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## BAHRAIN BUSTS 'TERROR' CELL LINKED TO TEHRAN

DJIBOUTI CUTS IRAN TIES • QATAR RECALLS ENVOY • JORDAN SUMMONS AMBASSADOR



Min 07°  
Max 23°  
High Tide 11:03 & 21:19  
Low Tide 03:33 & 15:37

### ASSEMBLY PANEL DEBATES REVISED ANTI-GRAFT LAW DEAL ON E-CRIMES LAW

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly's legal and legislative affairs committee discussed yesterday a new law for the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Authority after its law was annulled by the constitutional court over procedural flaws. The panel's secretary MP Ahmad Al-Qudhaibi said the committee will vote on the new law on Sunday to be ready for an Assembly debate on Jan 12. He said the main amendment to the law is the inclusion of a definition on profiteering and granting the authority powers to search without a prior warrant from the public prosecution. The authority has also been empowered under the new law to follow up cases with investigation authorities.

After the constitutional court's decision last month, the government dissolved the Anti-Corruption Authority which was established about a year ago and assumed its duties in the past few months. But the government immediately prepared a new law to avoid the shortcomings in the previous law and sent it to the Assembly for approval. The law was scheduled to be debated on Dec 22, but the death during the session of MP Nabil Al-Fadhil forced the suspension of Assembly meetings.

Justice Minister Yaqoub Al-Sane said there are no differences between the government and MPs over the new draft law, adding the new law affirms the independence of the authority and that it follows the justice ministry in small administrative affairs only.

Continued on Page 13

### AMIR RETURNS HOME



**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) is welcomed at the airport by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after he returned home from Morocco yesterday evening after a private visit. — KUNA

**DUBAI:** Bahrain said yesterday it had dismantled an Iran-linked "terror" cell that was planning attacks in the kingdom, amid a growing diplomatic crisis between Gulf Arab states and Tehran. The cell was allegedly linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Lebanon's Tehran-backed Hezbollah militia and planning to carry out a "series of dangerous bombings" on the tiny Sunni-ruled kingdom, an interior ministry statement said. Members of the "secret terrorist organization" have been identified and many arrested, said the statement on the official BNA news agency, adding that others remain at large.

Among those arrested were 33-year-old twins Ali and Mohammed Fakhrawi identified as leaders of the group. The cell is allegedly linked to the little-known Al-Ashtar Brigades which has reportedly claimed responsibility for bombings in the Shiite-majority kingdom, including one outside a Sunni mosque in 2013. It is also linked to suspects involved a July 28 bombing that killed two policemen and wounded six others. Al-Ashtar Brigade, as well as Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, are on Bahrain's list of "terrorist groups".

The twins have travelled to Iran on several occasions to obtain financial and logistical support, relying on their relations with "terrorist elements" that have strong ties with the Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah, the statement said. Ali Fakhro and two other suspects also met in 2012 with Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and his deputy who offered them "\$20,000 in support of their organization," Bahrain said. The tiny but strategic US ally has seen frequent unrest since a Shiite-led uprising erupted in 2011 demanding a constitutional monarchy. Bahrain frequently accuses Tehran of backing the unrest. Saudi Arabia accused Iran Saturday of sponsoring "terrorism" recalling Iran-linked cells that have been uncovered smuggling explosives and arms to Bahrain and Kuwait.

Iran warned Saudi Arabia yesterday to stop working against it as their diplomatic crisis intensified despite efforts to defuse a row that has raised fears of greater regional instability.

Continued on Page 13



**PYONGYANG:** This picture taken from North Korean TV yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un signing a document of a hydrogen bomb test. — AFP

## 3,781 ARRESTED IN BNEID AL-GAR RAID

### News

in brief

#### Gas leak at Ahmadi refinery injures worker

**KUWAIT:** A gas leak that occurred at a major refinery in Kuwait yesterday injured a worker but did not affect the plant's operations, state news agency KUNA reported. Workers were able to control the leak in the second line of a gas liquefaction plant in the Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery, Ali Abdullah, vice president for financial and administrative affairs at Kuwait National Petroleum Co, told KUNA. "The leak did not result in any ... material damage as the refinery and gas liquefaction plant's operations were not affected," Abdullah was quoted as saying, adding that the injured contractor was treated at the scene.

#### Netflix streaming TV now in 190 countries

**LAS VEGAS:** Netflix's streaming TV service is now operating in 190 countries, with the addition of 130 new markets, the company announced yesterday. "Today you are witnessing the birth of a new global Internet TV network," said co-founder and chief executive Reed Hastings at the Consumer Electronics Show. "With this launch, consumers around the world - from Singapore to St Petersburg, from San Francisco to Sao Paulo - will be able to enjoy TV shows and movies simultaneously - no more waiting." While English is the main language for most of the new markets, Netflix said it has added support for Arabic and Korean, along with simplified and traditional Chinese to the 17 languages it now uses. Users can access Netflix through an app on a smart TV, a videogame console, a streaming player, a smartphone or a tablet.

**KUWAIT:** As part of its ongoing security campaign to arrest lawbreakers, the Ministry of Interior raided Bneid Al-Gar, where it arrested 3,781 persons, a press statement by the ministry said yesterday. A strong show of force was carried out by ministry personnel in the area to prevent lawbreakers from fleeing, said the statement. It stressed that all expat residents must carry with them at all times identification documents to avoid being arrested and potentially at some point being deported.

Furthermore, it urged businesses, citizens and residents to ensure that those whom they hire for work have valid resi-

gency permits and not hire anyone without residency documentation or with an expired one to avoid legal accountability. The Bneid Al-Gar raid also saw security personnel entering residences to check the documents of people living there.

For the past two weeks, the interior ministry has launched major crackdowns in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Industrial Ardiya, arresting thousands of residency violators. The current campaign is the second major crackdown on illegal expats and criminals since 2013, when thousands of people were summarily deported for residency violations and even traffic offenses. — Agencies



**KUWAIT:** Policemen check the documents of workers in their residence in Bneid Al-Gar yesterday. — KUNA

### N KOREA 'SUCCESSFULLY' CONDUCTS H-BOMB TEST

**SEOUL:** North Korea said yesterday it had carried out a "successful" miniaturized hydrogen bomb test - a shock announcement that, if confirmed, would massively raise the stakes in the hermit state's bid to strengthen its nuclear arsenal. The announcement triggered swift international condemnation but also skepticism, with experts suggesting the apparent yield was far too low for a thermonuclear device. "The republic's first hydrogen bomb test has been successfully performed at 10:00 am (0130 GMT)," North Korean state television announced.

"We have now joined the rank of advanced nuclear states," it said, adding that the test was of a miniaturized

device. The television showed North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un's signed order - dated Dec 15 - to go ahead with the test, with a handwritten exhortation to begin 2016 with the "thrilling sound of the first hydrogen bomb explosion".

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye condemned what she described as a "grave provocation" and called for a strong international response as the UN Security Council planned to hold an emergency meeting later yesterday. The North's main ally China voiced its strong opposition, while the White House said it was still studying the precise nature of the test and vowed to "respond appropriately".

Continued on Page 13

Embassy denies Ethiopian maids abused in Jahra jail



Tweets too short? Twitter mulling 10,000 characters



Why 'Creed' was Sylvester Stallone's toughest role



Amla quits as South Africa skipper after Test draw





KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Kuwait's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran Majdi Al-Dhafiri. — KUNA



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

## CROWN PRINCE RECEIVES ENVOYS TO IRAN, ITALY

### ACTING SPEAKER MEETS ADVISORS

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Kuwait's ambassadors to the Islamic Republic of Iran Majdi Al-Dhafiri, and to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Earlier, His Highness received Acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Premier and

Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.

#### Advisors

In other news, Acting National Assembly Speaker Adel Al-Jarallah Al-Kharafi stressed National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem's keenness on development of the administrative and technical systems in the General Secretariat of the National Assembly. During his meeting with the consultants yesterday, Kharafi conveyed Ghanem's greetings and appreciation for

their efforts, proved through the constitutional and legal documents during the last period.

Ghanem praised the prominent role played by the Secretary-General of the National Assembly Allam Ali Al-Kandari; employing legal and constitutional expertise of the Secretariat for organizing the structure of the Technical Office, which includes legal and constitutional advisers in the Council. He pointed out that the constitutional views would enrich the debate through parliamentary comment

on the government projects and provides a careful study of various aspects in order to avoid mistakes.

#### Defense Minister

Separately, Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah met yesterday with Turkish Ambassador in Kuwait Murad Tameer on several issues of mutual interest. During the meeting, the ambassador delivered a letter to Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah from Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz, the Defense Ministry's Moral

Guidance and Public Relations Department said in a press statement. The Kuwaiti minister hailed deep relations between both friendly countries and stressed mutual willingness to promote and develop them, it added. Meanwhile, Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah met with Italian Ambassador in Kuwait Giuseppe Scognamiglio on a number of issues and matters that concern both sides. He lauded deep relations between both friendly nations, pointing to mutual willingness to bolster and develop bilateral cooperation. —KUNA

## ENVOY HAILS KRCS' AID TO PALESTINIANS

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has been instrumental in providing the Palestinian people with much-appreciated humanitarian aid over the years, a Palestinian official said yesterday. After meeting earlier today with KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi, Palestine's Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboob told KUNA he discussed with Hasawi the possibility of KRCS providing a hospital in Al-Quds (occupied Jerusalem) with essentials for tending patients and training Palestinian journalists on personal safety tactics when reporting from crisis regions.

Ambassador Tahboob expressed appreciation for KRCS's efforts last month at bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza Strip, saying it was timely and much sought-after. Meanwhile, Hasawi noted KRCS's readiness to coordinate efforts with existing relief aid organizations in Palestine to avail the Palestinian people with the humanitarian aid they seek.

#### Syrian refugees

Meanwhile, Deputy Head of Delegation at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Lebanon Marco Succi commended KRCS' hard work in support of the Syrian refugees. The KRCS makes great efforts to provide the needs of Syrians in Lebanon, Succi told KUNA after a meeting with head of the KRCS volunteers' department Dr Musaed Al-Enezi. He said they appreciate the KRCS's work to alleviate refugees' sufferings, adding that they look forward to furthering bilateral cooperation to assist Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

In the meantime, regional media coordinator of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Salah Debaka lauded the rapid response of the KRCS to help the refugees. Since the eruption of the Syria crisis, the KRCS has been active offering assistance to thousands of refugees all over Lebanon, he told KUNA. He congratulated the KRCS on its 50th anniversary. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah leaves for Bahrain yesterday. — KUNA

## INFO MINISTER HEADS TO BAHRAIN FOR GCC EVENT

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah headed yesterday to Bahrain to partake in the Manama 'GCC tourism capital for 2016' festivities. Sheikh Salman said

that Kuwait participation in the event was to show support to Bahrain's tourism sector. He noted that the festival was part of the GCC plan to support tourism in the region, stressing that developing the tourism sector in the Gulf States required

continuous cooperation. Sheikh Salman affirmed that the GCC region was witnessing a number of cultural activities chiefly amongst them was the celebration of Kuwait as the capital of Islamic culture for 2016. — KUNA



KUWAIT: KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi meets Palestine's Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboob. — KUNA

## WORLD GOVERNMENT SUMMIT IN DUBAI TO DISCUSS INNOVATIVE FUTURE SOLUTIONS

**DUBAI:** More than 150 governments and international organizations will come together for the World Government Summit, organized by the UAE government in Dubai from February 8 to 10, 2016, to share knowledge and experiences in the efforts to improve government work and offer better services to humanity.

In a major transformation, as part of the Summit a number of global initiatives and research studies will be released throughout the year, highlighting the Summit's status as an organization that works constantly to find innovative solutions in government services.

Announcing the Summit, Mohammed Abdullah Al-Gergawi, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the World Government Summit, said: "The previous editions of the Summit have been successful in establishing a global platform for best practices in innovation for the development of government services. The new name of the Summit reflects the goal of expanding its role on the international level and strengthening partnerships with major global and regional organizations such as United Nations, Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and World Economic Forum."

Gergawi said the World Government Summit has now transformed into the largest platform for the next generation of governments leaders, and aims to prepare for the future and improve the lives of nearly seven billion people by gathering the world under one umbrella.

Gergawi said: "The World Government Summit research and studies will cover several sectors, including future of education, future of economy, future of technology, future of health care, future of development, future of government work, sustainability and future of the environment, cities of the future, and future of human capital management in the labor market."

#### Creating knowledge

The World Government Summit will witness ten major changes. The first is the new name and the logo, while the second change is the transformation of the Summit from a Forum to an organization that offers integrated knowledge services for more than 150 governments and global organizations with the goal of foreseeing future governments, creating knowledge and organizing events throughout the year.

Thirdly, the summit will answer tomorrow's questions by preparing for the future and proposing solutions to challenges. Fourthly, the Summit will issue government research and reports and launch global development indicators constantly throughout the year.

#### 'Edge of Governments'

The fifth change will be visible in the nature of the sessions, with their duration and mechanisms enhanced to ensure better dialogue between speakers and the audience. The sixth change includes the development of a smart application and the website of the World Government Summit as knowledge platforms. The seventh change will be the introduction of

a smart application to provide effective communication between the participants. The eighth change is the 'Edge of Governments' exhibition, aimed at enabling 15 governments to share their experiences and knowledge on applied disruptive innovations.

#### Successful projects

As the ninth change, an annual guest of the Summit will showcase various experiences, while the tenth change is the launch of a new annual award - World Government Summit Award - to honor the best minister in the world who has led a new and successful qualitative government project.

As in previous editions, the Summit this year will honor the winners of the third edition of the m-Government Award. Besides, a number of meetings will be organized on the sidelines of the Summit to discuss the implementation of sustainable development goals.

#### Vital sectors

The World Government Summit will discuss the latest topics of relevance to future technical applications. One of the sessions, hosted by Tim O'Reilly, founder of O'Reilly Media, will look at the future of government work and explore the new generation of smart government. Another topic related to cities of the future, will be discussed in a session titled, 'The future of road transportation', hosted by Jim Al-Khalili, professor of physics at the University of Surrey.

The future of the digital economy will attract much attention with discussions spread across multiple sessions, including one

on 'Digital coins: The Future of Money'. A session on the future of innovation and ways to develop environments will be hosted by Christopher M. Schroeder, an entrepreneur, advisor and investor in interactive technologies and social communications.

#### Specialized reports

The World Government Summit will launch a number of reports in cooperation with knowledge partners, both during the Summit as well as throughout the year. These include reports on artificial intelligence, development

of sciences and the future of governments in cooperation with The Economist. A survey will be launched on digital transformation of the government in collaboration with Deloitte. In addition, a report on the future of teaching methods will be released in cooperation with Oxford Analytica, while another report on the upcoming major innovations will be launched in collaboration with Harvard University.

The Summit will also set the stage for several other events, including the Museum of the Future, which will focus on the robotics and artificial intelligence sector.



Mohammed Al-Gergawi with partners of the World Government Summit.

# ETHIOPIAN MAIDS JAILED IN JAHRA NOW HOME: EMBASSY

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Ethiopian Embassy in Kuwait denied social media reports that some Ethiopian women were beaten and abused by police in a Jahra prison. "No, they were not beaten or abused by the police. Probably verbal tussles occurred, but they were not abused or mistreated," clarified Zenebe Kebede, Deputy Head of Mission and Minister Counselor at the Embassy of Ethiopia in Jabriya. "We immediately attended to the case when we received the reports from social media and concerned people. We visited the prison immediately, but found no harassment or abuse took place."

A cellphone video circulated on Facebook and Ethiopian websites in December, showing more than 10



**Zenebe Kebede, Deputy Head of Mission and Minister Counselor at the Embassy of Ethiopia**

women in a single cell, several of them lying on the floor, explaining their pitiful conditions in Amharic and claiming they were beaten and abused. "The room was probably small but they were transferred immediately to well-maintained deportation facilities," Kebede said.

### Runaway maids

Reports said the women may have been imprisoned for up to a week before the video leaked last month. Kebede confirmed the women were detained at the Naem prison in Jahra. "They were housemaids who had run away from their employers and had absconding cases filed against

them with the authorities. They were arrested by the police at a checkpoint. There are crackdowns going on in Kuwait against expats who are in violation of immigration policies, and these Ethiopians were among those people who were arrested. They were rounded up and taken by the police, and after a few days, they were transferred to the deportation facilities in Jleeb where they were treated fairly, and following deportation procedures, they were sent back home," Kebede explained.

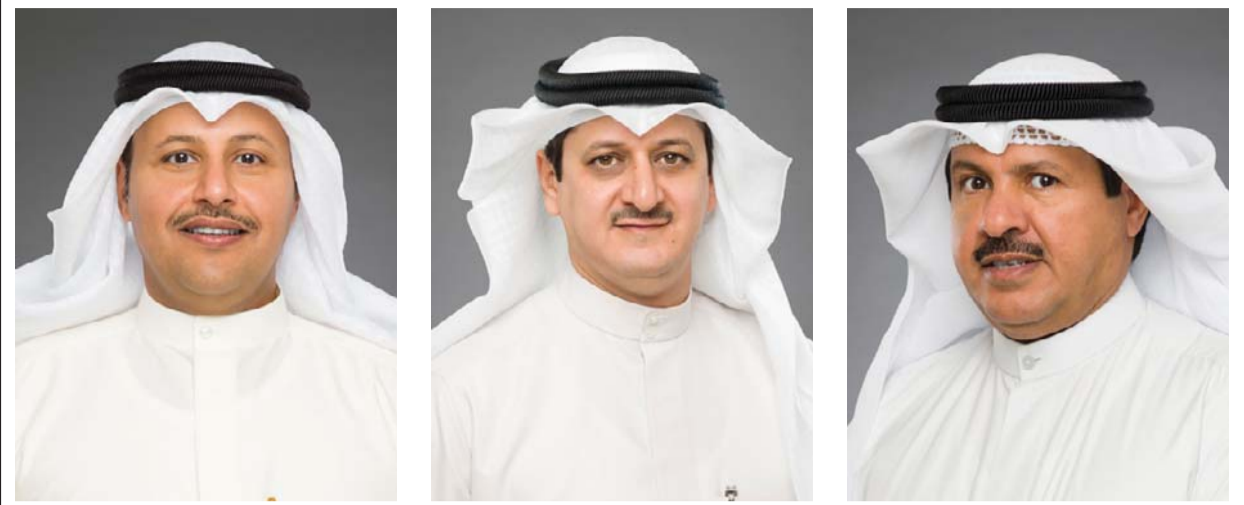
"I call it an isolated case. They were treated fairly like any other violator and they were placed in the deportation center for a few days only. Now all of them are in Ethiopia. We are working with the police officials here with mutual respect and understanding of laws. We know they are very supportive when Ethiopians are detained and they let us know about it. We then process the necessary travel documents," he mentioned.

There are about 54,000 Ethiopians in Kuwait, 50,000 of them working as domestic workers. The Ethiopian government has banned sending domestic helpers abroad including the Middle East and Kuwait. "The ban, or suspension, is in place to address the issue of human trafficking. What we do now is that we negotiate with countries over the rights and obligations of both the employers and workers. If the agreement is clear, only then we send domestic workers abroad," Kebede noted.

### No shelter

Unlike other domestic labor exporting countries like the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Ethiopia does not have its own shelter at the embassy. "We do not have a shelter because we have few runaways, and because they can be accommodated in the facilities run by the government. We try to help by negotiating with employers - for example if their salaries are not paid, we demand the employer to pay them and provide them with air tickets to return home," he asserted.

As part of its escalating "Kuwaitization" strategy, Kuwait has cracked down on undocumented migrant workers in recent years - authorities deported over 25,000 expats through the Talha deportation prison last year alone. Most deportees belonged to 10 nationalities, with Bangladeshis, Ethiopians, Sri Lankans and Indians topping the list. Authorities claim they try to expedite deportations to avoid overcrowding, as Talha prison can only accommodate 800 persons. The Ministry of Interior no longer depends exclusively on Kuwait Airways to secure departure tickets for deportees, but still often waits for sponsors or embassies to process documents and arrange travel documents.



**MP Talal Al-Jallal**

**MP Fares Al-Otaibi**

**MP Majed Moussa**

## MPS ADAMANT IN 'PROTECTING CITIZENS RIGHTS' AGAINST SUBSIDY CUTS

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** MP Talal Al-Jallal reiterated his demands against overburdening citizens or deprive them of rights mentioned in the Kuwaiti constitution. "The government must put His Highness the Amir's words during the opening of the parliamentary term into practice," he said, noting that the recommendations made by the finance ministry on reducing subsidies were against the Amir's instructions. Expressing strong rejection to increasing fuel prices, Jallal instead welcomed any government effort to diversify sources of income instead of relying on oil as the state's sole source of national income and urged Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh to act accordingly. Meanwhile, MP Fares Al-Otaibi stressed that he was serious about filing a grilling to the finance minister the moment the government takes a 'step forward towards lifting subsidies.' He explained that his motion would include four main points - lifting of subsidies, privatization, the Capital Markets Authority and public funds squandering by the investment authority.

Otaibi added that the government was very late in cancelling the privileges given to ministers and senior officials such as vehicles. "Nevertheless, paying ministers and senior officials a KD 250 allowance in return is a waste of public funds," he remarked.

In other news, MP Majed Moussa

joined lawmakers rejecting Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem's call to hold a closed-door session to discuss regional concerns and attacks on the Saudi embassy and consulate in Iran. "The Kuwaiti people have every right to know their representatives' attitudes in this matter, especially since the session will discuss the regional Iranian menace," he underlined.

In the meantime, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) yesterday issued a statement condemning

the Iranian attacks on the Saudi embassy and consulate in Iran. The statement stressed that those attacks come within a series of Iranian aggressions and expansions in the region and that Iran had been interfering in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and others countries along with Kuwait. "The recent arrest of an Iranian terrorist group and weapons and the arrest of a network of saboteurs and spies earlier are examples of such interference," ICM stressed, expressing full consolidation with Saudi Arabia.

## KUWAIT WINS BEST RESEARCH ON DESERT PLANTS AWARD

**DOHA:** Dr Ali Mohammad Al-Dosari, a member of the Kuwaiti National Committee on Combating Desertification, has expressed his pride over winning an award on the best research on plants in GCC member states. Following the winners' honoring ceremony on Tuesday, Dosari, also a Kuwaiti researcher, said that the award encourages researchers in GCC countries to take part in similar competitions,

boost the concept of environment and raise awareness over its significance. He added that the encouragement of the political leadership, fronted by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, contributed highly in obtaining the award. He noted that his research included 15 kinds of these plants. — KUNA

## JUSTICE PALACE FIGHT HEARING SET FOR MARCH 7

### FIVE ACQUITTED OF JOINING IS

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** The court of misdemeanors yesterday set a hearing on March 7 to review a case related to a fight between the sons of the late Sheikh Fahd Al-Ahmad and Lo'ai Al-Khorafi and Ibrahim Al-Kandari at the courts complex. Notably, the public prosecution office had referred sheikhs Athbi, Khaled and Dhari Al-Fahd to court for trading blows and insults with Khorafi and Kandari in the Palace of Justice while hearing the 'Fintas Group' case.

### Citizens acquitted

The criminal court yesterday acquitted five citizens of charges of joining the Islamic State (IS) group. The five citizens had been facing charges of joining and illegally communicating with a banned organization.

### Trafficker's case adjourned

A court yesterday adjourned a case filed against a former senior Ministry of Interior official, who is also a ruling family member, for trading in visas sold to some Egyptian expats along with some other businessmen and women pending summoning some of the defendants. Notably, the court had charged around 25 people of forgery and visa trafficking.

### Firearm possession

The criminal court yesterday annulled a previous verdict sentencing a citizen in absentia to three years in jail with

labor over charges of possessing a firearm and shooting during a wedding in Jahra and acquitted him.

### Fugitives caught

Capital governorate detectives arrested three expats wanted for financial claims, said security sources, noting that the first suspect, a Filipina, had been wanted over KD 1,332, the second, an Egyptian, had been wanted for KD 2,342 and the third was a Pakistani wanted over a debt of KD 1,468.

### Man found dead

A citizen died at his ranch along Salmi highway, said security sources, noting that the man was not feeling well and an ambulance was dispatched to the ranch where paramedics tried to save him, but he had died before they arrived. The body was referred to forensics to decide on the cause of death, that initially appears to be natural.

### Ministry reshuffle

Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah issued ministerial decisions appointing a number of senior officials. The decision included appointing Major General Farraj Al-Zobi as Mubarak Al-Kabeer security director, Major General Ali Madhi as deputy security director in Jahra, Brigadier Abdul Rahman Al-Suhail as director of the weapons detectives department and Colonel Waleed Musaed as his assistant.

## 3 KG MARIJUANA BUSTED WITH PASSENGER

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** An Asian man was arrested at Kuwait International Airport with possession of marijuana which he admitted of attempting to smuggle into Kuwait. A total of three kilograms of the drug were found hidden in cases of nuts inside the suspect's luggage, said Suleiman Al-Fahad, Airport Customs Supervisor. The man, who faces capital punishment if convicted with drug trafficking, was referred to the proper authorities for further action.



**KUWAIT:** Director of Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) Lieutenant General Yousef Al-Ansari received Deputy CEO of Petroleum Industries Company (PIC) Abdallah Suwailem and PIC Director of Safety and Vocational Health Eng Salem Al-Azmi. Both sides discussed matters of mutual concern. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

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In Brief

MINISTER, BUREAU DISCUSS CELEBRATIONS

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah met on Tuesday with Assistant Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Martyrs Bureau Chief Fatema Al-Amir to discuss planned activities marking national festivals. Sheikh Salman hailed the bureau's national role to remember the martyrs of Kuwait and their heroic deeds. — KUNA



KUWAIT PROPONENT OF FIGHTING CORRUPTION

**RIYADH:** Kuwait is totally committed to bolstering principles of transparency and fighting corruption in all its forms locally, regionally, and internationally, Zakariya Al-Ansari, assistant undersecretary for legal affairs at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Justice said. He made his statements following the conclusion of the second meeting for GCC officials in charge of monitoring corruption and safe-guarding transparency in government work. — KUNA



ENTERTAINMENT CITY'S SPRING BREAK TIMINGS

**KUWAIT:** The Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) announced special working hours for the Entertainment City during the spring break. During the period from January 10, 2016 and January 21, 2016, the facility welcomes visitors from 1:00 pm to 10:00 pm every day, said Saqer Al-Bader, Public Relations and Marketing Director at TEC. Female visitors have exclusive entrance on Mondays, Saqer added.



Photo

of the day



**KUWAIT:** An aerial view showing the junction between the First Ring Road and the Essa bin Salman Al Khalifa Road, commonly known as the Fahaheel Expressway or 'Road number 30,' in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat.

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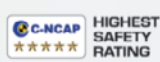
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PIC ACHIEVES FINANCIAL SAVING OF \$188 MILLION

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Petrochemicals Industries Company (PIC) has realized financial saving at the value of more than \$188 million through successful implementation of projects, and completion of more than 533 Six Sigma ones, CEO Asaad Al-Saad announced yesterday. Saad made the remark in a PIC statement on the occasion of the 'Think-K' event sponsored, and attended by, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) CEO Nizar Al-Adsani.



Asaad Al-Saad

The projects that contributed to such savings include financial enterprises to decrease spending or increase profits, in addition to others to realize social environmental responsibility. Others targeted reducing implementing operations periods, and curbing faults, Saad noted. He said that a large number of employees were trained to obtain the green and black belts of Six Sigma. Green belt

holders totaled 128 employees, while black belt ones hit 28.

The PIC is willing to continue implementing Six Sigma and training 25 percent of its staff, besides enhancing cooperation with other similar companies operating in the field. The company desires to achieve a remarkable position by expanding in the field of high value petrochemicals, and enhancing integration with KPC

activities, both here and abroad, said PIC Vice Executive Chief for administrative and financial affairs in Saad Abu-Khousa. The company is planning to hit a distinguished position on the international scene of the industry, he added.

Meanwhile, Vice Executive Chief for aromatics Hadi Abul pointed to the various challenges facing the petrochemicals industry globally. The company's policy seeks to enhance development in at home and abroad, and as well as bolstering added value by further integration among oil projects, he said.

'Think-K' event organized by PIC, aims to focus attention on sharing the best practices and experiences in oil projects in line with the 2030 strategy of KPC and affiliated companies, as well as projects of health and environmental safety to achieve maximum benefit from the oil sector. — KUNA

OIL SUPPLIES REACH 97 MILLION BPD: REPORT

**KUWAIT:** Oil supplies last October reached 97 million barrels per day; however, that would not necessarily lead to any hike in the global crude price, according to a report released yesterday. The report by the Diplomatic Center for Strategic Studies said that any chance for a hike in the price will rely on OPEC's decision to lower down its production.

The report indicated that production from outside OPEC had increased the commercial reserves of crude oil to around three billion barrels in October 2015, adding that OPEC pumped in around 31.750 million barrels per day during the same month.

The report went on saying that the International Energy Agency (IEA) also predicted that oil prices will remain low in the upcoming five years due to the increase in supplies and decrease in demands on part of developed nations. By 2020, the forecasted price of oil will be at \$80 per barrel, predicted the report which added that the current prices might reach as low as \$20 per barrel. It also addressed forecasts for the prices in 2016-17, indicating that several speculative reports and researches pointed at the possibility of US crude reaching the prices of \$50 to 60 per barrel.



Despite the lackluster performance for the oil price in 2015, major oil exporters are planning to increase their production, said the center's report, adding that Kuwait recently allocated a sum of \$120 billion for the development of the energy sector in the upcoming five years with \$50 billion of that money

going towards Al-Zour refinery, a project aiming at producing clean fuel energy and petrochemical byproducts. The report also said that Kuwait was focusing on increasing oil production with the discovery of new oil reservoirs north of the country as part of its 2030 development strategy. — KUNA

# KUWAIT WELL POSITIONED DESPITE LOWER PRICES

## 'YEAR IN REVIEW 2015' BY OXFORD BUSINESS GROUP

By Oliver Cornock

**KUWAIT:** The need for economic diversification was underscored this past year as the Kuwaiti economy came under pressure from lower oil revenues.

However, the country remains well positioned to weather both lower prices and global volatility and continues to benefit from a healthy banking system, rising public spending on new infrastructure, and foreign direct investment (FDI) reforms aimed at improving investment inflows.

### Falling forecast

In April 2015 the IMF World Economic Outlook Report projected Kuwait's economic growth would reach 1.7 percent in 2015 before rising to 1.8 percent in 2016. However, in its most recent World Economic Outlook, released in October, the organization revised its forecast slightly downward to 1.2 percent in 2015, but predicted growth would recover to 2.5 percent by next year.

The slowdown is largely attributed to falling oil prices. Still, the government continues to benefit from relatively high financial buffers, which are enabling increased public investment in infrastructure - a key factor expected to support non-oil growth

in 2016 and beyond. Indeed, the IMF expects non-oil GDP growth to roughly double the pace of overall expansion over the medium term as the impact of recent investments takes effect.

### Oil impact hits hard

Kuwait's fiscal position has deteriorated notably as a result of lower energy prices, declining from a surplus of 11.7 percent of GDP in 2013/14 to a deficit of 4.4 percent in 2014/15. After compulsory transfers to its sovereign Future Generations Fund, and excluding investment income, IMF projections indicate the country's overall fiscal balance narrowed from a 34.7 percent surplus in 2013/14 to 17.3 percent in 2014/15.

Despite promising developments in government spending cuts - including reductions in costly fuel, water and electricity subsidies, as well as travel and other allowances for government employees and payments to Kuwaiti nationals seeking medical treatment abroad - the country's current account surplus has continued to decline, largely as a result of remaining subsidies. The IMF predicts Kuwait's current account surplus will shrink from 31.2 percent of GDP in 2014 to 10.2 percent and 8.9 percent in 2015 and 2016, respectively, before recovering

to around 11.3 percent in 2017.

### Capital markets slump, banks stay strong

Capital markets also faltered over the course of the year, with prices on the Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) dropping by 16 percent year-on-year as of the end of August, reflecting weakening demand in China, falling commodities prices and global volatility. Since the beginning of 2014 at least 24 of the KSE's 211 listed firms have announced plans to delist, with another five companies delisted by the authorities



due to inactivity and accumulated losses. According to bourse authorities, the total value of traded shares fell by 12 percent to KD2.45bn (\$8.06bn) during the first half of the year.

However, the state's well-regulated

banking sector has remained resilient, with the IMF reporting sector-wide capital adequacy of 16.9 percent, a 2.8 percent non-performing-loan ratio, and a provisioning ratio of 172 percent as of the end of June 2015.

### Construction, non-oil growth to lead in 2016

With the country's non-oil economy continuing to lead growth, the government released the latest five-year economic development plan in January. Although a detailed implementation strategy has yet to be released for the scheme, which will run through to 2020, the vision includes KD34.15bn (\$112.4bn) in infrastructure spending, improved economic diversification and regulatory reforms to attract investment and boost private sector participation in the economy - all of which could push Kuwait towards more robust economic growth in the coming year.

Construction spending is expected to continue its forward momentum in 2016, with investment firm Alpen Capital reporting in June that at \$123.6bn, the value of Kuwait's ongoing construction projects ranked third highest in the GCC in 2014. According to the report, the country's infrastructure sector was on track to grow by an

estimated 15-20 percent in 2015 as a result of efforts to upgrade transport networks and deliver government-funded housing - with a new metro system and 45,000 housing units laid out under the latest five-year plan.

As of mid-October, some \$30bn worth of projects had been awarded year-to-date, according to MEED, compared to \$24bn in all of 2014, for a combined \$251bn worth of builds either planned or under way.

### FDI reforms

Perhaps most promising for the nation's future economic growth, however, was the release in December 2014 of regulations clarifying the 2013 Direct Investment Law. The executive regulations, which are the final step in the law's implementation, include efforts to reduce red tape and lengthy procedures by establishing a one-stop shop for licensing businesses. Five months after the announcement, US tech giant IBM announced it had received the first license to establish a 100 percent foreign-owned Kuwaiti company under the new law, suggesting the government's approach to attracting FDI is already paying dividends.

— Oliver Cornock is Managing Editor of Oxford Business Group





### Recruiting a Visits Officer and Team Administrator

The British Embassy in Kuwait has a vacancy for a Visits Officer and Team Administrator who will be leading on organisation of inward visits to Kuwait of UK Ministers, VIPs and senior government officials.

Standard working hours are from 07:30 until 15:30 Sunday to Wednesday, and 07:30 until 13:30 on Thursdays. The successful candidate may also be required to work outside normal working hours occasionally.

The Embassy offers an attractive working environment and remuneration package for the role, including salary of KD.470 per month inclusive of all allowances. The successful candidate will be expected to start work as soon as possible.

**For a full job description and application form please visit our website:**  
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Please send the completed application form along with your resume and cover letter to [kuwaitrecruitment@fco.gov.uk](mailto:kuwaitrecruitment@fco.gov.uk). **The closing date for all applications is 16 January 2016.**



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Crime

Report

GROCCER FOILS ROBBERY ATTEMPT

**KUWAIT:** A thief stormed a grocery store in Riggae and beat the grocer, but when he failed to steal anything, he escaped. The grocer filed a complaint at Andalus police station. A security source said an Indian man who works in the grocery store came to Andalus police station with a medical report stating that he sustained bruises and swelling in his left eye, and told them he was beaten by a man who stormed the grocery store in an attempt to steal. Detectives are working on the case.

Camp theft

Jahra detectives are looking for a camp guard who stole the contents of his sponsor's camp and power generator before escaping. A security source said a citizen went to Qashaniya police station and told them his Bangladeshi guard stole from the camp and disappeared.

Fight

A fight between a citizen and a bedoon in Maidan Hawally resulted in the bedoon sustaining a head injury. The injured man was taken to hospital while the other was taken to the police station.

Employee insulted

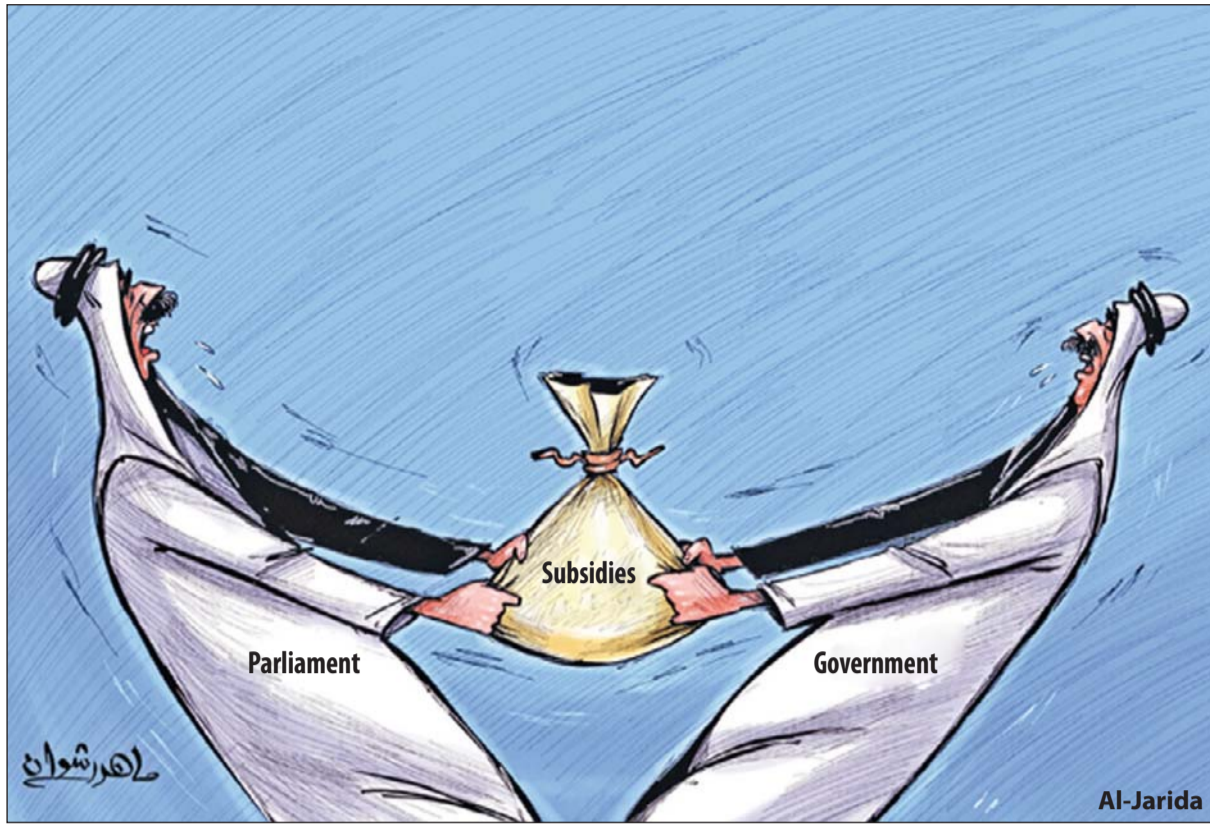
An employee of Al-Sabah health zone filed a complaint against a woman who insulted her over a transaction. A security source said the employee went to Shuwaikh police station and said a woman came in while she was at work, then when she asked her to bring certain documents, she got angry and insulted her in front of other employees. Police are investigating.

Cross-dresser caught

A bedoon man was taken to the criminal detectives department after being arrested in Sulaibiya wearing women's clothes and having an imported bottle of liquor, shabu and drug paraphernalia. Jahra police patrols noticed a car being driven erratically by a girl, and when they stopped it and approached the driver, they smelled liquor and spotted the bottle next to him.

Officer punished

Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah issued a decision transferring a director of a traffic department from his job to become an inspector at the supervision and inspection department as a disciplinary action following a complaint against him by employees, accusing him of processing traffic transactions for his family's company and giving them preference at the expense of others. Security sources said the complaint accused this officer, a colonel, of discriminating between employees contrary to legal and administrative rules and regulations. —Al-Rai



TSC JOINS HORECA AS GOLDEN SPONSOR

**KUWAIT:** In view of the growing number of major companies joining the Horeca Kuwait 2016 exhibition, The Sultan Center (TSC) announced its intention to join the event as a golden sponsor. In this regard, Bassam Zantout, TSC's Commercial and Operations Director said that TSC is one of the leading regional companies listed in Kuwait Stock Exchange with annual revenues of over \$1 billion. He added that the group business portfolio includes retail, restaurants, telecommunications, investments, information technology, real estate and security solutions.

Zantout also stressed that through its commitment to basic values, providing a multicultural environment and focusing on service quality, TSC is the prime shopping option for consumers in the GCC and Middle East regions with over 10,000 employees, 65 branches and 21 restaurants in Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain and Oman. He added that TSC serves over 600,000 customers on a weekly basis, providing them with a variety of goods, foodstuff, fresh products, household appliances and equipment, electronics and sports.

Further, Zantout said that Horeca Kuwait has become one of Kuwait's

most important exhibitions, bringing hospitality and food industries experts from Kuwait and the Middle East together under one roof. "This opens the door for establishing future deals and partnerships and expanding cooperation with other companies," he underlined pointing, out that taking part in Horeca provides direct contact with seekers of quality products and services.

"TSC is keen on introducing its variety of products, especially those carrying the TSC brand and sold for suitable prices in addition to an integrated variety of needs that make TSC a complete shopping center saving customers' time and effort," Zantout explained.

Notably, Horeca 2016 has attracted over 60 participants of the world's leading hospitality, food industries and hotel equipment companies, in addition to several travel agencies and offices. The event is organized by Leaders Group in collaboration with Hospitality Services Company. It takes place on January 18-20, 2016 at Badiya Ballroom in Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel and Spa, under auspices of Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.



Bassam Zantout

Al-Qabas

DROPPING THE DAESH CARD

By Abdelmohsen Jamal

**S**ince the forceful interference by Russia in Syria and the continued air strikes on the terrorist sites, as well as the international acceptance of Security Council resolution number 2254, asks all countries around the world to take all the necessary steps to fight this new type of terror, which relies on the wrong religious dimension, which is facilitated by stray fatwas issued by some clergymen who have a wrong reading of Islamic fiqh.

Daesh is not a new understanding of Islam, but it is the result of a wrong reality that began hundreds of years ago and caused many tragedies for Muslims and others. Yet with the development of civilization, and the advent of modern state principles, democratic systems and Western influence, the activity of this extreme religious understanding diminished.

But it rose again after the fall of dictator Saddam Hussein's regime and the dismantling of the Iraqi army and escape of its senior leadership, who found the opportunity after the appearance of the Arab Spring, and having several Arab countries exposed to political chaos and international interference. They found their opportunity in cooperating with extreme religious sides and formed a new power and were harbored by some parties and found the so-called Islamic state in Iraq and Levant in cooperation with Al-Qaeda first, then split from it later.

Daesh became a suitable cradle for all those with extreme religious preferences, and benefited from the weak grips of Syria and Iraq, and controlled vast areas and cities in those two countries overnight, then declared its religious state and appointed a caliph, and asked all Muslims including their leaders to pledge allegiance to him!

This matter encouraged many of their supporters to go to Syria and Iraq to fight the "infidel" Muslims. Also, some of those who were naturalized in Western countries surfaced as they carried out terrorist operations in the countries that harbored them! All that made the West and East pay attention to this new danger, even when they benefited from it for some time to shake some Arab regimes, but after failing to do so, and when the danger reached Europe, and after the Russian interference on the side of the Syrian regime, everyone had to get that UN resolution to fight extreme religious organizations before control is lost and things reach grave consequences.

With the issuance of that resolution, and dropping the Daesh card and removing it from the international game, the countdown began for the end of "Khayal Maatah", as betting on it is over.

—Translated by Kuwait Times

BURGAN BANK SPONSORS WORLD WHEELCHAIR FENCING TITLEHOLDER TARIQ AL-QALLAF

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced that it is sponsoring Tariq Al Qallaf, Kuwait's world champion wheelchair fencer, for the second time on his journey to the USA Fencing Championship. The championship will take place in Louis, Missouri from 8 - 11 January, 2016. The bank's sponsorship falls under its corporate social responsibility umbrella, to supporting Kuwait's world titleholders in reaching greater heights and raising the Kuwaiti flag at worldwide arenas.

Qallaf participated in more than 70 competitions across the region and the world over the past 30 years, bagging 29 gold medals. During his participation in the US Fencing Championship in October 2015, he won three gold medals along with the title of 'Best Fencing Champion'.

Qallaf is now well on his way to take part in the USA Fencing Championship for the second time, where he aims to retain his worldwide title and achieve 1st place. Burgan Bank's sponsorship of Qallaf springs from its belief that his talent has defied all odds and has led him to win



Hessa Al-Najadah, Senior PR Officer at Burgan Bank (right) with Tariq Al-Qallaf

top accolades at international championships. The bank will continue sponsoring many more athletes in the future, as

part of the continued development of the bank's overall social responsibility framework that adds more value to the local community.

KIPCO RECOGNIZED FOR NUKS-USA CONFERENCE SUPPORT

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Projects Company (KIPCO) was recognized by the National Union for Kuwaiti Students - USA Branch (NUKS-USA) for its Platinum Sponsorship of the student body's 32nd conference. The conference was recently held in San Diego, California.

KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), Faisal Al-Ayyar, received the student representatives and commended them on their efforts to provide support and assistance for close to 11,000 Kuwaitis studying in the United States.

KIPCO's Group Communications Director, Eman Al-Awadhi, said: "Supporting Kuwait's young generation is at the heart of KIPCO's contributions to the society. We believe in the instrumental role that young people will play in the development of our country, and our participation in the NUKS-USA conference offers us the opportunity to interact with tomorrow's leaders and to better understand their visions and aspirations for Kuwait and its future."



KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive) Faisal Al-Ayyar (right), receiving a commemorative plaque from NUKS President Fahad Al-Jadaan.

The student representatives expressed their appreciation for KIPCO's support of this event for the

fifth consecutive year. This year's conference was attended by around 3,500 Kuwaitis studying in the United States.

BY-ELECTIONS ON FEB 20 OR MAR 5

**KUWAIT:** Well-informed ministerial sources said by-elections in the third electoral constituency to elect a lawmaker to fill in the position of late MP Nabil Al-Fadhil might be held on Feb 20 or Mar 5. The sources explained that candidates applying to run

in the elections would be allowed to register with the elections committee for 10 days starting on the day following the publication of the interior minister's decision in this regard, which includes Fridays and public holidays. —Al-Anbaa

OBJECTIONS DELAY RATIONALIZATION

**KUWAIT:** Official governmental sources said a report by Ernst & Young on lifting subsidies was referred for further study and consideration in view of the public and parliamentary rejection to increase fuel and services prices. Prices have to be reconsidered, especially those of fuel, stressed the sources. "Some decisions on lifting subsidies require parliamentary approval," added the sources, noting that the entire matter

might probably be postponed until the new budget was approved by the parliament in April, when the finance ministry is expected to explain the measures it took to cut expenditure. "The government wishes to share the responsibility of such a historic decision of lifting subsidies or maintaining current situations and accumulating deficits with lawmakers," the sources concluded. —Al-Anbaa

SCHOOL LIBRARY BOOKS TO BE REVIEWED

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Education's (MoE) assistant undersecretary for activities and educational development Faisal Al-Maqseed stressed that following the withdrawal of eight books from school libraries that had illicit photos and ideas, the ministry decided making field visits to various school libraries to review all books to remove any similar ones. Maqseed added that he had received several complaints from educationalists and parents about books with illicit content and that he personally inspected the concerned

books and decided removing them from libraries. Meanwhile, MoE decided cancelling the social studies book for grade 10 and using a new one that had already been prepared under the title 'Kuwait History', with more information about Kuwait instead of some of the topics deemed difficult by many students. Informed sources said that the new book was being currently printed to be distributed to high schools by the beginning of the next school year. —Al-Anbaa and Al-Jarida

COORDINATION WITH 3 GULF STATES TO REVEAL DUAL CITIZENS: SHEIKH MAZEN

**KUWAIT:** Interior Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Nationality and Passports Affairs Major General Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah said uncovering forgeries of Kuwaiti nationality continues, adding that what had been exposed lately is just a small part of a larger crime. Jarrah said the sector he heads is determined to put an end to the manipulation of the nationality file, and said there is direct security cooperation with Gulf counterparts to identify dual citizens, and "this is going on currently with Saudi Arabia and will expand soon to Qatar and UAE".

He said Kuwait-Gulf cooperation to discover dual citizens contributes to a largest extent to preventing manipulation of Kuwaiti nationality, especially since one of the accused in the forgery of a nationality file who escaped from a sentence

passed against him, was able to hide because he has nationality of another country in a different name and continued entering and leaving Kuwait and continued with his criminal act.

Jarrah regretted that one of the suspects in this case worked at the nationality department, and also that the suspects were "Kuwaitis who found the Kuwait nationality cheap to a point that they added those who do not deserve the honor of getting it in their file, instead of their children, who are in other countries in exchange for a few dinars".

Parliamentary panel

He appreciated the parliamentary panel dealing with this issue, and pointed to the adoption by MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji of the issue in addition to other MPs. He said their defense of this national issue will have a



Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah

great effect on supporting the efforts of security departments.

When asked about the delay in revealing such files, especially that some issues go back to a few years through which the forgers who became Kuwaitis

benefited much more than what they paid to get the nationality and its advantages such as housing loans, housing care, marriage loan and student scholarships, Jarrah said the issue "is not as easy as some imagine, because it requires checking and follow up, in addition to prosecution warrants and assurances so that it will be possible to arrest a forger". He reminded of the report of Sheikh Thamer in checking the manipulation of nationality tests, which had many facts that prove that the issue is not transient and that there are many manipulators".

He said nationality manipulation is almost non-existent since the past two years due to a new plan that was made to investigate and monitor with its discovery systems, most important of which are DNA tests. —Al-Rai



**Palestinian violence marked by an increased female role**

## BANGLADESH UPHOLDS DEATH SENTENCE FOR ISLAMIST LEADER



**COLOGNE:** In this Dec 31, 2015 picture, people gather at the Cologne main station. — AP

## MERKEL UNDER FIRE AFTER NEW YEAR SEX ASSAULTS

VICTIMS BLAMED MEN OF 'ARAB OR NORTH AFRICAN' APPEARANCE

**BERLIN:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel came under mounting pressure yesterday over her welcoming stance toward migrants, which opponents have linked to a shocking rash of apparently coordinated sex attacks in Cologne on New Year's Eve.

Police in the western city said they have received more than 100 complaints by women reporting assaults ranging from groping to two rapes, allegedly committed in a large crowd of revelers during year-end festivities outside the city's main train station and its famed Gothic cathedral.

Victims blamed men of "Arab or North African" appearance, inflaming a heated public debate about Germany's ability to cope with the nearly 1.1 million asylum seekers the country took in last year. Authorities have said there is no concrete indication that the perpetrators were asylum seekers who arrived in last year's record influx. No arrests have been made.

However critics of Merkel's liberal refugee policy charged that the Cologne assaults proved she was playing with fire without a clear strategy to integrate the mainly Muslim newcomers who will settle in Germany. The right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which hopes to gain seats in three regional elections in March, charged the attacks were "a result of unchecked immigration". Late Tuesday 200-300 people, according to police estimates, gathered in front of Cologne cathedral calling for more respect for women. One female demonstrator held a sign reading: "Mrs Merkel, what are you doing? This is scary".

border controls due to the migrant crisis.

The two countries agreed to lift temporary border checks as soon as possible, but only after migrant flows decline. Merkel has urged a thorough investigation of the "repugnant" attacks in Cologne, which she said required "a tough response from the state". Witnesses said groups of 20-30 young, intoxicated men out of a crowd of about 1,000 people had surrounded victims, assaulted them and in several cases robbed them. A plain-clothes policewoman was reportedly among those attacked. Victims described terrifying scenes in the marauding mob. Steffi, 31, said she saw "countless weeping women" when she arrived at the station and was hit with a volley of sexist slurs shouted in German as she made her way through the crowd. "I saw a girl... who was crying, with ripped stockings, her skirt askew—she was just wrecked," she told the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung.

"A young guy came out of the crowd and made vulgar comments. 'Can I help you? I know I can help you' he said with a strong accent and made obscene gestures with his hand. When she wanted to get away, he followed her. I told him to piss off." Authorities urged victims to file complaints after facing accusations of initially playing down the rampage. "We assume more people will come forward," said police Chief Wolfgang Albers, who yesterday dismissed calls for his resignation. The northern port city of Hamburg said it had received 53 reports of similar attacks at New Year's street parties.

### 'General suspicion'

Justice Minister Heiko Maas warned against scape goating refugees over the assaults, which he said "appeared to be coordinated". "No one should exploit the attacks to smear refugees as a group," he told news agency DPA. Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere lashed out at Cologne police for failing to stop the assaults.

"The police cannot work in this way," de Maiziere told public TV channel ARD late Tuesday. "I am urgently demanding clarification." Faced with accusations of self-censorship of the inflammatory case, which took four days to hit national media outlets, public broadcaster ZDF apologized for delays in reporting on the melee. "The news situation was clear enough," wrote deputy chief editor Elmar Thevessen on Facebook, calling it a "mistake" not to cover the incidents sooner. — AFP

## SWEDEN, DENMARK AGREE TO LIFT BORDER CHECKS

**BRUSSELS:** Sweden and Denmark have agreed to lift temporary border checks as soon as possible but must first slow migrant flows, the EU said yesterday after emergency talks Europe's passport-free Schengen zone. EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos called the meeting after Denmark this week slapped spot checks on its border with Germany, and Sweden imposed its own controls on travellers from Denmark.

"We agreed to keep (the measures) to a minimum and return to normal as soon as possible. This means the flows have to be slowed down," Avramopoulos said following the talks in Brussels with officials from Sweden, Denmark and Germany. "We all agreed that Schengen and free movement must be safeguarded," Avramopoulos added.

More than a million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe in 2015 — many of them fleeing the war in Syria in the worst crisis of its kind to face the continent since World War II. The EU's cherished passport-free Schengen area has come

under huge strain, as many countries have reintroduced border controls to deal with the flow of migrants trying to reach wealthy Germany. Sweden and other countries from the main landing point in Greece.

Schengen rules mean checks can be reintroduced for up to six months. Swedish migration minister Morgan Johansson said the new checks "should not be put in place longer than we need". He said the controls were necessary because his country has taken in more asylum seekers per capita than any other EU nation — 160,000 asylum requests last year, including 26,000 unaccompanied minors, with 115,000 of them in the last four months. Danish immigration minister Inger Stoejberg said they were "monitoring the situation by the hour" but added that "in Denmark we don't wish to be the final destination for thousands and thousands of asylum seekers." German interior minister official Ole Schroeder said part of the problem was that an EU scheme to relocate 160,000 refugees from frontline Greece and Italy to other member states was not working. — AFP

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## CHINESE GAY MAN SUES FOR RIGHT TO MARRY

**BEIJING:** A court has accepted China's first same-sex marriage case, lodged by a gay man against a civil affairs bureau for denying him the right to marry, in a decision hailed as a step forward for gay rights. While homosexuality is not illegal in China, and large cities have thriving gay scenes, same-sex marriage is not legal and same-sex couples have no legal protections. Sun Wenlin, 26, told Reuters a court in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province, had accepted his lawsuit on Tuesday.

"I think from a legal point of view, we should be successful," Sun said. "Our marriage law says there is the freedom to marry and gender equality. These words can be applied to same-sex marriage." Sun said he had filed the lawsuit in December because he wanted to form a family unit with his 36-year-old partner.

Sun said he had tried to register to marry his boyfriend at the Furong district civil affairs

bureau in June but was rejected by an official who told him "marriage had to be between a man and woman".

Officials at the Furong district civil affairs bureau could not be reached for comment and a court official in Furong, where the case will be heard, said the court "will not comment on cases before they are heard".

China is becoming more tolerant of homosexuality, which until 2001 was listed as a mental disorder, but many gay people remain under heavy pressure to stay in the closet. Activists said the court's acceptance of the case was significant and would likely lead to more such cases. "In China, courts often reject politically sensitive cases, so the fact that the lawsuit is accepted signals some official willingness to address discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people, which is encouraging," said Maya Wang, a China researcher at New York-based group Human Rights Watch. —Reuters

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# CRUZ DOWNPLAYS TRUMP RAISING CONCERNS OVER CANADIAN BIRTH

## 'PRECARIOUS ISSUE MANY PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT'

**SIoux CENTER:** Ted Cruz tried to make a joke Tuesday out of Republican presidential rival Donald Trump raising questions about whether the Texas senator's birth in Canada could be a liability if he becomes the party's nominee. Trump told the Washington Post in an interview published Tuesday that Cruz's Canadian birthplace and his holding a double passport was a "very precarious" issue that "a lot of people are talking about."

Trump has ramped up his attacks on Cruz since the Texas senator sprinted ahead of the billionaire real estate mogul in some opinion surveys in Iowa whose caucuses kick off the state-by-state nominating contests. Cruz, in response to questions about Trump's comments, said the best way to respond was to laugh it off and "move on to the issues that matter." He first reacted on Twitter, posting a link to a video from the 1970s television show "Happy Days" showing the character Fonzie water skiing over a shark. The moment, known as "jumping the shark," has come to refer to the use of a gimmick to halt the decline of a television show or other effort.

"What the American people are interested in is not bickering and back and forth," Cruz told reporters before a town hall in Sioux Center that drew hundreds of people. Cruz was concluding the second day of a six-day swing through Iowa before the Feb 1 caucuses, while Trump was holding a rally in New Hampshire.

### 'Natural born citizen'

The US Constitution says only a "natural born Citizen" may be president. Legal scholars, however, generally agree the description covers foreign-born children of US parents. Cruz was born in Calgary, Alberta, in 1970 while his parents were working in the oil business there. His mother, Eleanor, is from Delaware, while his father, Rafael, is a Cuban who became a US citizen in 2005. Cruz has said that because his mother is a citizen by birth, he is also one. Under US law, anyone born to a US citizen is granted citizenship no matter where the birth takes place. Cruz renounced his Canadian citizenship in 2014, amid speculation he was preparing for a presi-



IOWA: Republican Presidential candidate Sen Ted Cruz, R-Texas, campaigns at Penny's Diner in Missouri Valley. — AP

dential run, less than a year after he released his birth certificate. But that didn't stop Trump from raising the issue Tuesday. "Republicans are going to have to ask themselves the question: 'Do we want a candidate who could be tied up in court for two years?' That'd be a big problem," Trump said in The Washington Post interview. "It'd be a very precarious one for Republicans because he'd be running and the courts may take a long time to make a decision. You don't want to be running and have that kind of thing over your head."

Trump was one of the loudest voices questioning whether President Obama was born in Kenya and thus not eligible to be US president. Obama is an American citizen born in Honolulu; his father was Kenyan, his mother American. Previous foreign-born Americans - notably Republicans John McCain and George Romney - have run for president with some mention, but no serious challenges, of their eligibility. The comments mark a reversal for Trump, who in September downplayed Cruz's birthplace in an interview with ABC. — AP

# QUESTIONS ABOUT OBAMA'S EXECUTIVE PLAN ON GUNS

### EFFECT ON GUN VIOLENCE COULD PROVE TO BE SMALL

**WASHINGTON:** President Barack Obama's plan to strengthen controls on guns in the US is meeting swift resistance from gun rights groups, Republicans and even a few Democrats who say it's up to Congress to enact new policies on firearms. Yet the overall effect on gun violence could prove to be relatively small. Some questions and answers about Obama's presidential actions on gun control:

#### What action is Obama taking?

Obama announced a 10-point plan to try to keep guns from people who shouldn't have them. The centerpiece is new federal guidance that seeks to clarify who is "in the business" of selling firearms and has to get a federal license.

Licensed dealers must run background checks on prospective buyers, but private sellers don't. Obama is aiming to narrow that loophole so that more firearms sold at gun shows, flea markets or online are subject to background checks. Other steps include 230 new examiners the FBI will hire to process background checks.

And Obama is directing federal agencies to research smart gun technology to reduce accidental shootings and asking Congress for \$500 million for mental health care. Further steps aim to better track lost guns and prevent

trusts or corporations from buying dangerous weapons without background checks.

#### Would this have stopped recent mass shootings?

Probably not. An Associated Press review shows that Obama's executive actions would have had no impact in keeping weapons from suspects in several of the deadliest incidents, including Newtown, Connecticut; San Bernardino, California; and Aurora, Colorado. The shooters in Newtown and San Bernardino, for example, used weapons purchased by other people.

Obama's actions could potentially reduce other gun deaths - especially suicides, which cause two-thirds of gun deaths. But it's unclear whether the steps will significantly curb unregulated gun sales. Millions of guns are sold annually in informal settings outside of gun shops, including many through private sales arranged online. The Obama administration acknowledged it couldn't quantify how many gun sales would be newly subjected to background checks. Nor could it say how many currently unregistered gun sellers would have to obtain a license.

#### Why now?

Obama is running out of time. With barely a year left in his presidency, he has to act quickly to roll out new policies, especially if he

wants them to become ingrained and harder to rescind when the next president takes over. After the Newtown shooting, Obama in 2013 sought far-reaching, bipartisan legislation that went beyond background checks to ban certain assault-style weapons and cap the size of ammunition clips.

When the effort collapsed in the Senate, the White House said it was working to identify every legal step he could take on his own. But a more recent spate of gun-related atrocities, including in San Bernardino, California, spurred the administration to give the issue another look.

#### Can the president do this alone?

Obama says he can. Republicans and gun rights advocates say he can't. The White House says Obama is acting fully within his legal authority, by clarifying existing laws that Congress has already passed. It's an argument Obama has used before when opposition in Congress has led him to take sweeping executive action on immigration, climate change and other issues.

Still, Obama readily concedes the executive steps will be challenged in court. One likely option for opponents is to challenge Obama's authority to define what it means to be "engaged in the business" of selling guns, since that definition isn't laid out in the law. — AP



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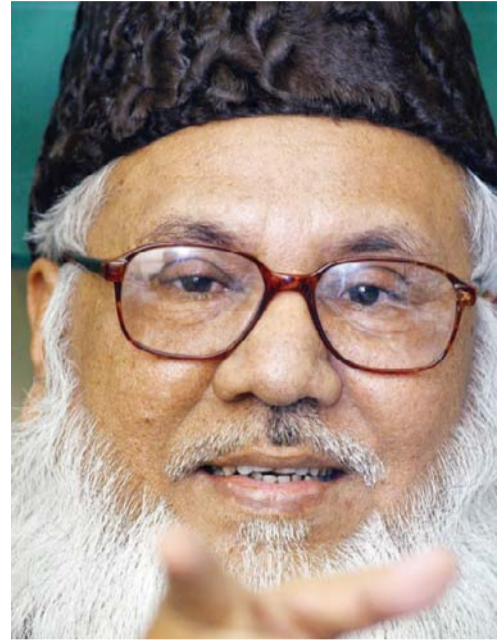


# BANGLADESH UPHOLDS DEATH SENTENCE FOR ISLAMIST LEADER

'LONG AND PAINFUL WAIT FOR JUSTICE FOR THE FAMILIES'

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh's highest court yesterday upheld the death sentence for the leader of the country's largest Islamist party for crimes during its 1971 independence struggle, paving the way for his execution within months. The Supreme Court dismissed an appeal by Motiur Rahman Nizami, head of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, who was convicted of murder, rape and orchestrating the killing of top intellectuals when he was the leader of a ruthless militia during the conflict.

"The court upheld the death sentence in



Motiur Rahman Nizami

three out of four charges. We're very happy," prosecutor Tureen Afroz told reporters. "Most importantly, the death penalty was upheld for the killings of the intellectuals." Nizami, 72, Jamaat's leader since 2000 and a minister in a former Islamist-allied government of 2001-2006, faces the gallows within months unless his case is reviewed by the same court or he is granted clemency by the president.

Three senior Jamaat officials and a key leader of the main opposition have been executed since December 2013 for war crimes, despite global criticism of their trials by a controversial war crimes tribunal. The court swiftly dismissed previous reviews of those four opposition leaders on death row, leading to their execution, the latest in November last year.

Hundreds of secular protesters who have been campaigning tirelessly for the trials of the Islamist leaders for their roles in the 1971 war burst into impromptu celebrations at a square in central Dhaka as the news of the court's decision came. "This verdict brings an end to the long and painful wait for justice for the families of the victims of the war," Imran Sarker, head of a secular group, said, showing a V-sign to reporters. "We now want his quick execution."

Prosecutors said Nizami was the leader of a student wing of Jamaat during the war and turned it into the Al-Badr pro-Pakistani militia, which killed top professors, writers, doctors and journalists in the most gruesome chapter of the conflict. Their bodies were found blindfolded with their hands tied and dumped in a marsh on the outskirts of the capital. The killing was carried out based on a hit-list he ordered and the aim was to "intellectually

cripple" the fledgling nation, they said.

**'Terrible conflict'**

Security was tight across the country after previous convictions of the Jamaat officials triggered the country's deadliest violence since independence with some 500 people killed, mainly in clashes between Islamists and police. "We've stepped up security. It is sufficient to prevent any violence," deputy police commissioner Maruf Hossain Sorder said ahead of the verdict.

Following the verdict, Jamaat called for a nationwide strike on Thursday, saying the charges against Nizami were "false, baseless and imaginary" and the case was "aimed at killing" him. "The government wants to steer the country towards terrible conflict in a planned way by killing Motiur Rahman Nizami in cold blood through its own fixed blueprint," the party said in a statement posted on its website, calling him an "internationally acclaimed Islamic scholar".

Jamaat said Nizami would now seek a review of the judgment. Defense lawyer Khandker Mahbub Hossain told reporters that they would decide their next course of action after consulting with him. Since it was established by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in 2010, the war crimes court, called the International Crimes Tribunal, has sentenced more than a dozen opposition leaders for war crimes.

Rights groups have criticized the trials, saying they fall short of global standards and lack any international oversight. The secular government maintains the trials are needed to heal the wounds of the conflict, which it says left three million people dead. Independent researchers put the toll much lower. —AFP



**DHAKA:** Bangladeshi activists campaigning for capital punishment for war criminals celebrate outside the Supreme Court after a review petition of Jamaat-e-Islami party's senior leader Motiur Rahman Nizami's appeal against his death sentence was dismissed. —AP

# INDIA COURT CHALLENGES DELHI TO SHOW CAR BAN CUTS SMOG

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian court yesterday challenged the Delhi city government to prove that its restrictions on cars were improving air quality in the world's most polluted capital. The Delhi high court said a trial ban, that allows most private cars to use the roads only on alternate days, was causing inconvenience to the public due to inadequate public transport.

With pollution levels still running at 10 times the international safe limits, it ordered the government to submit data for January 1-7 by Friday so the impact of the ban could be assessed. The Delhi government launched the trial ban last Friday in an attempt to thin the toxic blanket of smog that has settled over the city.

"In these six days you must have collected data related to pollution level, we think it's sufficient for you," the bench of Judges G Rohini and Jayant Nath said, according to the Press Trust of

India news agency. "You will have to think about the inconvenience caused to public at large," the judges said, responding to a handful of petitions against the scheme.


Air quality, which traditionally worsens in winter as the cooler air traps pollutants and people start lighting fires, remains poor despite the trial restrictions which are due to last 15 days. Environmentalists, however, say it would be unrealistic to expect a rapid improvement and attribute the smog to low winds and a fall in daytime temperatures.

The Delhi government defended the scheme, saying it had helped decongest the city's clogged roads and resulted in less pollution from cars. "We have increased the frequency of the metro, increased the number of buses, people are carpooling... all of Delhi has come together to support this campaign," the city's

transport minister Gopal Rai told news channels after the court order.

"Vehicular pollution, which is the most harmful of PM 2.5, has come down significantly in the interior part of Delhi," he said. PM2.5 refers to microscopic particles that penetrate deep into the lungs and are particularly harmful to health. India's state-run System of Air Quality Weather Forecasting and Research showed PM 2.5 concentrations at a "very unhealthy" 272 level yesterday and advised against going outside.

It recorded Delhi's PM 2.5 concentration hovering between "very poor" and "severe" levels since January 1, with Monday's reading spiking to 280, well above the World Health Organization safe limit of 25. 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. —AFP




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## UN HR CHIEF DEMANDS THAI ACTION ON DISAPPEARANCES

**GENEVA:** The UN human rights chief urged the Thai government yesterday to do more to determine the fates of 82 people listed as disappeared, including a prominent human rights lawyer missing for 12 years. "All of the families of those who have disappeared have the right to know the truth regarding the disappearance of their kin, as well as any progress and the results of investigations," Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

He voiced particular concern about the

case of Somchai Neelapaijit, a Muslim lawyer who vanished in 2004 while he was defending suspected Islamic militants who had accused authorities of torturing them while in custody. Late last month, Thailand's Supreme Court upheld the 2011 acquittal of five police officers accused of involvement in his abduction and disappearance.

Zeid harshly criticized that decision, accusing the Supreme Court of missing "an opportunity to protect the rights of the vic-

tims to truth, justice and redress in cases of involuntary and enforced disappearance."

Somchai disappeared from the streets of Bangkok under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra during a surge in fighting between the army and Islamist militants in Thailand's deep south. Thaksin, who was eventually deposed in a military coup, was on record as saying the lawyer had been killed by at least four government officials, although his body has never been found.

Five police officers eventually stood trial over the incident after eyewitnesses reported seeing Somchai bundled into a car on the night he vanished. But since Thailand does not recognize the crime of enforced disappearance, the court only considered charges of robbery and coercion, not for disappearing him or murder, the UN rights office said. Zeid called on the Thai government to criminalise enforced and voluntary disappearance, in line with international standards.

"There is a lack of adequate legal and institutional framework for the victims and their families to seek justice in enforced disappearance cases in Thailand," he said. This is of particular concern, the UN rights office statement said, since "the issue of enforced disappearances in which state officials have been implicated remains a serious concern." Somchai's unsolved case is just one of 82 enforced disappearances recorded in Thailand by a group of UN experts since 1980, it pointed out. —AFP

## HISTORIC SOUTH KOREA-JAPAN DEAL STUMBLES OVER STATUE

### STRUGGLE OVER DIMINUTIVE BUT DAUNTING OBSTACLE

**SEOUL:** A landmark deal between South Korea and Japan to end a decades-old feud over wartime sex slaves is struggling to overcome a diminutive but daunting obstacle in the form of the small statue of a teenage girl. "I am here to defend the peace monument," 22-year-old

embassy official to protest what it called Kishida's provocative comments. South Korea's foreign ministry has also stressed that because the statue was put up by civic groups, it has no right to order its removal. And the group that spearheaded the campaign to

percent of people opposed to the slightest relocation.

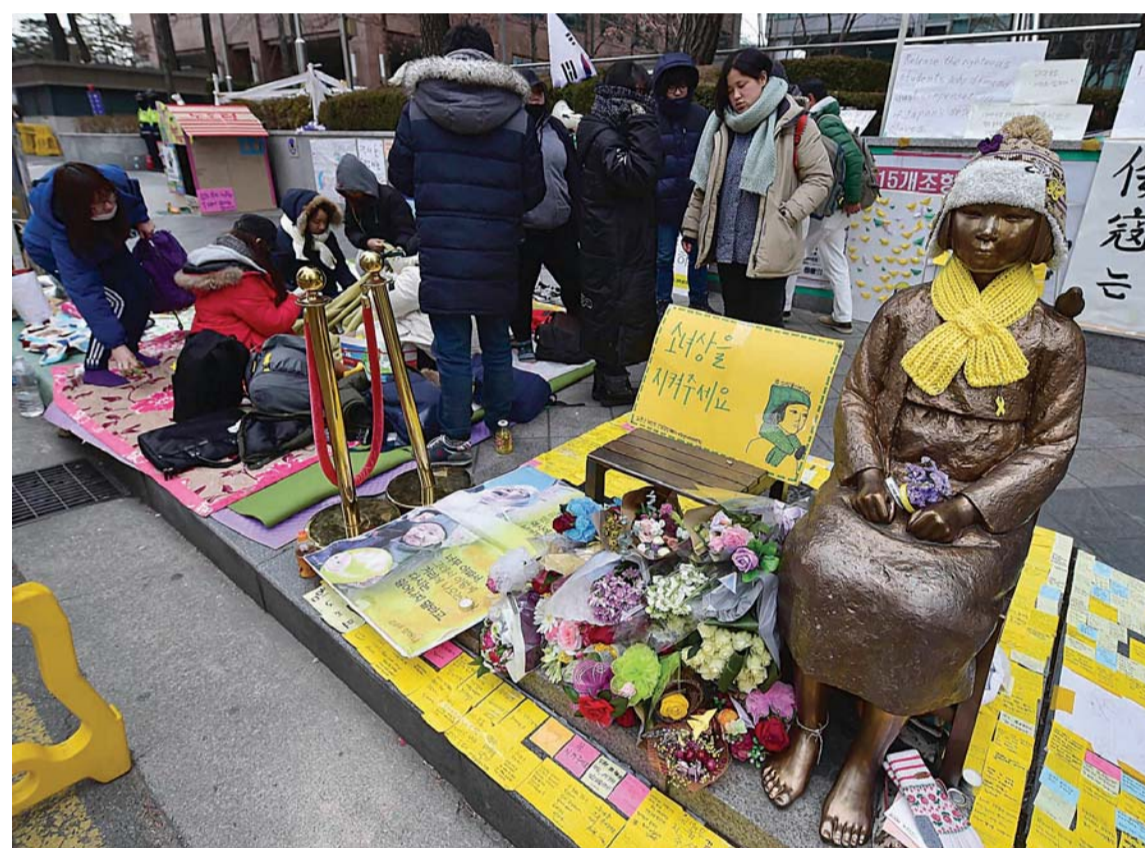
#### Tricky balancing act

Bong Young-Shik, a senior research fellow specializing in Japan at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, said the row placed the South Korean government in a tight spot, given the substantial political capital it has already expended on making the deal with Japan. "The issue of the wartime sex slaves is a highly emotive issue in Korea and the statue is its symbol," Bong said. "The public is infuriated by Japanese attempts to remove the statue, but even more outraged because it looks like the Korean government is collaborating," he added.

The bronze figure that has stared across the road at the Japanese embassy for the past four years was set up with public donations totaling 30 million won (\$25,000). An empty chair next to the young woman represents the victims who have died since the war, while a shadow engraved into the base of the statue is that of a frail old woman-reflecting the agony that still haunts the survivors.

The statue has proved to be an extremely potent and popular symbol, and is regularly wrapped in clothing with the passing seasons-such as a woolly hat and scarf in winter. More than two dozen similar monuments have been erected around South Korea, and another dozen or so abroad in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. Outside the Japanese embassy, Jung Woo-Ryung said she would keep guarding the statue as long as necessary.

Jung belongs to a student organization that is one of a number of groups who have organized a rotating round-the-clock vigil to keep the bronze where it is. "We are demanding that the issue be resolved by meeting the demands of the victims. I will continue to come here as long as the protest goes on," she said. —AFP



**SEOUL:** Korean students stage a sit-in protest against a recent agreement between South Korea and Japan near a statue (right) of a teenage girl symbolizing former "comfort women" who served as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers during World War II, in front of the Japanese embassy. —AFP

Jung Woo-Ryung defiantly declared, as she stood guard Tuesday beside the seated bronze figure that was erected on the pavement opposite the Japanese embassy in Seoul in 2011.

Depicting a young, barefoot woman, dressed in a traditional Korean hanbok dress and with her fists clasped tight in her lap, the statue is both a symbol of the suffering endured by so-called "comfort women" forced to work in Japanese military brothels during World War II, and of their struggle to extract a formal apology and compen-

the comfort woman statue, which has now become a focus for South Korean activists who accuse the government of selling out to Tokyo.

#### A confused deal

Japan insists the agreement included a clear undertaking from South Korea to remove the statue, with Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida stating Monday that he understood it would be "relocated appropriately". But Seoul says it only promised to look into the possibility of moving the bronze and called in a senior Japanese

create and erect the bronze is adamant that it isn't going anywhere. The statue cannot be "a condition or means of any agreement," the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan said in a statement on its website.

"And the Korean government cannot mention anything about the removal or moving of the monument," it added. South Korean public sentiment about the overall agreement is evenly divided, but on the specific issue of the statue passions run high, with surveys showing up to 75

## TAIWAN'S TSAI URGES ANSWERS ON HONG KONG BOOKSELLERS

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's presidential frontrunner Tsai Ing-wen urged authorities in Hong Kong and Beijing yesterday to explain the disappearance of five Hong Kong booksellers feared detained by mainland Chinese authorities. The missing men all worked for the same Hong Kong-based publishing house known for books critical of the Chinese government, in a case that has sparked anger in the city.

Tsai's comments come the week before an

election in which she is tipped to unseat the Beijing-friendly ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party, raising questions over cross-strait relations. Tsai, who leads the Beijing-sceptic opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has said she wants to preserve the "status quo" with China if she becomes president-but opponents say she would destabilise ties.

The DPP traditionally leans towards asserting independence, which has never formally

been declared by Taiwan. "(I) hope that Hong Kong and Beijing authorities... will give a clear explanation," Tsai said yesterday at a campaign event in Taipei. "At the same time, (they) should implement concrete measures to ensure freedom of speech in Hong Kong," she said. "Taiwanese people care deeply about freedom of speech, because Taiwan after all went through a very difficult period to win our freedom of speech."

The island was ruled under martial law by KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek until 1987. Large-scale protest movements flared in both Hong Kong and Taiwan in 2014, with protesters angry at growing Chinese influence. Taiwan split from China in 1949 after a civil war on the mainland, but Beijing still considers it part of its territory awaiting unification-by force if necessary.

Hong Kong is semi-autonomous after it was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 and enjoys freedoms unseen on the mainland, but there are increasing fears those are under threat. The KMT's China-friendly policy has been a major source of criticism. But its presidential candidate Eric Chu also voiced concern Tuesday about the disappearances.

"The Hong Kong or Chinese authorities must provide a clear answer... as pursuit of democracy and freedom is a universal ideal," he said during a campaign event in southern Taiwan, according to the Apple Daily. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi did not reply directly when asked Tuesday whether China had detained the booksellers, but said policy towards Hong Kong remained unchanged. —AFP



**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, DPP, presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen, (center in black) speaks to supporters at a temple in the Beitou area. —AP



**MANILA:** Harry Roque, Emilia Mangilit, Isabelita Vinuya, Avelina Culala Four of the remaining 32 alleged WWII sex slaves clench their fists along with their legal counsel Harry Roque, (center) to demand compensation and apology from the Japanese Government during a news conference. —AP

## FILIPINOS RAPED BY JAPANESE WWII TROOPS DEMAND COMPENSATION

**MANILA:** A group of elderly Filipino women raped by Japanese troops during World War II called for compensation from Japan yesterday, following Tokyo's pledge of \$8.3 million for South Korean women forced into Japanese military-run brothels during the war.

The women's lawyers said they were also exploring the possibility of filing cases with United Nations bodies and holding Philippine President Benigno Aquino III liable for allegedly failing to support the case of the women against Japan.

Isabelita Vinuya, the 84-year-old president of Malaya Lolasa - a group of Filipino women abducted and raped by Japanese troops in their village - urged the Philippine government to support their demand for justice from Japan. "We have appealed more than once or twice to our government to help us, support us before Japan so that we can be given justice for the sufferings we went through during World War II," Vinuya said at a news conference, adding that many of the women have died without seeing justice. Japan and South Korea announced last week that they had settled their decades-long standoff over wartime sex slaves, with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe apologizing and agreeing to contribute 1 billion yen (\$8.3 million) for a foundation to help support the victims. Historians say tens of thousands of women from around Asia were sent to front-line military brothels to provide sex to Japanese soldiers.

#### 'Is there a difference?'

"Is there a difference in the rape of a South Korean and a Filipino woman?" Harry Roque, the Filipino victims' lawyer, said at yesterday's news conference. "The answer is there should be none, because rape is a crime against women and is prohibited by international humanitarian law and is recognized as an international crime."

He noted that South Korea's Supreme Court had ordered the government to fight for the rights of the Korean victims, but that the Philippines' top court dismissed in 2010 a case filed by Vinuya and 70 other women urging the court to compel the government to press their claims against Japan. The Philippine court also denied an appeal filed by the women.

Vinuya said she was 13 when the Japanese troops raped women and children in her village of Mapaniqui in Pampanga province, around 60 kilometers (37 miles) north of Manila. The troops also razed homes and killed men in the village. Three other women at yesterday's news conference said they were teenagers when they were raped during the siege. Vinuya said that only 32 of more than 90 women from her victims' group are still alive. Only 70 of 174 from another such group, the Lila-Filipina, are alive, according to its head, Richilda Extremadura. Extremadura also called on Japan to compensate former sex slaves and rape victims from the Philippines and 11 other countries and urged President Aquino to initiate talks with Japan. —AP

## INDONESIA TURNS TO CHINA AS UIGHURS JOIN ISLAMIST JIHADIS

**JAKARTA:** Indonesian authorities are working with their counterparts in China to stem a flow of ethnic Uighur militants seeking to join Islamist jihadists in the world's most populous Muslim country, Indonesia's counter-terrorism chief said.

Saud Usman Nasution's comments come amid mounting concern in Indonesia about possible attacks by sympathisers of the Islamic State group and follows the arrest of 13 men across the island of Java, including a Muslim Uighur with a suicide-bomb vest.

The appearance among Indonesian militant networks of Uighurs, who come from the Xinjiang region in far-western China, is likely to add to Beijing's concerns that exiles will return to their homeland as experienced and trained jihadists. China says Islamist militants and separatists operate in energy-rich Xinjiang on the borders of central Asia, where violence has killed hundreds in recent years.

#### Culture and religion

Rights groups say much of the unrest can be traced back to frustration at controls over the Uighurs' culture and religion, and that most of those who leave are only fleeing repression not seeking to wage jihad. China denies repressing rights. Nasution, who heads the National Counter-Terrorism Agency, told Reuters in an interview on Tuesday that several Uighurs had responded to a call last year by Santoso, Indonesia's most high-profile backer of Islamic State, to join his band of fighters.

Islamic State and human trafficking networks helped them travel via Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia to Santoso's hideout in an equatorial jungle of eastern Indonesia, he said. However, the would-be suicide bomber arrested on Dec. 23 was hiding in a house just outside the capital, Jakarta.

"We are cooperating with China and investigating evidence such as ATM cards and cellphones," Nasution said,

adding that an Indonesian team went to China to interview members of the man's family, who would not confirm that they were related to him. There was no immediate comment from China's foreign ministry on whether Beijing is collaborating with Indonesia.

"As far as China is concerned, these people are running off, some of them taking part in jihad and planning to strike back," said Pan Zhiping, a terrorism expert at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences. "Of course we must stop them. I believe, in terms of jointly guarding against extremism, it is necessary that we cooperate."

Bilveer Singh of the Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore said the direct involvement of Chinese Uighurs in Southeast Asian militancy added "an external dimension to the existing home-grown terrorist threat". "It could also complicate ties with a rising China, which may want to play a bigger counter-terrorism role in the region," Singh said in a Eurasia Review article.

#### 'Serious concern for China'

Indonesia's security forces have given Santoso, who styles himself as the commander of the Islamic State army in Indonesia, until Jan. 9 to surrender along with his force of about 40 men on the far-flung island of Sulawesi. However, security analysts believe a larger threat is emerging across the populous island of Java as networks of support for Islamic State grow.

Indonesia has been largely successful in disrupting domestic militant cells since the bombing of two nightclubs on the resort island of Bali in 2002, and sporadic attacks have been mainly targeted at the police. The government is now worried that the influence of Islamic State, whose fighters hold swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq, could bring a return of jihadi violence and strikes against foreigners and soft targets. —Reuters



Bulgarians plunge into the icy winter water of a lake in Sofia to catch a cross during Epiphany Day celebrations yesterday. — AFP

## BAHRAIN BUSTS 'TERROR' CELL LINKED TO TEHRAN

Continued from Page 1

Tensions widened between Saudi Arabia and Iran after protesters torched the kingdom's diplomatic missions in the Islamic republic following the Saturday execution of Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. Riyadh cut ties with Tehran in response and was joined by some of its Sunni Arab allies including Bahrain and Sudan. The United Arab Emirates also downgraded relations with Iran and Kuwait recalled its ambassador.

Djibouti, the tiny Horn of Africa nation and ally of Saudi Arabia, said yesterday that it too had broken diplomatic ties with Tehran. "Djibouti cut its diplomatic ties with Iran out of solidarity with Saudi Arabia," Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf told Reuters in a text message.

Jordan summoned Iran's ambassador to protest the attacks on Saudi missions. Amman expressed its "strong condemnation" of Saturday's attacks by protesters on the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Iran's second city Mashhad, a foreign ministry spokesman told official news agency Petra. "The attacks on the Saudi embassy and consulate constitute a flagrant violation of international conventions," the spokesman said.

Late yesterday, Qatar recalled its ambassador to Iran. "The ministry summoned this morning Qatar's ambassador to Tehran against the backdrop of attacks on the embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Tehran," QNA quoted Khalid Ibrahim Abdulrahman Al-Hamar, the director of the Asian Affairs Department, as saying. Qatar's foreign ministry called the embassy attack a "violation of international charters and norms that ensure the security and protection of diplomatic missions and their members".

Staff at Iran's embassy in Riyadh and its consulate in Jeddah flew home yesterday, Saudi state news agency SPA reported. Iran's state broadcaster IRIB said a plane carrying 54 Iranian diplomats and their families had landed at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport. As its diplomats arrived home, Shiite-dominated Iran fired the latest verbal salvo in a dispute that has seen Riyadh and some Sunni Arab allies cut diplomatic

ties with Tehran. At a press conference in the capital, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Riyadh must end prolonged efforts to confront Iran.

Citing longstanding differences that became a full-blown split after Saudi Arabia executed Shiite cleric and activist Nimr Al-Nimr, Zarif said the Sunni-ruled kingdom had sought systematically to inflict damage. "For the past two-and-a-half years, Saudi Arabia has opposed Iran's diplomacy," he said at the press conference with Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari. "Saudi Arabia has moved against our efforts and, unfortunately, they opposed the nuclear agreement," Zarif said, also accusing Riyadh of "taking measures against the Iranian people" through its efforts to keep oil prices low. "This trend of creating tension must stop. We need to stand united... and stop those who are adding fuel to the fire," he added.

The spike in tensions comes after Iran last year secured a historic nuclear deal with world powers led by the United States, causing major concern in longtime US ally Riyadh. That deal, when finally implemented, will end sanctions on Iran's oil and gas industry and could see the Islamic republic challenge Saudi Arabia's role as the Middle East's dominant energy and economic power. The dispute has raised fears of an increase in sectarian tensions in the Middle East that could derail efforts to resolve pressing issues including the wars in Syria and Yemen.

Zarif reiterated that the embassy's ransacking had no official blessing. "All Iranian officials condemn it," he said. Jaafari, who was to also hold talks with Rouhani, said Iraq was seeking a potential diplomatic role to help resolve the crisis and echoed the concerns about sectarianism. "I have spoken to the foreign ministers of some of the Arab countries to reduce the consequences of this issue and prevent enemies from dragging the region into a war that can have no winners," Jaafari said. Shiite-majority Iraq has close ties with Tehran. About 2,000 members and supporters of powerful Iraqi Shiite militias demonstrated in Baghdad yesterday against Nimr's execution. — Agencies

## N KOREA 'SUCCESSFULLY' CONDUCTS H-BOMB...

Continued from Page 1

A hydrogen, or thermonuclear, bomb uses fusion in a chain reaction that results in a far more powerful explosion than the fission blast generated by uranium or plutonium alone. Last month Kim suggested Pyongyang had already developed such a device. That claim was questioned by international experts at the time and there was continued skepticism over yesterday's test announcement, which took the international community by surprise.

"The seismic data that's been received indicates that the explosion is probably significantly below what one would expect from an H-bomb test," said Australian nuclear policy and arms control specialist Crispin Rovere. The test, which came just two days before Kim Jong-Un's birthday, was initially detected as a 5.1-magnitude tremor at the North's main Punggye-ri nuclear test site in the northeast of the country. The weapons yield was initially estimated at between six and nine kilotons - similar to the North's last nuclear test in 2013. The first US hydrogen bomb test in 1952 had a yield of 10 megatons.

Bruce Bennett, a senior defence analyst with the Rand Corporation, said if it was an H-bomb that was tested, then the detonation clearly failed - at least the fusion stage. "If it were a real H-bomb, the Richter scale reading should have been about a hundred times more powerful," Bennett told AFP. South Korea's defence ministry also told reporters it doubted yester-

day's explosion was thermonuclear in nature. There were expressions of concern but no public panic on the streets of Seoul, where people have become largely inured to North Korea's provocations over the years.

Most experts had assumed Pyongyang was years from developing a hydrogen bomb, while assessments were divided on how far it had gone in developing a miniaturized warhead to fit on a ballistic missile. Whatever the nature of the device, it was North Korea's fourth nuclear test and marked a striking act of defiance in the face of warnings from enemies and allies alike that Pyongyang would pay a steep price for moving forward with its nuclear weapons program.

The North's official news agency was unrepentant. US "imperialists" had escalated the situation on the Korean peninsula to the brink of war, defying the North's calls for a peace treaty, it said. "The more frantic the hostile forces get in their moves to isolate and stifle the DPRK (North Korea), the stronger its nuclear deterrent will grow, bringing them to deathbed repentance."

The three previous tests in 2006, 2009 and 2013 triggered waves of UN sanctions. Their failure to prevent a fourth detonation will put the Security Council under intense pressure to take more drastic action this time around. It throws down a particular challenge to US President Barack Obama, who, during a visit to South Korea in 2014, vowed sanctions with "more bite" if Pyongyang went ahead with another test. — AFP

## ASSEMBLY PANEL DEBATES REVISED ANTI-GRAFT...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the head of the Assembly's educational and guidance committee MP Awdah Al-Awdah said yesterday the committee held an informal meeting with Information Minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and ministry advisors to review the final text of the electronic crimes law. He said the two sides were in agreement over the amendments made by the committee on the government-sponsored bill and that

it will be sent to the Assembly for debate and approval. Awdah said he believes the Assembly will approve the law in two rounds after discussions with the government. The law applies to electronic websites and news bulletins which do not come under the existing press law.

Also, four lawmakers submitted a proposal calling on the government to give priority of employment to children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners immediately after Kuwaiti citizens.



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## O'DONOVAN BANNED EIGHT WEEKS FOR HEAD-BUTT

**SYDNEY:** Irish striker Roy O'Donovan was slapped with an eight-week ban yesterday for head-butting, one of the longest suspensions ever handed out by Australia's A-League. The 30-year-old, who plays for Central Coast Mariners, was cited for his attack on Wellington Phoenix player Manny Muscat over the New Year period. Only former Mariners goalkeeper Danny Vukovic has received a bigger suspension in the A-League with a nine-month ban for striking a referee in 2008. O'Donovan pleaded guilty to violent conduct. Muscat was earlier banned for two matches for his part in the confrontation. The Mariners said they were "extremely disappointed" and may appeal against the decision. "The disparity in sanctions issued for this match highlights the flaws in the system," club chief executive Shaun Mielekamp said. "The media circus around the incident has a high impact on the result and we will look at our avenues for appeal." O'Donovan is in his first season with the Mariners after stints with Sunderland, Coventry City, Blackpool and Northampton Town in England. —AFP

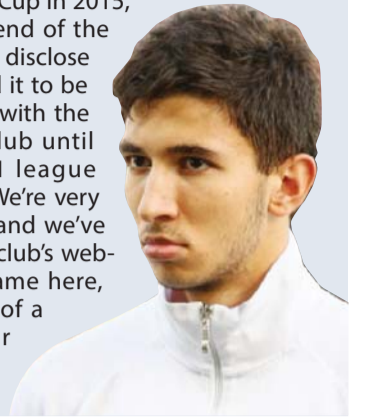


## MADRID MAD TO APPOINT ZIDANE

**BERLIN:** Real Madrid's decision to appoint Zinedine Zidane as their new coach has been described as "madness" by former Bayern Munich boss Ottmar Hitzfeld in an interview with Swiss daily Blick. "For him (Zidane) it is like winning the lottery jackpot. It is madness," said the 66-year-old Hitzfeld, who ended a stellar coaching career after taking Switzerland to the 2014 World Cup. Hitzfeld added that the former France great "is only living off his illustrious name as a player." Zidane's only previous experience as a coach is his 18 months at the helm of Real Madrid's second team, Castilla, in the regional third tier of Spanish football. "Zidane has proved nothing as a coach and he is now in charge of the biggest stars in the world. It is an incredibly difficult task although I hope it goes well for him," said Hitzfeld. Pep Guardiola was appointed Barcelona coach despite his only prior experience being leading Barca's B team to promotion from the Spanish fourth tier. For Hitzfeld, who won the Champions League as coach of both Borussia Dortmund and Bayern, a great player does not always make a great coach because "it also depends on his natural authority as the boss." Zidane, 43, was appointed Madrid coach on Monday night after the sacking of Rafael Benitez. —AFP

## LIVERPOOL SIGN SERBIAN GRUJIC

**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool completed a deal for Red Star Belgrade's 19-year-old Serbian midfielder Marko Grujic yesterday in Juergen Klopp's first signing since he took over as manager in October. Grujic, who has played for Serbia at under-21 level and was a member of the under-20 squad that won the World Cup in 2015, will return to Red Star on loan to the end of the season. The Premier League club did not disclose a transfer fee but British media reported it to be about 5.1 million pounds (\$7.5 million) with the player said to be contracted to the club until 2020. He has scored five goals in 21 league appearances for Red Star this season. "We're very pleased because Marko is a big talent and we've seen him a lot of times," Klopp told the club's website (www.liverpoolfc.com). "When I came here, our scouts showed me some footage of a very skilled player from Red Star Belgrade. — Reuters



TERMAS DE RIO HONDO AND JUJUY: Peugeot's French driver Sebastien Loeb and co-driver Daniel Elena from Monaco, compete in the Stage 3 of the 2016 Dakar Rally between Termas de Rio Hondo and Jujuy, Argentina, on Tuesday. — AFP

## LOEB FIRES BROADSIDE WITH SECOND STAGE WIN

**SANTA CATERINA DE JUJUY:** Sebastien Loeb's sensational Dakar Rally debut continued on Tuesday when he topped the podium for the second time in two days with victory in the third stage of the gruelling two-week rally-raid. France's nine-time world rally champion, driving a Peugeot, clocked 2hr 9min 39sec over 190km between the Argentinian towns of Termas de Rio Hondo and San Salvador de Jujuy to consolidate his place atop the overall stand-

ings. Mini-driving defending champion Nasser al-Attiyah of Qatar sits in fifth place overall, 6min 50sec adrift of Loeb, and just behind the Mini of Finland's Mikko Hirvonen, Loeb's former WRC rival who is also making his race debut. "It seems that the times will be very close between the drivers," said the 41-year-old Loeb, adding that the desert stages would be a real test. "I pushed hard and I had a good stage with no mistakes. Everything is ok at the moment."

Loeb, who has been racing in the World Touring Car Championship since effectively retiring from WRC rallying after the last of his nine consecutive world titles in 2012, added: "For the moment, for sure, I'm enjoying it. It has been two good days for me. "The car is going very well. I have a good feeling with the car. It's performing well so at the moment I'm enjoying it," said the Frenchman, who spent his illustrious WRC

career at the wheel of a Citroen. "At the moment we are on tracks... so I've got a good feeling on this type of road. But when we go to the desert it will be different, with long and hot stages. That is something that I don't know very well, so we will see. "We will continue for the moment and I'll try to do my best and we'll see where we are in a few days," said Loeb, accompanied by long-time co-driver and fellow rally-raid novice Daniel

Elena. Argentina's Kevin Benavides, on a Honda, won the motorcycle section of the stage, shortened because of bad weather, after the initial winner Joan Barreda Bort was handed a one-minute penalty for speeding. That bumped the Spanish Honda rider down to fifth on the stage, with Portugal's Paulo Goncalves (Honda) and Frenchman Antoine Meo (KTM) moving up to second and third respectively. —AFP

## HIRSCHER BEATS KRISTOFFERSEN TO WIN WORLD CUP SLALOM

**SANTA CATERINA VALFURVA:** Marcel Hirscher earned his 36th career win on the World Cup circuit yesterday, edging Norwegian rival Henrik Kristoffersen by 0.21 seconds in a men's slalom. The four-time overall champion from Austria was third after the opening leg but posted the fastest second-run time to finish in 1 minute, 54.54 seconds. Meanwhile, Therese Johaug beat Ingvald Flugstad Oestberg in the women's 10-kilometer mass start to cut her Norwegian teammate's lead in the Tour de Ski to just 12.2 seconds yesterday. Norwegians completed the top four, with Johaug winning in 26 minutes, 37.6 seconds - 9.9 seconds ahead of Oestberg. Heidi Weng was 19.7 behind in third. Weng is 2:33.1 behind Oestberg in the Tour de Ski standings. Alexey Poltoranin of Kazakhstan edged Dario Cologna of Switzerland in a photo fin-

ish to win the men's 15-kilometer race. Poltoranin finished in 35 minutes, 35.9 seconds, one-tenth of a second ahead of Cologna, who was 0.6 seconds ahead of Italy's Francesco de Fabiani. After five of eight races in the Tour de Ski, Norway's Martin Johnsrud Sundby still leads compatriot Petter Northug Jr. It was the third time in three slaloms this season that Hirscher and Kristoffersen shared the top-two spots - though the first time with the Austrian on top. "It's super cool," Hirscher said about his rivalry with the 21-year-old Norwegian. "It gives me new motivation, new strength. Also in training I try to make another step forward." Kristoffersen still led Hirscher by 0.07 toward the end of his final run but had a costly mistake in the last few gates before the finish. "That is ski racing. But one mistake is OK," the Norwegian said. "I am satisfied. It was a good run. I heard Marcel was

incredibly fast in the lower section." Kristoffersen was reluctant to speculate about a duel with Hirscher for this year's World Cup slalom title, which the Austrian won the past three seasons. "It's still a long way until (the final races in) St. Moritz," he said. "Now I think Marcel is the best, and I am close behind him." Kristoffersen remained in the lead of the discipline standings with 280 points, 20 clear of Hirscher. Aleksander Khoroshilov of Russia is third with 114 points. Eyeing his second victory after winning in Schladming a year ago, Khoroshilov led Hirscher by 0.10 after the opening run. **AMAZING JOB** However, he was already half a second behind the Austrian at the first split of his second run and finally came third, 0.32 off the winning time. "The feeling was pretty good, especially



OBERSTDORF: Norwegian Therese Johaug celebrates during the winner ceremony of the ladies 10 kilometer classic competition of the "Tour de Ski" Cross Country World Cup yesterday in Oberstdorf, southern Germany. — AFP



SANTA CATERINA: From left, second placed Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway, winner Marcel Hirscher of Austria, and third placed Alexander Khoroshilov of Russia celebrate on the podium of an alpine ski, men's World Cup slalom, in Santa Caterina, Italy, yesterday. — AP

in the second run," Hirscher said. "Henrik and Aleksander did an amazing job as well so it was pretty close as it's been all season so far." Hirscher matched retired Benjamin Raich's total of 36 World Cup wins. They are runners-up to Austrian record holder Hermann Maier, who won 54 times. It also was the Austrian's 17th slalom win, which put him third on the all-time list. Only Ingemar Stenmark of Sweden (40) and Alberto Tomba of Italy (35) had more wins in the discipline. "It is nice. I am skiing a couple of years more so we will see at the end how far I can (go in) the rankings," Hirscher said. "Anyway, records are only for retired athletes, who are sitting in their seat and drinking a glass of red wine."

Hirscher went top of the overall standings again, leading Aksel Lund Svindal of Norway by 85 points. Svindal doesn't compete in slaloms. World slalom champion Jean-Baptiste Grange of France finished 2.60 behind Hirscher in 18th. David Chodounsky, who was third in the discipline standings before the race, failed to finish his first run while none of his five American teammates managed to qualify for the final run either. The race was moved from Zagreb because of a lack of snow. It was the first in a series of five slaloms within three weeks. This weekend, a giant slalom and a slalom will be contested in Adelboden, with further slaloms to follow in Wengen, Kitzbuehel and Schladming. —AP





## BRIT BROADY PREVAILS AFTER RACQUET ROW IN AUCKLAND

**AUCKLAND:** A fired up Naomi Broady let her racquet do the talking as she stormed back to beat Jelena Ostapenko in an ill-tempered Auckland Classic clash marred by an on-court row after the Briton called for the Latvian to be disqualified.

Tensions boiled over in the second set of the low key second round clash when, after a winner by Broady, the 18-year-old Ostapenko's racquet came out of her hand, bounced off the blue hard court and against the back wall towards the ball boy.

"She threw the racquet and hit the ball boy, no way was that accidental," the 25-year-old Broady complained to the umpire. Play was delayed as the umpire and ball boy had a conversation. The umpire opted for a code violation over a disqualification after the Latvian wildcard argued the racquet slipped from her hand but a clearly upset Broady called for another official to adjudicate.

"I asked for the tournament referee to come down onto the court to give his opinion," Broady was quoted as saying by local media.

"But as he isn't the chair umpire, he goes by what the chair umpire says and his opinion was that it had slipped from her hand, as Jelena had said, so it was just a code violation and move onto the next point."

Broady, who knocked out former world number one Ana Ivanovic in the first round on Tuesday, settled quicker to take the tiebreak and force a deciding set but she looked down and out as she trailed 5-1 in the third.

But the British qualifier saved a second match point as she stormed back to prevail 4-6 7-6(4) 7-5, helped by 21 aces, and book a spot in the quarter-finals where she will face American fifth seed Sloane Stephens.

Both players shook hands at the end of the contest but bad blood remained with Broady clearly angry about the incident and repeating her accusation that Ostapenko intentionally threw her racquet in the second set.

The umpire attempted to quell the trouble as the players continued their verbal volleys. "Jelena commented that my behaviour was terrible," Broady said. "Which I thought was a bit out of order, considering the events that had gone on in the match. I don't think I did anything disrespectful to her, or anyone else on the court. "So I'm not really sure where that came from, but tensions were high, adrenalin was going. We had a bit of a confrontation, but she's going to be a fantastic player and I'm sure we'll both learn from any mistakes we make today and move forwards." — Reuters

## AZARENKA ADVANCES TO Q-FINALS AT BRISBANE

**BRISBANE:** After two injury-interrupted seasons, Victoria Azarenka is emerging from the shadows of some highly-ranked rivals who have either withdrawn from Australian Open warmup events or lost in the early rounds.

The two-time Australian Open champion reached the quarterfinals of the Brisbane International - a tournament she won in 2009 - with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Ysaline Bonaventure.

Bonaventure, a lucky loser from qualifying, was cast into the second round on Wednesday as a replacement for top-seeded Simona Halep, who had a bye before withdrawing from a scheduled second-round match with Azarenka because of an Achilles tendon problem.

The No. 2-ranked Halep withdrew within an hour of defending champion Maria Sharapova pulling out of the tournament with a left forearm injury. Top-ranked Serena Williams withdrew from the Hopman Cup in Perth after skipping her first match and retiring in the second set of the U.S. team's second against Australia Gold because of inflammation in her left knee.

Venus Williams and Ana Ivanovic - the top two seeded players at the ASB Classic in Auckland, New Zealand - were beaten in the first round.

Azarenka conceded an early service break against Bonaventure and had seven double-faults in the first set, but otherwise dominated after converting her fifth breakpoint chance in a fourth game that lasted more than 17 minutes and went to deuce 11 times.

Azarenka who dropped to a year-end No. 22 ranking in December after being restricted to just 23 events across 2014 and '15, is working her way back into form.

"I definitely missed playing since I haven't in a while," she said. As for the broader issue of injuries, she said: "I'm just going to try to take care of myself right now, and hopefully everybody will be ready for the Australian Open."

Fourth-seeded Angelique Kerber beat Madison Brengle 6-3, 6-0 to set up a meeting with Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, while

Andrea Petkovic had a 7-5, 6-4 win over Ekaterina Makarova to move into a quarterfinal against U.S. qualifier Samantha Crawford, who had an upset 7-5, 7-5 win over seventh-seeded Belinda Bencic.

Petkovic, who has struggled in the past with serious injuries, attributed the high attrition rate in January to the extra work players are putting into the conditioning over the off-season.

"If I know them well, the top players, they still will be in good shape when it comes to the Australian Open," Petkovic said.

### NISHIKORI UNTRUBLED

In the men's draw, second-seeded Kei Nishikori opened with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Mikhail Kukushkin to move into the quarterfinals against seventh-seeded Bernard Tomic, a 7-6 (6), 4-6, 7-6 (4) winner over Radek Stepanek.

Third-seeded Marin Cilic beat Chung Hyeon 7-5, 7-6 (3), and No. 8 Dominic Thiem had a 6-3, 6-2 win against Denis Kudla to advance.

At the Hopman Cup mixed teams event in Perth, Western Australia, Germany leveled its record at 1-1 with a 2-1 win over France, which lost for the second time.

Alexander Zverev gave Germany a 1-0 lead with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Kenny De Schepper, but Caroline Garcia beat Sabine Lisicki 6-2, 7-6 (5) to send the match to a mixed doubles decider, which the German pair won 6-4, 6-7 (6), 10-6.

In a night match, Andy Murray lost to Australia Green's Nick Kyrgios. Heather Watson was playing Daria Gavrilova in a bid to keep Britain alive.

In New Zealand, third-seeded Caroline Wozniacki resisted the fate of other seeded players at the tournament with a 6-0, 6-2 win against Christina McHale and No. 5 Sloane Stephens beat Carina Witthoef 3-6, 6-1, 6-3.

Austrian qualifier Tamira Paszek beat two-time Grand Slam champion Svetlana Kuznetsova and British qualifier Naomi Broady reached the quarterfinals with a 4-6, 7-6 (4), 7-5 win over Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia. — AP



**DALLAS:** Dallas Mavericks guard Deron Williams (8) shoots a 3-pointer in the final second of the second overtime in an NBA basketball game against the Sacramento Kings on Tuesday, in Dallas. The Mavericks won 117-116. — AP

## MAVS WIN IN 2 OTs, MAKE IT 22 STRAIGHT AT HOME OVER KINGS

**DALLAS:** Deron Williams hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer in the second overtime, and the Dallas Mavericks beat Sacramento 117-116 Tuesday night for their 22nd consecutive home victory over the Kings. Williams took an inbound pass from Devin Harris with 2.3 seconds left, pump faked to get Rudy Gay to fly by him in the left corner and the ball went in after the buzzer sounded. Dirk Nowitzki hit an earlier 3 as the Mavericks scored the last eight points after falling behind 116-109 with 1:20 left in the second overtime. DeMarcus Cousins scored 35 for his third straight 30-point game for the Kings, including a buzzer-beating layup for a 98-all tie at the end of regulation. Former Dallas guard Rajon Rondo was out with back spasms in his first visit since an acrimonious split after an ill-fated half-season with the Mavericks. The Kings haven't won a regular-season game in Dallas since Feb. 27, 2003. Sacramento did win a game in Dallas during a five-game playoff series victory over the Mavericks in 2004.

**BULLS 117, BUCKS 106**  
Jimmy Butler had 32 points and a season-high 10 assists to lead Chicago over Milwaukee for its season-best fifth straight win. Pau Gasol scored 26 points with 11 rebounds, and Taj Gibson added 11 points and 14 boards as the Bulls led the entire way. Derrick Rose returned to the Bulls after missing three straight games with a sore right hamstring. He showed no effects of the injury and finished with 16 points. Khris Middleton scored 26 for Milwaukee, and Michael Carter-Williams had 20 points and 12 assists.

**KNICKS 107, HAWKS 101**  
Arron Afflalo and Carmelo Anthony both

scored 23 points, and New York almost lost a 16-point lead before holding off Atlanta to give the Knicks their second win over the Hawks in three days. The Knicks led by 16 in the third quarter but saw the lead reduced to two points in the final minute before Jose Calderon scored on a drive with 18 seconds remaining. Kristaps Porzingis had 17 points and 11 rebounds for New York. Anthony finished with 11 rebounds and seven assists. Paul Millsap led Atlanta with 19 points.

**WARRIORS 109, LAKERS 88**  
Klay Thompson scored 22 of his 36 points in

the first quarter and Stephen Curry added 17 before sitting out the fourth to rest his ailing leg in Golden State's victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Kobe Bryant sat out his third straight game with a sore right shoulder for the Lakers, whose three-game winning streak ended in Golden State's 33rd win in 35 games. Curry stayed in the game after taking a blow on his left leg in the third period, but briefly limped with obvious frustration on his face. The reigning MVP missed two games with a bruised lower left leg last week before returning for Golden State's last two games. Curry went to the locker room before the fourth. — AP

### NBA Results/Standings

Atlanta 101, New York 107; LA Lakers 88, Golden State 109; Dallas 117, Sacramento 116 (OT); Chicago 117, Milwaukee 106.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference				
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB				
Toronto	21	15	.583	—	Oklahoma City	24	11	.686
Boston	19	15	.559	1	Utah	15	18	.455
New York	17	19	.472	4	Portland	15	22	.405
Brooklyn	10	24	.294	10	Denver	12	23	.343
Philadelphia	4	33	.108	17.5	Minnesota	12	23	.343
Central Division				Pacific Division				
Cleveland	23	9	.719	—	Golden State	33	2	.943
Chicago	21	12	.636	2.5	LA Clippers	22	13	.629
Indiana	19	15	.559	5	Sacramento	14	21	.400
Detroit	19	16	.543	5.5	Phoenix	12	25	.324
Milwaukee	14	23	.378	11.5	LA Lakers	8	28	.222
Southeast Division				Southwest Division				
Miami	21	13	.618	—	San Antonio	30	6	.833
Atlanta	21	15	.583	1	Dallas	20	15	.571
Orlando	19	16	.543	2.5	Memphis	19	17	.528
Charlotte	17	17	.500	4	Houston	17	19	.472
Washington	15	17	.469	5	New Orleans	11	22	.333



**BRISBANE:** Victoria Azarenka of Belarus hits a return against Ysaline Bonaventure of Belgium during their women's singles match on the fourth day of the Brisbane International tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

## DJOKOVIC EASES INTO QATAR QUARTER-FINALS

**DOHA:** Novak Djokovic breezed through to the quarter-finals of the Qatar Open yesterday, losing just four games in a comprehensive defeat of Spain's Fernando Verdasco.

The World Number one triumphed 6-2, 6-2, in one hour nine minutes. It matched the score of his first round victory against Dustin Brown and means the Serb has spent just two hours on court in the first two rounds. "Both of the matches went very well," said the Serb immediately afterwards, adding he had put in a "very solid performance" yesterday.

Ominously for his rivals, Djokovic looked already to be getting back to his dominant form of 2015. In warmer temperatures experienced in Doha than in the rest of the week-around 20 degrees Celsius (68 Fahrenheit) — Djokovic controlled the match from the very beginning.

He first broke Verdasco's serve in the fourth game to 15 and was rarely troubled after that. The Serb squandered another break point just two games later but eventually closed out the set on Verdasco's serve to go one up in just 31 minutes.

Verdasco, the world number 49 who had beaten Djokovic four times in their 11 previous meetings, offered some resistance in the second set but only enough to delay the inevitable. The Spaniard, who may have been feeling the effects of his first round victory less than 24 hours before, missed two break opportunities in the second set and was made to pay.

Djokovic, was watched on by coach Boris Becker, the first winner of the Qatar Open back in 1993.

It is not yet known who Djokovic's third round opponent will be, but it was at that stage last year that he crashed out of the Qatar Open, losing to Croatia's Ivo Karlovic.

Rafael Nadal plays his second round match later yesterday, against Robin Haase of the Netherlands. Earlier Jeremy Chardy won an all-French clash beating compatriot Paul-Henri Mathieu 6-2, 6-4. — AFP



**DOHA:** Novak Djokovic of Serbia celebrates after winning against Spain's Fernando Verdasco during their tennis match in the Qatar Open tournament yesterday, in Doha. — AFP

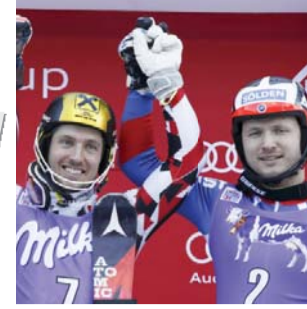




# Sports

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ALI BLASTS 'IRRESPONSIBLE' BLATTER AND PLATINI

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TURIN: Juventus' Alvaro Morata, center, jumps for the ball during a Serie A soccer match between Juventus and Verona at the Juventus stadium, in Turin, Italy, yesterday. — AP

## JUVENTUS CONTINUE RESURGENCE, FIORENTINA GO TOP

**ROME:** Champions Juventus continued their resurgence by beating Hellas Verona 3-0 at home yesterday for an eighth successive Serie A victory as Fiorentina provisionally went top of the table with a 3-1 win at Palermo. Juventus, who took one point from their opening three matches and were 11 behind the leaders on Oct. 31, are now third on 36 points after goals from Paulo Dybala, Leonardo Bonucci and Simone Zaza earned them a comfortable win.

Chasing a fifth consecutive Italian title, Juve are two points behind Fiorentina, who were helped to victory by two goals from Josip Illicic, and level with Inter Milan, who can return to the summit with a win at Empoli later yesterday. AS Roma's stuttering season

continued when they twice let a lead slip to draw 3-3 at Chievo, leaving them fifth on 33 points and increasing the pressure on coach Rudi Garcia.

Roma, who took the lead when teenage striker Sadiq Umar scored for the second game running in his first league start, have won one of their last nine games in all competitions and recently exited the Italian Cup to second-tier Spezia. Bologna's Emanuele Giaccherini scored in the 82nd minute to secure a surprise 1-0 win at AC Milan, while Frosinone and Sassuolo drew 2-2, Udinese defeated Atalanta 2-1 and Lazio's clash with Carpi finished goalless.

With Serie A returning from its winter break, Juventus continued where they left off in December.

The Turin side took the lead when Dybala scored his ninth league goal of the season, curling a fine free kick into the corner of the net in the eighth minute after Samuel Souprayen had brought down Stephan Lichtsteiner. Dybala was decisive again when his superb free kick was met emphatically by Bonucci in the 45th minute and Paul Pogba set up Zaza with eight minutes remaining to leave winless Verona bottom on eight points.

Roma's Umar had found the net as they ended a seven-game winless run against Genoa before the winter break and struck again in the seventh minute against Chievo. Alessandro Florenzi added a second 30 minutes later, but Chievo drew level with goals

from Alberto Paloschi and Dario Dainelli.

Roma's Iago Falque made it 3-2 with a low strike in the 71st minute, but the home side equalised again when goalline technology showed that Simone Pepe's effort had crossed the line.

Fiorentina's Illicic opened the scoring against Palermo in the 13th minute by knocking the ball between Edoardo Goldaniga's legs and finishing beneath Stefano Sorrentino. The midfielder added a sublime second in the 42nd minute, making space on the edge of the box before slamming home a curling effort. Alberto Gilardino halved the deficit in the 77th minute, but Jakub Blaszczykowski added a late third. — Reuters

## FORMER CHELSEA DOCTOR CARNEIRO ATTENDS TRIBUNAL

**LONDON:** Former Chelsea team doctor Eva Carneiro attended a tribunal hearing yesterday regarding her constructive dismissal case against the club.

Wearing a long, grey coat and holding hands with her husband, Carneiro made no comment to the media as she arrived for the hearing flanked by her legal team in Croydon, south London.

The preliminary hearing at London South Employment Tribunal is being held in private before an employment judge and will outline the timetable for the case.

Carneiro, 42, left Chelsea in September after being removed from first-team duties by manager Jose Mourinho, who was sacked by the Premier League champions last month.

Mourinho had rebuked her and physiotherapist Jon Fearn for running onto the pitch to treat Eden Hazard during his side's 2-2 draw with Swansea City on the season's opening day, which temporarily left Chelsea with nine men. Mourinho called Carneiro and Fearn "impulsive and naive", but the Premier League Doctors' Group said failure to treat Hazard would have been a breach

of their care of duty.

Yesterday's hearing will also address witness statements and the disclosure of documents from each side, as well as any legal disputes that may exist between them over procedural matters.

Reports suggest a date for a full hearing could be fixed for June, but the parties may agree to a settlement before the case is heard. Carneiro is also believed to have tabled a separate legal claim against Mourinho for alleged victimisation and discrimination. Mourinho was cleared by the Football Association of making discriminatory remarks to Carneiro.

But she complained that she had not been asked by the FA to make a statement about what had happened. "I was surprised to learn that the FA was allegedly investigating the incident of August 8 (the date of the Swansea game) via the press," Carneiro said. "I was at no stage requested by the FA to make a statement.

"I wonder whether this might be the only formal investigation in this country where the evidence of the individuals involved in the incident was not considered relevant." — AFP



LONDON: Former English Premier League Chelsea soccer team doctor Eva Carneiro with her husband Jason De Carteret arrives for an unfair dismissal hearing in south London, yesterday. — AP

## NEGREDO HAT-TRICK AS VALENCIA BEAT GRANADA

**VALENCIA:** Striker Alvaro Negredo scored a hat-trick, including two second half penalties, as Valencia thrashed Granada 4-0 in the first home leg of their King's Cup last 16 clash yesterday.

Negredo has been given a new lease of life under coach Gary Neville and the win was a confidence boost for Valencia who have yet to pick up a victory in La Liga under the former Manchester United and England player.

He robbed the ball off Diego Mainz and stroked it into the corner past keeper Ivan Kelava after seven minutes. Santi Mina laid the second on a plate for Rodrigo Moreno and then Mina was fouled by Uche Agbo with Negredo scoring the subsequent penalty after 62 minutes.

Negredo, the former Manchester City player who has had appendicitis and was frozen out by former-coach Nuno Espirito Santo, scored his third from the spot in the 83rd after he himself was fouled by Matheus Doria.

Second half goals from Inaki Williams, Aritz Aduriz and Aymeric Laporte earlier saw Athletic Bilbao come from behind to beat high-flying Villarreal 3-2. A confident Villarreal had won their previous five matches and went ahead through Leo Baptistao and Samu Garcia but Bilbao came back fighting after the break.

Baptistao slotted home clinically following a good team move after 16 minutes and Samu Castillejo then sent a defence splitting pass for Garcia, who rounded keeper Iago Herrerin and knocked the ball into an empty net.

Williams led the comeback with a 53rd minute strike, after being set up by Benat Etxebarria, and then found Aduriz to score from the centre of the penalty area. Laporte completed the turnaround by converting a Benat free-kick from a tight angle after 80 minutes.

A poor second half for Villarreal also saw the dismissal of Mario Gaspar with three minutes to go. Holders Barcelona face city rivals Espanyol later while La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid have a derby against Rayo Vallecano. Real Madrid were disqualified from the cup for fielding an ineligible player against Cadiz in the last round. — Reuters

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## FITBIT 'SMART FITNESS WATCH' DISAPPOINTS MARKET



SAKHIR: The sun sets behind an oil pump in the desert oil fields of Sakhir, Bahrain. Oil futures spiked briefly after Saudi Arabia cuts diplomatic ties with Iran, a development that could be seen as a threat to oil supplies. Investors quickly discounted those fears, however. — AP

# IRAN TRYING TO AVOID OIL PRICE WAR

## TEHRAN PLEDGES TO MODERATE EXPORTS

**NEW DELHI:** Iran wants to avoid an oil price war with rival producers and only gradually lift exports once sanctions against it are lifted, a senior official said, in what would be a major shift away from planning to ship as much fuel as soon as possible. Iran, which has some of the world's biggest petroleum reserves, has repeatedly urged fellow members within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to make room for a supply jump from the Islamic Republic, pledging to ramp up exports as soon as sanctions on its oil industry are lifted under a nuclear deal with world powers.

A move to limit export growth would be a major shift in Iran's policies in an environment when most OPEC and non-OPEC producers are fighting for market share despite a growing

global oil glut, which has already cut crude prices by two-thirds since 2014, hurting energy firms and oil exporting nations. "We don't want to start a sort of a price war," Mohsen Qamsari, director general for international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), told Reuters by telephone. "We will be more subtle in our approach and may gradually increase output," Qamsari said. "I have to say that there is no room to push prices down any further, given the level where they are."

He did not give any detail on how much Iran would be prepared to moderate a rise in its shipments but said Iran would not offer further discounts to lure customers.

Currently, Iran offers 90-day credit, free shipping and some discounts on crude prices to buyers in India. The more cautious

words from Iran come a week after relations with its main Middle East rival and top oil exporter Saudi Arabia broke down over the execution of a prominent Shiite cleric who was revered in Iran.

A more moderate re-entry into markets would suit Saudi Arabia and other Middle East OPEC members who are already locked into an aggressive fight for market share. On Tuesday, Saudi Arabia signaled that the new rift would not affect talks on the Syria civil war. Iran's most senior oil official, oil minister Bijan Zanganeh, said last weekend Iran would not seek to distort the markets but will make sure it regains its market share. Beyond only gradually lifting it exports, Qamsari said Iran wanted to invest into refining capacity to use its crude, but did not give details.

### Ballooning oversupply

Iranian crude oil exports have fallen to around 1 million barrels per day (bpd), down from a peak of almost 3 million bpd in 2011, before western sanctions against Tehran started. Iran previously said it planned to raise oil output by 500,000 bpd post-sanctions, and by another 500,000 bpd shortly after that. Even a gradual increase in its exports would come at a time of a global glut, with producers around the world pumping hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude every day in excess of demand.

Oil prices are near 11-year lows below \$37 per barrel and some analysts like Goldman Sachs say prices may tumble as low as \$20 a barrel as supplies keeps rising. To sell additional barrels but avoid adding to ballooning oversupply, NIOC is looking at buying stakes in existing and new refineries over-

seas, Qamsari said, without specifying countries or companies. Using its crude in refineries instead of selling it into the market unprocessed would be similar move to other Gulf producers such as Saudi Arabia, although Iran's challenge would be to raise financing as its existing overseas oil sale revenues are frozen as part of the sanctions. Refiners in India, Iran's second biggest oil client after China, owe almost \$6 billion to Tehran. Qamsari said Indian refiners including Reliance Industries, which has halted imports of Iranian oil because of the sanctions, were interested in taking higher volumes from NIOC. Indian refiners were interested in buying West Karun grade, a blend of oil from 4-5 reservoirs, he said. Sanctions have crippled Iran's economy and forced it to resort to gasoline imports, and Qamsari said Tehran hoped to halt gasoline imports within a year, post sanctions. — Reuters

## SAUDI TO SAVE \$7 BILLION FROM ENERGY REFORMS

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia is expected to save \$7 billion a year after it introduced unprecedented energy price rises in a bid to offset the low cost of oil, a report said yesterday. Jadwa Investment said direct savings from the kingdom's price hike on diesel are estimated at \$2.75 billion (2.56 billion euros), and gasoline levies are expected to save an additional \$2.5 billion. The rest of the savings will come from price rises on natural gas, fuel oil and propane, it added. The total cost of energy subsidies in the world's top oil exporter was estimated at \$61 billion last year. Indirect costs include the impact on the environment, road accidents and overconsumption because of cheap prices.

Saudi Arabia posted a record budget deficit of \$98 billion in 2015, 15 percent of GDP, and is projecting a shortfall of \$87 billion this year. It posted an \$18 billion deficit in 2014. Last month, the OPEC heavyweight raised the price of gasoline, diesel, crude oil, ethane, natural gas, fuel oil and electricity by up to 80 percent. The Fitch ratings agency said yesterday that Saudi Arabia's 2016 budget contained significant reforms and followed key expenditure restraints during the second half of 2015.

"The lower-than-expected 2015 deficit mainly reflects measures to contain spending introduced during the year-including

greater scrutiny" of capital spending, Fitch said. The International Monetary Fund and other agencies had forecast the Saudi budget deficit last year to be as much as \$130 billion.

Saudi Arabia normally overspends its budget projections. Fitch said last year saw the lowest overspend since 1999 at just 13.4 percent, compared with a 10-year average of 24 percent.

"Without the one-off cost of royal decrees after the accession of King Salman and additional military and security spending... spending would have been almost on budget," the agency said.

Revenues in 2015 dropped to \$162 billion, the lowest since the global financial crisis in 2009, due to a massive \$123 billion fall in oil revenues. The contribution of oil income to revenues dropped to just 73 percent in 2015, from an average of 90 percent in the past decade. To finance the budget, the Saudi government withdrew from its huge fiscal reserves and issued bonds on the domestic market. Reserves dropped from \$732 billion at the end of 2014 to \$632 billion in November. The kingdom is estimated to have issued domestic bonds worth around \$30 billion since July, raising public debt to \$38 billion, or 5.8 percent of GDP, Jadwa said. — AFP

## VOLKSWAGEN LAUNCHES 'SMART' ELECTRIC REVAMP OF MINIVAN

**LAS VEGAS:** Meet the revamped Volkswagen Kombi. Once a hippie favorite, the minivan has been transformed into an electric, connected vehicle of the future. BUDD-e, unveiled late Tuesday in Las Vegas, is "a new concept for long-distance electric vehicles," explained VW brand chief Herbert Diess on the eve of the official opening of the Consumer Electronics Show. The electric minivan is rather modern but clearly a nod to that symbol of the hippie movement of the 60s and 70s-and idol of surfers and families-known as the Kombi or Bulli.

Volkswagen officially stopped production of the microbus about two years ago. The new version is filled with technology that makes it "intelligent" and "social" with a new electronic interface that is both intuitive and interactive. "Door handles are so 2016," Diess proclaimed, as he noted how the model responds to verbal commands or gestures. BUDD-e can also communicate with connected devices at home.

So you can check from the comfort of your van if there's enough beer left in the fridge before inviting friends over to watch a soccer match or to see who's come knocking at your door to let them in or ward them off. It's also based on the future modular production platform for VW electric vehicles, with a more efficient battery that is located under the floor. It charges up to 80 percent in just 30 minutes and can travel up to 373 miles (600 kilometers) on a full charge-equivalent to today's



NEVADA: Attendees look at Volkswagen's BUDD-e, a long distance electric vehicle, displayed during a press event at CES 2016 at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas on January 5, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

average car running on a full tank. Although it's just a prototype for now, "BUDD-e could be a reality by the end of the decade," Diess said.

### 'Smartphone on wheels'

The auto group also presented a second electric prototype, the e-Golf touch, which is due to hit the market within a year, according to VW's Volkmar Tanneberger. He called it a "smartphone on wheels," with verbal com-

mands and gestures replacing buttons, which has a new generation of infotainment systems and is compatible with almost any smartphone, and can also be charged wirelessly. You can also use a smartwatch to unlock the car, turn on the heat or air conditioning from a distance while the vehicle is still charging, or receiving notifications when someone else-say a teen-is driving the car and is driving too fast or exiting a predefined zone. — AFP



# US AUTO SALES SCORE NEW HIGH

**CHICAGO:** US auto sales touched a new high in 2015 as easy credit, hot new vehicles and strong consumer confidence pushed sales slightly above the record set

in 2000, industry data showed Tuesday. Some 17.47 million vehicles were sold in the United States last year, nearly 70,000 more than the record set 15 years earlier,

according to Autodata. Sales were up six percent from the 16.52 million vehicles registered in 2014.

The boom comes after sales collapsed to lows not seen in decades in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis which knocked General Motors and Chrysler into bankruptcy. That downturn accelerated much-needed restructuring at the Detroit Three carmakers, which began racking in record profits when the economy improved and sales started climbing again.

The good times are expected to keep on rolling in 2016. "The US economy continues to expand and the most important factors that drive demand for new vehicles are in place, so we expect to see a second consecutive year of record industry sales in 2016," said Mustafa Mohatarem, GM's chief economist. "The single most important pieces are the ongoing gains in employment and the growth in personal income. When you add in lower energy prices, it's easy to see why consumer spending is strong." Total industry sales rose nine percent in December, to 1.64 million vehicles, according to Autodata. The results come days before carmakers are set to reveal a host of new products at the Detroit auto show, where the mood is expected to be exuberant.

"It's truly remarkable that the auto industry is finishing off its best year ever just six years after the depths of the Great Recession," said Jessica Caldwell, an analyst with the automotive website Edmunds.com. While easy credit terms and low gas prices are making it easier for consumers to buy or lease new cars, Caldwell said the attractiveness of product offerings is sealing the deal. "If you're buying a new car today, you're getting a safer, more fuel-efficient and more technologically packed vehicle than ever before," she said in a statement. "Automakers are doing a great job giving the people what they want in a new car."

#### VW sales hit by scandal

Nearly every major carmaker shared in the gains. But embattled German automaker Volkswagen bucked the trend as sales were hit by a massive pollution-cheating scandal. VW sales fell nine percent to 30,956 in December and were down five percent in 2015 at 349,400 vehicles. The results were nonetheless better than the 25 percent drop registered in November after VW stopped selling diesel-engine vehicles shown to have been equipped for years with software that intentionally subverted clean-air regulations.

"As we look towards 2016, we are committed to rebuilding trust in the brand and would like to thank our customers and dealers for their continued patience and loyalty," said Mark McNabb, chief operating officer for Volkswagen of America. GM sales rose six percent in December to 290,230 vehicles while total 2015 sales for the largest US automaker were up five percent at 3.1 million vehicles. Ford sales were up eight percent in December at 239,242 and rose five percent in 2015 to 2.6 million vehicles. Fiat Chrysler sales jumped 13 percent in December to 217,527 while 2015 sales were up seven percent at 2.2 million vehicles.

Toyota sales increased 11 percent in December to 238,350 and were up five percent in 2015 at 2.5 million. Both of the Japanese automaker's brands—Toyota and Lexus—posted record-breaking December sales while its Corolla, RAV4 and Highlander vehicles smashed records for the year. "2015 was a standout year for the auto industry," Bill Fay, general manager for the Toyota division, said in a statement. Honda sales rose 10 percent in December to 150,893 and were up three percent for the year at 1.5 million. Nissan posted an eight percent gain in December at 139,300 while its 2015 sales rose seven percent to 1.4 million.—AFP



**FLORIDA:** A 2015 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 4WD LTZ Crew Cab pickup truck is on display at Miami Lakes AutoMall in Miami Lakes, Fla. Automakers reported December and full-year sales on Tuesday, Jan 5, 2016. —AP

## News

in brief

#### Saudi Electricity signs \$1.4 billion 3-yr loan with banks

**DUBAI:** Saudi Electricity Co (SEC), the Gulf's largest utility firm, said yesterday it had signed an agreement for a \$1.4 billion loan with seven international banks to be used as a back-up credit facility. The facility has a lifespan of three years and was provided by Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Mizuho Bank, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, HSBC, JP Morgan, Credit Agricole and Deutsche Bank. On Dec 16, SEC said it signed an agreement for a reserve credit facility worth up to 2.5 billion riyals (\$666.1 million) with National Commercial Bank and Samba Financial Group. The transaction announced yesterday brings the company's total revolving facilities to a value of 7.75 billion riyals, the statement added.

#### Euro-zone economy set for robust year

**LONDON:** The 19-country euro-zone's economy is poised for a year of "robust expansion" following its best quarterly performance in 4 1/2 years, a closely watched survey indicated yesterday. Financial information company Markit said its purchasing managers' index - a measure of activity across the manufacturing and services sectors - rose to a four-month high of 54.3 points in December from 54.2 the previous month. That monthly growth rounded off the best quarterly performance since the middle of 2011, according to Markit. "The euro-zone economy starts 2016 on a solid footing and well placed to enjoy a year of robust expansion," Markit's chief economist Chris Williamson said. Despite the findings, Williamson said the euro-zone economy is still not running on all cylinders. Overall growth in 2015 is only expected to be around 1.5 percent and France, Europe's second-largest economy, continues to lag. In December, France barely grew at all - its PMI survey reading was 50.1, just ahead of the 50 threshold that marks expansion and contraction. "Germany, Italy, Spain and Ireland are all enjoying strong expansions, but France is showing signs of stalling once again," he said.

#### Malaysia Airlines does U-turn on suitcase ban

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Less than 24 hours after telling Europe-bound passengers they were not allowed to take check-in baggage because of "unseasonably strong headwinds", Malaysian Airlines did a sudden U-turn yesterday. The troubled carrier, whose MH370 flight went missing in 2014 on its way to Beijing and has still not been found, had said it was limiting baggage to reduce weight. It cited concerns about its planes being able to carry enough fuel as they had to fly a longer and different route due to its own "risk assessment" and handle strong headwinds "in excess of 200 knots". The airline did not specify what the risk specifically was. Economy class passengers flying from Kuala Lumpur to London, Paris and Amsterdam would only be allowed to take one small piece of hand luggage with them, the company announced on Tuesday. Those in business class could carry two. Suitcases could be checked in on other flights, but would arrive much later than their owners, the company had said. The move was blasted as "ludicrous" and "strange" by industry analysts. But in a sudden about-face on Wednesday, Malaysia Airlines ditched its baggage rules and said passengers could carry the normal amount of luggage.

#### China sets yuan currency level near five-year low

**SHANGHAI:** China's central bank yesterday set the value of the yuan currency against the US dollar at its lowest since April 2011, according to the national foreign exchange market, raising worries over the health of the world's second-largest economy. The People's Bank of China (PBoC) set the daily reference rate at 6.5314 to \$1.0 yesterday, down by 0.22 percent from the previous day, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. It was its weakest for nearly five years. The move marked the seventh session the PBoC has weakened the yuan, reviving concerns over a shock devaluation of the currency in August, when it guided the unit down nearly five percent in a week. "Market forces are exerting strong pressure on the yuan to depreciate against the US dollar," senior international economist for PNC Financial Services Group, Bill Adams, said in a research note yesterday. "Chinese economic growth is weak, Chinese foreign trade is contracting, the PBoC has cut interest rates six times since November 2014, US interest rates are rising and capital is flowing out of China," he said. At 4:30 pm (0830 GMT), the onshore yuan was quoted at 6.5575 to \$1.0, down 0.58 percent from the same time on Tuesday.



**DENPASAR:** Tuna fish are loaded onto a truck at Benoa harbour in Denpasar on Bali island yesterday. Indonesian President Joko Widodo has unveiled a series of stimulus measures to lift slowing growth in South-East Asia's top economy and shore up the country's plunging currency. —AFP

## BRITAIN SERVICES GROWTH SLOWS, POINTING TO A SOFT END TO 2015

EU VOTE, SPENDING CUTS AND HIGHER RATES ARE 2016 RISKS

**LONDON:** Growth in Britain's dominant services industry slowed slightly in December, suggesting the economy expanded only modestly ahead of a new year in which it faces significant risks, a closely watched survey showed yesterday. British economic growth slid to its joint-weakest in nearly three years in the three months to September, and financial data company Markit said its December survey of purchasing managers pointed to only a marginally faster expansion in late 2015.

The Markit/CIPS UK services purchasing managers' index edged down to 55.5 last month from 55.9 in November, broadly in line with economists' forecasts in a Reuters poll, while a broader composite measure dipped to a three-month low. Markit lowered its estimate of fourth-quarter GDP growth to 0.5 percent from 0.6 percent a month ago, which compares with a sub-par 0.4 percent recorded in the

third quarter of 2015. "The relapse in the services PMI adds to evidence showing the recovery lost further momentum towards the end of 2015," Pantheon Macroeconomics chief UK economist Samuel Tombs said. Financial markets showed little reaction to the news, which left Britain still in a better position than most of its euro zone peers. Despite recent downward revisions to its growth numbers for 2015, Britain is expected to have headed the pack of major economies. But it has relied heavily on the services industry for growth, frustrating hopes for a more balanced recovery.

"The services sector remained the key driver of the UK's economic upturn ... (but) a rosy outlook is by no means assured," Markit's chief UK economist Chris Williamson said. A solid measure of new business was offset by the weakest pace of job creation in the sector since July, while long-term expectations for business activity among firms were the low-

est since 2013. Williamson said factors such as government spending cuts, a potential interest rate hike, uncertainty about the global economy and the prospect of a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union posed "significant downside risks" to economic growth this year.

The Bank of England is expected to raise interest rates in the second quarter of 2016, according to a Reuters poll of economists. But with inflation close to zero and earnings growth sluggish, it may find this difficult and financial markets only price in a move around the end of the year. Input prices and prices charged rose marginally in December, the PMI survey showed, but were both below long-run averages. Separate figures from the British Retail Consortium, also released on Wednesday, showed shop prices in December were 2.0 percent lower than a year earlier, almost matching November's joint-record 2.1 percent decline.—Reuters

## US MANUFACTURING SLOWDOWN STOKES FEARS ABOUT OIL DEMAND

**LONDON:** Growing signs of weakness in the US economy are helping keep oil prices under pressure even as tensions escalate across North Africa and the Middle East. US manufacturers reported business activity contracted for the second month running in December, according to the Institute of Supply Management (ISM). The ISM's composite manufacturing index was below 50 in both November and December 2015 for the first time since November 2012 and before that July 2009.

The Institute contacts around 300 purchasing managers each month to enquire about changes at their firms in production, new orders, employment, inventories and the speed of supplier deliveries. The results are used to produce the purchasing managers' index. In the past, index readings below 50 have generally been

associated with a contraction in manufacturing activity (<http://tmsnrt.rs/1Rhzgry>). The index is strongly cyclical and not every slowdown heralds an economic recession (not least because manufacturing now accounts for less than 15 percent of GDP).

But US manufacturers have reported slowing growth since the middle of 2015 which turned into an outright contraction towards the end of the year. The drop in the index is consistent with other indicators pointing to a pronounced slowdown in manufacturing activity in the second half of 2015. Freight movements by road, rail, barge and pipeline have been flat for the past year, ending five years of strong growth, according to the US Bureau of Transportation Statistics (<http://tmsnrt.rs/1R6Wct7>). —Reuters



**VIRGINIA:** A car pulls up to a Shell Gas Station in Woodbridge, Virginia. Oil prices fell further January 5 as the crude supply glut overshadowed a diplomatic row between key producers Saudi Arabia and Iran as fuel prices in the US have fallen below \$2 per gallon. —AFP

STOCKS HIT BY CHINA WORRIES, NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TEST

MSCI WORLD SHARE INDEX DOWN FOR 5TH DAY AS ASIA, EUROPE SLIDES

LONDON: World stocks fell for a fifth day yesterday as China fuelled fears about its economy by allowing the yuan to weaken further and a nuclear test by North Korea added to a growing list of geopolitical worries.

Souring sentiment toward riskier assets in turn lifted safe-havens such as the Japanese yen, US Treasuries, German Bunds and gold, while the pressure was firmly back on oil as both Brent and WTI fell \$2 to near \$35.50 a barrel.

Alvin Tan said. "The CNH (offshore yuan) is down 2 percent since New Year's Eve ... if they allow this to continue this has very serious repercussions for global markets."

Traders and economists fear the yuan's depreciation may mean the world's second-biggest economy is even weaker than had been expected and that it could trigger another wave of competitive devaluations around Asia and in other key economies.

There was more gloomy Chinese econom-

ic data to digest, too, with a PMI survey showing services sector activity expanded at its slowest rate in 17 months in December. State Chinese media meanwhile reported that a selling ban on major shareholders brought in to help arrest a market crash last summer would remain in place until the government publishes new rules on such disposals.

They were among very few risers, however, as North Korea's announcement that it had successfully conducted a test of a hydrogen nuclear device added to geopolitical worries stirred by a row between Saudi

Arabia and Iran. South Korea's KOSPI and the won both fell and Japan's Nikkei extended losses to close down 1 percent. In Europe, a 2.5 percent fall in mining and natural resource stocks left the FTSEurofirst 300 0.7 percent lower at 1,400. Another PMI showed growth in Britain's dominant services sector slowed slightly in December, suggesting one of Europe's best performing economies over the last couple of years expanded only modestly in the final part of 2015.

Oil pressure

The mood was similarly cautious in currency and bond markets, with the yuan's accelerated fall dragging down other emerging currencies like the Malaysian ringgit and Thai baht. The dollar touched a near three-month low of 118.35 yen while euro slid to a nine-month trough of 127.465 yen and dipped to \$1.0720 as a top European Central Bank policymaker reiterated its willingness to keep printing money. That

also helped push yields on German 10-year Bunds to their lowest since the ECB's last meeting in December, which delivered less in terms of policy stimulus than most traders had been expecting. The 10-year US Treasury yield fell by about 3 basis points to 2.22 percent.

"European government bond markets are enjoying a (balanced) environment, with sliding inflation expectations augmenting the lingering emerging market concerns," Commerzbank rate strategist Michael Leister said. Adding to the risk-off mood, crude oil prices hit new 11-year lows as the face-off between Saudi Arabia and Iran over Riyadh's execution of a Shiite cleric was seen extinguishing any chance of major producers cooperating to cut production.



SINGAPORE: A vessel docks along the bay at the container terminal port in Singapore yesterday. Singapore's trade-dependent economy grew by an estimated 2.1 percent in 2015, its worst performance since the 2009 recession, as global demand for Asian exports slumped, official data showed on January 4. — AFP

OIL HITS 11-YEAR LOW

LONDON: Oil prices hit their lowest in over 11 years yesterday, as the row between Saudi Arabia and Iran was seen making any cooperation between major exporters to cut output even more unlikely. Evidence of slowing economic growth in China and India has fuelled fears that even strong demand elsewhere may not be enough to mop up the excess crude that has resulted from near-record production over the last year.

The furor over Saudi Arabia's execution of a Shiite cleric has stripped nearly 8 percent off the price of oil in the last three trading days alone and has killed speculation that OPEC members might agree on production cuts to lift prices. "There are rising stockpiles and the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia make any deal on production unlikely," said Michael Hewson, head of strategy at CMC Markets.

Benchmark Brent crude futures were at \$35.07 a barrel at 11:20 GMT, down \$1.35 on the day, and at their lowest since early July 2004, having staged their largest one-day drop in percentage terms in nearly five weeks. US crude futures were down 88 cents at \$35.09 a barrel after already slipping 79 cents the previous day. Oil has slumped from above \$115 in June 2014 as shale oil from the United States has flooded the market, while falling prices have prompted some producers to pump even harder to compensate for lower

revenues and to keep market share. Adding to this oversupply, Iranian oil exports are widely expected to increase in 2016 as Western sanctions against Tehran for its alleged nuclear weapons program are likely to be lifted. "Shale production and increasing capacity from countries like Russia who need to protect revenue combined with expectations of further Iranian supply mean actual production as well as expectations of future production are rising," Hewson said. Still, a senior Iranian oil official said the country could moderate oil export increases once the sanctions are lifted to avoid putting prices under further pressure.

Also feeding into broad market weakness, a survey showed that China's services sector expanded at its slowest pace in 17 months in December, following on from weak factory data on Monday which also knocked markets globally. The People's Bank of China set a weaker midpoint for the yuan, prompting concerns that the economy of the world's largest energy consumer could be in worse shape than believed. In the United States, concerns over mounting oil stock levels persisted, with crude inventories likely to have risen by 439,000 barrels last week, according to a Reuters poll of eight analysts. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) will publish its closely watched weekly data at 15:30 GMT. — Reuters

GOLD EXTENDS GAINS

LONDON: Gold hit a four-week high yesterday, extending gains for a third session, as persistent concerns over the Chinese economy battered stock markets, while tensions simmered in the Korean peninsula and the Middle East. The metal is closing in on key chart levels, including the December high at \$1,088.70. A push above \$1,088 would indicate that gold may have bottomed out for now after twice rebounding from the \$1,045 area in December, technical analysts said. Spot gold was up 0.6 percent at \$1,083.76 an ounce at 10:47 GMT, while US gold futures for February delivery were up \$5.10 an ounce at \$1,083.50. Earlier it reached its highest since Dec 7 at \$1,085.60.

"Some risk aversion prompting safe haven flows has helped gold to stabilize and now test resistance," Societe Generale analyst Robin Bhar said. "Physical demand has been pretty strong at the lower levels." "As we go higher, we could see some of that physical demand beginning to slow. Now we need investors to jump back in and look to hedge some of the uncertainties over global growth, over China, with positioning in gold." World stocks fell for a fifth day yesterday as China fuelled fears about its economy by allowing the yuan

to weaken further, and a nuclear test by North Korea added to a growing list of political worries.

North Korea said it successfully tested a miniaturized hydrogen nuclear device yesterday, setting off alarm bells in Japan and South Korea. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran collapsed over the weekend after the Kingdom's execution of a Shiite cleric, a prominent critic of Saudi policy, set off a storm of protests in Tehran. "The metals are likely to continue to take direction from moves in equities, developments in China, US dollar swings and to a lesser extent geopolitical factors in the short term," MKS said in a note yesterday.

Traders will examine the minutes of the Federal Reserve's last meeting when they are released later for clues about the US central bank's plans for interest rate hikes. Gold fell 10 percent last year on fears higher US rates would lift the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding bullion. The Fed raised rates for the first time in nearly a decade last month and is expected to hike rates further this year. Silver was up 0.3 percent at \$13.98 an ounce, while platinum was down 0.3 percent at \$883.75 an ounce and palladium was down 1.4 percent at \$529.40 an ounce. — Reuters

Table with multiple sections: Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report, Weednesday 06 January 2016, Index, Price Index, Weighted Index, KSX 15, Trades, and various stock listings with columns for Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, and Change.











## FIVE HEALTH INSURANCE RESOLUTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR 2016

Health insurance may not be the sexiest New Year's resolutions subject, but thinking about it could be just as important as vowing to drop a few pounds or quit smoking. The cost of health care rises every year and coverage has been shrinking, which leaves a greater portion of the doctor bill to patients. It could be very beneficial to your fiscal health in 2016 if you make a few promises to yourself.

### Get familiar with your coverage

Know the limits of your insurance before you start using it. No one wants to begin the year with a nasty case of sticker shock from a steeper-than-expected doctor's bill. The particulars of your plan may have changed compared with last year, and perhaps you missed the letter or email from your employer or insurer. An outpatient surgery that would have cost you \$700 last year might run more than \$900 this year if the plan increased your coinsurance responsibility, or the amount you have to pay after meeting a deductible. Your deductible also may have jumped, which means you might have to spend more this year before most of your coverage begins.

### Shop for care

Shopping for health care is the wave of the future. Many employers and insurers are convinced that health care costs can be controlled better if providers are forced to compete for your business. Insurers are providing online tools that let patients compare prices and quality measurements for a wide range of non-emergency care. Doing that could save hundreds of dollars on an outpatient procedure for people with high-deductible plans. But you don't need an app or some online tool to shop for all care. Drugstores and grocers have been squeezing clinics into their store spaces for years. The world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, also has been developing in-store clinics that charge \$59 per office visit. That's much cheaper than the \$100 a patient with high-deductible coverage might pay for a doctor visit. The cost of an office visit can vary depending on factors like where the doctor is located. If you haven't met your deductible yet for the year, check with your insurer or the doctor's office to determine the cost of a visit before making an appointment.

Telemedicine is supposed to be all the rage in 2016, with big insurers like

UnitedHealth Group Inc expanding coverage and the drugstore chain Walgreens pushing a smartphone app that lets patients see a doctor without leaving home or work. Doctors have used video feeds and other technology for years to treat patients in rural areas or remote locations. But experts say growing smartphone use and customer demand are fueling a rapid expansion of telemedicine into everyday care. If you're worried about a high deductible, you might want to think about adding to your insurance coverage. Companies like Sun Life Financial offer accident coverage that will provide cash that helps cover costs left behind by shrinking insurance.

### Use it, don't lose it

This applies to flexible spending accounts, which employers provide to let their workers set aside income before taxes to cover health-related expenses. Resolve to use your entire balance before you lose it. Check with your employer on how that might happen. Some companies may require you to spend your money by the end of the year or give you a grace period into the new year. Many also allow you to carry over as much as \$500. These accounts can help pay for bandages, condoms or cough drops, among an array of eligible items, so think creatively if you need to spend a leftover balance. Those who can't spend down their accounts generally wind up forfeiting less than \$100, according to WageWorks Inc, which administers benefits accounts for employers.

### Learn deadlines

If you don't like your coverage, you can change it. But you have to know when the next chance will arrive. Employers hold open enrollment periods every year, generally in late fall for coverage that starts Jan 1. That's the main window in which people can adjust coverage, unless they have a life-changing event, like a marriage or the birth of a child. Likewise, coverage sold outside the employer-sponsored market also must be purchased largely during an open-enrollment window. For 2016 coverage, that window closes Jan 31. If you miss the open enrollment windows and have no coverage, consider a short-term or limited benefits plan. These can provide some protection from a big medical bill, but they generally offer skimpier coverage than what you can get through an employer. — AP

## BRAZIL CUTS VACCINE DOSES AS HEALTH SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Brazil has cut the number of doses for vaccinations given by the public health service to counter human papillomavirus (HPV) and pneumonia, as Latin America's largest economy looks to reduce health costs in the midst of a deep recession. In a statement late Tuesday, the Health Ministry said the changes were "routine" and would not alter the efficacy of the vaccinations but also noted the cost of the national program had risen 140 percent over the past five years.

In 2015, the cost of distributing nearly 300 million immunobiologics, such as vaccines, totaled 2.9 billion reais (\$720 million), the ministry said. Sources familiar with the matter said Brazil has been reducing imports of vaccines over the past year, resulting in

diminishing stocks. The ministry did not say how much money would be saved by reducing the number of doses.

Brazil's health system has been hit hard by falling government revenues. The state of Rio de Janeiro declared a state of emergency in December after it ran out of money to pay for equipment, supplies and salaries. Revenues for the state, which is Brazil's main petroleum oil hub, have been particularly hard hit by a slump in international petroleum prices. The health ministry said the doses for vaccination against HPV, a group of sexually transmitted viruses that can cause cancer, will be reduced to two from three. The doses for vaccines given to babies to fend off pneumonia will be cut to two, with a booster, from three and a booster. — Reuters



HOT SPRINGS, Arkansas: In this photo Glendon Bassett does a cardio workout at the Family YMCA. — AP photos

## MEDICARE IS CHANGING: WHAT'S NEW FOR BENEFICIARIES

**WASHINGTON:** Whether it's coverage for end-of-life counseling or an experimental payment scheme for common surgeries, Medicare in 2016 is undergoing some of the biggest changes in its 50 years. Grandma's Medicare usually just paid the bills as they came in. Today, the nation's flagship health-care program is seeking better ways to balance cost, quality and access. The effort could redefine the doctor-patient relationship, or it could end up a muddle of well-intentioned but unworkable government regulations. The changes have been building slowly, veiled in a fog of acronyms and bureaucratic jargon.

So far, the 2016 change getting the most attention is that Medicare will pay clinicians to counsel patients about options for care at the end of life. The voluntary counseling would have been authorized earlier by President Barack Obama's health care law but for the outcry fanned by former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, who charged it would lead to "death panels." Hastily dropped from the law, the personalized counseling has been rehabilitated through Medicare rules.

### Accountable Care Organizations

But experts who watch Medicare as the standards-setter for the health system are looking elsewhere in the program. They're paying attention to Medicare's attempts to remake the way medical care is delivered to patients, by fostering teamwork among clinicians, emphasizing timely preventive services and paying close attention to patients' transitions between hospital and home. Primary care doctors, the gatekeepers of health care, are the focus of much of Medicare's effort.

Patrick Conway, Medicare's chief medical officer, says that nearly 8 million beneficiaries - about 20 percent of those in traditional Medicare - are now in "Accountable Care Organizations." ACOs are recently introduced networks of doctors and hospitals that strive to deliver better quality care at lower cost.

"Five years ago there was minimal incentive to coordinate care," said Conway. "Physicians wanted to do well for their patients, but the financial incentives were completely aligned with volume." Under the ACO model, clinical networks get part of their reimbursement for meeting quality or cost targets. The jury's still out on their long-term impact. Still, a major expansion is planned for 2016, and beneficiaries for the first time will be able to pick an ACO. Currently they can opt out if they don't like it.

"We're all trying to understand where is that threshold when things will flip," said Kavita Patel, a Brookings Institution health policy expert who also practices as a primary care doctor. It could be like the switch from snail mail and interoffice memos to communicating via email, she says, but "I'm not sure we have reached critical mass."

Glendon Bassett, a retired chemical engineer, says he can vouch for the teamwork approach that Medicare is promoting. Earlier this year, a primary care team at SAMA Healthcare in El



HOT SPRINGS, Arkansas: Glendon Bassett visits with Tamara Hess-Adams team leader of the fitness center at the Family YMCA.

Dorado, Arkansas, prevented what Bassett feared would turn into an extended hospitalization. It started with a swollen leg.

### 'It was scary'

SAMA is part of Medicare's Comprehensive Primary Care Initiative, an experiment in seven regions of the country that involves nearly 400,000 beneficiaries and a much larger number of patients with other types of insurance. The insurers pay primary care practices a monthly fee for care coordination, and the practices also have the opportunity to share in any savings to Medicare. The primary-care teams at SAMA consist of a doctor, a nurse practitioner, three nurs-

es, and a care coordinator. The coordinator shepherds patients to avoid gaps in care. The nurses can be an early warning system for the doctor.

Bassett said he had a history of circulatory problems in his legs, but this was different. "It was scary," he said. "Within a week's time it turned from red to dark." He thought about the emergency room, but he got in right away to see the nurse practitioner working with Dr Gary Beville, his longtime physician. The nurse fetched other clinicians to look at Bassett's swollen right leg. He was immediately given antibiotics. And the doctor referred him to a cardiologist for an outpatient procedure that has since improved his circulation. While the medical treatment may have followed fairly standard protocols, Bassett believes the team approach prevented serious consequences. "If I hadn't seen the nurse practitioner when I did, I feel like I would have been in the hospital," he said. Bassett has since moved to Hot Springs, in another part of the state, but stays in touch. Medicare is weighing whether to expand the primary care model. Conway said more data is needed. Other notable changes coming in 2016:

### Hip and Knee Surgery

Joint replacements are the most common surgical procedure for Medicare beneficiaries. Starting in April, hospitals in 67 metro areas and communities will be responsible for managing the total cost of hip and knee replacements. The experiment covers a 90-day window from the initial doctor's visit, through surgery and rehabilitation. At stake for the hospitals are potential financial rewards and penalties.

Medicare's goal is to improve quality while lowering cost. But hospitals worry about financial consequences and advocates for patients say there's a potential to skimp on care. "What we are discovering with all this change is that trying to get to value over volume is very difficult to do," said Herb Kuhn, who heads the Missouri Hospital Association.

### Hospice Flexibility

Patients choosing Medicare's hospice benefit at the end of their lives have traditionally had to give up most curative care. Under Medicare's new Care Choices model, patients with a terminal illness will be able to receive hospice services without giving up treatment. A cancer patient could continue to get chemo, for example. Seventy hospices will start the experiment Jan 1, and another 70 will join in two years. — AP

# CLINIC PAGE



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## INDIAN EDUCATION EXHIBITION THIS WEEKEND AT CROWNE PLAZA

After the grand success of IIK EDU EXPO in March 2014 and January 2015, popular community portal IndiansinKuwait.com (IIK) announces a one of a kind Indian Education Exhibition "IIK EDU EXPO 2016" in Kuwait. The IIK Edu Expo will be held here for two days, 8th and 9th January 2016. The two day expo will be at Crowne Plaza, Al Afrah Ballroom, Farwaniya, Kuwait from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM.

The expo will give a good opportunity to the parents and students seeking admissions for higher education in India. Reputed residential schools, medical and engineering colleges, universities in India will be participating in the expo to showcase the latest educational opportunities available in India. This pioneering endeavor from IndiansinKuwait.com will be a one-stop destination that caters to the needs of young

expats in Kuwait. This will give students an opportunity to meet face-to-face with representatives from Indian Residential Schools, Universities and Institutions directly and ask them their burning questions, get advice on their applications and more. Career consultants from reputed universities will give free counseling to the students at the venue. There will be free seminars for students on various career opportunities on both the days

in the same hall by university professionals. In a unique opportunity, IIK offers the visitors to the expo a unique chance to win a Toshiba Notebook by pre-registering for the expo. Those who wish to attend the expo can pre-register their names at <http://www.indiansinkuwait.com/EduExpo2016/>. Pre-Registered lucky winner may win Toshiba Notebook at the end of the expo. Admission is free to the expo on both days, and it is

open to everyone. Platinum Sponsor of the event is Amity University, Diamond Sponsor is SRM University and Gold Sponsors are Acharya, Nitte University, Bits Pilani, Yenepoya University, Institute of Management Technology, Amal Jyothi College of Engineering, Manipal University and Sona College of Technology. This event is sponsored by High Sierra and organized by Lemonade International.



## BANGLADESH EMBASSY HOSTS 'BOOK FESTIVAL'

Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait celebrated a "Book Festival" and distributed text books of all classes of primary education in Bangladesh on 01 January 2016 among the Bangladeshi school-going children in Kuwait. Students of Class One to Class Five attended the distribution program of new and free text books at the Chancery. The

enthusiastic students and their guardians were very happy to receive the new books on the very first day of 2016. Earlier the text books were duly received by the Embassy from the concerned authority in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh has also been distributing free text books to the all primary and high school students in

Bangladesh since 2010. This year a massive total of 334 million copies of text books of classes from pre-school to Year-10 have been distributed among 44.9 million students all over Bangladesh. The day is a special day for school going students. The jovial students and their guardians participated in the joyous programs. The well-coordinated "Book Festival" ensures all

the students across Bangladesh to participate at their new academic classes with new sets of text books. As a part of the festive programs across Bangladesh the Embassy of Bangladesh in Kuwait also tried to share the similar sentiments among the school-going Bangladeshi students and their guardians living in Kuwait on the 1st of January 2016.



## CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR CELEBRATED AT IISM (KG)

IISM team of aesthetic teachers from KG organized Christmas and New Year celebrations for their tiny tots under the guidance of Nilofar Qazi, KG Head. The advent of winter season brings joy of Christmas which marks the birth of Jesus (PBUH) Christ followed by

the remarkable 'New Year'. At IISM KG atrium was decorated with gaiety and jubilation. The tiny tots of KG sang carols and performed a dance passionately. The bondless joy of celebrating the festivals was aptly visible on the faces of the tiny tots.

The occasion was graced by the presence of Director Malayil Moosa Koya, Principal FM Basheer Ahmed, Sr Vice Principal Narinder Kaur and Vice Principals. They blessed the students on this festive occasion and gave good wishes for a prosperous New Year.



## WINTER WEEKENDS AT THE SULTAN CENTER

Winter is here... The Sultan Center (TSC) celebrated the season by organizing various exciting activities and contests for children to enjoy which took place at TSC stores in Salmiya, Shaab and Sharq. Under the theme "Winter Greetings!" a special corner was decorated with snow princess and snowman to reflect the spirit of the season. Cookie decorations and give-aways for children made the events fun for the whole family.

To spice it up, TSC held a social media contest, where children took pictures with the snowman or snow princess, posted it on Instagram and had the chance to win exciting gifts. The events were held on December 25th and 26th, 2015 as well on January 1st and 2nd, 2016 giving TSC customers the chance to enjoy the celebration with their families and friends.



## Birthday Greetings

Happy birthday to our beloved Ibrahim Ismael Al-Shennawi. The very best wishes from all his family and friends.

## WHAT'S ON - SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All photos submitted for What's On should be minimum 200dpi. Articles must be in plain text and should include name and phone numbers. Articles and photos that fail to meet these requirements will not be published.

Please send them to [news@kuwaittimes.net](mailto:news@kuwaittimes.net)

## ALGHANIM INDUSTRIES JOINS JUDGING PANELS FOR STUDENT CAPSTONE PROJECTS AT AUM

Alghanim Industries, one of the largest private companies in the region, joined the judging panels for the Capstone Business Project Competition at the American University of the Middle East (AUM). Tom Hatton, Senior Director-Talent Management and Organizational Development, and Satish Kadkol, Manager-Kirby Post-Sales Engineering, were invited to join the judging panels, representing Alghanim Industries.

Tom was a judge for the Capstone Business Project Competition, in which 8 finalist groups presented an idea for a new company. The students prepared their business plan, covering

everything from financial analysis to a complete HR organizational structure. Satish was a judge for the Capstone Engineering Project Competition, which included 9 groups that had to come up with a new operational solution or process enhancement for an existing company. Each of the companies represented on the panel, including Alghanim Industries, will give one of the students from the winning team a month-long internship opportunity.

The presentations allowed students to showcase their creative, business driven ideas to a panel of well-respected executives from different companies. Alghanim Industries gives a special thanks to

AUM for the invitation and looks forward to long, prosperous collaborations on similar initiatives moving forward.

It is part of Alghanim Industries' strategy to find, encourage and educate future leaders about the company and provide them with the resources to make informative decisions related to their careers. In line with that strategy, Alghanim Industries participated in a number of events recently, namely the NUKS-USA conference in San Diego. Apart from NUKS, the biggest event gathering of Kuwaiti students outside of Kuwait, Alghanim Industries also took part in region-wide university career fairs.



## AL MULLA EXCHANGE PROVIDES A MUSICAL START TO THE NEW YEAR

Al Mulla Exchange provided a great opportunity for music lovers to journey back in time to the golden hits of India's man with the golden voice, Mohammed Rafi. The event titled 'Rafi Ki Ruhaniyat' was held on Jan 1 and 2, 2016, at the American International School, as a tribute to the legendary singer. The music show had capacity turnouts of more than 1,200 guests on both days.

Mohammed Rafi, who passed away at 56 in 1980, left behind a treasure trove of melodious songs which he sang during his illustrious career as one of Indian film industry's most famous playback singers. Rafi was notable for his versatility, his songs ranged from classical numbers to patriotic songs, sad lamentations to highly romantic numbers, qawwalis to ghazals and bhajans.

He was known for his ability to mold his voice to the persona of the actor, lip-synching the song. Between 1950 and 1970, Rafi was the most sought after singer in the Hindi film industry. He received six Filmfare Awards and one National Film Award. In

1967, he was honored with the Padma Shri award by the Government of India.

The tribute was showcased by Shrikant Narayan, famed playback singer who has got into The Limca Book of Records for his continuous rendition of Rafi songs. Touted as a singer whose voice is perfectly near to Rafi's, Shrikant was able to put the crowd into a rapturous mood of nostalgia. He was able to bring in the various moods of Rafi with his wide range of vocal prowess.

Al Mulla Exchange organized the music show to give their customers a melodious start to the New Year, in line with its tradition of providing the best promotions, offers and festivities to customers. On Jan 1, 2016, Al Mulla Exchange, also launched the Transfer and Win Gold Festival, which gives customers a chance to win 1 gm gold daily for 3 months and 1 kg gold grand prize at the end of the promotion.

Al Mulla Exchange's General Manager, Rakesh Joshi, said Mohammed Rafi is one of the legendary singers in India who has a large fan following even after 25 years of his death, not only in India but in many



parts of the world. "His songs are evergreen and people from all generations enjoy them, and we thought of giving our customers a chance to relive those golden memories from the yesteryears. We are happy to bring Shrikant Narayan to Kuwait for this and crowd's acceptance of the program is a testimony of our reach".



## KUWAIT CONTINENTAL HOTELS GROUP HOLDS ANNUAL CELEBRATION

The management of Kuwait Continental Hotels Co held the usual annual celebration of the hotels' staff and their families to strengthen the loyalty of them and to highlight their role in advancing & success the work during 2015.

The ceremony was held in Gardenia Hall of Kuwait Continental Hotel, the reception was

opened by the hotel General Manager, Kamal El-Din Hussein, who explained how the development and expansion witnessed by the Hotels Group during the past eighteen years.

Kamal Hussein thanked and honored Mr Abdu, Mrs Wessam, Mr Abu Al Khair, Mr Kumar and Mr Mushtaq and Mr Balu as Ideal Employers of year 2015 and also honored one

employer from each department of the hotel as their hard working.

Kamal Hussein thanked and commends the staff for their efforts during 2015 which was impact on the sales last year with 10% and average occupancy rate of over 75%, and sometimes in some group branches reaches the percentages of occupancy to 90% despite

stiff competition and the emergence of many new Hotels. Kamal Hussein also congratulate all the staff with the latest branch "New Born Branch" as he called, which joined latest the Hotels Group; it's "Continental Inn Suites". Before leaving staff to enjoy the ceremony, which included different Staff competition of the, great and exciting and wonderful games.

Kamal Hussein also honored the companies who shared to present gifts to the staff that also contributed to the success of the concert at the end of the ceremony, the General Manager, Kamal Hussein delivered the annual bonus; a month's salary for all staff of the Hotels Group which was ordered by Mr Fouad Al-Ghanim the CEO.

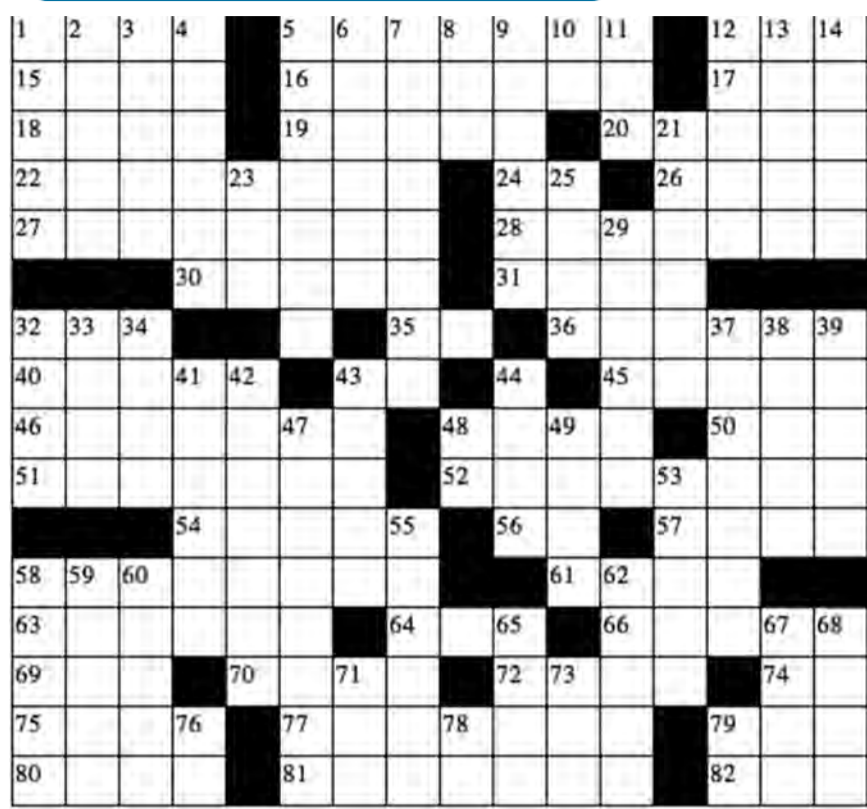








CROSSWORD 1130



ACROSS

1. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
5. Any of various evergreen plants of the genus *Pavonia* having white or yellow or purple flowers.
12. Inquire about.
15. Tear down so as to make flat with the ground.
16. Line of descent traced through the maternal side of the family.
17. A health resort near a spring or at the seaside.
18. In the Roman calendar.
19. The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
20. (Akkadian) Mother and earth goddess in Gilgamesh epic.
22. The area of the states of North Carolina and South Carolina.
24. Being ten more than one hundred ninety.
26. An elaborate song for solo voice.
27. Of or relating to the United States of America or its people or language or culture.
28. The god who fathered the islands and gods of Japan with his sister Izanami.
30. A living organism characterized by voluntary movement.
31. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
32. The month following March and preceding May.
35. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints).
36. English courtier (a favorite of Elizabeth I) who tried to colonize Virginia.
40. Fleshy spore-bearing inner mass of e.g. a puffball or stinkhorn.
45. Indigo bush.
46. A building having a circular plan and a dome.
50. Common black-and-gray Eurasian bird noted for thievery.
51. Type genus of the Adelgidae.
52. A medieval country in northern Europe that included regions now parts of northern France and Belgium and southwestern Netherlands.
54. Annoy continually or chronically.
56. An associate degree in nursing.
57. Any of several related languages of the Celts in Ireland and Scotland.
58. A swelling that is the characteristic lesion of tuberculosis.
61. An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
63. Someone who races the luge.
64. An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
66. Asian rat snakes.
69. A hotel providing overnight lodging for travelers.
70. A piece of dishware normally used as a container for holding or serving food.
72. The 11th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
74. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
75. Kamarupan languages spoken in northeastern India and western Burma.
77. Small genus of western African evergreen trees and shrubs bearing fleshy capsular three-seeded fruits edible when neither unripe nor overripe.
80. (Greek mythology) God of love.
81. The ball-shaped capsule containing the vertebrate eye.
82. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. Any plant of the genus *Erica*.
2. A woman of refinement.
3. A river in southeastern France.
4. Undergo resorption.
5. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
6. A genus of tropical American plants have sword-shaped leaves and a fleshy compound fruits composed of the fruits of several flowers (such as pineapples).
7. In a vacant manner.
8. (of securities) Not quoted on a stock exchange.
9. A B vitamin essential for the normal function of the nervous system and the gastrointestinal tract.
10. (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
11. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
12. Earlier a god.
13. Small branch or division of a branch.
14. An island of Hawaii northwest of Oahu.
21. A cyst on the underside of the tongue.
23. A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth.
25. A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
29. A port city in southwestern Iran.
33. Walk heavily and firmly, as when weary, or through mud.
34. A network of intersecting blood vessels or intersecting nerves or intersecting lymph vessels.
37. Advanced in years.
38. Wheelwork consisting of a connected set of rotating gears by which force is transmitted or motion or torque is changed.
39. The hole that an anchor rope passes through.
41. Having a bulb.
42. Marked by extreme anger.
43. A city in northwestern Switzerland.
44. Large genus of African trees bearing kola nuts.
47. Give a description of.
48. A radioactive transuranic element.
49. Having the slant of a bevel.
53. The event of dying or departure from life.
55. A technician who is highly proficient and enthusiastic about some technical field (especially computing).
59. Relating to or near the ulna.
60. A game in which numbered balls are drawn and random and players cover the corresponding numbers on their cards.
62. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
65. A Loloish language.
67. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
68. A island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
71. Marked by skill in deception.
73. Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
76. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
78. A unit of magnetomotive force equal to 0.7958 ampere-turns.
79. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today marks the advent of a good time as far as career and social life are concerned. A time of dues paying is over; real accomplishment is now possible. You present your ideas and show off your ability to express them to others. Information gained from one person and transferred to another person can be misconstrued. Refer others to the source of your information. This afternoon you may want to talk budget with a loved one. There will be an acceptable plan for future enjoyment. This could mean the purchase of a home, a vacation or future education for a young person. Consider a vacation where you can trade places with some friends or family that may be living outside of your state. Good manner and clear communications make this a winner.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You feel a love of order and law-an appreciation for responsibilities and duty. Problems and obstacles that have previously been confusing, should find easy explanation under your keen examination. Today is as if you have overcome some invisible obstacle and this is making you feel very powerful. You are very motivated to improve all areas of your life. You may be sitting with an elderly person this afternoon and find he or she lights up with interest when asked about some event of the past. This person will be pleased that you took the time to listen to what he or she has to say. This interest usually promotes a feeling that a person matters, which is a good thing. This communication may give you ideas for further plans to help with retired individuals.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You will be working on ways to improve your professional skills now. Pay attention to the details-you will be glad you did. Acting on impulse or instinct can lead to false starts-so count to ten before starting anything important. This is a time when you can put your businesslike ideas into words and convey them to others. Authority figures are paying attention to your communication skills. The way you handle yourself when someone needs advice is very important just now. The pursuit of success takes on a high priority. This is a successful day, with the realization that you have accomplished much, at work and in your life progress. There is a dreamy manner about you tonight and the young people in your home will enjoy your stories.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Ambition, practicality and achievement are admirable, but they are means to an end-not ends in themselves. Enjoy and appreciate the experiences that come your way. Many times you will find that just when you think you are right where you want to be, you will see new challenges to budge you into another direction. Others value your decision-making abilities and you will know how to proceed in matters concerning the public. Support and harmony are yours without asking. Any hot spots can be worked through by thinking before you act-patience will expel any arguments. You may want to check out the study of herbs-you have a natural tendency toward the medicinal and aromatic type of plants. The psychic realm is fascinating to you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You have a flair for presenting yourself in a positive and well-groomed manner-regardless of the stress you may be feeling at times. This first impression will serve you well in your communications with others. If you are feeling nervous and not quite up to a particular task-practice some of the breathing techniques that the yogi masters teach. If you do not know the techniques, you might consider taking a class or buying a book on the subject. This afternoon you are close to making a discovery that will help you to save your company many problems or financial responsibilities-keep your focus. You will be pleased by the results that your efforts bring forth. Working with your favorite hobby this evening will help you relax.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You and your co-worker friends may seek answers to some long-unanswered questions. Finding the answer to some of your questions will have you wondering where the time went. You meet your obligations automatically and display your flexible way of working your magic. You leave positive impressions with people. Your superiors are very happy with your work and your co-workers appreciate working with you. Your money problems could find some relief today. Dive into some form of art expression this afternoon-you will find this a great stress valve. The more you enjoy your creative side the more you will come to know your spiritual side. This evening is a great time to just sit back and enjoy what you have. Romance is possible.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today and tomorrow present opportunities to make extra money. This second job may eventually become your priority job. A conventional economic approach is the best way to start your family's income plan. You are motivated to use your creative mind today as you hear comments and are caught up in the passion of inventions, technology and creative expression as well. You may feel a sense of urgency in some of the projects that are presented to you. This afternoon you confirm appointments and schedule your time for the next few days. You may find that your job, or the motivation it creates, is more enjoyable than usual. Conversations with siblings could be confusing this evening. You might enjoy playing word games tonight.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is one of your better days for money. You are able to find successful ways to increase your income. Stay on the job and do not plan any trips, if possible, until later this month. As you introduce ideas of moneymaking to others, you will benefit as well. This could be through advising others toward their professional goals, investments, real estate, etc. If you are in real estate or if you want to sell your home, or perhaps a car, you will find a nibble becomes a commitment. Balance your social and business affairs so that your energies are not depleted. Neighbors or siblings have a big impact on your goals and make a big impression. If work has not been too exhausting today, this evening could be a wonderful time to interact with friends.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You have your own philosophy and may see the world through multicolored glasses. As a young person, you seemed to be empathetic of others and their emotional suffering. As an adult, you are extremely tolerant of humanity. You are optimistic and attract the love of audiences or groups of people. This may be a time when you find yourself creative in the arts. You are magnetic as your positive attitude captures the imagination. You have ideas that benefit humanitarian or charitable interests and counseling may occupy some of your time. You must be free to travel to places where you are needed, as you enjoy being needed. Medicine, welfare work and the arts are only a few of the areas that attract you.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

There is a drive for disciplined work today. It may be a bit difficult to concentrate from time to time, considering the celebrations that you know will come later this evening. This could be a challenging day but you are motivated. You will want to give all your attention over to whatever you are involved with just now. If you find yourself becoming distracted, take a little break... Walk a little for the exercise. New opportunities are on the horizon. Check out all ideas before you act and do not let the obvious opportunities pass you by without your investigation. Efficiency at work will finally end with an evening of play. You may think about the future and find that a friend will offer some wise advice. Enjoy your evening.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

There is much to be said about competition; however, in the place of business it may be better to compete with your own record than that of others. Unless a fair game has been indicated... Set your own pace. This could be a challenging day-keep the challenges on a level that is manageable. You can set an example for others to follow when you turn difficult situations into solutions that you or others can handle. This may mean you work with the public. A good conversation with those you love is possible this evening. You may have missed being outside lately but if weather permits, you and your family might bundle up and go on a discovery walk early in the evening. There could be some good surprises right around the block!



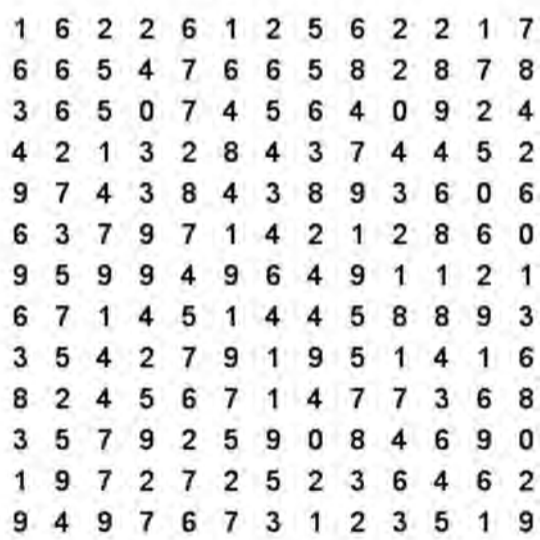
Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The workday is full of surprises and demands for quick decisions to be made. You do well in processing the information you get. Don't be afraid to ask questions-someone may be holding back information. You may have to do some reassessing and reevaluating with regard to priorities. Be careful not to overdo or overwork today and think about creating an opportunity to exercise. Others value you for your ability to make practical decisions concerning group issues. You could be solving some public-relations problems this afternoon. You have a natural sense of what the public wants at this time. Clear decisions affecting others could be made. You can create a peace of mind this evening and enjoy the company of a loved one as well.

WORD SEARCH

6 Digit Numbers

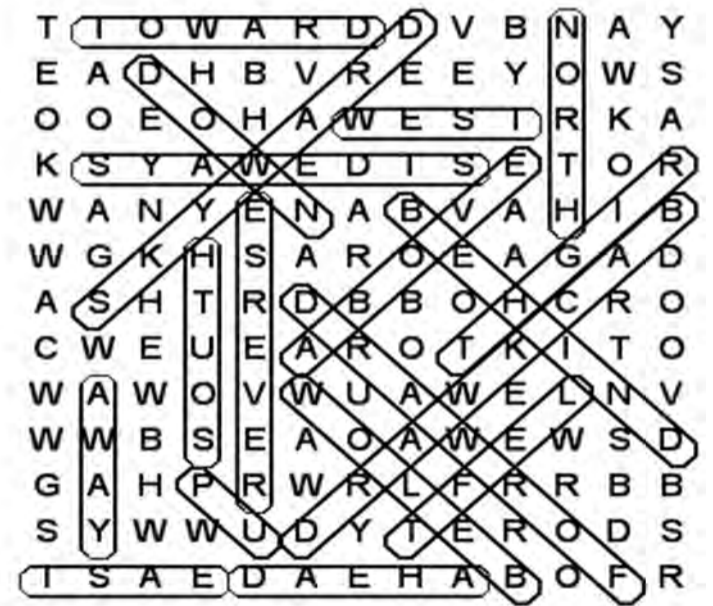
Find and circle all of the 6 Digit Numbers that are hidden in the grid. The numbers may be hidden in any direction.



- 106248 494114 564237
- 154259 496963 605271
- 162261 496974 653921
- 225479 532137 662735
- 236462 546183 751951
- 479158 563824 908469
- 489238

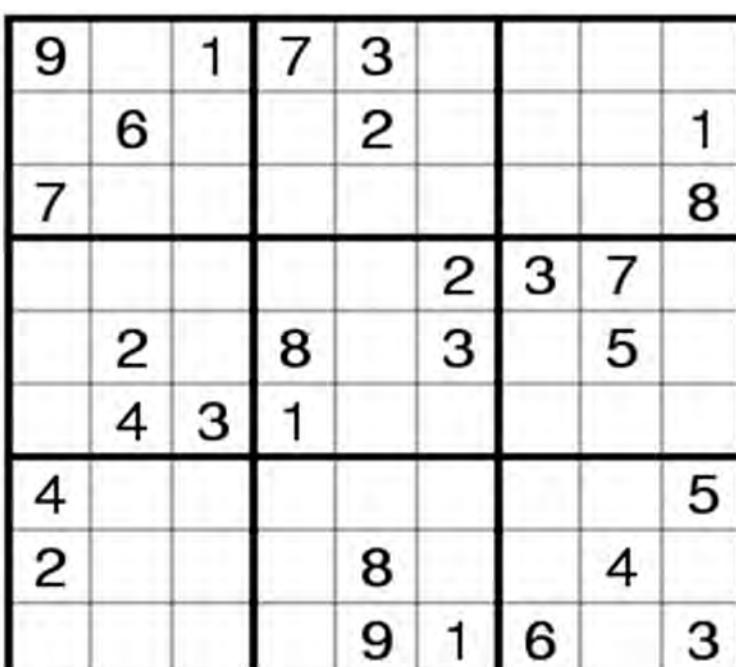
Yesterday Solution

Directions

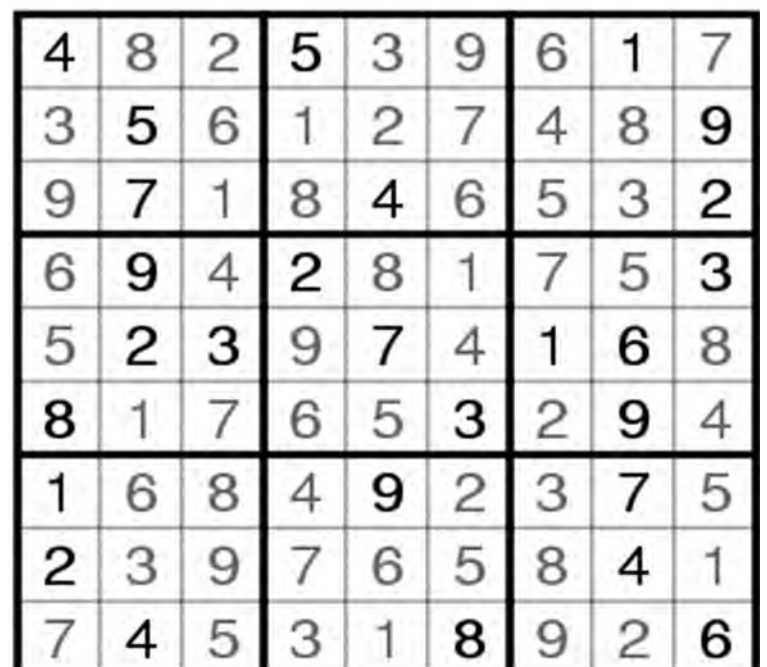


- ABOVE EAST SIDEWAYS
- AHEAD FORWARD SKYWARD
- AWAY LEFT SOUTH
- BACKWARD NORTH TOWARD
- BEHIND REVERSE UP
- BELOW RIGHT WEST
- DOWN

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



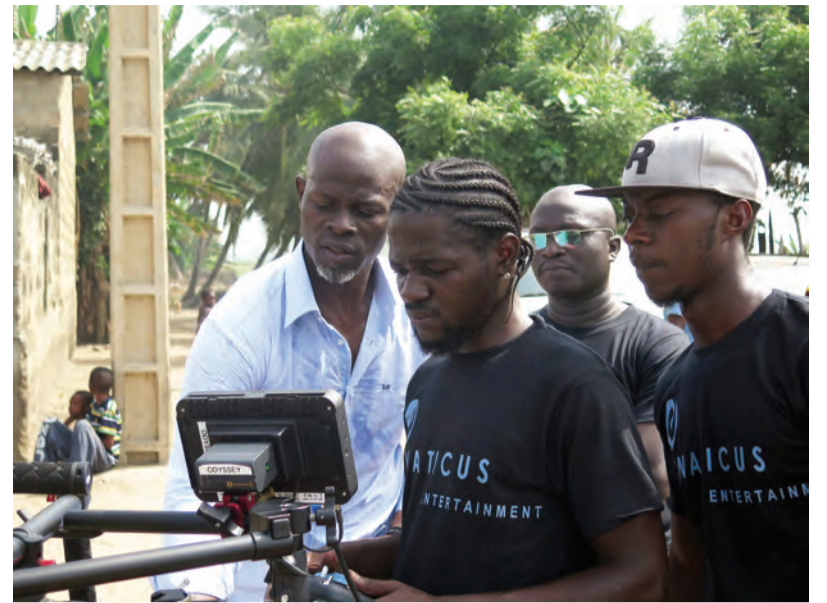




American-Beninese actor Djimon Hounsou (center) walking barefoot in procession with voodoo worshippers dressed in white robes through the dusty streets of the Heve village, near Come, southwest Benin, during a film shoot.



Voodoo worshippers walking barefoot in procession, dressed in white robes and draped with long strings of multicolored beads, through the dusty streets of the Heve village, near Come, southwest Benin, during a film shoot.



American-Beninese actor Djimon Hounsou (left) supervising the shooting of voodoo worshippers walking in procession through the streets of the Heve village. — AFP photos

## 'Blood Diamond' star returns to Benin to film 'true' voodoo

As the drumming rumbles on, Hollywood actor Djimon Hounsou walks shirtless with a voodoo procession making its way through the dusty streets of Heve in his native Benin. "I am like an African who has come home, who needs to know and learn about his culture," says Hounsou, who has starred in blockbusters like "Blood Diamond" alongside Leonardo DiCaprio and "Gladiator" with Russell Crowe. The American-Beninese actor is now making and starring in his own film documenting his quest to understand voodoo in this west African state where it was born, before history spread it overseas.

"The practices here are not bad and they aren't savage," says the tall 51-year-old with a shaved head and a salt-and-pepper goatee, decrying the negative image often depicted on the silver screen of back-alley sorcerers casting malicious spells. One classic is the 1973 James Bond film "Live and Let Die" where a Caribbean dictator uses voodoo to frighten and manipulate his island. But Hounsou says such images undermine the religion.

"That concept dates back to slavery. That is why we need to clarify what defines voodoo," Hounsou tells AFP, explaining that racism in the past is still perpetuating negative stereotypes about voodoo. In the village of Heve, which lies at the western edge of Benin's coastline, the people have long practiced voodoo, celebrating air god Dan and water god Mami Wata. As the worshippers file through the streets, resplendent in white robes and draped with multicolored beads, Hounsou's crew films everything.



A film crew following voodoo worshippers dressed in white robes and walking barefoot in a procession.

### Worshipping ancestors

By mid-morning, the heat in Benin, a country of more than 10 million people, is already intense. As technicians set up equipment in the town square, girls draw water from a tap. The village, with its devoted voodoo cult, was not chosen at random. "These spirits are very well preserved and people kept dedicating themselves truly to voodoo," explains priest David Koffi Aza, who practises F, a system of divination-and is work-

ing as a guide for Hounsou and his crew. "Imported religions didn't take hold so it's a purer practice." Spirits play a central role in voodoo, acting as a link between the living and the dead in a religion which is built upon the worship of both ancient ancestors and the four elements: earth, water, wind and fire.

In the wake of the slave trade, voodoo practices spread from west Africa to the West Indies, Brazil and the United States. According to the last census in 2002, 17 percent of Benin's pop-

ulation practices voodoo-an official religion in the country-while 27 percent are Catholic and 24 percent are Muslim. However, such figures mask the reality that many Beninese, whether they go to church or attend mosque, have voodoo shrines in their homes.

### 'A story badly told'

"After spending so much time in Europe and the US, seeing African diaspora traditions that resemble ours, I began to ask questions," says Hounsou, dabbling sweat off his brow. Working with Hounsou on his bid to document voodoo in Benin is co-director and star Sorious Samura, a well-known journalist from Sierra Leone. The two met nine years ago on the set of "Blood Diamond", a film that was based on Samura's documentary "Cry Freetown" which dealt with the civil war gripping his country. "Voodoo is a story that is very badly told, full of witchcraft, magic and evil-even Africans believe that," says Samura, adding that such ideas have been "buried deep in our psyche."

The two directors hope their film, entitled "In Search of Voodoo: Roots to Heaven", can help change that misconception. With less than a month until they finish shooting, Hounsou says they are not seeking to win converts. "Voodoo has existed for centuries. It doesn't force itself on you," he says. Shooting of the film is expected to finish on January 10, when a huge voodoo festival will be celebrated across the country. — AFP



Actress Ruby Rose poses for a portrait in Los Angeles. — AP

## Ruby Rose trades jailbird jumpsuit for designer denim

Now sought-after for her edgy, androgynous style, actress Ruby Rose initially struggled to find her niche. "When I first started in the industry back home in Australia at 18 there was a lot of push and shove as to how I should dress, if I was allowed to cut my hair short, if I had too many tattoos," said Rose in an interview Tuesday. "If I didn't get a campaign or if I didn't get a role, they would always come back to 'well she dresses like a boy!'"

Times have changed for the "Orange is the New Black" breakout star who recently swapped her Litchfield Prison uniform for distressed overalls and cutoff shorts as the face of Denim & Supply Ralph Lauren. Rose, who counts Vivienne Westwood, Annie Lennox and Madonna among her style icons, teamed with model Hailey Baldwin for the brand's latest social media and global ad campaign. She credits her hit Netflix series along with Amazon's "Transparent" for sparking a dialogue about gender identity and acceptance in the entertainment industry and beyond.

"People were waiting to start this conversation," said Rose. "Someone had to ignite it and once that happened, it was just a snowball effect where you had celebrities and all different people coming out and saying 'I'm gender fluid' or 'I'm transgender' and people feeling more comfortable in their skin." The 29-year-old also praised Louis Vuitton's latest womenswear campaign featuring actor-rapper Jaden Smith. "I mean he's so amazing but the reason that's so special is because that's how he dresses," said Rose. "It's not like they just went 'OK we're going to grab a guy that's popular, that people like, and we're going to put him in a dress.' It's not done in a tasteless way. It's just this is who he is." Though it has not yet been announced if her "Orange" character, Stella Carlin, will return for season four, Rose is busy with upcoming films including "John Wick 2" and "Resident Evil: The Final Chapter." "Acting is my life. It's what I live and breathe," said Rose. — AP

## Beauty company looking to help change red carpet chatter

Those in Hollywood looking to broaden the red carpet conversation beyond the inevitable "Who are you wearing?" have a powerful new ally: beauty giant L'Oreal Paris. The company is promoting use of the hashtag "WorthSaying" on Twitter during Sunday's Golden Globe Awards and will break out the best posts for use in digital advertising. Kristen Comings, a company vice president, said Tuesday the idea is to urge women everywhere to expand the red carpet chatter beyond pretty dresses.

"We really wanted to be part of that conversation," she said. "It's really about engaging beyond beauty and fashion to more substantive questions on the red carpet. These are amazing women who should be known for more than just a beautiful face. Many of the actresses become frustrated by those conversations." Brand ambassadors Julianne Moore, Karlie Kloss, Eva Longoria, Freida Pinto and Liya Kebede are among those who plan to participate. L'Oreal has been a broadcast sponsor of the Golden Globes for 13 years. The new hashtag is a play on the company's 40-year-old tagline, "Because You're Worth It." — AP



## Your eyes choose the cleansing expert

Applying makeup is a very important part of many women's daily routine. Here in this region especially, applying kohl is a strong Arabic tradition that goes back to Ancient Arabs, and remains an important part of women's make-up regime. However, removing stubborn eye makeup can irritate the skin, especially since some kohl and mascaras can require incessant rubbing to get it off due to oil or fat based ingredients that repel water.

NIVEA, the number one face cleansing brand, has the solution with its NIVEA Face Care Double Effect Eye Make-Up Remover that eliminates even the most resilient waterproof mascara with a gentle swipe while protecting the eye-area at the same time.

Suitable for all skin types, the NIVEA Double Effect Eye Make-Up Remover is also suitable for contact lens wearers. The oil phase, particularly extracted from sunflowers, effec-

tively removes even waterproof mascara and eye-make-up, while the aqueous phase protects and cares for the eye lashes with its caring formula, without leaving an oily residue. With an objective to unleash the secrets of Arabian beauty, NIVEA Face Care has partnered with Emirati make-up & skin care expert Asma Lootah.

As part of the campaign, Asma will help women learn the right cleansing and make-up techniques and reveal the secrets behind cleansed radiant skin. These are revealed in videos exclusively available on Nivea Middle East's website. NIVEA Double Effect Eye Make-Up Remover is the perfect addition to every woman's Arabian Beauty regimen! Available in leading supermarkets across the GCC, NIVEA Double Effect Eye Make-Up Remover is available at a price of Dhs 22.



The Nest pliable plastic earphone storage container has an inner spool that you wrap the cords around, and tuck the earbuds into the center. — AP photos



Photo shows the Nest pliable plastic earphone storage container.



In this photo provided by AsianFreckles, Lissan Loi's clever knitted golden snitch, inspired by the Harry Potter series, is a fun receptacle for earbuds.



In this photo Lissan Loi's clever knitted golden snitch.

## Products and ideas for tangle-free earbuds

Anyone who's wrestled with tangled earbuds knows how hard it can be to keep the little devils from becoming a scrambled bunch of knots, no matter where or how you store them. Here's the latest in cord technology designed to solve this messy problem:

### Product ideas

Zipbuds' Juiced 2.0 and Pro Mike models have an actual zipper between the cords; the glow-in-the-dark green version would be easy to dig out of the dark recesses of a bag. The Slide model employs a tiny zipper attachment like the ones on re-sealable plastic containers.

From Beats by Dre, urBeats have a flat, bright-red cable that resists tangling and is easy to see.

### Storage ideas

If you're not in the market for new earbuds but are just looking for a way to store them smoothly, there are lots of

options. The Sinch is a little rubber band that slips over a phone's cord port. Wrap the cords around the phone and secure with the built-in magnet.

The Spyder Byte is a black, plastic, spider-shaped clip that attaches to the cords to clasp and secure them.

The Nest is a pliable silicone case with an inner spool to hold earbuds. Pull one of the earbuds to release them from the spool when needed. For kids or those after a bit of whimsy in their tech accessories, Storenvy has a silicone 3-D rabbit that offers storage in its rear and room for a phone up front. It comes in a slew of hues.

### DIY

Look online for ideas on repurposing tape dispensers, thread spools, badge clips, credit cards, small snack boxes, travel-size swab holders, gum dispensers, bandage holders and contact lens cases into earbud storage.

Crafty types might tackle the bunny, butterfly or bear hold-

er; it's made from just felt, Velcro and thread. Cord tacos - discs that folds in half, with a simple closure - work for any tech cords, including earbuds. You can devise your own out of scraps of material, or find distinctive leather ones online.

Knitters can create a menagerie of cute earbud holders, including turtles, fish, frogs and mice. Tiny pouches secured with small buttons or snaps can be made quickly. Harry Potter fans might like a crocheted Golden Snitch; find Lissan Loi's pattern on her Etsy.com site, AsianFreckles.

### Technique

However you decide to store your earbuds, you might first want to explore whether there are ways to coil them so they won't get tangled. YouTube's got a half-dozen or more helpful folk who think they've got it figured out, and are willing to share. — AP

Music & Movies



Various cast members of 'The Hateful Eight' and director Quentin Tarantino (second right) attend a ceremony honoring Tarantino with a hand/footprint ceremony at the TCL Chinese Theatre IMAX, in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



Director Quentin Tarantino is honored with hand/footprint ceremony.



Director Quentin Tarantino is honored at the hand and footprint ceremony.

# Tarantino makes his mark-on Hollywood sidewalk

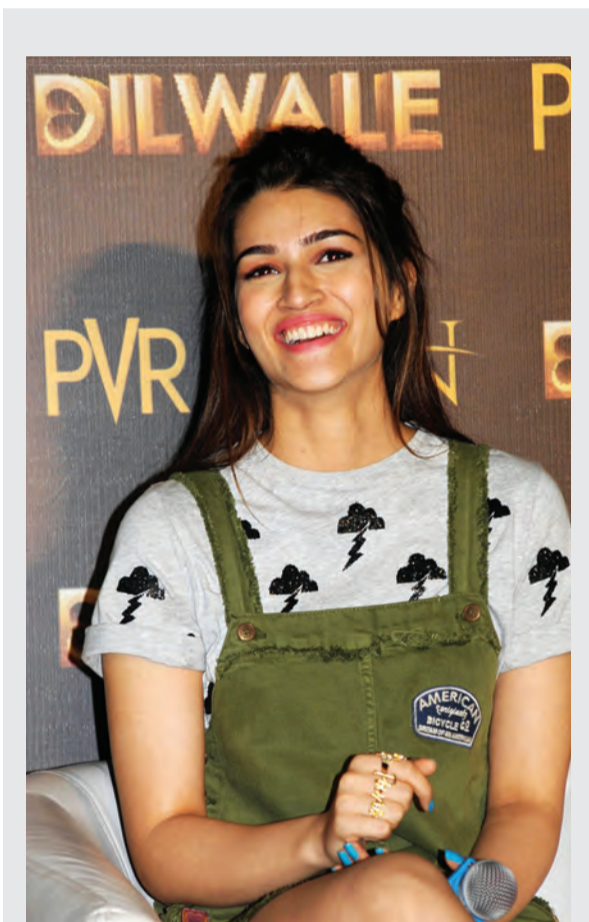
Oscar-winning American director Quentin Tarantino made another mark in Hollywood Tuesday, leaving his handprints on the sidewalk outside the legendary Grauman's Chinese Theatre. Out promoting his latest movie "The Hateful Eight"—which has been nominated for three Golden Globes—Tarantino, 52, said he was delighted by the honor. "Actually, it's not that I have wanted to do this my whole career, I have wanted

to put my hand and footprints in the Grauman Chinese Theatre courtyard way before I ever had a career," he said of the longtime Hollywood tradition at the cinema house, where thousands of stars have cast hand- and footprints in the cement.

"This is something I have wanted to do my entire life," he added. Tarantino was joined by Austrian actor Christoph Waltz, who won Oscars for "Inglourious Basterds" in 2010 and "Django

Unchained" in 2013 working with Tarantino. "Quentin baffles, he exhilarates, he perplexes, he surprises, but most of all he entertains us," Waltz said. "We want more and more of these imprints and always in 24 frames per second." Just two weeks ago, Tarantino got his star on the better-known Hollywood Walk of Fame. The filmmaker, who dropped out of high school insisting he could learn more on his own, won Oscars himself for black

comedy western "Django Unchained" in 2013 and cult favorite "Pulp Fiction" in 1995. "The Hateful Eight" is nominated for Golden Globes for supporting actress for Jennifer Jason Leigh, best screenplay and original score for composer Ennio Morricone. — AFP



In this photograph Indian Bollywood actress Kriti Sanon looks on during a promotional event for the forthcoming Hindi film 'Dilwale' in Mumbai. — AFP

## Bollywood star shames man watching pirated film on flight

A Bollywood star posted a series of angry tweets after a passenger sitting next to her on a flight brazenly started watching a pirated copy of one of her films. Actress Kriti Sanon was travelling to Delhi last week when the man seated beside her and her mother started using an iPhone projector to watch Hindi blockbuster "Dilwale". The \$15 million movie, which sees Sanon star alongside Bollywood icon Shah Rukh Khan, had only been released in cinemas 10 days previously.

"Someone watchin pirated version of Dilwale in front of me on phone in the flight! Annoyed!! #SayNoToPiracy" the 25-year-old posted on Twitter. The tweet, which has been liked almost 3,000 times, was accompanied by a photo showing the passenger watching the movie. It also included an angry emoji face. Shortly afterwards she tweeted again. "Sad to c the hardwork of so many ppl bein watched in such pathetic quality! Please enjoy films in cinemas #SayNoToPiracy," Sanon wrote.

It was accompanied by another picture of the passenger, who appeared to be enjoying the movie. A third tweet followed, in response to a user who said that watching pirated movies was a criminal offence. "Yup..told him politely that he would enjoy the film more in a theatre. but he was busy showin off his projector!," she wrote, this time including two angry emoji faces. — AFP

# Bollywood's 'Deadly Dutt' set for prison release

Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt will be released from prison next month after serving a sentence for possessing weapons supplied by gangsters behind the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, reports said yesterday. The disgraced star will walk free from Yerwada Central Jail in the western state of Maharashtra on February 27, slightly ahead of schedule, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported. Dutt was originally sentenced to a six-year term after being convicted in 2006 of possessing guns supplied by mafia bosses who orchestrated the series of bombings in Mumbai that killed 257 people.

He spent 18 months in prison before being released on bail in 2007, pending an appeal. In March 2013, the Supreme Court upheld his conviction but cut his prison term from six years to five. Dutt was later granted four extra weeks of freedom to work on unfinished movies and went back to jail in May that year to serve the remaining three-and-a-half years of his sentence. PTI said yesterday that

Maharashtra Home Minister Ranjit Patil had granted Dutt remission, clearing his release for February 27. Calls and text messages to the minister by AFP went unanswered. The 56-year-old actor shot to fame in the mid-1980s in a string of action movies in which he performed his own stunts, earning him the nickname "Deadly Dutt".

He is best known for playing a mobster with a heart of gold in the popular "Munnabhai" series. The 1993 attacks were believed to have been staged by Muslim underworld figures in retaliation for religious riots in which mainly Muslims died, following the razing of an ancient mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh state. Dutt was found guilty of possession of an automatic rifle and a pistol, which he insisted were only meant to protect his family in the tense atmosphere in Mumbai following the mosque's destruction. In 2007, he was acquitted of more serious charges of conspiracy in the deadly blasts, which also wounded more than 700 people. — AFP



Sanjay Dutt



Picture taken on October 17, 2008 shows French conductor and composer Pierre Boulez conducting the SWR Symphony Orchestra during the opening concert of the Donaueschinger Musiktage music festival in Donaueschingen, southern Germany.



This file photo taken on January 9, 1984 shows French conductor and composer Pierre Boulez (right) talking with US composer and guitarist Frank Zappa (center) and French Minister of Culture Jack Lang (left), at the Theatre de la Ville in Paris, where he directed three works of Zappa. — AFP photos

# French avant-garde composer Pierre Boulez dies aged 90

World-renowned conductor-composer Pierre Boulez, considered one of the most influential voices in contemporary classical music, has died aged 90, his family said yesterday. "For all those who knew him and who appreciated his creative energy, his artistic rigour, his openness and his generosity, his presence will remain alive and intense," the family said in a statement from the Philharmonie de Paris, which Boulez spearheaded. As well as being an expert interpreter of the works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Scriabin, the Frenchman found himself, with KarlHeinz Stockhausen, a seminal figure in the mid-20th century experimental avant-garde.

Later in the 20th century, he would push back the frontiers of music still further with computer-generated music at his Paris studio. Born in 1925 in the small provincial town of Montbrison, in central France, Boulez studied under Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire during the war years, where he was influenced by his teacher's own abstract, atonal style with irregular rhythm. A frequent guest conductor for great orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic, Boulez famously shunned the baton, always conducting with his hands.

He led the BBC Symphony Orchestra and from 1971-77 was music director of the New York Philharmonic, where he favored contemporary works over the classics beloved by his acclaimed predecessor Leonard Bernstein. It was his exasperation with the relative conservatism of the French musical world that prompted Boulez to make his



This file photo taken on December 20, 2011 shows French composer and conductor Pierre Boulez directing the Paris Orchestra under the Louvre Pyramid during a free concert in Paris.

home in the southwestern German city of Baden-Baden in the early 1960s, where he eventually died. Boulez's compositions were noted for their difficulty, with one of his defining works, "Le Marteau Sans Maitre" ("The Hammer Without a Master"), drawing inspiration from surrealist poetry and lacking any bass line. French President Francois Hollande offered his condolences to Boulez's family and hailed someone who "made French music shine throughout the world." "As a composer and conductor, he always reflected his era," said Hollande. — AFP

# Italian screen siren Pampanini dead at 90

Silvana Pampanini, an Italian actress and beauty who was one of the country's leading post-war cinema stars, has died at the age of 90, local media reported yesterday. Pampanini, who had been hospitalized since October according to Corriere della Sera, starred in over 50 films during her 1950s heyday. She came to prominence as a Miss Italy contestant in 1946 (her failure to win caused a tabloid outcry) and went on to work with a long list of famous film figures, including Buster Keaton, Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, Toto and Jean Gabin.

With her voluptuous, wide-eyed looks, Nini Pampan, as she was nicknamed in France,

became a symbol of Italian beauty around the world. The brunette was seen as having paved the way for fellow screen sirens Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida. Pampanini never married but was reported to have sparked the romantic ardour of a string of famous men, from Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Egypt's King Farouk I to Orson Welles and Omar Sharif. Described as both a devout Catholic and a life-long diva, she worked only occasionally after giving up full-time acting to look after her elderly parents in the mid-1960s. — AFP



# Madonna's Singapore concert is for adults only

The Singapore leg of pop superstar Madonna's global Rebel Heart Tour has been restricted to fans aged 18 and above, the concert's local coordinator said yesterday. The one-night-only event on February 28, Madonna's first-ever concert in the city-state, will be held at the 55,000-seat National Stadium, entertainment firm MediaCorp Vizpro said. "Please note that this concert is rated 'R18' with the consumer advisory on 'Sexual References'. Only those above 18 years of age will be permitted into the venue," it said on its Facebook page. Concerts and other forms of public entertainment are

classified by the Media Development Authority, which also regulates the film and broadcast industries.

The Straits Times newspaper noted that Madonna's concert tour setlist includes a segment involving dancers dressed as scantily-clad nuns pole-dancing on cross-shaped stripper poles. Affluent Singapore, often ridiculed as a "nanny state" for its tradition of social control, has eased censorship in recent years and become an Asian entertainment hub. But the authorities say its population is still largely conservative. — AFP





# Why 'Creed' was Sylvester Stallone's toughest role

Nearly 40 years after Sylvester Stallone introduced audiences to Rocky Balboa, the actor's return for his seventh shot at the character in "Creed" has propelled him into a surprise awards-season contender—a status he hasn't claimed for a long time. "I actually am startled," says Stallone, 69, in a recent interview at an upscale Beverly Hills hotel. "It's a character that I love and never thought I'd play again. I didn't think it would resonate like it did, especially with a newer generation. I never went into the film thinking this is going to be a transformative performance. I just thought Rocky has a lot of issues, a lot of problems. He's like all of us."

Warner Bros release, financed for \$35 million by MGM and New Line, was directed and co-written by Ryan Coogler, the 29-year-old Sundance wunderkind behind "Fruitvale Station," who grew up watching the boxing movie series with his dad. In this latest chapter, Rocky isn't the main attraction. He coaches Adonis Johnson (Michael B. Jordan), the son of his late rival and pal Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers). The surprise success of "Creed," which grossed more than \$100 million domestically, has given Stallone a renewed spring in his step. The performance has earned him his first Golden Globe nomination since "Rocky" and a National Board of Review award as best supporting actor.

Jordan says. "I was down for a minute."

Stallone exposed himself to emotional punches that were far more painful. He first met with Coogler in mid-2012. The young director had wanted to make a new "Rocky" because it was a franchise he loved watching as a kid. When Coogler's dad got sick from a rare vitamin deficiency that caused his muscles to atrophy, he got the idea for a "Rocky" reboot in which the character fell ill. "I wanted to see my dad's hero go through something similar to what we were going through," Coogler says. Yet "Creed" isn't just a son's homage to his father. It's also a dad's valentine to his boy. In July 2012, Stallone's son Sage died of a heart attack at 36, shortly after that first meeting with Coogler. Stallone was devastated. Sage had played Rocky's son in 1990's "Rocky V" and Stallone would often think about his son while on the "Creed" set. "I wanted to pay respect to him," he says, "and share those feelings with people who have undergone a tremendous loss."

"Creed" honors Sage in a gut-wrenching moment that brings Stallone's pain to the screen. In a scene midway through the film, Adonis holds up a picture of Rocky's son, who has moved to Vancouver to escape the shadow of his famous father. The image—a young Sage, wearing

before Apollo's death. "There's a lot there," Stallone says, adding that he recently bumped into Weathers, who looked as imposing as ever. "I can't believe I got in the ring with him," Stallone says.

## 'Rambo V'

"Even if it was play fighting," Coogler is startled to hear that Stallone has already let the cat out of the bag about their plan. "Oh no!" he says with a sigh. "There are no secrets with Sly." Jordan sounds more skeptical. "So it's going to be a CGI version of Sly?" he teases, adding that he'd like to be in the next film. Sylvester Stallone and Burgess Meredith in 'Rocky' REX/Shutterstock. As for his non-"Rocky" career, Stallone is more ambivalent about continuing as an action star. He hopes that "Creed" finally leads the way to more dramatic roles. "I had never, ever thought of myself as an action person," he says. "I'm just not that athletic. I'm not naturally a mesomorph. I'm actually kind of thin. But I do like the physical challenge." He adds that shooting tenpole action movies is physically grueling. "I never got tremendous fulfillment from it. Because it becomes a tug of war between exasperation and exhaustion. Very rarely does it all go well."

It's kind of like one of those triathlons." Stallone had previously said publicly that he was working on "Rambo V," but he thinks the character is done. "The heart's willing, but the body says, 'Stay home!'" he says. "It's like fighters that go back for one last round and get clobbered. Leave it to someone else." He's also not involved in the "Rambo" TV series, which focuses on the character's son. "I don't want to cast aspersions," Stallone says, "but it's delicate to try to replace a character with his son. I've seen the son of Flicka, the son of Tarzan, the son of King Kong. It's a very difficult premise."

With more than 20 scripts to his name, Stallone admits that he's struggled to come up with new stories. "I find writing very debilitating, exposing," he says. "It can be a very noisy, angry neighbor." He wonders whether he's inspired by the same material he once was. "What would I write today?" he asks. "I don't know. I would have to retool my thinking and realize it would not be some grand adventure. It would be about something biographical—the journeys of a young man trying to make it in the world." As for his Oscar prospects, Stallone is unfamiliar with the award season gauntlet. That may explain why he hasn't been present at cocktail parties and lunches as some of the other aspiring nominees. He's not even sure he should join the campaign trail. "Do you think it makes a difference?" he asks.

If Stallone does land an Oscar nomination, he'll be at least better dressed for the occasion this time around. He remembers attending the 1977 ceremony in a rented tux. As his car pulled up to the show, his bow tie broke. "Bam!" Stallone says. "The chauffeur said, 'Hey do you want to borrow my tie?'" I go,

"Nah I don't think it's going to matter." I put my collar on the outside. The undershirt was showing. It was just so street. And by the way, I was perceived as being arrogant. No, I'm just poorly dressed. I had no style." He lost for actor, but was brought up onstage when "Rocky" was named best picture over "All the President's Men" and "Taxi Driver." "I felt as though I peaked in 1977," Stallone says. "Your film got an award. Now what? It was an incredible amount of success from nowhere." He likes to tell young actors to savor every moment. "When you're in the center of the storm, you miss all this incredible energy," Stallone says. "It's like a tsunami." — Reuters

## Stretching his muscles

For many years, Stallone tried to stretch his muscles as a serious thespian without much luck. It's ironic that the role that typecast Stallone for most of his career, paving the way for all those "Rambo" and "Expendables" sequels, has finally set him on a dramatic path. "It's changed everything," says the actor, who lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Jennifer Flavin. "Now my kids will actually listen to me for five minutes. Like, 'Oh you got nominated for something! I get some respect.'" "Creed" was the hardest "Rocky" for Stallone. He wasn't sure if he even wanted to step back into the ring, since he'd already concluded 2006's "Rocky Balboa," which was supposed to be the franchise's finale, on an upbeat note. "To resurrect Rocky under the premise that you're dying is a tough sell," Stallone says of the subplot in "Creed," in which Rocky's diagnosed with cancer. "I kept saying, 'I'd be interested, but can the neighbor be sick, and Rocky helps?' I didn't know if people wanted to see him sick."

Stallone allowed Coogler the freedom to work on the first draft of "Creed" with co-writer Aaron Covington. But Stallone, also a producer of the film, was active in shaping Rocky's journey and his dialogue. "When it comes to Rocky," Stallone says, "his world is the size of a matchbook cover. It's very tight. The more simplified you keep it, the better." He recalls studio executives offering notes over the years for the different U-turns Rocky has faced. "Rocky never existed," Stallone says. "It's a fairy tale. It's a myth. I love allegories, and I love very much 'The Iliad' and 'The Odyssey.' I wasn't doing a documentary. I was trying to create a modern-day fable." "You think with age you acquire a surety of choice and perception," Stallone says. "Quite often it's just the opposite."

## Art Streiber for Variety

Even though Rocky is part of his DNA, Stallone turned to an acting coach to prepare for "Creed"—the first time he's done that for a role since 1997 drama "Cop Land." "I just started to understand how you break down moments," Stallone says. "What are the obstacles you're overcoming? Who is this character you're playing? Who do they remind you of in real life?" Stallone compares himself to a professional athlete who enlists a trainer to stay in shape. "You need that perspective to push you over that chasm of fear," he says. This was the rare "Rocky" in which he isn't physically hit. "I'm just carrying over the injuries from the other movies," he jokes. "I start to walk toward the ring, and I bleed." It was his co-star who took a beating in "Creed." During the film's final fight, Coogler noticed that a slow-motion blow to Jordan's face didn't look convincing. Stallone finally suggested that Jordan take the shot for real. "The expression 'I saw stars'—I now know what that looks like,"

explaining how all studio executives make decisions based on numbers. "I think it makes the movies worse. 'Rocky' today would have been a footnote in a cancelled office meeting. It just wouldn't have worked."



boxing gloves, posing with Stallone in front of a punching bag—is from a family album. "I remember the first time I saw the photo, I was heartbroken," says Coogler, who urged Stallone to give him the picture. "I thought it wouldn't be right not to have a representation of Sage in the movie." "It's a character that I love and never thought I'd play again. I didn't think it would resonate like it did, especially with a newer generation."

## Sylvester Stallone

Stallone had originally resisted the idea. "It took a while," he says, his voice softening. "I really didn't want to do it—I swear to you. It's just too painful. It's rough. There is no closure. There is nothing. The wonderful thing about acting is that it's a release. I can take some solace in that." Stallone, who grew up on the East Coast, was born to a working-class family. He harbored dreams of acting, and was—according to Hollywood lore—dead broke when he wrote the

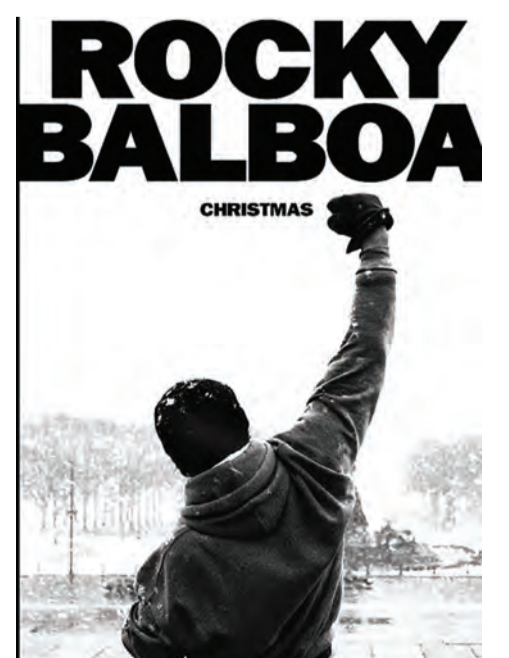
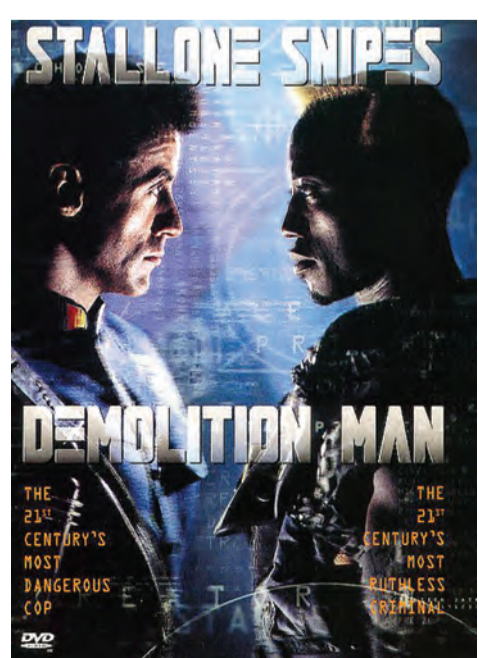


If Stallone sounds like a retired champ, the story line fits his real life. In the '80s and '90s, Stallone—along with Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger—ruled the action industry with tough-guy hits like "Rambo," "Demolition Man," "Cliffhanger" and "Cobra." But those kinds of mid-budget action films are no longer an essential part of a movie industry that relies on comic-book sagas and reboots. The real draw of "The Fast and the Furious" franchise isn't Vin Diesel's biceps, but the cars. And many of the less macho leading male stars of today—Ryan Gosling, Jake Gyllenhaal, Joseph-Gordon Levitt, James Franco, Oscar Isaac and Michael Fassbender—tend to be slender, sensitive types. Art Streiber; Location: SLS Hotel, Beverly Hills

## Main attraction

Stallone says that Rocky's appeal has always been that he's an Everyman. Although he's nothing like Rocky in real life—he's soft spoken, a poet not a fighter, and he peppers references to Shakespeare and Homer in conversation, often sounding like a high-school English teacher—he's managed to age with his on-screen alter ego in real time. "You just take from your own life experiences, and I've had many peaks and valleys," Stallone says. "It's confounding, because you think with age you acquire a surety of choice and perception. Quite often, it's just the opposite. You realize the older you get, the less certain everything is." He's had to ask friends if "Creed" really is a good movie. "I'm not sure if I trust my own impressions anymore," he admits.

The movie, which opened in November, is the first "Rocky" film Stallone didn't write himself. The



Music & Movies



Matt Damon, left, and Luciana Barroso attend the National Board of Review Awards gala at Cipriani 42nd Street on Tuesday in New York. — AP photos



Actor Finn Wittrock, from left, director Adam McKay and actor John Magaro.



Actor Nicholas Hoult, left, and director George Miller.



Actor Sylvester Stallone.



Actress Jessica Chastain.



Actress Brie Larson.

# Damon credits Stallone for launching his career at NBR dinner

The National Board of Review dinner on Tuesday night in Manhattan doubled as a victory lap for an old Hollywood champ, as Sylvester Stallone was showered with multiple tributes.

**Matt Damon**

Early in the evening, Matt Damon—this year's winner for best actor in "The Martian"—revealed that when he was shopping around 1997's "Good Will Hunting," the fact that Stallone starred in "Rocky," after writing the screenplay, kept him from letting another actor from stealing his movie. "Believe me, they really wanted to take it away from us," Damon said, as he credited Stallone with both his and Ben Affleck's acting careers. He revealed that studio executives thought, "God, Leonardo DiCaprio would be so good in this" of the screenplay he co-wrote. But, he added, "every time they said, 'You can't do this,' we said, 'It's been done before.'" Then came Stallone's award for best supporting actor for "Creed."

**Ryan Coogler**

Director Ryan Coogler took the stage with a sprawling introduction to his hero—he watched Stallone growing up in all the "Rocky" movies. On the first day on the "Creed" set, Coogler was surprised to see Stallone arrive with four pages of notes for a character he's played since 1976. "He was like a malleable piece of clay, but a piece of clay that's been a movie star for 40-plus years," Coogler said. He noted that he's often asked how he directed Stallone. "I still don't know," Coogler admitted. "I tried to see him for who he was."

The National Board of Review gala, where the winners are announced in advance, is always like the un-televised rehearsal dinner for the Golden Globes. Yet this year's ceremony at Cipriani 42nd Street, held as the Oscar ballots are due in mere hours, could actually influence the Academy Awards nominations next week. When the NBR announced "Mad Max: Fury Road" as best picture last month, the selection drew snickers around the blogosphere. But that was before the action tentpole starring Tom Hardy became the surprise darling of many critics' groups. Director George Miller proved to be the night's best over-sharer.

He said that Nicholas Hoult, who introduced him, had been suffering from a "tummy bug" and hadn't eaten a bite. He also offered his surprise at collecting year-end accolades. "I didn't think we would still be talking about it," Miller said of his epic. "Yet here we are, still in conversation. In my home, our kids called it the National Board of Wooooo!"

**Brie Larson**

Brie Larson continued her awards streak by landing a best actress statue for "Room." "I've been working since I was a kid, and watched fancy things on TV, and never thought real people go to them—I thought you were bred and born into it," she said. "I didn't know a girl from Sacramento could make it this far."

**Jennifer Jason Leigh**

Jennifer Jason Leigh, named best supporting actress for "The Hateful Eight," called her part in the Quentin Tarantino Western the role of a lifetime. "It was freezing, the costumes weighed 100 pounds, I was covered in blood and chained to another actor for six months," she said. "Honestly, I've never had more fun."

**Ridley Scott**

Ridley Scott, the best director winner for "The Martian," described his film as a drama, a comedy and an action movie all rolled into one. "I'm proud of 'The Martian,' because it could only be fulfilled with my special team," he said, including the actors who "made it fly."

Jessica Chastain introduced the prolific director, as she recalled the first time she saw "Alien" as a girl. "I remember sitting in my room with that borrowed VHS," she said. "At that young age, that film had brought a novel concept to my childhood home—there's more than one kind of role for an actress."

**Jason Segel**

Jason Segel shared a story about meeting Jacob Tremblay from "Room," who won the best newcomer award. The 9-year-old actor recognized him by asking: "Are you the Muppets guy?" "I told him I was and we became fast friends," Segel said. "Later, he came back eager to introduce me to his new friend Johnny Depp. I told him I was too shy. In reality, I was worried it would look like I used a 10-year-old to meet Johnny Depp." Tremblay's speech had the crowd oohing. Standing on a crate, he told the audience he needed a minute. "This is my first award and that makes me really happy," he said. "The mind of me is so blown." He shared the breakthrough prize with Abraham Attah from "Beasts of No Nation," who flew in from Ghana for the ceremony. Attah noted that after the shoot, one of the producers on the film enrolled him in a private school, where he's now studying.

**Cary Fukunaga**

Cary Fukunaga accepted the NBR's Freedom of Expression Award for "Beasts of No Nation." He extended his appreciation to the producers at Red Crown Productions for standing by him, even as the budget for his indie ballooned due to unexpected costs

from shooting in Africa. "You allowed me to make this film without trying to destroy the vision of what we were working for," he said. "Thanks for protecting me." The night wasn't without a pair of swipes at a certain Republican frontrunner. When emcee Willie Geist brought up the Twitter feud Samuel L. Jackson was having with Donald Trump, the actor offered a quip: "I'd say f-k him, but this is a polite crowd." Later, "Inside Out's" Lewis Black (who voices Anger) was presenting best-animated film to director Pete Docter, and he suggested that if he'd seen the Pixar hit as a kid, he would've saved himself years of therapy. "I think if Donald Trump had seen this film when he was 10, he'd be a better person today," Black said. "For those of you who didn't applaud, I pray for your souls."

Meanwhile, Stallone, 69, managed to cement his status as the perennial underdog in his acceptance speech. He leapt on the stage, and gave Coogler a big embrace. "You are the future," he said. "I'm the past." He talked about his passion for storytelling. "I love all artists," he said. "As we get older, we become better actors. Quite often, the opportunity doesn't present itself." — Reuters



Robert De Niro, left, and Grace Hightower.



Jennifer Jason Leigh



Emily Blunt, left, and Benicio del Toro.



Kristen Stewart



Jason Segel



Director Ridley Scott and wife Giannina Facio-Scott.



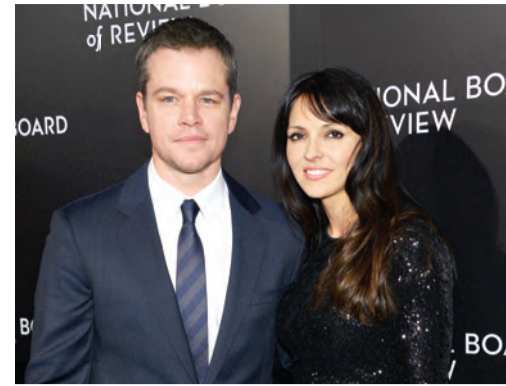
Samuel L. Jackson, left, and Jennifer Jason Leigh.

# Lifestyle

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Damon credits Stallone for launching his career at NBR dinner

# 39



Visitors walk through the China Ice and Snow World during the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival in Harbin, northeast China's Heilongjiang province on January 5, 2016. Over one million visitors are expected to attend the spectacular Harbin Ice Festival, where buildings of ice are bathed in ethereal lights and international ice sculptors compete for honors. — AFP

## India's Mumbai to get 'world's first slum museum'

The teeming Indian metropolis of Mumbai-home to the neighborhood made famous by the film "Slumdog Millionaire"-is to get the world's first slum museum, organizers said yesterday. The museum will showcase some of the myriad of objects that are produced every year in Dharavi, one of Asia's biggest slums and the setting for Danny Boyle's hit 2008 movie. "It will be the first museum ever created in a slum," Spanish artist Jorge Rubio, who is behind the initiative, told AFP.

The small mobile museum will open in February for two months and display everything from pottery and textiles to recycled items, Rubio added. The organizers of 'Design Museum Dharavi' say they want to challenge people's perceptions of slums by highlighting the creative talent that resides in them. More than a million people live in the maze of alleyways that make up Dharavi with many working in the area's mini-factories, which produce every kind of goods imaginable.

Following the success of "Slumdog Millionaire", the slum has become a tourist attraction and guides offer tours of its hundreds of workshops. In 2010 Britain's Prince Charles cited Dharavi as a role model for sustainable living, praising its habit of recycling waste. Last year the slum hosted its first art biennale. More than half of Mumbai's 20 million inhabitants live in slums, enduring cramped conditions, poor ventilation and a lack of toilets. — AFP



Alligator wrestler Pharaoh Gayles wrestling an alligator at the Miccosukee Indian Village in Miami, Florida.



On billboards across the Florida Everglades, a burly Native American man pries open an alligator's mouth, pressing his face dangerously close to the reptile's 80 glinting teeth.



Alligator wrestling is considered a Native American tradition, but animal rights group have criticized the shows.

## Florida Indian tribe's last alligator wrestler bows out

On billboards across the Florida Everglades, a burly Native American man pries open an alligator's mouth, pressing his face dangerously close to the reptile's 80 glinting teeth. "Adventures Await," the ads promise, as motorists whiz by. The man's name is Rocky Jim, Jr, a 44-year-old Miccosukee Indian who has been wrestling alligators for 31 years, entertaining countless tourists from a sand pit and pond beneath a chickee hut along the Tamiami Trail, a two-lane road linking Miami to the port city of Tampa.

But on the final Sunday of 2015, the last remaining Miccosukee Indian in the century-old tradition of wrestling alligators decided it was time to step down, leaving no successors in sight among the tribe of around 600 people. The end came just minutes into the 1 o'clock show, when Jim coaxed the alligator's mouth open by gently tapping its snout, then placed his hand inside. The move is perilous only if something touches the alligator's palate-a drop of sweat, a grain of sand-causing the jaw to reflexively snap shut. While pulling out his hand, he rotated it slightly and accidentally grazed a tooth.

The feeling was like "a door slamming on your hand. With sharp teeth," Jim said in an interview later. But in the moment, as he looked down at his palm and forearm encased in the alligator's jaw, he had only one thought: "Don't shake." "If it shakes, my hand is going to go with it," he told AFP, describing the thrashing motion alligators use to slice up fresh meat, much the same way as sharks. "Its natural instinct is to do that," said Jim, who had been bitten several times before.

### Native tradition

Alligator wrestling is considered a Native American tradition, first popularized in the early 1900s by a white man, Henry Coppinger, Jr, the US-born son of Irish immigrants, according to historian Patsy West. Coppinger himself wrestled alligators, and recruited natives-who lived alongside the reptiles and hunted them-to perform, too. Paying crowds flocked to see men climb on alligators' backs, open their jaws and flip them over-with the effect of making them go limp for a few minutes. But today, the tradition is waning. Animal rights group have criticized the shows, casino revenue rather than alligator tourism often provides cash flow for native tribes, and Indian youths are increasingly turning to careers in modern society.

"The skills are not as common as they once were," said author and anthropologist Brent Weisman. Some native alligator wrestlers still remain among the larger Seminole tribe of

some 2,000 people, which shares a historical connection to the Miccosukees. Those that remain "have decided to do it very deliberately, not for a tourist attraction as it once was, but as a way of keeping traditional Seminole culture alive," Weisman said.

### 'Read their body language'

Jim was 13 when he learned to handle alligators from his father, Rocky Jim, Sr They would go out in the canals of the Everglades in search of turtles, and the elder would demonstrate how to move the creatures away without hurting them, or getting hurt. "Just see how they are moving and how they are going to react," Jim recalled his father saying. "Just read their body language." Jim was in his 30s when the tribe asked him to perform at the Indian Village, a tourist stop that sells crafts, offers airboat rides and hearty foods like pumpkin fry bread and catfish. He agreed.

Far from a punch-out, smack-down event as the name "alligator wrestling" might imply, Jim became famous for pulling wild, hissing alligators heavier than his own 278-pound (125-kilogram) frame out of the water by their tails, then tip-toeing around them, stroking them, tapping them, even getting close enough to touch his nose to the snouts of the most aggressive among them. His secret? "We just respect them," he said. When he first saw Jim perform, Pharaoh Gayles, a 25-year-old wrestler of Puerto Rican, African-American and Seminole descent, "thought he was a little bit crazy." But he watched, and learned. "He just really knows what he is doing and he has an understanding of the animal."

### An owl and a shadow

Recently, arthritis in his knee began to slow Jim down, and he cut back to part time. But this winter, an annual festival beckoned. He performed five shows on the first day, as Gayles knelt in the pit with him and narrated for the audiences. Driving home that evening to his home in a Miami suburb, Jim saw a shadow of a man by the side of the road. A couple of yards later, an owl flew in front of him. "For us, an owl means somebody will pass, and a shadow is the same thing, so when they are together it is a bad thing," Jim said. The next day, the alligator bit him.

Fortunately, the animal did not thrash. Gayles helped open its jaws, which left Jim with seven puncture wounds, and his mind made up to retire. "I was just really waiting for the right time. I guess this was the right time," he said. For Gus Batista, who wrestles alligators on a Seminole reservation, Jim "has been a big partaker in this beautiful art" and "has earned the right to bow out honorably." And while Jim's absence leaves a void, he has already begun teaching his 13-year-old son to catch baby alligators-not necessarily to make it his trade, but to keep a tribal tradition alive. — AFP



Rocky Jim, Jr, a 44-year-old Miccosukee Indian who has been wrestling alligators for 31 years, entertained countless tourists. — AFP photos