more departments have added or expanded training in recent years as they faced greater scrutiny and litigation, the vast majority offer at best a maximum of 40 hours and are not reaching enough officers, according to police and mental health advocates.

Last weekend's Chicago police slaying of 19-year-old college student Quintonio LeGrier, who relatives said had suffered from mental issues, has raised questions about the training of officers who are routinely thrust into tense situations with people who may be affected by varying mental disorders, or drug and alcohol abuse. "We're asking the police to fill the gaps that have been created by inadequate mental health resources," said Ron Honberg, national director for policy and legal affairs at the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

"It seems sadly ironic, tragically ironic when you call 911 about someone having a heart attack, they send a trained EMT professional, but when you call about someone in a psychotic crisis, a psychotic episode, they send police," he added. The Chicago shooting also prompted calls from Mayor Rahm Emanuel for a review of the police department's Crisis Intervention Team and improved guidance for officers handling cases where the mental health of a person is a factor. Mentally ill people have been shot to death in recent years by police in Texas, California, Colorado and Virginia. Americans with severe mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed by police than other civilians, an advocacy group found.

'Psychologists with guns'

With no national requirements on training recruits on de-escalation and crisis intervention, the average is just eight hours on each, according to a survey released in August 2015 by the Police Executive Research Forum. "Society has turned police officers into psychologists with guns, and they don't have the training for that," said Scott Johnson, a Washington state attorney. Johnson represents Ryan Flanagan, a veteran officer with the police department in Pasco, Washington, who resigned in July after he and two patrolmen fatally shot an unarmed Mexican orchard worker who battled depression, homelessness

and drug abuse.

Flanagan had only been trained to offer a mentally distressed person a phone number for a county healthcare worker, or detain the suspect until one arrived, said Johnson. Pasco Police Department spokesman Ken Roske said Flanagan's training encouraged officers to get mentally ill people a "professional intervention as soon as possible." But he added that officers also received training on how to interact with the mentally ill, including sessions with state and local mental health and veterans officials. In Seattle, the police department since 2012 has implemented court-ordered reforms to address what the Justice Department has called a pattern of excessive force that often arose during encounters with the mentally ill or drug-addled suspects. Police spokesman Sean Whitcomb said the department now has training protocols that include sessions on how to de-escalate a violent scene and calm down a distressed person, and has imposed 40-hour certification training for specialized officers that get dispatched to a majority of such calls.

Shifting burden

Many in the law enforcement community want more training, especially as the burden of the severely mentally ill has shifted in recent decades to police departments from public hospitals. "The better trained the officer, the safer they are and the more effective they are," said Rich Roberts, spokesman for the International Union of Police Associations. He said police often did not receive enough training because of the cost. Law enforcement encounters with the mentally ill have soared in recent decades as the number of public psychiatric hospital beds plummeted to about 17 per 100,000 people in 2005 from 340 per 100,000 in the 1950s, according to the Treatment Advocacy Center.

The center has estimated there are almost 8 million Americans or 3.3 percent of US adults with severe mental illness. About half those people are untreated, resulting in about 216,000 homeless and 400,000 incarcerations. The 1987 killing of a mentally ill man in Memphis, Tennessee, led to the creation of the highly regarded Crisis Intervention Team, or CIT, program, which brings together law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency departments and individuals with mental illness and their families.— Reuters



WYOMING: Bison grazes near a stream in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. —AP

GRIZZLY BEAR DEATHS RISE YELLOWSTONE POPULATION GROWS

CHEYENNE: The number of grizzly bear deaths or removals in the Yellowstone region climbed to an all-time high in 2015, but biologists say they're not worried about the animal's long-term survival in the area. The known or suspected deaths of 55 bears shouldn't interfere with plans to remove the region's grizzlies from protection under the Endangered Species Act, Frank van Manen, leader of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, said. "This year should be considered within the context of what we've seen in terms of the long-term trend," van Manen said. The team of state and federal scientists and biologists estimates more than 700 grizzlies live in the Yellowstone region spanning parts of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. That's up from about 600 in 2010 and around 200 in the early 1980s.

Grizzlies first were listed as a threatened species in 1975. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has set a management goal of 674 bears as it moves toward delisting. One reason for this year's high number of deaths: Poor production of wild berries, possibly because of late high country frosts and snow, caused bears to wander far in search of food. "When you have a year of lower food availability, bears just tend to roam around more and be more vulnerable to various sources of mortality," van Manen said. "They get into trouble more. We had a lot of conflicts this year as a result of that."

Also, the region had only an average year for another grizzly food staple - nuts from the cones of whitebark pine trees. Grizzlies have proven adaptable, however, and able to sustain themselves on a variety of natural food sources in the region, van Manen said. Wildlife managers this year euthanized 24 grizzlies for a variety of run-ins with people, property or livestock. Zoos took in four of those bears' cubs, including two cubs that belonged to a grizzly sow that killed a hiker in Yellowstone National Park in August. Wildlife managers typically euthanize problem bears only as a last resort. More often than mauling people, such bears cause issues like killing livestock and raiding trash facilities.

"But we're also talking about a very intelligent animal," van Manen said. "Once they learn how to get access to human food sources, it becomes a real challenge. And their homing ability is just tremendous. You can move them 50 or 100 miles and they know how to make their way back pretty quick, in a lot of cases." Other deaths included four grizzlies hit by vehicles. Another 19 remain under investigation. Hunters killed many of those grizzlies, and law enforcement officers are withholding details until they sort out what happened, according to van Manen. Deliberately killing a grizzly without sufficient justification, namely self-defense, is

punishable by up to a year in prison and fines of up to \$50,000. The study team counts the cubs taken to zoos in their annual mortality count. That puts this year's toll of 59 above the previous recent high of 56 in 2012. The study team counted 28 known and probable deaths in 2014 and 29 in 2013. Berries were more plentiful those years, van Manen said. Biologists acknowledge they never know exactly how many grizzlies die in the region that includes Yellowstone National Park and immediately surrounding areas. The total known and unknown grizzly deaths may have topped 70 in 2015, van Manen said.— AP



Photo shows a grizzly bear roaming near Beaver Lake in Yellowstone National Park, Wyo. Biologists counted more grizzly bear deaths in or removals from the Yellowstone region in 2015 than any year in recent memory but aren't worried about the species' long-term survival in the area. — AP

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ASSE ORGANIZES PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2015

The American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Kuwait Chapter is a premier voluntary, non-profit making Health, Safety and Environmental organization, which strives to provide professional guidance, training, consultancy and resources to the industrial and social sectors in the region.

As a part of continuous efforts in its professional journey, ASSE Kuwait Chapter recently organized the 8th International HSSE and Loss Prevention Professional Development Conference (PDC) and Exhibition recently at Radisson Blu Hotel, under the patronage of Kuwait's Minister of Oil.

The two day conference with the Theme "Sharing Experience to Enhance the HSSE Culture" was inaugurated by Sheikh Talal Al-Sabah, Acting Undersecretary, Minister of oil, State of Kuwait.

The inaugural session was attended by Mohammad Husain, President and CEO, EQUATE, Mohammad Ghazi Al-Mutairi CEO, Kuwait National Petroleum Company, Ismail Abdullah Deputy CEO, Support Services Kuwait Oil Company and Michael Belcher, President ASSE USA. Fadhel Al-Ali, Chairman ASSE Kuwait, Vasudevan, Director Professional Development Conference (PDC) also participated in the discussions with question and answers. Bala Siva Srikanth Deputy Director of the Professional Development Conference (PDC) moderated the discussion.

Major General Yousef Al-Ansari Director, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate Michael Belcher, President ASSE USA, Fadhel Al-Ali, Chairman ASSE Kuwait, Ashok Garlapati Global Region, Vice President ASSE USA, also participated in the inaugural ceremony.

G Sampath Reddy, President of the ASSE Kuwait Chapter in his welcome address highlighted the activities of the Chapter and welcomed everyone to this prestigious event. Fadhel Ali, Chairman ASSE Kuwait Chapter in his opening address stated the importance of the conference.

Vasudevan, Director of the ASSE Kuwait Chapter's 8th International HSSE and Loss Prevention Professional Development Conference (PDC) and Exhibition, briefed the highlights of the conference, which was organized by the volunteer efforts of the Chapters members.

Panel discussion

After the inaugural ceremony an executive panel discussion was held with the participation of Mohammad Husain President and CEO, EQUATE, Mohammad Ghazi Al-Mutairi CEO, Kuwait National Petroleum Company, Ismail Abdullah Deputy CEO, Support Services Kuwait Oil Company and Michael Belcher, President ASSE USA. Fadhel Al-Ali, Chairman ASSE Kuwait, Vasudevan, Director Professional Development Conference (PDC) also participated in the discussions with question and answers. Bala Siva Srikanth Deputy Director of the Professional Development Conference (PDC) moderated the discussion.

At the end of Executive Panel discussion, Riaz Mohammed Shareef, past president of ASSE Kuwait Chapter and Advisory Committee

member was awarded as the chapter safety professional of the Year- 2015.

During the two day conference, symposiums on Process Safety Management, Sustainable Energy and plenary session where 68 technical papers on topic related to the Occupational

Exposition

An exposition by major industrial suppliers and service providers were organized during this two day conference which was a major event where the conference delegates had an opportunity to get accustomed to the latest

Petroleum Company (KNPC), Major General Yousef Al-Ansari Director, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate Ali Al-Kshawe Manager (HSE), Kuwait National Petroleum Company. Ahmed A Abbas Manager, (HSE), Kuwait Oil Company Sati S Al-Otaibi Manager (EHS and F&S), JO - Wafra Salem Al-Azmi Manager - HSE.

The conference was sponsored by Equate, KOC, KNPC and RIMSCO as platinum sponsors. The conference was endorsed by International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC), National Examination Board Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) and supported by Board of certified Safety professionals (BCSP), Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), Centre for chemical Process Safety (CCPS).

More than 350 delegates including Managers, Team Leaders, Consultants, Specialists, Engineers, Physicians, Coordinators and Inspectors and Supervisors of various disciplines from oil sector and other companies attended the conference. AUM students who attended the conference and were given free registration for their participation.

The closing ceremony of the conference was held on the afternoon on 10th December. Feedback from the internal and external participant and dignitaries were taken during the closing ceremony. Bala Siva Srikanth, Deputy Director for the 8th International HSSE and Loss Prevention Professional Development Conference (PDC) and Exhibition gave the vote of thanks.



Health and Industrial Hygiene, Process Safety, Personal Safety, Fire Safety, Environmental Engineering and Management, Loss Prevention, Industrial Security, Behavior Based Safety (BBS), Ergonomics were presented. E-poster exhibition on various topics were presented.

safety and fire equipment in the market.

The advisory board for the PDC 2015 were Michael Belcher, CSP President, American Society of Safety Engineers, USA, Ismail Abdullah Ali, Deputy CEO (Corporate Services Directorate), Kuwait Oil Company, Khaled Saleh Al-Asousi Dy CEO Support Services, Kuwait National



The Kuwait National English School Choir recently performed in front of an enthusiastic audience of parents, staff and friends. The message was to show that through the universal language of music despite of all economic, environmental, political and security issues around the world, people can be bound together and promote tolerance and love for a spirit of cooperation and peace.



KU COLLEGE INAUGURATES 29TH ENGINEERING DESIGN EXHIBITION

The College of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University (KU) inaugurated yesterday the 29th engineering design exhibition aiming to highlight distinguished engineering projects, and provide stimulus atmosphere of culture of innovation and implementation of technological solutions in practical life easily.

In a speech at the inauguration ceremony,

Dr Issal Al-Safran, acting dean of the college, said that the exhibition seeks to show several messages, mainly the role of Kuwaiti youth in serving their country as they have many practical and scientific capabilities.

About 335 male and female students are participating, with 83 projects, in the two-day exhibition, which is held under the auspices of Undersecretary of Ministry of State for Youth

Affairs Sheikhha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, he added.

The event also aims to measure capabilities of graduates for work, he said, noting that the exhibition is expected to attract a large number of visitors in the presence of several representatives from the State's companies and institutions. It works on helping engineers make progress, discover new theories and highlight their capabilities and skills, he point-

ed out. Safran lauded education at the college for providing a suitable atmosphere which encourages students to innovate, expressing his gratitude to the role of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences in supporting youth and showing their innovations.

Meanwhile, Sheikhha Al-Zain pointed to the importance of support provided by the State's

institutions, the private sector and civil society to the Kuwaiti youth in order to involve them in development progress as they make up about 72 percent of the total population. She said that the ministry backed several engineering projects, noting that it organized the award of innovative excellence, which is considered a first one in its kind in Kuwait's history. —KUNA



CLASSIFIEDS



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (31/12/2015 TO 06/01/2016)

SHARQIA-1
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 11:30 AM
POINT BREAK 1:30 PM
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 4:00 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 6:00 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 9:00 PM
POINT BREAK 12:05 AM

SHARQIA-2
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 12:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 1:45 PM
JOY 3:30 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 6:15 PM
JOY 8:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 10:45 PM
JOY 12:30 AM

SHARQIA-3
BANG BANG BABY 12:30 PM
THE BIG SHORT 2:30 PM
BANG BANG BABY 5:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 7:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 9:45 PM
THE BIG SHORT 11:45 PM

MUHALAB-1
SNOWTIME! 12:30 PM
SNOWTIME! 2:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 4:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 7:30 PM
POINT BREAK 10:30 PM
POINT BREAK 1:00 AM

MUHALAB-2
BANG BANG BABY 12:00 PM
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 2:00 PM
EXTRACTION 4:15 PM
BANG BANG BABY 6:15 PM
EXTRACTION 8:15 PM
BANG BANG BABY 10:15 PM
EXTRACTION 12:15 AM

MUHALAB-3
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 1:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 3:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 5:45 PM
THE BIG SHORT 7:45 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 10:30 PM
THE BIG SHORT 12:30 AM

FANAR-1
JOY 12:15 PM
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 2:45 PM
JOY 5:00 PM
KHANET EL YEK 7:30 PM
JOY 9:30 PM
JOY 12:15 AM

FANAR-2
BANG BANG BABY 11:30 AM
BANG BANG BABY 1:30 PM

THE BIG SHORT 3:30 PM
BANG BANG BABY 6:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 8:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 10:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 12:30 AM

FANAR-3
SNOWTIME! 12:45 PM
STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS 2:45 PM
SNOWTIME! 5:45 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 7:45 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 9:45 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 11:45 PM

FANAR-4
EXTRACTION 11:45 AM
EXTRACTION 1:45 PM
POINT BREAK 3:45 PM
EXTRACTION 6:15 PM
EXTRACTION 8:15 PM
POINT BREAK 10:15 PM
EXTRACTION 12:45 AM

FANAR-5
THE GOOD DINOSAUR 12:00 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 2:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 5:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 8:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 11:30 PM

MARINA-1
BANG BANG BABY 12:15 PM
THE BIG SHORT 2:15 PM
BANG BANG BABY 5:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 7:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 9:45 PM
NO THU
THE BIG SHORT 11:45 PM
NO THU

MARINA-2
POINT BREAK 12:00 PM
EXTRACTION 2:30 PM
EXTRACTION 4:30 PM
POINT BREAK 6:30 PM
EXTRACTION 9:00 PM
EXTRACTION 11:00 PM
NO THU
POINT BREAK 1:00 AM
NO THU

MARINA-3
JOY 1:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 3:30 PM
THE GOOD DINOSAUR 5:30 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 8:00 PM
JOY 10:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 12:30 AM
NO THU

AVENUES-1

THE PEANUTS MOVIE 12:30 PM
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 2:45 PM
THE PEANUTS MOVIE 5:00 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 7:15 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 9:15 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 11:15 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 1:15 AM

AVENUES-2
THE BIG SHORT 12:15 PM
THE BIG SHORT 3:15 PM
THE BIG SHORT 6:00 PM
THE BIG SHORT 8:45 PM
THE BIG SHORT 11:30 PM

AVENUES-3
DILWALE - Hindi 11:30 AM
DILWALE - Hindi 2:30 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 5:45 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 9:00 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 12:15 AM

AVENUES-4
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 11:45 AM
DILWALE - Hindi 2:00 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 5:15 PM
Special Show "DILWALE - Hindi" 5:15 PM
DILWALE - Hindi 8:30 PM
APARTMENT NO. 6 - Kuwaiti Film 11:45 PM

AVENUES-5
JOY 12:30 PM
THE BIG SHORT 3:15 PM
Special Show "JOY" 3:15 PM
EXTRACTION 6:00 PM
Special Show "EXTRACTION" 8:15 PM
JOY 11:00 PM
EXTRACTION 1:15 AM

AVENUES-6
EXTRACTION 12:00 PM
EXTRACTION 2:15 PM
EXTRACTION 4:30 PM
EXTRACTION 6:45 PM
EXTRACTION 9:00 PM
EXTRACTION 11:15 PM

AVENUES-7
SAVVA. HEART OF THE WARRIOR 11:45 AM
BANG BANG BABY 2:00 PM
SAVVA. HEART OF THE WARRIOR 4:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 6:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 8:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 10:00 PM
BANG BANG BABY 12:05 AM

AVENUES-8
SNOWTIME! 12:00 PM
SNOWTIME! 2:15 PM
KHANET EL YEK 4:15 PM

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CHANGE OF NAME

I Mikky S/o Akhter Hussain
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28-12-2015

EMERGENCY
112

THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY FOR CIVIL INFORMATION

Automated enquiry
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1889988

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr: 05:17
Shorook 06:42
Duhr: 11:50
Asr: 14:41
Maghrib: 17:00
Isha: 18:22



Flight Schedule

Arrival Flights on Sunday 3/1/2016

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	AXB	393	Kozhikode	14:20
JZR	239	Amman	00:25	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:30
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	KAC	672	Dubai	14:45
MSR	3000	Sharm el-Sheikh	00:35	KAC	284	Dhaka	14:45
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40	KAC	788	Jeddah	14:50
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	GFA	221	Bahrain	15:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	KNE	472	Jeddah	15:05
THY	772	Istanbul	01:05	OMA	645	Muscat	15:30
ETH	3402	Addis Ababa/Riyadh	01:30	KAC	562	Amman	15:40
DLH	635	Doha	01:35	ABY	127	Sharjah	15:45
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	01:45	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00	JZR	535	Cairo	15:50
JZR	555	Alexandria	02:25	QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30	JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	FDB	051	Dubai	16:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	JZR	257	Beirut	16:30
FDB	067	Dubai	03:05	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	16:40
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10	RJA	640	Amman	16:55
QTR	1076	Doha	03:15	KAC	542	Cairo	16:55
CEB	7694	Manila	03:15	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
MEA	406	Beirut	03:20	IRM	1194	Mashhad	17:25
KKK	6507	Istanbul	03:20	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:25	MSR	614	Cairo	17:50
KAC	544	Cairo	03:35	KAC	678	Muscat/Abu Dhabi	17:50
LMU	510	Cairo	04:05	JZR	777	Jeddah	17:55
PGT	860	Beirut	04:10	KAC	502	Beirut	18:00
THY	170	Istanbul	04:15	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
DHX	770	Bahrain	05:40	FDB	063	Dubai	18:05
QTR	8511	Istanbul	05:55	KAC	792	Madinah	18:10
FDB	5061	Doha	06:10	UAL	982	IAD	18:15
BAW	157	Dubai	06:30	JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
KAC	412	London	06:40	KAC	786	Jeddah	18:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:20	ABY	123	Sharjah	18:45
QTR	1086	Doha	07:25	QTR	1080	Doha	18:55
SVA	512	Riyadh	07:40	KAC	742	Dammam	19:05
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	KAC	774	Riyadh	19:25
OMA	641	Muscat	08:00	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	354	BLR	08:15	KAC	166	Paris/Rome	19:30
KAC	206	Islamabad	08:25	KAC	618	Doha	19:35
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	08:30	JZR	483	Istanbul	19:35
KAC	352	Kochi	08:30	KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40	KAC	102	New York/London	19:55
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:50	FDB	061	Dubai	20:20
KAC	162	Colombo	08:50	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20
ABY	325	Sharjah	09:00	MSR	606	Luxor	20:45
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:20	FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
QTR	1070	Doha	09:25	JAI	572	Mumbai	20:55
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:55
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:40	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
IRC	528	Ahwaz	09:40	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:00	ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	873	Dubai	10:40	UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
SVR	341	Damascus	11:05	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
JZR	165	Dubai	11:25	QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
AGY	682	Asyut	11:30	JZR	125	Bahrain	22:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:40	KLM	417	Amsterdam	22:05
SAW	701	Damascus	11:55	AIC	981	Chennai/Ahmedabad	22:25
FDB	075	Dubai	12:20	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:25
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:25	FDB	059	Dubai	22:30
JZR	561	Sohag	12:30	KAC	172	Frankfurt	22:35
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	MSC	501	Alexandria	23:00
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	JZR	239	Amman	23:05
JZR	175	Dubai	13:00	JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
KAC	382	Delhi	13:50	UAL	981	Bahrain	23:25
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10	PIA	205	Lahore	23:40
FDB	057	Dubai	14:10	FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
				THY	764	Istanbul	23:50
				JAI	574	Mumbai	23:55

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation
of bookings will help other passengers to use seats

Departure Flights on Sunday 3/1/2016				AGY	683	Alexandria	12:40
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05	KAC	785	Jeddah <td>13:00</td>	13:00
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40	JZR	786	Riyadh <td>13:10</td>	13:10
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:55	FDB	076	Dubai <td>13:10</td>	13:10
MSC	404	Asyut	00:55	KAC	791	Madinah <td>13:25</td>	13:25
UAL	981	IAD	01:10	MSC	402	Luxor <td>13:30</td>	13:30
MSR	3001	Sharm el-Sheikh	01:35	SAW	702	Damascus <td>13:35</td>	13:35
KAC	283	Dhaka	02:10	JZR	176	Dubai <td>13:45</td>	13:45
THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	MSR	611	Cairo <td>14:00</td>	14:00
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:35	UAE	872	Dubai <td>14:15</td>	14:15
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	02:45	KAC	673	Dubai <td>15:00</td>	15:00
ETH	3403	Addis Ababa	03:05	FDB	058	Dubai <td>15:10</td>	15:10
KAC	381	Delhi	03:30	QTR	1079	Doha <td>15:10</td>	15:10
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45	AXB	394	Kozhikode <td>15:20</td>	15:20
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:55	SVA	503	Madinah/Jeddah <td>15:45</td>	15:45
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	GFA	222	Bahrain <td>15:45</td>	15:45
FDB	068	Dubai	04:00	KAC	617	Doha <td>15:45</td>	15:45
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10	KAC	773	Riyadh <td>15:50</td>	15:50
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:15	KAC	741	Dammam <td>15:55</td>	15:55
KKK	6508	Istanbul	04:20	KNE	473	Jeddah <td>16:05</td>	16:05
MEA	407	Beirut	04:20	ABY	128	Sharjah <td>16:25</td>	16:25
PGT	861	Istanbul	04:55	OMA	646	Muscat <td>16:30</td>	16:30
QTR	1077	Doha	05:00	JZR	266	Beirut <td>17:05</td>	17:05
LMU	511	Cairo	05:05	JZR	238	Amman <td>17:30</td>	17:30
MEA	409	Beirut	05:10	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi <td>17:30</td>	17:30
THY	765	Istanbul	05:15	FDB	052	Dubai <td>17:35</td>	17:35
CEB	7695	Manila	05:20	QTR	1073	Doha <td>17:40</td>	17:40
JZR	560	Sohag	06:10	JZR	538	Cairo <td>17:45</td>	17:45
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30	UAE	858	Dubai <td>17:45</td>	17:45
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55	RJA	641	Amman <td>17:55</td>	17:55
RJA	643	Amman	07:05	SVA	511	Riyadh <td>18:15</td>	18:15
THY	771	Istanbul	07:05	GFA	216	Bahrain <td>18:20</td>	18:20
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:10	JZR	184	Dubai <td>18:40</td>	18:40
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	IRM	1195	Mashhad <td>18:40</td>	18:40
QTR	8512	Doha	07:40	MSR	615	Cairo <td>18:50</td>	18:50
FDB	054	Dubai	08:10	JZR	124	Bahrain <td>19:10</td>	19:10
JZR	174	Dubai	08:25	FDB	064	Dubai <td>19:20</td>	19:20
QTR	1087	Doha	08:40	ABY	124	Sharjah <td>19:25</td>	19:25
BAW	156	London	08:45	UAE	876	Dubai <td>19:30</td>	19:30
SVA	513	Riyadh	08:50	UAL	982	Bahrain <td>19:30</td>	19:30
JZR	534	Cairo	08:55	GFA	218	Bahrain <td>20:15</td>	20:15
OMA	642	Muscat	08:55	KAC	361	Colombo <td>20:45</td>	20:45
JZR	256	Beirut	09:05	QTR	1081	Doha <td>20:50</td>	20:50
KAC	171	Frankfurt	09:05	KAC	351	Kochi <td>20:50</td>	20:50
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:25	OMA	648	Muscat <td>21:20</td>	21:20
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:40	FDB	062	Dubai <td>21:20</td>	21:20
KAC	541	Cairo	09:55	MSR	619	Alexandria <td>21:45</td>	21:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55	DLH	634	Doha <td>21:45</td>	21:45
KAC	117	New York	09:55	DHX	171	Bahrain <td>21:50</td>	21:50
KAC	561	Amman	10:00	FDB	5054	Dubai <td>21:50</td>	21:50
KAC	671	Dubai	10:05	JAI	571	Mumbai <td>21:55</td>	21:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:25	JZR	502	Luxor <td>22:00</td>	22:00
KAC	501	Beirut	10:30	KAC	301	Mumbai <td>22:10</td>	22:10
JZR	482	Istanbul	10:35	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi <td>22:10</td>	22:10
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35	MEA	403	Beirut <td>22:20</td>	22:20
IRA	664	Shiraz	10:40	ALK	230	Colombo <td>22:25</td>	22:25
KAC	677	Abu Dhabi/Muscat	10:50	GFA	220	Bahrain <td>22:30</td>	22:30
QTR	1071	Doha	11:00	UAE	860	Dubai <td>22:55</td>	22:55
IRC	529	Ahwaz	11:00	QTR	1083	Doha <td>23:05</td>	23:05
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25	KLM	417	Dammam/Amsterdam <td>23:05</td>	23:05
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:20	KAC	205	Islamabad <td>23:10</td>	23:10
KAC	103	London	12:25	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi <td>23:15</td>	23:15
SYR	342	Damascus	12:25	KAC	411	Bangkok/Manila <td>23:35</td>	23:35
UAE	874	Dubai	12:30	FDB	060	Dubai <td>23:35</td>	23:35
				KAC	415	Kuala Lumpur/Jakarta <td>23:40</td>	23:40

CROSSWORD 1126

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ACROSS

1. A periodic paperback publication.
4. A famous waterfall in Venezuela.
12. Enlarged prostate.
15. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
16. Taxonomic kingdom comprising all living or extinct animals.
17. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
18. A parallelogram with four equal sides.
20. A branch of the Tai languages.
21. Marked by the presence of snow.
23. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
25. Expected hopefully.
27. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
29. Earn on some commercial or business transaction.
30. A phrase or pronunciation that is peculiar to a particular locality.
34. (British) A waterproof raincoat made of rubberized fabric.
36. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
37. Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
39. Manufactured in standard sizes to be shipped and assembled elsewhere.
43. A master's degree in library science.
44. A barrier constructed to contain the flow or water or to keep out the sea.
45. (Informal) Of the highest quality.
46. Informal terms for a meal.
49. Cut or impressed into a surface.
52. A metric unit of volume equal to one tenth of a liter.
53. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
56. Father of the storm gods Marut.
57. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
58. The upper side of the thighs of a seated person.
60. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
64. Come out into view, as from concealment.
68. A genus of Paridae.
71. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
72. Arousing to action or rebellion.
75. Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
76. A form of address for a married woman.
77. United States composer (born in Austria) and pianist noted for his interpretations of the works of Mozart and Beethoven and Schubert (1882-1951).
78. Of the blackest black.
79. A lyric poem with complex stanza forms.
80. The feeling of patient submissive humbleness.
81. Used of a single unit or thing.

DOWN

1. Made from residue of grapes or apples after pressing.
2. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
3. A correctional institution used to detain persons who are in the lawful custody of the government (either accused persons awaiting trial or convicted persons serving a sentence).
4. An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
5. An organization of independent states to promote international peace and security.

6. Related by blood.
7. Any of various systems of units for measuring electricity and magnetism.
8. (British) Your grandmother.
9. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
10. The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
11. An independent group of closely related Chadic languages spoken in the area between the Biu-Mandara and East Chadic languages.
12. All the plant and animal life of a particular region.
13. A person who handles or caresses in a clumsy or over-familiar manner.
14. Austrian composer who influenced the classical form of the symphony (1732-1809).
19. A woman of refinement.
22. A daughter of your brother or sister.
24. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
26. American plant having spikes of blue flowers and growing in shallow water of streams and ponds.
28. Urge or force (a person) to an action.
31. A member of the Siouan people formerly inhabiting the Black Hills of western South Dakota.
32. (of molten metal or glass) Formed by pouring or pressing into a mold n 1.
33. Food mixtures either arranged on a plate or tossed and served with a moist dressing.
35. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
38. (Old Testament) Adam's wife in Judeo-Christian mythology.
40. King of Saudi Arabia since 1982 (born in 1922).
41. Type genus of the Aceraceae.
42. English monk and scholar (672-735).
47. Capital of the state of Oregon in the north-western part of the state on the Willamette River.
48. Ability to apply knowledge or experience or understanding or common sense and insight.
50. A restraint that confines or restricts freedom (especially something used to tie down or restrain a prisoner).
51. Spicy fruit of the cubeb vine.
54. A nihilistic art movement (especially in painting) that flourished in Europe early in the 20th century.
55. The syllable naming the fourth (subdominant) note of the diatonic scale in solmization.
59. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
61. A chronic emphysema of the horse that causes difficult expiration and heaving of the flanks.
62. Analyze syntactically by assigning a constituent structure to (a sentence).
63. A hidden storage space (for money or provisions or weapons).
65. Dry red table wine from the Rioja region of northern Spain.
66. Greek anatomist whose theories formed the basis of European medicine until the Renaissance (circa 130-200).
67. Related on the mother's side.
69. Not easy.
70. An aggressive remark directed at a person like a missile and intended to have a telling effect.
73. A liquid used for printing or writing or drawing.
74. Of a light yellowish-brown color n 1.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You're swept up in a whirlwind of cosmic energy as you naively attempt to untangle your emotional attachments. You might try to take an impartial approach to relationships today, but you still could encounter a block until you make a tough decision. Not surprisingly, the right choice now may alter the trajectory of your life. Luckily, your clear intentions help you to cast the current circumstances in a positive light, empowering you to walk fearlessly into the future.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You're doing everything you can to avoid an unpleasant confrontation today because you cannot see how it will lead to anything constructive. It's a lot less stressful to ambivalently sit on the fence and wait for resolution than to get caught up in the emotional fray. Nevertheless, inaction only works for so long. Everyone will feel better after the various opinions are out in the open, even if there's no apparent common ground to be found yet. Thankfully, it's not necessary to force a group consensus now; compromise is an art that cannot be rushed.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are driven to defend your recent choices while messenger Mercury is put to the test by warrior Mars. If you proudly stand up to political pressure, your priorities evolve and your most spiritual thoughts will endure. Holding onto your vision helps you conquer a difficult opponent. You may feel that someone is out to defeat you; however, if you are clever enough to steer clear of conflict today, you can continue toward your destination without further interference. Take the high road and see who follows.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Showing your feelings comes more naturally now that action-planet Mars is camped out in your 5th House of Self-Expression. All emotional interactions may seem a tad overwhelming now; there's so much going on in your life, it's nearly impossible to know where to start. Although it's healthy to power through your hesitation, don't share everything at once. Choose your subject matter carefully and then take a creative route to prove your point; your wide-ranging knowledge base and infamous tenacity will help you to reach your goals.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Fortunately, you're processing the waves of change today while standing on a strong foundation. However, you may be recovering from recently going out on a limb and sharing more than was necessary. And you might face an uphill battle, no matter how optimistic you are that everyone can step beyond their parochial thinking to see the bigger picture. Most attempts to demonstrate your intellectual superiority are bound to fail now. Instead of turning this into a game where someone is likely to lose, it's up to you to invent a way in which everyone can win.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Although you quickly acknowledge the power of your convictions, it's tricky when someone close to you works with an entirely different set of assumptions. But it's a waste of energy to engage in a fight just to prove someone else is wrong and you are right. Trying to change another person's mind is a dead-end street today. Thankfully, you will be free to re-focus on your continued self-improvement once you acknowledge that intelligent people can hold opposing views. When in doubt, err on the side of peace.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Fortunately, your creativity is flowing directly from the source now, making it a breeze to be proactive in all your endeavors. Mercury's current visit to your 5th House of Self-Expression inspires eloquent communication and increases your mental agility. Still, you may need to fight for your right to speak your mind. Being considerate of people's feelings is an admirable trait, but don't allow your willingness to compromise stop you from doing what's best for you. Be as kind to yourself as you are to others.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You might sense that someone is attempting to derail your plans behind your back, but it may just be your fears conjuring up these fantasies now. However, combative Mars and the evocative Moon return to your suspicious sign today, raising issues of jealousy or possessiveness in relationships. But don't succumb to your own negativity; the choice is truly yours. Choosing to believe in the best of others over all other options should be enough to keep the day rotating with a positive spin.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your cheerful attitude can positively impact your immediate future, but self-doubt could wreak havoc on a perfectly good day. Thankfully, delicious Venus forms a creative alignment with joyous Jupiter, lifting your spirits and raising your hopes. Make time to connect with your close friends because they will be the ones who can help to take your mind off of your troubles with a little laughter and a lot of love. Being mindful of your blessings keeps your heart humble.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may lock horns with your group of friends and find yourself in a standoff today, especially if you feel threatened by your own sense of insecurity. But other people's clever ideas are no match for your unforgiving persistence and the strength of your convictions. Although someone might provoke your anger now, don't let your emotions distract your focus from your ambitious goals. Your current optimism mixed with your unwavering concentration is an unbeatable combination.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You possess the gift of clear vision today and shouldn't let anyone dismiss your intuitive hunches. But interpersonal dynamics can get dicey if someone questions your authority. Your energy could quickly shift into a more aggressive posture now if you believe you need to defend your intentions. Don't bother justifying your dreams; just keep your eyes on the distant horizon and continue to march in that direction. Listen to your inner voice and your journey will be one of discovery and delight.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Although everyone seems very intense for some strange reason today, you're still able to stay slightly detached from your emotions. Luckily, your optimistic outlook on relationships enables you to sidestep an unnecessary conflict with someone who fundamentally disagrees with your position. Remember that you don't need to be right; you have absolutely nothing to prove now. Instead of stirring up trouble with a loved one, concentrate on manifesting your dreams.

Yesterday's Solution

Moods & Emotions 2

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

AMUSED	DISLIKE	HORROR	SHOCK
ANNOYED	DOUBT	INFATUATED	SULKY
ANTSY	EMPATHY	JOYOUS	SULLEN
ANXIOUS	ENVY	LEERY	TERRIFIED
CARING	EUPHORIA	PRIDE	TRANQUIL
CONTEMPT	GLUM	RAGE	UNCERTAIN
CONTENT	GREED	SAD	UNHAPPY
CONTRITE	GROUCHY	SATISFIED	WARY
DELIGHT	GUILT	SERENITY	
DESPAIR	HATRED	SHAME	

The hidden word is: DISCOURAGED

Daily SuDoku

6	1		3	2				
3			4					
	5	8	6					
			9	5		3	6	2
				4				
	2	3	8		1	5		
					6	7	5	
					4			3
			5	8			1	4

very hard

Yesterday's Solution

9	6	2	5	3	8	7	1	4
8	5	7	1	2	4	9	3	6
1	4	3	9	6	7	5	8	2
4	7	8	2	9	5	3	6	1
3	9	5	8	1	6	2	4	7
6	2	1	4	7	3	8	5	9
5	8	6	7	4	2	1	9	3
2	1	4	3	5	9	6	7	8
7	3	9	6	8	1	4	2	5

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

For labor-related inquiries
and complaints:
Call MSAL hotline 128

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401
Jabriya	25316254
Maidan Hawally	25623444
Bayan	25388462
Mishref	25381200
W Hawally	22630786
Sabah	24810221
Jahra	24770319
New Jahra	24575755
West Jahra	24772608
South Jahra	24775066
North Jahra	24775992
North Jleeb	24311795
Ardhiya	24884079
Firdous	24892674
Omariya	24719048
N Khaitan	24710044
Fintas	23900322



PHARMACIES ON 24 HRS DUTY

GOVERNORATE	PHARMACY	ADDRESS	PHONE
Ahmadi	Sama Safwan Abu Halaifa Danat Al-Sultan	Fahaeel Makka St Abu Halaifa-Coastal Rd Mahboula Block 1, Coastal Rd	23915883 23715414 23726558
Jahra	Modern Jahra Madina Munawara	Jahra-Block 3 Lot 1 Jahra-Block 92	24575518 24566622
Capital	Ahlam Khaldiya Coop	Fahad Al-Salem St Khaldiya Coop	22436184 24833967
Farwaniya	New Shifa Ferdous Coop Modern Safwan	Farwaniya Block 40 Ferdous Coop Old Kheitan Block 11	24734000 24881201 24726638
Hawally	Tariq Hana Ikhlas Hawally & Rawdha Ghadeer Kindy Ibn Al-Nafis Mishrif Coop Salwa Coop	Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St Salmiya-Amman St Hawally-Beirut St Hawally & Rawdha Coop Jabriya-Block 1A Jabriya-Block 3B Salmiya-Hamad Mubarak St Mishrif Coop Salwa Coop	25726265 25647075 22625999 22564549 25340559 25326554 25721264 25380581 25628241

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



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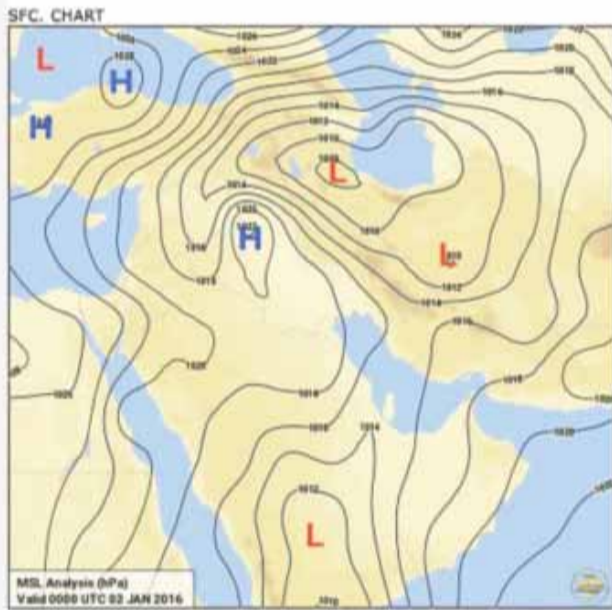


Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

Issued 02/01/2016-07:00 LT UTC +3hr

Max Temperature 16 °C

By Day : Sunny and significant decrease in temperature with light to moderate freshening at times over coastal areas north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h
By Night : Cold with light to moderate freshening at times north at times over coastal areas westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h



Four-Day Forecast

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Expected Weather	cold	cool + scattered clouds	cool + scattered clouds	sunny
Min Temp °C	03	02	07	09
Max Temp °C	12	14	16	18
Wind Direction	north westerly	north westerly	variable wind changing to light easterly	variable wind changing to light to moderate north westerly
Wind Speed km/h	22 - 42	15 - 40	08 - 28	08 - 28

All times are local time (GMT+3) unless otherwise stated

Warnings & Weather Watches

no warnings or weather watches

Kuwait Forecast

Station	MIN °C REC	Max °C EXP
KUWAIT CITY	14	17
KUWAIT AIRPORT	09	16
ABDALY	10	18
BUBYAN	11	17
JAHLA	13	18
FAILAKA ISLAND	14	18
SALMIYAH	14	16
AHMADI	15	18
JAL ALIYAH	11	17
QAROH ISLAND	18	19
UMH AL-MARADEM	17	19
NUWAISSIB	15	18
WAFRA	13	18
MANAGISH	10	17
SALMIY	08	16
MUTRIBA	10	17

Recorded Yesterday at Kuwait Airport

Max Temp (°C)	21
Min Temp (°C)	13
Max Rel Hum (%)	100
Min Rel Hum (%)	79
Max Wind Speed (km/h) and Direction	39 SE
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR	0 mm

	Sunrise	06:43
	Sunset	17:01

Prayer Times

Fajr	05:18
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:52
Asr	14:43
Sunset	17:01
Isha	18:23

INTERNATIONAL CALLS



Afghanistan	0093	Luxembourg	00352
Albania	00355	Lesotho	00266
Algeria	00213	Macau	00853
Andorra	00376	Macedonia	00389
Angola	00244	Madagascar	00261
Anguilla	001264	Majorca	0034
Antiga	001268	Malawi	00265
Argentina	0054	Malaysia	0060
Armenia	00374	Maldives	00960
Australia	0061	Mali	00223
Austria	0043	Malta	00356
Bahamas	001242	Marshall Islands	00692
Bahrain	00973	Martinique	00596
Bangladesh	00880	Mauritania	00222
Barbados	001246	Mauritius	00230
Belarus	00375	Mayotte	00269
Belgium	0032	Mexico	0052
Belize	00501	Micronesia	00691
Benin	00229	Moldova	00373
Bermuda	001441	Monaco	00377
Bhutan	00975	Mongolia	00976
Bolivia	00591	Montserrat	001664
Bosnia	00387	Morocco	00212
Botswana	00267	Mozambique	00258
Brazil	0055	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Brunei	00673	Namibia	00264
Bulgaria	00359	Nepal	00977
Burkina	00226	Netherlands	0031
Burundi	00257	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Cambodia	00855	New Caledonia	00687
Cameroon	00237	New Zealand	0064
Canada	001	Nicaragua	00505
Cape Verde	00238	Nigar	00227
Cayman Islands	001345	Nigeria	00234
Central African	00236	Niue	00683
Chad	00235	Norfolk Island	00672
Chile	0056	N. Ireland (UK)	0044
China	0086	North Korea	00850
Colombia	0057	Norway	0047
Comoros	00269	Oman	00968
Congo	00242	Pakistan	0092
Cook Islands	00682	Palau	00680
Costa Rica	00506	Panama	00507
Croatia	00385	Papua New Guinea	00675
Cuba	0053	Paraguay	00595
Cyprus	00357	Peru	0051
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Philippines	0063
Czech Republic	00420	Poland	0048
Denmark	0045	Portugal	00351
Diego Garcia	00246	Puerto Rico	001787
Djibouti	00253	Qatar	00974
Dominica	001767	Romania	0040
Dominican Republic	001809	Russian Federation	007
Ecuador	00593	Rwanda	00250
Egypt	0020	Saint Helena	00290
El Salvador	00503	Saint Kitts	001869
England (UK)	0044	Saint Lucia	001758
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Saint Pierre	00508
Eritrea	00291	Saint Vincent	001784
Estonia	00372	Samoa US	00684
Ethiopia	00251	Samoa West	00685
Falkland Islands	00500	San Marino	00378
Faroe Islands	00298	Sao Tone	00239
Fiji	00679	Saudi Arabia	00966
Finland	00358	Scotland (UK)	0044
France	0033	Senegal	00221
French Guiana	00594	Seychelles	00284
French Polynesia	00689	Sierra Leone	00232
Gabon	00241	Singapore	0065
Gambia	00220	Slovakia	00421
Georgia	00995	Slovenia	00386
Germany	0049	Solomon Islands	00677
Ghana	00233	Somalia	00252
Gibraltar	00350	South Africa	0027
Greece	0030	South Korea	0082
Greenland	00299	Spain	0034
Grenada	001473	Sri Lanka	0094
Guadeloupe	00590	Sudan	00249
Guam	001671	Suriname	00597
Guatemala	00502	Swaziland	00268
Guinea	00224	Sweden	0046
Guyana	00592	Switzerland	0041
Haiti	00509	Syria	00963
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Serbia	00381
Honduras	00504	Taiwan	00886
Hong Kong	00852	Tanzania	00255
Hungary	0036	Thailand	0066
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Toga	00228
Iceland	00354	Tonga	00676
India	0091	Tokelau	00690
Indian Ocean	00873	Trinidad	001868
Indonesia	0062	Tunisia	00216
Iran	0098	Turkey	0090
Iraq	00964	Tuvalu	00688
Ireland	00353	Uganda	00256
Italy	0039	Ukraine	00380
Ivory Coast	00225	United Arab Emirates	00976
Jamaica	001876	United Kingdom	0044
Japan	0081	Uruguay	00598
Jordan	00962	USA	001
Kazakhstan	007	Uzbekistan	00998
Kenya	00254	Vanuatu	00678
Kiribati	00686	Venezuela	00582
Kuwait	00965	Vietnam	0084
Kyrgyzstan	00996	Virgin Islands UK	001284
Laos	00856	Virgin Islands US	001340
Latvia	00371	Wales (UK)	0044
Lebanon	00961	Yemen	00967
Liberia	00231	Yugoslavia	00381
Libya	00218	Zambia	00260
Lithuania	00370	Zimbabwe	00263

PRIVATE CLINICS

Ophthalmologists	
Dr. Abidallah Al-Mansoor	25622444
Dr. Samy Al-Rabeea	25752222
Dr. Masoma Habeeb	25321171
Dr. Mubarak Al-Ajmy	25739999
Dr. Mohsen Abel	25757700
Dr. Adnan Hasan Alwayl	25732223
Dr. Abdallah Al-Baghly	25732223
Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT)	
Dr. Ahmed Fouad Mouner	24555050 Ext 510
Dr. Abdallah Al-Ali	25644660
Dr. Abd Al-Hameed Al-Taweel	25646478
Dr. Sanad Al-Fathalah	25311996
Dr. Mohammad Al-Daaory	25731988
Dr. Ismail Al-Fodary	22620166
Dr. Mahmoud Al-Booz	25651426
General Practitioners	
Dr. Mohammed Y Majidi	24555050 Ext 123
Dr. Yousef Al-Omar	24719312
Dr. Tarek Al-Mikhaazem	23926920
Dr. Kathem Maarafi	25730465
Dr. Abdallah Ahmad Eyadad	25655528
Dr. Nabeel Al-Ayoobi	24577781
Dr. Dina Abidallah Al-Refae	25333501
Urologists	
Dr. Ali Naser Al-Serfy	22641534
Dr. Fawzi Taher Abul	22639955
Dr. Khaleel Abidallah Al-Awadi	22616660
Dr. Adel Al-Hunayan FRCS (C)	25313120
Dr. Leons Joseph	66703427

Plastic Surgeons	
Dr. Mohammad Al-Khalaf	22547272
Dr. Abdal-Redha Lari	22617700
Dr. Abdel Quttainah	25625030/60
Family Doctor	
Dr Divya Damodar	23729596/23729581
Psychiatrists	
Dr. Esam Al-Ansari	22635047
Dr. Eisa M. Al-Balhan	22613623/0
Gynaecologists & Obstetricians	
Dr Adrian arbe	23729596/23729581
Dr. Verginia s.Marin	2572-6666 ext 8321
Dr. Fozeya Ali Al-Qatan	22655539
Dr. Majeda Khalefa Aliytami	25343406
Dr. Ahmad Al-Khooly	25739272
Dr. Salem soso	22618787
General Surgeons	
Dr. Amer Zawaz Al-Amer	22610044
Dr. Mohammad Yousef Basher	25327148
Internists, Chest & Heart	
Dr. Adnan Ebil	22639939
Dr. Mousa Khadada	22666300
Dr. Latefa Al-Duweisan	25728004
Dr. Nadem Al-Ghabra	25355515
Dr. Mobarak Aldoub	24726446
Dr Nasser Behbehani	25654300/3

Paediatricians	
Dr. Khaled Hamadi	25665898
Dr. Abd Al-Aziz Al-Rashed	25340300
Dr. Zahra Qabazard	25710444
Dr. Sohail Qamar	22621099
Dr. Snaa Maarroof	25713514
Dr. Pradip Gupare	23713100
Dr. Zacharias Mathew	24334282
Dermatology	
Dr. Mohammed Salam	
Bern University	23845955
Dentists	
Dr Anil Thomas	3729596/3729581
Dr. Shamah Al-Matar	22641071/2
Dr. Anesah Al-Rasheed	22562226
Dr. Abidallah Al-Amer	22561444
Dr. Faysal Al-Fozan	22619557
Dr. Abdallateef Al-Katrash	22525888
Dr. Abidallah Al-Duweisan	25653755
Dr. Bader Al-Ansari	25620111
Neurologists	
Dr. Sohal Najem Al-Shemeri	25633324
Dr. Jasem Mola Hassan	25345875
Gastrologists	
Dr. Sami Aman	22636464
Dr. Mohammad Al-Shamaly	25322030
Dr. Foad Abidallah Al-Ali	22633135

Endocrinologist	
Dr. Abd Al-Naser Al-Othman	25339330
Dr. Ahmad Al-Ansari	25658888
Dr. Kamal Al-Shomr	25329924
Physiotherapists & VD	
Dr. Deyaa Shehab	25722291
Dr. Mused Faraj Khamees	22666288
Rheumatologists:	
Dr. Adel Al-Awadi	25330060
Dr. Khaled Al-Jarallah	25722290
Internist, Chest & Heart	
DR.Mohammes Akkad	24555050 Ext 210
Dr. Mohammad Zubaid MB, ChB, FRCP, PACC Assistant Professor Of Medicine Head, Division of Cardiology Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital	25339667
Consultant Cardiologist	
Dr. Farida Al-Habib MD, PH.D, FACC	2611555-2622555
Inaya German Medical Center Te: 2575077 Fax: 25723123	

Psychologists /Psychotherapists	Soor Center Tel: 2290-1677 Fax: 2290 1688	info@soorcenter.com www.soorcenter.com	Kaizen center 25716707	Noor Clinic 23845955	William Schuilenberg, RPC 2290-1677 Zaina Al Zabin, M.Sc. 2290-1677
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Refaeli

expecting her first child

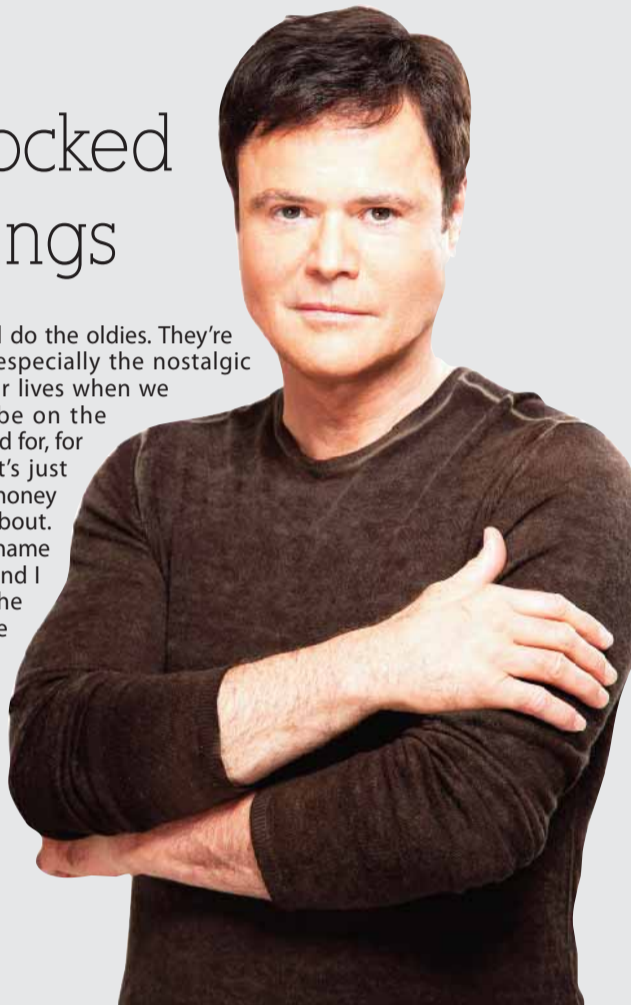
The 30-year-old model - who tied the knot with businessman Adi Ezra last September - has revealed they will welcome a baby together this year. Alongside a baby and bottle emoji and a picture of her positive pregnancy test, she wrote: "2016 is going to be like.. Happy & Healthy New Year!" Meanwhile, Bar recently revealed she wanted to have her first child "soon". She said: "I would love to have kids soon. We keep feeling like we need some more time to ourselves but I think that feeling will never go away. So we will probably aim for children soon, I hope. "I don't think marriage should [change a relationship]. I believe people choose to get married because they are happy with their lives together, so why would we change

anything? "I didn't expect it - I always thought it would be the same as the day before the marriage - but you feel a spark of extra commitment when you call someone your 'husband.'"And Bar previously predicted she would get pregnant at 30-years-old. Before her wedding, she shared: "I'm getting married. I'm building a house. I'm probably going to get pregnant while I'm 30. I'm becoming a woman at 30."

Osmond 'got knocked on the head' by his siblings

The musical family would never let one another get carried away by their fame and success and relied on each other to stay grounded, though they also think being so close helped them navigate the roller-coaster of fame. Jimmy Osmond said: "We had each other. When things went wrong we were there, and when things went right we were there to knock each other on the head. A lot of kids don't have that. "We promised each other when we started hearing voices we're just gonna start locking each other up. "We had days when a member of our band. Brother, sibling, sister or whatever, thinks they're so that, so we all just up and bang 'em on the head." Jay Osmond added: "Donny got knocked on the head a couple of times. But at some point we realized it took a massive machine and all of us putting our little pieces of the puzzle together, creating this brand. "I think, Donny, everyone recognizes, Marie recognizes, there would be a Donny, Marie or Jimmy if it wasn't for Alan, Merrill or Jay." Jimmy, Jay and Merrill Osmond are currently touring together and are always happy to play their old hits for fans because they're not doing it for the

money. Jimmy said: "We'll do the oldies. They're coming to your shows, especially the nostalgic group, to remember their lives when we were lucky enough to be on the radio. That's what they paid for, for Pete's sake. "Otherwise it's just about you making more money and that's not what it's about. You know I went to a big name concert not so long ago and I was so excited to hear the hits. "And they were like 'I'm not gonna play any of that.' Well I'm out of here, because that's what I paid for. People that don't do the hits, that's crazy."



Will Young had a visitation from a dead friend

The 'Joy' singer learned about "visualization meditation" while on a fasting retreat and finds the experience of seeing spirits bathed in "golden light" gives him a feeling of "complete goodness" that only being on stage comes close to replicating. He said: "I went on a fasting retreat in and we did visualization meditation and ever since then I've done. "It's all about the light, and some people that have passed away. I had a friend who passed away two years ago, Jo McCormack, she did all my A&R for all my records, this is the first record she hasn't done and it was really hard to not have her around. "And immediately when she died, she popped up, and they're bathed in light, they've just got like all around. "I can't explain the feeling, there's no feeling in life

really, apart from being on stage, actually I would say, from this complete goodness that comes from it. It's really weird. I didn't take it from the visualisation, it's just happened. "I didn't think about it, which is why I love it, because it's just sort of weird, it's just happened, that they have this light, and for some reason they've always got this golden light." Will is very in touch with his spiritual side and finds it beneficial to practice yoga every day. He told BANG Showbiz: "We come from stars. I do (practice yoga every day) at the moment now. I got through a block. There was a block, so I stopped meditating because I didn't want to get through it but I did and now I do it every day."



Mackenzie Crook is turning into his dad

The 'Pirates of the Caribbean' actor has confessed he's becoming more and more like his old man as he gets older, and is now interested in activities he thought were boring when he was a young lad. Speaking about the inspiration behind his TV series 'Detectivists' - which follows two members of a metal detecting club - Mackenzie exclusively told BANG Showbiz: "I've always had collections and my dad's always had collections. "My dad was a coin collector and he tried to get me into it when I was a kid but I just thought it was the most boring thing ever and then a few years ago something happened, something in my brain switched and I suddenly realised and now I find myself turning into my dad and I'm collecting coins myself." The 44-year-old star went on to admit that he doesn't mind becoming more like his dad but that he tries to keep his coin collecting a secret. He added: "I quite like it actually. I've made my peace with it, but I still won't often tell people I'm a coin collector. Maybe it's just something private."



Kim and Kanye want to buy a manor in UK

The 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' star and the 'Only One' hitmaker - who have two-year-old daughter North and three-week-old son Saint together - are reportedly considering getting their own slice of the "aristocratic lifestyle" in the form of a manor in the English countryside. A source said: "Kanye takes his image very seriously and he currently has his sights set on an aristocratic lifestyle. "While he will always have a home in Los Angeles - where Kim's expansive family are based - he likes the idea of having a manor across the

pond." And to mark the occasion, the 38-year-old rapper is said to be commissioning a huge medieval-style family portrait painting for his Los Angeles home and is currently working on getting together a shortlist of Parisian and Dutch fine artists to fly over to the United States to start work on the piece. The insider added to the Daily Mirror newspaper: "The portrait is all part of his upper-class image. It will probably hang in there home in Los Angeles to begin with until the English country home is ready."



Delevingne wants to 'grow as a person'

The 23-year-old model-and-actress has set a number of New Year's resolutions in order to improve herself and try new things. She said: "My New Year's resolutions are to grow as a person, challenge myself and be inspired." Cara - who is dating singer St Vincent aka Annie Clarke - recently spoke of how "loyalty" is very important to her. She said: "Loyalty is one of the most important things to me in the world. Once I care about someone, I'll jump in front of a car for them. "I'm a real 'ride or

die' kind of gal. It's all about trust and loyalty." The 'Paper Towns' star also confessed to loving romantic gestures, though she is "embarrassed" about some of the things she's done in the name of love. She admitted: "I've serenaded a couple of people before, which is really embarrassing. "I used to write love letters a lot, and I have travelled very far for a day to see someone."

Damon insists diversity comments were edited

The 44-year-old actor came under fire after suggesting that films only need a broader range of actors and not necessarily directors or producers during a heated debate with producer Effie Brown on the Season 4 premiere episode of his HBO reality show, 'Project Greenlight', which offers filmmakers a chance to direct a \$3 million feature film but insists his comments were taken out of context. He told the New York Times: "The idea that I would say that there didn't need to be

diversity behind the camera, it's not only complete anathema to what I believe in my heart and always have. But it's not something that I think anybody would ever say with a camera on. "When Effie was advocating for the woman and the Vietnamese-American guy, what I actually said was, 'Are we judging a contest or are we casting a reality show?'. And that's when she said, 'Wow.' And I went, no, Effie, I'm completely serious, what is our responsibility at this point? Because we had already blown it on

the competition." Despite the controversy, Matt insisted that he and Effie did not fall out over their discussion. He said: "We were fine that day. It wasn't like I left and said, 'Boy, I got in an argument with Effie Brown', and I don't think she would have left thinking that she had had an argument with me. But the truth is, Effie did an awesome job for us. She's an awesome producer."



SCHUMER

challenging her Internet trolls to 'find happiness'

The 'Trainwreck' actress has had her fair share of nasty comments from people on social networking sites, but chose to take the high road when it came to passing on her New Year wishes to these negative posters. She wrote: "Happy New Years to internet trolls. I hope you find happiness this year. Nourishing relationships and a life you can be proud of." Amy previously found herself at the centre of cruel comments about her weight back in February. Movie critic Jeff Wells labelled her chubby

after seeing 'Trainwreck', and added: "There's no way she'd be an object of heated romantic interest in the real world." But instead of letting the criticism get her down, Amy decided to hit back with a semi nude picture. She wrote alongside the snap: "I am a size 6 and have no plans of changing. This is it. Stay on or get off. Kisses!" Later this year, Amy stripped off for the infamous Pirelli calendar. In the images shot by world famous photographer Annie Leibovitz, Amy is seen sitting on a stool wearing

nothing but her underwear, clutching a takeaway cup of coffee. Clearly delighted with the final product, Amy tweeted: "Beautiful, gross, strong, thin, fat, pretty, ugly, sexy, disgusting, flawless, woman." Annie added of the 2016 images, which also featured Serena Williams: "I wanted the pictures to show the women exactly as they are, with no pretence."



Wilson's New Year's resolution is to be more sociable

The 'Pitch Perfect' actress spent 2015 trying to find more "balance" in her life and thinks she is in the right frame of mind to end the year and start anew in 2016. Asked her New Year's resolution, she said: "I always have a goal of trying to be more sociable. I'm trying to find more balance. And I think I did that in 2015. Ending things on a super positive reflective note pumps you up so you can crush the new year." Though she enjoys socializing, the 35-year-old star always tries not to drink too much at glitzy events in Hollywood because she doesn't want to be "sloppy" and she's also had some outrageous requests made towards her. She told Glamour magazine: "I've been to a lot of Hollywood parties, and there are people I've respected who will be really drunk and say the craziest things. People have offered,

like, threesomes! Sloppy is not usually a good look." The Australian star recently revealed she dreams of starring in a London stage show. She said: "I'd love to do the West End, but you want to originate a role to really make an impact. I mean if I just came in and did 'Wicked' or something, it wouldn't be that exciting. So, I'm always looking. "I'd love to write an original musical but it can take a long time. 'Hamilton', that's on Broadway right now, took six years and it's a work of genius, so it would probably take me like 20 years! But I should get started because it would be awesome."



Kimberly Wyatt wants a UK driving license

The former Pussycat Dolls singer lives in Britain with her husband Max Rogers and their 12-month-old daughter Willow and she thinks it's about time she was able to get out and about on the road. She said: "I have one New Year's resolution and that is to get my UK's driving license." The doting mother recently spoke of how she has altered her exercise regime in order to incorporate her little girl. She explained: "Willow is my priority now, I find ways to do it with her. We do mommy and baby yoga and weight classes. I love having her in that fitness atmosphere. I do my squats while holding her hand and do push-up kisses and she loves it. It feels like playtime for her." And the 33-year-old star hopes her dedication to keeping fit and healthy will rub off on her daughter long-term. She explained: "In this selfie-obsessed generation, where people are so driven by fame and looks, with Photoshopped faces and bodies, we're all living in a false reality. What's important to me is to stay true to myself and to what I've learned along the way so that I can introduce Willow to that in the healthiest way I know. "I have no control over the choices she makes in the future - my own experience taught me that - but I can be the best example to her that I can possibly be."



Goulding and Dougie Poynter are reportedly back together

The pair recently took a break after for over 18 months of dating but Dougie has fuelled speculation they have reconciled after posting a sweet birthday message to the singer. He posted a picture of Ellie on stage on Instagram and wrote: "Happy birthday to this very special/rad lady @elliiegoulding (sic)" to celebrate Ellie's 29th birthday on Wednesday. Dougie also shared a picture of himself with Ellie's cat, which he captioned "Ze cat whisperer (sic)." Ellie and Dougie recently agreed to go their separate ways as their busy work schedules have made their relationship more and more difficult to maintain, but were hoping to resolve their problems and reconcile eventually. A source said: "They are taking a break. Their work commitments have meant they have been spending more and more time away from each other and it has made it difficult to maintain their relationship. They've decided to have a temporary break to see if they can work things out. "They are both very sad that things have hit a rough patch, but are trying to see if a little distance can help them get through it." Ellie had been touring the US and Europe promoting her album 'Delirium', while the 28-year-old McFly bassist has been equally busy. The source added to the Daily Mirror newspaper: "Globetrotting can really take its toll on any relationship, but it's especially hard when work regularly demands that both sides have to be away."



Lemmy calmly accepted his fate with terminal cancer

The 70-year-old musician died earlier this week, just two days after being told he had between two and six months to live, but his bandmate Mikkey Dee insisted Lemmy took the diagnosis well. He told Swedish newspaper Expressen: "When he went home he said, 'I've had a good run' and then more or less died." Milley also confirmed the group - also consisting of Phil 'Wizz' Campbell - will go their separate ways for good after the legendary musician, who was the sole constant member of the band, passed away. He said: "Motorhead is over, of course. Lemmy was Motorhead. We won't be doing any more tours or anything. "And there won't be any more records. But the band survives, and Lemmy lives on in the hearts of everyone." The rock icon's death was confirmed on the group's

official Facebook page as the 'Ace of Spades' hitmakers paid tribute to a "lovely, wonderful man". The post read: "There is no easy way to say this...our mighty, noble friend Lemmy passed away today after a short battle with an extremely aggressive cancer. He had learnt of the disease on December 26th, and was at home, sitting in front of his favorite video game from The Rainbow which had recently made its way down the street, with his family. "We cannot begin to express our shock and sadness, there aren't words. We will say more in the coming days, but for now, please...play Motorhead loud, play Hawkwind loud, play Lemmy's music LOUD."

Styles and Kendall enjoyed a dinner date

The 21-year-old singer and the 21-year-old model - who went on a string of dates in 2013 before their brief romance fizzled out - have fuelled speculation of a reconciliation after being spotted dining together at Blanchard's restaurant on the Caribbean Island of Anguilla. While the pair were joined by a group of friends, they sat beside each other and looked quite cosy, according to pictures obtained by E! News. And a tweet from an excited fan in the restaurant read: "IM AT DINNER WITH KENDALL JENNER AND HARRY STYLES ARE EATING DINNER NEXT TO ME THIS IS NOT A DRILL." Harry showed off his new tattoo of an eagle as he posed for pictures with fans at the restaurant. He has covered up the 'Things I Can't' tattoo on his right arm and replaced it with the image of the majestic bird. Meanwhile, Kendall revealed she is hoping for a more restful 2016 after being secretly admitted to hospital for exhaustion this year. The 20-year-old supermodel explained that her jet-set lifestyle finally caught up with her and she has vowed to take better care of herself next year. Kendall wrote on her website, KendallJ.com: "I just got so tired from work and life and everything that it freaked me out at the end of this year. I actually had to go to the hospital because I was so exhausted - it was definitely a wake-up call that I need to take better care of myself. "So, I guess my resolution would be to chill out more and have the ability to be a little more spontaneous. I want to enjoy being home a little bit more. No matter what, 2016 is going to be the best yet. I can feel it!" Kendall also revealed that she often sets goals such as "finding a boyfriend" for herself but isn't too worried about her love life right now. She explained: "I'm not big on New Year's resolutions. I don't write a list down or anything, it's definitely more of an in-my-head kind of thing. I set random goals like 'find a boyfriend' but it's not legit at all."



Dinah Jane Hansen has a crush on Chris Brown



The 18-year-old Fifth Harmony musician is a huge fan of the 'Loyal' hitmaker but doesn't want the 26-year-old star to find out about her crush because she'd be embarrassed if they bumped into each other. She exclusively told BANG Showbiz: "Yes I am single. I'm 18 I just have friends. Celeb crushes? Chris Brown, I hope he doesn't really find out." The 'Worth It' singer continued to say she isn't just an admirer of his looks, but thinks he's "a legend" because he is such an incredible performer. She explained: "I'm just a big, big fan of his artistry. I just love his music and everything about how he portrays himself as an artist, he's a great entertainer. That guy is a legend." However, the former 'The X Factor USA' contestant revealed she couldn't act on her feelings when she met him at a recent celebrity basketball game she was involved in because it would have been "too soon" after meeting him. She joked: "Well I couldn't [make a move on him] on the basketball court, that would be too soon. It was funny because he was the one who passed me the ball at the end of the game and he was like, 'Shoot it, just shoot it,' like whispering to me at the pointer line and I couldn't believe he was actually talking to me. I didn't make the shot but at least he passed me the ball, at least he whispered to me."

— Bangshowbiz



In a Monday, March 2, 2015 file photo, singer Natalie Cole performs at "An Evening of SeriousFun Celebrating the Legacy of Paul Newman," at Avery Fisher Hall, in New York.



In a Sunday, Feb. 8, 2009 file photo, Natalie Cole holds the best instrumental arrangement accompanying vocalist award backstage at the 51st Annual Grammy Awards, in Los Angeles.

Natalie Cole, Grammy winning singer, dies

Natalie Cole, the daughter of jazz legend Nat King Cole, who carved out her own success with R&B hits like "Our Love" and "This Will Be" before triumphantly intertwining their legacies to make his "Unforgettable" their signature hit through technological wizardry, has died. She was 65.

While Cole was a Grammy winner in her own right, she had her greatest success in 1991 when she re-recorded her father's classic hits - with him on the track - for the album "Unforgettable ... With Love." It became a multiplatinum smash and garnered her multiple Grammy Awards, including album of the year. Cole died Thursday evening at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles due to complications from ongoing health issues, her family said in a statement.

"Natalie fought a fierce, courageous battle, dying how she lived ... with dignity, strength and honor. Our beloved Mother and sister will be greatly missed and remain UNFORGETTABLE in our hearts forever," read the statement from her son Robert Yancy and sisters Timolin and Casey Cole. "I had to hold back the tears. I know how hard she fought," said Aretha Franklin in a statement. "She fought for so long. She was one of the greatest singers of our time."

Drug problems

Natalie Cole had battled drug problems and hepatitis that forced her to undergo a kidney transplant in May 2009. Cole's older sister, Carol "Cookie" Cole, died the day she received the transplant. Their brother, Nat Kelly Cole, died in 1995.

Natalie Cole was inspired by her dad at an early age and auditioned to sing with him when she was just 11 years old. She was 15 when he died of lung cancer, in 1965. She began as an R&B singer but later gravitated toward the smooth pop and jazz standards that her father loved. Cole's greatest success came with her 1991 album, "Unforgettable ... With Love," which paid tribute to her father with reworked versions of some of his best-known songs, including "That Sunday That Summer," "Too Young" and "Mona Lisa."

Her voice was spliced with her dad's in the title cut, offering a delicate duet a quarter-century after his death. The album sold some 14 million copies and won six Grammys, including album of the year as well record and song of the year for the title track duet. While making the album, Cole told The Associated Press in 1991, she had to "throw out every R&B lick that I had ever learned and every pop trick I had ever learned. With him, the music was in the background

and the voice was in the front."

"I didn't shed really any real tears until the album was over," Cole said. "Then I cried a whole lot. When we started the project it was a way of reconnecting with my dad. Then when we did the last song, I had to say goodbye again." She was also nominated for an Emmy award in 1992 for a televised performance of her father's songs. "That was really my thank you," she told People magazine in 2006. "I owed that to him."

Another father-daughter duet, "When I Fall in

Starry beginnings

Cole was born in 1950 to Nat "King" Cole and his wife, Maria Ellington Cole, a onetime vocalist with Duke Ellington who was no relation to the great bandleader. Her father was already a recording star, and he rose to greater heights in the 1950s and early '60s. He toured worldwide, and in 1956 he became the first black entertainer to host a national TV variety show, though poor ratings and lack of sponsors killed it off the following year. He also appeared in a few

blamed her past intravenous drug use.

She criticized the Recording Academy for giving five Grammys to drug user Amy Winehouse in 2008. "I'm an ex-drug addict and I don't take that kind of stuff lightly," Cole explained at the 2009 Grammy Awards. Hepatitis C "stayed in my body for 25 years and it could still happen to this young woman or other addicts who are fooling around with drugs, especially needles."

Cole received chemotherapy to treat the hepatitis



In a Wednesday, June 26, 2013 file photo, Grammy winning singer-songwriter Natalie Cole poses for a portrait in promotion of her new album "Natalie Cole en Espanol," in New York.— AP photos

Love," won a 1996 Grammy for best pop collaboration with vocals, and a follow-up album, "Still Unforgettable," won for best traditional pop vocal album of 2008. Cole made her recording debut in 1975 with "Inseparable." The music industry welcomed her with two Grammy awards in 1976 - one for best new artist and one for best female R&B vocal performance for her buoyant hit "This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)."

She also worked as an actress, with appearances on TV's "Touched by an Angel" and "Grey's Anatomy." But she was happiest touring and performing live. "I still love recording and still love the stage," she said on her website in 2008, "but like my dad, I have the most fun when I am in front of that glorious orchestra or that kick-butt big band."

movies and spoke out in favor of civil rights.

Natalie Cole grew up in Los Angeles' posh Hancock Park neighborhood, where her parents had settled in 1948 despite animosity from some white residents about having the black singer as a neighbor. When told by residents who said they didn't want "undesirable people" in the area, the singer said, "Neither do I, and if I see (any), I'll be the first to complain." The family eventually included five children.

Natalie Cole started singing seriously in college, performing in small clubs. But in her 2000 autobiography, "Angel on My Shoulder," Cole discussed how she had battled heroin, crack cocaine and alcohol addiction for many years. She spent six months in rehab in 1983. When she announced in 2008 that she had been diagnosed with hepatitis C, a liver disease spread through contact with infected blood, she



In a Sunday, July 6, 2003 file photo, singer Natalie Cole performs on Stravinsky stage, during the 37th Montreux Jazz Festival, in Montreux, Switzerland.

and "within four months, I had kidney failure," she told CNN's Larry King in 2009. She needed dialysis three times a week until she received a donor kidney on May 18, 2009. The organ procurement agency One Legacy facilitated the donation from a family that had requested that their donor's organ go to Cole if it was a match. Cole toured through much of her illness, often receiving dialysis at hospitals around the globe. "I think that I am a walking testimony to you can have scars," she told People magazine. "You can go through turbulent times and still have victory in your life." — AP

Reactions to the death of Natalie Cole

Reaction to the passing of Grammy-winning singer Natalie Cole, who died in Los Angeles on Thursday at age 65:

Aretha Franklin

"I am sorry to hear about Natalie Cole's passing. I had to hold back the tears. I know how hard she fought. She fought for so long. She was one of the greatest singers of our time. She represented the Cole legend of excellence and class quite well."

Tony Bennett

"Natalie was an exceptional jazz singer and it was an honor to have recorded and performed with her on several occasions. She was a lovely and generous person who will be greatly missed."

Dionne Warwick

"More like family than friend was Natalie. My heart aches. My sincere condolences to her family and may she now rest in peace."

Neil Portnow, president/CEO of The Recording Academy

"We are very saddened to learn of the passing of one of music's most celebrated and iconic women ... Natalie followed her legendary father into the music business with magnificent hits like "Inseparable," "This Will Be" and "Unforgettable" achieving multiplatinum, worldwide success in her own right. We've lost a wonderful, highly cherished artist."

Arsenio Hall

"In college, I named my bass guitar Natalie! As a young stand up comic I opened for Natalie Cole. She was all that, in all ways! (RIP)."

Rev Jesse Jackson

"#NatalieCole, sister beloved & of substance and sound."

May her soul rest in peace. #Inseparable."

Marlee Matlin

"I am saddened by the news of the passing of my friend Natalie Cole. Lovely song bird (and great actress too) - she is now singing in heaven." —Marlee Matlin
Pam Grier
"Peace be still, Natalie Cole, a gracious songbird."

Ken Erlich

"In a way, she was like a connector. She connected her father's generation ... and the great pop singers of that time with the generation that came right after her, or alongside her, of great women - Whitney, Anita Baker, Mariah, Celine."

Questlove from The Roots

"Sophisticated Lady. I love Natalie Cole so much man. One of the first childhood idols I got to meet and nerd out on when I first got in the business." —Questlove from The Roots

Fantasia

"Rest in peace Natalie Cole.. I will forever love your music. Your voice was like an Angel."

Lenny Kravitz

"As the new year was ushered in, an angelic instrument moved on. Natalie Cole's voice was perfection. And what a lady... You will be missed my dear. Love." —Lenny Kravitz

MC Hammer

"Prayers for #NatalieColes family. She saw and touched the world through her journey of life and with her beautiful voice. #Inseparable."

Rosie O'Donnell

"We will miss her like crazy." — AP

She was 'Unforgettable': Key songs from Natalie Cole

Though her father was the incomparable Nat "King" Cole, Natalie Cole successfully carved out her own space in the musical universe with hit songs and albums that earned her multiple Grammy Awards. After some of her albums proved unsuccessful, she reinvented herself and had a comeback that brought her to the top of the charts. And though she battled with heavy drug addiction, she marked a clean return and even advocated against drug use in the music industry.

A passionate singer who connected emotionally with her songs, Natalie Cole was a versatile performer throughout her career, singing styles that included R&B, pop, and jazz, among others. She died Thursday in Los Angeles at age 65.

Some of her best work:

"This Will Be" (1975)
"Inseparable" (1975)
"I've Got Love On My Mind" (1977)
"Our Love" (1977)
"Someone That I Used to Love" (1980)
"Jump Start" (1987)
"I Live for Your Love" (1987)
"Pink Cadillac" (Bruce Springsteen cover) (1987)
"Miss You Like Crazy" (1989)
"Unforgettable" (with Nat King Cole) (1991) — AP

George Lucas apologizes for calling Disney 'white slavers'

George Lucas has apologized for criticizing Disney's handling of "Star Wars" and saying he had sold his characters to "white slavers" in a recent interview with Charlie Rose. In a statement issued Thursday, Lucas says he misspoke and used a "very inappropriate analogy." It was not clear what the "Star Wars" creator meant by the "white slavers" comment, and Rose did not ask a follow-up question on his PBS show that aired Dec. 24. The charged words nonetheless sparked ire when the interview was posted online Wednesday.

"I rarely go out with statements to clarify my feelings but I feel it is important to make it clear that I am thrilled that Disney has the franchise and is moving it in such exciting directions," said Lucas in his statement.

He sold his company, Lucasfilm, to the Walt Disney Co. in 2012 for \$4.06 billion, and the studio charged ahead in developing "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" with director JJ Abrams and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy. Disney has laid plans for two more "Star Wars" films and three anthology films set in the Star Wars universe over the next few years.

Lucas discussed his decision to stay out of the new installments in the hour-long interview with Rose and had criticized Disney's retro, fan-centric approach to "The Force Awakens." The interview was conducted prior to the Dec 14 premiere of the film, where Disney chairman and CEO Bob Iger thanked Lucas, who was in attendance, for his "sheer genius" in creating "Star Wars."

"The Force Awakens" plays homage to Lucas' original trilogy and has garnered largely positive reviews from fans and critics alike. After less than two weeks in theaters, it has already become the eighth highest grossing film of all time globally. "I have been working with Disney for 40 years and chose them as the custodians of 'Star Wars' because of my great respect for the company and Bob Iger's leadership," said Lucas in his Thursday statement. "Disney is doing an incredible job of taking care of and expanding the franchise." — AP

New Year celebrations from around the world



Fireworks explode over the river Rhine in front of the Great Saint Martin Church and the Cologne Cathedral during New Year's celebrations in Cologne.



A young Iraqi poses at an amusement park during New Year celebrations in the southern city of Basra.



Light and fireworks are seen during a New Year's Eve performance in Barcelona.



An Egyptian policeman riding a camel stands guard during New Year celebrations in front of the pyramids near the Egyptian capital Cairo.



Fireworks explode around the London Eye during New Year's celebrations in central London.



Fireworks light the sky above the Statue of St. Wenceslas at Prague's Wenceslas Square.



Fireworks light the sky over Copacabana beach during New Year's Eve celebrations in Rio de Janeiro.



Exploding fireworks reflect in the water of the Maschsee lake in Hanover, central Germany.



Fireworks light up the sky over the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and the city skyline.



Simone Carabella of Italy, dives in the Tiber river as part of the traditional New Year's celebrations.



A large inflatable balloon in the shape of the Lord Mayor of London takes part in the New Years Day Parade.

Natalie Cole, Grammy winning singer, has died

SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 2016



Members of the Polish American String Band perform during the 116th annual Mummers Parade in Philadelphia on Friday, Jan 1, 2016. Outrageously costumed Mummers strutted their stuff Friday at the city's annual New Year's Day parade, a colorful celebration that features string bands, comic brigades, elaborate floats and plenty of feathers and sequins. — AP

Top-grossing films of 2015

Moviegoers set a new box office record in 2015 with more than \$11 billion in ticket sales.

MOVIE	GROSS (in millions)	RELEASED
"Jurassic World"	\$652.2 million	June 12
"Star Wars: The Force Awakens"	629.0	Dec. 18
"Avengers: Age Of Ultron"	459.0	May 1
"Inside Out"	356.5	June 19
"Furious 7"	353.0	April 3
"American Sniper"	348.8	Dec. 25, 2014
"Minions"	336.0	July 10
"The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2"	268.5	Nov. 20
"The Martian"	225.1	Oct. 2
"Cinderella"	201.2	March 13

Data for U.S. and Canadian theaters through Dec. 30

'Jurassic World' leads top 10 movies of 2015

Dinosaurs, Jedi and superheroes dominated the 2015 box office year, now the highest ever recorded, with over \$11 billion in ticket sales. The top 10 movies at US and Canadian theaters through Dec 30, as compiled Thursday by Rentrak:

1. "Jurassic World," \$652.2 million.

2. "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," \$629 million.

3. "Avengers: Age of Ultron," \$459 million.

4. "Inside Out," \$356.5 million.
5. "Furious 7," \$353 million.

6. "American Sniper," \$348.8 million.

7. "Minions," \$336 million.

8. "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2," \$268.5 million.
9. "The Martian," \$225.1 million.

10. "Cinderella," \$201.2 million.

— AP

Cameras allow New Year's views all over world

If you aren't looking for a rockin' New Year's Eve or forced small talk between television hosts, an online service is offering a way to experience the beginning of 2016 as it happens all over the world.

New Year's Eve is usually the year's most popular day at EarthCam.com, a 20-year-old service that shows live camera views from hundreds of landmarks. The hourly celebrations began at 11 am EST with beach fireworks on the Philippine island of Boracay and continue until the last stroke of midnight in Kauai, Hawaii, five hours behind Times Square. The celebrations are offered without fanfare, or commentators.

"We do get comments people that they appreciate that this is a clean feed," said Lisa Kelly, strategic sales director at

EarthCam. "It's not edited - it's real life happening." In its infancy two decades ago, EarthCam installed cameras at various vantage points overlooking New York's Times Square. At the time, the very idea seemed inexplicable - cameras showing live feeds over the Internet? Times Square is still the service's most-watched camera view, even with many more vantage points now available.

Great advertising

The New Jersey-based company offers separate services. At EarthCam.com, users can choose their own camera views, to see the Eiffel Tower bathed in afternoon sunlight, early evening bustle in Moscow or pedestrians in front of Dublin's

Temple Bar. EarthCamtv.com is a curated site, where producers choose the different vantage points for look-ins - a beach in the Caribbean, Niagara Falls or animals frolicking in a zoo.

Separately, the company maintains cameras overlooking construction sites all over the world for people to check the progress of work. EarthCam installs and maintains the cameras in return for the locations; it's great advertising for people to see the waves constantly rolling in at a hotel on a tropical beach, for example. While nothing matches New Year's, EarthCam gets usage bumps for its views of New Orleans at Mardi Gras or Dublin on St Patrick's Day, Kelly said. EarthCam is offered on Apple TV and also as an app for people who are on the go on New Year's Eve.

That day, EarthCam's cameras will show what's happening in Budapest, Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Dubai, Chicago, Seattle and San Francisco. Views of Abbey Road in London, Rick's Cafe in Jamaica, Bourbon Street in New Orleans and Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles are also offered. Some 50 locations in all will be featured. Kelly's personal favorite is the over-the-top celebration in Transylvania, Romania, which can be seen at 5 pm EST in the United States. "It's on my bucket list to go there for New Year's," she said. "They know how to do it right." — AP



This image provided by EarthCam shows a New Year's Eve scene in Times Square on Broadway.— AP photos



(Above and below) These images provided by EarthCam show a New Year's Eve scene on Thursday, Dec 31, 2015, in Transylvania, Romania.

